

The Middleman

Douglas Wilkinson

After a violent attack, a directionless young man is thrust into a mysterious spiritual trial where every choice pulls him toward darkness or grace where the only escape is becoming the man he was meant to be.

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FADE IN

INT. COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

Golden light pours through tall windows. The place hums — CLINKING spoons, HISSING frothers, baristas calling names over low CHATTER.

NATHAN EVANS (Late 20s) steps inside. Shirt tucked, tie strangled, hair surrendering to gravity. A man one breath from unraveling.

At the pickup counter he almost grabs the wrong cup. Spots his own cup. A small exhale — a tiny victory.

He claims a corner table with his coffee and an ancient briefcase. Pulls out a resume so wrinkled it looks slept on.

He tries flattening it. No luck.

NATHAN
(muttering)
Biggest weakness? Punctuality. No.
(beat)
Focus, Nate.

At the next table, a paperback lowers just enough to reveal warm, amused eyes. A faint smile. The book rises again.

Nathan scrolls interview notes on his phone. His crooked tie slips further sideways with every anxious swipe.

The book lowers fully, revealing MELINDA CATES (Late 20s).

MELINDA
First impressions are everything.

Nathan freezes mid-scroll. Sheepish smile.

MELINDA (CONT'D)
Your tie is an unnatural disaster.

He fumbles with it — making it worse. She laughs, kind.

NATHAN
Is that... better?

Not even close.

She stands and gestures him closer.

Nathan leans in. Melinda straightens his tie with gentle precision. An unexpected intimacy that lands deeper than either of them expects.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Wow. You have magic hands.

MELINDA
(blushing)
Don't make this weird.

They share a small, easy laugh.

NATHAN
Too late. I'm Nathan.

MELINDA
Melinda.

A final tug. Perfect.

MELINDA (CONT'D)
Interview?

NATHAN
Yeah. Olsen Marketing. My friend
hooked me up. My first real job.
(beat)
I just hope I'm not a total train
wreck.

Her smile says she sees more in him.

MELINDA
Just breathe. Put something peaceful
in your mind. You'll do great.

It helps. His shoulders drop.

Then he checks the time. Panic floods his face.

NATHAN
Oh no. No, no, no. I'm actually late.

He gathers his belongings, bolts for the exit.

MELINDA
You're not going to ask for my number?

Nathan stops dead. Turns.

NATHAN

Uh... why?

She closes her book with a confident smirk.

MELINDA

I'm invested now. I need to know if
you got the job.

Nathan melts. Offers his coffee cup like a sacred artifact.
She writes her number on the sleeve.

Nathan studies it like she handed him a map out of his old
life.

NATHAN

Uh... thanks.

(beat)

I gotta go.

He rushes out - hopeful, terrified, floating.

Melinda watches him leave, warmth blooming across her face.

EXT. CITY STREET - CONTINUOUS

Nathan bursts out of the coffee shop, floating somewhere
between panic and hope.

He pauses, checks the coffee sleeve again - her number.

One last glance back into the coffee shop. A grin breaks
across his face.

Then he disappears into the moving crowd. The city swallowing
him whole.

TITLE CARD: THE MIDDLEMAN

INT. MELINDA'S LOFT - MORNING

SUPER: THREE YEARS LATER

A soft CHIME alarm.

Morning light slides across Melinda's nightstand, catching an
open Bible beside a cluster of framed photos:

- The two of them in a kitchen, flour everywhere.
- Nathan hugging her from behind.
- A candid shot of them asleep on a couch.

Melinda wakes with a slow blink – rested, peaceful. She taps the alarm and stretches beneath the blankets.

She slips out of bed.

In the kitchen, she brews tea with calm, practiced motions. Her apartment is tidy and intentional – lived-in but cared for.

At her vanity, she applies makeup with easy confidence. No rush. No stress. Her morning moves like breath.

Her phone BUZZES in a ceramic tray. A smile forms before she even answers it.

Nathan appears on screen. Half-dressed. Shirt misbuttoned. Hair stuck somewhere between effort and surrender.

Melinda's face softens.

MELINDA
Morning, you.

INTERCUT:

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT

Nathan lifts two ties toward the camera – terrible in completely different ways.

Behind him:

- A leaning stack of unopened mail on the counter
- A dying plant in the window
- A laundry basket he meant to get to

NATHAN
Which one is less... awful?

INT. MELINDA'S APARTMENT

Melinda bites a small smile. Affectionate. A hint of "oh, Nate."

MELINDA
Ummm... the blue, I think.

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT

Nathan tosses the other aside and loops the blue tie around his neck. He knots it quickly – no guidance.

It lands crooked. Not wrong. Just never quite right.

INT. MELINDA'S APARTMENT

Melinda watches, patient and amused. Maybe a touch wistful.

MELINDA
That'll do.

NATHAN (V.O.-VIDEO CALL)
Really?

MELINDA
It's very... you.

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT

Nathan laughs softly, proud in a resigned way.

They share a look – the kind only people who truly know each other can.

NATHAN
You always know what's best for me.
Thanks, babe.

INT. MELINDA'S APARTMENT

MELINDA
Have a great day.

She hangs up.

Melinda sits there a moment. Her expression warm... but a faint shadow lingers beneath it. Something unspoken. Something she hasn't admitted yet. Even to herself.

EXT. CITY STREET - LATER

Morning traffic hums. Steam slips from rooftop vents. Commuters stream along the sidewalks with practiced urgency.

Nathan steps into the flow and is consumed by it.

People rush past. Cars hiss through intersections. The city moves with purpose.

Nathan doesn't. He drifts, carried by the current more than choosing a direction.

Ahead, against a brick storefront, a HOMELESS MAN — CHARLEY (60s) — sits on the sidewalk. Layered in mismatched coats. Wrapped in a blanket full of holes.

A cardboard sign rests on his knees: ANYTHING HELPS.

He watches the crowd drift past. Then kind his eyes settle on Nathan.

CHARLEY

Hey, friend. Can you help me get something to eat?

Nathan slows — a stutter step. Enough to show he heard. But his eyes flick away. His phone suddenly becomes the excuse.

Nathan drifts toward the outer edge of the sidewalk, giving Charley a wide berth.

Charley's hopeful expression fades as Nathan disappears into the crowd.

INT. MARKETING FIRM — NATHAN'S CUBICLE — LATER

Printers BUZZ. Keyboards CLATTER. A mid-sized marketing firm running at full speed.

Nathan drops into his chair, lets his battered briefcase slide to the floor, and exhales.

His monitor wakes. EMAIL NOTIFICATIONS flood the screen like incoming artillery.

VOICE (O.S.)

Lover boy returns!

Nathan groans without looking up.

NATHAN

Please don't call me that.

DAVE GRIFFITH (Late 20s) rises over the cubicle wall, leans in grinning at his own joke.

DAVE
Tonight's the night, right?
Anniversary number three. Fancy
restaurant. Romantic lighting.

He notices Nathan's bouncing knee. The fidgeting. The avoidance. Dave's grin fades.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Uh oh. I know that look. What's going
on?

NATHAN
Mel keeps asking about our future.

DAVE
Yeah, because she sees one. What's
your problem?

Nathan shrugs. Adulthood weighs on his shoulders.

NATHAN
She sees something in me I don't think
I can give her.

Dave studies him realizing the truth. It's fear - not doubt.

DAVE
Be honest with her. Start there.
That's all she needs.

NATHAN
I just don't want to say the wrong
thing.

DAVE
Saying nothing *is* the wrong thing.
That's how you lose people.

Nathan swallows. That lands too honest.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Take it from me, whiskey and silence
will kill a relationship.

NATHAN
You're lucky you're single.

DAVE

Are you kidding? I would kill for a girlfriend who knows words with more than five letters.

Nathan cracks a small smile.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Look. You don't have to know everything. Just show her how you feel.

Before Nathan can respond -

MR. OLSEN (O.S.)

Numbers review in ten! Conference room. Let's move, people!

The office scatters like startled birds.

Nathan straightens quickly, eyes darting to his monitor. His knees start bouncing again.

MR. OLSEN (50s) appears at the cubicle wall.

MR. OLSEN

Evans... status on the Campbell account?

Nathan stiffens.

NATHAN

Uh... yeah. Yes. I'm... almost through the projections. Just need to finalize the uh... breakdown.

Olsen studies him. Patience thinning.

MR. OLSEN

You need to tighten up, son. Campbell is a priority. Be the leader I hired you to be.

NATHAN

I'll try... sir.

Olsen stares a beat longer than comfortable, then moves on.

Dave leans back over the wall.

DAVE
Bossman's on a rampage this week.

He reaches - pats Nathan's shoulder.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Come on, Romeo. Try not to hide behind
your monitor all day.

Nathan watches Dave head off - equal parts dread and
gratitude - then turns back to work.

INT. LOCAL DELI - DAY

The lunch rush hums. Plates CLATTER as employees hustle
behind the counter and customers crowd the tables.

Nathan sits alone in a corner booth. Sandwich untouched.
Laptop open.

On his screen:

- Top 40 Anniversary Gifts for Her
- Meaningful Gifts Women Actually Like
- Jewelry She Won't Hate

Nathan's knees bounce under the table. He drags both hands
through his hair, drowning in options.

His phone BUZZES - INCOMING VIDEO CALL: AXLE CROSS

Relief washes over him as he answers.

AXLE (Late 20s) explodes onto the screen - sweaty, neon-lit,
pounding music. A dance club - at eleven in the morning.

NATHAN
What's up, buddy?

AXLE (VIDEO CALL)
Nate, Dawg! How you doin'? You alive?

Nathan leans back in the booth, grateful for the distraction.

NATHAN
Yea, I'm alive.
(beat)

(MORE)

NATHAN (CONT'D)
What the hell, man? You're already partying? It's not even noon.

Axle spins the phone – dancers, flashing lights – then back to his face.

AXLE (VIDEO CALL)
Yea, buddy! You're coming with me tonight, right?

Nathan glances at his laptop again. Gift guides everywhere. The anxiety creeps back in.

NATHAN
Dude... it's Mel's and my anniversary.

Axle freezes for a beat. Gears turning slowly.

AXLE (VIDEO CALL)
Oh... oh, yea.
(beat)
Bring her, man.

Nathan pinches the bridge of his nose.

NATHAN
Yeah, that'll go over nicely.

Axle shrugs, big and theatrical.

AXLE (VIDEO CALL)
You need to lighten up, lose some tension. You feel me?

He suddenly looks past the camera.

AXLE (VIDEO CALL) (CONT'D)
Oh, hey. Some fine honeys just walked in. Gotta bounce. Call me if you grow a wild hair.

He fires a finger gun at the camera as the call ends.

Nathan stares at the dark phone screen a moment.

Slowly he looks back to his laptop. Gift guides. Meaningful gestures. Romantic expectations.

He takes a bite of his sandwich. Doesn't even taste it.

INT. RESTAURANT - EVENING

Soft jazz drifts through the room. Glasses CLINK. Silverware SCRAPES. The warm murmur of a full dining room.

A candle flickers between Nathan and Melinda at a small table by the window. City lights glow behind them.

Melinda looks effortlessly put together – elegant, confident, completely at ease in this world.

Nathan looks nice – suit jacket over a blue polo. Casual, but he made an effort.

He fidgets with his napkin.

Melinda reaches across the table and gently places her hand over his, stilling the nervous motion.

MELINDA

You remember our first date here?

NATHAN

Yeah. I spent ten minutes trying to pronounce the wine list.

Melinda laughs softly. Loving the memory.

MELINDA

You were so nervous. I thought it was cute... you trying so hard.

NATHAN

Three years later, my knees still shake.

Melinda studies him a moment.

MELINDA

Ok... don't freak out. I wanted to give you something you really, really need.

She slides a large, wrapped box across the table.

Nathan tenses slightly as he opens it.

Inside – a brand-new leather briefcase. His initials engraved in the corner.

Nathan looks up, stunned.

NATHAN

Mel... I... I can't-

MELINDA

You've been carrying around that beat up old thing for years. I thought... maybe it was time.

Nathan runs his fingers across the leather.

NATHAN

This... this is incredible. Thank you.

Melinda smiles pleased but quiet.

Nathan hesitates – then reaches under the table and pulls up a small jewelry-store bag. Glossy. Generic.

Melinda's smile softens as he sets it in front of her.

She opens the bag and lifts out a simple silver necklace. Pretty. Safe.

MELINDA

Oh, Nathan. It's... lovely.

Nathan brightens, oblivious.

NATHAN

I wasn't sure what you'd like. Simple felt safe.

She nods faintly.

MELINDA

Simple is definitely... safe.

Nathan watches proudly as she studies the necklace a moment longer – missing the shift.

NATHAN

I'll help you try it on later. I bet it looks good on you. Everything else does.

She gently places the necklace back in the box.

MELINDA

Sure. That would be nice.

Her hand slowly withdraws from the table, retreating to her lap. She sits back, quieter now.

NATHAN

So... dessert?

MELINDA

Not tonight.

(beat)

Can we get the check?

Nathan's smile falters.

The quiet between them is different now. He feels it, he just doesn't understand it yet.

INT. NATHAN'S CAR - MOVING - LATER

Streetlights streak across the windshield. Passing cars WHOOSH by. A soft, forgettable song plays low on the radio.

Nathan drives as Melinda stares out the passenger window, arms folded. Distant.

NATHAN

You're... really quiet. Everything okay?

She doesn't look over.

MELINDA

I'm just thinking.

Nathan snaps the radio off.

NATHAN

About what?

She finally turns toward him. The look says: *you know*.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Is this about the necklace? I knew I should-

MELINDA

This is so much bigger than a necklace, Nathan.

Nathan opens his mouth to speak. Nothing comes out.

MELINDA (CONT'D)

That right there. You never say what you feel. Sometimes I think you never will.

NATHAN

I... I don't always know what to say.

Melinda leans back, closing her eyes for a moment.

MELINDA

I'm not asking for perfect words. I just need something honest from you.

NATHAN

I honestly care about you. You know that.

Melinda turns to him - facing him fully now.

MELINDA

Care about me? After three years I was hoping for something deeper than care.

His shoulders sag. He looks at her - fear creeping in.

NATHAN

(soft)

I don't want to lose you.

The words land. They soften her - briefly.

MELINDA

Wanting not to lose me isn't enough. I need you to build something with me. A life. A future. Maybe a family.

Nathan glances between her and the road - missing the red light ahead.

NATHAN

I'm doing the best I can, Mel.

MELINDA

No... you're doing just enough to not break anything. That's the problem.

Nathan turns toward her-

A BLARING HORN.

HEADLIGHTS flood the windshield.

INTERCUT:

EXT. INTERSECTION

A pickup truck BLASTS through the intersection on the cross street.

INT. CAR

NATHAN

Hold on!

He jerks the wheel hard.

TIRES SCREAM.

Melinda slams sideways into the passenger door.

EXT. INTERSECTION

Nathan's car fishtails, barely missing the truck.

It hops the center divider, skids sideways.

Another car HONKS, swerving past in a blur of headlights.

INT. CAR

Nathan overcorrects.

The car spins.

EXT. INTERSECTION

The car skids to a violent stop near the curb – facing the wrong direction.

Tire smoke drifts through the headlights.

INT. CAR

Silence.

Nathan and Melinda sit frozen, breathing hard.

Nathan's hands grip the steering wheel, knuckles white.

NATHAN

Are you ok?

Melinda lets out a small laugh. Shock more than humor.

MELINDA

Y-yeah... yes-

Nathan exhales fast.

NATHAN

That guy just totally blew through
the-

MELINDA

No, Nathan. You ran the red light!

Nathan blinks. Replaying it.

MELINDA (CONT'D)

You weren't watching.

Melinda steadies herself. When she speaks again, her voice is calmer. Sharper.

MELINDA (CONT'D)

This is what I mean. You don't steer.
You coast. Hoping things just work
out.

A tear slips down her cheek. She wipes it away, irritated with herself.

MELINDA (CONT'D)

I'm sitting here telling you how I
feel, and you're somewhere else.
You're never where you need to be.

She taps the dashboard gently.

MELINDA (CONT'D)

Right here.

Nathan absorbs it, wounded, but silent.

Melinda takes a breath. A decision forming.

MELINDA (CONT'D)

I need to know. Are you going to build
a life with me? Or just try not to
lose me?

The question hits him hard.

After a beat, Nathan opens his mouth. Nothing.

Melinda nods slowly. Her last piece of hope fading.

She unbuckles her seatbelt and opens the door. Cold air rushes into the car.

NATHAN

Where are you going?

She steps out. Her breath visible in the night air.

MELINDA

Home. When you figure out what you want... you know where I live.

She SLAMS the door. The sound echoes through the car.

NATHAN

Mel!

Through the windshield, Melinda walks away down the sidewalk. She never looks back.

Nathan swallows hard. His hands tremble on the wheel. He exhales a long, shaky breath.

The windshield fogs around him.

INT. MELINDA'S APARTMENT - LATER

Lights FLICK on as Melinda steps inside. The apartment is quiet.

She drops her keys into a ceramic dish — CLINK — and moves to the bedroom, sitting on the edge of the bed.

Her eyes drift to the open Bible resting on the nightstand.

After a moment, she picks it up and opens to a bookmarked page — reading silently. Her face softening, her eyes growing wet.

A single tear slips down her cheek. This time she lets it.

She exhales, closes the Bible gently and presses it to her chest.

MELINDA

(soft, broken)

God... I don't know what to do with
him. I don't know what he wants. I
can't make him see me... or us.

She swallows, fighting the emotion.

MELINDA (CONT'D)

Please... help him wake up. Help him
find direction. Even if it's not with
me.

Another tear falls.

MELINDA (CONT'D)

Just... don't let him stay lost.

She clutches the Bible tighter. A small, trembling anchor in
her hands.

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The door closes behind Nathan with a hollow THUD.

He stands in the dark. Coat still on. Keys in hand. His chest
tight, breath uneven.

The silence presses in on him.

He pulls out his phone and opens his messages with Melinda.

On his screen - he types: *"I'm sorry. Please forgive me."*

Deletes it.

Types again: *"Can we talk?"*

Deletes it too.

His thumb hovers above the screen. Lost.

Nathan exhales a trembling breath and scrolls down.

Lands on DAVE. Stops. He already knows what Dave would say.

NATHAN

I can't. Not tonight.

He scrolls past Dave - finds Axle.

He taps VIDEO CALL. One ring.

Axle appears instantly - neon lights, pounding music, bodies moving all around him.

AXLE (VIDEO CALL)

Nate, dawg! What's up?

Nathan closes his eyes, exhausted.

NATHAN

Hey, man.

(beat)

The dates over... I can't... I don't know what happened.

Axle's grin fades. Concern replaces it - messy, but real.

AXLE (VIDEO CALL)

Aw, hell. I'm on my way, man. Stay right there.

The call ends. The apartment falls silent again. Nathan stands alone in the dark.

INT. WAREHOUSE RAVE - NIGHT

BASS slams through the warehouse like a shockwave. Fog rolls across the floor. Lasers slice the air.

Neon washes over bodies packed shoulder to shoulder. Sweat. Heat. Alcohol. Everything loud.

Nathan steps inside and is immediately lost in the chaos. Out of place.

Axle BURSTS in behind him.

The crowd erupts - high fives, shrieks, shoulder bumps. Two scantily clad women drape themselves over him instantly.

WOMAN #1

Axle! You're back!

WOMAN #2

We were about to give up on you!

Axle soaks it in, grinning wide. He beams at Nathan.

AXLE
See, bro. My people.

Nathan forces a smile – impressed, but uneasy.

Axle slings an arm around him.

AXLE (CONT'D)
Come on. Let's get you settled.

They weave through the dancers to a battered table littered with bottles and neon shot glasses.

AXLE (CONT'D)
Sit. I'll grab drinks.

Nathan sits stiffly as Axle disappears into the crowd.

The bass vibrates through the table – through his chest.

His knees bounce. The air thick with sweat and perfume.

A GIRL with glitter in her hair slides into the booth startling him.

GIRL
Hey... you alone?

NATHAN
Oh, no. I'm here with a friend.

She brushes her leg against his under the table.

Nathan flinches, pulling away.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Sorry. I'm not really looking for anything like that.

She smirks like she's heard it before.

GIRL
If you change your mind, come find me.
(leaning in)
We can do whatever you want.

She rises – melts back into the crowd as Axle returns carrying a tray of shots. Four drunk girls trailing behind him.

He slams the tray down - shots RATTLE. They all collapse into the booth.

AXLE

Now we're doing this right.

Axle hands a shot to Nathan. The glass shakes as he holds it.

Girls press in - touching, laughing, leaning close.

AXLE (CONT'D)

Pick one. Any one. I promise you won't even remember Mel when they're through with you.

The room starts closing in.

Lights strobe harder. Faces blur. Colors smear.

The bass slows into a dull, chest-shaking thud.

Nathan's breathing quickens. His heartbeat pounds in his ears.

He grips the table. Hands and knees shaking.

The shot falls from his hand - spilling.

Axle's voice seems to echo from far away.

AXLE (CONT'D)

Naaate... bro... you goood?

Nathan's vision tunnels. His breath snaps shallow-

POP

Everything slams back into clarity. Normal lights. Normal sound.

Nathan glances around, terrified.

NATHAN

I... I need some air.

He shoots up, climbing over legs and bodies.

AXLE

Nate! Dude! Come back!

But Nathan is already pushing through the crowd.

He bursts through a door into the cold night air.

EXT. WAREHOUSE ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Music THUMPS through the warehouse walls - dull and distant, like a dying heartbeat.

Nathan doubles over, hands on his knees, gulping air. Sweat drips from his face onto the pavement.

His hands tremble as he tries to steady his breathing.

He wipes his mouth, trying to steady himself. Shame and fear crash in all at once.

Slowly, he straightens looking back at the warehouse door - glowing, pulsing with light and noise. The chaos inside.

Something in him finally gives way.

Nathan turns away and walks into the night.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Nathan walks alone. Shirt half-unbuttoned from the rave. Shoulders hunched against the cold.

A faint cloud of perfume clings to him. He sniffs his jacket - winces.

After a block he finally looks up.

Ahead - cemetery gates. Still. Familiar.

Nathan slows. He hadn't meant to come here. But something draws him forward.

A long beat. Then he steps inside.

EXT. CEMETARY - CONTINUOUS

Gravel crunches beneath Nathan's shoes as he follows the winding path - moving between rows of headstones until he reaches a small family plot.

Two markers side by side.

THOMAS EVANS – an older stone, weathered and fading.

CATHERINE EVANS – cleaner, newer. A small bouquet rests at the base. A small angel statue rests beside Catherine's marker.

Nathan lowers himself onto the grass studying Catherine's name. He runs his fingers across the engraving.

NATHAN

Hey, Mom.

Nathan exhales, the words fighting to come out.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I don't know what I'm doing.

The confession cracks something open. Tears stream down his face instantly.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

My life is falling apart.

(beat)

Mel's mad at me. Dave tries to help.

Axle is... Axle.

(helpless chuckle)

You never liked him anyway.

A faint breeze stirs the trees.

Nathan wipes at his eyes, frustrated with himself.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I feel stuck all the time.

(beat)

I keep messing up and hurting the people I care about.

His voice breaks. Tears fall into the grass.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

You always knew what to say.

A soft gust brushes the back of his neck. Just wind through the trees.

He leans closer to the headstone.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I wish you were here to tell me what
to do. Give me a sign, a push.
Something.

(broken whisper)

I can't do this alone.

The truth settles over him like weight. His shoulders sag.

After a long moment, Nathan pushes himself to his feet. Still
hollow. Still unsure.

He rests his hand against the headstone. A small, trembling
gesture.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I love you.

(beat)

I miss you.

Nathan turns and walks into the darkness.

Behind him, the flowers at Catherine's grave shift gently in
the breeze. The faintest echo of a presence. Nathan never
sees it.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - MIDNIGHT

Nathan walks alone, rubbing his tired eyes. Cold air slips
through his half-unbuttoned shirt.

Up ahead, beneath a flickering streetlamp, a HOMELESS MAN
(40s) mutters to himself - gaunt, jittery, clearly strung
out.

His belongings are scattered across the sidewalk like fallout
from a small explosion.

Nathan instinctively drifts toward the far edge of the
sidewalk.

The man notices him. Straightens.

HOMELESS MAN

Hey! Hey you. C'mere a sec. Help me
out.

Nathan keeps walking. Not rude. Just drained.

HOMELESS MAN (CONT'D)
Don't... don't walk past me like that.
I ain't a ghost.

Nathan quickens his pace.

The man rises - lurches after him.

HOMELESS MAN (CONT'D)
Just... just gimme a little somethin',
man. Anything.

Nathan turns, backing up a step, hands raised.

NATHAN
I'm... I'm sorry. It's been a long
night. I don't want any trouble.

The man steps closer. Too close. His pupils are blown wide.
His breath reeks of alcohol and hunger.

HOMELESS MAN
You got cash. I can smell it on you.

Nathan continues backing up, heartbeat rising.

NATHAN
Look... I don't have anything.
(beat)
Just leave me alone, okay?

The man FLINCHES - like Nathan struck him.

He SHOVES Nathan - hard.

Nathan slams backward into a brick wall. The air blasts from
his lungs.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Hey! Stop!

Instinct kicks in. Nathan shoves him back - clumsy,
defensive.

Something inside the man snaps. His fist SLAMS into Nathan's
face with a brutal THUD.

Nathan's head whips back into the brick.

A SICKENING CRACK.

Nathan drops to his knees.

The world tilts. Sound distorts – traffic, a distant siren, the man yelling.

The man yanks Nathan's wallet from his back pocket.

Another shove.

Nathan collapses – hitting the pavement.

The man bolts down the street.

Nathan's vision tunnels. Darkness closing in.

Blackness.

POP.

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! An alarm blares.

Sunlight cuts through the curtains, dust drifting in the beam like slow ash.

Nathan jolts upright – gasping, disoriented.

His face is swollen and bruised – one eye darkening, a split along his cheek.

He groans and touches his face – winces.

Still rattled, he swings his legs off the bed and stumbles toward the bathroom.

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nathan FLICKS on the light – instantly freezes. The mirror doesn't lie.

A swollen black eye. A deep bruise along his forehead. Blood dried at the corner of his cheek.

NATHAN
(low)
Jesus.

He touches the bruise again. Pain shoots through him.

He jerks back -

FLASHES:

- The homeless man shouting.

- A fist flying towards him.

- His head smalling into brick.

He turns on the water and splashes his face. Pink water spirals down the porcelain.

Nathan stares at his reflection. Something doesn't feel right.

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Nathan clicks on a small TV.

A MORNING NEWS ANCHOR drones in the background.

TV ANCHOR (O.S.)

-weather's steady this Saturday morning, high of mid-70s. No big changes expected through the weekend.

(beat)

And in local headlines, city council meets Monday to discuss budget revisions-

Nathan presses BREW on the coffee maker.

Bread drops into the toaster.

He rubs the back of his sore neck.

His phone lights up - a text from DAVE.

ON SCREEN: *"Hey man, checking in. You okay?"*

Nathan exhales, touched.

He starts typing-

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Nathan jumps, nearly dropping his phone.

AXLE (O.S.)
Yo! Nate! Open the door, man!

Nathan twists the knob when-

-Axle immediately BURSTS inside like a human battering ram. Sunglasses indoors. Sweating. Buzzing with chaotic energy.

AXLE
Dude, what the hell was your prob-

Axle stops cold. He takes in Nathan's bruised face.

AXLE (CONT'D)
Whoa! You get hit by a truck?

NATHAN
Something like that.

Axle grabs Nathan's chin and turns his head toward the light.

AXLE
Daaamn. You look like shit, bro.

Nathan swats his hand away.

NATHAN
What do you want, man?

AXLE
What do I want? Maybe an explanation for you ditching me last night.

NATHAN
I... had a lot going on.

AXLE
Yeah. A lot of running off when things get hard.

Nathan just stares.

AXLE (CONT'D)
Anyway, my fixer called. Got the scoop on today's races.

NATHAN
Axle, I am not in the mood-

AXLE

Don't care. I need a wingman. This is how I make my living. Besides, it's a blast.

Nathan hesitates.

NATHAN

Yeah... I guess I'll-

He catches his reflection in the toaster; Nathan sees his bruised face. Something shifts in him. A quiet authority in his voice.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

You know what. Not today, man.

Axle blinks. The answer lands harder than he expected.

AXLE

Dude. Don't make me go alone.

Nathan shrugs gently. Honest.

NATHAN

Sorry. When I hang with you, things tend to get messy.

Axle freezes for a beat. That one stings.

A faint vibration ripples through the room. On the counter - Nathan's coffee mug suddenly CRACKS.

POP!

Nathan startles.

Axle notices - pretends he didn't notice.

AXLE

Yeah... well. Messy is where the fun is.

Nathan doesn't respond.

Axle forces a smirk.

AXLE (CONT'D)

You used to know how to live, man.

Nathan nudges him toward the door.

NATHAN
Time to go, Axle.

Axle resists the push, leans closer, voice sharper now.

AXLE
Honestly bro, life ain't gonna get any
easier until you loosen up.

NATHAN
I'll call you later.

Axle steps out. The door shuts behind him.

Nathan lingers a moment in the quiet.

Then he picks up his phone and opens his text thread with
Melinda.

ON SCREEN: *"Hey... can we please talk-"*

Quickly deletes it.

His fingers hover - a quiet realization hits him.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Not like this.

Nathan grabs his coat and heads for the door.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - LATER

Nathan steps outside, zips his coat against the crisp morning
air.

A jogger in neon orange passes by waiving - her ponytail
swings with each step.

JOGGER
Morning.

Nathan half-smiles, lifting a hand in greeting.

He starts walking.

Across the street, three kids play tag in a small courtyard -
a girl in a pink jacket dodging two boys in mismatched
hoodies.

The girl SQUEALS as she slips past them.

Behind him - a blue sedan rolls around a corner. Its engine sputters - uneven.

WHIR. CLUNK. POP.

Nathan flinches at the sound - then shakes it off.

He turns a corner -

- and freezes.

Charley sits against a brick wall. A small Bible rests open on his lap. He looks up with a warm, easy smile.

For a split second, Charley's gentle face overlaps with memory of the violent homeless man.

Nathan's breath catches. His shoulders tense.

CHARLEY
Morning, friend.

Nathan forces a tight smile - more reflex than kindness.

His eyes flick to Charley's hands. To the cart beside him. To the sidewalk between them - calculating distance.

Nathan backs away a step.

Then quickly crosses the street.

Charley watches him go. No anger. No surprise. He's used to this.

He lowers his eyes and returns to his reading.

Nathan reaches the curb-

-Something shifts in the world around him. The sky warms with a faint orange tint. Shadows stretch slightly. The air grows just a little warmer.

Nathan doesn't notice. He pulls his coat tighter and keeps walking.

EXT. MELINDA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - LATER

Nathan climbs the small stairway, clutching a cheap bouquet.

At the top he stops. His reflection in the glass door stares back at him. Not great.

He smooths his wrinkled shirt. Runs a hand through his hair, trying to flatten it.

Sniffs his armpit once - winces.

Nathan rolls his shoulders, forcing a little dignity back into himself.

He takes a steady, deep breath - then heads inside.

INT. MELINDA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Nathan reaches Melinda's door. He fluffs the flowers, then KNOCKS gently.

Silence.

He KNOCKS again, firmer.

NATHAN

Melinda? It's Nathan.

Nothing.

Nathan waits another moment. His hope fading fast.

Finally, he sets the bouquet carefully on the welcome mat and turns away, deflated.

As he approaches the building entrance, he notices a woman outside the glass - struggling with armfuls of groceries.

EXT. MELINDA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Nathan steps outside and holds the door open for her.

NATHAN

Here you go.

WOMAN

Thank you.

She slips inside.

Something shifts in the air. The sky brightens a shade, shadows shorten, the air cools slightly.

Nathan pauses. Something feels... different.

He turns to leave –

– Dave stands there. Calm. Present. Watching him with quiet patience.

NATHAN

What are you doing here?

DAVE

Saw you heading this way. Thought you might need a friend.

Nathan exhales, shoulders sagging.

NATHAN

She wouldn't even open the door.

DAVE

Yeah. My ex used to do that. I tried flowers. Apologies. Big speeches. None of it mattered.

NATHAN

Why not?

DAVE

Because *I* hadn't changed.

Nathan processes it.

Dave takes a single step forward, careful not to crowd him.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Wanting her back doesn't mean you're ready for her. And it sure doesn't mean she's ready for you.

Nathan looks away, throat tight.

NATHAN

I don't know what to do, Dave.

DAVE

Start with you. Figure out who you are before you decide who she needs you to be.

Nathan swallows, absorbing it.

NATHAN

I'll think about it.

Dave gives a small, knowing smile.

DAVE

Funny thing is when you start making the right choices... the world tends to notice.

Nathan blinks at him. The line lands somewhere deep, though he doesn't understand it yet.

Dave pulls him into a brief hug.

DAVE (CONT'D)

You know I'm around if you need me.

Nathan nods, then heads down the street.

Dave watches him go. Quiet. Knowing. Almost sad.

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - LATER

Nathan sits on the edge of his bed; an ice pack pressed to his bruised cheek.

His phone rests beside him. The screen is dark - no messages. No calls.

He lowers the ice pack and stares at the swelling in the small mirror across the room.

A long breath escapes him.

His eyes drift to the nightstand.

A single framed photo of him and Melinda - laughing at a street fair.

Nathan studies it.

DAVE (V.O.)
(soft, echoing)
Start with you. Figure out who you
are.

Nathan exhales slowly.

NATHAN
Easier said than done.

Nathan eases back onto the mattress, eyes drifting to the ceiling.

The apartment hums softly – refrigerator, distant traffic, pipes in the walls. Life continuing somewhere beyond him.

His eyes grow heavy.

They slowly close.

FADE TO BLACK

POP!

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! The alarm blares.

Sunlight slices through the curtains, dust drifting in the beam like slow ash.

Nathan jolts upright.

His face is still swollen and bruised from the beating.

He touches his cheek – winces.

Nathan swings his legs out of bed and limps toward the bathroom.

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

He FLICKS on the light.

The mirror shows the same damage – swelling, purple-black bruising across his forehead, the split along his cheek. No healing. No change.

NATHAN

Still? Come on.

He presses the bruise lightly. Same sharp sting.

Nathan splashes cold water on his face, pats it dry, and exhales slowly.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Let's just get through today.

He studies his reflection a moment longer. Something about this still feels wrong.

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Nathan steps in and clicks on the small TV mounted beneath the cabinet.

A MORNING NEWS ANCHOR drones as he moves through his routine.

TV ANCHOR (O.S.)

-weather's steady this Saturday morning, high of mid-70s. No big changes expected through the weekend.

(beat)

And in local headlines, city council meets Monday to discuss budget revisions-

Nathan pauses. His brow tightens.

NATHAN

Saturday?

He shakes it off.

Presses BREW on the coffee maker.

Drops bread into the toaster.

His phone lights up beside him. He glances down - a text from Dave.

ON SCREEN: *"Hey man, checking in. You okay?"*

Nathan stares at it. Thumb hovering.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Nathan jumps.

AXLE (O.S.)

Yo! Nate! Open the door, man!

Nathan exhales, irritated, and unlocks the door.

Axle barrels inside – sunglasses on, restless energy twitching through him.

AXLE

Man, you still look like roadkill.

NATHAN

Good morning to you, too.

AXLE

Look, we gotta go. I let you slide yesterday, but today... I ain't taking no for an answer.

NATHAN

Slide? You were practically dragging me out.

AXLE

I was being nice.

Axle paces the kitchen, wired.

AXLE (CONT'D)

You don't want to sit around here all day, staring at your bruises and your mistakes. Come with me. I'll clear your head.

Nathan studies him. Something about Axle feels... off.

NATHAN

What part of my face says, "take me to the racetrack, Axle"?

(beat)

I got stuff to do.

Axle smiles – but his eyes don't.

AXLE

Like what?

Nathan opens his mouth. Nothing comes out.

AXLE (CONT'D)

Exactly.

NATHAN

I said no, man.

Axle freezes. His jaw tightens. Something dark flickers behind his eyes.

The overhead light flickers.

The toaster SPARKS - SNAP!

Two burnt slices BLAST upward, smoke curling into the air.

Nathan startles.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

What the-

Axle flinches too, then smooths his expression, almost amused.

AXLE

Man... I would hate to see what this place does if you really put your foot down.

Nathan shoots him an annoyed look.

AXLE (CONT'D)

But hey... we both know that's not really your style.

Nathan starts pushing him toward the door.

NATHAN

Time to go.

Axle digs his heels in, resisting.

AXLE

Don't wait too long to loosen up, bro. Pressure like that tends to pop.

Nathan gives him a final shove. Axle stumbles out into the hall.

Nathan SLAMS the door behind him - harder than intended.

The vibration rattles a narrow side table.

A dusty old Bible slides off and hits the floor.

Nathan crouches and picks it up, brushing dust from the faded gold lettering.

A brief glint of sunlight flashes through the window – just enough to draw Nathan's eye.

His gaze drifts toward it.

Across the rooftops, a church steeple catches the morning light.

Nathan glances down at the Bible in his hands.

Then back to the steeple.

Something stirs inside him.

Nathan tucks the Bible under his arm, grabs his coat, and heads out.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - LATER

Nathan steps outside, zipping his coat against the crisp morning air.

A jogger in neon orange runs past, ponytail bouncing.

She gives him a cheerful wave – like she's done it before.

JOGGER

Morning.

Nathan hesitates before returning the wave.

He watches her go.

Down the block, the same three kids play tag in the courtyard.

The girl in the pink jacket dodges two boys in mismatched hoodies.

She SQUEALS as she slips past them.

Behind him, a blue sedan rolls around the corner. Its engine sputters.

WHIR—CLUNK—POP.

Nathan flinches again. This time he watches the car longer, brow furrowing.

NATHAN

That's weird.

He shakes it off and continues down the street.

EXT. CHURCH - LATER

Nathan stands on the sidewalk, staring up at the cross above the church entrance — the same one he glimpsed from his window.

He looks down at the Bible in his hand.

Then back to the church.

People drift inside, casual and unhurried.

Nathan watches them for a moment before climbing the steps.

A soft gust bends a low tree branch beside the walkway, revealing a small sign beneath it:

OUR LADY OF PEACE CATHOLIC CHURCH - SATURDAY MASS - 10:00AM

Nathan never notices it.

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Nathan freezes just inside the doorway.

A small group of NUNS glide past in quiet whispers. Votive candles flicker across the sanctuary like a soft constellation.

A woman dips her fingers in holy water; a child clumsily imitates her.

Nathan stands out here — though no one seems to notice.

A PRIEST (60s, warm, worn) approaches.

PRIEST

You look like a man who hasn't decided
if he's staying or running.

NATHAN

That obvious?

The priest smiles and gestures toward a back pew.

PRIEST

Welcome. Please sit.

Nathan eases down, his eyes flick toward the crucifix.

NATHAN

I'm not Catholic.

PRIEST

Nobody's perfect, son. What brings you
in today?

NATHAN

I don't know. I just... felt pulled.

PRIEST

Pulled is good. Most people don't end
up here by accident.

He glances down at the Bible in his hands.

NATHAN

I don't even know why I grabbed this.
It was just... there.

PRIEST

We call that grace. God puts what we
need back within our reach.

Nathan scoffs lightly, but without bitterness.

NATHAN

I don't think God is very interested
in me right now.

The priest leans closer.

PRIEST

You are exactly who *He's* interested
in. Most people who walk in here need
a reset in life.

The words land. Nathan's eyes glisten.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Grace doesn't erase your path, son. It
walks it with you.

The priest rises.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

I'm hearing confessions after Mass.
You won't walk out a different man,
but saying the truth out loud is the
first step toward cleaning your soul.

NATHAN

But... I'm not Catholic.

The priest rests a gentle hand on his shoulder.

PRIEST

God doesn't care.

The priest moves on.

Nathan sits alone as the sanctuary breathes around him – soft
footsteps, murmured prayers, candlelight.

Pressure builds inside him. His grip tightens on the Bible.

He glances right.

A woman kneels in prayer – but her eyes lift toward him.

Nathan shifts in the pew.

Left – A man looks up from his bible – watching.

Nathan's breath quickens.

Ahead – A child stares straight at him.

Nathan's heartbeat spikes. Sweat beads his brow. Now it feels
like everyone is watching.

Nathan rises slowly from the pew.

He backs into the aisle, trying to steady his breathing.

He squeezes his eyes shut – then opens them.

Reality snaps back.

Everyone is simply praying, whispering, lighting candles. No one is looking at him.

Nathan wipes his face, shaken.

NATHAN

I can't do this.

He turns to leave -

- SLAMS into the holy water stoup - CLANK!

It wobbles wildly, water splashing his sleeves. Nathan catches it just in time.

Now people really are staring.

Nathan looks toward the crucifix. For a moment it feels like it's staring back at him too.

He bolts for the door.

EXT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Nathan bursts through the doors and onto the steps.

He stumbles into the stair wall, grabs the railing, gulping air. Trying to steady himself.

DAVE (O.S.)

I was hoping you would find your faith again.

Nathan's head snaps up.

Dave stands at the bottom of the stairs, hands in his pockets, completely calm.

DAVE

I just didn't expect you to start here.

NATHAN

I can't do this with you right now, Dave.

Dave nods, unoffended. If anything, he seems to understand.

DAVE

That's okay. Just don't run from the things trying to help you.

The words strike a deep bruise.

NATHAN

I'm not running! I'm just trying to catch my breath.

Nathan pushes past him and heads down the steps.

Dave watches him go, concerned. He doesn't follow.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - LATER

Nathan walks fast, head down, gripping the Bible tightly.

The world around him feels slightly warped – heat haze rising from the pavement.

Up ahead, Charley kneels beside his cart, struggling to reattach a loose wheel.

He looks up with warm eyes and a hopeful smile.

CHARLEY

Hey there, friend. You got a screwdriver I could borrow?

For a split second, the violent man from the night before flashes over Charley's face – fist raised, eyes wild.

Nathan's fingers tighten more around the Bible. He opens his mouth – nothing comes out.

Charley's smile softens.

CHARLEY (CONT'D)

It's alright. Take care.

Nathan sidesteps him, nearly stumbling off the curb as he passes. He doesn't look back.

The world shifts. The sky warms a shade. Shadows stretch longer. The air grows hotter.

Nathan feels the wrongness but doesn't understand it. He rips his coat off and hurries away.

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - LATER

Nathan sits on the edge of the bed, the Bible in his hands.

He flips through the pages without really seeing them. His breathing falters.

His finger traces a passage as he mumbles the words under his breath.

Pages turn faster. Words blur together. Verses feel too bright, too sharp, too much.

NATHAN

What am I even supposed to do with
this?

Nathan exhales sharply and snaps the Bible shut.

He hurls it across the room.

THUD - It strikes a wall and falls face down.

Nathan collapses backward onto the bed, one hand clutching his chest.

His breathing shakes. Eyes wide. Overwhelmed and fractured.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I can't do this.

The panic burns itself out. His breathing steadies, exhaustion settling over him.

His limbs go slack. His eyes drift closed.

FADE TO BLACK

POP!

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

Sunlight slices through the curtains.

Nathan stirs, eyes closed. He rubs his face - winces. The

bruises are still there.

NATHAN

What? No!

His eyes snap open.

He leaps to his feet.

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nathan FLICKS on the light.

The mirror shows the same damage – swelling, bruising, the split along his cheek. No healing. No change.

NATHAN

Oh, come on!

He backs away from the mirror like it's accusing him.

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Nathan enters and clicks on the small TV.

The same MORNING ANCHOR drones.

TV ANCHOR (O.S.)

-weather's steady this Saturday morning, high of mid-70s. No big changes expected through the weekend.

Nathan freezes.

NATHAN

(in perfect synch with the TV)
In local headlines, city council meets Monday to discuss budget revisions-

He cuts himself off. Horrified.

His phone BUZZES - a text from Dave.

ON SCREEN: *"Hey man, checking in. You, okay?"*

Nathan's breath quickens.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
No. No freaking way...

His eyes snap to the door. Anticipating-
-BANG! BANG! BANG!

AXLE (O.S.)
Yo! Nate! Open the door, man!

Nathan pales. Backs away.

NATHAN
What in the hell is happening?

Axle POUNDS harder. Relentless now.

AXLE (O.S.)
Don't keep me knocking, bro. Come on!

Nathan bolts from the kitchen.

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nathan throws open the window and scrambles onto the fire escape.

EXT. FIRE ESCAPE - CONTINUOUS

He clammers down the RATTLING metal stairs two steps at a time.

Axle's POUNDING echoes through the building.

AXLE (O.S.)
NATE!

The shout detonates through the alley like a sonic pulse.

Brick shudders. Windows rattle. The fire escape TREMBLES beneath Nathan's grip.

Nathan stops dead. Looks up.

NATHAN
What is going on?

Near the top bracket, a screw slowly unwinds.

POP.

Dust sprinkles down raining on him.

Another tremor ripples through the metal. The ladder vibrates like something alive.

A bolt twists loose with a metallic CREAK.

Nathan scrambles down faster now, feet slipping, metal CLANGING beneath him.

He drops the final step, hitting the ground.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

Nathan leaps backward onto the sidewalk, stumbling. He stares up at the building he just fled.

The jogger in neon orange passes exactly as before - same pace, same ponytail bounce, same bright wave.

JOGGER

Morning.

Nathan recoils like she's a ghost.

Down the block, the SAME THREE KIDS play tag. The girl in the pink jacket SQUEALS in the same rhythm, dodging in the same pattern.

Nathan turns, stares down the street, breathing hard.

NATHAN

Blue sedan.

Right on cue. A BLUE SEDAN rolls around the corner. Same engine cough - WHIR-CLUNK-

-Nathan clamps his hands over his ears - POP.

The sound detonates louder this time, like the world is mocking him.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I'm losing my mind.

He backs away into the street –

A CAR HORN BLARES.

Nathan spins just as an SUV screams past him, missing him by inches. Wind and engine noise whip past as it rockets by.

He stumbles backward onto the curb, heart pounding.

Across the intersection, Charley pushes his cart along the sidewalk – same coat, same slow rhythm.

Nathan gasps, hyperventilating, spinning in place. Everything feels wrong. Repeating. Closing in.

Then he spots it – The coffee shop.

Nathan bolts toward it like it's the only solid thing left in the world.

INT. CORNER COFFEE SHOP - LATER

Nathan BURSTS in, nearly knocking over a chair.

Conversations stop. Heads turn toward him.

Sheepishly, he drops into a corner booth, trembling.

At the next table over, a worn book slowly lowers.

DAVE

Rough morning?

Nathan flinches.

NATHAN

Dave? What... how... what?

Dave studies him calmly.

DAVE

Breathe, Nate. Talk to me.

Nathan swallows, glancing around the cafe like the walls might be listening. He leans closer.

NATHAN

You're gonna think I'm crazy.

DAVE

What could you possibly say that's crazier than how you look right now?

Nathan licks his lips, voice low.

NATHAN

It's the same day. I mean it's literally repeating. I've lived this day three times.

He gestures to the bruises on his face.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

This... all of this. I... I... I see the same woman jogging every morning. The same kids playing tag. The same car-

Dave leans in, grounding the moment.

DAVE

Okay. Slow down. Walk me through it.

NATHAN

You don't get it. I know what's coming. I predicted the morning news, your text. Axle banging on my door. All of it.

DAVE

Nate... this sounds like a lot of-

NATHAN

It's real!

Heads turn. Nathan lowers his voice quickly.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

It's real. I'm stuck in a damn loop.

Dave's voice stays soft.

DAVE

Nate... I love you, man. But somethings not right here.

NATHAN

You're damn right!

More heads turn.

Nathan scans the coffee shop, suddenly aware of the attention. Embarrassed, he slides deeper into the booth.

DAVE

You need to breath, buddy.

Nathan exhales deeply.

NATHAN

I know, I know something is-

He stops cold - his eyes go wide.

Through the window he sees-

-Melinda.

She stands outside the cafe alone. She looks beautiful. Relaxed. Glowing.

For a moment, his world narrows to only her.

Nathan slowly rises from the booth - a smile forms.

Then a man steps up beside her. Tall. Easy smile. Confident.

He brushes her arm as they talk.

Melinda laughs. Blushes. Tucks her hair behind her ear - a move Nathan knows all too well.

The smile fades from Nathan's face.

He slowly drifts toward the window.

The man leans closer, whispering something in her ear. Melinda's smile brightens - a glow Nathan hasn't seen in a long time.

Dave joins him at the window.

DAVE

Nate?

Melinda and the man turn and walk down the sidewalk.

Nathan hesitates.

Then-

-slips out the door - following them.

EXT. MELINDA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Melinda and the man stop at the entrance. They stand close. Too close. Comfortable and intimate.

Nathan hides behind a neighboring stairwell column, barely breathing.

He watches as Melinda laughs – soft, genuine.

The man reaches up and gently touches her cheek. A familiar tenderness.

Melinda leans into his hand.

Nathan's stomach twists. He doubles over and VOMITS onto the sidewalk.

When he looks up, Melinda and the man are already slipping inside. The door closes softly behind them.

Nathan's knees shake. He slides down the column, burying his face in his hands.

AXLE (O.S.)

Sure must suck watching him have what
you want so badly.

Nathan looks up.

Axle stands calm – hands in his pockets. His expression is uncharacteristically soft.

NATHAN

What in the hell do you want now?

Axle jerks his chin toward the apartment.

AXLE

By the look of things, you need a
break.

NATHAN

(defeated)

I need a whole new life. This one is
overwhelming.

Axle climbs a step and squats to Nathan's level, voice gentle – almost brotherly.

AXLE

Nathan... we've been friends since the sixth grade. I hate seeing you like this, man.

Axle places a comforting hand on his shoulder.

AXLE (CONT'D)

You don't have to deal with this alone.

Nathan snuffles, shaking his head - not saying no, just lost.

NATHAN

I can't even think straight. I need out of my own head.

AXLE

Bro... you're talking to the right guy.

Nathan looks up at him, broken - wipes his eyes, trembling.

Axle rises, offers a hand.

AXLE (CONT'D)

Let's go. Tonight's on me.

Nathan glances once toward Melinda's apartment door. Then back to Axle.

He takes the hand.

The world bends. A faint HUM vibrates through the air. The temperature rises slightly. Sunlight dulls toward burnt orange.

Nathan doesn't notice.

Axle does. He smiles.

EXT. NIGHT CLUB - LATER

Neon lights pulse against the building. Bass THUMPS through the walls.

A crowd spills out onto the sidewalk, laughing, smoking, alive with chaos.

Nathan and Axle approach.

AXLE

Tonight... we burn it all down.

He slaps Nathan on the back and pushes him inside.

INT. NIGHT CLUB - CONTINUOUS

Music THUNDERS. Strobes ripple across a packed dance floor.

Nathan and Axle shove through the crowd. Axle is electric - alive in his element.

They drop into a booth near the dance floor.

A waitress places a tray of shots on the table.

Axle lifts a shot - shoves a shot into Nathan's hand.

AXLE

Let's get you outta that head.

Nathan throws it back instantly. Then grabs another. Then another.

Axle bursts into delighted laughter.

AXLE (CONT'D)

My man! I love the enthusiasm, but damn... you trying to forget the whole year?

Nathan flashes a crooked, broken grin.

NATHAN

That's the idea isn't it?

AXLE

Touche, brother.

They CLINK and down their shots.

Soon Nathan is pounding drinks, laughing too loud, leaning into the chaos.

NATHAN

This! This is living, baby! You were right, man.

Axle leans back, watching proudly – like Nathan is finally becoming the man he always wanted him to be.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

How do you do this? Day in, day out?

(beat)

Teach me.

Axle spreads his arms, basking in the chaos.

AXLE

Practice, bro. You ease into it. Swim before you crawl... whatever.

NATHAN

Crawl before you walk.

AXLE

Yeah, that.

(beat)

I just know one thing. I want to live!

He vibrates with manic energy.

A group of girls dances past. One grabs Nathan's hand and pulls him toward the floor.

Nathan glances at Axle – unsure.

AXLE (CONT'D)

That's what I'm talking about. Go get her.

Nathan rises, follows her onto the dance floor.

Music POUNDS.

Nathan dances wildly.

Shots appear to manifest out of nowhere. He downs them all.

Soon, lights start to streak. Faces blur. The room spins.

Nathan continues to dance, laugh and drink.

The music slows – bass becoming a dull, pulsing heartbeat.

Lights smear into neon trails.

Nathan spins through bodies, drunk, reckless, lost in the noise.

From the booth, Axle watches — pleased.

INT. NIGHT CLUB - BATHROOM - LATER

A stall door BURSTS open.

Nathan drops to his knees and VOMITS violently.

Axle rushes in behind him.

AXLE

Whoa. Easy, man. Easy.

Nathan COUGHS, gasping.

AXLE (CONT'D)

So much for easing into it.

Axle hauls him to his feet.

Nathan's eyes are glossed over.

Axle gently SLAPS his cheek twice — no effect.

AXLE (CONT'D)

Partys over.

EXT. NIGHT CLUB - LATER

They push through the doors.

Nathan's arm hangs over Axle's shoulder. Axle carries most of his weight, half-dragging him forward.

Nathan's head droops, swaying with each uneven step.

Behind them the bass THUMPS through the walls.

Out here — the street is quiet.

CRACK!

Orange lightning splits the sky. Thunder BOOMS overhead. Wind whips down the street. Rain begins to fall hard within seconds.

Axle glances up at the sky, amused.

AXLE

Man... weather sure turned to hell.

A taxi idles at the curb.

Axle yanks the door open and dumps Nathan inside.

Nathan collapses into the seat, barely conscious.

The door SLAMS shut.

BLACK OUT

POP!

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

Nathan's eyes crack open - pale, sweaty, hungover. Bruised exactly as yesterday.

He groans, clutching his head.

NATHAN

Please... no more.

He tries to sit up, fails, collapses back. Forces himself up on the second try. The room spins. He breathes through it.

He doesn't go to the bathroom. He already knows what's waiting in the mirror.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Nathan shuffles in. Reaches for the TV - stops. Too loud. Too predictable.

He grabs his phone instead and slides the volume all the way down. Ignoring Dave's waiting text.

He pours a glass of water with trembling hands. Almost drops it.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Nathan jolts. The glass of water slips - SHATTERING in the

sink.

AXLE

Yo! Nate! Open the door, man!

Nathan freezes, staring at the door like it might explode.

AXLE (CONT'D)

Don't keep me knocking. I know you're
in there.

Axle POUNDS the door harder.

The apartment SHUDDERS. Picture frames jump. A lamp rattles.
Dust sifts from the ceiling.

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. Each hit deeper. Heavier.

Nathan slides down the wall, covering his ears.

The floor TREMBLES beneath him.

Then - silence.

Nathan stays on the floor, chest heaving, waiting for the
next quake.

FOOTSTEPS walk away from the door in a huff.

Slowly, painfully, Nathan gathers himself - pulling himself
to his feet like lifting concrete.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nathan collapses onto the bed and pulls the covers over his
head.

TIME LAPSE - The digital clock on the nightstand jumps
forward:

8:12 - 9:03 - 10:47 - 11:11 - 1:56 - 3:00 PM

Daylight drifts in from the window - shifts in smooth sweeps
- morning white to midday glare to late afternoon orange.

Nathan never moves.

INT. BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

The sheets shift. Nathan finally surfaces.

He squints at the clock: 3:03 PM.

The light outside feels wrong - harsh, burnt, oppressive.
Sweat beads across his forehead.

NATHAN

This can't keep happening.

He grabs a pillow and SCREAMS into it. The sound dies in the fabric.

The pillow falls away. Nathan sits there, hollow.

Slowly, he rises from the bed.

Something on the floor catches his eye. The dusty Bible he threw yesterday.

He stares at it a moment, reluctantly reaches down and picks it up.

As he lifts it -

-a loose handwritten note slips out.

RACK FOCUS - THE NOTE:

*"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.
Philippians 2:12: Love you, Mom."*

NATHAN (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Mom...

Nathan clutches the Bible to his chest, eyes squeezed shut.

He stands slowly. Tucks the Bible under his arm, grabs his keys, and heads for the door.

EXT. CEMETARY - AFTERNOON

The sky burns a tired molten orange - the same oppressive hue that's enveloped Nathan all day.

He passes through the iron gate. Inside, everything is still.

No birds. No wind. Even the city hum feels quieter.

He reaches Catherine's headstone and sinks to his knees. No words at first – just a man unraveling.

He releases a deep exhale.

NATHAN

(raw, breaking)

I don't know who I am anymore.
Everything I've touched is broken.

A tear slips free. He wipes it away, ashamed, and looks toward the headstone.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I don't want to be afraid anymore.

(beat)

I'm tired of coasting.

(beat)

I want to be better than this.

A cool breeze rolls through the cemetery. The oppressive heat eases. Shadows soften. Colors return to normal.

Nathan opens his eyes. Something feels different.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I've never needed you more than I do
right now.

A soft vibration hums through the air behind him.

CATHERINE (O.S.)

You always talk to yourself when
you're scared.

Nathan freezes. He knows that voice.

Slowly, he stands and turns.

The air SHIMMERS – not glowing, not ghostly. Just a gentle distortion, like heat bending a distant horizon.

CATHERINE forms within the shimmer, fading into view as if she's been here all along. Exactly as Nathan remembers her.

NATHAN

Mom?

She smiles – soft, aching.

CATHERINE

Hi, sweetheart.

She opens her arms.

Nathan collapses into her, shaking, crying – clinging like the world is falling apart behind him.

She holds him tenderly.

When he finally pulls away, she studies his bruised face with quiet sadness.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

You've always had a lot on your heart.

Nathan wipes his face.

NATHAN

My life is a mess. I don't even recognize myself anymore.

Catherine listens. No judgement, only love.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Melinda's gone. She moved on without me. I guess I waited too long.

CATHERINE

Sometimes when we're scared, we stand still so long the world keeps moving on without us.

(beat)

You've always lived right in the middle, Nathan. Half in faith. Half in love. Half in the man you want to become.

NATHAN

I'm scared. What if I choose wrong?

Catherine lifts his chin, cups his cheek.

CATHERINE

If you choose from your heart and lean into the faith that I raised you with... you'll never choose wrong.

NATHAN

Faith left me a long time ago.

CATHERINE

Did it leave you... or did you walk
away from it?

Nathan looks down, ashamed.

She lifts the Bible from his hands. Finds the note.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

I put this here for you.

She taps the page.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Sometimes life gives us the same
moment until we choose to live it
differently.

Nathan absorbs this. Something deep inside him shifts.

Catherine rests her palm against his bruised cheek.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

You don't have to have everything
figured out today. You just have to
choose the next step.

Nathan breathes, shaky but steadier.

Catherine leans her forehead gently against his.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

I'm right behind you, sweetheart.
(beat)
I love you.

Nathan's eyes fill. He covers her hand with his.

NATHAN

I love you too.

A peaceful smile spreads across Catherine's face.

CATHERINE

You need rest. You need healing. You
need a clean start.

She gives him a soft, encouraging nudge backward.

Nathan reaches for her.

NATHAN
Mom... wait-

Their hands almost touch again.

POP!

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

Nathan wakes. Same alarm. Same morning light.

He exhales, almost believing yesterday was just a dream.

Nathan sits up, touches his face - and freezes. No pain. No tenderness. His eyes widen.

He bolts from the bed.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

FLICK - the light snaps on.

Nathan stares at his reflection. The bruises and wounds are gone.

A real smile spreads across his face. He touches his cheek again; almost afraid the healing might vanish.

Then something settles behind his eyes. A memory. A promise.

CATHERINE (V.O.)
Rest. Heal. Clean start.

Nathan steps back, chest rising and falling.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nathan studies the apartment like he's seeing it for the first time.

On the floor where he left it lies the Bible. Catherine's handwritten note still peeks from the pages.

Nathan picks it up - rereading the note. His throat tightens. A small, grateful smile.

He starts to close the Bible-

-notices a dogeared page. He opens to it.

RACK FOCUS - A HIGHLIGHTED VERSE:

"Choose you this day whom you will serve. Joshua 24:15"

Nathan stares. His breath shudders. He lowers himself to the floor, elbows on his knees, Bible in his hands.

Nathan stares at the page. The word sinks in.

NATHAN
(whispers to himself)
Choose.

His eyes close. A tear slips free - not from pain, but surrender.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Lord... I choose.
(beat)
I just don't know where to start.

An empty bottle on the coffee table tips - rolls off - and CLATTERS onto the floor.

Nathan opens his eyes, glancing to the bottle. He picks it up, studies it.

Through the window, the morning light glows, illuminating the room.

His eyes sweep the apartment.

Dirty dishes. Empty bottles. Laundry spilling from a chair. Clutter everywhere.

He looks down at the bottle again. He sees it differently now.

MONTAGE - NATHAN RESTORES ORDER

- Nathan gathers empty bottles and drops them into a trash bag.

- The sink faucet RUNS. Dirty dishes scrubbed clean.

- Laundry dumped into the washing machine. The lid SLAMS shut.
- Nathan waters the dying plant in the window.
- Windows SLIDE open. Fresh morning air pours inside.
- A cluttered coffee table cleared and wiped down.
- A stack of unopened mail sorted neatly.
- The trash bag tied tight and carried to the door.
- Sunlight spreads across the now-quiet room.

END MONTAGE

Nathan stands in the living room doorway - proud.

The apartment behind him - Clean. Ordered. Peaceful.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Alright, Lord... what's next?

Nathan opens the Bible again - the pages settle.

RACK FOCUS - A VERSE:

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."
Proverbs 27:17

A realization forms.

A smile blooms across his face.

EXT. DAVE'S HOUSE - LATER

Nathan jogs up the walkway, Bible tucked under one arm, urgency in his stride. He KNOCKS.

Then KNOCKS again - harder, faster.

DAVE (O.S.)

Alright... I'm coming, I'm coming.

The door swings open. Dave stands there in pajama pants, hair wild, still half asleep.

DAVE

Nate?

Nathan stands there neatly dressed, clean, composed, hair combed. No bruises. No panic. Just quiet resolve.

Dave glances down at the Bible under Nathan's arm. That tells him everything.

A small, relieved smile spreads across his face.

DAVE (CONT'D)

You've made your choice.

NATHAN

Yeah, I finally did.

Dave exhales, proud. He grips Nathan's shoulder.

DAVE

About time, brother.

(beat)

Get in here.

Nathan steps inside.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE - MORNING

Nathan sits at the kitchen table, coffee in hand.

Dave sits across from him. His worn Bible already rests beside his coffee.

Dave gently slides it closer. His hand lingers on the cover - almost protective.

DAVE

When everything fell apart for me...
this was about the only thing that
didn't.

Nathan listens intently.

DAVE (CONT'D)

First couple months after the divorce,
I drank myself stupid every night.
Woke up one morning on the front
porch. Didn't remember how I got
there.

Dave flips open the Bible.

Nathan notices the pages – margins crowded with notes, underlines, years of wrestling with the words.

DAVE (CONT'D)

That's when this one hit me.

(reading)

Psalm 46:10 "Be still and know that I am God."

Dave closes his eyes, taking a slow breath.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Just stop long enough to hear something true.

Nathan nods, absorbing it.

Dave flips to another passage.

DAVE (CONT'D)

That made this one make sense.

(reading)

Philippians 4:7 "The peace that surpasses all understanding."

He leans back slightly.

DAVE (CONT'D)

I used to think faith meant having answers. Turns out it just means sometimes taking the next step without them.

Nathan exhales, easing into the moment.

Dave flips again, softer now.

DAVE (CONT'D)

And this one. Would've saved my marriage if I'd learned it sooner.

(reading)

Ephesians 4:32 "Be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving."

Nathan lets the words settle. Something inside him loosens.

Dave closes the Bible halfway.

DAVE (CONT'D)

You know what... I know a great bible study. Good people. Nobody pretending they've got it all together. Wanna go?

Without missing a beat-

NATHAN

Absolutely.

Dave blinks, surprised. Then smiles - pride and hope.

Outside the kitchen window, a breeze stirs the trees. For the first time in days, the world feels calm.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - AFTERNOON

Nathan and Dave walk side by side, Bibles in hand, their pace easy.

Up ahead, Axle approaches - slows. He clocks the Bibles immediately.

AXLE

Nate, dawg. Where are you and choir boy off to?

DAVE

Ignore him.

But Nathan doesn't shrink.

NATHAN

Bible study. You wanna come?

Nathan and Dave keep walking - passing him.

AXLE

Study a God that's never shown up when I needed him. Nah... I'm good.

Nathan glances back over his shoulder calm, not defensive.

NATHAN

Your choice, man. But you're not beyond saving.

For a split second, something wounded flickers in Axle's eyes.

AXLE

Yeah, well... I'll sign up when God starts pulling His weight.

His shadow stretches the wrong direction – away from the sun, reaching toward Nathan.

Axle stands there, disappointed. The warped shadow pulses faintly at his feet.

He just watches Nathan disappear down the sidewalk.

AXLE (CONT'D)

(yells back, desperate)

Think of all we could do if we worked together on this!

Axle's shoulders sag.

AXLE (CONT'D)

(quiet, almost to himself)

Don't leave.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - LATER

A small, softly lit classroom. Eight or nine people sit in a loose circle – coffee cups, open Bibles, easy conversation.

LESLIE (60s), warm and steady, leads the study.

LESLIE

Anyone have an example from the verses we just read?

Across the circle, SARAH (late 20's) - raises her hand.

SARAH

I struggled with patience. Trusting that God's timing might be different from mine.

A quiet ripple of nods.

Dave's eyes linger on her – admiration he doesn't quite hide.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Sometimes... patience is the only act of faith we have.

Dave watches Sarah a little too long.

Nathan notices it.

Dave suddenly snaps upright and flips through his Bible like he urgently needs to study something.

Nathan hides a grin behind his coffee cup.

LESLIE

I think that's all for today. Let's
close in prayer.

A soft breeze slips through a cracked basement window. The overhead lights warm slightly.

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Nathan and Dave step into the cool night air.

DAVE

So... what'd you think?

NATHAN

I liked it. More than I expected to.
Thanks for inviting me.

Behind them, Sarah exits the church laughing with another woman.

Dave notices immediately. Nathan catches the look.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Someone catch your eye?

Dave nearly chokes.

DAVE

I... I don't know what you're talking
about.

NATHAN

Uh huh. See you tomorrow.

Nathan heads down the sidewalk. Dave watches him go — proud.

Then glances once more toward Sarah.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - LATER

Nathan walks home from church; Bible tucked under his arm. His steps are lighter. The night air feels clearer.

Streetlamps glow brighter. Even the pavement seems calmer beneath him.

A quiet peace follows him – until he sees Charley. Sitting against the same brick wall. Same cart. Same crooked wheel.

Charley looks up.

CHARLEY

Evening, friend.

Nathan slows. His breath tightens, pulse jumping – but he doesn't cross the street.

He steps toward Charley. Then another. Stops a few feet away.

Nathan opens his mouth to speak. Nothing comes out.

Charley simply waits, warm and patient.

A flash in Nathan's mind – a fist, brick rushing up.

Nathan flinches. Takes a step back. Then another.

Charley's smile never fades.

Nathan quickly rounds a corner out of Charley's sight.

Nathan leans against a wall, breathing hard, hands trembling. He closes his eyes, steadying himself.

He slowly peeks around the corner.

Charley has already returned to his Bible.

Nathan almost calls out – almost steps forward. But the fear wins. He lowers his head and walks away, ashamed.

EXT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Nathan steps into the crisp morning light and stretches, taking it in.

The familiar JOGGER in neon runs past.

JOGGER

Morning.

NATHAN

Morning.

(beat)

You know you're making the rest of us
look lazy.

She laughs, calling back-

JOGGER

Never too late to start.

Nathan smiles - genuinely.

Up ahead, the same three kids play tag. The girl in pink
dodges a tag with impossible agility.

NATHAN

(calling out)

Woah! She's unbeatable today.

Behind Nathan, the familiar sputtering cough of an engine.

WHIR-CLUNK-POP.

He steps into the street, raising a friendly hand.

The BLUE SEDAN slows and stops. The DRIVER leans out the
window.

DRIVER

Something wrong?

NATHAN

Your engine sounds ready to give up.

DRIVER

Yeah, I know, sorry.

Nathan smiles, pulling a small card from his pocket.

NATHAN

This guy's a great mechanic. Good man.

The driver glances at the card, embarrassed.

DRIVER

I can't afford-

NATHAN

Tell him to send the bill to Nathan
Evans.

The driver blinks, stunned.

DRIVER

What... why would-
(beat)
Thank you.

Nathan nods and steps back onto the sidewalk.

A soft breeze moves down the street. Sunlight warms slightly.

Across the street, Axle watches with burning eyes.

He crosses quickly.

AXLE

Nate! Nate... I need your help.

Nathan calmly keeps walking but studies him. Cautious.

NATHAN

What is now, Axle?

AXLE

Whoa... hey. No need for the attitude,
man.

NATHAN

No attitude. If you want to talk, I'm
here for you. If you're trying to drag
me off somewhere... I'm not
interested.

AXLE

Come on, Nate dawg. I thought we were
friends.

Nathan stops, takes a deep breath.

NATHAN

We are friends. And I love you... but
you're not the best influence right
now.

Axle's expression fractures – hurt, anger, confusion
colliding. For a moment he looks almost childlike.

Then he snaps.

AXLE

Well, go chase your holy glow then.
See how long it takes before God drops
you too.

He storms off.

Heat ripples off him like desert air. His shadow stretches
the wrong direction – long and warped.

Nathan watches him go.

Only when Axle disappears down the block does the world
soften again – warmth returning, shadows settling back into
place.

Nathan exhales once. Then he continues down the sidewalk,
steady and unaffected.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - LATER

The morning rush has passed. Soft chatter blends with the
HISS of steaming milk.

A BELL DINGS as Nathan enters.

He spots Dave at his usual table, relaxed, rereading the same
battered paperback.

Nathan approaches quietly.

NATHAN

You know... the ending doesn't change
no matter how many times you read it.

Dave looks up – then grins, closing the book.

DAVE

Bold talk from a guy who never
finished chapter one of anything.

Nathan smirks and sits across from him.

Dave notices something new in Nathan. His smile deepens.

DAVE (CONT'D)

You're glowing. What happened this
(MORE)

DAVE (CONT'D)
morning?

Nathan chuckles, almost bashful.

NATHAN
I helped someone. I mean, really
helped. It felt great.

Dave nods – remembering that feeling.

DAVE
That's how it starts.

NATHAN
Do you ever feel like... you're
finally becoming the man you were
supposed to be?

Dave leans back, eyes soft.

DAVE
Yeah. Took me a while. But yeah.

Nathan absorbs that – grateful.

The BELL DINGS again.

Nathan glances past Dave – and stiffens.

Melinda's BOYFRIEND entered the cafe. Casual, warm,
completely unaware of the role he plays in Nathan's life.

Dave notices Nathan freeze.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Hey... you good?

Nathan inhales slowly. Sweat beads his brow.

His heartbeat pounds in his ears. The cafe noise dulls around
him.

Nathan's knees shake. Hands tremble.

Slowly, he rises and walks across the cafe, calm and
deliberate.

He stops in front of the boyfriend.

BOYFRIEND

Uh... hey. Can I help you with something?

Nathan exhales deeply - breath shuttering.

He glances once toward the door - back to the boyfriend.

NATHAN

You don't know me. But I know Melinda.

The boyfriend braces, expecting a threat or jealousy. Nathan gives him neither.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

She deserves... more than anything... to be happy.

Nathan swallows, steadying himself.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I couldn't give her that. But if you can... you have my blessing. Please, take good care of her.

The boyfriend's expression softens.

BOYFRIEND

Thank you. I will.

Nathan nods once. His eyes are wet - but proud.

He turns and heads for the door.

Dave watches from across the room - realizing what Nathan just did.

As Nathan steps outside, the world responds. Sunlight breaks warmly through the cafe window. The hum of the room softens. A quiet stillness settles - like someone whispered yes.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Nathan steps outside. The door CLICKS shut behind him.

He breaks. Not loudly. Not dramatically. Just a man finally releasing years of weight.

Nathan leans against a tree, one hand bracing himself. His

breath trembles. Tears spill fast, blurring the world into soft shapes. He wipes them away, but they keep coming.

He grips the tree, forcing himself upright, riding out the storm inside him.

Dave exits the cafe behind him - approaches slowly.

DAVE

Nate? You okay?

Nathan tries to speak. Nothing comes. He shakes his head - not denying it, just barely holding together.

Dave steps closer.

DAVE (CONT'D)

That... that must have been hard.

NATHAN

You have no idea... how much that hurt.

His knees wobble, almost buckle.

Dave catches him, steadying him by the shoulders.

DAVE

Hey... you did it. And you didn't run this time.

Dave leans in slightly, lifts his chin. They lock eyes.

DAVE (CONT'D)

I'm so proud of you.

Nathan's face crumples - not collapsing, just releasing.

Dave pulls him into a tight, grounding embrace. Nathan clings back, shaking once as a small gasp escapes.

Dave rests a steady hand on the back of Nathan's head, calm and brotherly.

As they separate, Nathan looks up. Eyes red, glassy - but steady now. Something new lives there. Resolve.

NATHAN

Dave...

(beat)

Will you baptize me?

Dave freezes. The question hits him like ton of bricks.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

If I'm going to get through this, I
need God in my life. I can't do this
without Him.

Dave's eyes well slightly. He glances upward for just a
moment - overwhelmed.

Then he looks back to Nathan, smiling through it.

DAVE

Buddy... I'd be honored.

He pulls Nathan into another firm embrace.

Nathan holds on longer this time, steadying himself as his
breathing settles.

Around them, the world brightens subtly - sunlight warming,
the breeze softening. A quiet peace settles exactly where the
pain just lived.

EXT. CITY FOUNTIAN - LATER

A modest public fountain bubbles in a quiet plaza.

Nathan and Dave jog up, slightly breathless from the
emotional sprint of their morning. Dave surveys the scene,
hands on his hips.

DAVE

Alright. This is definitely not what
the early church had in mind. But I
guess it'll work.

NATHAN

Jesus got baptized in a river. This is
like the city version.

Dave takes a cautious sniff - instantly regrets it.

DAVE

The city version smells like pigeon
poop.

Nathan laughs.

Dave rolls up his sleeves like a man preparing for a job he is absolutely not qualified for.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Okay, so... I don't have a prayer card, or the proper verses. Do I need a robe?

Nathan gives him a sideways look, then steps into the fountain, shoes and all. Water SPLASHES.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Bold strategy. Just dive right in.

Dave steps in after him, immediately slips - SPLASH. He barely catches himself.

Nathan bursts out laughing.

NATHAN

Very graceful, pastor.

DAVE

Now my underwear is baptized too.

Nathan laughs again - the kind that loosens something deep in his chest.

Dave steadies himself and places a hand on Nathan's shoulder. His voice shifts sincere beneath the ridiculousness.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Alright, man. You ready?

Nathan nods, eyes bright.

Dave scoops up a handful of fountain water. Way too much - it pours straight through his fingers.

NATHAN

This is going great so far.

DAVE

Shut up.

Dave tries again. This time he manages a decent handful. He clears his throat, suddenly official.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Nathan Evans... do you accept the Lord almighty into your heart and promise
(MORE)

DAVE (CONT'D)
to live your life in accordance with
His will?

NATHAN
I do.

DAVE
Then I baptize you in the name of the
Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

He splashes the water over Nathan's head - WAY too aggressively.

Nathan sputters.

NATHAN
Dude! That was like half the fountain.

DAVE
Extra coverage. You're welcome.

Nathan wipes water from his face, laughing.

For a brief moment he looks upward - thoughtful, almost grateful.

Dave pulls him into a wet, ridiculous, heartfelt hug.

THE WORLD RESPONDS: sunlight brightens softly, a light breeze cools their drenched shirts, the ambient noise dims. Everything feels lighter.

Then-

VOICE (O.S.)
Hey! You two idiots get out of the
fountain.

They break apart. Their eyes dart to see-

- A PATROL OFFICER jogging toward them.

Dave's eyes widen.

DAVE
Run!

They hop out and sprint across the plaza, shoes SQUEAKING, both laughing like kids.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - EVENING

Nathan walks home, still damp from the baptism. His hair still dripping. Shoes SQUEAK every few steps.

He hums softly - light, joyful. A tune from nowhere. He's lighter than he's been in years.

The world seems to agree. Evening sunlight gentle, shadows softer.

As Nathan rounds a corner-

-Axle steps out from behind a bus shelter.

Nathan stops humming - but he doesn't flinch.

AXLE

Taking a bath in God's kiddie pool I see.

NATHAN

Hello, Axle. What now?

Axle circles him slightly, taking in the wet clothes, the peaceful posture.

AXLE

So... this is the new Nate? Complete with hymns and coupons for good behavior.

Nathan steps past him.

NATHAN

I'm not fighting with you Axle.

AXLE

Who's fighting. I'm just saying people don't change overnight.

Nathan stops. Faces him fully.

NATHAN

I'm changing one step at a time. I'm done being dragged backwards. By you... or more importantly... myself.

A crack in Axle's façade. Fear under anger.

AXLE

I know who you are Nathan Evans. You forget... I know the real you. The mess underneath this little faith costume. Your past is what makes you the guy I love hanging out with, man. Don't run from it.

Nathan's voice stays calm.

NATHAN

I'm not running from my past. I just refuse to live in it anymore.

AXLE

So that's it? You're just... out?

Nathan walks away - waiving over his shoulder.

Axle watches him go, breathing hard. Something inside him begins to fracture.

The distortion creeps in slowly. Streetlamps dim one by one around him. Sound stretches - as if time itself is dragging its feet.

The pavement at his feet ripples, subtle and wrong. The air grows colder.

Axle's shadow lengthens across the sidewalk, reaching after Nathan like a child refusing to let go.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - CORNER - CONTINUOUS

Nathan rounds the corner - nearly tripping over Charley, seated beside his cart with the same crooked wheel.

Charley looks up, warm.

CHARLEY

Evening, friend.

Nathan slows. His hands tremble and his throat tightens.

Charley tilts his head, waiting with patient kindness.

Nathan glances back over his shoulder.

At the end of the block, Axle leans against a streetlight,

watching. Silent. Predatory.

Nathan forces himself to turn back to Charley. A breath in. He steps closer.

NATHAN

I... I would like-

Nathan freezes up - hands shaking.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I need to-

His voice falters.

Charley shifts slightly - just adjusting his posture.

Nathan flinches instinctively. The fear wins.

Nathan steps back.

Charley's smile never fades.

CHARLEY

It's okay, friend. Maybe tomorrow.

Shame floods Nathan. He turns and RUNS - fast, desperate, humiliated. He never looks back.

Behind him, Axle laughs. The sound follows Nathan down the block.

When the laughter fades, Axle's smile curdles into something darker.

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - LATER

The door SLAMS shut.

Nathan braces against it, breath ragged. Fear surges through him.

His eyes land on the Bible resting neatly on the nightstand.

He crosses the room quickly, grabbing it with trembling hands.

The pages fall open instantly - as if waiting.

RACK FOCUS - THE VERSE:

Hebrews 13:16 - *"Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."*

The verse is underlined and highlighted. Not by Nathan. By someone else.

Nathan stares. This isn't random. It's a directive.

His breath trembles as he drops to his knees.

NATHAN

(raw)

Lord... I know what you're asking of me. I feel it. I've run from this man more times than I can count. I've run from myself even longer.

His voice cracks.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Please, give me courage. Help me stand with him, instead of running from him. With your grace, fear shall not overtake me anymore.

Nathan's hands stop shaking. Not because he isn't afraid - Because now he knows exactly what he must do.

Nathan closes the Bible - looks toward the window.

Outside, the city glows faint orange. Something is coming.

Nathan reaches over and turns off the light.

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - MORNING

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

Nathan already stands at his window; two fingers pull back the curtain.

Immediately, something is wrong.

Outside, shadows lag behind people by a full second - like their souls are struggling to keep up.

Two pedestrians' cross paths - their bodies flicker, blurred

at the edges, like corrupted video frames.

A low-frequency HUM vibrates under everything.

The usual pieces of the Loop, the jogger, the kids, the coughing sedan are all gone.

Across the street stands Axle, half-sunk in shadow. Watching Nathan's window. Unmoving. A stretched smile crawls across his face.

Nathan's jaw tightens. He begins to let the curtain fall but something below catches his eye-

-Charley. His cart is on its side, collapsed into the gutter. Clothes, blankets, food spilled everywhere. He kneels beside it, trying to lift it, failing with weakening hands.

Axle walks toward him. Deliberate and predatory. He stops and kicks the broken cart with his foot.

Another wheel drops loose and clatters down the gutter into a storm drain.

Charley lets out a tiny, broken gasp.

Axle laughs, intimately cruel. He turns, stares into Nathan's window smiling, intimidating.

Nathan lets the curtains fall.

He picks up the bible from the nightstand, clutches it tight with both hands.

He closes his eyes.

NATHAN

I need you now. Please guide me to
know what is right.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - LATER

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - MORNING

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

Nathan already stands at his window; two fingers pull back the curtain.

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He picks up the bible from the nightstand, clutches it tight with both hands.

He closes his eyes.

NATHAN

I need you now. Please guide me to
know what is right.

Nathan opens his eyes - exhales.

He stiffens - jaw tight.

Resolve settles in.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - LATER

Charley sits beside his ruined cart.

His belongings sit piled on the curb - clothes, blankets, a few scattered cans.

He gathers what he can with tired hands, then stops. Nothing left to fix.

Charley exhales, defeated.

NATHAN (O.S.)

Hello, sir.

Charley slowly looks up.

Nathan stands over him.

Axle watches closely from the recess.

NATHAN

My name is Nathan.

Nathan kneels to Charley's level.

Charley studies him, guarded, still expecting disappointment.

CHARLEY

Hello, friend.

NATHAN

I haven't treated you right. I've walked around you, ignored you and avoided you on purpose.

Charley's expression softens.

CHARLEY

I'm used to it.

NATHAN

You shouldn't be. Not from anyone. Certainly not from me.

(beat)

I'm sorry.

Nathan extends a trembling hand - shaking, but sincere.

Charley takes it.

CHARLEY
My name is Charley.

Nathan smiles, a sincere warmth behind it.

NATHAN
Glad to finally meet you, Charley.
(beat)
May I give you something?

CHARLEY
You don't have to. I hold no grudge.

NATHAN
I want to... friend.

Charley's eyebrows lift.

Nathan rises and opens the trunk of his car.

Inside: clothes, blankets, socks, food, water, toiletries,
first aid supplies.

Charley stares, stunned.

Then Nathan reveals a brand-new folding utility cart and sets
it beside him.

Charley reaches toward it. His hand trembles. He looks at
Nathan in disbelief.

Then he breaks. Tears streak down his face as he collapses
into Nathan.

Nathan flinches – a reflex from old trauma – but quickly
softens, returning the embrace with humility and compassion.

Nathan holds him there.

For a moment the world goes still. The Loop stabilizes in a
heartbeat pulse of light radiating outward.

Down the block, a WOMAN hiding behind a parked car slowly
lifts her head.

Two PEDESTRIANS frozen mid-step flicker back into focus.

A CHILD peeks from behind a mailbox.

AXLE (CONT'D)

Let's see if God digs you out.

Axle's breath fractures with rage as he SLAMS his fist into the ground.

The pavement CRACKS. A tremor ripples outward. Dust rains from rooftops. A STOP sign twists. A parked car flickers between two positions like corrupted film.

Civilians scatter, diving into doorways, shielding children crying out in fear.

Nathan's eyes snap to Charley.

NATHAN

Run!

Charley scrambles away, slipping on loose debris.

A SHRIEK of metal. SCREEEEEE-KLANG!

Nathan looks up. The fire escape above them jerks violently. Bolts BURST free. Brackets tear loose from brick.

Half the structure rips away, swinging downward like an iron guillotine.

Charley scrambles backwards but slips and falls.

Nathan sees it.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

CHARLEY!

He sprints into the falling debris and throws his body over Charley, curling around him like a human shield.

The fire escape crashes down.

CRASH-KLANG-BOOM!

Iron slams Nathan's back. Bars crack ribs. A jagged edge tears through his shoulder.

Debris swallows Nathan and Charley whole.

Twisted metal CREAKS as the fire escape settles.

Slowly, Axle lowers his arms.

Silence.

Dust billows from the wreckage.

Axle nods - satisfied.

AXLE

See what compassion gets you?

He turns.

Then-

SCRAPING metal.

A large metal sheet shifts and falls off the pile - CRASH.

From the wreck, Nathan pushes himself up - blood streaking his face and back. But alive.

Charley rises beside him - unharmed.

Axle steps forward, shaking with furious emotion.

Nathan exits the debris, limps directly toward Axle.

NATHAN

Enough!

He shoves Axle back, almost toppling him.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

People are getting hurt!

Axle snarls, unhinged.

AXLE

People? These shadows? They're all nothing.

(points to Charley)

He doesn't matter. None of this matters.

Behind Nathan, terrified bystanders crouch behind cars, clutching each other.

A man presses himself against a storefront, shielding a crying toddler.

Nathan takes another steady step forward.

NATHAN
He matters to me.
(beat)
They all do.

Axle flinches as if struck.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Don't take your anger out on them.
(voice soft)
Take it out on me.

Axle searches Nathan's face, seeing nothing but sincerity.

Slowly, Axle extends one hand.

AXLE
Then kneel.
(beat)
Choose me and we can rule this place
together. No fear, no God, no
judgement.

Nathan looks around.

Terrified civilians. Dust-covered faces. People clinging to each other. Everyone's eyes locked on him.

His expression softens – not fear, but compassion.

Slowly, he lowers to one knee.

AXLE (CONT'D)
Yes. That's it.

Nathan reaches out, almost taking Axle's hand.

Axle steps closer, trembling with anticipation.

AXLE (CONT'D)
This... this is your purpose.

Nathan then lowers to both knees, clasps his hands, bows his head and closes his eyes.

Axle's smile falters.

AXLE (CONT'D)
Nate? What are you-

Axle recoils like he's been stabbed.

AXLE (CONT'D)

No! Don't do that!

The orange corruption begins to recoil from Axle like smoke from flame.

It writhes between them, resisting.

Axle staggers backward as the shadows thrash violently around him.

AXLE (CONT'D)

Stop!

Nathan remains kneeling, calm and prayerful.

Axle clutches his head and collapses to one knee.

AXLE (CONT'D)

Nate. Make it stop.

The corruption peels away in ragged strands, revealing flashes of the man beneath.

Axle flickers – monstrous silhouette dissolving into the frightened, exhausted man he once was.

AXLE (CONT'D)

Why are you doing this to me?

Nathan opens his eyes. For the first time, he truly sees him.

NATHAN

You did this to yourself.

(beat)

Just like I did.

Axle looks up, confused. Lost.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

You're stuck here too. This place won't let you go until you make your choice.

Axle trembles, trying to stand – failing. The strength that once filled him is gone.

AXLE

Why would you sacrifice yourself for them?

Nathan rises slowly, wincing through the pain.

NATHAN

Because that's who I choose to be.

Axle's lips tremble.

AXLE

You prayed for me. *Me.*

(beat)

After everything I've done. All that I
am.

Nathan's voice is gentle, unwavering.

NATHAN

This isn't who you are.

Axle's face fractures – fear, grief, longing.

Nathan steps forward. Slowly, he takes Axle's trembling hand.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

When you're ready to make your
choice... I'll be there for you.

A single tear falls down Axle's cheek.

AXLE

(sincere)

Thank you... my friend.

The tension drains from his body. He grows lighter.

Then his form breaks apart into warm embers drifting upward
on a gentle current. Not destruction. Release.

Silence settles over the street.

Cracks seal. The sky closes. Lights steady. The HUM fades.

People slowly emerge from hiding, shaken but safe.

SCARED WOMAN

Is it over?

A child points at the final drifting ember.

The last vibration disappears.

Nathan stands alone in the middle of the street. Bleeding.

Exhausted. Peaceful.

For the first time since the Loop began – the world is still.

Charley approaches quietly and places a gentle hand on Nathan's back.

Nathan turns - smiles.

Charley smiles warmly in return.

CHARLEY
Well done, my friend.

A quiet moment passes.

Nathan closes his eyes, exhausted and at peace.

CHARLEY (CONT'D)
Time to go home.

A fresh breeze drifts through the street.

Then-

POP!

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

BLACK OUT

BEEP BEEP BEEP - Soft and steady. A heart monitor.

Nathan GROANS softly, almost unnoticeable.

Fabric SHIFTING.

A quiet GASP, close.

FOOTSTEPS SHUFFLE.

MELINDA (O.S.)
(warm, breaking)
Nathan?

FADE IN

POV - NATHAN

A thin slice of blurry light cracks open. Shapes swim in and out of focus.

Melinda leans over him – just motion and warmth through the haze.

The steady BEEP of the monitor anchors him while everything else remains muffled.

His eyes close again.

FADE OUT

MELINDA (O.S.)
(urgent whisper)
Dave... Dave! He's waking up.

FADE IN

POV - NATHAN

Melinda's face fills the frame, stunned hope written across it.

Dave rushes into view on the other side of the bed.

Sound sharpens.

MELINDA
Come on, baby. Come on.

Nathan blinks again, long and slow.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

POV - NATHAN

Everything sharp now. Sunlight filters through the blinds. IV tubing. Monitors tracing calm, steady rhythms.

Nathan's eyes focus on Melinda.

Her breath catches.

MELINDA (CONT'D)
(crying)
Oh, my God. Nathan.

Dave squeezes Nathan's shoulder, voice cracking.

DAVE
Welcome back, man.

Nathan tries to speak. Nothing comes. Weakness, not fear.

Melinda cups his face gently in both hands.

Nathan blinks again - recognition, relief, exhaustion. A single tear slips down Nathan's cheek.

DAVE (CONT'D)
I'll get Axle. He needs to see this.

Dave hurries out.

Melinda leans her forehead against Nathan's.

MELINDA
I... I thought I lost you... I
thought-

Her voice breaks into quiet sobs. Nathan's fingers curl weakly around her hand.

INT. NURSES STATION - CONTINUOUS

A NURSE leans over a chart.

AXLE - clean-cut, charming, the real Axle - leans against the counter mid-flirt.

AXLE
So, you're telling me you don't
usually steal the Jell-O cups for your
favorites?

The Nurse laughs, flattered.

NURSE
I didn't say that.

Dave bursts out of the room.

DAVE
He's awake!

Axle spins instantly, every trace of bravado gone. Shock, relief, joy crash across his face.

AXLE

I'm coming!

He sprints down the hall, nearly taking out a vitals cart.

The nurses' station erupts into motion.

PA SYSTEM

Dr. Patel to 214... stat!

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Melinda sits on the edge of the bed, holding Nathan's hand.

Nathan's eyes flutter - fragile but focused.

Dave slips back inside.

Axle BURSTS in behind him, breathless. He stops at the foot of the bed, overwhelmed.

AXLE

Nate?

Nathan slowly turns his eyes toward him.

Axle swallows hard and steps closer.

AXLE (CONT'D)

Jesus, man. You scared the hell out of us.

His voice cracks.

AXLE (CONT'D)

Don't ever do that again.

He wipes his face quickly, hoping no one noticed.

Nathan exhales a ragged breath.

MELINDA

Say something. Anything. I just want to hear your voice.

Nathan tries. Only a trembling exhale escapes.

Two nurses and DR. PATEL enter with calm urgency.

DR. PATEL

Alright everyone, give him a little space. We need to check responsiveness.

Melinda scoots back but refuses to let go of Nathan's hand.

Axle and Dave retreat toward the corner, still catching their breath.

Dr. Patel shines a penlight in Nathan's eyes.

DR. PATEL (CONT'D)

Nathan... if you can hear me... blink twice.

Nathan's eyelids flutter. Then blink once. Then twice.

Melinda covers her mouth, sobbing in relief.

NURSE

Pulse stable.

DR. PATEL

Good, very good, Nathan. We're going to take this nice and slow.

The medical team moves around him, adjusting lines and checking monitors.

Melinda strokes Nathan's arm, whispering softly.

MELINDA

I'm still here, baby. I'm not going anywhere.

Nathan holds her gaze, overflowing with emotion he still can't speak.

FADE OUT

EXT. HOSPITAL - EVENING

FADE IN

A gentle hush blankets the building. Sunlight drifts across the windows - warm and golden. Not blinding. Calm.

Trees sway lightly in a breeze carrying the faintest hum.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL - DUSK

The sky blooms pink and lavender. Clouds drift like slow brushstrokes.

The world feels suspended – quiet, weightless. As if time itself is catching its breath.

A nurse pushes a wheelchair across the lot, her silhouette gliding through the fading light.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Hospital windows glow a soft amber. Halos of light spill into the darkness. No sirens. No chaos.

Just the steady pulse of a place standing watch.

A streetlamp flickers once, then settles into a steady glow.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

First light breaks – cool and glassy.

The sky shifts from blue gray to pale gold.

The building brightens slowly, as a new day begins.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nathan sits upright now, supported by pillows. Color has returned to his face. A neat bandage wraps the back of his head.

Dr. Patel stands at the foot of the bed with a tablet. Melinda sits beside Nathan, her hand resting lightly on his.

DR. PATEL

You had a subdural hematoma. A small brain bleed from the impact. You're healing well but you need to take it slow.

Nathan nods, processing it.

NATHAN
(shaky)
How long... was I out?

Mel and Dr. Patel exchange a glance.

MELINDA
Almost two weeks.

The words land. Nathan sinks back slightly into the pillows.

DR. PATEL
The good news is you're going to be fine. Strength and clarity will come back gradually. No pushing yourself.

He taps the tablet, then looks to Melinda with a small, knowing smile.

DR. PATEL (CONT'D)
You've got a great support system here. Use it.

He gives a reassuring nod.

DR. PATEL (CONT'D)
One more day for observation. If everything checks out, you can go home tomorrow.

MELINDA
Thank you, Doctor.

Dr. Patel exits quietly.

A warm silence settles in the room.

Nathan studies Melinda – the tired joy in her eyes, the relief she isn't even trying to hide. He gathers a little strength and squeezes her hand.

NATHAN
(shaky)
I choose you.

Melinda freezes.

Nathan gathers another shaky breath.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I love you.

Her eyes fill instantly. A small broken sound escapes – half sob, half laugh.

She leans in, both hands rising to cradle his cheeks as if anchoring herself to the moment she's waited years to hear.

MELINDA

(whispering, trembling)

I love you. I always have.

Melinda kisses his temple, gentle and grateful.

Nathan's fingers tighten around her hand, holding on with renewed purpose.

Nathan exhales – relief, love, certainty all at once.

INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - NEXT DAY

The front door swings open.

Dave helps Nathan inside. Nathan moves carefully – still weak, but steady enough with Dave's support.

DAVE

Easy, buddy. Lean on me.

They shuffle to the couch. Dave lowers Nathan onto it gently.

Nathan exhales – relief, and something like peace.

The apartment is quiet. No monitors. No antiseptic smell. Just home.

Dave stands there a moment, taking in the sight of Nathan alive in his own living room.

Nathan looks up at him.

NATHAN

Dave...

Dave raises an eyebrow, waiting.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Thank you.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

(beat)

For everything. For being the friend
that you are.

Dave swallows. Caught off guard by the sincerity.

DAVE

I love you, man. That's what we do, we
show up.

Dave sits beside him, voice soft but certain.

DAVE (CONT'D)

But Mel... buddy, that girl truly
loves you. She never left your side.
Not for one single hour.

Nathan's eyes soften, moisture gathering.

DAVE (CONT'D)

She talked to you, prayed for you.
Every single day.

Dave elbows him gently.

DAVE (CONT'D)

You better get your act together and
marry that girl.

Nathan gives a tired but confident smirk.

NATHAN

Way ahead of you.

The apartment door swings open again.

MELINDA

I swear... your parking situation is
ridiculous. I had to circle the block
four times just to-

She stops when she sees Nathan and Dave staring at her.

MELINDA (CONT'D)

What?

Nathan smiles.

Dave stands and steps aside, like he's presenting them to
each other.

Melinda drops her bags and rushes forward, practically leaping onto Nathan's lap.

Nathan winces slightly from the pain but wraps his arms around her – holding her like someone who knows exactly what he almost lost.

They kiss. Long, grateful, full of everything unspoken.

Dave stands there, suddenly very aware he's third-wheeling.

DAVE

Okay. Yeah. I'll just... go.

He slips out the door, softly closing it on his way out.

The kiss doesn't slow.

INT. OFFICE - NATHAN'S DESK - MORNING

SUPER: FOUR MONTHS LATER

The office hums with morning productivity. Phones RING. Keyboards CLATTER.

Nathan sits at his desk – put together, confident, present. A small pocket Bible sits neatly beside Nathan's keyboard.

His cubicle wall is lined with new photos: Nathan and Melinda at the beach. Cooking together. Laughing in a park. Life in full color.

Nathan types with calm focus as Mr. Olsen approaches. Stern and brisk as ever.

MR. OLSEN

Evans! I need the final numbers on the Campbell proposal.

Without hesitation, Nathan hands him a neatly bound packet.

NATHAN

They're ready, sir.

Olsen turns to go – Nathan stops him, respectful and composed.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

McAlister and the Walker Prospectus
(MORE)

NATHAN (CONT'D)
are ready too.

Olsen pauses. Takes the folders. A rare smile edges in – small, but genuine.

MR. OLSEN
Well done, son.
(beat)
There's the leader I always knew you
could be.

Nathan nods – steady, grounded.

Olsen moves on.

Dave suddenly pops up over the cubicle partition like a prairie dog. He raises a hand.

Nathan meets it with a confident high-five. They share a quiet look – gratitude, pride, brotherhood.

Work resumes around them.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - AFTERNOON

A circle of a dozen people sit with Bible study guides and half-empty coffee cups.

Nathan's eyes clock a paperback peeking from someone's purse. The same one Dave is always rereading.

Nathan follows it upward –

-It's SARAH. Sitting across the circle.

Nathan glances to Dave. Then back to Sarah. A knowing smile.

The study wraps. Chairs SCRAPE as people stand and begin to mingle.

Nathan rises and heads straight for Sarah.

NATHAN
Hi, Sarah. Quick question for you.

She looks up, curious.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Do you know words with more than five letters?

She laughs, caught off guard.

SARAH

I'm gonna say yes. Why?

Nathan jerks a thumb toward Dave, who's pretending to study his notes like they contain the secrets of the universe.

NATHAN

Because that guy over there would love to meet someone who does.

Sarah follows his gaze. Her smile warms.

Dave startles, smooths his shirt, and approaches – awkward but hopeful.

DAVE

Uh... hey. What's happening right now?

Nathan steps back, presenting them like contestants on a wholesome game show.

NATHAN

Dave... this is Sarah. Sarah... Dave.
You two already read the same book.
Seems like a good start.

Sarah lifts her copy from her purse.

Dave instinctively pulls his from his back pocket – embarrassed but proud.

Nathan quietly steps away.

SARAH

(smiling)

Chapter four made me cry.

Dave's face lights up immediately.

DAVE

Same.

(leaning in)

But chapter seven. Nearly killed me.

Sarah laughs. Dave laughs. A spark jumps between them.

Nathan watches, smiling.

Melinda steps beside him, slipping an arm around his waist.

MELINDA

Matchmaker now?

Nathan looks at her, beaming with admiration.

NATHAN

Just gifting him a little of what he
gave me.

Melinda rests her head on his shoulder as Dave and Sarah
continue talking, already lost in their own conversation.

Dave laughs – the kind of laugh Nathan hasn't heard in years.

EXT. CITY STREET - EARLY EVENING

Nathan and Melinda walk hand-in-hand down a sun-washed
sidewalk. Summer warmth fills the air. Each holds an ice-
cream cone.

Melinda laughs at something Nathan just said – easy, natural.

Nathan's PHONE BUZZES - video call.

He groans playfully and answers.

AXLE (VIDEO CALL)

Dude! Tell me the rumor isn't true.

NATHAN

(squints)

What rumor? I have no idea what you're
talking about.

AXLE (VIDEO CALL)

Bro... don't mess with me. Did you do
it or not?

Nathan smirks and lifts the phone so Axle can see Melinda.

Melinda raises her left hand. A ring sparkles in the sun.

Axle's jaw drops.

AXLE (VIDEO CALL) (CONT'D)
 Duuuuude... you sucker.

MELINDA
 HEY!

Axle bursts out laughing.

AXLE (VIDEO CALL)
 Just kidding, Mel. Congrats you two. I
 love you guys.
 (beat)
 I call dibs on planning your bachelor-

Nathan and Mel cut him off in perfect unison:

NATHAN	MELINDA
NO! Absolutely not!	Not happening!

AXLE (VIDEO CALL)
 Come onnnnn-

MELINDA
 Bye, Axle.

Nathan hangs up.

Melinda shakes her head, half-laughing.

MELINDA (CONT'D)
 What are we going to do with him?

Nathan smiles, soft and knowing.

NATHAN
 Pray for him.
 (beat)
 It's worked before.

They continue walking.

Then Melinda suddenly stops.

MELINDA
 Charley!

Up ahead, CHARLEY stops - turns.

He's cleaned up now. Groomed. Steady.

Nathan freezes.

NATHAN
(confused)
How do you know him?

Melinda looks at him, surprised. She realizes-

MELINDA
You don't know... do you?

Nathan frowns.

FLASHBACK - EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - NIGHT OF NATHAN'S ATTACK

Charley pulls his squeaky cart down the street.

The violent homeless man rounds the corner running at full speed. Blows past him.

Charley rounds the corner - stops.

Nathan lies slumped against a brick wall. Blood streaks his face. Pooling on the ground around him.

Charley instantly rushes to him.

He kneels, checking Nathan's pulse - Alive. He studies the wounds.

Without hesitation, Charley slips Nathan's arm over his shoulder and lifts him.

The effort nearly buckles his knees - but he steadies.

Charley glances back at his cart. Everything he owns. He leaves it.

Charley carries Nathan down the block. Struggling but determined.

Cars pass, people walk by. No one stops. No one helps. Yet Charley never slows.

EXT. HOSPITAL ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Charley staggers toward the ER doors, barely holding Nathan upright.

A nurse looks up and freezes.

NURSE

Oh my God.
(shouting inside)
We need a gurney out here.

Hospital staff rush outside.

They lift Nathan from Charley's arms and lay him onto the gurney.

Charley reaches into Nathan's pocket and pulls out his phone.

The screen lights up. MELINDA – a heart icon beside her name.

Charley presses CALL.

The staff wheel Nathan through the ER doors.

Charley stands alone outside the entrance, watching them disappear inside.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Nathan lies unconscious. Bandaged. Machines HUM softly. A heart monitor BEEPS steadily.

Charley kneels quietly at the foot of the bed. Hands folded in prayer. The room is still.

The door opens. Melinda rushes in – then stops in the doorway. Watching.

Charley finishes his prayer. He rises slowly, turns toward her.

BACK TO PRESENT - EXT. CITY STREET -

Nathan looks from Melinda to Charley.

Charley smiles warmly. Something deeper glows behind his eyes. Something Nathan has seen before, loop after loop, without ever realizing.

MELINDA

Charley, I'd like to officially
(MORE)

MELINDA (CONT'D)
introduce you to Nathan.

Charley offers his hand.

CHARLEY
Nathan, huh? I knew a Nathan once.
Saved my life.

Nathan blinks – shaken by the resonance of the words.
Something echoes from the Loop just beneath conscious memory.
He accepts Charley's hand – they shake.

NATHAN
Thank you... for everything you did.
You're my hero.

Charley gently waves the compliment away.

CHARLEY
Nah... just lending a hand to a man in
need. You'd do the same for me, right?

He gives Nathan a small wink – not playful. Knowing.
Nathan's breath hitches. Some part of him recognizes
something sacred in the moment.

CHARLEY (CONT'D)
You two go on now. And may your
wedding be blessed.

Melinda brightens.

MELINDA
We hope you'll come to the ceremony.

Charley pauses, touched by the invitation.

CHARLEY
I wouldn't miss it.

MELINDA
Take care, Charley.

Melinda gently guides Nathan forward.

As they pass, Nathan glances down at Charley's cart.

The items inside stop him cold. The exact supplies he packed in the Loop. Same organization. Same placement. The same cart.

Recognition slams into him. Nathan slowly turns.

Charley stands where they left him – watching. Peaceful. Proud.

Nathan's breath catches. Awe softens his whole body. A reverent smile forms – a silent thank you.

Charley returns the smile.

Then –

Charley lifts his hands. On each palm – faint, healed nail scars.

CHARLEY

May my Father's light rest on you...
and bring you peace.

He lowers his hands and turns.

Charley walks down the sunlit street. The light around him grows warmer.

A passing car crosses through frame, blocking him from view.

When the car passes – the sidewalk is empty.

Nathan stands in awe.

A warm breeze moves through the street – soft, peaceful.

Nathan closes his eyes for a moment, letting it wash over him.

When he opens them, a quiet smile settles across his face.

He takes Melinda's hand. They walk on.

FADE OUT

THE END