

DEPTH PERCEPTION

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. CAR - MORNING

JEFF ELLIS (45), average build, dressed for corporate America, grips the steering wheel.

White knuckles.

Traffic crawls along a two-lane highway. Red brake lights stretch endlessly ahead.

Jeff exhales through his nose. Tries to settle.

A BLACK CAR suddenly blasts past in the breakdown lane—cuts sharply in front of him—

Jeff swerves hard. SLAMS the brakes.

JEFF
Are you fuckin' kidding me?

His heart pounds. He rolls down his window.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Hey! Asshole!

The BLACK CAR DRIVER doesn't look. Just flips him off.

That does it.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Yeah—fuck you!

Sweat beads along his hairline. His breathing shortens.

The black car brake-checks him.

Once.

Jeff slams the brakes.

Again.

Jeff's jaw clenches. His hands shake—but he doesn't back off.

An opening—

Jeff guns it. Pulls alongside. Rolls down his passenger window.

JEFF (CONT'D)
You think you're tough in that
little shit box?

The black car driver laughs. Makes faces. Throws up more birds.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Yeah? Okay.

He jerks the wheel-

CRUNCH.

Metal scrapes metal. Tires SCREAM.

Traffic slams to a halt.

Jeff throws open his door and storms toward the black car.

JEFF (CONT'D)
C'mon! Get out! Let's go!

He yanks the door handle-locked.

Inside, the black car driver sits frozen, phone pressed to his ear. Eyes wide.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Who you calling? Daddy?

HONKS erupt behind them.

Jeff draws his fist back-

THUD.

The black car driver flinches.

Jeff drives his elbow through the window-

GLASS EXPLODES outward.

The black car suddenly LURCHES forward-

Jeff stumbles, tumbles hard onto the pavement.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Ahh-! You little prick!

The black car tears down the breakdown lane.

Gone.

Jeff scrambles up, breathing hard.

Another ANGRY DRIVER leans out from behind him.

ANGRY DRIVER
Hey! What's your problem bro? Let
it go!

Jeff spins, eyes blazing.

JEFF
Yeah? Do everyone a favor and go
kill yourself.

A beat.

Silence hangs—then sirens.

Red and blue lights flood the rearview mirror.

Jeff stands there, chest heaving.

CUT TO:

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Jeff exits through the front doors, scanning a stack of paperwork.

He stops.

Reads it again.

A court date circled in pen.

His jaw tightens. He exhales through his nose.

His phone RINGS.

JEFF
(into phone)
Yeah. Hi. I'm sorry. I had a
little... issue on the way in this
morning.

He listens.

JEFF (CONT'D)
No—yeah. I'm on my way.

He ends the call. Slips the phone into his pocket.

Tucks the paperwork under his arm.

Keeps moving.

EXT. EMPIRE STATE BUILDING - DAY

Midtown chaos. Horns blare. Pedestrians surge.

The Empire State Building looms above it all.

A digital news ticker scrolls on a passing bus-

"... MIDTOWN TRAFFIC ADVISORY... Aug 20, 2012"

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Rows of open seating. Cubicles. Glassed-in offices.

Jeff sits at his desk, staring through his monitor.

Present—but somewhere else.

His phone RINGS.

He doesn't move.

BRIAN (60s) steps up behind him.

BRIAN

Hey, man.

Jeff turns slowly. Registers him. Irritation flashes.

JEFF

Brian. What do you want?

BRIAN

Just wanted to swing by. See how
you're doing, dude.

Jeff scoffs.

JEFF

(muttering)

You've gotta be kidding me.

BRIAN

Sorry—what was that?

JEFF

I said—calling me “Man”? “Dude”?
What is this?

Brian blinks.

BRIAN
I was just saying hi.

He backs away. Leaves it alone.

Jeff's phone RINGS again.

This time, he answers.

JEFF
Yeah.

Listens.

JEFF (CONT'D)
I'll be right there.

He stands.

INT. OFFICE - SUPERVISOR'S OFFICE - DAY

A small, functional office. One glass wall.

HAROLD (40s) types at his desk.

Jeff stands in the doorway.

HAROLD
Hey—come in. Grab a seat. One
second.

Jeff sits. Leans back. Arms folded tight across his chest.

Harold finishes typing. Turns.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
Heard about this morning. You okay?

JEFF
(matter of fact)
I sit like this because it's
comfortable. Not because I'm
"closed off" or whatever.

Harold gives a tired half-smile.

HAROLD
Yeah. I know. You've worked for
me—what—ten years?

Jeff doesn't respond.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

Listen. I don't care what happened this morning. I-believe me—I get it. But—

Jeff shifts. Jaw tightens.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

I have to write this one up.

Jeff stands abruptly.

JEFF

You're writing me up for something that happened outside of work?

HAROLD

It was outside work—but even out there, you represent the company. This isn't coming from me. It's coming from the top.

That lands.

Jeff nods once.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

Jeff... why don't you take some time off, it's been a tough month, I think you—

JEFF

Anything else?

HAROLD

You okay, Jeff? Seriously. Anything I can—

Jeff is already gone.

EXT. JEFF'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Jeff pulls into the driveway of a modest colonial.

Solid. Familiar.

A little neglected.

INT. JEFF'S CAR - PARKED

The engine clicks off.

Jeff sits. Stares straight ahead.

He looks toward the front door.

Takes a breath.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The front door opens into a small vestibule.

JULIE ELLIS (11) darts past him, heading upstairs. Too fast. Avoidant.

JACK ELLIS (13) sits at the dining room table, homework spread out.

ANNA ELLIS (40s) moves through the kitchen toward the back of the house.

No one acknowledges Jeff.

He sets his backpack down. Walks toward the dining room.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

JEFF

You're not even done with that summer homework yet?

Jack glances up. Then back down.

JEFF (CONT'D)

You know school starts soon?

A slight nod.

JEFF (CONT'D)

No dinner on the table? What else is new?

Nothing.

Jeff exhales. Turns toward the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN

Anna sits at the island, phone in hand.

Jeff stops in the doorway.

JEFF

Hey.

She looks up. Says nothing.

Stands. Walks past him.

A beat.

JEFF (CONT'D)

(flat, to himself)

Hi. My day was good? How was yours?
What do you want for dinner?

Silence.

JEFF (CONT'D)

I'll figure something out.

INT. DINING ROOM

Jeff returns.

The table is empty.

Homework gone.

Jack is nowhere to be seen.

JEFF

Fine.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dark.

Anna lies on her side, back to the door.

Jeff enters quietly. Changes.

Slides into bed.

A beat.

Slowly, carefully, he shifts closer.

Anna rolls slightly away.

Not dramatic.

Just enough.

Jeff stops.

Moves back to his side.

Stares at the ceiling.

INT. JEFF'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Soft morning light.

Jeff wakes.

Alone.

He listens.

Nothing.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Empty.

No coffee brewing. No voices.

A cereal bowl sits in the sink. Un-rinsed.

Jeff opens the fridge. Closes it.

Checks the microwave clock.

Late.

He grabs his keys and heads out.

INT. DELI

Packed.

Jeff enters already irritated. Scans the room.

Pushes forward. Bumps into a LADY CUSTOMER.

LADY CUSTOMER
Excuse me!

He keeps moving.

LADY CUSTOMER (CONT'D)
(under her breath)
Jerk.

Jeff plants himself at the counter.

A line forms behind him.

A WOMAN CUSTOMER steps up beside him. Too close.

DELI GUY
Who's next?

WOMAN CUSTOMER
I'll have—

JEFF
Whoa. Lady. You blind? You see this
line?

WOMAN CUSTOMER
I'm in a rush. Do you mind?

JEFF
Yeah, I mind. You see that line?

She studies him. Calm.

WOMAN CUSTOMER
(to deli guy)
A dozen bagels. And two bacon, egg,
and cheese—

JEFF
Are you fucking kidding me?

DELI GUY
Bro, is this really a big deal?

The woman customer smirks.

WOMAN CUSTOMER
You should really relax.

Jeff steps back—seething.

Then storms out.

ANGRY MURMURS follow.

DELI GUY
Hey, take a hike!

JEFF
Yeah fuck you!

The deli guy turns to the woman customer.

DELI GUY
Sorry about that. That guys' always
in here bein' an asshole.

INT. JEFF'S CAR - PARKED

Jeff slams his fist into the console.

JEFF
Goddamn woman. Fucking deli guy.

He pounds the steering wheel again.

A beat.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Bro?!

He exhales hard through his nose.

Starts the car-peels out of the spot.

INT. OFFICE - BREAK ROOM - MORNING

A modest room. Round tables. Sink. Coffee machine. Vending machine.

Jeff grabs a breakfast pastry. Sits.

Rips the package open with unnecessary force.

Takes a bite.

Grimaces. Chews anyway.

BOB (40s), slightly disheveled, pours coffee. Notices Jeff.

BOB
Hey, Jeff. How you doin' today?

JEFF
Fine.

Bob pulls up a chair beside him.

Too close.

Jeff shifts away.

BOB
Did you hear about Phil in COE?
Someone said he-

JEFF
Bob.

Bob stops mid-sentence.

JEFF (CONT'D)
I don't give a shit about Phil.

A beat.

Bob blinks.

JEFF (CONT'D)
And you might wanna think about
showering before you come in here.

Bob freezes. Processes. Flushes with embarrassment.

Jeff stands, tosses the pastry in the trash.

Walks out.

INT. OFFICE - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Glass walls. Eight people around a table. Laptops open.

Mid-level corporate meeting.

Jeff sits near the end.

A PROJECT MANAGER (30s) clicks through slides.

PROJECT MANAGER
So if we shift the deployment to
Q3, we can avoid clashing
priorities.

Jeff stares at the table.

The HUM of the room creeps in.

Pens clicking.

Chairs shifting.

A cough.

PROJECT MANAGER (CONT'D)
Jeff, does that timeline work for
your team?

No response.

PROJECT MANAGER (CONT'D)
Jeff?

Jeff looks up. Blinks.

JEFF
Yeah. Sure.

PROJECT MANAGER
You sure?

JEFF
(flat)
I said yeah.

A beat.

The meeting continues.

Jeff glances around.

Two coworkers exchange a look.

Someone types. Stops.

Jeff shifts in his chair.

The voices blur slightly.

PROJECT MANAGER
Circling back to the risk
assessment—

Jeff exhales.

Too loud.

He closes his notebook.

Stands.

Everyone looks up.

Jeff says nothing.

He walks out.

Through the glass, the meeting resumes without him.

The door clicks shut.

INT. OFFICE - JEFF'S CUBICLE - MOMENTS LATER

Jeff stands at his desk.

Looks around.

Coworkers type. Laugh quietly. Sip coffee.

A normal day.

Jeff's breathing is shallow.

A nearby LAUGH snaps his attention.

Too loud.

He looks toward it. Then away.

His hands clench. Unclench.

He catches his reflection in his dark computer screen.

Stops.

Stares at himself.

He sits.

Forces his breathing to slow.

The office noise fades back in.

INT. JEFF'S CAR - EVENING

Rush hour.

Traffic barely moves.

Jeff checks the clock-

6:14

He exhales sharply.

Signals.

No one lets him in.

He glances right-

The breakdown lane.

A beat.

He moves into it.

The car surges forward.

HORNS BLARE.

A DRIVER leans out a window.

DRIVER
Hey! Asshole!

Jeff keeps his eyes forward.

Passes a line of cars.

Hands thrown up. More honking.

He cuts back in just before a merge—

BRAKES SCREECH.

Jeff's jaw tightens.

Checks the clock—

6:17

A car pulls alongside him in the breakdown lane.

The driver is yelling. Red-faced. Muffled.

Jeff grips the wheel.

He doesn't react.

Then—

He rolls down the passenger window.

Reaches into the cupholder.

A quarter.

He whips it.

CLACK.

It hits the other car's door.

Nothing dramatic.

Just petty.

Jeff immediately rolls the window back up.

Traffic moves.

The other car is stuck.

Jeff doesn't look back.

A school comes into view ahead.

He accelerates.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT

Sneakers squeak. A whistle. Low crowd noise.

Jeff enters, scanning.

Bleachers half full.

Paper cups of coffee.

He spots Jack.

On the bench.

Jersey on. Shoes laced.

Not warming up.

Jeff pauses.

Checks the scoreboard.

First quarter.

He climbs the bleachers. Sits.

A few parents glance-then look away.

Jeff's eyes never leave his son.

Kids rotate in and out.

Jack stays seated.

Jeff leans forward.

JEFF
(under his breath)
Come on...

BUZZER.

End of the quarter.

No movement.

Parents clap politely. Make small talk.

Jeff shifts. Restless.

JEFF (CONT'D)
(to no one)
You don't even give him a minute?

A nearby MOM stiffens.

Doesn't respond.

A DAD glances at Jeff. Looks away.

Second quarter.

Same rotation.

Jack stares at the floor.

Doesn't look toward the stands.

Jeff's jaw tightens.

JEFF (CONT'D)
This is ridiculous.

No one answers.

Timeout.

The COACH huddles players on the court.

Jack remains seated.

Jeff stands.

He just can't sit anymore.

INT. GYM HALLWAY - NIGHT

Game noise muffled behind closed doors.

The COACH (40s) exits the locker room, clipboard under his arm.

Jeff steps into his path.

JEFF
Why isn't my son playing?

The coach stops short. A flicker of surprise.

COACH
Jeff—um... what?

JEFF
He shows up. He does the work.

The coach shifts his weight. Glances past Jeff, down the hallway.

COACH
I don't know what to—
(beat)
Look you know the twenty-four hour rule—

JEFF
You sat him the whole game!

Jack steps out of the locker room.

His eyes meet Jeff's.

Jack hesitates. Then presses back against the wall. Alone.

COACH
Jeff, I need you to give me some space.

Parents move through the hallway. No one looks over.

JEFF
You don't even look at him out there. It's preseason—this is when he should be playing.

The coach exhales. Keeps his voice calm. Too calm.

COACH
If you have concerns, you should take them to the Athletic Director.

JEFF
That's it?

The coach nods once. Final.

COACH
I'm really sorry, Jeff.

He steps around Jeff and walks away.

Jeff doesn't follow.

He turns to Jack.

JEFF
(low)
Did he say anything to you?

Jack shrugs. Barely.

Jeff throws his arms up.

Leaves.

The BUZZER sounds again—muffled, distant.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Quiet.

Anna stands at the sink. Water running.

Julie sits at the table. Head down.

Jeff enters.

Drops his keys on the table.

Too loud.

Julie gets up and exits quickly.

Jeff watches her go.

JEFF
I've had it with that coach.

No response.

JEFF (CONT'D)
He sits him all game. For no
reason.

Anna turns the water off. Doesn't turn around.

ANNA
Not tonight, Jeff.

JEFF
(sarcastic)
Oh. Sorry to bother you with my
problems.

Jack hovers near the doorway.

Jeff turns to him.

JEFF (CONT'D)
You didn't do anything wrong?

Jack shrugs.

Sits.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Then I don't get it.

Anna turns.

ANNA
Because you cornered the coach.
People saw it.

JEFF
I asked a question.

ANNA
You were abrasive.

JEFF
Unbelievable.

He opens the fridge. Stares inside.

JEFF (CONT'D)
There's nothing to eat?

ANNA
There's food.

JEFF
Not dinner.

ANNA
I wasn't sure you were coming home.

That lands.

JEFF
Of course I was coming home.

ANNA
You left a meeting today without
saying anything.

Jeff freezes.

JEFF
How do you know that?

ANNA
Because people talk.

Silence.

Jack pushes his chair back.

Too loud.

JEFF
Go get that summer homework done.

Jack stands. Shakes his head slightly. Exits.

Jeff watches him go.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Great. Now I'm the bad guy.

ANNA
I'm not saying that.

JEFF
You don't have to.

He grabs a beer. Twists it open.

JEFF (CONT'D)
You all look at me like I'm—

ANNA
Jeff. Stop.

JEFF
Like I'm dangerous.

The word hangs.

Anna meets his eyes.

Careful.

ANNA
You scare them.

Jeff laughs. Short. Sharp.

JEFF
Good.

He drinks.

Anna turns back to the sink.

Jeff stands alone.

EXT. JEFF'S HOUSE - MORNING

Early morning light.

Jeff steps outside with coffee and backpack.

Across the street, a NEIGHBOR lifts a small child into an SUV.

The child laughs.

A backpack slips.

The neighbor adjusts it. Automatic. Gentle.

Jeff watches.

A beat too long.

The neighbor looks up. Catches Jeff's eye.

A polite nod.

Jeff scoffs—almost involuntary.

Turns away.

The neighbor freezes. Confused.

The car door closes.

Jeff doesn't look back.

INT. OFFICE - HR CONFERENCE ROOM - MORNING

A small, windowless room.

Neutral. Corporate.

A box of tissues on the table like a quiet accusation.

Jeff sits alone on one side.

Across from him sit HAROLD and an HR REPRESENTATIVE (50s), calm and prepared.

A manila folder rests between them.

HR

Thank you for coming in, Jeff.

Jeff nods. Says nothing.

HR (CONT'D)
This won't take long.

That lands.

Jeff's eyes flick to Harold.

Harold won't meet them.

HR opens the folder. No rush. Paperwork like ritual.

HR (CONT'D)
As you know, there have been
ongoing concerns regarding
professional conduct.

Jeff's jaw tightens.

JEFF
Concerns.

HR
You were issued a written warning
last week.

Jeff looks to Harold again, waiting for something.

Silence.

HR (CONT'D)
Since then, we've received
additional complaints.

JEFF
From who?

HR
We can't release that information.

JEFF
So I don't even get to know what
I'm accused of?

HR
This isn't an accusation.

HR slides a single sheet of paper across the table with two fingers.

HR (CONT'D)
This is a notice of termination,
effective immediately.

Jeff stares at the paper.

Doesn't touch it.

JEFF
You're firing me.

HR
Yes.

JEFF
For what?

HR
It's all listed in there. There's
been a pattern, Jeff.

That word again.

Jeff's throat moves. A swallow he tries to hide.

JEFF
I didn't do anything illegal.

HR
This isn't about legality.

JEFF
I've been here fifteen years.

HR
And we appreciate that.

Jeff lets out a small laugh. Not amused. Not even angry.

Just hearing the script.

HR (CONT'D)
You'll receive severance consistent
with company policy. Your access
has already been disabled.

Jeff looks up. That part hits different.

JEFF
Already.

Harold shifts, uncomfortable.

HAROLD
Jeff-

JEFF
So I walk out of here and I don't
even exist anymore.

HR
Security will escort you to collect
your belongings.

JEFF
Security.

HR
It's standard procedure.

Jeff nods once, as if he expected it.

He finally takes the paper.

Looks at it.

Folds it once, carefully, like he's keeping it clean.

JEFF
Can I at least say goodbye to my
team?

HR
That won't be possible.

That's the real cut.

Jeff nods again. Stands.

No outburst. No pleading.

JEFF
I gave you everything I had.

HR
We understand this is difficult.

Jeff looks at her. Really looks.

JEFF
No. You don't.

He turns and walks to the door. His hand touches the knob.

He pauses.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Just so you know-

They look up.

JEFF (CONT'D)
You're making a big mistake.

HR doesn't respond.

Harold still can't meet his eye.

Jeff exits.

The door closes softly behind him.

INT. OFFICE - OPEN FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

The HR conference room door opens.

Jeff steps out.

An OFFICE SECURITY GUARD (30s) waits nearby. Neutral. Professional.

The office security guard gestures down the hall.

They start walking.

At first, no one notices.

Then a few heads lift.

A whisper.

Someone stops typing mid-keystroke.

Jeff feels it.

They pass cubicles. Glass offices. People pretend not to stare.

A co-worker starts to stand, thinks better of it.

Another turns back to their screen too quickly, like they got caught.

They pass a conference room. Inside, a meeting continues.

We hear a laugh.

Then it dies as faces turn.

A woman at the table freezes with a pen in her hand.

Someone else avoids eye contact entirely.

Jeff's jaw tightens. He keeps moving.

The guard stops at Jeff's desk.

OFFICE SECURITY GUARD
You can take personal items only.

Jeff nods.

He opens a drawer.

His fingers hover over a framed photo.

His family.

He lifts it.

Holds it for half a second longer than he should.

Then places it face-down in his bag, like he can't stand them looking back.

He grabs his phone.

A coffee mug.

A stapler, then stops himself, puts it down.

That's it.

The guard gestures again.

They continue.

More murmurs now.

Not loud. Never loud.

Just enough to make the air feel contaminated.

Jeff catches his reflection in a glass wall.

Walking. Escorted.

They reach the elevators.

The guard presses the button.

They wait.

No one speaks.

Jeff's eyes stay forward, but his face in the chrome door stares back.

The elevator arrives.

They step in.

The doors close.

INT. OFFICE - ELEVATOR - MORNING

The elevator descends.

Jeff's reflection stares back at him.

He doesn't look away.

His breathing is shallow, controlled.

The guard shifts his weight, clears his throat like he wants to say something.

He doesn't.

DING.

INT. OFFICE - LOBBY - MORNING

They exit.

The office security guard escorts Jeff to the front doors.

Jeff pauses at the threshold.

Looks back.

No one is looking at him.

Not a single person.

Then he exits.

EXT. EMPIRE STATE BUILDING - MORNING

A steady rush of people flowing in and out.

Jeff stands just outside the entrance. Not moving.

Tie loosened. Backpack slung over one shoulder, tugging him slightly off balance.

People brush past him. A shoulder. A bag. A muttered "sorry."

Jeff doesn't react.

Inside, visible through the glass—the office security guard watches him.

Jeff stares straight ahead. Not at the building. Not at the street.

At nothing.

The office security guard steps out through a side door—not the revolving one. Casual. Non-threatening.

OFFICE SECURITY GUARD

Yo.

Jeff doesn't respond.

The guard waits a beat.

OFFICE SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)

Yo, buddy. You can't stand there.

Jeff blinks. Focus returns in fragments.

JEFF

Yeah.

OFFICE SECURITY GUARD

Alright. I just need you to keep moving.

Can't have folks lingering right here.

Jeff looks back—sharp.

The guard gestures gently down the sidewalk.

Jeff nods. Steps away.

He walks twenty feet. Stops again.

People keep moving around him. No one looks twice.

Jeff exhales sharply through his nose.

Then keeps walking.

EXT. MIDTOWN SIDEWALK - MORNING

Jeff walks. Not toward anything. Just away.

The city moves around him. Fast. Purposeful.

A DELIVERY GUY shoulders past him.

DELIVERY GUY
(never breaking stride)
Fuckin' tourist.

Jeff stops.

DELIVERY GUY already gone.

Jeff stands there, chest rising too fast. He looks around—no one cares.

A MOTHER adjusts her child's backpack nearby. The kid stares at Jeff a beat too long.

Jeff clocks it.

JEFF
What?

The mother instinctively pulls the kid closer. Not fear-habit.

Jeff frowns.

He shakes it off. Keeps walking.

A GROUP OF OFFICE WORKERS laugh as they pass. One of them bumps Jeff's arm.

Jeff doesn't react. Too stiff.

They keep laughing. Their laughter trails behind him.

Jeff slows. Lets them pass.

The sound fades.

He moves like a zombie. Begins to cross the intersection.

A big red hand on the street signal post.

He steps into the street.

A car barreling through the intersection BEEPS!

It continues at the same speed just inches from Jeff.

Startled Jeff lurches back.

MOUTHY PEDESTRIAN
Bro, see that red hand? It means
don't walk. It's so people who
can't read don't get run over.

He and his friend laugh.

Jeff closes his eyes takes a deep breath, restrains—moves on.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

Mid-morning lull. Too quiet to hide in.

Jeff stands in line. Tie loose now. Backpack on the floor by his foot.

He stares at the menu. Doesn't read it.

The BARISTA waits.

BARISTA
Whenever you're ready.

Jeff blinks.

JEFF
Coffee.

BARISTA
Okaay—what kind?

JEFF
Regular.

BARISTA
Size?

JEFF
Medium.

She taps it in.

BARISTA
Name?

Jeff hesitates.

JEFF
Jeff.

She writes it. Turns to the machine.

The silence stretches.

A MALE CUSTOMER behind Jeff checks his phone. Shifts. Creates space.

Jeff notices.

JEFF (CONT'D)
I'm almost done.

MALE CUSTOMER
I know.

Not annoyed. Reassuring.

That somehow makes it worse.

Jeff pays. The barista slides the cup toward him.

BARISTA
Careful—it's hot.

Jeff nods. Takes it.

He moves to the counter. Stands there.

Sips. Doesn't taste it.

Across the room, the barista leans toward another employee. Whispers something.

Jeff's eyes flick up. Their voices are low. Unintelligible.

Jeff looks down at his cup. At his hands. They're shaking.

He sets the cup down. Harder than intended.

Jeff stares at the coffee. Then picks it up. Walks to the trash. Pours it out.

The liquid disappears instantly.

Jeff watches it go.

Then drops the cup in.

He exits.

EXT. COMMUTER PARKING LOT - DAY

A modest lot near a subway entrance.

Rows of parked cars. Mostly empty.

Jeff's car idles.

Inside, Jeff stares straight ahead.

Hands on the wheel. Not gripping. Just there.

A train HORN sounds in the distance.

He doesn't react.

The clock on the dashboard blinks—

12:07

Jeff exhales. Slow. Shallow.

A car pulls into the lot nearby.

Someone gets out. Hurries toward the platform.

Jeff watches them go.

Then nothing.

The engine SHUTS OFF automatically.

Silence.

Jeff doesn't move.

He presses a button on his phone.

JEFF
Call Anna.

The phone rings.

ANNA (V.O.)
Hi, you've reached Anna, sorry I
can't take your call, you know the
drill. After the beep!

Jeff hesitates. Like he might speak.

He hangs up instead.

A thousand-yard stare.

A KNOCK.

Sharp. Loud.

Jeff flinches. Blinks fast, pulled back into the world.

A COMMUTER (50s), male, impatient, stands beside the driver's window. Keys in hand. Already annoyed.

COMMUTER
Hey—are you leaving?

Jeff doesn't answer.

The commuter leans closer. Peers in.

COMMUTER (CONT'D)
Bro. You've been sitting here a
while.

Jeff stares at him. Expression unreadable.

COMMUTER (CONT'D)
I need the spot.

A beat.

Jeff looks forward again.

The commuter scoffs.

COMMUTER (CONT'D)
Seriously?

He knocks again. Too hard.

COMMUTER (CONT'D)
Come on.

Jeff slowly lowers the window.

JEFF
I'm not parked.

COMMUTER
You're in the space.

JEFF
I'm sitting in my car.

The commuter shakes his head.

COMMUTER
Unbelievable.

Jeff studies him. Not angry. Measuring.

JEFF
There are other spots.

COMMUTER
Not close.

Jeff nods. Considers that.

Then raises the window.

The commuter pounds the glass once more.

COMMUTER (CONT'D)
Asshole!

Jeff doesn't react.

A long beat.

Jeff starts the car.

The engine hums to life.

The commuter steps back, satisfied.

Jeff pulls out of the space.

The commuter immediately moves toward it.

In the rearview mirror-

The commuter claims the spot.

Jeff doesn't look back.

EXT. JEFF'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Jeff pulls into the driveway.

The house is quiet.

Too quiet.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

The front door opens.

Jeff steps inside.

JEFF
Hello?

No answer.

He drops his keys on the table near the door.

Listens.

Nothing.

He moves through the house, slower at first, like he's expecting to hear something.

INT. KITCHEN

Empty.

Backpacks are gone.

No shoes by the door.

The clock on the microwave reads—

3:46 PM

Jeff checks it.

Checks it again, like it might change.

JEFF

Jack?

He moves faster now.

INT. JULIE'S ROOM

Bed made. Desk empty.

No scattered clothes. No toys. Nothing in motion.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

Same.

Jeff stands in the doorway.

Breathing shallow.

JEFF

Okay...

He pulls out his phone. Speaks into it.

JEFF (CONT'D)

Hey Dan... have you seen Jack? Or
Julie?

DAN (V.O.)

Jeff? Uh... no, Jeff, I haven't.
Everything ok?

Jeff's eyes sweep the room again.

JEFF
Yeah-I mean no, I just got home.
They should be-

He stops himself.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Don't worry about it. Thanks
anyway.

He hangs up.

Immediately dials another number.

JEFF (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Bill, sorry to bother you-are the
kids with Justin at your house?

BILL (V.O.)
No, Justin is doing the baseball
camp this week, you ok?

JEFF
(into phone)
Fine.

He ends the call.

Dials again. Doesn't wait for a greeting.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Have you seen my kids?

Listens.

JEFF (CONT'D)
What do you mean—"Jeff"?

He pulls the phone away.

Checks the contact.

Back to his ear.

JEFF (CONT'D)
They should be home.

A longer pause.

JEFF (CONT'D)
I'm at the house.

The voice on the other end lowers. Careful.

JEFF (CONT'D)
No-I'm not upset. I just need to
know where they are.

Another beat.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Okay.

He ends the call.

Jeff stands in the quiet kitchen, phone in hand.

Like the room is holding its breath with him.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Jeff stands alone.

Phone still in his hand.

The house hasn't changed.

JEFF
(quiet)
Where are you?

Silence.

Jeff sits.

Then stands again.

He paces one step. Stops. Listens like a sound might explain it.

Nothing.

He checks the phone screen again. No missed calls.

His thumb hovers over Anna's name.

He doesn't press it.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

Jeff stands at the counter, phone in hand. Still. Listening to nothing.

The BACK DOOR opens.

Anna enters, carrying grocery bags. Normal. Tired. Not defensive.

Jeff turns fast.

JEFF
Where were you?

ANNA
(slightly winded)
Out.

She sets the bags down. Starts unloading. Milk. Bread. Apples.

JEFF
With the kids?

ANNA
Yes.

Jeff exhales. Relief. Then his jaw tightens.

JEFF
You didn't answer your phone.

ANNA
I was busy.

Jeff watches her movements. Efficient. Careful.

JEFF
You could've texted.

ANNA
I said... I was busy.

JEFF
Where did you go?

Anna pauses just long enough to register.

ANNA
Julie had dance.
Jack was with Steve for a bit.

JEFF
Steve?

ANNA
Yeah.

JEFF
You didn't tell me.

ANNA
You weren't home.

JEFF
I was on my way.

ANNA
I didn't know that.

That lands wrong.

JEFF
So you just make plans without me now?

Anna closes the fridge gently.

ANNA
I make plans for the kids.

Jeff scoffs.

JEFF
Right. And I'm what-optional?

ANNA
That's not what I said.

JEFF
Yeah, you didn't have to.

Anna finally turns. Not angry. Tired.

ANNA
We just need stability right now.

JEFF
Stability for who?

ANNA
For them.

Jeff laughs once. Short.

JEFF
So I'm the problem.

ANNA
I didn't say that.

But she doesn't correct it either.

Silence.

Jack appears in the hallway. Hears enough to freeze.

Jeff clocks him.

JEFF
(to Jack)
You have fun?

Jack nods. Doesn't come closer.

ANNA
Jack—go finish your homework.

Jack disappears immediately.

Jeff watches him go.

JEFF
See that?

ANNA
See what?

JEFF
They don't even talk to me anymore.

ANNA
They talk to you.

JEFF
No. They react to me.

Anna's jaw tightens.

ANNA
Because they don't know which
version of you they're getting.

That lands hard.

JEFF
What version is that?

ANNA
The one who's already angry when he
walks in the door.

Jeff steps closer.

JEFF
I'm angry because no one listens.

ANNA
We listen.
I'm trying to keep things calm.

JEFF
By cutting me out?

ANNA
By keeping the temperature down.

JEFF
You're freezing me.

Anna meets his eyes.

ANNA
I'm protecting them.

A beat.

JEFF
From me.

Anna doesn't answer.

Jeff backs away, stunned. Not yelling. Not exploding.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Unbelievable.

He grabs his backpack. Heads for the door.

He hesitates. Then exits, slamming the door behind.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - AFTERNOON

A quiet suburban block. Tree-lined. Parked cars.

Late-summer stillness.

Jeff's car barrels down the street too fast.

A DOG WALKER (30s), female, walks a small DOG across the road, chatting with a FRIEND on the sidewalk.

The car ROARS past-

The dog walker yanks the leash back just in time.

The dog yelps.

DOG WALKER
Jesus Christ!

Jeff doesn't slow.

The dog walker spins, furious.

DOG WALKER (CONT'D)
Hey! Slow down!

The car is already gone.

Her friend shakes her head.

FRIEND
That guy again?

DOG WALKER
Every day. Always flying through
here like an asshole.

FRIEND
Jerk.

They watch the street for a beat.

The quiet settles back in like it never happened.

INT. JEFF'S CAR

Jeff grips the wheel tight. Eyes darting.

His breathing is clipped.

He checks the dashboard clock—

3:58 PM

He presses the phone button on the wheel.

A double BEEP.

JEFF
Call Anna.

The phone rings.

ANNA (V.O.)
Hi, you've reached Anna. Sorry I
can't take your call—

Jeff ends it before the beep.

Hits the button again. Double BEEP.

JEFF
Call Steve.

RINGING.

STEVE (V.O.)
Jeff, how's it going man, you doing alright?

JEFF
(into phone)
Hey—have you seen Jack or Julie?

STEVE (V.O.)
What?

JEFF
Have you seen them?! When I went home they weren't there.

STEVE (V.O.)
N—No, I haven't Jeff. Jeff—

Jeff hangs up.

JEFF
How's it going... "man"? Ugh!

Doesn't slow.

The neighborhood blurs past his windows.

He turns hard. Cuts onto another street.

Jeff's jaw tightens.

He dials again. Straight to voicemail.

ANNA (V.O.)
After the beep—

JEFF
Anna. Call me back. Please.

He ends it.

His grip tightens on the wheel.

The car surges forward.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - AFTERNOON

Jeff's car disappears around a corner.

The street returns to calm—as if nothing happened.

FADE TO:

EXT. JEFF'S HOUSE — NIGHT

Late.

Quiet.

Porch lights dot the block.

Except Jeff's house.

His car turns in.

Headlights wash over the colonial.

The engine cuts.

EXT. DRIVEWAY

Jeff steps out.

Breathing shallow.

He stares at the house like it might speak first.

A beat.

Then he moves.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE — NIGHT

The front door eases shut behind him.

Dark. Still.

Then—

Shoes by the entryway.

A faint glow from the kitchen night light.

Jeff freezes.

Listens.

Nothing.

He moves.

INT. KITCHEN

The kitchen looks lived in.

A dish in the sink.

A cup on the counter.

A cereal box left out-mid-thought.

Jeff stares at it.

His jaw tightens.

He sets his keys down with controlled care.

INT. LIVING ROOM

A blanket folded on the couch.

The TV remote on the coffee table.

Normal.

Too normal.

Jeff's eyes flick to the hallway.

He goes.

INT. JULIE'S ROOM

The door is cracked.

Jeff pushes it open.

Julie sleeps.

Breathing steady.

Hair across her face.

Jeff freezes.

Watches her chest rise and fall.

A long beat.

The anger doesn't leave.

Jeff steps closer.

Not touching.

Just close enough to confirm she's real.

He backs out silently.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

Jeff opens the door.

Jack sleeps on his side.

One arm tucked under the pillow.

A basketball bag rests near the bed.

Jeff stares at it.

Swallows something sharp.

He starts to speak-

stops himself.

Steps back out.

INT. JEFF AND ANNA'S BEDROOM

The door opens.

Anna sleeps, back to him.

Same position as before.

Jeff stands in the doorway.

Motionless.

He wants to speak. Doesn't.

He steps closer-then stops.

Anna doesn't stir.

Jeff leans in slightly.

Barely above a whisper-

JEFF
(low)
Unbelievable.

He backs away.

INT. HALLWAY

Jeff stands alone.

Surrounded by closed doors.

By quiet.

His breathing steadies.

Anger contained.

Nowhere to go.

INT. JEFF'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jeff lies on top of the covers.

Fully dressed.

Eyes open.

Staring at the ceiling.

Listening to the house breathe.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. JEFF'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

JULIE (O.S.)

Daddy!

The sound lingers.

Jeff's eyes snap open.

INT. HALLWAY

Jeff bolts from the room.

INT. JULIE'S ROOM

Julie sits up in bed.

Crying. Shaking.

JULIE
Daddy! Something's wrong with me!
Help!

Jeff drops to his knees beside the bed.

Careful. Close—but not touching.

JEFF
Julie—what's wrong? What is it?

JULIE
I don't know. Something's wrong.

I don't feel right.

JEFF
What—what do you mean?

Julie cries harder.

JULIE
I don't know!

Jeff's eyes flick to the doorway. The hall beyond. Empty.

He forces his voice calm.

JEFF
Okay. Okay. Breathe. Look at me.

Julie tries. Fails. Clutches her blanket.

Jeff stands, already moving.

INT. JEFF AND ANNA'S BEDROOM

Jeff rushes in.

JEFF
Anna. Anna. Something's wrong with
Julie.

Anna mumbles. Turns slightly.

Doesn't wake.

Jeff stares at her.

Like she's refusing on purpose.

JEFF (CONT'D)
(frustrated)
Ugh.

He's gone before she can even breathe again.

INT. JULIE'S ROOM

Jeff's back.

JEFF
Okay—okay. Come on.

He gently pulls Julie toward the edge of the bed.

She resists, panicked.

JEFF (CONT'D)
We're going to the hospital.

JULIE
Daddy, I'm scared.

Jeff pauses. His face softens for a fraction.

JEFF
It's okay. I've got you. Let's go.

INT. JEFF'S CAR - NIGHT

Jeff drives fast.

Sweat pours down his face.

Julie cries softly in the back seat.

Sparse traffic.

A car HIGH-BEAMS him.

BEEP.

Jeff flashes anger like a reflex.

JEFF
Fuck you!

He flips the bird out the window.

EXT. EXPRESSWAY

Jeff weaves through traffic.

Too fast.

Too aggressive.

INT. JEFF'S CAR

Jeff checks the rearview.

JEFF

Come on—move!

Get out of the left lane, asshole!

JULIE

Daddy.

JEFF

(to driver)

Move!

JULIE

Daddy.

JEFF

What?!

JULIE

I'm okay now.

Jeff blinks.

JEFF

What?

JULIE

I don't want to go to the hospital.

JEFF

No—we have to make sure you're
okay.

JULIE

No! I'm fine! Please don't take me
there.

JEFF

Julie—we're almost halfway there.

JULIE

Please, Daddy. I'm okay now. I feel better. I promise.

Jeff stares forward.

His breathing changes.

Not relief.

Suspicion.

He jerks the wheel toward an exit.

JEFF

Are you serious right now? You're fine all of a sudden?

JULIE

I'm sorry. I just want to go home.

Jeff scowls.

Signals.

Turns back.

INT. JEFF'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Gray morning light seeps through the blinds.

Jeff's eyes snap open.

He sits up fast.

Listens.

Nothing.

INT. HALLWAY

Jeff moves quickly.

Checks Julie's room.

Empty bed.

Perfectly made.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

Empty.

The basketball bag is gone.

INT. KITCHEN

Clean.

No backpacks. No shoes.

The cereal box is put away. The counter wiped down.

Not abandoned.

Cleared.

Jeff stands perfectly still.

JEFF

Anna?

Silence.

He pulls out his phone.

Hovers.

Doesn't press anything.

Just stands there—staring at the quiet house.

Like the quiet is watching him back.

INT. BATHROOM

Jeff splashes water on his face.

Looks up at himself in the mirror.

Studies his reflection.

Not anger.

Not sadness.

INT. JEFF'S BEDROOM

Jeff sits on the edge of the bed.

Fully dressed now. Shoes on.

Tie knotted too tight.

He stares at nothing.

A beat.

He stands.

Checks the mirror.

Straightens his tie. Too tight.

Loosens it a fraction.

INT. KITCHEN

The kitchen is spotless.

No noise.

Jeff pours coffee.

Doesn't taste it. Sets the mug down untouched.

INT. HOME OFFICE

Jeff pulls open a drawer, flips through a stack of business cards.

Dentist. Insurance. A therapist.

He keeps going.

ALVITO & DEVARADO PEDIATRICS.

He stops.

He turns it over. Office hours on the back.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - FRONT DOOR

Jeff grabs his backpack.

Pauses.

Looks back into the house.

Nothing looks wrong.

That's the problem.

He opens the door.

EXT. JEFF'S HOUSE - MORNING

Jeff steps out.

Closes the door behind him.

The house remains still.

INT. JEFF'S CAR - MORNING

Jeff starts the engine and pulls away.

No music.

No rush.

Just the hum of the road and his breathing.

INT. PEDIATRIC MEDICAL OFFICE - MORNING

Quiet. Clean. Muted colors. A poster about childhood anxiety on the wall.

A few families sit scattered in the waiting room. Coughs. Crinkling snack wrappers. A cartoon murmurs on a TV.

Jeff stands at the front desk. Backpack on. Eyes rimmed red.

The RECEPTIONIST (40s) looks up.

RECEPTIONIST

Good morning.

JEFF

Hi. I'm trying to get my daughter checked.
She had... an episode last night.

RECEPTIONIST

Okay.

What's her name?

JEFF

Julie Ellis.

She types. Routine. Then-

She stops.

Types again. Slower.

RECEPTIONIST
Date of birth?

JEFF
March ninth, two thousand one.

She enters it.

The screen gives her something she didn't expect.

Her posture changes. Not alarm. Not sympathy.

RECEPTIONIST
And which doctor does she usually
see?

JEFF
Alvito.

She nods. Types. Pauses again.

Turns the screen slightly away.

RECEPTIONIST
Just one moment.

She stands and walks through the door behind the desk.

Jeff waits. Shifts.

Parents avoid eye contact. No one stares. Which is worse.

The receptionist returns. Carefully neutral.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)
Dr. Alvito isn't available today.

JEFF
That's fine.
Whoever's covering.

RECEPTIONIST
I'm afraid we won't be able to
schedule anything right now.

JEFF
I don't understand.

RECEPTIONIST

If this is an emergency, urgent care or the ER would be the appropriate option.

JEFF

It's not an emergency.
She's scared. That's why I'm here.

RECEPTIONIST

I understand.

JEFF

No. You don't. I'm her father. I'm asking for an appointment.

A beat.

RECEPTIONIST

This needs to be handled directly with the physician.

JEFF

Then get him.

RECEPTIONIST

He's not in today.

JEFF

So what am I supposed to do?

RECEPTIONIST

You can call tomorrow.

JEFF

Tomorrow? That's it?

RECEPTIONIST

Yes.

Jeff exhales. Sharp.

JEFF

That's ridiculous.

RECEPTIONIST

Sir-

JEFF

I'm doing exactly what you tell parents to do. And you're telling me to leave.

She hesitates. Then reaches for the phone.

RECEPTIONIST

I'm just going to ask you to lower
your voice.

JEFF

I'm not yelling.

RECEPTIONIST

Please.

She speaks quietly into the phone. Hangs up.

A PEDIATRICS SECURITY GUARD appears behind the desk. Not
aggressive. Just there.

Jeff notices. Swallows it.

JEFF

Unbelievable.

He steps back.

JEFF (CONT'D)

I'm trying to help my kid.

RECEPTIONIST

I sorry sir. Really, I am.

Jeff scoffs.

JEFF

Yeah ok.

Jeff turns and walks out.

The receptionist watches the door close.

She exhales. Slow.

Shakes her head once. Almost imperceptible.

Then she straightens.

Back to work.

INT. JEFF'S CAR - MORNING

Jeff slams the door shut.

Hands on the wheel. Still.

Then-

JEFF
What the fuck did you do, Anna?

He laughs. Short. Disbelieving.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Now I can't even make a doctor's
appointment?
For my own kids?

He shakes his head. Runs a hand through his hair.

JEFF (CONT'D)
You tell them something?
You put something in a file?

He scoffs. Looks out the windshield.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ.

He grips the wheel tighter. Breathing picking up.

JEFF (CONT'D)
I'm trying to help them.
I'm the only one trying.

EXT. PARKING LOT - SAME TIME

A MOM (30s) opens the back door of her SUV. Her young son climbs out.

She freezes.

Two cars over-Jeff in his car. Muffled Yelling. Hands on the wheel.

The mom's eyes narrow. Instinctive.

She pulls her son closer. Shuts the door faster than necessary. Locks it.

She shoots Jeff one last look. Not fear.

INT. JEFF'S CAR

JEFF
You don't get to take that from me.

He starts the car.

Pulls out.

Too fast.

EXT. COMMUTER PARKING LOT - MORNING

Jeff pulls into a space.

Kills the engine.

He sits longer than necessary.

Hands on the wheel.

Grip tightens, then loosens.

He exhales and gets out.

EXT. SUBWAY ENTRANCE - MORNING

Jeff descends into the station with the morning crowd.

Head down. Moving with them. Not with them.

INT. SUBWAY CAR - MORNING

Packed.

Bodies pressed together.

Jeff stands near the door, backpack pinned against his leg.

No space. No eye contact.

A TEEN with headphones leans back and bumps him.

Jeff stiffens.

The train LURCHES.

A COMMUTER LADY stumbles, grabs the pole.

Her elbow clips Jeff's arm.

COMMUTER LADY

Sorry.

Jeff doesn't respond.

Another stop.

More people push in.

A SUBWAY MAN squeezes past.

SUBWAY MAN
Excuse me.

Jeff exhales sharply through his nose.

The noise builds.

The man grabs a strap, armpit in Jeff's face.

He winces, twists his nose, looks away.

Voices.

Metal.

Movement.

Too much.

His grip tightens on the pole as the doors SLAM shut.

The train surges forward.

EXT. 34TH STREET SUBWAY ENTRANCE - MORNING

Jeff emerges into the street.

Noise.

Traffic.

Life moving too fast.

Across the way, the Empire State Building.

Towering. Unyielding.

Jeff stops as people stream around him.

A BUILDING SECURITY GUARD jokes with a coworker near the entrance.

They laugh.

Jeff watches.

Jaw tightening, then releasing.

He checks his watch.

Late.

He takes a step toward the building.

Stops.

Breathing shallow now.

He looks away.

Then back again.

Finally, Jeff turns and blends into the crowd.

INT. GUN STORE - DAY

Fluorescent lights.

Glass cases.

Rifles mounted neatly along the walls.

A small bell CHIMES as the door opens.

Quiet. Ordinary.

A CLERK (60s), hardened, retired New York cop by posture alone, wipes down the counter.

Jeff enters.

The clerk looks up, eyes him.

Casual but alert.

Jeff gives a small nod. Says nothing.

He walks the length of the glass case.

Handguns. Black. Impersonal.

He stops.

CLERK
Somethin' I can help you with?

Jeff clears his throat.

JEFF
I want to buy a gun.

The clerk studies him. Neutral. Professional.

CLERK

Okay. What're you looking for?
Hunting? Home defense?

JEFF

Self defense.

CLERK

House? Or carry?

Jeff blinks.

JEFF

What?

CLERK

You want it for the house, or you
planning to carry it?

JEFF

Uh, carry. Yeah.

That lands.

The clerk doesn't react.

Just nods once.

CLERK

Alright. I'll need your state ID,
social, and your carry permit.

Jeff freezes.

JEFF

My what?

CLERK

New York State pistol permit.
County-issued.

A beat.

JEFF

I thought you could just-

The clerk shakes his head.

CLERK

Not here. We ain't Pennsylvania.
Permit comes first. Background
check comes after.

Jeff looks back at the case.

JEFF

How long does that take?

The clerk exhales through his nose.

CLERK

Shotgun permit's quicker. Six months, give or take. Pistol? Ten if you're lucky. Usually longer.

Jeff absorbs that.

The clerk pulls a few cards from beneath the counter.

CLERK (CONT'D)

Classes. Instructors. Some'll help with the paperwork.

Jeff nods slowly.

JEFF

Okay.

He stands there a moment longer, like he's waiting for divine intervention to change the answer.

Then he turns away from the case.

JEFF (CONT'D)

Thanks.

The clerk watches him head for the door.

CLERK

Have a good one.

The bell CHIMES again as Jeff exits.

EXT. GUN STORE - DAY

Jeff steps into daylight.

Traffic passes.

People walk by.

No one looks at him.

He stands there motionless.

Then exhales sharply through his nose and keeps walking.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The front door opens.

Jeff steps inside.

The house is quiet.

He sets his backpack down.

JEFF
Anna? Jack. Julie?

Nothing.

INT. KITCHEN

He flips on the light.

Empty.

He opens the refrigerator.

Rips through drawers.

Slams it shut.

The freezer.

Frozen bags spill onto the counter.

Jeff exhales sharply, shoves them aside.

JEFF
Of course.

He opens the pantry.

Stares.

Closes it gently.

A SOUND upstairs.

Jeff looks up.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Jack?

Nothing.

He moves toward the stairs.

Another sound.

A floorboard CREAK.

Jeff freezes.

JEFF (CONT'D)

Julie?

No answer.

INT. HALLWAY

Doors closed.

Light spills faintly from under Julie's door.

Jeff stands there listening.

Nothing.

He opens the door.

INT. JULIE'S ROOM

Spotless.

Bed made.

Jeff steps inside.

Clicks off the light.

Dark.

He backs out.

Downstairs, a faint CLINK.

Like a dish settling.

Jeff turns.

INT. KITCHEN

Exactly as before.

Still.

Jeff shakes his head.

INT. HOME OFFICE

Dark.

Jeff sits at his desk, still fully dressed.

Shoes on.

Tie loosened.

The glow of the laptop illuminates his face.

On the screen-

Search results:

"Gun stores near New York"

"New York handgun permit wait time"

"Pennsylvania gun store hours"

He scrolls.

Clicks.

A small, family-owned gun shop.

Photos of rifles mounted on walls.

An address.

Pennsylvania.

Jeff stares.

Another search-

"Can you buy a shotgun in Pennsylvania without permit"

He reads carefully.

Jaw tightening.

Google Maps.

A route appears.

Just over two hours.

Jeff doesn't move.

He pulls a scrap of paper from the desk.

Writes the address neatly.

Folds it once.

Slips it into his pocket.

He closes the laptop.

The screen goes dark.

The house remains silent.

INT. JEFF'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Morning light.

Jeff wakes.

Checks the clock-

8:30 AM

He sits up, dry-mouthed. Hollow-eyed.

INT. KITCHEN

The kitchen is clean. Orderly.

Jeff pours coffee.

Doesn't drink it.

Sets the mug down untouched.

He grabs his keys.

INT. PENNSYLVANIA GUN STORE - DAY

Bright. Clean. Almost sterile.

Glass cases gleam.

Shotguns mounted neatly along the wall.

Muted cable news murmurs overhead.

A bell CHIMES.

Jeff enters.

A GUN CLERK (30s) looks up.

GUN CLERK
Morning.

Jeff nods.

Moves along the wall.

Stops at a pump-action shotgun.

Studies it.

GUN CLERK (CONT'D)
Home protection?

JEFF
Yeah.

The clerk steps closer. Calm. Not salesy.

GUN CLERK
Pump's simple. Reliable. Hard to
mess up.

Jeff doesn't hesitate.

JEFF
I'll take that one.

The clerk pauses just long enough to really look at Jeff.

GUN CLERK
Alright. I'll need your ID.

Jeff hands over his New York driver's license.

The clerk clocks it.

GUN CLERK (CONT'D)
New York, huh.

Jeff says nothing.

INT. REGISTER

The clerk types.

Screen flickers.

GUN CLERK
You're good to buy a long gun out
of state, long as it's legal back
home.

Jeff nods.

GUN CLERK (CONT'D)
New York's a pain about this stuff.
Just so you know.

The monitor SPINS.

Jeff stands still, hands at his sides.

The clerk glances up at him, then back to the screen.

Another beat.

JEFF
Everything okay?

The printer WHIRS.

The clerk tears the form free.

GUN CLERK
Yeah. You're good.
(then, routine)
You want ammo?

JEFF
Yeah.

GUN CLERK
Buckshot's standard. Home defense.

Jeff nods.

He signs the form.

His hand steady.

Too steady.

The clerk slides the boxed shotgun across the counter.

GUN CLERK (CONT'D)
Transport it locked in the trunk.
Ammo separate.

Jeff lifts the box.

The weight lands.

GUN CLERK (CONT'D)
And once you cross back, that
part's on you. New York rules.

Jeff meets his eyes.

JEFF
Understood.

The clerk gives a small nod. Not approval. Just closure.

GUN CLERK
Take care.

JEFF
Thanks.

Jeff heads to the door.

The gun clerk looks at the computer.

GUN CLERK
Hey, hold on a second.

Jeff freezes.

A bead of sweat on the forehead.

A beat.

Jeff turns, looks back at the gun clerk.

GUN CLERK (CONT'D)
Your license.

He holds it out.

Jeff walks back, grabs it, nods.

The bell CHIMES as Jeff exits.

The clerk watches the door a beat longer than necessary.

INT. JEFF'S CAR - AFTERNOON

Bright afternoon light.

Trees blur past the windows.

Jeff drives too fast.

Not reckless. Intent.

The dashboard clock reads 3:18 PM.

His jaw is tight.

Eyes locked forward.

Red and blue lights FLASH in the rearview mirror.

Jeff exhales through his nose.

Signals.

Pulls onto the shoulder.

Red and blue lights strobe in the rearview mirror.

Jeff already has both hands on the wheel.

Window down.

A NEW YORK STATE TROOPER approaches from behind.

Measured. Observant.

He stops just behind the driver's door.

TROOPER
Afternoon.

JEFF
Afternoon.

TROOPER
You know how fast you were going?

JEFF
No.

The trooper studies him a beat.

TROOPER
Eighty-two.

JEFF
Sorry.

No reaction.

TROOPER
License and registration.

Jeff hands them over.

Steady.

The trooper looks at the license.

Then back at Jeff.

TROOPER (CONT'D)
Where you coming from today?

JEFF
Pennsylvania.

TROOPER
Business or personal?

JEFF
Personal.

A beat.

TROOPER
Where you headed?

JEFF
Home.

The trooper nods once.

TROOPER
Sit tight.

He walks back to the cruiser.

Jeff watches him go in the side mirror.

His breathing shallow now.

INT. STATE TROOPER CRUISER

The trooper types.

Pauses.

Types again.

The computer screen flickers in his sunglasses.

INT. JEFF'S CAR

Jeff stares straight ahead.

His phone BUZZES in the cup holder-

UNKNOWN CALLER

He doesn't look at it.

The phone BUZZES again.

Jeff doesn't move.

The trooper exits the cruiser.

EXT. HIGHWAY SHOULDER

The trooper returns.

Hands Jeff his license and registration.

TROOPER
You in a hurry today, Jeff?

Jeff blinks.

JEFF
No.

The trooper watches him.

TROOPER
Everything okay?

JEFF
Yeah.

A beat.

TROOPER
You seem a little keyed up.

JEFF
Long day.

The trooper nods. Almost sympathetic.

TROOPER
That'll do it.

He shifts his stance. Glances toward the back seat.

TROOPER (CONT'D)
Any weapons in the vehicle?

The question lands.

Jeff doesn't answer immediately.

Not defiant.

Thinking.

JEFF
No.

The trooper clocks the half-second delay.

Doesn't push.

TROOPER
Alright.

He opens his ticket book.

Pen scratches paper.

TROOPER (CONT'D)
I'm writing you for the speed.

Jeff nods.

TROOPER (CONT'D)
Slow it down. Get where you're
going.

JEFF
I will.

The trooper hands him the ticket.

Holds Jeff's gaze a beat longer than necessary.

TROOPER
Drive safe.

JEFF
Thanks.

The trooper steps away.

The lights cut off.

Daylight returns to normal.

INT. JEFF'S CAR

Jeff sits there.

Doesn't start the engine right away.

His phone BUZZES again-

UNKNOWN CALLER

Jeff answers without lifting it.

JEFF

Yeah?

Silence.

Not dead air.

Presence—on the line.

Jeff's eyes flick to the passenger seat.

Empty.

JEFF (CONT'D)

(low)

Not now.

The call disconnects.

Jeff starts the engine.

Signals.

Pulls back onto the highway—
this time under the speed limit.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

The front door opens.

Jeff steps inside.

Closes it.

The house is still.

JEFF

Anna?

Nothing.

He drops his keys on the table.

Listens.

Silence.

INT. STAIRCASE / HALLWAY

Jeff climbs the stairs.

Measured.

Each step deliberate.

INT. JEFF AND ANNA'S BEDROOM

Jeff enters.

The room is neat.

Too neat.

He closes the door behind him.

Crosses to the closet.

INT. CLOSET

Jeff kneels.

Opens the long cardboard box.

Inside, nestled in foam—

the shotgun.

He stares at it.

Not fear.

Not excitement.

He removes it.

Checks it. Mechanical. Careful.

Then the ammo.

He places both on the top shelf.

Pushes them back.

Out of sight.

INT. JEFF AND ANNA'S BEDROOM

Jeff steps back.

Looks around.

Everything is where it belongs.

Almost.

A faint SOUND downstairs.

A CLINK.

Glass on ceramic.

Jeff freezes.

INT. HALLWAY

Jeff steps out.

JEFF

Hello?

Silence.

INT. KITCHEN

The kitchen is exactly as he left it.

A single cereal bowl, rinsed, drying in the rack.

INT. DINING ROOM

Empty.

INT. KITCHEN

JEFF

What else is new. Alone for dinner again.

He yanks open the fridge.

Barely anything inside.

Milk.

Condiments.

Nothing real.

He SLAMS the door shut.

FADE TO:

INT. JEFF'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dark.

Jeff's phone glows on the nightstand-

2:17

JACK (V.O.)

Dad!

The sound lingers.

Jeff bolts upright.

JEFF

Jack?!

INT. JACK'S ROOM - NIGHT

Jeff pushes open the half-closed door.

Jack's bed is neatly made.

Like it's never been slept in.

The room immaculate.

Jeff exhales.

Shakes his head.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Early summer light filters through the windows.

Quiet.

Ordered.

Jeff crosses the room with coffee.

He opens the coat closet.

Reaches for his sport coat-

Stops.

On the floor-

JULIE'S DANCE BAG.

Not tossed.

Set down.

Forgotten.

Jeff frowns.

Nudges it with his foot.

Unzips it. Tap shoes.

Dance clothes.

Jeff exhales.

JEFF

Shit.

He checks his watch.

Rushes out the door-

blazer left behind.

EXT. ROSEMARY'S DANCE STUDIO - MORNING

A small, unassuming building.

Music pulses faintly inside.

Parents rush past Jeff.

Someone bumps him.

No apology.

Jeff turns, eyes flashing-

then restrains himself.

INT. ROSEMARY'S DANCE STUDIO

Mirrors line the walls.

Banners taped up-

SUMMER DANCE CAMP

Jeff moves through, already out of sync.

INT. FRONT DESK - MORNING

A DANCE CAMP COORDINATOR (40s) flips through a clipboard.

Jeff steps up.

JEFF

Hi. My daughter forgot her stuff.
Julie Ellis.

He holds up the bag.

The coordinator scans the list.

CAMP COORDINATOR

I don't see her on the list.
They're all in Studio B right now.
You can leave it here.

JEFF

I can just give it to her.

CAMP COORDINATOR

Parents aren't allowed past the
lobby during sessions.

JEFF

It'll take two seconds.

CAMP COORDINATOR

I'll make sure she gets it.

She's already reaching for the next parent.

Jeff hesitates.

Jaw clenched.

Then exits.

EXT. DANCE STUDIO - SIDE COURTYARD

Jeff heads for his car-

then stops.

Kids spill out.

Laughing.

Stretching.

Drinking water.

Jeff stands near the fence.

Watching.

Then—

Julie.

Hair pulled back.

Leotard.

Lagging behind the group.

JEFF
(excited)
Julie!

No response.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Julie!

He waves.

She stops.

Looks directly at him.

For a split second—

recognition.

Then she turns away.

Runs back inside.

Jeff's smile collapses.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Julie—hey!

A DANCE INSTRUCTOR (30s) approaches.

Calm.

INSTRUCTOR
Sir?

JEFF
That's my daughter.

INSTRUCTOR
I understand.

But parents aren't allowed back here.

JEFF
She didn't hear me.

INSTRUCTOR
Sir, I need you to step away from
the fence.

Jeff looks again.

Julie doesn't look back.

Doesn't wave.

Doesn't acknowledge him.

JEFF
Julie!

The instructor's tone firms.

INSTRUCTOR
Sir.

You need to leave the property.

Other parents glance over.

Eyes on him.

JEFF
I'm her father.

INSTRUCTOR
And I'm asking you to leave.
Come back at pickup. Unless there's
an emergency?

A beat.

Jeff steps back.

JEFF
(to himself)
Unbelievable.

He turns.

Walks away.

Behind him, the music swells again.

Normal.

Uninterrupted.

EXT. DANCE STUDIO PARKING LOT - MORNING

Jeff crosses the lot toward his car.

A MOTHER nearby lifts her phone—aims it toward the studio.
Not at Jeff.

Jeff slows. Clocks it.

He adjusts his backpack. Keeps walking.

The phone stays up.

Jeff stops.

JEFF
Can I help you?

The mother lowers the phone immediately. Embarrassed.
Defensive.

MOTHER
What? No. I was—my daughter—

She gestures vaguely toward the studio. Already stepping away.

Jeff watches her go.

Across the lot, another parent avoids eye contact. A man unlocks his car too fast.

He looks down at his hands. They're steady.

He exhales.

Gets into his car.

EXT. JEFF'S CAR

Jeff yanks the door open.

SLAMS it shut.

Inside the car—he screams. The sound deadened by glass and metal.

Bangs the steering wheel.

Again.

Then stops.

Breathing hard.

Hands shaking.

He forces them still.

Starts the car and pulls away.

EXT. EMPIRE STATE BUILDING - MORNING

The iconic tower looms overhead.

Midtown hums. Tourists snap photos. Office workers stream toward the entrance with coffee and earbuds.

Across Fifth Avenue—Jeff stands alone.

Tie knotted too tight.

The crowd slides past him, bumping his shoulder, brushing his arm.

No apologies.

He looks thinner now. Paler.

Sweat beads along his hairline despite the mild August morning.

Jeff adjusts his tie.

Then his watch.

Checks the time—

8:47

He watches the revolving doors.

A GROUP OF EMPLOYEES exit together, laughing.

One of them glances his way.

Jeff stiffens.

He steps forward—

One foot off the curb—

Stops.

His breathing shifts.

Shallow. Controlled.

He wipes his palms on his pants.

Dark streaks.

Jeff scans the building.

The glass lobby.

The security desk.

Metal detectors.

His jaw tightens.

Inside, the building security guard jokes with a coworker.

They laugh.

The sound hits Jeff wrong.

He flinches.

A BUS ROARS past, swallowing everything.

Jeff exhales hard.

Steps back onto the sidewalk.

PEDESTRIAN

Hey pal, you might wanna look
before you cross the street.
Welcome to New York.

A laugh.

Jeff clenches his fists.

Forces them still.

Looks up again.

At the building.

At the people.

At life moving forward without him.

A moment passes.

Then another.

Jeff turns away.

Walks back down Fifth Avenue.

The Empire State Building remains.

Unyielding.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Anna stands at the counter, back to him.

Normal clothes. Hair tied back.

She rinses a glass in the sink.

Jeff stops short.

JEFF
Where have you been?

She doesn't turn.

ANNA
Out.

JEFF
With the kids?

She sets the glass in the rack.

ANNA
Yes.

Jeff exhales. Anger slips back into place.

JEFF
You didn't answer your phone.

ANNA
I was busy.

JEFF
You're always busy.

She finally turns.

ANNA
And you're always looking for a
fight.

That lands.

JEFF

I had a long day, alright?

ANNA

We've all had a long day.

That's not an excuse anymore.

Jeff steps farther into the kitchen.

JEFF

Don't start.

ANNA

I didn't. You came in hot. You
always do.

Jeff laughs. Short. Bitter.

JEFF

Right. This is my fault.

ANNA

You have to stop.

JEFF

You think I don't see what you're
doing?

ANNA

What I'm doing?

JEFF

Pushing me out.
Turning them against me.

Anna's composure cracks.

She sits.

ANNA

I tried to hold it together.
Longer than I should have.

JEFF

By freezing me out?

ANNA

You don't hear yourself.

Jeff's voice rises.

JEFF
No, you don't hear me.
You don't hear anything I say
anymore.

EXT. JEFF'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Muffled SHOUTING bleeds through the walls.

Across the street, a NEIGHBOR pauses while loading groceries.

Another NEIGHBOR walks past with a stroller.

They both register the noise.

NEIGHBOR #1
(low)
Is that Jeff?

The shouting dips.

Then spikes again.

NEIGHBOR #2
Should we call someone?

They listen.

NEIGHBOR #1
Let's give it a few minutes.

They exchange a look.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

ANNA
Because every conversation feels
like it could go wrong.

JEFF
Go wrong how?

Anna hesitates.

Just a beat too long.

JEFF (CONT'D)
How, Anna?

ANNA
I don't feel safe when you don't
see it happening.

Jeff stiffens.

JEFF
See what happening?

ANNA
This.

JEFF
I'm standing in my own kitchen.

ANNA
With that look in your eyes.

JEFF
What look?

ANNA
And then you go and buy that—that thing.

Jeff steps closer.

JEFF
You're fucking crazy.

Anna looks down.

ANNA
I'm tired of it.
We're tired of it.

Jeff notices her hands.

Shaking.

JEFF
You went through my things.

ANNA
I didn't have to.

JEFF
So you admit it.

ANNA
I admit I know when something is wrong.

JEFF
You think I'm dangerous.

ANNA
I think you scare us.

JEFF
I scare you.

ANNA
Yes.

Silence.

JEFF
That's what this is?
You painting me like some-

ANNA
I'm asking you to stop.

JEFF
Stop what?

She wipes her eyes.

ANNA
I can't keep pretending we can come
back from this.

JEFF
And what does that look like to
you?

ANNA
It looks like me asking you to
leave for the night.

That hits.

JEFF
Leave.

ANNA
Just for tonight.

JEFF
So you can what?
Talk about me? Plan my exit?

ANNA
So what's left of this house can
breathe.

JEFF
So you can breathe.

ANNA
Yes.

They stare at each other.

JEFF
You don't get to decide that.

ANNA
I already have.

Jeff laughs. Empty.

JEFF
Unbelievable.

He turns.

JEFF (CONT'D)
You want me gone so bad?
Fine.

ANNA
That's not what I said.

JEFF
It's what you meant.

He reaches the doorway.

ANNA
Jeff. Stop torturing yourself.

He stops.

Doesn't turn.

JEFF
Just make sure they know I tried.

He exits.

Anna stands alone.

The sink drips.

Once.

Then again.

INT. JEFF'S BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Jeff enters fast.

Shuts the door.

Locks it.

He opens the closet.

Reaches up.

Pulls down the shotgun.

Then the ammo.

He hesitates.

Looks at himself in the mirror.

Not proud.

Not ashamed.

He wraps the gun in a sweatshirt.

Jams it into a duffle bag.

Stuffing the ammo in with it.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Jeff exits.

Doesn't look back.

The door shuts.

EXT. ROADSIDE MOTEL - NIGHT

A rundown motel.

Cars scattered across the lot.

Neon flickers.

INT. MOTEL ROOM

Cheap. Anonymous.

Muted beige walls.

The door SLAMS shut.

Jeff drops the duffle bag on the table.

He stands there.

Then—

Jeff paces.

Fast.

Hands chopping the air.

Dragging through his hair.

JEFF

You don't get to do that.

You don't get to decide who I am.

He turns.

Paces again.

JEFF (CONT'D)

Dangerous.

Scoffs.

JEFF (CONT'D)

I'm not dangerous.

I'm not.

He laughs.

Sharp.

JEFF (CONT'D)

You hear that?

I'm not dangerous.

He punches the wall.

Not hard enough to break it.

Hard enough to hurt.

He winces.

Keeps moving.

Drops onto the bed.

Immediately stands again.

Too much energy.

INT. MOTEL BATHROOM

Jeff splashes water on his face.

Looks up.

His reflection looks wrong.

Pale.

Sweaty.

JEFF
You think I scare them.

He shakes his head.

JEFF (CONT'D)
I never touched them.
Not once.

That stops him.

He stares at himself.

The words hanging there.

Then he turns away.

INT. MOTEL ROOM

Jeff stands in the bathroom doorway. Looks around the room.

He crosses to the door. Locks it.

Starts over to the desk.

He pauses.

Listens.

A faint KNOCK.

Jeff turns. Alert now.

Another KNOCK. Clear this time.

Jeff moves to the door. Peers through the peephole.

Empty hallway.

He unlocks the door. Opens it.

Nothing.

Jeff steps into the doorway. Looks both directions.

Down the hall, a MOTEL GUEST fumbles with a key. Doesn't look up.

JEFF

Hey.

The guest startles. Looks at him.

MOTEL GUEST

Yeah?

JEFF

Did you knock?

MOTEL GUEST

No.

The guest gestures to the door.

MOTEL GUEST (CONT'D)

I just got here.

Jeff studies him. Trying to line something up.

JEFF

You sure?

MOTEL GUEST

(confused)

Yeah.

An awkward beat.

JEFF

Okay.

The guest nods, uneasy. Turns away.

MOTEL GUEST

(muttering)

Psycho.

Jeff closes the door. Locks it.

He stands there.

Waiting.

Nothing happens.

Jeff exhales. Shakes it off.

He sits on the edge of the bed. Rubs his face.

Then—he notices the DO NOT DISTURB sign on the inside handle.

Already hanging.

Jeff stares at it. Frowns.

He reaches out. Takes it down.

Sets it on the table. Careful.

He sits back down.

Still listening.

He finally moves to the small desk.

Pulls a NOTEPAD from his bag. A pen.

He stares at the blank page.

The shotgun rests on the bed behind him. Wrapped. Present.

He starts writing.

SCRATCH

SCRATCH

JEFF (V.O.)
I tried. I tried to be what you
needed.

He stops. Crosses something out.

Writes again.

JEFF (V.O.)
I'm not the man you think I am.

He scoffs.

JEFF
(out loud)
That's bullshit.

He rips the page out. Crumples it. Throws it across the room.

Starts a new page.

JEFF (V.O.)
You pushed me to this.

He freezes.

Stares at the words.

JEFF
No.

He draws a line through the sentence.

JEFF (CONT'D)
You don't get that.

He writes again.

He glances back at the bed.

At the shape under the sweatshirt.

Then back to the page.

The notepad is half-filled now. Pages torn out. Scattered.

He writes.

JEFF (V.O.)
I know you think this is about
anger. It isn't.

He pauses.

JEFF
It's about—
(beat)
quiet.

He writes again.

JEFF (V.O.)
It's about making it stop.

He looks at the gun.

Really looks at it now.

JEFF
You wanted me gone.

He shakes his head.

JEFF (CONT'D)
You don't get to decide that.

He writes again.

The pen digs into the paper.

He stops.

Stares at the words.

His breathing is shallow now.

The room feels smaller.

He reaches back.

Unwraps the shotgun just enough to see it.

Metal. Cold. Final.

He sets it back down.

Doesn't touch it.

Not yet.

Jeff sits there.

Writing.

Outside, a car passes.

Tires hiss on pavement.

The sound lingers.

EXT. ROADSIDE MOTEL - MORNING

Early light. Pale. Unforgiving.

Jeff exits his room. Backpack on.

A MAID (40s) pushes a cart nearby. Towels. Supplies. Latina. Focused. Professional.

Checking her list.

MAID
You checkin' out, mijo?

JEFF
Yeah.

She nods. Professional.

MAID
Everything okay in there?

Jeff blinks. The question lands heavier than intended.

JEFF
Yeah. Fine.

A beat.

She smiles politely—slightly suspicious.

MAID
Okay.

She wheels the cart past him.

As she goes—

MAID (CONT'D)
(matter-of-fact)
You have everything?

Jeff nods.

He walks toward his car.

Behind him, the maid pauses. Looks at his door. Then at the clipboard.

She writes something. We don't see what.

Jeff unlocks his car.

Gets in.

Drives off.

EXT. HERALD SQUARE - MORNING

Jeff sits at a table.

Backpack at his feet.

People pass in every direction.

Phones. Coffee. Purpose.

Jeff watches.

A MAN about Jeff's age laughs into his phone. A BUSINESS WOMAN adjusts her heels, late. A TOURIST lines up a photo.

Jeff pulls out his phone. Checks it.

Nothing.

He scrolls. Stops on Anna's name. Doesn't tap it.

He locks the phone. Stares ahead.

A PIGEON hops near his foot. Jeff nudges it away gently with his shoe.

The pigeon flutters off. Life continues.

Jeff exhales.

Then stands.

Adjusts his jacket.

Squares himself.

Then heads toward Fifth Avenue.

EXT. FIFTH AVENUE - MORNING

Jeff walks with the current now. Not drifting. Not rushing. Trying to match the pace.

His backpack sits high on his shoulders. Sweat darkens the collar of his shirt. He looks worn. Not wild.

He slows near a crosswalk. Waits for the light.

A BUSINESSMAN (50s) stands beside him. Immaculate. Phone pressed to his ear.

BUSINESSMAN
(into phone)
Yeah, no—he's solid. A little
intense, but solid.

Jeff glances at him. Just a reflex. The businessman notices.

A beat.

The businessman shifts—half a step away. Not fear. Calculation. Protecting his space.

The WALK signal flashes.

They cross.

Halfway through, Jeff stumbles slightly. Catches himself.

A woman walking toward him clocks it. She adjusts her path without thinking. Wide berth.

Jeff notices this one.

The backpack shifts on his shoulder. Thumps softly against his back.

Nothing dramatic. But nearby—

A SUIT freezes mid-step. Eyes locked on the bag.

The suit pulls his briefcase closer.

Creates distance.

He reaches the far curb. Stops. Turns back.

Traffic flows. People stream past him like water around a rock.

Across the street—a MOTHER holds her daughter's hand. The girl stares at Jeff openly.

Jeff gives a small, polite nod. Almost a smile.

The mother tightens her grip. Guides the girl away. Doesn't look back.

Jeff stands there. Absorbing it.

He exhales. Long. Controlled.

Then—

Jeff steps back into the crowd.

Disappears among suits, backpacks, tourists, purpose.

EXT. EMPIRE STATE BUILDING – MORNING

The revolving doors spin endlessly.

Jeff stands in the middle of the sidewalk—staring at the doors. No street between him and the entrance. Just glass. Steel. Uniforms.

People pass in and out around him. No one notices. No one slows.

Jeff adjusts his tie. Too tight. He loosens it—then tightens it again.

His breathing is shallow. Measured. Forced.

He looks through the glass—the security desk. The METAL DETECTORS. The building security guard laughing with a coworker.

Jeff steps forward. Wipes sweat off his forehead.

One foot on the first step.

Then—

A FIRE ENGINE HORN BLASTS nearby. Sudden. Violent. Too close.

Jeff flinches hard. Hands fly up instinctively.

The sound ECHOES off the building—red light flickers across the glass.

The building security guard looks up. Sees Jeff frozen.

Their eyes meet.

Not suspicion. Just awareness.

That's enough.

Jeff's shoulders collapse inward. He shrinks. Physically smaller than he was a second ago.

He steps back. Then another.

The siren fades as the truck barrels past.

Jeff doesn't look at the guard again. Doesn't look at the doors.

He turns.

Walks away fast. Not running. Just gone.

The revolving doors keep spinning.

Uninterrupted.

EXT. SUBWAY STAIRS - MORNING

Jeff hustles down the steps, misses one, stumbles, catches himself on the railing.

A NURSE instinctively reaches out.

NURSE
Oh! Are you okay?

JEFF
Shut the fuck up.

The woman recoils.

NURSE
Jesus—well fuck you then!

Jeff straightens, embarrassed, angry. People funnel past him. Someone bumps his shoulder hard.

Jeff snarls—but swallows it.

The TRAIN ROARS in.

INT. SUBWAY CAR — MORNING

Crushed. Shoulder to shoulder.

A man's armpit is inches from Jeff's face. Damp.

Jeff twists away—straight into a woman coughing. Wet. Uncovered.

Jeff shuts his eyes.

The train LURCHES.

Someone steps on his shoe.

STRAPHANGER
Sorry.

Jeff doesn't respond.

A TEEN laughs through headphones.

Jeff's jaw tightens.

His reflection stares back at him in the dark window—pale, hollow.

Unfamiliar.

EXT. COMMUTER PARKING LOT — DAY

Jeff unlocks his car too aggressively. Misses the handle. Gets it.

Slams the door.

Hands on the wheel.

Still.

Then—he GUNS it.

EXT. ROADSIDE MOTEL — DAY

Jeff skids into the lot. Tires squeal.

A MOTEL GUEST looks up.

Jeff barrels past him.

INT. MOTEL ROOM — DAY

Jeff bursts in. Locks the door.

Checks the window.

Breathing hard.

He yanks the shotgun from the closet.

Starts for the door—

Stops.

Looks around the room like it might testify against him.

He goes back to the table.

The NOTEPAD. Half-written pages. Crossed out. Torn.

He grabs the top page, folds it without reading, jams it into his pocket.

Jeff looks at the shotgun again.

JEFF
(out loud)
I'm not dangerous.

INT. MOTEL HALLWAY — DAY

Jeff barrels down the corridor. Doesn't look at anyone.
Doesn't slow.

EXT. ROADSIDE MOTEL - DAY

Jeff bursts into sunlight. Fumbles the key. Gets it.

INT. JEFF'S CAR - DAY

The shotgun lies across the passenger seat. The note in his pocket.

Jeff peels out.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREETS - DAY

Too fast. Too sharp. Too close.

A horn BLARES. Jeff doesn't react.

INT. JEFF'S CAR - DAY

His breathing is shallow now. Controlled-barely.

JEFF
(under his breath)
Just stop.

EXT. JEFF'S HOUSE - DAY

Jeff screeches into the driveway.

The house looks normal.

Too normal.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - DAY

The door SLAMS behind him.

JEFF
Anna!

Nothing.

He strides down the hall. The shotgun hangs loose in his hand.

Heads upstairs.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Jeff locks the door.

Sets the shotgun down.

Stares at himself in the mirror. Eyes sunken. Unrecognizable.

Slowly, he sits on the edge of the tub.

He lifts the shotgun. BUTT on tile. BARREL under his chin.

Not dramatic. Exhausted.

A long beat.

ANNA (O.S.)

Jeff?

His jaw tightens.

ANNA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

Jeff closes his eyes.

ANNA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Please don't start this again.

That word—start.

Jeff's eyes SNAP open.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

The bathroom door FLIES open.

Jeff storms down the hall, shotgun in hand.

Down the stairs.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Anna stands at the counter. Calm. Still.

ANNA

Jeff, please—

JEFF

I'm sick of your please. Sick of
you telling me what I am—what to
do!

Jeff raises the shotgun.

ANNA
(calm)
Jeff—

JEFF
I was never dangerous.

YOU made me dangerous!

ANNA
Please, you need to—

BOOM!

The blast punches straight through where Anna stands.

The cabinet behind her ERUPTS. Wood explodes. Plates SHATTER. Dust and splinters fill the air.

Jeff staggers from the recoil.

Ringing.

Smoke.

Anna hasn't moved.

No blood. No flinch. No reaction.

Jeff's eyes flick to the destroyed cabinet—then back to her.

JEFF
What...

Anna turns her head slightly. Soft. Almost sad.

ANNA
Jeff.

The room feels wrong. Flat. Hollow.

Jeff steps closer—staring at her like she's a glitch.

JEFF
I shot you.

No answer.

His hands start to tremble.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Where are the kids??

Nothing.

The shotgun slips from his grip.

CLATTERS to the floor.

Jeff turns and RUNS.

EXT. SCHOOL GYM - DAY

Jeff bursts through the doors.

Empty.

His footsteps ECHO too loudly.

Then—

A banner on the far wall—

#17

JACK ELLIS

1999 - 2012

Jeff stops dead.

JEFF

No.

He staggers backward. Slides down the wall.

Then forces himself up.

Runs.

INT. GYM HALLWAY - DAY

A trophy case. Jack's photo. Black ribbon.

A mural—"Jack Ellis Spirit Award."

Jeff sees his own last name.

Stops breathing.

JEFF

No no no—

He breaks.

INT. ROSEMARY'S DANCE STUDIO - DAY

The front door FLIES open.

Jeff storms inside.

The camp coordinator at the front desk looks up, startled.

CAMP COORDINATOR
Excuse me—sir?

Jeff doesn't slow. Pushes past.

CAMP COORDINATOR (CONT'D)
Sir—you can't just—

Jeff moves down the hallway. Faster now. Breathing hard.

He reaches the studio room.

Stops.

On the back wall—

JULIE ELLIS

Forever in Our Hearts

Jeff stares.

The room tilts.

He presses his forehead to the mirror. Hands flat against the glass.

JEFF
I was right there too.

Behind him, the camp coordinator has followed. Her tone is different now.

CAMP COORDINATOR
Oh my god...

She takes in his face. The shock. The devastation.

CAMP COORDINATOR (CONT'D)
I didn't know. I'm so sorry.

Jeff doesn't respond.

She gently places a hand on his shoulder.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

A harsh, fluorescent HUM.

Jeff sits at a metal table across from a DETECTIVE. Hands folded. Knuckles white.

The detective speaks calmly. Too calmly.

DETECTIVE
We found them in the bathtub.

Jeff's eyes stay on the table.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)
Your wife used a kitchen knife.

Jeff's jaw tightens.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)
After that... she turned the knife
on herself.

Silence presses in.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)
There was a note.

Jeff swallows.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)
She wrote that she was afraid you
were going to hurt them.

Jeff shakes his head. Barely.

JEFF
I never-

He can't finish.

The detective watches him—not accusatory. Just stating facts.

DETECTIVE
They fought back. Skin under their
fingernails.

Jeff breaks—a violent sob ripping out of him. He folds forward, hands gripping his hair.

The detective lets the moment sit.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)
Your wife wasn't well, Mr. Ellis.

Jeff shakes his head. Lost.

The detective slides a business card across the table.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)
This is someone we recommend when
things get too hard to handle.

Jeff stares at the card.

Doesn't pick it up.

The HUM grows louder.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. ROSEMARY'S DANCE STUDIO - DAY

Jeff collapses his knees in front of Julie's memorial.

The camp coordinator on the phone behind him.

CAMP COORDINATOR
Yes... Mr. Ellis... He's here.
(beat)
Ok, I'll be here.

FADE TO:

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Empty now.

Jeff moves slowly. Touches the walls. The banister.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Jeff stands at the counter. The shotgun rests nearby.

He unfolds the note. Places it down. Smooths it flat.

A final, deliberate gesture.

He sits on the edge of the tub.

Shotgun butt on the tile. Barrel under his chin.

Same position.

Different man.

EXT. JEFF'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Two people walk past on the sidewalk.

A muffled BANG from inside the house.

They stop.

Exchange a look.

Then keep walking.

FADE OUT:

THE END