

VALERIA NOIR

Written by

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COLD OPEN

EXT. PRIVATE SCHOOL - LATE AFTERNOON - OVERCAST

A private school with old architecture stands under an overcast sky.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

A long, dark hallway stretches between classrooms.

Students pour out as classes end. The corridor quickly fills with children in uniform, backpacks slung over their shoulders, voices raised in conversation and laughter.

EXT. SCHOOL GATE - CONTINUOUS

Children stream out through the school gates. Parents wait nearby. Traffic moves past. Teachers stand at the entrance, saying goodbye.

VANESSA (10) stands slightly apart from the others. She wears a red jacket and carries her backpack low on her back.

She scans the crowd, then notices a black Mercedes parked nearby.

INT. MERCEDES - CONTINUOUS

Vanessa gets into the car.

Through the window, she waves to her friends outside. They wave back, laughing.

The laughter fades. Vanessa turns forward.

The eyes in the mirror are unfamiliar. The smile is not her own.

She freezes. Her smile disappears. Vanessa goes still.

VANESSA  
(whispers)  
Who are you?

The driver watches her in the rearview mirror. He says nothing.

The car drives away through the city streets of Darr City under the rain.

ALICIA STEIN (V.O.)

Darr City...

A city stripped bare by the greed  
of the highborn.

A city of tribes - but no  
conscience.

Morality didn't die here. It  
drowned.

There was a moment... fleeting,  
almost imagined -

when the sun came out.

People believed this place had a  
future.

But the light was a mirage.

INT. MONITORING CENTER - UNKNOWN LOCATION - DAY

A monitoring center filled with surveillance screens showing  
different parts of the city.

Streets. Stores. Public spaces. People moving through daily  
routines.

INT. VALERIA NOIR'S OFFICE - EARLY MORNING

Valeria Noir's office shows signs of constant use. The space is cluttered and personal.

The window looks out onto the street below. No direct sunlight reaches inside.

A gloved hand reaches for an ashtray and takes a nearly finished cigarette.

Valeria brings it to her lips, then lowers it.

ALICIA (V.O.)  
Sometimes, to find the truth...  
you gotta step on it in heels.

EXT. CITY STREET - EARLY MORNING - LIGHT RAIN

An almost empty city street in the early morning.

A homeless man sleeps beside a trash bin, wrapped in a worn blanket. A discarded vodka bottle lies near his foot.

GLORIA CHARLOTTE walks down the sidewalk in red high heels.

She wears a red dress and carries a black handbag and a folder. A black umbrella is open in her hand.

Gloria moves with purpose, focused straight ahead. She does not acknowledge her surroundings.

She passes unnoticed reactions from the street and keeps walking.

Gloria reaches a ten-story pre-war building with a well-preserved facade. She closes her umbrella, pushes open the heavy wooden door, and enters.

INT. BUILDING LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

A spacious lobby. A porter stands behind the counter.

FRANK, the porter, an elderly man with thick glasses, reads a newspaper.

Gloria walks past him.

GLORIA  
(politely)  
Morning, Frank.

FRANK  
(without looking up)  
Good morning, Miss Charlotte.

INT. ELEVATOR - MOMENTS LATER

Gloria enters an old elevator. She pulls the folding grate shut and presses "7."

She stands still as the elevator rises.

INT. 7TH FLOOR - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Gloria exits the elevator and walks down the hallway.

She stops at one of the last doors and takes out her keys.

She notices the door is already unlocked.

She pauses, then pushes the door open and steps inside carefully.

INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A leather chair faces away from the door. A gloved hand holding a cigarette rests on the armrest.

It is Valeria.

VALERIA  
(calm, without turning)  
Good morning, Gloria.

Gloria reacts, caught off guard. She sets her things on the desk.

GLORIA  
How the hell are you here this  
early, Valeria?

VALERIA  
I made you coffee.

GLORIA  
(looks confused)  
Hold on. My boss made me coffee?  
Today's not your birthday.  
(pauses, teasing)  
Wait... don't tell me you had a  
naughty guest last night?

Valeria turns the chair to face Gloria and puts out the cigarette in the ashtray.

A smartwatch above the black glove catches the light.

VALERIA  
You know I don't have time for  
things like that.

GLORIA  
That's new.  
Still, thanks for the coffee.

VALERIA  
Today marks six months since I  
opened this agency.

GLORIA  
(smiling)  
Yeah. And six months minus two days  
since I started working here.  
Come to think of it, that probably  
means it's time for a raise.

VALERIA  
In that time, we've had one major  
case, one lost dog, and that other  
thing I'd rather forget.

GLORIA  
(teasing, taking her seat)  
Sounds like someone's missing her  
little spy cult.

VALERIA  
I'm legally allowed to kill you if  
that ever leaves this office.

GLORIA  
(grinning)  
Then I guess you'd be doing the  
world a favor.

VALERIA  
But I'd lose the best damn  
secretary on Earth.

GLORIA  
(overly dramatic sigh, sipping  
coffee)  
So you'd miss my coffee.

VALERIA  
(looking at her, no smile but warm)  
I'd miss your mind.  
And that constant clatter on the  
keyboard.

INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The office phone rings. Gloria answers.

GLORIA  
Valeria Noir's office. How can I  
help you?

She listens. Her expression tightens. She glances at Valeria.

GLORIA  
Yes, she's here.  
(pause)  
Of course. I'll let her know.  
Goodbye.

Gloria hangs up. Valeria watches her.

GLORIA  
That was Simon Axe. He wants you to  
come to the Axe estate, just  
outside the city.  
He said it's important.

VALERIA  
Just like that, someone upstairs  
answers my prayers.

GLORIA  
You do know who Simon Axe is.

VALERIA  
I see his name in headlines  
sometimes, but I don't pay much  
attention.

Valeria types, scans the screen.

ON SCREEN: "Axe Brothers Donate to Children's Hospital."

VALERIA  
Philanthropists.

GLORIA  
Yeah. Them.  
They're also known for other  
things.  
The kind that don't come with press  
releases.

VALERIA  
Sounds like they want to step into  
the light.  
Guess that makes me useful.

GLORIA  
(sarcastic, with a hint of a smile)  
You wanted a case.  
Let's hope they didn't just lose a  
dog.

VALERIA  
Or get a kite stuck in a tree.

Valeria takes her black trench coat and slips it on. She adjusts it with practiced ease, already heading for the door.

GLORIA  
(serious)  
Val... just be careful.

Valeria pauses at the doorway. She glances back at Gloria and gives her a faint, knowing look.

VALERIA  
(confident)  
Always, Glo.  
And don't wait up for lunch.

Valeria exits.

EXT. CITY BOULEVARD - MORNING

Traffic moves slowly along a city boulevard.

A black Dodge Challenger drives through the street.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Valeria drives, fully in control, eyes steady on the road.

EXT. CITY OUTSKIRTS - LATER

The car leaves the city.

Buildings give way to older roads and sparse surroundings.

EXT. ESTATE - MORNING

A large estate stands behind an open gate.

A black Challenger drives through and stops at the base of wide stone steps.

Valeria steps out of the car.

She takes in the mansion, assessing it.

She closes the car door and walks toward the entrance without hesitation.

INT. ESTATE - FOYER / STAIRCASE - CONTINUOUS

A butler opens the door and nods to Valeria.

She enters, walks through the hallway, and ascends the staircase.

INT. ESTATE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A formal living room furnished with classic pieces.

CYNTHIA sits at one end of the couch. She leans on one elbow, hands folded in her lap, staring ahead.

DUNCAN stands beside her. He remains still, his posture tense and controlled.

SIMON sits apart in a leather chair near the bookshelf, watching quietly.

Valeria enters the room.

Valeria is already seated. She says nothing.

DUNCAN  
(restrained)  
Thank you for coming, Miss Noir.  
My brother Simon spoke highly of  
you.

VALERIA  
(slightly surprised)  
Thank you for the confidence.  
What kind of case are we talking  
about?

SIMON  
(sharp)  
My niece, Vanessa, was kidnapped  
yesterday afternoon.  
We need someone discreet.

VALERIA  
I'm sorry to hear that.  
Have you reported this to the  
police?

DUNCAN  
(snaps)  
Yeah. Those useless bastards know.  
What frustrates me most is how  
slowly they're moving.

Simon glances at his brother, uneasy, then turns back to  
Valeria.

SIMON  
We have eyes everywhere.  
But we want this handled by someone  
neutral.  
Someone like you.

VALERIA  
Understood.  
Did the kidnappers make contact?  
Any mention of a ransom?

DUNCAN  
(angry)  
Yeah. I got a text from a hidden  
number.  
They want me to sign over my  
business...

(MORE)

(CONT'D)

(softening)  
Some punk thinks he can outrun me  
in this town.

SIMON  
(calm, controlled)  
Forgive my brother, Miss Noir.  
I'm worried as well.  
We have until the end of the day  
for the transfer to be completed.

Simon looks at Duncan. Valeria watches them both.

VALERIA  
Tell me exactly when and how it  
happened.

DUNCAN  
(steadier)  
It started yesterday morning.  
I received a threat on my phone...  
anonymous again.  
They told me to stay put, or I  
wouldn't make it to my next  
birthday.

Cynthia studies Valeria. Valeria meets her gaze.

DUNCAN  
Normally my bodyguard, Eliah Mort,  
picks Vanessa up.  
Or I do, when I can.

SIMON  
That's why Eliah stayed with him.  
We had reason to take the threat  
seriously.

DUNCAN  
We had to send another driver, but  
his car blew a tire on the way.  
By the time we realized something  
was wrong,  
Vanessa had already been taken.

Duncan steps closer to Cynthia. He takes her hand. She grips  
it tightly.

DUNCAN

We had another one of our cars at a repair shop for routine service. The kidnapper took it, posing as one of our employees. According to the mechanics, he had a company badge. After that... everything is clear.

SIMON

I requested the school's surveillance footage myself. You can see Vanessa getting into the car willingly. She likely thought it was Duncan.

VALERIA

Someone knew your routine. Do you suspect anyone close to you?

SIMON

We're very careful, Miss Noir.

Valeria turns to Duncan.

VALERIA

Then who would benefit the most from taking you down?

DUNCAN

Vera Rusko. We've had serious trouble. She's been trying to undermine my business for years. But I don't think she'd go that far.

SIMON

I wouldn't rule it out. Not with Vera.

DUNCAN

(angry)  
If I find out it was her, she'll never see daylight again.

VALERIA

Did that car have GPS?

SIMON  
It did.  
We tracked it to a warehouse near  
the south docks.

VALERIA  
I want to see it.

DUNCAN  
Of course... It's in the garage.  
The butler will take you.

VALERIA  
Good.  
Keep me informed if anything  
changes.

Cynthia finally speaks.

CYNTHIA  
Miss Noir... please.  
Find Vanessa.

VALERIA  
I'll do everything I can, Mrs. Axe.

CYNTHIA  
Please... call me Cynthia.

VALERIA  
I'll be in touch, Cynthia.

INT. GARAGE - AXE FAMILY ESTATE - MOMENTS LATER

Several luxury cars are parked in a neat row.

Valeria stands beside a black Mercedes. ANDREW, the butler,  
waits nearby.

VALERIA  
(not looking away from the car)  
Have you noticed anything unusual  
between the Axe brothers lately?

ANDREW  
No, ma'am.  
They rarely cross paths here.  
Mr. Simon Axe hasn't been on the  
estate in months.

Valeria glances at him but does not respond.

She opens the driver's door.

Valeria takes a small scanning device from her coat and  
examines the interior of the car.

After a moment, she steps back.

VALERIA  
(to herself)  
No prints.  
No trace.  
This was planned down to the  
detail.

EXT. AXE FAMILY ESTATE - LATER

Valeria walks to her car, gets in, and closes the door.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

She taps the dashboard and places a call.

INT. HIGH-TECH WORKSHOP - CONTINUOUS

DIMITRI works at a cluttered bench. He answers his phone  
without looking up.

DIMITRI  
Tell me you didn't kill someone  
again.

VALERIA

No.

But if this coffee doesn't kick in,  
I might.

DIMITRI

Uh-huh.

What do you need this time?

VALERIA

I need help with a public figure...  
Duncan Axe.

He's been receiving threatening  
texts.

I want to know where they're coming  
from.

And I want everything you can find  
on him and his brother, Simon.

DIMITRI

Lucky for you, you caught me in a  
good mood.

But it'll take time.

I've got a few hostile servers to  
deal with.

And two new girls to brief.

VALERIA

You've been busy.

DIMITRI

Ever since you left, your perks  
took a hit.

Be glad you still have the Dodge.

VALERIA

I'm keeping it.

I like the way it runs.

Call me when you find something.

DIMITRI

Always a pleasure, Miss Noir.

He ends the call.

INT. VALERIA'S CAR - OUTSIDE AXE ESTATE

Valeria sits in her car, still and focused.

A knock comes at the window. She turns.

SIMON AXE stands outside with an umbrella and a small leather bag.

Valeria lowers the window.

SIMON  
Miss Noir.  
An interesting name.

VALERIA  
It's a pseudonym.

SIMON  
It doesn't suit you.

VALERIA  
I assume you didn't come here to  
discuss my name.

SIMON  
I wanted to thank you for coming.  
I truly hope you'll be able to find  
my niece.

VALERIA  
I'll do everything I can, Mr. Axe.  
Finding the girl is what matters.

SIMON  
That's what we're counting on.  
We'll stay in touch.  
Hopefully with good news.

Simon steps away and heads back toward the estate.

Valeria watches him go.

Her expression tightens slightly.

INT. BAR VELVET - DAY

A strip club. Dancers perform on poles. A few intoxicated patrons sit scattered around.

MARTINA WINE (23) sits in a booth. She reads a book while eating an apple. Her feet rest on the table. A half-finished glass of red wine stands nearby.

VERA RUSKO enters and notices Martina's posture.

VERA  
Martina, how many times do I have  
to tell you not to put your feet on  
the table in front of customers?

MARTINA  
(eyes on the book)  
The customers are watching your  
dancers.  
(looks up at Vera)  
No one cares about my feet.

Vera is not pleased. She moves to a more secluded booth where LIAM waits. He wears an expensive black leather jacket and drinks coffee.

Vera sits beside him. She takes an envelope of cash from her bag and hands it to Liam.

LIAM  
What's this for?

VERA  
Yesterday's job.

LIAM  
I told you I don't do this for  
money.

VERA  
I like to pay.

Liam pockets the envelope.

LIAM  
Duncan's daughter was kidnapped.

VERA  
That's concerning.

Liam takes a sip of coffee.

VERA  
We need to be careful.  
Things are going to heat up on the  
streets.

LIAM  
I'll keep you informed.

Vera nods. Liam stands and leaves.

Vera lights a cigarette and looks toward Martina with  
disdain.

EXT. AUTO REPAIR SHOP - MIDDAY

Valeria pulls up outside an auto repair shop and parks.

INT. AUTO REPAIR SHOP - CONTINUOUS

A busy garage filled with cars under service.

MARIO, 40s, a mechanic, works near a lift. He notices Valeria  
as she enters.

VALERIA  
Hi. I'm Valeria Noir... a private  
investigator.  
I'm looking into a black Mercedes  
that was left here.  
It belongs to the Axe family.

MARIO  
Yeah.  
The cops were here last night.  
(MORE)

(CONT'D)

We didn't feel great about it once we realized we handed the car over to a stranger. But he had an Axe family badge. Now our regulars are giving us looks.

VALERIA

Right.

He looked like one of theirs. Nothing about him struck you as unusual?

MARIO

No.

I hadn't seen him before, but the Axe family sends new drivers sometimes.

They show the badge, we do the work.

We've dealt with Duncan and Simon for years.

VALERIA

Can I see the security footage?

MARIO

Police took it last night.

Asked questions, looked around.

VALERIA

Can you describe the man?

MARIO

Average guy.

Forties or fifties.

Short hair, some gray.

Black suit, wore a cap.

Looked like their other drivers.

VALERIA

What kind of work were you doing on the car?

MARIO

Routine service.

Oil change, filters.

Brakes and suspension check.

VALERIA

Was there any deadline?

MARIO

No. The car could've gone another couple of months without service.

Valeria considers this. She takes out a business card and hands it to Mario.

VALERIA

Alright.

Thank you.

If anything else comes to mind, call me.

MARIO

Of course.

And if your car ever needs work, we've got you.

VALERIA

I'll keep that in mind.

Goodbye.

Valeria turns and leaves.

INT. FIREPLACE ROOM - MORNING

Duncan stands near the fireplace, facing away.  
Cynthia sits at the table.  
Elijah stands by the door, hands in his pockets.

CYNTHIA

I still can't believe we're even having this conversation.

DUNCAN

Neither can I.

CYNTHIA

She's our daughter.  
Our only joy.

Duncan closes his eyes, then looks toward the window.

DUNCAN  
I used to believe money protected  
us.  
That power was enough.  
That if you paid the best people,  
things like this didn't happen.  
Turns out I was wrong.

CYNTHIA  
I'd live ten lives in misery if I  
had to.  
I just want my child back home.

Duncan turns to her.

DUNCAN  
I have people everywhere.  
We hired a detective.  
I believe Vanessa will be home  
before the meeting.

A brief silence.

CYNTHIA  
And the police?  
Why aren't they calling?

DUNCAN  
They're dragging their feet.  
That may need to change.

Elijah watches them, saying nothing.

EXT. SOUTH DOCKS - CONTAINER YARD - EARLY AFTERNOON

Valeria walks between rows of shipping containers toward a  
warehouse.

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

An empty warehouse with scattered scrap and tire marks on the floor.

Valeria checks her phone, matching the location to GPS coordinates.

She examines the ground. Several sets of tire tracks overlap.

VALERIA  
(quiet)  
This is where they switched  
vehicles.

Valeria scans the floor, then the entire warehouse. She thinks.

VALERIA  
(reasoning)  
Everything happened fast, but there  
were no prints in the car.  
Someone came back later and wiped  
it clean.

Finding nothing else, she turns to leave.

She notices a lanyard with a badge on the floor. Nearby, small drops of blood lead toward the containers.

Valeria follows the trail outside.

EXT. CONTAINER YARD - CONTINUOUS

Valeria tries one container. It is locked.

Her GPS leads her to another container marked TRX-9084 - DARR CITY / HAMBURG.

It is held shut by a loose metal sheet. She opens it.

INT. SHIPPING CONTAINER - CONTINUOUS

A man lies dead among empty boxes and debris. It is the mechanic from the repair shop.

There is a clean cut across his throat. No signs of a struggle.

Valeria steps inside and examines the body.

She checks his hand, then his pockets. Nothing.

Mud prints surround the area.

VALERIA  
(under her breath)  
The police were here.

She looks back toward the yard, then at the body.

VALERIA  
Either they missed this..  
or they chose not to see it.

Valeria leaves the container.

EXT. AXE TOWER - AFTERNOON

A glass skyscraper with the AXE logo above the entrance.

INT. SIMON'S OFFICE - TOP FLOOR - AFTERNOON

Simon sits behind his desk, holding a phone.

A lit cigar rests between his fingers.

A video plays on the screen. Its content is not visible.

The door opens.  
LARISSA KLAUS enters.

Simon locks the phone and places it face down on the desk.

LARISSA  
(smiling)  
What were you watching?

SIMON  
The stock market.

Larissa raises an eyebrow.

LARISSA  
Since when do you care about the  
stock market?  
I thought you operated by a  
different standard.

SIMON  
Times change.  
And I'm an honest man.

Simon stands.

SIMON  
(amused)  
What brings my beautiful jewel  
here?

LARISSA  
I had some time.  
Thought I'd stop by.  
(pause)  
By the way, aren't you more  
interested in your niece than in  
the stock market?

Larissa crosses the room and sits on the sofa.

LARISSA  
Any news about Vanessa?

SIMON  
Unfortunately, no.  
But everything is under control.

LARISSA  
Poor girl.  
I wouldn't want to be in her  
mother's place right now.

SIMON  
Everything will fall into place.  
Very soon.

LARISSA  
I got a notification from the bank.  
Solar Elements now has access to  
the gallery's account.  
(pause)  
Was that the plan,  
or is there something you forgot to  
mention?

SIMON  
You wanted the deal with the Greek  
jewels.  
Customs were the problem.  
With this structure, that problem  
is gone.

LARISSA  
So I launder,  
and you sell?

SIMON  
No.  
You're the art.  
I'm the frame that holds it.

Simon turns away and pours himself a drink.

Larissa watches him in silence.

EXT. THE DOCKS - LATER

Valeria walks between the containers. Her phone rings on a  
secure line.

DIMITRI  
Home-invasion hacking.

VALERIA  
Please tell me you're not standing  
on some bank roof right now.

DIMITRI

My own roof.  
Spying on the neighbor... She's  
pretty bundled up today.  
(turns serious)  
The number that sent those texts?  
Last signal traced to the Murky  
River.

VALERIA

Of course.  
Where else would it end up?  
(pause)  
I found a body.  
Can you cover my trip to the docks?

DIMITRI

You're pushing your daily favor  
limit.  
By the way, aren't you going to ask  
about the Axe brothers?

VALERIA

I figured you'd tell me anyway.

DIMITRI

Yeah. You're always charming.  
So... Simon Axe owns three TV  
stations and five websites.  
Through those alone, he feeds the  
city a steady diet of bullshit.  
Twenty-four seven.

VALERIA

So the flattering headlines online...  
turns out he wrote them himself.

DIMITRI

He's deep into real estate too.  
Old money, dirty money.  
He and his brother are two of the  
city's top-tier criminals.  
The younger one's trying to go  
legit.  
Which usually means he's either  
scared..  
or someone's about to rip  
everything out from under him.

VALERIA

How did I miss these stars?

DIMITRI  
And one more thing you'll  
appreciate.  
They've got old business with a  
washed-up madam named Vera Rusko.

VALERIA  
They mentioned her this morning.  
My gut says she's not involved.  
Something doesn't add up.

DIMITRI  
If you ask me, you should find a  
man and get a normal job.

VALERIA  
And who saves the decent ones?

DIMITRI  
I was hoping you would.  
Right now, you're saving the bad  
ones.

VALERIA  
Even the bad ones have kids...

DIMITRI  
I know that hits close to home for  
you.  
And it hits me too, not having you  
around.  
(softening)  
Take care.  
See you soon.

The line disconnects.

Valeria stops, thinking.

EXT. MURKY RIVER - IN FRONT OF APARTMENT BUILDING - AFTERNOON

A worn apartment building lines a narrow street. A message is  
spray-painted on the wall near the entrance.

A group of men play dice on the sidewalk.

TAYLOR CASSIDY stands nearby, watching the game.

Gold chains at his neck. A smartwatch on his left wrist.

Across the street, a black Dodge Challenger pulls up and stops.

Valeria sits behind the wheel.

A kid nudges Taylor and points at the car.

Taylor steps away from the game and walks over. He looks the car over, then leans against it.

Valeria lowers the window. They lock eyes.

TAYLOR  
(irritated)  
Damn it, Valeria.  
Don't roll up in this thing around here.  
People are gonna think I'm talking.

VALERIA  
You want me walking in heels?

TAYLOR  
(smiling, sarcastic)  
Still funny as hell... Look, they're already taking selfies with the car.

VALERIA  
I wouldn't be here if it wasn't serious.  
I'm tracking a missing girl.  
Her phone signal dropped near Murky River.  
Around here.  
You heard anything about what your old friends are into these days?

Taylor glances around.

TAYLOR  
I don't know what they're into.  
And I don't want to.  
But a couple of days ago I saw a  
white guy, mid-thirties.  
Red plaid shirt. Black glasses.  
Looked like he walked out of GTA.  
Hanging around the warehouses.  
Driving an old Pontiac.  
Looked like his granddad drove it  
before him.

VALERIA  
Which warehouses?

TAYLOR  
(smiling)  
My former friends'.

VALERIA  
Maybe that's where she is.

TAYLOR  
You better have a plan.  
One that doesn't include my name.

VALERIA  
It doesn't.  
Next time, drinks are on me.

Valeria raises the window and drives off.

Taylor watches the car leave.

TAYLOR  
(to himself)  
Yeah.  
You're welcome.

INT. DIMLY LIT APARTMENT

Gregory stands with his back to the room, leaning against the  
kitchen counter.

Photographs line a nearby shelf. In some, he wears a police uniform. In others, he stands beside a woman at the beach. A police badge rests in a glass case.

He remains still, facing the counter.

A half-empty bottle of vodka sits nearby. He reaches for it, hesitates, then pulls his hand away.

He looks at the coffee machine.

He makes coffee.

EXT. ROOFTOP TERRACE - APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Gregory steps onto the rooftop terrace, holding a coffee cup. He leans against the railing and looks out over the city and the distant ocean.

He takes a sip and lowers the cup.

The mug bears a photo of him and a woman, smiling.

FLASHBACK - BEACH - DAY

ALICIA STEIN hugs him on the shore. They are younger. He is clean-shaven.

They laugh and hold each other.

She stands beside him, smiling.

BACK TO PRESENT

Gregory stands alone on the terrace. He takes another sip of coffee.

His phone rings.

He answers.

VALERIA (V.O.)  
I need muscle.

GREGORY  
On my way.

He ends the call and checks his watch.

EXT. PARKING LOT / STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Valeria leans against her parked car, holding a burger and a soda.

A dark green Jeep pulls up nearby. Gregory steps out and walks toward her.

They stop a few feet apart.

VALERIA  
You smell like vodka.

GREGORY  
You still eating garbage?

VALERIA  
I won't tell Gloria this time.  
You know how much effort she put  
into pulling you off the bottle.

GREGORY  
I'm clean.  
Just coffee today.

VALERIA  
I'll mark the calendar.

GREGORY  
Don't stall.  
You said you needed muscle.

VALERIA  
Duncan Axe.  
Ring a bell?

GREGORY  
Yeah.  
Real classy guy.  
What about him?

VALERIA  
His daughter was taken.  
I suspect Taylor's old crew.

Gregory looks at her, suspicious.

VALERIA  
My job is to get her out.  
Yours is to help me do it.

GREGORY  
Since when do we work for  
gangsters?

VALERIA  
She's ten years old.

Gregory considers this.

GREGORY  
Alright.  
What's the plan?

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - AXE TOWER - DAY

DUNCAN AXE, CYNTHIA AXE, and SIMON AXE sit around a large  
table.

ELIAH MORT stands near the window, watching the room.

The doors open. A secretary lets in three lawyers. They sit  
across from Duncan.

One of the lawyers places documents on the table.

LAWYER 1  
Mr. Axe, I need to be clear.  
We're only intermediaries.  
We have no involvement in the  
situation itself.

Duncan grips a pen but does not respond.

Cynthia watches him.  
Elijah watches the lawyers.

DUNCAN  
Maybe we wait a little.

LAWYER 2  
Mr. Axe, we were instructed that  
once the documents are presented,  
they must be signed immediately.

DUNCAN  
Shut up.

Simon leans forward.

SIMON  
We don't know if Valeria Noir can  
deliver.  
Think about Vanessa.

Duncan hesitates. His phone vibrates. He checks the screen.

A message reads: "Tick-tock."

Cynthia snaps.

CYNTHIA  
Sign it.

Duncan pulls the documents closer and signs. He finishes and  
slides them back.

The lawyers gather the papers and stand.

SIMON  
We won't let this go.  
We'll find them.

The lawyers leave.

Duncan looks to Eliah and nods.  
Eliah exits after them.

INT. AXE TOWER - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Eliah follows the lawyers down the corridor.

They step into an elevator. The doors close.

Eliah turns and heads for the stairwell.

INT. STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Eliah descends quickly.

A door swings open. Someone strikes him.

He falls down the stairs.

As he goes down, he catches a glimpse of a red plaid shirt.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - AXE TOWER - MOMENTS LATER

Eliah returns, bruised and shaken.

He looks at Duncan and gives a slight shake of his head.

Duncan slams his fist on the table.

INT. GGP WAREHOUSES - HIDEOUT - LATE AFTERNOON

VANESSA sits alone on a large bed.

The room is sparse. A metal nightstand stands beside the bed with a pitcher of water, a glass, and a half-eaten burger.

Vanessa stands and walks to the metal door. She tries the handle. It is locked.

She presses her ear to the door, listening.

INT. HIDEOUT - MAIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Several men occupy the space.

Two argue over a video game.  
One sits on a couch watching security monitors.  
Another counts cash at a table.  
A man nearby sorts watches and gold chains.

Boxes of sneakers and electronics are stacked against the walls.

INT. HIDEOUT - INNER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Newspaper clippings, police reports, and maps cover the walls.

Two armed men sit at a table playing cards.

In the corner, TEODOR FRANKLIN, known as PATCHER, sits alone in a chair. He reads quietly and observes the room.

EXT. GHETTO STREET - NEAR G.G.P. WAREHOUSES - LATE AFTERNOON

Valeria's car is parked with a clear view of the G.G.P. warehouses.

INT. VALERIA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Valeria and Gregory sit in silence, focused on the dashboard screen.

A live feed shows the interior of the warehouses through security cameras.

Valeria taps on a tablet, switching between feeds.

VALERIA  
Perfect.  
We've got eyes inside.

GREGORY  
I hope you're not watching me too...  
naked in the shower.

VALERIA  
Not yet.

GREGORY  
Alright.  
Let's hear the genius plan.

VALERIA  
I reroute their cameras.  
We disappear from their system.  
Then we run the decoy.

Gregory looks at her, confused.

INT. GGP WAREHOUSES - DAY

The room is unchanged.  
PATCHER reads.  
Two men play cards.

A knock comes at the front door.

The card players stop and look to PATCHER. He gives a slight nod.

One man stands, draws a gun, and goes to the door. He opens the peephole.

VALERIA stands outside, wearing sunglasses and red lipstick.

VALERIA  
Hey, handsome.  
I heard someone called for a girl.

GANGSTER 1  
Get the hell out of here.

VALERIA  
Don't keep a lady waiting.  
Time's money.

The peephole shuts.

GANGSTER 1  
Boss, some hooker's outside.  
Probably the wrong place.

Patcher keeps reading.

GANGSTER 2  
Is she hot?

GANGSTER 1  
Not bad.

GANGSTER 2  
Then bring her in.

Patcher glances at the security monitors. The entrance shows nothing.

He looks up, but the door opens.

GREGORY forces his way inside. One man is knocked back.

A smoke grenade rolls across the floor.

Gregory fires. Gangster 2 goes down.

VALERIA enters, masked and armed.

They move through the room. One by one, the remaining men are taken down.

Valeria heads for the inner room.

INT. INNER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

PATCHER stands holding VANESSA.

PATCHER  
They told me not to hurt her.  
But I will if I have to.

VALERIA  
Let her go.  
You walk out alive.

PATCHER  
You have no idea what's coming.

VALERIA  
Try me.

Patcher lowers his weapon and releases Vanessa.

Valeria motions for Vanessa to come to her. They back out together.

Gregory covers them from the hallway.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE WAREHOUSES - DAY

Valeria and Vanessa run to the car. Gregory follows.

They get in and drive away.

EXT. PARKING LOT - LATE AFTERNOON

Valeria's car pulls into the parking lot and stops.

INT. VALERIA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Valeria and Gregory sit in the front seats.  
Vanessa sits in the back, calm and observant.

GREGORY  
I can stick around if you want.

VALERIA  
Thanks.  
You've done enough.  
I've got it from here.

GREGORY  
Alright.  
I'll see you at the gym this  
weekend.  
Unless you're off chasing gangsters  
again.

VALERIA  
We're on.  
See you soon.

Gregory gets out of the car.

Valeria watches him walk away.

VANESSA  
Do you work for my dad?

VALERIA  
Not exactly.  
But he sent me.

VANESSA  
I knew it.  
You're not like the others.  
They were dumb and scary.  
And you're not quiet like Eliah.

VALERIA  
How are you feeling?

VANESSA  
I was scared at first.  
Then I realized they weren't as  
tough as they acted.  
They even looked after me.  
In their own way.

VALERIA  
The person behind this didn't want  
you hurt.  
I think I understand why.

She turns toward Vanessa.

VALERIA  
You did great.  
Let's get you home.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Valeria's car drives away.

INT. SIMON AXE'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Valeria enters with Vanessa.

DUNCAN  
Vanessa?

He rushes to her and holds her tightly.

CYNTHIA takes Vanessa's hand and does not let go.

SIMON  
(smiling)  
Congratulations, Miss Noir.  
Looks like you did your job.

VALERIA  
Vanessa is fine.  
(beat, looks at Duncan)  
But it's too late now, isn't it,  
Mr. Axe?

DUNCAN  
Too late?  
What are you talking about?

VALERIA  
Your company.  
The contracts.  
They've already been signed.

DUNCAN  
(nods)  
I didn't have a choice.  
They threatened my daughter.

VALERIA  
(turns to Simon)  
Don't you think the threat came  
from inside?

Silence.

SIMON  
What do you mean, "from inside,"  
Miss Noir?

VALERIA  
Why did you insist the car be  
serviced two months early?

SIMON  
I care about my family's safety.  
And my staff's.

Duncan looks between them.

VALERIA  
Concern for your staff...  
Then how do you explain your driver  
being found dead at the docks?

SIMON  
I don't know anything about that.

Cynthia pulls Vanessa closer.  
Duncan watches Simon.

VALERIA  
The man who picked up Vanessa  
wasn't a kidnapper.  
He was hired through your company.  
He was sent to collect the car from  
the shop.  
Then to pick up Vanessa from  
school.  
Then to drive to the docks.

The others remain silent.

VALERIA  
There, another vehicle intercepted  
him.  
Vanessa was taken.  
The driver resisted... He was  
killed.  
The police haven't found him.  
That wasn't an accident...  
This was planned by you.

Silence.

CYNTHIA  
(whispering)  
No.

VALERIA  
You wanted to walk away clean.  
No loose ends.  
And what's more convenient than  
hiring someone you thought was a  
rookie?  
(beat)  
I'm not a rookie.

SIMON  
Impressive, Miss Noir.

DUNCAN  
(frozen, then to Simon)  
It can't be.  
(voice rising)  
Tell me this isn't true.

VANESSA  
(looking at Simon)  
The driver talked the whole time.  
He was excited to work for our  
family.

VALERIA  
(to Duncan)  
Which company were the shares  
transferred to?

DUNCAN  
It was called Solar Elements.

Valeria takes out her phone and shows it to them.

VALERIA  
Solar Elements is owned by an  
offshore company in Panama.  
The listed director is Larissa  
Klaus.  
(looks at Simon)  
That name sound familiar?

Simon falters for a brief moment.

DUNCAN  
(quiet, then exploding)  
Your new girlfriend?  
You're stealing my company?

SIMON  
I built this company.  
I'm the one pulling it out of the  
mud.

DUNCAN  
You built nothing.  
I built it from scratch while you  
skimmed off the top.  
You used my daughter to get  
leverage?

SIMON  
She was never harmed.  
I stayed out of sight.  
(to Valeria)  
I didn't expect you to be this  
effective.

VALERIA says nothing. She holds his gaze.

DUNCAN  
(steps toward Simon)  
You stole from me.  
You used my child-

Vanessa moves between them.

VANESSA  
Dad.  
Please don't.

Duncan stops.

SIMON  
(smiling)  
I would never hurt my own niece.  
But I would never let you stay on  
top, brother.

Simon makes a small gesture.

The guards step forward.

Duncan, Cynthia, and Vanessa turn toward the exit.

Cynthia stops. She turns back, walks up to Simon, and slaps him.

She holds his gaze, then leaves.

Simon wipes blood from his lip.

SIMON  
(to Valeria)  
You surprised me.  
Talent like yours attracts trouble.

VALERIA  
At your age,  
I'd expect better judgment.

Simon clenches his jaw but stays silent.

Valeria turns and walks out.

VALERIA  
Have a good evening, Mr. Axe.  
You can open the champagne.

Simon remains alone.

EXT. DARR CITY - MAJOR BOULEVARD - NIGHT

Valeria's car moves through traffic on a major boulevard.

INT. VALERIA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Valeria drives, focused on the road.

Gloria appears on the dashboard screen.

GLORIA  
I still can't believe he did that  
to his own brother.

VALERIA  
That kind of thing happens more  
than you'd think.  
Sometimes worse.

GLORIA  
So let me guess.  
Simon hired you and never paid.

VALERIA  
Duncan transferred the money.  
Even after losing everything.  
For now.  
(pause)  
The real damage is a child who went  
through hell and a decent man who  
didn't make it out.

GLORIA  
What about the police?  
Didn't they do anything?

VALERIA  
They're involved too.  
This runs deeper than what we can  
see.  
(pause)  
Wrap things up and go home, Glo.

GLORIA  
Good night, Val.

INT. SIMON AXE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Simon stands alone in the office.

He opens a liquor cabinet, takes out a bottle of whiskey and two glasses, and pours.

The door opens.  
ANDRE DANIELS enters.

Simon turns to him and offers a glass.

SIMON  
Right on time.  
Did you take care of the driver?  
I heard our detective found the  
body.  
Unfortunate.  
I was starting to like her.

ANDRE  
That's no longer our concern.

SIMON  
(smiling)  
To new opportunities.

Andre takes the glass.  
They clink.

Andre shows no reaction.

EXT. DARR CITY - NIGHT

The AXE Tower stands over the city.

ALICIA (V.O.)  
This city lived in shadow for a  
long time.  
Long enough to forget what daylight  
feels like.

Power learned to hide here.  
Corruption learned to blend in.  
And people learned not to look too  
closely.

Lately, something's been slipping  
through the cracks.

Whether the light breaks through,  
or turns out to be just another  
illusion,  
remains to be seen.

I'm Alicia Stein.  
This is the city I once called  
home.

#### EPILOGUE BEATS

INT. ESTATE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

VANESSA sits with her parents at home. She stays close to  
them.

DUNCAN sits on the couch with his family. He is present but  
distant.  
CYNTHIA holds his hand.

INT. 7TH FLOOR - HALLWAY - NIGHT

GLORIA locks the office door. The sign reads: VALERIA NOIR -  
PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR.  
She pauses and looks upward.

INT. GREGORY`S APARTMENT - NIGHT

GREGORY stands on a terrace at night, holding a glass of vodka.

EXT. MURKY RIVER - NIGHT

TAYLOR stands alone on a quiet street.  
Several G.G.P. members approach him.  
Taylor reaches for the panic button on his watch.  
They strike him and leave him on the pavement.

INT. VALERIA`S APARTMENT - NIGHT

VALERIA sits alone at home on the couch.  
She holds a cigarette and a photograph of her parents.