

THE SHADOW VERSE

written by

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ON BLACK

"Those who enter the invisible world imprudently
expose themselves to real dangers."

- Allan Kardec

FADE IN:

EXT. MANOR - NIGHT

Wind lashes the cliffs as waves CRASH violently against the
rocks below.

The manor stands alone in the darkness, battered by salt and
time.

An iron gate CREAKS slowly in the wind.

A lantern swings and strikes the stone wall... CLANG.

From somewhere deep inside the house comes a faint, irregular
ticking.

TICK. TACK.

INT. MANOR - HALLWAY - NIGHT

A narrow corridor stretches into shadow.

Old floorboards CREAK under unseen weight as ancient
portraits line the walls - saints, scholars, men of faith.

Some faces have been scratched away. Others blackened by
fire.

One portrait remains untouched.

A priest in dark robes. Sharp-eyed. Unforgiving.

Beneath the frame, barely legible: CYPRIANUS.

A distant sound begins.

CHANTING.

Low at first. Latin.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Men drink heavily around a long wooden table. Tankards CLASH as ale spills across the wood.

Drunken laughter fills the room while the chanting grows louder, rough Latin spoken in unison.

Among them sits CHRISTOPHER THORNE (32), his eyes fixed on something unseen.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The chanting echoes through the house as the corridor stretches deeper into darkness.

INT. CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - NIGHT

Young CATHERINE THORNE (6) hides beneath a blanket, eyes wide with terror.

The chanting bleeds through the walls. The laughter begins to twist: warped, grotesque.

The walls BULGE slightly.

On the ceiling, a BLACK MASS crawls slowly across the plaster.

Young Catherine opens her mouth... but no sound comes out.

INT. RITUAL ROOM - NIGHT

Moonlight slices through thick dust.

At the center of the room stands a BLACK STONE PEDESTAL. On it rests a massive GRIMOIRE.

Open. Ancient.

The candle flame bends toward the book.

TICK. TACK.

A sudden CRACK breaks the silence.

The book SLAMS SHUT.

Silence.

The leather cover TREMBLES. A metal quill slowly rises from the pedestal, hovering above the book.

Then it PIERCES the leather cover.

A wet tearing sound. Blood wells around the nib.

SCRATCHING begins. Slow. Deliberate.

Letters carve themselves into the leather:

THE SHADOW VERSE.

The scratching stops.

THUNDER CRACKS.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. OCEANFRONT VILLA - DAY

Blinding sunlight. The horizon stretches endlessly. The ocean rolls.

A silk robe flutters in the breeze.

CATHERINE THORNE (25) reclines on a white terrace chair. Elegant.

JAMES (50s), immaculate in uniform, approaches with a silver tray.

A crystal flute of champagne.

JAMES

Your champagne, Ms. Thorne.

Catherine takes the glass.

CATHERINE

Thank you, James.

He turns away.

Catherine leans back, closes her eyes.

Breathes in the salty air.

The classical music WARPS.

James halts mid-step. His image GLITCHES.

Catherine opens her eyes.

The horizon inverts. The ocean becomes sky. A thin CRACK crawls up the champagne glass.

CRACK... The liquid inside turns BLACK.

BUZZ.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Catherine JOLTS awake.

Her hand knocks over a paper coffee cup. It spills across her desk.

ANNA (30) leans over the cubicle wall.

ANNA

You okay?

Catherine blinks. Disoriented.

CATHERINE

I was somewhere else.

ANNA

I could see that, but now he wants to see you. Right away.

CATHERINE

Who?

ANNA

The Manager.

INT. MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

Fluorescent lights HUM overhead.

THE MANAGER (50s) sits rigid behind his desk. Avoids eye contact.

He slides a document toward her. Pulls his hand back quickly, as if afraid to touch her.

CATHERINE

You wanted to see me?

The door closes. Catherine stands across from the desk.

The Manager scrolls through security footage on a tablet. He turns it toward her.

MANAGER

For the past three weeks, the fire alarms have triggered at exactly 4:44 p.m.

ON SCREEN - SECURITY FOOTAGE

Conference Room B. Open office. Elevator lobby. Time stamp: 4:44 pm.

Seconds before the alarm sounds, faint black particles drift down around Catherine.

Not smoke. Ash. Light. Sparse. The alarm SHRIEKS.

BACK TO SCENE

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Maintenance replaced the sensors. There's no heat source. No wiring fault.

A beat.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

But every incident occurs within a few feet of you.

Catherine doesn't blink.

CATHERINE

That doesn't mean I caused it.

MANAGER

It means people are uncomfortable.

Silence.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

They report the smell of something burning.

He slides an envelope across the desk.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

We can't have repeated fire alarms and falling ash tied to one executive.

A beat.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

We need to let you go. Effective immediately.

Catherine takes the envelope and exits.

The Manager remains seated.

A small dark fleck lands on his desk. He looks at it. Touches it. It smears. He glances at the wall clock—4:44 pm.

The smoke detector light flickers once.

INT. OFFICE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Catherine walks toward the elevator.

Lights FLICKER as she passes.

The elevator DINGS. She steps inside. Without touching the panel, the button for the 4TH FLOOR lights up. RED.

The doors close. THUD.

INT. CATHERINE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A small studio apartment that smells of stale wine.

Unwashed dishes. Unopened bills. An EVICTION NOTICE.

Catherine sits on the floor, back against the wall. She's still wearing her office clothes.

Her phone BUZZES on the floor. A text message lights up the screen:

I came by while you were at work. Took my things. Don't call.
- MARK.

Catherine stares at the screen. No tears. She takes a swig from an almost empty bottle.

NOX, a black cat, winds around her legs, meowing softly.

CATHERINE
(scratching his ears)
Yeah. I know. I'm hungry too.

A sudden BANG on the door. Nox scurries under the sofa.

LANDLORD (O.S.)
(muffled, angry)
Thorne! I know you're in there. You have until morning. Then I'm changing the locks and tossing your crap on the street.

Catherine doesn't move. She holds her breath.

Footsteps fade.

CATHERINE

(whisper)

Oh, shit!

She looks toward the window. Rain lashes against the glass.

City lights blur outside. She crosses to the window and shoves it open.

The WIND HOWLS into the room.

Cold rain soaks her face. She climbs onto the sill.

Four stories down. Wet pavement. Neon reflections.

One step. She leans forward. Her grip on the frame loosens.

RRRRRING - The phone lights up on the floor. The sound cuts through the wind like a blade.

Catherine startles, looks down at the drop, then at the phone.

RRRRRING.

Nox jumps onto the counter. Stares at her. Catherine steps down from the ledge, shaking.

She picks up the phone.

UNKNOWN NUMBER.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Hello?

VOICE (FILTERED)

Ms. Thorne? This is Nurse Baker from St. Vincent's Hospital.

CATHERINE

If this is about a bill, I can't...

NURSE BAKER (V.O.)

It's about your father; he's been admitted in critical condition.

Catherine stops breathing. The room spins.

CATHERINE

I thought he was dead...

NURSE BAKER (V.O.)
 We have Mr. Thorne's ID and his records. Please, Ms. Thorne, he's asking for you; he keeps saying your name.

Only rain forcing its way inside.

NURSE BAKER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Ms. Thorne? Are you there?

CATHERINE
 (barely audible)
 Is he alive?

NURSE BAKER (V.O.)
 He doesn't have much time. If you want to see him, you must come now.

CLICK.

The line goes dead. Catherine lowers the phone and looks at the open window.

Then she looks at the eviction notice and starts crying, drops to her knees.

From inside the wall, a slow, metallic SCRAPE... like a nail searching for bone.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT (LATER)

Sterile.

Only the rhythmic, wheezing sound of a RESPIRATOR. A HEART MONITOR beeps fast. Irregular.

Christopher Thorne (51) lies in the bed, a skeleton wrapped in paper-thin skin.

Catherine stands in the doorway, soaked from the rain.

Shivering.

She stares at her father. She recognizes him immediately.

CATHERINE
 I thought you were dead...

Christopher's eyes open. Clouded. They settle on her. He flinches.

CHRISTOPHER
 (wheezing)
 Catherine... My lovely daughter...

CATHERINE
 Did you know that mom died
 screaming? Where were you?

CHRISTOPHER
 (struggling)
 I'm so sorry... I was blinded by
 it...

CATHERINE
 By what?

He coughs violently.

CHRISTOPHER
 The book. The hunger for more. For
 the perfect life...

Catherine steps closer, anger fighting confusion.

CATHERINE
 What did you do, Dad? Why did Mom
 die?

Christopher grips the bedsheets. Knuckles white. Close his
 eyes...

FLASHBACK - 1980

EXT. CLIFF EDGE - EVENING

The sun sinks into the ocean. Wind whips hair and clothes.

Waves smash against jagged cliffs.

A RED YAMAHA skids to a stop near a weathered stone wall.

Christopher (26) kills the engine. HELENA (18) climbs off,
 laughing at the mess of her windblown hair.

They take off their helmets. For a moment, there is only the
 roar of the sea. Ahead, the ruins of an old chapel cling to
 the rock.

HELENA
 It's so loud... I can't even think.

She rests a hand on her belly.

HELENA (CONT'D)
 She feels it too. She's waking up.
 Kicking like crazy.

CHRISTOPHER
 (smiling)
 Just close your eyes and feel the
 breeze.

Christopher watches her. The wind whips her hair across her face. He brushes it away. The playfulness fades.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)
 Marry me. Here. Now.

HELENA
 (laughing nervously)
 What? Here? We don't even have
 rings...

CHRISTOPHER
 We've got each other. What else do
 we need?

She looks at him.

The ROAR OF THE SEA fills the silence. She sees that he means it.

HELENA
 You're serious...

CHRISTOPHER
 I've never been more serious. I
 love you with all my heart.

HELENA
 Promise me she'll never forget
 this...

CHRISTOPHER
 I promise.

He cups her face.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)
 Here, where the sea ends and the
 land begins. I swear... nothing can
 touch us.

Helena blinks, overwhelmed. A tear slips down her cheek.

HELENA
 Then kiss me, husband.

They KISS passionately.

BACK TO HOSPITAL

CHRISTOPHER

Now I know, it's a curse, a family
curse. Let me tell you what
happened the night you were born...

SUPER 1980

INT. DELIVERY ROOM - NIGHT

Chaos.

HELENA

(a guttural scream)

AHHH!

The room is freezing. Breath FOGS in the air.

The overhead lights BUZZ violently.

ZZZRT.

DOCTOR

(shouting over the noise)

Push, Helena! Push!

HELENA pushes. Veins bulge in her neck.

A metal tray CLANGS to the floor. No one looks. The clock on
the wall TICKS loudly. 4:43...

Suddenly, the lights DIE. TOTAL DARKNESS. Three seconds pass.

Only Helena's ragged breathing can be heard.

Then, emergency RED LIGHTS HUM to life.

The DOCTOR is holding the baby. Silence. The baby isn't
crying.

HELENA

(weak, terrified)

Why isn't she crying?

The DOCTOR rubs the infant's back. Nothing happens.

The clock CLICKS - 4:44.

The baby INHALES - And WAILS. Not high-pitched. Deep.
Guttural.

It sounds like an adult voice trapped inside a newborn's chest.

The metal tray on the floor VIBRATES with the sound's frequency.

The NURSE wipes the baby's chest. She FLINCHES.

NURSE

Doctor...

Beneath the infant's skin, a SIGIL rises like a fresh brand.

It pulses once. Then FADES into the flesh.

The NURSE and DOCTOR exchange a look, rattled and silent.

HELENA

(whisper)

Catherine... You're perfect!

Above them, the cracked clock still reads 4:44 A.M.

EXT. CLIFFSIDE - NIGHT (SAME TIME, 4:44 A.M.)

Wind HOWLS. Waves SMASH.

Christopher stands at the edge, THE SHADOW VERSE clutched... bound tight in leather straps.

A cigarette GLOWS between his fingers.

He looks up - clouds RIP OPEN - revealing a full, BLOOD-RED MOON that strikes the book. It TWITCHES.

Christopher takes a drag. Exhales shaky smoke.

The cover suddenly HEATS. The leather SEARS his palms.

CHRISTOPHER

(gritting his teeth)

Ah! Shit!

He drops the cigarette. Embers scatter at his boots.

The book HUMS. The straps WRITHE.

The smell of BURNING SKIN mixes with the salt air.

The wind SCREAMS. From the ruined chapel, the bell RATTLES on its own.

A SHADOW whips across the rocks. Christopher jerks.

The book SLAMS on stone. The impact ECHOES.

He stares at his palms.

A SIGIL smokes into his flesh.

Then, he looks at the book. A broken laugh escapes him: nervous, collapsing into a sob.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)
 (trembling whisper)
 It's real...

He looks up at the sky. Stunned.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)
 You heard me.

He backs away slowly.

Like he's standing too close to something dangerous.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)
 (to himself)
 What have I done?

BACK TO HOSPITAL ROOM

CHRISTOPHER
THE SHADOW VERSE...
 (beat)
 It's not just a book, Cat. It's a
 burden.
 (beat)
 And you must be careful. It's
 beyond anything you understand.

The HEART MONITOR begins to accelerate.

BEEP, BEEP, BEEP...

The lights FLICKER.

Christopher suddenly GRABS Catherine's wrist. His grip is shockingly strong.

CHRISTOPHER
 Listen to me. Go to the manor. But
 don't touch it. Stay away from it.

He pulls her closer, whispering urgently.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)
I hid it. Please... do not open it.
But if you find it, promise me.
NEVER READ IT BACKWARDS.

CATHERINE
Dad, you're hurting me!

Christopher's eyes widen. Feverish.

CHRISTOPHER
It tricks you!
(beat)
It gives... But it takes.

Suddenly, he stiffens.

His eyes lock on something behind Catherine. Primal terror.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)
(choking)
It's here...

CATHERINE
(turning)
What?

Nothing.

Just the empty doorway.

She turns back; Christopher is dead. Eyes wide. Mouth locked in a scream that never escaped.

The heart monitor does not flatline, just STOPS.

At that moment, the RADIO on the bedside table turns on by itself. A whisper. Barely audible.

RADIO (V.O.)
Welcome home.

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY (DAYS LATER)

Rain lashes against the window.

Catherine sits across from an ELDERLY SOLICITOR.

He is uncomfortable, avoids eye contact.

He slides an envelope and a BRASS KEY across the mahogany desk.

SOLICITOR

The deed has been transferred. The manor is yours, Ms. Thorne. But, your father died with nothing left.
(beat)

SOLICITOR (CONT'D)

However, he left specific instructions regarding the manor. You were to receive this key in person.

Catherine picks up the key, too heavy and old.

The Thorne family crest is worn smooth by time and worry.

She opens the letter.

INSERT - THE LETTER - Handwritten. Frantic.

"I locked it away, but it wasn't enough. It's not a keepsake. It's a prison. If you find it, do not read it."

Underlined so hard that the paper is torn:

NEVER READ IT BACKWARDS.

Catherine folds the letter. Her hands are steady. Her eyes are not.

SOLICITOR (CONT'D)

(clearing his throat)
He wasn't well at the end. Kept talking about walls breathing.
(a polite, dismissive nod)
Good luck, Ms. Thorne. You'll need it.

CUT TO:

EXT. THORNE MANOR - DAY

Grey fog.

The taxi pulls away, its taillights swallowed by the mist.

The MANOR looms on the cliff, old and damaged.

Ivy chokes the stone.

Catherine drags two suitcases through the mud. In her other hand, a CAT CARRIER. Inside, NOX growls low. Unhappy.

CATHERINE

*Look at the size of this house...
And I was living in an attic...*

She reaches the massive OAK DOORS. The brass key resists. Rusted.

She uses both hands.

CLUNK - The lock yields.

INT. THORNE MANOR - ENTRY HALL - NIGHT

The door GROANS open. Catherine steps inside.

The smell hits her, metallic copper. She sets the bags down.

She opens the carrier. NOX steps out. Tail puffed. Hissing at the dark staircase.

He ducks behind Catherine's legs. Catherine scans the space.

CATHERINE

I remember... I was here before...

Thick, unbroken LINES OF SALT run along every baseboard. Except at the door... Her boot has broken the line.

On the walls, carved directly into the expensive wallpaper:

CATHERINE... "IT LISTENS." "DO NOT SLEEP." "I'M SORRY, MY DAUGHTER."

Hundreds of CRUCIFIXES are nailed over cracks in the plaster. Not decorative.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

(whisper)

Jesus, Dad...

She takes one step forward. The FLOORBOARDS SCREAM beneath her weight. Then - Right beside her ear - A sound.

Hhhhhh... Hhhhhh... Slow breathing.

Catherine freezes and turns her head.

The wallpaper EXPANDS slightly... then contracts... once, like a lung, then still.

NOX YOWLS and bolts into the kitchen.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Nox! Wait!

She runs after him, unwilling to be alone in the hallway.

SUPER: 1988

INT. THORNE MANOR - NIGHT

Lightning rips the sky. Thunder follows.

Helena (26) drags Catherine (8) through the corridor, fast and panicked.

Doors slam open and shut. Wallpaper bulges as if something claws beneath it.

Toys spark and grind on the floor, broken gears screeching.

From inside the walls - TICK. TACK.

Catherine hugs her doll. Her face streaked with tears.

CATHERINE

(crying, confused)

I don't understand... I'm scared,
Mommy...

HELENA

Keep moving! Don't stop!

A shadow sweeps across the ceiling. A chair tips and SKIDS across the hallway, slamming into the wall.

They sprint past the stairwell.

At the top: Christopher. Holding something dark against his chest. A familiar shape. Leather-bound.

Eyes black and hollow. The darkness behind him swells.

CATHERINE

(screaming)

That's not Daddy! That's not Daddy!

The ticking speeds up, pounding like a second heartbeat. The doll flickers red, faint, then stronger.

Catherine sobs, clinging to it.

The FRONT DOOR SLAMS open—wind howls through—then SLAM! It shuts again.

A little girl's sobs, Catherine hears her own voice crying and laughing back at her.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
 (covering ears, sobbing)
 Please, Mommy, make it stop!

HELENA
 Catherine, run! Close your eyes and run!

They stumble into the dining room.

The chandelier SWINGS like a pendulum. Plates rattle.

A cabinet bursts open, dishes CRASH to the floor. Silence.

FLASH

The BLACK MASS fills the doorway. Tall. Slick. Faceless.

It doesn't move, but it SEES them.

The house SHUDDERS. Walls CRACK. Paintings fall, glass shattering.

CATHERINE
 (screaming, hysterical)
 It's coming! It's coming!

The doll pulses red in sync with her sobs.

Her whole body trembles.

The back door BURSTS open. Cold rain whips in.

Helena drags Catherine through the rain, stumbling and sobbing.

At the threshold, Catherine dares a glance back; in the attic window, Christopher stands. Still. Watching.

The BLACK MASS presses into him—wet, intimate, alive, remaining behind.

Catherine clutches the doll, shaking and breathless. Its red glow throbs with her heart.

On the wall inside, a cracked clock stops at 4:44.

THUNDER CRACKS.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY.

INT. THORNE MANOR - LIBRARY - DAY

A cathedral of dust and memories. Floor-to-ceiling shelves.
Dark oak.

Ivy veils the windows, turning daylight into gray gloom.

Catherine steps in.

NOX stops at the threshold. He sits, tail twitching, staring
into the dark corners.

He refuses to enter.

CATHERINE
(whisper)
Ok, fine! Wait there.

She moves deeper into the room.

Her fingers trace the spines until she reaches the section
her father described.

No loose shelf. No hidden latch. The panel is NAILED shut.

She grabs a heavy brass bookend and SMASHES the wood.
SPLINTERS fly. Behind the broken panel: darkness.

Catherine reaches in.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
What is this...?

She pulls out a carved PALO SANTO BOX. It smells of grave
dirt. She opens it. Wrapped in red cloth—the SHADOW VERSE.

Black hide. A raised sigil scarred into the leather.

Under her fingers, the surface is warm. It pulses. She
unwraps it.

The spine EXHALES, wet.

FIRST PAGE - sharp handwriting, fresh red:

NEVER READ IT BACKWARDS.

Catherine stares at the words. A pull in her gut, like
magnetism.

She SLAMS the book shut and dust motes explode in the air. A single lamp casts sick yellow light.

MOMENTS LATER

Catherine sits on the faded rug, already holding a glass of wine.

She opens her laptop. She's tipsy. Angry.

On screen: Anna.

ANNA

Are you in a cult now? Because that lighting screams "sacrificial virgin."

CATHERINE

(dark laugh)

It's all I could find; no electricity in some parts of the house...

She holds up a jar.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Look at this: a preserved rat fetus in lavender oil!

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

He didn't just collect coins, Anna. He collected curses.

She taps the black book on her lap.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

I found this on the wall. Wrapped like a corpse.

ANNA

That is literally a biohazard. Put it down. That's creepy!

Catherine opens the book casually.

CATHERINE

Listen to this.

(reading)

To silence one who will not be still, burn their name and bury their breath.

ANNA

Catherine, stop. You look...
insane.

CATHERINE

Insane? Raymond threw me on the
street in the rain. He stole my
mother's necklace as collateral. He
threatened to kill Nox.

She strokes NOX without looking at him. Her eyes never leave
the book.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

I don't want to sue him. I want him
to feel it. I want him to choke on
his own greed.

ANNA

(nervous)

Okay. You're scaring me, lady! Put
the creepy book away and go sleep,
tomorrow I can help you with that
mess!

CATHERINE

Ok, see you tomorrow, *luv ya!*

She snaps the laptop shut. The room drops into deeper
darkness. She drains the bottle. The anger remains.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

(whisper)

Let's see if this works. He
deserves it!

INT. LIBRARY - LATER

Three candles shimmer. Catherine kneels inside a circle of
SALT and tarnished COINS. In front of her:

A soot-blackened MIRROR.

FOUR black PINS.

A scrap of paper with the name, "RAYMOND ELLIS" written in
charcoal.

She lights the paper. It curls into black ash.

CATHERINE
 (steady)
*Scribe nomen in fumo... et sepeli
 spiritum eius.*

Smoke rises. It does not disperse. She picks up the FIRST pin.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
 One: for your cruelty.

She DRIVES the pin onto the table. The house CREAKS.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
 Two: for the lock.

SLAM. Another pin. The temperature drops. Her breath fogs.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
 Three: for the HUMILIATION. Four:
 for the threat.

All candles BLOW. Darkness. Then, right beside her ear...

VOICE (V.O.)
 Done.

Catherine gasps, scrambling back.

INT. RAYMOND'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Only the sound of the TV: a cheesy game show.

Applause.

Laughter.

Blue and white light flickers across the room.

RAYMOND sits in his armchair.

A beer can IS still in his hand. His eyes are blown wide, bursting with capillaries.

Raymond's mouth stretches open... impossibly wide.

Blackness spills from inside. Something rotten.

On the floor, amidst the spilled beer, no footprints... just a single black pin.

CUT TO:

INT. THORNE MANOR - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Silence.

Catherine walks through the dark hallway, carrying a candle.

The house creaks softly around her.

A large antique clock stands against the wall. The pendulum swings.

TICK.

TACK.

TICK.

TACK.

Catherine stops. The clock suddenly STOPS. She frowns.

CATHERINE

That's strange... Oh well, let's go
Nox.

She leans closer.

The hands slowly move by themselves.

4:43...

The ticking grows louder.

4:44!

The entire house GROANS.

The candle flame stretches sideways as if something passed through the room.

Behind Catherine, a SHADOW moves across the wall.

Catherine turns. Nothing.

The clock suddenly begins ticking again.

TICK.

TACK.

TICK.

Catherine slowly backs away.

Uneasy.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Grey light filters through the dust.

Catherine stands by the counter, shaking from the cold.

She grips a chipped mug of black coffee with both hands.

The old TV HUMS.

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)

*A man called Raymond Ellis was
found dead in his apartment early
this morning.*

Catherine locks up. The mug trembles.

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

*Police have not released details,
but sources describe the scene as
"MACABRE." Authorities are ruling
out robbery.*

A photo flashes on screen: Raymond. Smiling.

The signal GLITCHES. The sound warps into a high-pitched SCREECH.

Catherine flinches. The mug slips from her hands.

SMASH.

Hot coffee and ceramic shards spread across the floor. She stares at the mess in shock.

CATHERINE

(whisper)

FUCK...

She backs away until her back hits the fridge.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

(whisper)

I didn't mean... I just wanted him
to suffer a bit...

On the counter - **THE SHADOW VERSE** - Open.

She didn't leave it there.

It was in the library. The red cloth is undone.

A fresh, wet stain appears on the page.

Her phone BUZZES. She jumps and looks at the screen.

EVICTION PROCEEDINGS: DISMISSED

Catherine stares at the word DISMISSED.

CATHERINE (V.O.)
It worked... It actually worked!

FLASHBACK:

INT. ATTIC APARTMENT - NIGHT

It's Catherine's 18th birthday.

Rain hammers the roof. Inside, the light is dim.

On the table: a pathetic celebration, a store-bought cupcake with a single candle.

Helena (older, gaunt) strikes a match. Her hands shake as she lights the candle.

Catherine (18) sits opposite her. Furious.

HELENA
Happy Birthday Baby Girl! You can make a wish, dear, a good one!

CATHERINE
Mom, are you serious? Matt invited me to a party. Real people. Music. It's my eighteenth birthday, Mom.

Helena stares at the flame.

HELENA
I know, but you're safe here. There's something out there...

Catherine snaps to her feet.

CATHERINE
Safe? I'm in a prison. I'm going out. I'm an adult now. You can't legally stop me.

Helena looks up. Her eyes are terrified hollows.

HELENA

Adulthood isn't freedom, Catherine.
It's exposure. The protection, it
ends tonight.

CATHERINE

Stop with the witchy crap. I'm
going.

Catherine grabs her jacket. Then: TICK. TACK. Loud. Violent.
Like a hammer inside the wall. Catherine stiffens.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

(voice trembling)
Is that... the pipes?

Helena stands. Panic rising. She grabs the salt, spilling it
across the table.

HELENA

It's midnight. You're eighteen.
Don't answer the door. Don't look
at the shadows.

Suddenly, the TOY DOG on the shelf WHIRS. It FALLS.

THUD.

It lands upright. Facing Catherine. Its eyes glow red. The TV
clicks on. Within the static, a whisper:

VOICE (V.O.)

Happy birthday...

Helena SCREAMS.

HELENA

GO TO YOUR ROOM! LOCK IT! NOW!

Terrified by her mother's sheer panic, Catherine backs away,
then RUNS.

INT. CATHERINE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (LATER)

Catherine lies awake. Fully clothed. Shivering. Her phone
screen glows.

4:44 A.M.

The rain has stopped. A sound from the hallway. Not
footsteps. Dripping.

CATHERINE

Mom?

She opens the door.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Dark water leaks from beneath the bathroom door. Catherine approaches.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

She pushes the door open. Heat hits her face.

The bathtub OVERFLOWS. Black, oily water spills onto the tiles.

Helena lies in the tub. Eyes open. Staring at Catherine.

Her face is wrong.

Catherine steps closer.

Her shoes SQUELCH.

CATHERINE

Mom...?

No response. She reaches out.

Touches Helena's shoulder. The skin is SCALDING.

Helena's head lolls back. Her mouth comes into the light:
SEWN SHUT.

Thick black thread, like a shoelace, stitches her lips together.

Catherine gasps, backing away and hyperventilating. She bumps into the sink. A RAZOR clatters to the floor.

The body in the tub CONVULSES. A vibration builds behind the sewn lips.

A birthday song plays. Distorted and dark.

HELENA (V.O.)

Happy... birthday... to... you...

CATHERINE

(screaming)

STOP! MOM, PLEASE!!

HELENA (V.O.)
Happy... birthday... dear...

The stitches RIP. One by one.

SNAP. SNAP.

Blood sprays.

The jaw UNHINGES.

A soot-stained hand SHOOTS OUT from Helena's mouth.

Catherine spins to run. The door SLAMS SHUT.

BACK TO THE PRESENT - KITCHEN

A wave of nausea hits her. She rushes to the sink. Nothing comes up but bile.

Suddenly, NOX HISSES from the doorway. Fur standing straight up.

The kitchen bulb BURSTS.

Glass rains down.

A shard cuts Catherine's cheek. She gasps and touches the cut.

Blood beads on her finger. A drop of blood falls on the floorboards.

The wood absorbs it instantly. The floorboards GROAN softly.

Catherine clutches her bleeding cheek, sliding down the fridge door and realizing she is trapped.

SMASH TO:

INT. CAFÉ - DAY

Late morning. The espresso machine HISSES loudly.

Catherine sits in the corner.

She looks like she hasn't slept in days—pale and jagged. She stirs her coffee.

Anna sits opposite her, looking worried.

ANNA

You look like shit, Cat. I saw the news about your landlord. Are you okay?

CATHERINE

(whisper)

I did it.

ANNA

Did what?

CATHERINE

The ritual. I wrote his name, Anna. I burned it. And the next morning, he was found sewn shut.

Anna glances around, checking if anyone heard. She leans in.

ANNA

Stop. You're traumatized. You were starving, he was threatening you... It's a coincidence. A horrible, freak coincidence.

Catherine looks up. Her eyes are sharp. Focused.

CATHERINE

Is it? The eviction is cancelled. I have a roof now, even though I don't have much money yet.

She grips Anna's hand.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

It works. It listens.

Anna pulls her hand away.

ANNA

You're scaring me, Cat! You don't need voodoo, you just need help. Come stay with me for a while, until you get a new job.

CATHERINE

I can't leave now. This house is the only thing I have. I just need a job and... enough to survive.

ANNA

Don't do this. Tell me you're not doing this. Do you want me there?

CATHERINE
 I'm okay. I can handle it. Don't
 worry. See you later.

INT. THORNE MANOR - LIBRARY - NIGHT

Shadows stretch across the floor.

Catherine rummages through her father's "collection."

She grabs a jar labeled "MILK TEETH - 1985". Another jar, a
 honeycomb suspended in black liquid.

She opens THE SHADOW VERSE.

The pages rustle. There is no wind.

INSERT - BOOK PAGE

"SPELL FOR TRUE FORTUNE"

Requirements: A gift of bone given to the earth.

WARNING (IN RED INK):

WE RECEIVE GIFTS BUT AWAKEN SHADOWS.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Dirt floor.

Damp iron in the air.

Catherine kneels, digging with her bare hands.

Dirt packs under her fingernails. She places the offerings
 into the hole:

A handful of old milk teeth.

The black honeycomb.

A heavy GOLD COIN.

She covers the hole, takes a pocketknife, and pricks her
 thumb. Three DROPS OF BLOOD fall onto the soil.

CATHERINE
 (whisper)
*Saturne, dona mihi fortunam.
 Praetium accipio.*

She waits. Nothing happens.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
 (breaking)
 Please...

No movement. No sound. She stands. Defeated.

INT. LIBRARY - LATER

Catherine lies curled on the faded rug, wrapped in a blanket with NOX. The house is silent.

CLINK - Metal on wood. Her eyes SNAP open.

CLINK... CLINK...

She looks up. A single COIN falls from the darkness above. Hits the floor. ROLLS toward her. She picks it up. Heavy.

CLINK. CLINK. More coins fall.

They bounce off shelves. Off the desk. Off the floorboards. Catherine scrambles back.

CATHERINE
 (laughing, terrified)
 It worked... Oh my God!!!

She grabs a handful of coins.

Behind her: The shadows elongate.

Something tall separates itself from the darkness.

A floorboard GROANS, a heavy shift in the dark.

VOICE (V.O.)
Paid in full.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Sunlight blasts through the curtains. Dust dances in the air.

CATHERINE stands by the counter. She pours coffee.

Her phone BUZZES.

CATHERINE
 (clearing her throat)
 Hello?

NATALIE (V.O.)
 Ms. Thorne? NATALIE WONG from
 Kestrel & Stein. We've reviewed
 your portfolio. We'd like to offer
 you the Vice President position. It
 comes with a strong package - six-
 figure base salary and a signing
 bonus.

CATHERINE
 Are you serious?

NATALIE (V.O.)
 Absolutely. We believe you're an
 excellent fit for the role. I can
 arrange a car to pick you up so we
 can finalize the details.

CATHERINE
 I... thank you. I don't even know
 what to say. Yes. Absolutely.

Catherine lowers the phone slowly and spins around.

On the floor, GOLD COINS. Dozens of them. Leading toward the
 door. She picks one up and smiles.

CUT TO:

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

INT. CAR - DAY

Catherine sits in the back of a luxury car, transformed,
 wearing a sharp black suit, with her hair perfect.

INT. ANNA'S HOUSE - DAY

Anna looks exhausted, wrapped in a blanket, clutching a mug.

ANNA
 Morning crazy. You know, the lights
 in my flat went crazy at exactly
 4:44 A.M.

CATHERINE
 (checking her reflection)
 Old wiring, Anna.

ANNA

It didn't feel like WIRING. It felt like someone was watching me sleep. Anyway, did you sleep well? I was thinking of meeting you in one hour.

CATHERINE

I have great news. I got a job!! I'm on the way right now. I'm finally winning.

ANNA

What? Wow... that is great!!!

In the car, Catherine touches the window control.

ZZZT. The reading light above her head FLASHES.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. ANNA'S KITCHEN - DAY

A kitchen lamp POPS.

ANNA

(screams)

Oh my God, what's going on?!

Catherine watches the flickering light. She isn't scared. She smiles.

CATHERINE

I need to go, Anna. It's my first day! I don't want any distractions!
Luv ya!

EXT. SKYSCRAPER - DAY

A monolith of black glass piercing the sky - KESTREL & STEIN.

INT. LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Pristine. Magnificent.

Natalie (25), flawless, types at the desk.

CATHERINE

Good morning. I'm Catherine Thorne.

Natalie looks up.

NATALIE

Ms. Thorne, welcome. Thank you for coming at such short notice. Mr. Stein is expecting you. Please take the elevator down the hall.

CATHERINE

Thank you.

INT. LIFT - MOMENTS LATER

Catherine stands alone, doesn't touch anything.

The floor indicator races: 10. 20. 30. It stops at: 44.

The doors open with a heavy, metallic GROAN.

INT. DAVID STEIN'S OFFICE - DAY

Huge. Cold. Minimalist.

DAVID STEIN (30) sits behind a glass desk, typing furiously.

DAVID

(without looking up)
You're late.

CATHERINE

I apologize, but I'm five minutes early.

David stops typing.

He looks up, ready to dismiss her. Then - he sees her. The air in the room SHIFTS. The recessed light above his head strobos. David stands. Walks around the desk. Too close.

DAVID

(lower, softer)
My apologies. Time seems to...
stop.

He inhales slightly. As if she smells like something addictive.

CATHERINE

(steady)
Mr. Stein. I'm here about the VP position.

DAVID
David, please.
(smiles)

DAVID (CONT'D)
I had a test prepared. I was going
to make you rewrite the merger
strategy overnight.

CATHERINE
I can do that. No problem.

DAVID
Now that feels like a waste of your
talents and my time.

He fixes a slight fold in her blazer lapel. His fingers
linger. Eyes burning.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Let's discuss your role over dinner
tonight.

CATHERINE
Should I be worried?

DAVID
Have you ever tried Portuguese
food?

CATHERINE
No.

DAVID
Then you have absolutely nothing to
worry about.

Behind him, Catherine glances toward the corner of the room.

TICK. TACK. A sound like a hook snagging flesh.

CUT TO:

INT. THORNE MANOR - NIGHT

The front door closes softly behind CATHERINE. Stillness.

She slips off her shoes at the entrance. Bare feet on cold
stone.

She exhales, long, tired.

Crosses to the kitchen. Uncorks a bottle of wine.

The sound is sharp in the quiet, then she pours a glass, and sinks into the sofa.

NOX jumps up, circles once, and settles against her stomach.

She absently strokes its fur. For a moment... peace.

Then, faintly: TICK.

She doesn't notice. Her phone VIBRATES.

Anna (CALLING)

Catherine answers.

INTERCUT - PHONE CALL

ANNA

So? How was your first day? Tell me *everything*.

TACK.

Catherine smiles, relaxed.

CATHERINE

I can't even describe it... It felt *meant to be*.

ANNA

What do you mean?

A beat.

Catherine takes a sip of wine.

TICK.

CATHERINE

From the moment I stepped into the building, I felt like I was on the right path. Like things finally made sense.

ANNA

And your boss?

TACK.

Catherine laughs softly.

CATHERINE

Oh my God. We're having dinner tonight.

ANNA

Already?

CATHERINE

Yeah. And yes, he's handsome.

TICK.

NOX shifts slightly. Its ears twitch.

ANNA

Wow. I'm so happy for you. You deserve this. You sound... finally happy.

Catherine exhales, relieved.

CATHERINE

Nothing strange this time. I really think everything's going to work out.

A pause.

ANNA

Any strange signs? Anything from the book? It sounds almost too good to be true.

Catherine's hand stills on NOX'S back.

TACK.

A faint CREAK somewhere in the house.

CATHERINE

Not yet. But I did feel something odd...

ANNA

What?

NOX lifts its head now. Alert.

CATHERINE

David, my boss, kept looking at me like he was... hypnotized.
(half-joking)
Maybe that's the price.

A subtle DRAFT OF AIR brushes Catherine's ankles. She shivers.

ANNA
Are you okay?

CATHERINE
Yeah. Just old house noises.

She glances toward the dark hallway.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
I need to get ready for dinner. And you? I didn't even ask, are you okay?

ANNA
Not really. I'm not feeling great, but I'm going out for a walk. Maybe it'll help.

CATHERINE
Okay. We'll talk tomorrow.

ANNA
Sure. *Luv ya.*

CATHERINE
Luv ya.

The call ends.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Heavy rain. Headlights smear across wet asphalt.

Anna walks quickly, tense. She keeps glancing over her shoulder. She dials Catherine's number.

No answer.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - NIGHT

MUSIC PLAYS. Softly. Elegantly. Voices are inaudible.

Catherine sits at the table.

Portuguese wine is poured.

A quiet, intimate rhythm fills the air.

Her PHONE VIBRATES on the marble. She sees the name.

Anna: CALLING.

She hesitates.

EXT. CITY STREET - CONTINUOUS

Anna slows down, feeling uneasy.

The call continues to ring. She turns again.

Her breath quickens. She grips the phone tighter.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

Catherine flips the phone FACE DOWN onto the table.

She forces a smile and lifts her glass.

David mirrors the gesture. A silent toast. They drink.

EXT. CITY STREET - CONTINUOUS

Anna stops trying. Starts walking again.

The streetlight above her FLICKERS. Just once.

She steps onto the crosswalk.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Catherine laughs. A real laugh. She leans back. Relaxed. Distracted.

EXT. CITY STREET - CONTINUOUS

A CAR appears too fast. A HORN BLARES. Anna turns... CRASH.

SOUND CUTS HARD.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The music keeps playing.

Catherine lifts her glass again, but then her hand SLIPS.

THE GLASS FALLS and SHATTERS on the marble floor. RED WINE spreads outward. Pooling like blood.

The music warps slightly. Still playing. Something is not right.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Her PHONE VIBRATES again. Harder. She picks it up.

SCREEN:

ANNA - 3 MISSED CALLS

UNKNOWN NUMBER - INCOMING

Catherine answers. We don't hear the voice. Her face drains.

David stands.

Already reaching for her coat. Catherine looks down at the wine on the floor.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Monitors BEEP softly.

Anna lies in a coma. Tubes. Bandages.

Her hand rests on the sheet.

In her fist is a small silver medal of Saint Michael.

The chain snapped. Catherine notices. Her eyes fill with tears. Emptying out her emotions.

CATHERINE

(whisper)

I'm so sorry, Anna.

A beat.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

You called me. I turned the phone
face down. You didn't deserve this.
Not you.

The monitor's glow DIMS for a half-second in the dark. A SHADOWED FIGURE stands behind her.

Catherine turns. There's nothing there.

LATER THAT NIGHT

Catherine sleeps curled in the chair, her head resting near Anna's arm. The machines continue their rhythm.

FLASHBACK - THE DREAM

The Latin chanting begins again.

INT. THORNE MANOR - NIGHT

Men in dark robes circle a table. Candles flicker along the walls. The sound of the sea crashes outside.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Catherine gasps AWAKE. The room is unchanged. Machines beep. Anna lies still. Catherine wipes her face, shaken.

INT. THORNE MANOR - LIBRARY - SAME TIME

THE SHADOW VERSE lies open on the floor.

There is no wind, but the pages SHIVER.

Dark ink SEEPS through the margins, forming unfamiliar shapes.

On the wooden floor are THREE BLACK FOOTPRINTS. The room is empty.

CUT TO:

SIX MONTHS LATER

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Close on a pregnancy test: NEGATIVE.

Catherine stares. Her breath catches.

She sinks to the floor, clutching the test.

CATHERINE
(whisper, breaking)
What's wrong with me...?

Tears fall. She wipes them away. Forces herself up.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A storm builds outside. Lightning flashes, briefly flooding the room with white light.

From the shadows behind her comes a faint, distorted WHISPER.

VOICE (V.O.)
Catherine... Let me out...

She spins.

Nothing.

Another flash of lightning.

For an instant, a HUMAN SHADOW lingers on the wall, then vanishes.

CATHERINE
No... No, I can't use the book
again...

The television turns ON by itself. A warped infomercial plays.

TV ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*All your dreams... Can come true...
For a price.*

The image GLITCHES.

Catherine's reflection in the dark screen looks back at her, a fraction out of sync.

BAM! The wardrobe door SLAMS shut. Catherine gasps. Only the low hiss of TV STATIC remains.

Catherine reaches for the library doorknob. Her hand trembles.

DAVID (O.S.)
Cath?

She turns. David stands in the doorway, looking sleepy and gentle.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Come to bed, babe. We'll rest. Try
again tomorrow.

He takes her hand. She lets him. They step away. The lights CLICK OFF.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (MONTHS LATER)

Muted daylight filters through plastic blinds. The room is sterile. Machines BEEP softly, precise and indifferent.

Anna lies in a coma, tubes and bandages tracing her still body.

Catherine sits beside the bed, holding Anna's hand.

Her thumb moves slowly over Anna's knuckles.

CATHERINE

(quiet)

Hi Anna... I went to the doctor today. I didn't want to go alone. I kept thinking, if you were awake, you'd tell me not to panic.

She swallows.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

It didn't work again.

The heart monitor SKIPS - BEEP. BEEP - then stabilizes. Catherine looks at the screen. Nothing changes.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

It's probably nothing. But you know me. No pills. No precautions. Nothing.

Her grip tightens.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

I think there's something wrong with me.

The IV line TWITCHES once.

Catherine freezes, watching it.

The monitor resumes its steady rhythm.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

You'd say I'm not broken. You'd drag me out of here. Force me to take a few days off. Beach. Sun. No clocks. Just breathing again.

A faint smile flickers and fades.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

(whisper)

I don't know what else to do.

A long silence.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
 I'm going to turn to the book. One
 last time.

The monitor FLATLINES: a sharp TONE.

Catherine jolts.

The line immediately corrects itself: BEEP. BEEP. Normal.

No doctors. No nurses.

As if nothing happened.

Catherine stares at Anna's face, then slowly releases her
 hand and steps out of the room.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

The house is silent. Pages flutter faintly on their own.

THE SHADOW VERSE lies open on the desk.

Catherine enters barefoot and approaches.

The letters on the parchment pulse a faint red glow.

At the top of the page:

FERTILITY RITUAL - LUNAE SANGUINIS

Her fingers glide across the ink.

CATHERINE
 (whispering)
 Under the full moon...

Her eyes settle on the final line, handwritten in darker ink:

Da mihi filium vel moriar in silentio.

She closes her eyes. Her hands tremble, but she does not
 hesitate. She turns and walks out.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Catherine takes the last dried rose from a vase, finds an old
 needle in a drawer, and pricks her finger.

A bead of blood forms.

She collects it into a small glass vial, pulls a strand of her hair, and wraps the rose, vial, and hair into a black cloth pouch.

INT. LIBRARY - LATER

She returns and places the pouch beside the book.

The candle flame flickers.

She moves the armchair aside, rolls up the rug, and kneels on the bare wood.

With white chalk, she draws a circle marked by four intersecting crescent moons and a womb-like sigil at its center.

She unwraps the pouch, pours the blood into a stone bowl, scatters the petals, and lays the strand of hair over the symbol.

The air thickens.

She kneels before the book and begins reading backwards.

CATHERINE

*Aperi uterum meum, sub luna
plena... Vita transi, spiritus
veni... Da mihi filium vel moriar
in silentio... Ego recipio. Ego
consentio. Ego aperior...*

The candles flicker violently.

A dissonant female whisper hums in reverse.

Catherine's chest rises and falls, her hands lifting slightly as if guided.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

(screaming)

GIVE ME A CHILD!

The chalk circle glows a faint red.

The candles extinguish at once.

Silence.

A distant woman's scream pierces the dark.

THE SHADOW VERSE shakes.

Its spine cracks open as black ash spills onto the floor, gathering and rising into shape.

A burned woman emerges from the ash, hollow-eyed.

JUSTINA
(whispered)
You read the spell backwards.

(beat)

JUSTINA (CONT'D)
You released me.

Catherine trembles.

JUSTINA (CONT'D)
(whispering)
*She will be born. But she will
never walk alone.*

A deep heartbeat echoes. Catherine places a trembling hand over her belly.

CATHERINE
(barely audible)
What have I done?

The ash collapses inward and vanishes. The final candle flickers and dies.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - MORNING

A pregnancy test rests on the sink.

POSITIVE.

Catherine inhales sharply.

Behind her, the mirror slowly fogs and a single word appears in the condensation: *MOTHER*.

Her smile holds, but something unsettled lingers beneath it.

INT. THORNE MANOR - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Morning light fills the room. Catherine sits at the table holding the test.

David enters, still half asleep, and kisses the top of her head.

DAVID
Have you been up long?

CATHERINE
I have something to tell you... I'm pregnant.

He stops.

DAVID
... Wait... What?

She nods. He exhales a breath he didn't know he was holding.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Are you serious?

She nods again.

He drops to his knees in front of her, hands instinctively resting on her stomach.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Oh my God... We're having a baby.

Catherine smiles.

But something flickers behind her eyes, not doubt, not fear...

...As if something has answered.

A low hum begins. The wooden wall subtly rises and falls like breath.

Catherine notices.

David doesn't.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Catherine lies awake, her hand resting on her belly. David sleeps beside her.

A whisper.

CHILD'S VOICE (V.O.)
Mommy...

She sits upright. The bedroom door stands slightly ajar.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

The mirror fogs again.

Words form slowly: SHE'S COMING...

Catherine stares at her reflection.

Something about it feels wrong.

JUSTINA (V.O.)
You released me.

A beat.

JUSTINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Now you must pay the price.

A single sharp note rises.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

The door BURSTS open.

Catherine rushes in, pale, shaking, on the verge of collapse.

David jolts awake.

DAVID
Catherine? What is it?

She switches on the bedside lamp. Her hands won't stop trembling.

CATHERINE
(breathless)
We need to leave. Now. We have to
get out of this house.

DAVID
What? Slow down. What happened?

CATHERINE
She spoke to me. In the mirror.
There was blood in the sink. The
door slammed shut. By itself.

David sits up, still foggy with sleep.

DAVID
 You had a nightmare. You're
 pregnant. You're stressed. It's
 normal, love.

CATHERINE
 (shivering)
 It wasn't a dream.

She grabs his face, forcing him to look at her.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
 David... please. There's something
 in this house.

A beat.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
 And now it knows about the baby.

A low, irregular rhythm begins inside the walls, almost
 backward, almost wrong.

The bedside light flickers and dies. Silence. Then...
 SCRAPING.

Fingernails drag slowly across wood.

Neither of them moves.

A soft sound rises - A BABY'S CRY.

BABY (V.O.)
 ...ma... ..ma...

Catherine clamps a hand over her mouth.

DAVID
 That's... that's Nox. It must be.

CATHERINE
 (quiet, hollow)
 No.

The cry twists into a faint, broken giggle.

Catherine steps back, staring at the wall.

The wallpaper peels. A thin crack spreads through the
 plaster.

From it, a single BLACK TEAR slides downward.

DAVID
We'll pack. We'll leave after the
baby's born.

The giggle echoes. A sharp violin string SNAP cuts the air.

SMASH TO:

Full moonlight spills through the window, cold and silver.

The curtains shift slightly in the night air.

From the living room, the low murmur of the television. DAVID
is still awake.

Catherine lies on her back, six months pregnant, eyes open.

One hand rests over her belly.

A sudden internal pain. Not a contraction. A deep, spreading
heat.

CATHERINE
(whisper)
No...

She inhales sharply and grips the sheet.

The sensation intensifies, radiating from inside her. She
places both hands firmly over her stomach. The skin beneath
her palms begins to darken.

At first, it seems like shadow under the moonlight.

Then it deepens.

The color spreads slowly across her belly until the entire
surface turns black.

Not bruised.

Not inflamed.

As if the skin has been burned long ago and left to cool.

Fine hairline fractures form across it.

Catherine lifts her head and stares down at herself.

The baby moves. Not a kick. A slow turn. Deliberate.

The blackened surface tightens.

A shape presses outward from beneath the skin.

Five long impressions test the surface from within.

Catherine touches the darkened skin. A soft, sickening sound—
skin meeting heat.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Ah!

She jerks her hand away.

Her palm flushes red instantly.

The pain follows a second later, sharp and real.

She presses her other hand against her stomach. It burns
again.

The faint smell of smoke drifts into the room.

The black surface ripples subtly, as if something beneath it
is shifting, aware.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

DAVID! AHHHH!!

The shape presses harder from inside her. The thin fractures
across her belly deepen in the moonlight.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

DAVID!

FLASH IMAGES

Flames consuming a wooden stake.

A woman screams as fire climbs her body.

A page of an ancient book turns backwards.

Ash falls through darkness.

A pair of black eyes opens inside smoke.

BACK TO SCENE.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

David looks up from the couch.

He had already felt uneasy tonight.

The moonlight makes the apartment feel unfamiliar. He stands and moves quickly toward the bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

As Catherine swings her legs off the bed, the heat vanishes.

Instantly. She looks down.

Her belly is normal. Smooth. No cracks. No blackness.

She looks at her hands. Unmarked. The smell of smoke is gone.

David enters.

DAVID

What happened?

She points at her stomach, breathing hard.

CATHERINE

It was burning.

He steps closer and studies her carefully.

He sees nothing unusual.

He places his hand gently over her belly. The baby moves softly beneath his palm.

He exhales.

DAVID

You're tired. That's all.

She shakes her head.

CATHERINE

No.

He brushes hair from her face.

DAVID

It's the moon. You're overwhelmed.

He kisses her forehead. Turns to leave.

He pauses briefly.

He inhales.

A faint trace. Smoke.

He says nothing and closes the window slightly before he exits.

Catherine remains seated on the edge of the bed.

Moonlight washes over her.

Her breathing steadies, and then she looks down at her stomach.

For a brief second, a thin black line crosses the skin like a crack in porcelain.

It fades.

The baby moves once. Slow. Measured.

She places her hand gently over her belly again. Hesitates.

Then she presses her palm against it. Waiting for something to happen. Nothing does.

Her expression shifts. Not relief. Fear.

CATHERINE

What is happening to me...?

The moon slips behind a cloud. The room darkens.

INT. HOSPITAL - ULTRASOUND ROOM - DAY

Cold, clinical light fills the room as a low electronic hum lingers beneath the silence.

Catherine lies still on the table, gel spread across her belly, staring at the ceiling while the DOCTOR moves the wand with steady precision, studying the monitor.

DOCTOR

Everything looks good. The baby's in position. Labor should begin tonight.

She leans closer to the screen.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Wait.

On the monitor, the fetus floats peacefully, but a faint ripple distorts the image behind it, slightly out of sync.

CATHERINE

What is that?

DOCTOR

I don't know. It could be a reflection.

Her voice lacks conviction.

The image glitches for a split second—a hunched female shape flickers behind the fetus, head tilted unnaturally—and then disappears.

A sharp metallic PING cuts through the room.

The doctor immediately switches off the machine.

The screen goes black.

He wipes the gel from Catherine's stomach, his movements brisk and controlled.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

We're done. Let's prepare you for delivery.

Catherine slowly sits up and catches her reflection in the dark monitor: her face staring back, and something standing just behind her, perfectly still.

INT. DELIVERY ROOM - NIGHT

Alarms blare and red lights pulse as Catherine writhes in pain on the bed.

The medical team moves quickly around her.

DOCTOR

We're losing the heartbeat!

NURSE

Blood pressure is dropping!

Without warning, the monitors shut down and the main lights cut out, leaving only a dim emergency glow.

A low whisper drifts through the room, indistinct and almost Latin.

The staff freeze as a shadow moves briefly across the ceiling and vanishes.

CATHERINE

(hoarse whisper)
She's coming...

The baby is delivered.

A normal newborn cry fills the room - thin, fragile, human - but another sound bleeds beneath it, delayed and distorted: a woman's scream fused into the infant's voice.

The nurse recoils.

NURSE
That wasn't a baby.

That wasn't a baby.

The doctor lifts the child.

THERESA
Her eyes open.

Darker than they should be. Reflecting no light.

DOCTOR
She's staring at me.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - ROOM - MORNING

Warm sunlight fills the room.

Catherine sits in the hospital bed, pale but smiling.

David stands beside her, holding the newborn.

THERESA cries, a perfectly normal baby's cry.

A NURSE checks the chart.

NURSE
Everything looks good.

David looks at Catherine, relieved.

DAVID
Let's go home.

Catherine nods.

They smile at the baby.

For a moment, everything is peaceful.

A faint sound.

Tic. tac.

So soft it could almost be imagined.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THERESA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Soft lamplight. Warm. Safe.

Theresa (1), round-cheeked and drowsy, sits against her pillows. Catherine holds a bottle to her mouth.

David leans on the doorframe.

DAVID

Last one, Cheeky Cheeky. Then
sleep.

Theresa drinks, eyes fluttering.

Catherine kisses her forehead.

CATHERINE

Goodnight, my love.

They switch off the lamp. The door remains slightly ajar.

Silence.

CLINK.

The bottle hits the floor. It rolls slowly across the wood. A soft giggle.

A beat.

THERESA (O.S.)

Again.

In the hallway, Catherine and David stop. They exchange a smile.

DAVID

She wants an audience.

Catherine suppresses a laugh. They re-enter.

Theresa lies still in her crib. The bottle rests on the floor beside it.

CATHERINE

You little performer.

She picks it up, kisses Theresa again.

They leave. Silence.

After a moment, the bottle shifts. Just slightly.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE - THERESA'S BIRTHDAYS

A CHILDREN'S BIRTHDAY SONG plays. Bright. Familiar.

AGE 1

Cake smeared across Theresa's cheeks. Catherine laughs freely. David films everything.

DAVID

That's my Cheeky Cheeky!

Theresa claps wildly.

The camera slowly drifts away from the table, down the hallway, toward the darkened library.

THE SHADOW VERSE sits on its pedestal. Closed. Still.

--

AGE 3

Theresa runs in circles wearing a paper crown.

DAVID

Careful!

She crashes into Catherine's legs. Laughter. Real. Unforced.

The camera retreats again, past balloons, past light, into shadow.

Inside the library, a faint draft brushes the shelves. One page inside the closed book lifts. Falls back.

--

AGE 5

Smaller gathering. Just family. Theresa stands before five candles.

CATHERINE
Make a wish, Cheeky Cheeky.

Theresa closes her eyes. She blows.

The flame trembles, but remains. Applause.

She inhales again - before blowing - all five candles extinguish.

Not violently. Not with wind. They simply die.

A pause. Slightly too long.

DAVID
Okay... who cheated?

Nervous laughter. Theresa looks at the candles. confused.

INT. THERESA'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Golden light on the wall.

David forms a rabbit shadow with his hands. Theresa bursts into laughter.

THERESA
Again! Again!

Catherine makes a bird. The shadows dance.

DAVID
Your turn.

Theresa tries. Small hands, clumsy shapes. Everyone laughs.

Catherine kisses her head.

CATHERINE
Time for bed.

They exit. The door closes halfway.

The wall remains. Still. Then, a third shadow appears.

Tall. Distorted. Unattached. It does not move. It does not fade.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Grey winter light. The ocean is restless.

Cold wind sweeps across the empty shore.

Theresa (5) runs along the wet sand, laughing.

David chases her.

DAVID
Hey! Slow down!

THERESA
You have to catch me first!

She runs faster.

David finally grabs her and lifts her into the air.

She laughs loudly.

Catherine watches from a blanket wrapped in a coat.

For a moment, everything feels peaceful.

David spins Theresa.

THERESA (CONT'D)
Again! Again!

David drops beside Catherine.

DAVID
She's going to wear me out.

Catherine smiles.

CATHERINE
She gets that from you.

Theresa suddenly stops playing.

She stares toward the ocean.

Completely still.

DAVID

Theresa?

THERESA

Mommy...

Catherine looks up.

THERESA (CONT'D)

Who is that lady?

Catherine turns toward the water.

Nothing.

Just waves.

CATHERINE

There's no one there, sweetheart.

Theresa keeps staring.

Unblinking.

THERESA

She's watching us.

A cold wind sweeps across the beach.

Catherine slowly pulls Theresa closer.

Uneasy.

CUT TO:

INT. THERESA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Theresa (6) sleeps. The baby monitor emits a faint crackle.

Catherine listens from the hallway.

A whisper of movement. She enters the room.

Theresa is sitting upright in bed. Eyes open. Calm.

CATHERINE

Cheeky Cheeky? Why are you awake?

Theresa smiles faintly.

THERESA

*She doesn't like it when you close
the door.*

A stillness fills the room.

CATHERINE
Who doesn't?

Theresa slowly turns her head toward the dark corner.

THERESA
The one that stands there.

Catherine looks. Nothing. When she turns back, Theresa blinks. Confused.

THERESA (CONT'D)
Mommy?

Catherine forces a smile and pulls Theresa into her arms, but the far corner of the room remains heavy with shadow.

CLOSE ON - Theresa's EYE. Still. Too still.

A low hum vibrates through the bedroom as moonlight spills across the toys, leaving one corner untouched by light.

Theresa stands barefoot in her pajamas, staring into the dark, her hands trembling.

CATHERINE (O.S.)
Theresa...?

Catherine steps inside.

Theresa turns slowly.

Black ash smears her mouth.

Catherine freezes as a low, animal growl slips from the child's throat.

Her eyes roll back, dark and unfocused.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
Baby... stop. Please.

Theresa drops to all fours and claws at the floor.

THERESA
(guttural)
Let me out!

She lunges forward, headbutting Catherine.

Catherine falls back.

Theresa collapses moments later, sobbing.
Just a frightened child again.

INT. LIBRARY - HALLWAY - STAIRCASE - NIGHT

Catherine rushes downstairs.
The house feels tight around her.
The walls seem to shift as she passes.
The library door CREAKS open on its own.
THE SHADOW VERSE lies open on the table.
Catherine flips through the pages wildly.
They stop abruptly.
A heading bleeds across the parchment:

TRACES OF OBSESSION
The words on the page:

Screams that do not belong to children...
Unnatural marks... bites...
A second voice within the child.
The body resists.
The soul yields.
Catherine pulls back her sleeve.
A fresh BITE MARK swells red against her skin.
A dull THUD echoes from upstairs.
The HUM returns.
Uneven now.

INT. UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The door is locked.
Water runs inside.

CATHERINE

Theresa! Open the door!

The lock CLICKS.

The door swings open.

Steam fills the room.

The shower runs cold.

Theresa stands in the tub.

Slowly.

Deliberately.

She hits her head against the tiles.

THUD.

THUD.

THUD.

Not crying.

Not reacting.

Just repeating the motion.

Catherine freezes.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Oh Jesus... baby, stop...

Theresa turns. Her eyes are normal. Terrified. But her mouth moves slightly out of sync.

THERESA

(tears streaming)

It hurts...

She suddenly bites Catherine's shoulder. Catherine cries out.

Theresa recoils in horror as black ash seeps from her lips.

INT. THERESA'S ROOM - NIGHT

In the corner, a BLACK MASS seeps from the wall.

Two blood-red eyes flicker in the void.

The lights STROBE.

The mass doesn't move.

It just... WATCHES.

Silence.

Tic. tac.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL - ADMINISTRATION OFFICE - DAY (DAYS LATER)

Cold fluorescent lights HUM overhead.

Catherine sits across from the PRINCIPAL and the SCHOOL COUNSELOR.

Paperwork neatly stacked.

Everything is official.

INT. SCHOOL - OFFICE - DAY

PRINCIPAL

Mrs. Stein, we need to be very clear. Theresa attacked another student. This wasn't a push or a punch. She bit him.

COUNSELOR

She tore the top of his ear with her teeth.

Catherine blinks, but says nothing.

PRINCIPAL

The boy is in the hospital. His parents are pressing charges.

COUNSELOR

Afterward, Theresa was unresponsive. She just kept repeating something.

Catherine looks up.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

"He was hiding something in his head."

A faint, high whisper threads briefly through the room, sharp and almost imperceptible—gone before Catherine can place it.

CATHERINE

I want to see her.

COUNSELOR

She's in the nurse's office, but we need to address this. If this continues, she won't be able to remain at this school.

INT. SCHOOL - NURSE'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Theresa sits curled on a cot, knees drawn to her chest. Dried blood stains the corners of her mouth. On a nearby tray sit saline, gauze, and a small cup of water.

Catherine steps inside, forcing her breathing to be steady as the fluorescent lights hum overhead.

THERESA

(flat)

He screamed... like a rabbit.

Catherine moves closer.

CATHERINE

Why, Theresa? What happened?

Theresa keeps her eyes fixed on the wall.

THERESA

There was something in his ear. It was whispering.

(beat)

I had to take it out.

A long silence stretches between them.

Catherine wraps a blanket around her and takes her hand.

CATHERINE

We're going home.

They step into the hallway together.

The overhead lights flicker once, dim, then stabilize.

For a brief moment, the ceiling above them seems to rise and fall.

Subtle as breath beneath plaster.

Then everything returns to normal.

INT. FAMILY HOME - ENTRYWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

The door bursts open. Catherine pulls Theresa inside.

CATHERINE

Go upstairs and take a bath. Then
we'll talk, okay?

Theresa pauses at the bottom of the stairs.

THERESA

(distant, eerily flat)
He screamed like a rabbit...like he
knew.

Catherine exhales slowly.

Theresa slips her hand free and runs upstairs barefoot.

On the wall beside her, a shadow climbs too.

Taller.

Slightly curved.

Not matching her shape.

Catherine remains alone in the hallway as the house settles
around her.

INT. FAMILY HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Catherine stands motionless, phone in hand. The four wall
clocks begin spinning counterclockwise as the ticking builds
steadily in volume.

She opens Theresa's backpack and finds a drawing: a woman
with her mouth sewn shut, a child trapped inside her body.
Beneath it, scrawled in heavy strokes:

I WANT TO KILL MYSELF.

Catherine drops the page and dials.

CATHERINE

(whispering, breaking)
Mateo... it's Catherine.
(MORE)

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

I found your number in my mother's diary. Helena. My daughter needs help.

She hurt another child. Something's wrong with her. Please.

Thunder cracks outside.

MATEO (V.O.)

(calm, grave)

Helena... I remember. Where are you?

CATHERINE

The manor. The old one.

A weighted pause.

MATEO (V.O.)

I'm on my way.

The clocks stop instantly.

Catherine looks up. At the top of the stairs, Theresa stands perfectly still, holding her doll, a faint twisted smile on her face.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

Wind howls as the front door swings open.

MATEO enters rain-soaked, a worn leather satchel over his shoulder.

Inside: a copy of *The Gospel According to Spiritism*, a covered glass of magnetized water, herbs, cotton bandages, and a single white candle.

David rushes to him.

DAVID

Mateo, thank God. She's upstairs. Please, save her.

Catherine appears at the landing, clutching THE SHADOW VERSE, her eyes wild.

CATHERINE

She's burning from the inside. She's saying things that aren't hers.

Mateo looks up slowly, the air in the hallway seeming to thicken around him.

MATEO
Where is the child?

DAVID
In her room. But she's not herself.

CATHERINE
(ashamed)
She found the book and started reading.

Mateo closes his eyes briefly, as if he had expected this moment.

MATEO
It has begun again.

Lightning splits the sky.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Emergency lights flicker weakly. From behind a half-open door comes a wet, guttural sound threaded with distorted children's whispers.

Somewhere inside the walls echoes the warped ticking of a clock with no hands.

Mateo places his palm against the door and slowly pushes it open.

INT. THERESA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Theresa writhes in bed, the sheets soaked, her eyes pitch black.

Dark fluid stains the corners of her mouth.

The walls seem to pulse faintly as the bed groans under her movements.

A doll tumbles from a shelf and begins to cry mechanically.

THERESA (V.O., DISTORTED)
She read it backwards... and now I
come back...

The ticking accelerates.

THERESA (CONT'D)
 (feral shriek)
 I hate you! Let me out!

Mateo kneels beside the bed and opens his satchel, lighting the single white candle. Its flame becomes the only steady light in the room as shadows deepen around them.

MATEO
 (low, prayerful)
 Lord of life and of spirits, grant
 light to those in darkness. Close
 the doors of the past. Relieve
 those oppressed by shadow.

Lightning detonates in a blinding flash.

For an instant, JUSTINA stands behind Theresa.

Her skin is blackened, veined with sigils.

Her mouth is stitched shut, yet her whisper seeps into Theresa's ear without moving.

JUSTINA
 (whisper, cold)
 Let me out.

BLACKOUT.

Silence. No thunder. No screaming. Only a wet slither moving through the walls as the house groans beneath them.

Theresa screams. The bed splinters. The walls convulse as if alive.

INT. THERESA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Theresa lies unconscious, but breathing, as the storm fades into distant thunder.

Catherine collapses beside the bed, shaking, drained.

Mateo leans against the doorway, pale, spent.

MATEO
 It was only a matter of time.

CATHERINE
 (hoarse)
 You knew?

Mateo looks at Theresa before he answers.

MATEO

This didn't start with you. It began long before you were born.

CATHERINE

What do you mean?

MATEO

Justina – The woman Cyprian tried to enchant. When he tried to bend her will to force love where there was none, she refused him.

FLASHES - 17TH CENTURY

A village square at night. Torches burn in the wind. Villagers gather around a wooden stake.

JUSTINA stands bound to it, blistered, but defiant.

MATEO (V.O.)

So he destroyed her.

A silver needle pierces Justina's lips. Tar-dark thread pulls tight, sealing them closed.

Flames rise around her.

Through the fire, her eyes lock onto CYPRIAN, who is in priest's robes.

He holds a massive, leather-bound book.

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

She was burned... but her soul did not leave with the smoke.

The book's cover shifts slightly, almost breathing, as the flames reflect in its surface.

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

It was trapped in the pages, waiting for a desperate heart to open the door.

The book absorbs her final breath as the flames engulf her.

Justina's body collapses into the fire.

The book falls open in Cyprian's hands.

Ink begins to bleed across an empty page.

Words write themselves.

A symbol forms, dark and twisted.

Cyprian watches, horrified.

The page suddenly SLAMS shut.

The fire dies down around the stake.

Only the book remains in Cyprian's hands.

BACK TO SCENE.

Mateo's voice lowers as the memory fades.

MATEO

From that night on, the book was no longer just ink and paper. It was a prison.

CATHERINE

How do we stop her?

INT. THERESA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

THE SHADOW VERSE lies inside the chalk protection circle. Theresa trembles on the bed, her breathing shallow and uneven.

Catherine stares at the book for a long moment. A decision settles over her.

CATHERINE

Mateo, there's another way.

Mateo senses the danger immediately.

MATEO

What are you doing?

Catherine picks up the small ritual blade from the table and, before he can stop her, slices her palm.

Blood spills into her hand.

She presses the bleeding palm firmly against the cover of THE SHADOW VERSE.

The book shudders violently as the blood spreads across the leather, like living ink.

Catherine's eyes roll back.

Her body collapses into a trance.

INT. THE BOOK - NIGHT

Darkness.

Drops of blood fall from above, turning into letters as they strike the ground. Words drift through the air like crimson rain.

Catherine walks through them as if moving through the pages of a living book.

Around her, fragments of memory flicker into existence.

A younger Catherine screams in a dim bedroom.

CHILD CATHERINE

Let me out!

On a high shelf, a WHITE CAT watches silently.

HELENA stands in the doorway, crying.

Across the room, Christopher chants in Latin over the open book, his voice echoing endlessly.

CHRISTOPHER (V.O.)

(in Latin, repeating)

Non aperia... non aperias...

The memories begin to collapse inward, folding into darkness.

From the void, a burning hand emerges and reaches toward THERESA, who lies trapped in shadow.

Flames crawl across the unseen pages of this world as the hand closes around her throat.

Catherine runs forward.

CATHERINE

No!

She stops suddenly.

The ground beneath her is parchment.

The walls are words.

The world itself is the book.

Understanding dawns.

Catherine presses her bleeding hand against the surface beneath her.

The blood ignites, sending fire racing through the letters and across the pages. The entire space begins to burn from within.

The darkness recoils.

JUSTINA forms in the flames, her burned skin veined with sigils, her mouth stitched tightly shut.

The fire climbs toward her.

JUSTINA
(muffled)
No...

The thread strains across her lips.

The stitches snap.

The blackened thread tears violently as her mouth rips open.

JUSTINA (CONT'D)
(screaming)
NOOOOO!

The flames engulf the pages around her as the world fractures and collapses.

CATHERINE
Mateo!

Bring me back. Now!

INT. THERESA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Catherine's body convulses violently inside the chalk circle.

Mateo grabs her shoulders.

MATEO
Catherine! Come back!

THE SHADOW VERSE trembles on the floor. The spine cracks open as a deep red glow pours from the pages.

The book suddenly implodes inward.

Ash erupts into the air like black sand.

Silence.

Theresa gasps, her eyes returning to normal as she begins to cry, frightened and human.

Catherine inhales sharply and opens her eyes.

Mateo steadies her.

MATEO (CONT'D)
You walked through it.

Catherine looks at Theresa.

CATHERINE
And I burned the door behind me.

INT. THERESA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

The remains of THE SHADOW VERSE lie inside the circle, nothing but black ash.

Mateo kneels and places a plain glass jar on the floor. Carefully, he gathers the black ash and seals it inside.

Catherine watches from the edge of the bed, exhausted.

MATEO
(softly)
Let this house be clean. Let no
shadow return. Let blood return to
what it was meant to be.

He seals the jar with a quiet bow of his head.

EXT. FAMILY HOME - MORNING

Mist lifts as Mateo walks to his car carrying the jar. He pauses and looks up at Theresa's window.

A faint glow behind the curtain. He gets in and drives away.

Catherine watches from the doorway, silent.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLIFFSIDE - CHAPEL - NIGHT

Wind lashes the cliffs. Waves crash below. The chapel stands cracked and forgotten against the void.

Mateo approaches alone, holding the jar close to his chest. The iron gate creaks open.

Inside, bare stone. A single carved recess in the rock.

He kneels and places the jar inside. For a moment, nothing happens.

MATEO

(soft prayer)

God, our Father, who art all power
and goodness, give strength to
those who pass through trials. Give
light to those who seek the truth.
And place compassion in the hearts
of all spirits.

He slides a heavy stone slab into place. The instant it locks. The iron gate outside slams shut.

Silence.

Then faintly, almost imagined:

TICK. TACK.

The sound dissolves into the wind and waves. Mateo exhales, not relief but burden. He walks into darkness. The chapel remains sealed.

CUT TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD: YEARS LATER

EXT. COASTAL PROMONTORY - EVENING

A golden sky bleeds into the ocean. Cliffs tower above crashing waves, the landscape unchanged.

Catherine (42) walks slowly along the rocky path, dressed in white.

In her hands, she holds a WOODEN URN with two compartments engraved with distinct sigils, one for her father, one for her mother.

David (46) walks beside her. A few steps behind them, Theresa (16), carrying a worn sketchbook. Her eyes are calm. Older than her years.

They stop near the precipice. Catherine kneels, placing the urn on a flat stone. The wind tugs gently at her dress.

CATHERINE

They were like fire and ice... My
mother ran from the book.

(MORE)

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
 My father let it consume him. And
 I... I survived.

David rests a hand on her shoulder.

DAVID
 You didn't just survive. You ended
 it.

Theresa steps closer, hesitant.

THERESA
 I dreamt of her again last night.
 She was singing. And Grandpa was on
 the stairs, looking at her.
 Smiling. Together again.

Catherine swallows emotion.

CATHERINE
 They never truly left. But today...
 we let them rest.

She glances at her watch - 4:44 P.M. The wind stills, then
 returns, softer.

Catherine opens the urn. Inside, the ashes shift slightly,
 almost aware.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
 By earth, by wind, by sea... Be
 released. Here... Where it all
 began.

She looks at Theresa.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
 Will you help me?

Theresa nods.

Together, they tilt the urn. The ashes spiral into the wind,
 glowing faintly as they dissolve into the dying light.

Silence.

A BLACK BUTTERFLY drifts past, carried by the breeze.

Catherine takes Theresa's hand. Then David's. They sit
 together on a flat rock, facing the horizon.

No clocks. No whispers. Only waves. Catherine closes her
 eyes.

DAVID
 (soft)
 We did it.

She nods.

As the ashes fade, the BLACK BUTTERFLY drifts away from the family. Theresa watches it. Hesitates. Her parents don't notice.

The butterfly moves inland, toward the cliffs.

EXT./INT. CLIFFSIDE CHAPEL - CONTINUOUS

Old. Carved directly into stone. A narrow IRON GATE, blackened with age, seals the entrance. Closed.

The butterfly slips through a narrow gap.

Theresa edges closer and peers inside.

Dust motes drift in the dying light. The air feels older than memory.

On the altar - where a saint's image should be - sits the childhood DOLL. Perfectly still. Its eyes glow a faint, familiar red.

The iron gate CREAKS open just enough. Theresa slips inside. At the far wall, a STONE RECESS. Cracked. Within it, fused into the rock: the remains of the urn and ash. Melted. Breathing. Letters carved into the stone glow faintly:

VERSE

Theresa presses a trembling finger against a sharp edge. A DROP OF BLOOD falls, seeping into the carving. The red light pulses once. The air tightens.

THERESA
 (whisper)
 What is this...?

SLAM - The IRON GATE SHUTS. From inside the stone: A BURNED FACE SLAMS FORWARD.

Eyes blazing. The stitched mouth RIPS OPEN.

JUSTINA
 (screaming)
 LET ME OUT!

BLACK SCREEN.

THE END