

THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

The city hums—neon, car horns, distant sirens. Rain glints on wet pavement.

INT. NEW YORK CITY - APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

A cramped, dimly lit bedroom. Shadows cling to the walls.

RIVER KEPLEY (21)—striking yet fragile, chin-length blond hair framing haunted baby-blue eyes—sits motionless on the edge of his bed. Promise etched into his features. Trauma never far beneath the surface.

His gaze fixes on a framed TONY AWARD POSTER hanging crookedly on the wall. The metallic gleam casts a shadow across half his face—aspiration split by memory.

River reaches for a BURNT PHOTOGRAPH resting on the nightstand. The edges are blackened, blistered by fire. The image is warped but intact enough to reveal his parents—smiling, alive—before everything was taken.

He traces the charred border with his thumb. The faint smell of smoke lingers. His fingers tremble.

A DISTANT SIREN cuts through the silence.

River flinches.

INT. KEPLEY ESTATE - FOYER - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

Fire crawls along the walls. Smoke coils like living things. Windows explode outward. SCREAMS—his parents. Heat lashes River's skin. He gasps--

INT. NEW YORK CITY - APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

River jerks back to himself. Street noise bleeds in. Car horns. Neon reflections pulse across the window. Just streets. Just the city. But his breathing is ragged. His heart pounds.

He scrubs his hands against his jeans, as if trying to wipe away something that won't come off.

River crosses to the window. The BROOKLYN BRIDGE glows in the distance—unyielding, alive. He takes a long pull from a bottle of vodka.

On the television, a grainy VHS recording of *LES MISÉRABLES* plays.

River watches—transfixed.

Onscreen, his parents in their youth: YOUNG VERA KEPLEY, radiant as Cosette, moves toward YOUNG MARLON KEPLEY, dashing as Marius. They meet. He pulls her close. They kiss. Applause swells faintly from the tinny speakers.

River's grip tightens on the photograph. He pauses the tape. Rewinds. Plays it again. And again.

The burnt photograph rests loosely in his hand as Vera crosses the stage—alive, fearless, incandescent.

River doesn't blink.

INT. RIVER'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

River grips the pull chain above the mirror. Lets go.

His reflection flickers. He brushes his hair aside. A scar. Jagged. Deep. He stares. No words. Just breath. Just silence. His eyes glass over. A single tear slips down.

INT. RIVER'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

With his wet hair in his face, River stands beneath a shower head, soaking him. With his hand, he massages his forehead. Then, a KNOCK on the door. River pauses, turning in his right profile.

RIVER
Yeah, what is it?

INT. UNION SQUARE - SUBWAY STATION TERMINAL - DAY

River walks among the crowd of COMMUTERS towards the turnstiles.

INT. SUBWAY STATION PLATFORM - DAY

River walks past the back of a newsstand window featuring a collage of magazine covers. Centered within is a VOGUE MAGAZINE, with a cover photo of a beautiful MODEL posing. Large, colorful letters across the center of the cover: "LIZZY." The caption across the bottom reads, "New York Fashion Week."

INT. SUBWAY STATION PLATFORM - DAY (LATER)

As his hair falls over the left side of his face and he leans forward in his seat, River's gaze is fixed on a loving COUPLE, standing together with an INFANT in her arms.

Their tender kiss captures his attention until he looks down at the ground, and his hair is swept into the air by the oncoming train.

INT. SUBWAY TRAIN CAR - DAY - TRAVELING

OVERCROWDED. River sits shoulder-to-shoulder with fellow COMMUTERS, his New York Yankees cap pulled low over his eyes. A BOOK rests in his hand, open to a DIAGRAM of Stanislavski's system—his "Plan of Experiencing" (1935).

River anxiously glances around the train at the PEOPLE. His left hand trembles. Then his eyes return to the page, trying to stay locked there.

INT. MOVEMENT STUDIO - DAY

STUDENTS are barefoot, standing in front of mirrors. The instructor, HEIDI, walks past each one.

HEIDI

Mirror work is not about vanity.
It's about meeting yourself — raw,
unfiltered. No hiding.

River stands frozen. Everyone else begins — gestures, facial expressions, full-bodied movement. He stays rigid. His hair veils his scar.

Heidi approaches. Gently pulls the hair from his face.

HEIDI (CONT'D)

You can't act behind a mask, River.

River looks at himself. Just breathes.

His lip trembles. He tries to move — awkwardly lifts an arm — but stops. He backs away.

HEIDI (CONT'D)

Don't run from it. Use it.

RIVER

(low)

It uses me. Every time I try.

INT. NYC DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - STAGE - DAY

River sits among a semicircle of students, scripts in hand. His tousled hair shadows half his face; wire-rimmed glasses frame sharp, eager eyes. Black Converse scuff the floor as he scribbles notes, caught in a moment of quiet intensity.

MARIE DUCHAMP, 55, poised and warm, stands before them, clipboard resting on an empty chair.

MARIE DUCHAMP

(soft smile)

I was in Vienna recently. Heard Alfred Brendel play Beethoven's late sonatas. For a fleeting moment—maybe ten seconds—I saw sound ripple through the air like waves. No, I wasn't high.

(a beat, then lightly)

Shakespeare's greatest moments live in that space. To own this play, you must dive deep—into every shadow of your character.

(pauses, eyes scanning the room)

Auditions for *Macbeth* will begin soon, and we'll see who rises to claim the prestigious title role.

The room crackles. Eyes sharpen. Hearts quicken.

INT. PARIS - HOTEL LOUNGE - NIGHT

A pair of slender HANDS gracefully play Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" on the piano. They belong to ELIZABETH MOREAU, 24, elegant, sophisticated, with long, dark hair. She bears a similar pain to River.

EXT. HOTEL BALCONY - NIGHT

Elizabeth sits curled up in a chair, staring at the flashy lights of the EIFFEL TOWER. She smokes, sips from her glass.

Elizabeth sets down her drink on the table and picks up a BROCHURE. The cover reads, "33rd International Piano Competition for Outstanding Amateurs in Paris."

INT. HOTEL RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Elizabeth sits quietly at a table. With a pencil, she marks down treble clef and bass clef notes onto a sheet of piano staff paper. A WAITER approaches and fills her empty glass with burgundy wine.

All dialogue in italics is in French with English subtitles.

ELIZABETH

(smiles politely)

Thank you.

INT. HOTEL LOUNGE - NIGHT

Elizabeth continues to play "Moonlight Sonata" on the piano.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

Elizabeth nervously sits on the bed holding the hotel phone to her ear. Her MOTHER'S VOICE is on the receiving end.

MOTHER

(over phone)

Is that you, Elizabeth? Oh, please, please, say something.

Elizabeth curls her FIST in frustration.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

(over phone)

Stop blaming yourself for what happened. It's not your fault. Come home, sweetie. Come home.

As tears stream down her cheeks, Elizabeth cups a hand over her mouth and hangs up the phone.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT (LATER)

The television flickers—Martha Argerich commanding the piano. Elizabeth watches, unmoving. Her cocktail glass trembles in her hand.

On the screen, Martha's fingers fly with furious grace.

Elizabeth blinks. Her father's image flashes in her mind—cheering in the crowd.

Her glass slips. CRASH. Shards scatter across marble. Liquid pools. She doesn't flinch.

INT. THE NYC DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - STAGE - NIGHT

With assured strides, River and the others exit the classroom, ready to seize what lies ahead.

MARIE DUCHAMP

Have a good night! See you tomorrow!
Good night!

EXT. LINCOLN CENTER PLAZA - NIGHT

Floodlights illuminate the BUILDING FACADES. The REVSON FOUNTAIN spouts streams of water high into the air. River walks with his back to the fountain towards the street.

INT. RECORD STORE - NIGHT

River stands on a footstool, reading the back cover of a VINYL RECORD ALBUM. He slides the album in between two others on the top shelf and continues to sift through the row of vinyl.

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - NIGHT

Rain-slicked streets shimmer with neon. Crowds surge through the chaos - cellphones, theater lights, soulless advertising towering above it all.

River stands still at the edge of it - a figure made small by steel and screen. His coat pulled close, hood shadowing half his face. He clutches a brown paper bag like an anchor.

Behind him, a theater marquee glows. Posters of strangers in masks. Applause playing on loop from another life.

He lowers his head. Breathes. The moment stretches.

Across the intersection, a black town car door swings open. Out steps Elizabeth, regal and unsteady in towering heels, silver dress catching every color of the city. A camera flash goes off - she flinches. She lights a cigarette with trembling hands.

River glances her way just as she exhales, her eyes briefly closing in relief. He sees something in her. Not beauty. Collapse.

She takes a step. He takes one, too. They collide at the crosswalk. It's not dramatic - just two people distracted by the gravity of their own worlds.

ELIZABETH

(mutters)

I'm so sorry-

She looks up. Locks eyes with him. A flicker of recognition - not memory, something deeper. Like meeting someone you've already dreamed about.

RIVER

No, I... it's fine.

He adjusts his hood. Hair falls like a curtain across the left side of his face. She notices. But doesn't stare.

ELIZABETH
You from here?

RIVER
Not really. But I live here. You?

ELIZABETH
Nowhere, lately.

He chuckles. So does she. The city roars around them. Yet time slows.

RIVER
You okay?

ELIZABETH
(quiet)
Are you?

They stand in the middle of the crosswalk like ghosts. Traffic hesitates around them.

The walk sign flashes. Someone yells.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
I have to go.

She moves. Then stops. Pulls a lipstick from her purse and writes something on a crumpled flyer.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
I don't know why I'm doing this.

She presses it into his hand.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Call me. Or don't.

She disappears into the crowd.

River opens the flyer. Her name. A number. A red lipstick heart.

He looks up. She's gone.

A gust of wind kicks up. He turns — sees his reflection in a glass storefront: half of his face glowing in the neon, the other shadowed. He smiles for the first time in a long time.

INT. BACKSTAGE - RUNWAY SHOW - NIGHT

Fluorescent lights buzz overhead.

Elizabeth sits in the makeup chair, shoulders hunched slightly, head tilted forward. A MAKEUP ARTIST, focused and expressionless, applies foundation to her cheek with a soft brush.

INT. FASHION SHOW VENUE - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT (LATER)

A swarm of MODELS and STYLISTS surround Elizabeth as she stands, arrayed in a silver sequin dress. One stylist, GISELLA, 30, wears an intercom headpiece. She zips up the back of Elizabeth's dress while another STYLIST places stilettos on her feet.

With her hand on Elizabeth's back, Gisella guides her towards the curtain.

GISELLA

All right, people!
 (claps her hands)
 Take your spots! Come on! Chop,
 chop! Let's have a great show,
 everyone!

INT. FASHION SHOW VENUE - RUNWAY - NIGHT

Elizabeth confidently walks down the runway alongside a group of fashion MODELS, flashing a smile as she strikes a sultry pose. PHOTOGRAPHERS snap pictures.

Elizabeth turns and struts back towards the curtain.

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - SIDEWALK - NIGHT

River stands across the street, observing the MAJESTIC THEATER where *Les Misérables* plays. A line of ATTENDEES waits to enter the venue. River takes a swig of vodka from a brown paper bag. In his mind, he hears--

MALE ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

And the Tony Award for best
 performance by an actor in a leading
 role goes to... River Kepley!

River closes his eyes, sips from the bag, then raises his arms. In his mind, he hears a THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE...

INT. DANCE CLUB - NIGHT

Black lights. Pounding music. Celebrating in style, Elizabeth drinks champagne at a VIP table with a chain of COVER GIRLS. A Polish model, MARYKA, 25, whispers in Elizabeth's ear.

INT. BATHROOM STALL - NIGHT

Elizabeth watches Maryka pull out a bag of COCAINE from her purse. With a key, Maryka snorts a bump, then hands the key and bag to Elizabeth.

MARYKA

Here. Take some.

Elizabeth accepts, then dips the key into the bag and snorts cocaine off the key. Maryka moves closer to Elizabeth and observes as she shuts her eyes, leans against the wall, and fancies the euphoric sensation.

EXT. WEST GREENWICH VILLAGE - SIDEWALK - NIGHT

As River walks, his attention is drawn up ahead to the backside of a graffitied apartment building on the street corner: *Casablanca* plays, with Humphrey Bogart holding Ingrid Bergman tightly in his arms, projected from the building's rooftop onto the right corner of the high-rise wall.

INT. LOUNGE BAR - NIGHT

A dim jazz bar soaked in amber light. Vinyl spins in the background. River sits alone at the bar, runs his fingers over a worn Beethoven LP.

He flips it over, studies the back. Half-curious, half-lost.

A delicate voice interrupts:

ELIZABETH (O.S.)

Ah... *Moonlight Sonata*.

(beat)

His most fragile storm.

River turns.

Elizabeth, radiant and slightly tipsy, stands beside him. Her gaze lingers on the album, not him.

RIVER

Uh... I haven't listened to it yet.

ELIZABETH

(shrugs)

Most people haven't really listened.
They just hear it.

She gestures to the empty stool next to him.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

May I? I promise I don't bite.
Unless provoked.

River nods, guarded. She sits.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I'm Elizabeth.

RIVER

River.

A handshake. Soft. Warm.

ELIZABETH

River. That's poetic.

RIVER

It's... inherited.

ELIZABETH

(laughs softly)

Aren't we all?

The BARTENDER passes by. Elizabeth flags her with a dramatic flair.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Two shots of Patrón, s'il vous
plaît. And a round for my
girlfriends back there.

She gestures to a table of MODELS. The bartender nods.

RIVER

Friends?

ELIZABETH

Co-workers. Mostly noise and
perfume.

River chuckles. She turns back to the LP.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

This one—*Bagatelle in A Minor*. Feels
like a goodbye written too late.

RIVER
You play?

ELIZABETH
Since I was five. It's the only
thing that doesn't lie to me.

RIVER
Must be good, then.

ELIZABETH
Terrifyingly.
(smirks)
And you?

RIVER
Actor. In training.

ELIZABETH
So we both fake things for a living.

RIVER
Some of us better than others.

Their drinks arrive. They raise their glasses.

ELIZABETH
To Beethoven. And beautiful lies.

RIVER
To the people who keep playing
anyway.

They clink. Drink. Eyes locked.

ELIZABETH
You don't talk much.

RIVER
I say what I need.

ELIZABETH
(leans in, soft)
Sad eyes...
(beat)
You've lived, haven't you?

A silence.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
I should go. But thank you—for the
call. And the honesty.

She slides off the stool. Pauses. Looks at him like she's memorizing the moment.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Don't let the sadness swallow the art. Let it feed it.

RIVER
Same goes for the music.

She smiles. Turns.

RIVER (CONT'D)
Elizabeth.

She looks back.

RIVER (CONT'D)
I'll listen to it tonight.

ELIZABETH
Then you won't be alone.

She disappears into the dark.

River watches her go, the vinyl still in his hands--
--and the music already beginning.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. UPSTATE NEW YORK - THEATER PARKING LOT - NIGHT

VEHICLES circle in search of an open spot.

SUPERIMPOSE: "TWO YEARS EARLIER."

INT. THEATER - BACKSTAGE - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

With short blond hair and scar-free, River is bare-chested and donning black tights and boots. He takes a deep breath, then exhales in front of a dressing-table mirror.

RIVER
(as Hamlet)
"Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them? To die: to sleep"--

He grabs a black, long-sleeve shirt from the countertop and slides it on over his head.

Then--River's wild, irresponsible, and unambitious sibling, KAIDEN, 18, enters. He's slightly intoxicated. Kaiden's accompanied by the attractive and witty REBECCA STANTON, 17. They're wearing ragged clothes and black, camouflage makeup.

River turns around, sighing with irritation.

KAIDEN
 (to River)
 Dude, I know. I know. My bad. I'm
 late.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT

A jam-packed AUDIENCE has their eyes glued to the STAGE FLOOR as River and another STUDENT portray Hamlet and Horatio. They stand before Rebecca and Kaiden, portraying the gravediggers. They're both on their knees with shovels, surrounded by a pile of dirt.

Kaiden attempts to hand River an unearthed SKULL, but it slips out of Kaiden's grasp onto the floor. The audience finds this humorous.

RIVER
 (softly)
 Are you for real right now? Pick it
 up, you idiot.

Feeling awkward, River smiles at the audience. Kaiden, embarrassed, picks up the skull and hands it to River. With both hands, River raises the skull in the air and stares death in the face.

INT. THEATER - STAGE - NIGHT (LATER)

River, Kaiden, Rebecca, and a row of ACTORS stand hand in hand. They take a bow in front of an applauding audience. A VELVET CURTAIN closes in front of them.

INT. THEATER - LOBBY - NIGHT

River and Kaiden enter through a side door and walk through a group of BYSTANDERS towards their parents, MARLON and VERA KEPLEY, both 48. River is decked out in a vintage corduroy blazer, double plaid, cords, and wire-framed glasses.

VERA	MARLON
(claps her hands)	(claps his hands)
Bravo! You both were	Bravo! Bravo! Well done,
remarkable! We're so proud of	boys! Well done!
you.	

Vera and Marlon embrace their sons, speaking indistinctly.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - LAKE - DAY

A view from the lake of a sandy beach, with a two-masted SCHOONER moored to the wooden pier. Vera sits on a stone wall that rises high above a cliff and is surrounded by summer trees.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - DAY

Establish a Gothic-style, Victorian MANSION, nestled in the heart of an immense country estate.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - OVERLOOK - DAY

Vera is seated on the wall next to a wooden easel. She peers out at the dawn's orange sky, then brushes oil paint onto a canvas.

INT. KEPLEY ESTATE - DEN - DAY

River stands before a display case, gazing at TONY AWARDS. Behind each statuette is a PHOTOGRAPH. The photo on the left is of Vera, 31, and the photo on the right is of Marlon, 33, each grasping their statuette with a big smile.

MARLON (O.S.)
Success doesn't happen overnight,
you know?

River glances over and sees Marlon standing in the doorway.

MARLON
Keep chasing your dreams, and
remember that your talent is
appreciated. Don't ever give up.
Everything will fall into place,
okay?

River nods, gazing with envy at the accolades.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - WALL - DAY

A wooden easel and a canvas rest on the stone wall. Vera sits quietly, focused as she brushes a Monet-like SUNRISE above a crescent-shaped lake. River approaches Vera.

RIVER

Hey, good morning, Mom!

VERA

Morning, hon! Oh, and please don't mind me. I'm just trying to finish up.

River kisses Vera on the cheek.

RIVER

Oh, sweet! I love it. It's pretty cool.

VERA

Thank you! This thing--
 (re: painting)
 --it's been taking me ages though to complete. I search every morning when I get up for the perfect sunrise. Today's one of the better ones we've had in a while.

EXT. SCHOONER - DAY - TRAVELING

River and Kaiden swiftly raise the sails as Marlon steers the boat. Vera savors the sunset with a glass of wine.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - BEACH - NIGHT

River, Kaiden, and ten CLASSMATES sit around a bonfire drinking, laughing, smoking, and speaking indistinctly. 70s glam rock in the style of David Bowie plays in the background. River sits across from Kaiden and Rebecca.

River watches Kaiden pound wine, then leans back and takes in the breathtaking sight of the star-filled sky.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - BEACH - NIGHT (LATER)

The party is over. Classmates stagger away from the bonfire, cheerfully yelling, laughing, and falling all over each other. River walks from the lake carrying a bucket of water. He sees Kaiden vomiting in the sand beside the bonfire.

RIVER
 (to Kaiden)
 Oh, Jesus. Kaiden! Watch out, man!
 Get back, will ya, please?

As River pours water over the fire, Kaiden stumbles backwards.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - STAIRCASE - NIGHT

Kaiden has his arm wrapped around River's shoulder, and River has his arm around Kaiden's waist, balancing Kaiden as they walk up STONE STEPS leading up a STEEP HILL.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - NIGHT

Moonlight grazes the edges of the estate. River and Kaiden linger near a thicket of shrubs and hydrangeas, half-lit by the house's glow.

Kaiden smokes, swaying slightly—eyes half-lidded, humming an off-key melody. River watches him, wary but worn out.

River glances toward the house. A dim light flickers in the basement window.

RIVER
 I'm done for the night, man.
 (beat)
 Get some rest, yeah?

Kaiden just smirks and flicks ash into the leaves.

INT. KEPLEY ESTATE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

River reaches the bottom step, pauses.

RIVER
 (sniffs)
 What the hell is that?

A faint, acrid odor hangs in the air.

He surveys the crates of old wine, then moves toward the stairs. As he ascends, something outside the basement window catches his eye—

Kaiden's body topples over the shrubs. Limbs slack. Still.

RIVER (CONT'D)
 (chuckles)
 You good out there?

KAIDEN (O.S.)
 (grunting)
 Yeah... yeah. Damn bush got me.

River shakes his head, half amused, and keeps climbing. The light behind him buzzes faintly. Then stillness.

EXT. FRANCE - CHÂTEAU - DAY

A picturesque country château is hidden from the world with distant hilltops and a massive VINEYARD at its backside, accentuating its natural beauty.

EXT. CHÂTEAU - VINEYARD - DAY

With a basket in hand, CLAUDE MOREAU, 45, slightly built, with specs and a fedora, walks through an aisle of dense GRAPE VINES.

INT. CHÂTEAU - ELIZABETH'S BEDROOM - DAY

A KNOCK on the door. DIANE MOREAU, 40, a former runway beauty, enters.

The room is spacious and lovely. A black GRAND PIANO rests in the center. Embellishing the walls are several framed magazine pictures displayed together, with Elizabeth's FACE gracing the covers.

Agitated, Diane walks over to the window and opens the black window curtains, revealing a GORGEOUS VIEW of a sprawling vineyard.

In the bed, a BODY nestles beneath the mountain of fluffy pillows and blankets. Diane jerks the blankets down over Elizabeth's body. Lying only in lace panties, Elizabeth opens her eyes and smiles at her mom. Diane sits beside her.

DIANE
We were expecting your presence last night.

ELIZABETH
 (groaning)
Mom, um... what time is it?

DIANE
Almost two. What time did you get in?

ELIZABETH

Five. I think.

Diane shakes her head, then runs her hand through Elizabeth's hair.

DIANE

The life of a fashion model. Honey, burning the candle at both ends, it's not healthy. You have to slow down.

ELIZABETH

I know. I know I do.

DIANE

But, the Conservatoire, Elizabeth! Your audition! It's in two days! Have you lost yourself and--

ELIZABETH

No, no, Mom, of course not. I haven't forgotten.

DIANE

But, what about--Have you mastered Chopin's étude? Have you chosen the proper attire? How's your posture nowadays?

Elizabeth sits up, kisses Diane's cheek.

DIANE (CONT'D)

(calmer)

My God, it's finally here! Your big day we've all been waiting for.

Elizabeth hugs Diane.

DIANE (CONT'D)

Dad's been asking for you all morning long. We both miss you.

ELIZABETH

I miss you, too.

EXT. CHÂTEAU - BACKYARD - DAY

Claude and Diane relax on a wooden bench. Elizabeth approaches. Claude stands up and embraces Elizabeth.

CLAUDE

How are you, my love? Your trip, how was it?

ELIZABETH

Dad, it was exciting but stressful. My God, that Italian designer, Donatella, she can be utterly difficult.

CLAUDE

I'm sorry, sweetheart, but, I'll tell you, you must taste these grapes. You see, one day, I promise you, they'll make a fine wine.

EXT. CHÂTEAU - BACKYARD - DAY (LATER)

As Elizabeth drinks wine, she gazes out at the horizon. Then, an ADONIS BLUE lands on the rim of her glass. She watches, admiring the butterfly.

ELIZABETH (V.O.)

Little butterfly. Oh, little butterfly. If only I had a set of those wings. Free together, yes, we would roam this twilight sky as one.

Elizabeth reaches out to touch the butterfly, but just as her fingers are about to make contact, it takes flight. She watches it soar away, and a feeling of elation washes over her.

INT. CHÂTEAU - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Elizabeth, Diane, and Claude share a laugh at the table and speak inaudibly while they dine on a sumptuous meal and sip wine.

EXT. CHÂTEAU - DRIVEWAY - DAY

Claude sits in the driver's seat of a BLACK SUV. Diane and Elizabeth stand face-to-face beside the passenger-side door. Elizabeth has dressed appropriately in a stylish, black, long sleeve, button-down shirt, black dress pants, and black shoes.

DIANE

*Remember, just feel relaxed, okay?
Breathe in--
(inhales sharply)
--then breathe out.
(exhales slowly)
This exercise is paramount.*

ELIZABETH

Okay, Mom.

The passenger-side window lowers; Claude pokes his head in the window.

CLAUDE

Come, darling. You're going to be late.

Elizabeth opens the door and enters. Diane watches Elizabeth look out the passenger-side window at her and smiles. Then-- Diane watches as they drive away.

EXT. NOTRE DAME DE PARIS CATHEDRAL - TOWER - DAY

A panoramic view of the PARIS SKYLINE with one of the cathedral's distinctive GARGOYLES.

INT. CONSERVATOIRE DE PARIS - THEATER - DAY

The AUDITION PANEL is seated in the front row with their ballpoint pens and clipboards in hand. On the stage--

Elizabeth sits in front of the piano. She is calm and collected, with perfect posture. She takes a deep breath and exhales. Her fingertips massage the piano keys. The sound of Chopin's "Étude Op.10, No.3, in E major" fills the air... Her technique is flawless, and the sound enchanting.

INT. KEPLEY ESTATE - RIVER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A low cough. River bolts upright, drenched in sweat. Confused. Breath shallow. The room is soaked in a hellish red glow--shadows dancing wildly across the walls. Smoke coils at the ceiling like a living thing.

Then--he hears it. A low CRACKLING. A growing ROAR. He turns toward the door--a dense flood of smoke spills in from the base, curling toward him.

River stumbles out of bed, barefoot, coughing harder now. He grabs the doorknob--SIZZLE!

RIVER
 (flinching)
 Ah—!

He yanks his hand back, blistering. Then—BOOM. The door BURSTS inward on a gust of flame. A wall of HEAT slams him back. River's eyes go wide. Through the doorway—the hallway is an inferno. Flames lick the ceiling. Wood splinters. Smoke chokes the air. He freezes for a beat, stunned—

Then instinct kicks in. He charges into the chaos.

INT. KEPLEY ESTATE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Flames claw down the walls, devouring paint, splintering beams. River drops low, crawling through the smoke. His breath comes in ragged GASPS. Cinders drift around him like ash from a dying star.

A beam CRASHES behind him—he flinches, shielding his head.

He pushes forward, eyes burning, skin slick with sweat. The air is thick. Unbreathable. He presses a hand to the wall to steady himself—SCALDING HOT. He jerks away.

Then—he hears it. A muffled VOICE. A DOOR rattling. Someone still inside. River surges forward, through the fire.

INT. CONSERVATOIRE DE PARIS - THEATER - DAY

Elizabeth continues to play "Étude Op.10, No.3, in E major" on the piano.

INT. KEPLEY ESTATE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

River stumbles through the smoke, choking. The fire hisses and bellows down the corridor. He reaches Kaiden's door—grabs the knob. Locked.

RIVER
 Kaiden!
 (pounding)
 Open up! Wake up, man!

No answer. The flames crackle louder.

RIVER
 Kaiden! Do you hear me?
 (beat, voice breaking)
 Please—

He slams his shoulder into the door. Once. Twice—CRACK. The door flies open. A suffocating wall of smoke barrels into him.

INT. KEPLEY ESTATE - KAIDEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

River charges in, shielding his face.

RIVER
(coughing)
Kaiden!

Flames crawl up the curtains. The room glows orange. He lunges toward the bed. Empty.

River freezes, breath ragged. Just fire. And absence.

INT. CONSERVATOIRE DE PARIS - THEATER - DAY

Elizabeth pulls back her hands from the piano keyboard and places them on her lap. She momentarily sits in silence. Then, she stands up with confidence and walks across the stage. Respectfully, the panel of judges applauds her stellar performance.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Elizabeth is beaming with joy as she strolls away from the Conservatoire de Paris building.

EXT. AVENUE JEAN JAURES - DAY

Claude's SUV idles curbside. Elizabeth enters via the passenger-side door.

INT. SUV - DAY

Elizabeth closes the passenger-side door. Claude awaits impatiently, his eyes sparkling with anticipation.

CLAUDE
*And so... what's the verdict,
sweetheart? Tell me. Come on.*

Elizabeth smiles, bursts with excitement, and hugs Claude.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
Honey, you've done it! So much preparation and commitment, and all your hard work. You're going to be one of the great pianists of the 21st century, Elizabeth. You're much deserving of this honor. Congratulations!

A beat. Then, Claude turns to Elizabeth and with a warm smile--

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
I love you.

A flash of white--

WHAM! A box truck slams into the driver's side. Glass. Screeching metal. Silence.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. RIVER'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

River stands in front of the mirror, rubbing in a clear facial cream over his facial scar.

INT. WEILL CORNELL MEDICINE - DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

River sits on top of a table. With his hands, DOCTOR BROWN, 50s, examines River's facial scar.

DOCTOR BROWN
 The graft has really taken form here with the other skin. It's healed very nicely. It looks good. How does it feel? Any discomfort at all?

RIVER
 No, not really. Only when I do this, it feels tight.

River purses his lips and moves the muscles in his cheeks from side-to-side.

EXT. PARIS - HOTEL BALCONY - DAY

Pale morning light bathes the stone balcony in a soft gray haze. Elizabeth sits slouched in a woven chair, hair tousled, mascara faintly smudged. A half-finished glass of wine sweats on the table beside her.

She stares past the wrought iron railing—at the distant Eiffel Tower, blurred in the haze. Her hands tremble slightly as she lifts a page of sheet music, eyes scanning before losing focus.

Her breath catches. She lowers the page.

Buzz. Her phone vibrates on the table. She glances down:
"Incoming Call - Mom."

A beat. Her thumb hovers. The screen fades to black.

Wind rustles the paper on her lap. Elizabeth doesn't move.

INT. TAXICAB - DAY - TRAVELING

Elizabeth rides in the back seat, peering at the busy Paris streets. She reaches into her purse, pulls out her wallet, and opens it. Then--

Elizabeth removes a PHOTOGRAPH of herself and her parents posing in the evening with the LOUVRE PYRAMID behind them. As she reflects on that day, a small smile creeps onto her lips.

INT. PANTHÉON-ASSAS UNIVERSITY - COMPETITION HALL - DAY

The elegant theater hushes. JUDGES sit in a perfect line — still, expressionless.

A spotlight rests on the lone grand piano. Elizabeth, pale and drawn, steps into it — clutching her sheet music. She bows, then sits. Her hands hover above the keys of the Steinway, but her mind drifts--

MONTAGE - ELIZABETH'S MEMORY UNFOLDING:

A) EXT. VINEYARD - DAY - Claude laughs under the sun.

B) EXT. INTERSECTION - DAY - A windshield lies shattered.

C) EXT. STREET - DAY - A white sheet covers Claude's body.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. PANTHÉON-ASSAS UNIVERSITY - COMPETITION HALL - DAY

Elizabeth's hands are trembling. She forces a breath, then begins: Chopin's "Waltz in A-flat major, Op. 42." But her fingering slips on the second pass.

A murmur ripples through the audience. The hall seems to breathe louder.

Elizabeth hesitates. The sound of her own heartbeat drowns out the keys. She stops. Dead silence. Her shoulders rise with shame. She glances at the judges – one whispers something to another.

Elizabeth closes her eyes. She inhales slowly. Lowers her hands back to the keys. Begins again. This time, the melody blooms. Not perfect – but full of humanity, precision softened by ache. Every measure reveals something: longing, loss, defiance.

By the final bars, she's transformed – as if the piano pulled her back into herself.

A final note. Silence. Applause. From the judges: faint nods. No smiles. But respect. Elizabeth bows. She doesn't beam. But she knows. She survived the silence – and filled it with something real.

INT. PARIS CHARLES DE GAULLE AIRPORT - TERMINAL - DAY

In sunglasses, Elizabeth rolls her luggage across the floor. Walking towards her, a TODDLER struggles with her every step. The TODDLER'S PARENTS are on opposite sides, holding her hand. As she passes by, Elizabeth smiles and waves at the toddler.

FEMALE AIRPORT ANNOUNCER
(over PA system; filtered)
*Ladies and Gentlemen, your
attention, please. This is the last
call before the doors are closed for
flight Air France, 7:30 to
Los Angeles. We ask all passengers
to board immediately at gate A-22.
Thank you.*

INT. AIRCRAFT - BUSINESS CLASS - DAY

Elizabeth sits tensely, sipping a glass of champagne. Her phone rests beside her on the tray table. Her phone vibrates.

Elizabeth sets down her glass on the table, picks up the phone, and reads the text message: "*Dear Elizabeth Moreau: Congratulations! You have successfully advanced to the Semifinal Round of the "International Piano Competition for Outstanding Amateurs in Paris."*"

Elizabeth takes a sip of her champagne and smiles.

INT. NYC DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - STAGE - DAY

A bare stage. Dim rehearsal lights. A few students observe from the shadows, scribbling notes.

River stands center-stage in rehearsal blacks, shoulders tense, script trembling in hand. Opposite him is JONAH LI, 22, polished, charming, and already performing like he owns the role.

Marie, arms folded, watches closely from the edge of the stage.

RIVER (AS MACBETH)

"Is this a dagger which I see before
me, the handle toward my hand? Come,
let me clutch thee—"

He steps forward—but falters. The words waver. He loses the rhythm. Looks down at the floor.

MARIE DUCHAMP

Stop.

A pause. She rises from her seat with furrowed brows, clipboard clutched at her side.

MARIE DUCHAMP (CONT'D)

River—stop.
(beat)
Come downstage.

River lowers his script, breath heavy. The tension is palpable.

MARIE DUCHAMP (CONT'D)

Are you drunk?

Murmurs stir among the observing students. Someone coughs. Another nudges their neighbor. The air crackles with unease.

RIVER

(quietly)
No. I'm just... tired.

MARIE DUCHAMP

Don't lie to me. There's talk,
River.
(beat)
There's no room for this. Not in
this program.

River's shoulders stiffen, eyes on the floor.

MARIE DUCHAMP (CONT'D)
 I'm not here to humiliate you.
 (softer)
 But I can't protect you if you keep
 doing this to yourself.

RIVER
 (angrily)
 You think I want to screw this up?

MARIE DUCHAMP
 No. I think you're in pain.
 (beat)
 But talent alone won't save you. It
 never has.

She approaches, gentler now.

MARIE DUCHAMP (CONT'D)
 You have something real. But come in
 fogged up, and you'll drown.

Jonah smirks again—subtle, but cruel.

River stares at the stage lights, blinking fast.

MARIE DUCHAMP (CONT'D)
 You have one week. Prove to me you
 can carry this role—or step aside.

JONAH
 All good, teach. I'll keep the crown
 polished.

River's eyes flash. He swallows it down.

Marie exits quietly.

River stares at the space in front of him. His reflection in
 the darkened wings. His own doubt echoing back. Lights fade.

INT. MARIE DUCHAMP'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Marie sits across from River. The room is dim, intimate. Her
 expression is tired—but not unkind.

MARIE DUCHAMP

It's not about me. It's about you.

(beat)

You're talented. One of the best I've seen in years. But you're unraveling. You've got the voice, the presence, the pain. But I don't cast potential. I cast fire. Vulnerability. Bravery.

RIVER

(guarded)

I'm fine.

She tilts her head.

MARIE DUCHAMP

You smell like vodka, River.

A silence.

MARIE DUCHAMP (CONT'D)

You're better than this. And you know it.

(beat)

But you don't trust that yet. Not really.

RIVER

I don't trust anything.

MARIE DUCHAMP

Then start with the words. Start with Macbeth. He doubted himself too—until it destroyed him.

She lets that sit.

MARIE DUCHAMP (CONT'D)

You don't have to be perfect. You just have to be honest. Start there.

River nods faintly. No defiance. Just silence.

INT. RIVER'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The walls are adorned with abstract artwork. Antique furniture, vinyl albums, piles of compilation discs, independent films, modern fashion and art magazines, paintbrushes and depleted bottles of wine scatter along the floor. On the muted TV, *The Hunger* plays...

River's roommate, CAMERON, 25, scrawny and art savvy, paints a canvas that rests on a wooden easel. River enters.

CAMERON
(to River)
Hey, what's happening, man?

RIVER
Crazy day.
(chuckles)
It's all good, though. How 'bout you?

CAMERON
Oh, all right. I'm fine. I think I'm going to head out here in a bit.

RIVER
Where are you heading?

CAMERON
I don't know. I was thinking, maybe the East Village. Want to join me or--Oh, shit, man, I totally forgot. You got a letter out there on the table. It came yesterday.

RIVER
Huh. I'll check it out.

INT. RIVER'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

River walks over to the kitchen table, grabs a sealed envelope, and swiftly tears it open. His face falls as he scans the contents and a look of confusion washes over him.

EXT. SANTA MONICA - BEACH - DAY

Waves crash beneath the Santa Monica Pier. Hotels line the beach.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Beside the entrance, the BELLHOP situates River's luggage.

River hands money to the bellhop as he exits the room.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - BEDROOM - DAY

River opens the refrigerator and sees the private, stocked mini-bar. He grabs two liquor mini-bottles, twists off the caps, and pours them into a glass.

EXT. HOTEL SUITE - BALCONY - DAY

River observes the ocean and the activity along the beach. The MOON appears as pure as it does in the night sky.

EXT. SANTA MONICA - BEACH - DAY

River walks a few feet away from the wet sand, tracking the SURFERS and the waves belting the shore.

River spots a shiny FISH coasting across the top of a glassy wave. Suddenly, a lean young MAN WITH TATTOOS and long blond hair, holding a skimboard, runs past River.

SKIMBOARDER

Excuse me, brah!

The skimboarder drops his board, jumps on it, glides out into the ocean, loses his balance, and WIPES OUT on a wave.

EXT. SANTA MONICA BOARDWALK - DAY

Golden light drips over the Pacific. The horizon burns in soft amber. Below, dolphins arc and vanish into the blue-fluid and free.

River leans against the railing, coffee in hand. Shoulders slightly curled. His scar hidden beneath messy blonde hair. Eyes lost to the sea.

FOOTSTEPS approach—light, familiar.

Elizabeth appears beside him, scarf fluttering in the ocean breeze. She doesn't speak. She watches the water. The dolphins.

ELIZABETH

Look at them.

(beat)

Always half-awake.

RIVER

(quietly, without looking
at her)

Like they're afraid to dream.

Their eyes meet. Something unspeakable passes between them.
The sound of the world dulls.

RIVER (CONT'D)

I've never seen dolphins up close.
Feels... unreal.

ELIZABETH

Most beautiful things do.
(beat)
I'm glad you called.

RIVER

Me too.

A silence settles—not empty, but full.

ELIZABETH

May I see you? All of you?

River stills. The wind brushes a lock of hair from his cheek—
but not enough. After a long breath, he turns to her.

Elizabeth lifts her hand slowly, carefully—as if handling
sacred porcelain—and sweeps his hair back. She tucks it
behind his ear, revealing the scar. She studies him. No pity.
Only grace.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

It's unique.

RIVER

(small laugh, stunned)
You're the first person who's ever
said that.

ELIZABETH

Then they weren't really looking.

A WAVE crashes below. They watch, together. The intimacy
between them shifts—closer now.

EXT. SANTA MONICA - BEACH - DAY (LATER)

Barefoot, shoes in hand, River and Elizabeth walk along the
shoreline. The wet sand glistens beneath them.

RIVER

(chuckling)
That audition story was definitely
not one of my finer moments.

ELIZABETH
 (smiling)
 No, but it was honest.

They stop. Watch the sea again. Timeless. Infinite.

RIVER
 Do you have any siblings?

ELIZABETH
 No. Just me.
 (she hesitates, then clears
 her throat)
 My mother and I... we don't speak
 much.

RIVER
 Why not?

ELIZABETH
 It's complicated. She—
 (beat)
 She... just reminds me.

They fall quiet. A conch shell tumbles in the tide near their feet.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
 Oh—look!

River wades in, retrieves it, and hands it to her. Elizabeth presses it to her ear.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
 When I was little, my parents took
 me to Saint-Tropez. I would walk for
 hours searching for shells.
 (smiles)
 There were never any. But I kept
 looking. That joy of searching—I
 think I've been chasing it ever
 since.

RIVER
 Well—hold onto this one.
 (beat)
 So you remember today.

She looks at him—really looks—and something softens inside her. Then, without warning, she steps close and kisses him. It's not passion. It's trust. Permission. Forgiveness.

When they part, they stay close. The sun sinking behind them. The shell still in her hand. And for a moment, they are just two broken people—whole in each other's presence.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

Standing in front of the mirror, River runs his hands down the lapels of his dark blazer. A knock on the door--

INT/EXT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

River opens the door and sees Kaiden sipping from a flask and smoking a cigarette. Kaiden wears a dark blazer and pants. An awkward silence. Kaiden stares at River's facial scar, and River glances at Kaiden's cigarette.

Holding back his anger, River peers at the bags beneath Kaiden's tearful eyes as he stands in the doorway. River senses something's off with him.

KAIDEN

Hey, what's up, man?

RIVER

Kaiden, how are you?

A handshake, then an awkward embrace.

KAIDEN

Do you mind, man, if I use your bathroom real quick?

RIVER

No, not at all. Sure. Go right ahead.

EXT. HOTEL SUITE - BALCONY - NIGHT

River watches the Pacific Parks' FERRIS WHEEL go round and round. He takes a sip from his glass.

Kaiden enters, suspiciously cheerful, with his flask in hand.

KAIDEN

Is that pretty dope or what?

RIVER

What's that?

KAIDEN
(gazes out at the ocean)
The view, man. The view. It's
killer. Check it out!

RIVER
Yeah, I like it. It's cool.

KAIDEN
Uh-huh. So what were you thinking
when you read my letter, huh?
(beat)
You probably thought I was full of
it, right?

RIVER
What exactly are you referring to?

KAIDEN
Me kind of being an actor and all?

RIVER
(scoffs)
Jesus, dude, you know, I haven't
really given that one too much
thought, if you know what I mean.

KAIDEN
Look, okay, I know you're probably
upset. I got it. But I did try to
get in touch with you. I did.

RIVER
Oh, I see. Hmm. That's pretty
interesting, though. When was that?
Because I must've missed your
fucking memo on our front doorstep!

River aggressively gets in Kaiden's face.

KAIDEN
Dude, what's your problem? I tried!
They wouldn't let me see you, man!
You were in rough shape. Why do you
have to be such an ignorant prick
sometimes, huh?

River strikes Kaiden on his left cheek, knocking Kaiden to
the ground.

RIVER
Ignorant!

River grabs Kaiden by the throat, glares at him, and remembers--

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Two years earlier. River is lying down in a bed. His head, face, and left arm are covered with bandages. His eyes well up, and his left-hand clenches the white sheet.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Hiding behind the window curtain, River, wearing a transparent face mask, spies on other burned PATIENTS and their FAMILIES outside, enjoying the SUNSHINE.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

River lies in bed, covered in bandages. He hands a folded piece of paper to Doctor Brown, who opens it. The paper reads, "Kill Me!" With concern, Doctor Brown stares at River.

INT. HOSPITAL BATHROOM - DAY

In his face mask, then, he yells, and with his right fist, River punches the mirror, shattering the glass.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. HOTEL SUITE - BALCONY - NIGHT

River has a firm grip on Kaiden's throat.

RIVER

Ignorant? Look at me! This is what I'm left with!

River releases his grip on Kaiden's throat and steps away from him, moving towards the railing.

RIVER (CONT'D)

Brother of mine? Yeah, good one.

KAIDEN

Dude, I'm sorry! I think about it every day. I tried! I couldn't do anything! Are you kidding me?

RIVER
I couldn't even attend their
funeral. Go figure, right?

KAIDEN
Bro, chill dude. I'm really sorry. I
am. You got to believe me.

RIVER
Where were you that night, huh?

KAIDEN
What do you mean? The night of the
fire?

RIVER
(chuckles)
Come on, man. Cut the bullshit.

Kaiden tearfully stares up at River.

KAIDEN
What? You think I started the fire?
Is that what you think? You think I
did it? Are you nuts or something?

RIVER
(sneering)
Well, I guess I don't know what the
fuck I'm talking about then, now, do
I?

KAIDEN
You don't remember seeing me? I was
there.

River shakes his head in disbelief.

RIVER
(mumbles)
Whatever, dude.

INT. TAXICAB - NIGHT - TRAVELING

River and Kaiden sit in the back seat; each upset and staring
out their own window. Kaiden sports a bruise on his left
cheekbone.

INT. LAEMMLE FAIRFAX - NIGHT

The AUDIENCE watches the SILVER SCREEN. Kaiden and River are
together in the front row. River sees--

ON THE SCREEN: Inside an industrial warehouse, a stand-off between two groups of modern-day GANGSTERS. Kaiden stands among one of the groups. Then, both rivals open gunfire against each other.

The audience bursts into spontaneous APPLAUSE. Their reaction enralls Kaiden, and River ponders as he stares down at the ground.

River reaches into his pants pocket and removes his vibrating phone.

EXT. SANTA MONICA PIER - NIGHT

A glowing carnival haze. Laughter and ocean breeze in the air. River and Elizabeth walk side by side, cotton candy in hand.

INT. PHOTO STUDIO - NIGHT

Industrial gray backdrop. Elizabeth stands in a dramatic feathered McQueen-style dress, camera flashes popping. She meets River's gaze across the studio—smiles. Winks. He's mesmerized.

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - NIGHT

Steam curls around flickering candlelight. River and Elizabeth recline together in a clawfoot tub, wine glasses in hand. Skin to skin. Stillness between them.

ELIZABETH
(smiling softly)
Let me guess... class clown?

RIVER
(chuckles)
Haunted mime.

She studies him—searching beneath the sarcasm.

RIVER (CONT'D)
There was a fire. My parents didn't
make it.
(beat)
I was inside.

A long silence.

ELIZABETH
But you got out.

RIVER

Most of me.

She sets down her glass. Reaches for her purse. Pulls out a small bag.

ELIZABETH

Just once. Let's forget.

He hesitates. She doesn't push. Just waits, holding the moment between them.

River nods. She dips a key, offers it to him. They snort. Then--she kisses him. Soft. Slow. Sad.

They sink deeper into the water, the candlelight flickering on their faces. Neither says another word.

MONTAGE - SANTA MONICA - NIGHT TO MORNING:

A) River and Elizabeth stumble down the pier, laughing, high.

B) On the Ferris wheel - River grips the rail. Elizabeth kisses him mid-ride.

C) They make love under tangled sheets.

D) Elizabeth lies awake, tearful, watching River sleep.

E) Dawn creeps over the ocean. From the hotel balcony, they sit nude and watch the waves crash below.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

River traces her cheek.

RIVER

You look like a dream someone's afraid to wake up from.

ELIZABETH

I don't know how to stop.

RIVER

Stop what?

ELIZABETH

Feeling empty when the high fades.

RIVER

Your dad?

She nods.

RIVER (CONT'D)
Then let me stay awake with you.

She leans into him.

EXT. CAFE - DAY

They sit with coffee.

ELIZABETH
You know... you were my first.

RIVER
First?

ELIZABETH
Man. I've only dated women since I
was fifteen.

RIVER
Oh. Got it.

They laugh awkwardly. Then--her hand trembles. River gently takes it.

INT. VINTAGE SHOP - DAY

Elizabeth pulls a bold jacquard jacket from the rack.

ELIZABETH
Madonna!

RIVER
Spectacular.

EXT. VENICE BOARDWALK - DAY

They lie under a palm. Elizabeth stares at the horizon.

ELIZABETH
My father said music says what words
can't.
(softly)
Every Sunday, we'd drive to the
coast. Windows down. He'd hum Chopin
or Debussy.

RIVER

He sounds like someone who made the world feel safe.

ELIZABETH

I have to go to Berlin. Big show.
Fashion, art, music.
(beat)
Come with me?

RIVER

I wish I could. I have a play.

They sit in silence.

ELIZABETH

Then promise me one thing.

She leans close, whispering:

ELIZABETH

Remember me like this... before I disappear.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - DANCE CLUB - NIGHT

Elizabeth and River are lost in a passionate moment on the dance floor. Their bodies move together in a seductive rhythm, and their lips meet in a fiery kiss.

EXT. DANCE CLUB - NIGHT (LATER)

River and Elizabeth stand close together at the bar, their arms wrapped around each other. They talk softly to each other, their words indistinct. Then--

Elizabeth sees Maryka and a group of fashion MODELS approaching.

ELIZABETH

Oh, hey!

MARYKA

(smiles)
Ciao! Ciao! Party's here!

Maryka kisses Elizabeth on her cheeks, showing her affection. The fashion models dance gracefully around Elizabeth and River to the music.

ELIZABETH

I'm glad you could make it! This is my friend, River!

MARYKA

Hi!

RIVER

Hey, Maryka!

Maryka greets him with a quick, standoffish kiss on one cheek. River feels socially awkward.

River watches as Markya whispers in Elizabeth's ear.

ELIZABETH

(to River)

I'll be right back, all right?

RIVER

Where are you going?

Maryka quickly pulls Elizabeth away before she has a chance to reply. River, engrossed in drinking at the bar, senses that something is amiss.

EXT. DANCE CLUB - NIGHT (LATER)

River takes a sip of his drink and surveys the dance floor, his eyes scanning the CROWD in search of Elizabeth.

EXT. DANCE CLUB - NIGHT

Bass-thumping. Lights pulsing like a heartbeat. River pushes through the CROWD, drink in hand, his eyes scanning. He weaves past velvet ropes and private booths. Glitter. Sweat. Laughter. Then--

A hand grabs his waist.

River whips around—Elizabeth. But not the Elizabeth he knows. Her pupils are dilated. Lipstick smudged. She sways slightly, a dazed smile on her face, like she's in slow motion while the world spins.

RIVER

Elizabeth? Jesus—where have you been? I've been looking everywhere. Are you okay?

ELIZABETH

(grinning)

Of course I'm okay. I'm great,
River. Come on, baby—have a drink
with me!

She giggles and lurches forward, nearly spilling his glass.
He steadies her.

RIVER

You're not okay. Come with me. Now.

He gently but firmly wraps an arm around her, trying to guide
her out.

ELIZABETH

(tensing)

No. Let go of me.

She pulls back, losing balance. He steadies her again.

RIVER

I'm not leaving you like this.

ELIZABETH

(voice rising)

I said I'm fine! You're hurting me!

River lets go, stunned. Her eyes flash — anger and confusion
battling through the haze.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

You don't want to party? Then go. I
didn't ask you to come!

RIVER

Elizabeth, listen to yourself—this
isn't you.

ELIZABETH

Maybe you don't know me as well as
you think.

Maryka appears like a shadow, flanked by MODELS.

MARYKA

(to River)

Back off. You don't touch her again.

She wraps a protective arm around Elizabeth and glares at
him.

MARYKA (CONT'D)
 (to Elizabeth, softening)
 Come, chérie.

They start to pull her away. Elizabeth stumbles, then looks back—just for a second.

RIVER
 (shouting)
 Elizabeth! I love you!

She pauses—but doesn't respond.

Maryka turns, flips him the bird with a smirk. The models encircle Elizabeth like bodyguards.

River stands there, breathless. A man out of sync with the beat of the world around him.

A slow strobe. The moment stretches. He turns and disappears into the crowd.

INT. ELIZABETH'S HOTEL BATHROOM - NIGHT

Elizabeth stares at herself in the mirror, cocaine residue under her nose.

She rips off her eyelashes. Then--Elizabeth's eyes fall to a bottle of pills. She hesitates, then hurls it into the sink.

Elizabeth drops to the floor, shaking — grabs the conch shell from her purse. Clutches it to her heart.

INT. LOS ANGELES - FASHION HOUSE LOBBY - DAY

Elizabeth, still groggy, stumbles into the lobby. A powerful French DESIGNER fumes.

DESIGNER
 Where were you? The Berlin contract
 - it's gone!

Elizabeth opens her mouth, but nothing comes. She turns to leave, mascara smudged, heart pounding.

EXT. RIVER'S HOTEL ROOM - BALCONY - DAY

River stares at the ocean and sadly contemplates about last night.

He makes a call from his cell phone.

RIVER
 (into phone)
 It's like, three o'clock. Where the hell are you? What happened to brunch, dude? Yeah, give me a shout.

River hangs up the phone, then peers out at the ocean.

RIVER
 (to ocean)
 Goodbye.

EXT. SANTA MONICA - SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

River steps out of a taxicab standing before a trio of waterfront homes and speaks with the TAXI DRIVER.

The taxi pulls away. River walks towards Kaiden's home.

EXT. KAIDEN'S HOME - FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

River knocks. After a beat, he opens the unlocked door.

RIVER
 Kaiden! Hello! Hey, you here?

INT. KAIDEN'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

River looks around.

INT. KAIDEN'S HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

River gazes out the window at the vast, blue ocean.

INT. KAIDEN'S HOME - HALLWAY - DAY

River passes the bathroom, and up ahead, in another room, he hears instrumental music playing, then a faint CRY...

INT. KAIDEN'S BEDROOM - DAY

River bursts in-

The curtains are drawn. The room smells of sweat and something sour. Music skips on a worn vinyl, needle scratching softly in the background.

A SHADOW vanishes through the hallway.

River's eyes lock on Kaiden. Sprawled in bed. Still. His eyes wide. Glassy. Not blinking. A syringe dangles from the crook of his arm. Track marks bloom like bruised flowers.

River freezes. Steps closer. He touches his brother's neck. Nothing.

River inhales sharply—like the air's been sucked from the room. He drops to his knees.

RIVER
(voice breaking)
Kaiden... why'd you leave me like
this?

He yanks the syringe out and hurls it across the room—it CLATTERS violently into a wall, then silence.

Tears flood his face as he collapses onto the bed. His trembling hand reaches for a framed photo on the nightstand. Two boys. Fishing rods. Barefoot. Laughing. River stares at it, his thumb brushing over their younger faces.

He closes Kaiden's eyes with reverence. Leans in. Presses a kiss to his brother's forehead. Then--River lies beside him. Slowly. Carefully. Like he might wake him. Back to back. He curls into himself, the photo clutched to his chest.

EXT. PARIS - NIGHT

An aerial view of The CITY OF LIGHT.

SUPERIMPOSE: "TWO MONTHS LATER."

INT. PRACTICE ROOM - CONSERVATOIRE DE PARIS - NIGHT

A dim, empty rehearsal space. The soundproofed walls swallow the city beyond. Elizabeth sits at the piano, her back slightly hunched, hands trembling over the keys. She tries again — Chopin's "Nocturne" — but her fingers falter. She stops. Presses her hands into her lap. Breathes hard.

The door creaks open. NICOLE, 50s, kind-eyed with a lived-in grace, enters carrying a tote stuffed with sheet music. She pauses upon seeing Elizabeth.

NICOLE
Pardon. I didn't realize someone was
still in here.

Elizabeth quickly wipes her eyes, embarrassed.

ELIZABETH

It's fine. I was just... failing quietly.

Nicole chuckles, sets her tote down gently.

NICOLE

You're the girl everyone speaks highly of. The one with the storm behind her eyes.

ELIZABETH

I lost myself. I don't know how to come back.

NICOLE

Then don't come back. Become something new.

INT. IMEP PARIS COLLEGE OF MUSIC - HALLWAY - NIGHT

From the side entrance, Elizabeth peeks through the glass door at the performance on stage. A MALE CONTESTANT plays Bach's "Partita No.2 In C minor."

SUPERIMPOSE: "International Piano Competition for Outstanding Amateurs in Paris - Semifinals."

Elizabeth looks at her hands that tremble. She shakes them in the air and takes a deep breath.

INT. IMEP PARIS COLLEGE OF MUSIC - THEATER - NIGHT

Sitting in the front row, the SECOND GROUP OF JUDGES has their attention drawn to the stage, where Elizabeth sits in front of the piano playing Chopin's "Étude Op.10, No.3, in E major." Her technique and expression is deeply passionate. Elizabeth remembers--

INT. SUV - DAY - (FLASHBACK)

Two years earlier. Silence--then a high-pitched RINGING. Upside down. Glass everywhere. The world is inverted.

Elizabeth blinks awake, dangling from her seatbelt in the flipped SUV. Blood trails from her ears. Her breath rattles. She gasps--

ELIZABETH

Dad...?
(weak, stammering)
D-Dad... where--?

She cranes her neck, dizzy. Sees the shattered windshield—a gaping hole where her father should be. No sign of Claude.

Outside, shapes move—two PARAMEDICS crouched near the wreck, speaking to her. But she can't hear them. Everything is muffled. Her breath quickens.

ELIZABETH

Where is he?
(crying out)
Where's my dad?

One paramedic raises a metal window punch—
CRACK! The passenger-side window shatters, spraying shards.

They reach in—hands outstretched, voices still lost in the ringing. A glint of trauma shears—her seatbelt is sliced.

Elizabeth drops, crumpling into their arms, the world spinning into a blur of blood, panic, and missing pieces.

INT. IMEP PARIS COLLEGE OF MUSIC - THEATER - NIGHT

Elizabeth continues to play Chopin's "Étude Op.10, No.3, in E major." Tears fill her eyes as she continues to remember--

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. PARIS - INTERSECTION - DAY

Chaos. Sirens wail in the distance. Glass litters the asphalt like shrapnel. Elizabeth lies strapped to a stretcher, her face pale and streaked with blood.

The paramedics wheel her toward the waiting ambulance. Her gaze locks across the intersection—a mangled box truck. A crumpled SUV, flipped on its side. Then--

Claude. His body lies face down in the street, twenty feet from the wreck. Unmoving. Blood pooling beneath him.

Elizabeth freezes. Her breath catches. The ringing in her ears returns—deafening.

ELIZABETH

(whispers)
No... no...

Then louder—

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Dad!
 (weeping)
 No! Dad!!

She thrashes against the restraints.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Let me go! Let me go!
 Please—I need to get to him!

Her voice cracks—raw, desperate.

Across the scene, PARAMEDIC #3 gently unfolds a white sheet and lowers it over Claude's body.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

(anguished scream)
 No! Don't! Please—don't cover him!
 Dad!

The stretcher keeps moving.

Elizabeth sobs, reaching toward the lifeless shape as it vanishes beneath the sheet, the sirens drowning her cries.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

On her knees, Elizabeth laments in front of her father's gravestone.

INT. CHÂTEAU - ELIZABETH'S BEDROOM - DAY

Elizabeth sits on her bed reading an ACCEPTANCE LETTER from the Conservatoire de Paris.

Elizabeth becomes upset, tearing up the letter.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. IMEP PARIS COLLEGE OF MUSIC - THEATER - NIGHT

In tears, Elizabeth stares down at the ground, then peers up at the ceiling, as she continues to play Chopin's "Étude Op.10, No.3, in E major." Her tone is intense and emotionally charged.

Elizabeth loses focus and slams both hands on the piano keys, creating a harsh, discordant sound. From her seat, a judge gives a sudden jerk of her head.

Elizabeth clutches her stomach, breath faltering. She rises abruptly—stumbles off stage.

INT. IMEP PARIS COLLEGE OF MUSIC - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Elizabeth barrels through the glass door, holding her stomach, and SLAMS into a MALE CONTESTANT dressed in a tuxedo.

MALE CONTESTANT

Are you okay?

ELIZABETH

(shakes her head)

Don't.

(beat)

Just—don't.

Elizabeth glances down the hall and sees the judges following her bizarre behavior with disappointed reactions.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

(sighs with remorse)

Fuck...

Elizabeth hurries down the hall, opens the bathroom door, and enters.

INT. IMEP PARIS COLLEGE OF MUSIC - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Elizabeth drops to her knees, her body wracked with sobs. She clutches her stomach, then lunges forward and vomits into the toilet.

Her breathing slows. Shaking, she collapses onto her back against the cold marble floor. Above her, the ceiling fresco — a reproduction of *Michelangelo's The Creation of Adam* — looms overhead.

Her gaze locks on it. The painted ANGELS seem to stir in her vision, ethereal figures moving around GOD, reaching toward ADAM. Elizabeth stares up, lost — fragile, searching for connection in the silence.

INT. FASHION SHOW VENUE - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Behind the curtain, Elizabeth waits in line with ten MODELS. She's ailing, with dark circles under her eyes, and fixated on her trembling hands.

STYLISTS and DESIGNERS pace up and down the line, inspecting the frail MODELS. STYLIST #1 approaches Elizabeth, examines her embroidered, black lace gown, then looks into her eyes.

STYLIST #1
Are you feeling okay, honey?

STYLIST #1 feels Elizabeth's forehead.

STYLIST #1 (CONT'D)
Did you eat anything today?

ELIZABETH
(agitated)
Yes, I have, okay? I wish everyone would stop asking me that! I'm fine, okay?

STYLIST #1
(shocked)
Very well.

Stylist #1 walks to the next MODEL in line.

INT. FASHION SHOW VENUE - RUNWAY - NIGHT

Elizabeth and a crew of MODELS work the runway.

INT. FASHION SHOW VENUE - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Elizabeth walks through a crowd of MODELS, STYLISTS, and DESIGNERS. A beautiful, British model, CARA, passes by.

CARA
Marvelous job, Lizzy! You were fuckin' ace out there, mate!

Elizabeth smiles politely.

EXT. FASHION SHOW VENUE - STREETS - NIGHT

Limousines line the streets. Elizabeth smokes a cigarette. She's surrounded by MODELS and PHOTOGRAPHERS. Maryka approaches Elizabeth and kisses her on both cheeks.

MARYKA
Ciao, sexy girl! How are you, love?

ELIZABETH
Ciao! I'm fine. And you?

Maryka and Elizabeth walk towards a limousine. The CHAUFFEUR opens the back passenger door.

MARYKA

I need a drink after that show. Good Christ. Come.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, get me the hell out of here, will you?

Elizabeth and Maryka hop into the back of the limousine, and the chauffeur closes the door behind them.

INT. PARIS - PENTHOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A private gathering of twenty PARTY PEOPLE drinking and doing drugs. Elizabeth hangs beside Maryka on the sofa. A plate with a mound of cocaine is passed to Maryka. She exclaims with excitement, snorts a line, then passes it to Elizabeth, who does the same.

INT. PENTHOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Elizabeth staggers down the hall into--

INT. PENTHOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

JADE, MARYKA, and a few MODELS chill out in chairs. Cara is passed out on the bed.

JADE

Hey, Lizzy! Come in. Sit down.

Elizabeth glances over at Cara and then back at Jade, who holds up a syringe.

JADE (CONT'D)

Want to try, Lizzy? Best feeling ever. Like one thousand orgasms all in one shot. For you. You want?

Elizabeth nods, sits down beside Jade.

JADE (CONT'D)

Sit back, baby. Relax.

Jade wraps a belt around Elizabeth's arm. Her finger flicks the needle and injects the drug into Elizabeth's veins. Elizabeth takes a deep breath and falls back into the chair.

She gets a rush from the injection. Jade and Maryka exchange a glance.

MARYKA
(giggles)
Better than any classical piano
piece you will ever perform.

Elizabeth's eyes roll back into her head.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

A huge crystal blue wave crashes in with the force of the ocean.

INT. PENTHOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Maryka wakes up and looks over at Elizabeth. She's motionless, with bluish-colored lips.

MARYKA
Elizabeth?

Maryka kisses Elizabeth's face.

MARYKA (CONT'D)
Did you like it, huh? Fuck yeah, you
loved it, I bet, didn't you? You
know, I've always um... had this
strong desire to be with you.
Watching you strut down that runway.
So sexy.

She moves her hand up under Elizabeth's skirt.

MARYKA (CONT'D)
And I--hmm... I always wondered what
your pussy tastes liked. Wake up,
baby.

Maryka pulls back her arm and looks at her bloody hand.

MARYKA (CONT'D)
Elizabeth, wake up. Don't scare me.

Maryka steps away from her, notices Elizabeth's crotch area is saturated in blood.

MARYKA (CONT'D)
What the fuck!

Maryka runs out of the room.

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

Elizabeth floats beneath the bluish-green surface. It's quiet. Still. The surface fades farther away as she slowly sinks. Elizabeth looks up toward the light, but it gets smaller. She keeps sinking.

INT. PARIS - HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

A NURSE shines a light in Elizabeth's eyes. Elizabeth awakens, disoriented in bed.

NURSE

*Elizabeth, you're okay. Elizabeth?
You're in the hospital. Just relax.
I will bring the doctor.*

The nurse exits. Elizabeth looks around, trying to get her bearings. A moment later, the nurse re-enters with DOCTOR BRODEUR. He quietly closes the door.

DOCTOR BRODEUR

*Elizabeth, I'm Doctor Brodeur. Your
mother, she's outside. I need a word
before she enters.*

Elizabeth nods. The doctor looks over the test sheets.

DOCTOR BRODEUR (CONT'D)

*You know, there's this buzz going
around about you here with all the
female nurses.*

ELIZABETH

Pardon?

DOCTOR BRODEUR

*Yes, the nurses here in this
hospital. A little too crazy, I
think. They're fans of your work.
However, on a more serious note,
your blood work shows extremely high
levels of cocaine and heroin in your
system. You're very lucky to be
alive. I'm surprised that someone as
petite as you has such a high
tolerance.*

A beat.

DOCTOR BRODEUR (CONT'D)

Look, it's none of my business how you choose to live your life, but um...

(beat)

Elizabeth, are you aware that you were pregnant?

ELIZABETH

(shocked)

What?

DOCTOR BRODEUR

Ten weeks, you were, into the first trimester. It didn't survive. I'm so sorry you did not know. Perhaps things, maybe your choices, would've been different if you had known there was another life growing inside you.

Elizabeth, dismayed, rolls on her side, holding her stomach. Doctor Brodeur exits the room. Diane enters, rushes over to the bed, and hugs Elizabeth.

EXT. UPSTATE NEW YORK - CEMETERY - DAY

Tall pine trees stand behind River. Still and heavy. He kneels before three graves with three red roses in his hand. The last grave, to River's right, is new. The earth still soft. He places a rose on each one, slow and careful.

A wind passes through. The trees moved. River looks up at them, then shuts his eyes and listens. The wind in the branches. The quiet.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - DAY

River stands in the dirt, staring down at the concrete mansion foundation of his former home.

INT. UPSTATE NEW YORK - POST OFFICE - DAY

River stands at the counter. A CLERK hands him a bin overflowing with mail.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - BEACH - DAY

From the shore, River is troubled, skipping rocks across the water.

He reaches into his pants pocket and pulls out a piece of paper: "WATERTOWN FIRE DEPARTMENT." He reads the letter and envisions--

INT. KEPLEY ESTATE - CELLAR - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

Like fireworks on the Fourth of July, SPARKS from the WIRES in the HVAC UNIT rise above the WOODEN CRATES of wine and catch fire.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - BEACH - DAY

From the shore, River crouches down and bursts into tears. River's hand shakes as he pulls out his phone from his jacket, then dials a number and struggles to speak.

RIVER
Hey, hey, hey. Hi, how are you?
It's, it's me--

INT/EXT. NYC - PORT AUTHORITY - NIGHT

With his backpack, River exits through the doors and onto the busy streets.

INT. SUBWAY STATION - NIGHT

Surrounded by a crowd of people, River stands, lost in a daze. Trains and fellow COMMUTERS pass by him at an accelerated pace.

INT. DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - STAGE - NIGHT

Spotlight on River. He stands center stage, clutching the script.

RIVER (AS MACBETH)
I have no spur to prick the sides of
my intent..

His voice falters. His breath shortens.

He sees phantom flames flicker in the wings. Screams echo faintly.

The casting director leans forward.

MARIE DUCHAMP
Keep going, River.

River sways, fights the dizziness. His hands shake.

He abruptly walks off the stage.

INT. DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - GREEN ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

River chugs vodka from a hidden flask. Eyes bloodshot. He stares in the mirror, slaps his face, tries to steady himself. Fails.

INT. LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT

River stands at the register, watching as the CASHIER places his liquor bottle into a brown paper bag.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - ROAD - NIGHT

River walks beside the "WOLLMAN ICE RINK." It's empty, except for the workers wrapping up the busy workday. He sips the alcohol from the paper bag.

River stares ahead at the trees and the lighted Midtown BUILDINGS that barricade the park.

INT. RIVER'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

River sits at his desk, drinking from the liquor bottle. He ponders to himself, then pounds his fist against his cell phone on the desk, breaking it.

RIVER
Fuck you! Fuck you, you
motherfucker!

River weeps and holds his stomach, then leans forward, rocking himself back-and-forth.

INT. RIVER'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

River turns the faucet, and hot water pours into the bathtub.

INT. CHÂTEAU - BATHROOM - DAY

Steam rises off of the bathwater. With the phone up to her ear, Elizabeth stares at her disheartened reflection in the misty mirror.

RIVER
 (over phone; filtered)
 Hey, it's me. Hi. I'm sorry. I
 really need to speak with you.

Elizabeth dials her phone and listens to the phone ring.
 River's automated voicemail recording. Frustrated, she tosses
 her phone up against the wall.

ELIZABETH
 (softly to herself)
 I'm sorry, too.

Elizabeth climbs into the bathtub, exhales, leans back, and
 dips her head beneath the water. In tears, she opens her left
 fist.

INT. RIVER'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

River curls up in a bathtub filled with hot water. He opens
 his right hand, revealing a RAZOR BLADE. He glances at his
 wrists and remembers--

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. KEPLEY ESTATE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Two years earlier. Smoke thickens. Debris rains from above.
 River stumbles forward, coughing, his eyes red and wild. He
 bursts into--

INT. KEPLEY ESTATE - FOYER - NIGHT

An INFERNO. Flames claw up the curved staircase. The balcony
 overhead groans, ablaze, splinters falling like fire-rain.
 River freezes--awestruck and terrified--then bolts toward the
 stairs.

RIVER
 Someone! Please--answer me!

Each step groans beneath him. River climbs the staircase,
 unsteady--ash stinging his eyes.

He reaches the top--just as the stairs give way. CRACK--BOOM.

He leaps, grabbing for the upper balcony. His hand SNATCHES a
 burning rail. It CRUMBLES in his grip.

RIVER
 No--!

The railing shatters. River plunges with it.

River SLAMS to the marble floor. The back of his head hits hard. His body goes limp. Everything goes dark.

INT. KEPLEY ESTATE - FOYER - NIGHT (LATER)

A low groan. River stirs. His cheek pressed to the floor. Smoke dances above him. A scorched beam rests across the side of his face. He winces. Slowly pushes it off.

Charred skin peels away—revealing a fresh, seared wound: RED, RAW, EXPOSED.

He turns, eyes flickering. Overhead, flaming joists break free. Crash.

A pile of burning timber slams to the floor nearby. River gasps, rolls away just in time, his world flickering between pain and firelight.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. RIVER'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

With the razor blade, River severs the veins in his left wrist. He grimaces, raising his wrist in the air. Then-- River's blood spouts into the air and the water.

With his right hand, River rubs some blood from his left arm, and with bloody fingertips, he outlines a giant HEART on the porcelain tub tiles.

River lowers his arm into the bathtub. Blood diffuses into the water and trickles down the heart.

INT. CHÂTEAU - BATHROOM - NIGHT

A RAZOR BLADE severs Elizabeth's veins in both her wrists. She panics, then faints. Blood diffuses into the clear water.

INT. RIVER'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

An evil droning permeates the air. Immersed in blood, River opens his heavy eyes and sees--

In his mind, River's doppelgänger hovers above him. In the form of a grotesque, WINGED, BLACK DEMON, with EVIL RED EYES. In its grasp, a burnt TONY STATUETTE.

River GASPS for air as the black demon sits on the side of the bathtub.

As River reaches for the statuette with his lacerated wrist, the black demon grabs River's wrist and LICKS his blood, awaiting his final gasp.

INT. CHÂTEAU - BATHROOM - NIGHT

A similar droning echoes... Elizabeth opens her heavy eyes and sees--

In her mind, the atmosphere is a shade of SCARLET RED. Standing in the black doorway, a silhouette of a tall and petite BLACK FIGURE, with a round black hat and a long black dress, striking a pose in a pair of black stilettos. Its elbow rests against the side of the doorway, with a hand on its hip.

The black figure struts towards the bathtub, then, the black figure transforms into Elizabeth's doppelgänger in the form of a WINGED, BLACK DEMON, and lunges at Elizabeth. With terror, Elizabeth GASPS for air.

Hovering above Elizabeth, the black demon grabs her hand below her lacerated wrist.

ELIZABETH
(low-voice)
Please, I don't want to die...

With its piercing EYES, the black demon GROWLS, moving closer to her. Elizabeth fearfully sinks her head beneath the water.

INT. RIVER'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

As River lies submerged in a bloodbath, the black demon floats over him, holding River's wrist. Then--

The black demon sets then releases River's wrist in the water.

RIVER
Take me...

The black demon growls, inches closer to him. River sinks his head beneath the water and sees through the bloody water--

The black demon's face lurks at the surface. The glare from the ceiling light blinds River. He remembers--

INT. KEPLEY ESTATE - FOYER - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

Two years earlier. River lies sprawled on his back, dazed-- blood on his scalp, gasping through smoke-thick air.

A low, eerie groan of burning wood creaks overhead. He lifts his head. Through the choking black smoke, a shape emerges. Two glowing red eyes stare back. Unblinking. Inhuman. They hover within the rising embers like some spectral demon.

River freezes. Terrified.

RIVER
(screaming)
No! No!

KAIDEN (O.S.)
River! Where are you?!

From the haze—Kaiden bursts through, coughing, hunched, shielding his eyes.

KAIDEN
I see you! Hold on!

He tries to push forward—but a wave of heat knocks him back.

He looks up. The ceiling above River groans, buckling.

KAIDEN
Shit—!

Sparks rain down. Chunks of burning wood CRASH inches from River's body. Then--

Two FIREFIGHTERS grab Kaiden from behind.

KAIDEN (CONT'D)
No! No—my brother's still in there!
Let me go! You don't understand!

They drag him back toward the back door.

KAIDEN (CONT'D)
Save him—not me!
(struggling, desperate)
River!

River reaches toward him—arm shaking, vision blurred. Too late.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

The mansion is a skeletal blaze—a cathedral of fire. FIREFIGHTERS form a line, hoses blasting. Shouts echo.

River lies strapped to a stretcher, barely conscious. The left side of his face and arm is scorched.

He turns his head—eyes locked on the collapsing home. His childhood. His family. Everything—gone.

A single tear rolls through soot-covered skin.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. CHÂTEAU - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Diane enters and sees Elizabeth beneath the bloody water.

DIANE

*Elizabeth! Elizabeth! What is this?
Elizabeth!*

Through the bloody water, Elizabeth sees the black demon's FACE lurking closer to the surface. Diane reaches into the bathtub. Elizabeth's eyes flutter.

EXT. CHÂTEAU - BACKYARD - DAY

A view of the vineyard and the vibrant SUN setting quickly behind the vast horizon.

INT. CHÂTEAU - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Diane hauls Elizabeth from the bathtub. Her body is soaked, streaked with blood. She lays her daughter flat on the cold tile.

ON WHITE:

An image — a 19th-century MOSAIC of the Madonna and Child, shimmering in fractured shades of blue and gold. Beautiful. Still. Timeless. Then--the mosaic begins to melt. Pigments bleed like tears — the Madonna's face wavers, warps, and weeps. A golden halo bends, liquefies — swallowed by darkness.

INT. RIVER'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

River lies in the bathtub beneath the bloody water and sees the black demon's face beside the surface. Then--

The black demon's face with its SHARP FANGS penetrates the surface.

Cameron appears beside the black demon and reaches into the bathtub. The black demon ROARS fiercely, unable to thwart Cameron from pulling River from the water.

River lies on the bathroom floor, blinded by the bright light. His eyes roll back, and his body convulses in Cameron's grasp.

River's body stops shaking as he's carried towards the door, staring at the light. With his eyes wide open, River exhales his last breath and then loses consciousness.

INT. FRANCE - HOSPITAL - NIGHT

A group of DOCTORS, including Doctor Brodeur, and NURSES surround Elizabeth, who lies on the operating table. Doctor Brodeur pumps Elizabeth's chest while another hold's defibrillator paddles.

Diane watches in horror through an observation window as Doctor Brodeur punches Elizabeth in the chest.

DOCTOR BRODEUR
Elizabeth, come back! Come back to us!

Doctor Brodeur administers the defibrillator paddles.

DOCTOR BRODEUR (CONT'D)
Charging two hundred. All clear!

A long BEEP. The heart monitor shows FLATLINE. Doctor Brodeur administers the defibrillator paddles again.

DOCTOR BRODEUR (CONT'D)
Again! All Clear!

The heart monitor continues to FLATLINE.

INT. MOUNT SINAI HOSPITAL - E.R. - NIGHT

A SECOND GROUP OF DOCTORS and SECOND GROUP OF NURSES surround River.

DOCTOR #1
Come on, River! Come back! Damn it, come on! Don't give up! Fight, I say! Fight!

Doctor #1 lays defibrillator paddles on River. DOCTOR #2 desperately looks on.

DOCTOR #2
All right! Let's go! Charge two hundred! All clear!

A long beep sounds. The heart monitor screen shows FLATLINE--

EXT. SUNFLOWER PATCH - DAY (DREAM SEQUENCE)

River is situated within a magical-looking patch of tall, white SUNFLOWERS. He marvels at the glistening flowers, then steps forward.

Elizabeth's sparkling figure glows ahead. River steps toward her as light dances like diamonds on his skin.

River approaches Elizabeth. They now stand face-to-face, lost in each other's eyes. Their faces and bodies appear as sparkling silhouettes.

ELIZABETH
(softly, breathless)
You're really here.

RIVER
(taking her in)
I don't want to wake up.

ELIZABETH
Maybe we don't have to.

They share a long look. The sunflowers sway around them.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
I feel fabulous, like I could
levitate right now if I desired.

Elizabeth twirls like a prima ballerina.

RIVER
What--Holy shit! That's so awesome!

Elizabeth stops twirling, then walks with River.

ELIZABETH
River, could this be heaven, you
think? Oh, please tell me it is?

River caresses the side of Elizabeth's face with his shimmering hand.

RIVER
Well, it has to be then if you're
here.

River sees his hand dissipating into crystallized particles as it moves across her face. He holds his hand in place, and the particles re-form his hand.

River holds up his hand in front of Elizabeth's face. He blows on his hand, and it explodes into a million sparkling particles and then reshaping his hand. Elizabeth smiles in astonishment.

An EVIL DRONING rises. The sky darkens with clouds, and a strong wind follows blowing the flowers back and forth. Elizabeth hugs River. Their concerned eyes survey the area.

ELIZABETH

What's happening?

RIVER

I don't know.

ELIZABETH

Promise, please don't let me go.
Stay beside me?

RIVER

I'm here. I won't ever let you go, I promise.

The gleaming sunflowers wither away. Their decayed heads descend to the ground, shattering into pieces.

ELIZABETH

I was pregnant. I was. And it was yours. I'm very sorry.

RIVER

(somber)
What?

ELIZABETH

I didn't know. I swear. I was abusing drugs. I'm ashamed. Forgive me?

Elizabeth hugs River and weeps.

RIVER

Shh... It's okay. It's okay. Shh...
I'm here. Stop. Don't cry.

A shattered flower glints on the ground. Elizabeth crouches, lifting it with delicate care, the light catching every fragment of its sparkle.

Elizabeth and River watch as the sun breaches the clouds. The darkness moves across, covering the breach. They see Elizabeth's hands as the leaves of the glistening flower wither away, shattering into dust and carried off by the wind.

The storm strengthens, blowing debris and dead flowers in every direction. The darkness inches closer to River and Elizabeth, and so does the ear-splitting DRONE sound.

RIVER (CONT'D)

We need to go now! Come on! Run,
Elizabeth! Go, go, go!

Sprinting away from the darkness. River and Elizabeth see the storm surge towards them. Black clouds spit out bolts of lightning. Suddenly--

River stops, enveloping Elizabeth in his arms, and using his body as their shield, he kisses her. Amid the tender moment, the menacing darkness reaches for them. Then--

A RAY OF INTENSE LIGHT punctures the sky and reflects on River and Elizabeth. As they kiss, River and Elizabeth dissipate into a million STAR-SHAPED PARTICLES and get carried towards the light.

INT. MOUNT SINAI HOSPITAL - E.R. - NIGHT

River's EYES open. He gasps for air.

DOCTOR #1 (O.S.)

That's it! Breathe! Keep breathing!
We got you, man! Keep breathing!
You're okay! Just breathe!

River sees the second group of doctors and the second group of nurses hovering above him. Behind them, a bright light hangs from the ceiling.

DOCTOR #1

Welcome back, River. How was the
ride?

INT. FRANCE - HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Doctor Brodeur sighs with relief. A HEARTBEAT pattern pulse from the monitor. Sinus rhythm.

INT. MOUNT SINAI HOSPITAL - E.R. - NIGHT

In bed, River is petrified and breathing heavily.

EXT. CHÂTEAU - VINEYARD - MORNING

The warm glow of early morning sunlight reflects on the GRAPE VINES.

INT. CHÂTEAU - ELIZABETH'S BEDROOM - DAY

Cloaked in a white blanket, Elizabeth lies on her side, shivering as she stares out her window at the sunshine. Sweat pours down her face. A plastic bucket rests on the ground beside the bed.

Diane enters and walks over to the bed.

DIANE
(concerned)
My God, Elizabeth, you're sweating!

Elizabeth leans over the bed beside the bucket.

ELIZABETH
Mom, I feel gravely ill.

Diane leans over and raises the bucket in front of Elizabeth's face.

DIANE
Hold on. Hold on. It's going to get all in your hair.

With one hand, Diane holds back Elizabeth's hair as she VOMITS into the bucket.

DIANE (CONT'D)
That's it. Mom's here. Now lay back down. Come on. You need to rest. Lay down, sweetie.

Elizabeth leans back in bed. Diane places the bucket on the floor and stands beside the bed.

DIANE (CONT'D)
Honey, please don't shut me out like this anymore. Please speak to me. I can feel your pain.

With a blank expression, Elizabeth wipes away some vomit from her lips.

DIANE (CONT'D)
(upset)
Dammit, Elizabeth! What's happened to my daughter?

Diane smacks the bed. The sound cuts through the silence—sharp, provoking.

Elizabeth jerks upright, trembling with rage. Her eyes flare. Her voice quivers—barely contained.

ELIZABETH

Get out! Get out of my room! Leave me alone!

Diane looks at her daughter in disbelief.

DIANE

How dare you--

ELIZABETH

Mom, I can't take this anymore! I'm tired! I'm so tired of everything!

Diane cries, leans down, and hugs her daughter.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Mom, please! Please! Can't you see, I'm not well?

DIANE

Yes, I can see it. Don't you know how much I love you? You're all I have left! Don't you understand that?

In arms, they lie crying in bed.

ELIZABETH

Mom, I miss him so much!

DIANE

I know you do, honey. I miss him, too. It wasn't your fault. It wasn't your fault.

EXT. CHÂTEAU - FIELD - DAY

Elizabeth rests on her back in a small patch of variegated WILDFLOWERS. She holds a lavender flower, picking off the petals from its stem--

ELIZABETH (V.O.)

(delicately)

Refinement... Desire...

Elizabeth covers her right eye with her right hand and gazes up at the CLOUD FORMATIONS that move across the deep-blue sky.

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

Passion...

She removes her hand from her eye and places her left hand over her left eye and stares at the clouds.

ELIZABETH (V.O) (CONT'D)

Love...

DIANE (O.S.)

*Elizabeth? My love? Are you outside?
Please, answer me.*

ELIZABETH

Yes, Mom! I'm here!

DIANE (O.S.)

*Ah, good. Thank God. I'm making your
favorite—the veal, with the cream
sauce... it's roasting just how you
love it.*

INT. CHÂTEAU - ELIZABETH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Moonlight spills through the curtains, catching the black lacquer of the piano. Elizabeth plays the opening measures of *Clair de Lune*—soft, tentative, dissonant.

She stops. A beat. She sighs. With a pencil, she furiously scratches out a bar of notation on her staff paper, her hand trembling. She tries again—new treble and bass clef lines—but her fingers won't settle. Then--

A single drop of blood hits the paper. She freezes. Another drop follows, smearing into the ink. A red crescent forms across the notes—a silent wound on the music itself.

Startled, she pinches her nose, tilts her head back.

ELIZABETH

(under breath)

Shit...

EXT. CHÂTEAU - SIDE YARD - NIGHT

It's pitch dark. Every few paces, Elizabeth nervously glances up at the dim windows of her home. She quietly pushes her Vespa across the grass and onto the paved driveway.

INT. MOUNT SINAI HOSPITAL - PATIENT'S ROOM - DAY

From his wheelchair, River stares out the window at the busy Upper East Side traffic. Then--Marie Duchamp enters, holding onto the door. River turns around.

MARIE DUCHAMP

Hey! Hope you don't mind; I brought
some company with me.

Marie, Cameron, and River's theater classmates enter.
Surprised, River chuckles softly as they gather around him
with warm smiles.

EXT. LINCOLN CENTER - NIGHT

River stands alone near the fountain, the city buzzing behind
him. He clutches the photo of him and Kaiden – faded, worn.
He speaks, softly.

RIVER

I didn't save you.
(beat)
I couldn't.
(beat)
But you'll be there. Every night. In
every breath. Every pause.

He tucks the photo into his coat.

RIVER (CONT'D)

I'll burn it down. The fear. The
shame. All of it.
And I'll build something honest.

He walks toward the theater – a different man than the one
who left. A man who's become his art.

INT. NYC DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - THEATER - NIGHT

A dim, almost reverent hush fills the space. Marie Dushamp
sits in the back row with a clipboard in her lap. Beside her:
Jonah, confident, polished – watching, waiting.
A few faculty members sit in the shadows, quietly observing.

River Kepley steps out onto the stage. His movements are
spare, deliberate. He doesn't wear a costume – just black
rehearsal clothes. But the weight of everything he's lost
clings to him like armor. His parents. Kaiden. His scar.

RIVER (AS MACBETH)

*She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for
such a word...*

His voice is quiet at first. Not weak – intimate. Personal.
Every syllable pulled from the bottom of something broken.

RIVER (AS MACBETH) (CONT'D)
*Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and
 tomorrow,
 Creeps in this petty pace from day
 to day...*

He begins to pace – slowly – the way grief does.

JONAH watches, arms folded. Confident at first – then something shifts. A flicker of uncertainty.

River stops. Turns out to the empty house.

RIVER (AS MACBETH) (CONT'D)
Out, out, brief candle!

He touches the edge of his facial scar – not to hide it, but to summon it. He lets the pain fuel him.

RIVER (AS MACBETH) (CONT'D)
*Life's but a walking shadow, a poor
 player
 That struts and frets his hour upon
 the stage,
 And then is heard no more.*

Marie leans forward in her seat, caught.

RIVER (AS MACBETH) (CONT'D)
*It is a tale told by an idiot,
 Full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing.*

He doesn't bow. He doesn't move. Just lets the silence breathe. And then--applause. From Marie. From the faculty. Even Jonah lowers his eyes, humbled. Marie rises.

MARIE DUCHAMP
 Thank you, Jonah.
 (beat)
 River... the role is yours.

River stares at her, stunned. Disbelief cracks into quiet pride.

MARIE DUCHAMP (CONT'D)
 You didn't just speak the words.
 You lived them.
 (beat)
 Welcome to Macbeth.

River finally breathes. Not just air. *Relief. Ownership. Rebirth.*

INT. MARIE DUCHAMP'S OFFICE - NIGHT

MARIE sits with a cup of tea. River paces, restless.

RIVER

You ever feel like there's two of you? The one onstage, and the one you bury six feet down?

MARIE DUSHAMP

Every actor who's worth a damn does.

RIVER

This scar - it's not just on my face. It's in every line I try to say. I don't know how to perform without it stealing the scene.

MARIE DUCHAMP

Then let it. Let it steal the scene - because it's true. The best actors bleed.

RIVER

If I fail again... I'm not sure I'll get back up.

She steps forward. Puts a hand over his.

MARIE DUCHAMP

Then don't perform for us. Perform for them.

River's eyes fill with tears.

RIVER

My family?

She nods. Silence.

MONTAGE - VARIOUS

A) INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM - DAY - Marie Duchamp sits patiently in a chair, reading a magazine.

B) INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - DAY - River stares at the ceiling in his therapist's office. Silent.

- C) INT. RIVER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - River is curled up in a ball beneath the blankets, shivering and sweating.
- D) INT. RIVER'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT - Standing in front of the mirror, River works on his micro-expressions: surprise, fear, disgust, and anger.
- E) INT. MARIE DUCHAMP'S OFFICE - DAY - Marie and River sit on the sofa, each holding onto a script, rehearsing a scene inaudibly.
- F) INT. THE NYC DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - STAGE - NIGHT - In front of the class, River and Jasmine rehearse a scene inaudibly as Marie Duchamp follows
- G) INT. RIVER'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT - Deep in thought, River stares out his window at the aircraft flying high above.
- H) INT. THE NYC DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - STAGE - NIGHT - River and the other classmates sit and listen as Marie Duchamp explains something indistinctly.
- I) INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - DAY - River speaks indistinctly to the therapist.
- J) INT. RIVER'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT - River continues to work on his micro-expressions: contempt, sadness, and happiness.
- K) EXT. LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT - From the sidewalk, River peers into the glass window at the bottles of liquor on the shelves, then walks away.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. RIVER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

River has covered the walls with Macbeth lines, notes, and photos of war and fire.

He recites:

RIVER
"Out, out brief candle..."

River hurls a book. Punches the wall. Rips the script. Breath heaves as he paces. Looks at the vodka bottle. Picks it up.

A beat.

He puts it down.

RIVER (CONT'D)
No. Not tonight.

He returns to the page. Lights a candle. Whispers again.

RIVER (CONT'D)
"...Life is but a walking shadow..."

He keeps going. Slower. Deeper. More honest. His voice cracks – but it's real.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

River sits in front of the mirror under dim bulbs, already half in costume for *Macbeth*.

A small jar of stage makeup sits open beside him. He dabs the sponge into it, then lifts it to his face. He stops. Stares at his reflection. The scar across his cheek glares back under the lights.

After a long moment, River takes a tissue and wipes the foundation from his face.

He looks again – the full scar exposed. No fear. No mask. He sets down the sponge.

RIVER
(quietly, to himself)
Let them see.

He stands, shoulders back, and walks toward the stage.

INT. THE NYC DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - HALLWAY - NIGHT

River passes by STAGEHAND #1 and STAGEHAND #2, each carrying a PROP.

STAGEHAND #1
Excuse us.

River moves out of their way against the wall.

STAGEHAND #2
Good luck out there.

RIVER
Thanks, man.

INT. THE NYC DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - STAGE - NIGHT

Dim lighting followed by a fog cloud, eerie sounds, and thunder sound effects. Three ACTRESSES appear as the nomadic witches, huddled around a fire on the right side of the stage.

ACTRESS #1
(as Witch #1)
"Where hast thou been, sister?"

ACTRESS #2
(as Witch #2)
"Killing swine."

ACTRESS #3
(as Witch #3)
"Sister, where thou?"

INT. THE NYC DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - STAGE - NIGHT (LATER)

A spotlight touches down on the left side of the stage. In its light, two actors appear: River as MACBETH and DOMINIC, 26, as BANQUO. They're staring suspiciously at the witches.

RIVER
"Speak, if you can: what are you?"

INT. THE NYC DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - STAGE - NIGHT

In the center of the stage, Macbeth and Banquo stand. The witches circle an intrigued Macbeth and suspicious Banquo.

ALL WITCHES
"Hail! Hail! Hail!"

ACTRESS #1
"Lesser than Macbeth, and greater."

ACTRESS #2
"Not so happy, yet much happier."

ACTRESS #3
"Thou shalt get kings, though thou
be none: So all hail, Macbeth and
Banquo!"

ACTRESS #1
"Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!"

INT. THE NYC DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

River sips from a water bottle. Marie Duchump coaches and speaks indistinctly with him.

INT. THE NYC DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - STAGE - NIGHT

In the center of the stage, River as Macbeth stands. A light shines on his face.

RIVER

"Is this a dagger which I see before
me?"

River holds up his right hand and wiggles his fingers as if he were stroking a dagger.

RIVER (CONT'D)

"The handle toward my hand? Come,
let me clutch thee. I have thee not,
and yet I see thee still. Art thou
not, fatal vision, sensible To
feeling as to sight? Or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false
creation, proceeding from the heat
oppressed brain?"

River holds down his right hand into the dark, then holds it back up into the light. He now grasps a shiny, fake dagger.

RIVER (CONT'D)

"I see thee yet, in form as palpable
As this which now I draw."

INT. THE NYC DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - STAGE - NIGHT (LATER)

In the center of the stage, rests a king-sized bed with JEREMY, 25, as KING DUNCAN, lying in it. Macbeth stands over him, one hand over his mouth, the other plunging a dagger into his chest. The piercing sound effects carry Jeremy as King Duncan's muffled scream throughout the theater.

INT. THE NYC DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - STAGE - NIGHT

A castle room. Side-by-side, River as Macbeth and another STUDENT, 24, who portrays SEYTON, stand beside Jasmine, who plays LADY MACBETH. She's lying down in a bed, eyes closed and motionless. River as Macbeth gazes into the audience.

RIVER

"She should have died hereafter;
there would have been a time for
such a word.
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-
morrow, Creeps in this petty pace
from day to day"--

INT. THE NYC DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - STAGE - NIGHT (LATER)

River as Macbeth parries and jousts with Orion, 25, who
portrays MACDUFF.

RIVER

"Lay on, MacDuff, And damn'd be him
that first cries, 'Hold, enough!"

Orion as Macduff stands behind a wounded River as Macbeth,
who's on his hands and knees.

Orion as Macduff thrusts his sword into the heart of River as
Macbeth, and as River as Macbeth painfully grabs his chest,
he watches as a bright-red rose petal delicately floats down
in front of him, landing on his left scarred wrist.
Intrigued, River raises up his left hand, examining the
petal.

INT. THE NYC DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Marie Duchamp and Jasmine exchange a weird glance.

INT. THE NYC DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - STAGE - NIGHT

River continues to scrutinize the petal, then more fall like
snowflakes. He peers up at the balcony area. In his mind, the
audience morphs into:

Elizabeth is suspended in darkness, arrayed in a layered, red
dress, made up of rose petals, pouring down upon River. In
horror, Elizabeth peers at River.

She desperately reaches down to River and with a high-pitched
scream--

ELIZABETH

River!

River reaches out to Elizabeth and bellows in helpless agony
before fading into darkness.

Collecting himself, River dives back into character, staring intently out into the audience.

RIVER
 "...a tale told by an idiot, full of
 sound and fury, signifying nothing."

Silence.

In pain, River as Macbeth falls on his side to his demise. The audience rises up out of their seats and applauds.

The curtain falls.

INT. BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Cast celebrates - but River walks alone down the hall.

He finds a quiet mirror. Studies his reflection. Scar and all. A single tear falls. Then, he smiles.

From behind, Marie Duchamp appears.

MARIE DUCHAMP
 You did it, River.

He nods. Emotion washing through him.

RIVER
 I did it for them. But I think... I
 finally did it for me, too.

INT. THE NYC DRAMATIC ARTS STUDIO - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT (LATER)

All cast members, hand in hand, bow in front of an applauding audience. Standing to the far left of the chain, River smiles contently to the crowd. Then--

He immediately exits off to the side of the stage. Other cast members watch him leave and look at each other with confusion.

INT. JFK AIRPORT - TERMINAL - DAY

A MALE CLERK behind the check-in counter hands River a ticket.

INT. JFK AIRPORT - CONCOURSE - DAY

River hands his boarding pass to the FEMALE CLERK at the gate.

She scans his ticket and hands it back to him with a courteous smile. The sign above the gate reads, "Paris, France."

EXT. JFK AIRPORT - RUNWAY - DAY

A wide-body AIRCRAFT takes off.

INT. FASHION SHOW VENUE - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Elizabeth sits in a chair, staring at her sick reflection in the mirror. MAKEUP ARTIST #2 applies a blush to her cheeks. Elizabeth's eyes wander down to her wrists. She anxiously stares at her scars and rubs her fingers across them.

INT. FASHION SHOW VENUE - STAGE - NIGHT

The AUDIENCE is captivated by the genuine glitz and glamour of the MODELS on the catwalk. Elizabeth sashays down the runway.

INT. FASHION SHOW VENUE - STAGE - NIGHT (LATER)

Encore. The CROWD erupts when Elizabeth walks out hand in hand with the show's middle-aged, featured FEMALE DESIGNER.

INT. FASHION SHOW VENUE - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Elizabeth walks to the back of the stage behind the velvet curtain. She receives high praise and kisses from DESIGNERS and fellow models. Elizabeth forces a smile.

INT. FASHION SHOW VENUE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Elizabeth stands nude before a mirror. She raises her arms to the side, posing like Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*. A riveting tattoo outline of a RED HEART cascades down her spine.

Elizabeth dresses in her street attire with the bathroom stalls to her back. She hears MUMBLING and LAUGHING between two WOMEN from one of the stalls. Then--

In the mirror, Elizabeth sees Maryka and a gorgeous young model, JAMIE, 22, exit a stall, wiping their noses.

Maryka approaches the mirror. She sets her purse on the countertop, spilling out a few possessions: a cell phone, a vial of cocaine, lipstick, a gold cigarette case, and a syringe. Maryka examines her nostrils. Then--Elizabeth watches as Maryka applies lipstick in front of the mirror.

MARYKA

How have you been, darling? I don't see you much anymore.

ELIZABETH

I'm good. Just been really busy. How are things with you?

In Elizabeth's mind: Maryka is an enigmatic figure, her features shrouded in mystery, and her voice takes on an eerie distortion.

MARYKA

You know, as some Americans say:
"Same shit, different day."
(giggles)
Just work, that's all. Non-stop.
Congratulations on booking the
Versace AW25 campaign. I'm so
jealous.

Elizabeth rubs her eyes.

MARYKA (O.S.)

(jokingly)
And I don't know who you had to
sleep with to land that job, either?

Elizabeth looks at Maryka, who is faceless. Then--Elizabeth walks to Maryka and, intrigued, extends out her hand.

MARYKA (CONT'D)

Hey, what's up? Are you okay, love?
You don't seem like yourself.

Elizabeth steps backwards.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, I don't--

Maryka giggles. Now fully dressed, Elizabeth notices the SYRINGE on the countertop sink. She stares at her reflection in the mirror and--

In Elizabeth's mind, her reflection in the mirror is of herself cradling a BABY in her arms. She takes the child's hand and both wave. Then--

Elizabeth sees the creature's grotesque HAND grab her shoulder. Elizabeth snaps out of her trance, shaken up. In the mirror, Elizabeth sees Jamie with an OBSCURED FACE, standing behind her, with a hand resting on her shoulder.

JAMIE

Hey, you all right, Lizzy?

ELIZABETH

I apologize. I'm just a little
fatigued from the show, that's all.

Elizabeth glances at the syringe and snatches up her purse. She looks at Maryka and Jamie with their faces now back to normal. Confused, Elizabeth backs up into the stall and opens the door.

INT. FASHION SHOW VENUE - BATHROOM STALL - NIGHT

Elizabeth, neurotic, sits on the toilet seat. She reaches into her purse and pulls out her vial of drugs. Ready to indulge, then looks down at the floor and sees--

In her mind, she sees a BLACK MAMBA slithers around her ankle and up her leg.

ELIZABETH

(leans up)

No-no-no! Please, no! Get off me!

Elizabeth jumps up, drops the vial between her thighs into the toilet, and flushes it away. The snake DISAPPEARS. She sits back on the toilet seat, sighs with relief, then covers her face with both hands and weeps.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

*What have I done? Fuck. What have I
done? God, help me. I'm sorry. No
more. I love you. Help me. Please,
help me.*

INT. PARIS - AIRPORT TERMINAL - NIGHT

River pulls his luggage across the floor.

FEMALE AIRPORT ANNOUNCER

(over PA; filtered)

*All passengers must keep in touch
with their baggage.*

EXT. PARIS - NIGHT

A panoramic view of The City of Light.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

River exits a cab with his luggage. He stands on the curb and looks up at the sign on the building. It reads, "Gare d'Austerlitz."

INT. TRAIN STATION - NIGHT (LATER)

River reviews the departure information on the LCD BOARD.

INT. TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

River reads an English-to-French translation book as COMMUTERS pass by.

He approaches an OLDER MAN.

RIVER

Excuse me.

OLDER MAN

Yes, young man?

RIVER

(haltingly)

Train to Chateaudun?

The older man launches into an animated response as River struggles to keep up with his translation book.

INT. TRAIN STATION PLATFORM - NIGHT

River boards a train with his luggage.

INT. TRAIN - DINING CAR - DAY - TRAVELING

River sips a cup of espresso.

INT. TRAIN CAR - DAY - TRAVELING

From his seat, River stares out at the country sights as the sun rises.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

River walks with his luggage on the rural platform. A TRAIN passes by. The sign on the old stone building reads, "Chateaudun."

I/E. TAXICAB - RURAL ROAD - DAY - TRAVELING

River gazes out at the scenic view as a country vineyard glides by in the distance.

EXT. CHÂTEAU - DAY

A taxicab drives off, leaving River with his luggage in the stone-paved circle in front of the château. River reads a piece of paper, then walks over to the front door and rings the bell. No answer.

He peeks in through a window beside the door. River walks along the side of the château, investigating, and he sees a sprawling vineyard in the back.

River approaches the vineyard and looks up at a sign beside the vineyard. It reads, "Château Moreau." He gazes out at the vast vineyard.

DIANE (O.S.)

Can I, sir, help you?

River sees Diane exiting the vineyard with a basket in her hand. He nervously pulls out his English-to-French translation book from his back pocket, opens it, and flips through the pages. Diane eyes the cover of his book.

DIANE

Sir, it's okay. I speak English.

RIVER

Okay. Nice.

DIANE

You're American?

RIVER

I am.

DIANE

How can I help you? Are you here for a wine tasting?

RIVER

You know what; I'm not even sure if I'm in the right place or not. I have--

River holds up the piece of paper in his hand.

RIVER (CONT'D)

--this paper and--

ELIZABETH (O.S.)

*Mom! Mom! My back is really hurting!
I need a break!*

Elizabeth exits the vineyard, holding a basket filled with grapes. Suddenly, River and Elizabeth LOCK EYES. Then-- Elizabeth drops her basket, grapes spill out onto the grass.

RIVER

Hey!

ELIZABETH

River? What a surprise!

Diane looks on as River and Elizabeth rush into each other's arms.

RIVER

How are you? Are you okay?

ELIZABETH

You came all this way for me?

RIVER

Of course, I did. I miss you.

ELIZABETH

(smiles)

I miss you, too. I honestly thought I'd never see you again.

Elizabeth kisses River.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Mom, this is River. Remember, I spoke of him the other day.

DIANE

Oh, yes! I remember. Welcome, River!

Diane walks over and kisses him on both cheeks. They converse indistinctly.

EXT. CHÂTEAU - VINEYARD - DAY

Elizabeth and River take a stroll through the vineyard.

RIVER

So how long have you lived here?

ELIZABETH

My entire life. This place has solely been in my family since it first opened, nearly, I'd say, a hundred and twenty years ago. My great-grandfather was its founder.

RIVER

Man, that's wild!

ELIZABETH

It comes with a great deal of responsibility, too, for my mother, now that my father has passed on, but--

RIVER

Yeah, it must be pretty tough for her, I imagine.

EXT. CHÂTEAU - VINEYARD - DAY (LATER)

In front of some grapevines, Elizabeth and River lean over a large basket filled with clusters of grapes covered in moist paper towels. Elizabeth plucks a grape from the bottom of a cluster, bites it in half, and hands it to River.

ELIZABETH

Go on. Taste it. Tell me what you think.

River places what's left of the grape in his mouth and chews it.

RIVER

It's sweet. It's very sweet, actually.

ELIZABETH

(smiles)

Yes? You sure about that?

River nods. Elizabeth kisses him.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Good. Because this is how we determine if the cluster is ripe and ready to be picked.

Elizabeth sets her harvest knife over the cane at the base of the vine.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

And... when you're ready, you want to make your cut here.

Elizabeth cuts the cane and places the cluster in the basket.

EXT. CHÂTEAU - YARD - DAY

River and Elizabeth walk alongside the outside row of the grapevines, speaking indistinctly. River carries the basket filled with grapes.

River sets the basket on top of the picnic table. They sit down together and relax. As they stare out at the sunset, River takes notice of Elizabeth, who begins to shiver.

RIVER

Are you cold? Hold on.

Elizabeth looks at River with sad eyes. River places his comforting arms around her.

RIVER (CONT'D)

Come here. It's okay. Let me warm you up.

Elizabeth sinks her head into his chest.

INT. CHÂTEAU - DEN - NIGHT

Elizabeth shows River the framed, black-and-white photographs hanging on the wall. Then, she points to a photo of her father as a YOUNG CHILD standing in-between his PARENTS.

ELIZABETH

See, that's him, my father. And those are my grandparents.

RIVER

Oh, wow. He's so tiny, huh?

ELIZABETH

Well, I think most people at that age are quite small, don't you agree?

Elizabeth and River chuckle.

RIVER

Yeah, touché. Not sure why I just said that.

River continues to examine the photos of her family tree.

INT. CHÂTEAU - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

River drinks sparkling water as he sits with Diane and Elizabeth eating and speaking indistinctly at a candlelit table. Elizabeth and Diane sip wine.

Elizabeth smiles politely and then, with concern, stares down at her hands that fidget with her fork and knife. Then--

ELIZABETH

(impulsively)

River, you've not seen Paris yet, have you?

RIVER

No, not yet. Why?

Diane picks up on Elizabeth's erratic behavior.

ELIZABETH

Great! Let's go for a quick ride then, shall we? Let me show you The City of Light.

Elizabeth jumps up and bumps the table. River and Diane trade a surprised glance.

DIANE

(concerned)

Elizabeth? Come on, stay home. It's been a long day for us.

ELIZABETH

(to Diane)

What? What for? Don't worry. I'm good, Mom.

(to River)

What do you say?

RIVER
Absolutely! Yeah, let's do it.

River stands up.

DIANE
Elizabeth--River, my apologies, it's not a good idea. Not tonight.

RIVER
(bewildered)
Oh! Okay, no worries.

Elizabeth slams her hand against the table.

ELIZABETH
Mom, stop it! You're embarrassing me!

DIANE
Elizabeth, but--

ELIZABETH
But nothing! It'll be fine, I said. We'll be out for just a few hours. I want to be accommodating and generous to our guest, okay, Mom?

Diane nods her head in defeat. River is perplexed.

EXT. CHÂTEAU - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Elizabeth starts her Vespa, then texts on her phone and puts it in her purse. She grins, accelerates. River fumbles to keep up.

ELIZABETH
(giggles)
Come on, slowpoke! I guess I'm going to Paris alone then, huh?

RIVER
(laughs)
No! Hold on a second. What do you want me to say? I have a big head!

Elizabeth pulls away.

ELIZABETH
See you later! Ciao! Ciao!

River chases her.

RIVER
Hey, wait up! Stop! Where you going?
Wait for me!

Elizabeth slows down, and River hops on the back. He wraps his arms tightly around her waist.

RIVER (CONT'D)
I've never rode on one of these
things before!

River and Elizabeth drive away.

EXT. PARIS STREETS - NIGHT

The Vespa cuts through Paris like a blade.

Elizabeth laughs, fearless, untouchable. River clings behind her—terrified, alive.

She doesn't slow for lights.

RIVER
(shouting over wind)
Elizabeth—

Elizabeth laughs harder.

EXT. CHAMP DE MARS - NIGHT

The EIFFEL TOWER explodes in light.

River spins, overwhelmed. A child seeing magic for the first time. Elizabeth watches him. For a moment—she's sober. Present.

Elizabeth's phone BUZZES. The spell breaks. She turns away. Takes a pull from her flask.

EXT. DANCE CLUB - NIGHT

Elizabeth and River walk towards the front entrance. Her Vespa is parked on the street. There's a line of PEOPLE waiting to enter.

RIVER
What are we doing here?

ELIZABETH

I don't know. I just want to grab a drink real quick. If that's okay with you?

Elizabeth smacks River on his butt.

RIVER

(laughs)
Oh, damn! All right. Yeah.

ELIZABETH

We won't be long, I promise.

Elizabeth and River walk up to the entrance holding hands. The BOUNCER greets Elizabeth and kisses her on both cheeks. Then--he unclips the velvet rope barrier and allows Elizabeth and River to enter.

INT. DANCE CLUB - NIGHT

Bodies collide. Bass rattles bone.

Elizabeth moves like she owns the room. River doesn't.

At the bar--the TATTOOED BARTENDER hugs Elizabeth. A whisper. A nod.

A shot appears. Elizabeth doesn't look at River before drinking it. River watches. Then--

The bartender leans in. A subtle exchange. A small bag of drugs disappears into Elizabeth's palm.

She turns to River, flashing a smile that arrives too fast. They lock eyes. He knows. She knows he knows.

RIVER

(low)
You don't need that.

ELIZABETH

(smiling, airtight)
I'm fine.

She kisses him--not tender. Strategic. River doesn't kiss back.

A beat.

Elizabeth pulls away. Not ashamed. Offended.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
(low, dangerous)
Don't.

She turns—melts into the crowd.

River stands there, motionless, bodies slamming past him, sweat and sound and strobe swallowing the space where she was. He searches. Nothing.

The music surges—louder, faster, and carries her away.

EXT. CLUB - NIGHT

Elizabeth's Vespa idles under a streetlamp. River sits on the curb beside it, phone pressed to his ear.

RIVER
(voicemail)
Hey—uh... it's me. Just—call me back,
okay?

He hangs up. Tries again. Straight to voicemail.

EXT. CLUB - NIGHT (LATER)

The Vespa hasn't moved. River paces now. Checks the entrance.

Bouncers lock the doors. Chain the gate. They leave.

The street empties. River's face drains of color.

EXT. SAINT-MARTIN CANAL - DAWN

Mist curls above the water. Elizabeth sits on the ledge.
Small. Exhausted.

River approaches. For a moment—he sees something beside her.
A shadow. Wings? Or nothing at all.

He blinks. It's gone. Elizabeth doesn't look at him.

ELIZABETH
(quiet)
You ever get tired of yourself?

River sits.

Elizabeth opens her fist. Cocaine. She studies it like a relic.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

This is the only thing that doesn't
leave.

River doesn't answer.

Elizabeth throws the bag into the canal. It's gone instantly.

She breaks. Not pretty. Not loud. Just devastated. River
holds her. Elizabeth lets herself be held.

EXT. MARMOTTAN HOSPITAL - PARKING LOT - DAY

Diane, Elizabeth, and River stand in front of the red-brick
facade, with the printed sign above the entrance: "Hopital
Marmottan."

Diane and River embrace Elizabeth. Then--a FRENCH NURSE
appears in the entrance doorway. Elizabeth anxiously steps
towards the French nurse, then stops and turns back around.
River and Diane smile and wave to her.

Elizabeth and the French nurse head in through the doorway.

INT. PARIS - FASHION HOUSE - DESIGNER'S OFFICE - DAY

A sunlit room of Parisian elegance--tall windows, soaring
ceilings, and quiet opulence.

Racks of couture garments form sculptural shadows against the
walls. A silver tray with untouched espresso cups sits
between two armchairs.

Elizabeth stands tall, poised. Her complexion clear, eyes
bright--centered. She wears minimal makeup, effortless beauty.
There's a calm self-possession in her silence.

She stands opposite MADELEINE LAROCHE, 50s, elegant,
formidable -- the creative director of a major French fashion
house.

An ASSISTANT zips a couture dress on a mannequin nearby.

MADELEINE

Your face is the brand, Elizabeth.
The Milan campaign launches in two
weeks. Runways. Billboards. Vogue
covers.

(beat)

Why jeopardize that?

Elizabeth's eyes drift to a photo on the wall -- herself in a
gold dress at Cannes. Vacant eyes behind red lips.

ELIZABETH

Because I don't recognize her
anymore.

Madeleine raises an eyebrow.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I used to play piano in the dark...
just to hear something true.

(beat)

Now I spend more time being lit than
being alive.

Madeleine sighs, leaning back.

MADELEINE

You'll walk away from all this? The
contracts? The name?

Elizabeth smiles softly.

ELIZABETH

You call it a name. I call it a
costume.

A beat.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I want to play Chopin... in a room
that doesn't need me to be
beautiful.

MADELEINE

You're making a mistake.

ELIZABETH

Maybe. But at least it'll be mine.

She steps toward the door. Then turns back.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Thank you. For everything.

Madeleine watches her leave. Silent. Almost impressed.

EXT. PARIS - LEFT BANK - DAY

Elizabeth walks alone along the Seine. No cameras. No heels.
Just wind, trees, and the sound of a street musician playing
a Debussy prelude on a worn upright. She stops. Listens. And
smiles - a real one.

She continues walking. Free.

EXT. PARIS - SORBONNE COURTYARD - NIGHT

River and Diane converse indistinctly, as they walk toward the SORBONNE CHAPEL, surveying the historical buildings structure and the arrangement of statues.

SUPERIMPOSE: "TWO YEARS LATER."

INT. AMPHITHEATER AT THE SORBONNE - NIGHT

The venue is filled and comprised of MUSIC ENTHUSIASTS. River and Diane walk through the entrance and see a large sign resting upon an easel. The sign reads, "33rd International Piano Competition for Outstanding Amateurs in Paris: finals."

The six finalists HEADSHOTS appear side-by-side, in two rows; five finalists being MALE, and the sixth being Elizabeth. Beside each photo, a brief background description: profession, educational experience, country of nationality, and desired performance pieces.

River and Diane take a moment to look over the sign. Elizabeth's headshot is greatly admired by both of them.

RIVER

Oh, man! This is so great, isn't it?

DIANE

Yes, it's incredible. She's worked so hard to get back here. I'm so proud of her.

INT. AMPHITHEATER AT THE SORBONNE - WINGS - NIGHT

Elizabeth stares at the piano. She breathes deeply.

ELIZABETH (V.O.)

This is for the man who hummed
Chopin with the windows down. For
the girl who searched beaches for
shells that weren't there. For the
woman who chooses sound over
silence. I'm not afraid anymore.

INT. AMPHITHEATER AT THE SORBONNE - STAGE - NIGHT (LATER)

To welcoming applause, Elizabeth walks across the stage to the piano. She's wearing a black, full sleeve, shining sequined dress.

INT. AMPHITHEATER AT THE SORBONNE - NIGHT

From the audience, Diane and River cheerfully clap their hands as Elizabeth walks across the stage.

INT. AMPHITHEATER AT THE SORBONNE - STAGE - NIGHT

Elizabeth smiles politely, bows to the audience, and sits down at the piano. She looks at her hands; they no longer tremble. Then--

Elizabeth closes her eyes, breathes sharply through her nose, and exhales slowly through her mouth. Confidently, Elizabeth opens her eyes, caresses the keys, and plays "Suite Bergamasque, L.75: III. Clair de Lune" by Claude Debussy.

INT. AMPHITHEATER AT THE SORBONNE - NIGHT

As Diane and River watch Elizabeth play, Diane places a hand over her mouth.

DIANE
(astounded)
Oh! My favorite piece.

INT. AMPHITHEATER AT THE SORBONNE - STAGE - NIGHT

Elizabeth continues to play "Suite Bergamasque, L.75: III. Clair de Lune." The sound is breathtaking, and her transitions are masterful.

INT. AMPHITHEATER AT THE SORBONNE - NIGHT

With tears of joy, Diane continues to watch her daughter play and remembers--

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. FRENCH RIVIERA - BEACH - DAY

Claude and Diane lift Young Elizabeth out of the ocean. She beams with joy and giggles as her parents swing her back and forth.

EXT. FRENCH RIVIERA - BEACH - DAY

Beside the water, Young Elizabeth cheerfully walks with Diane and Claude, who are on opposite sides holding her hand.

EXT. FRENCH RIVIERA - BEACH - DAY (LATER)

All smiles, Claude, Diane, and Young Elizabeth use their hands to mold a gigantic SANDCASTLE.

EXT. FRENCH RIVIERA - BEACH - DAY

Sitting in the sand, Young Elizabeth rests in Diane's arms as they peer out at the miraculous SUNSET. Diane kisses Young Elizabeth on the cheek. Then--

Claude sits down behind Diane and Young Elizabeth and wraps his arms around them.

YOUNG ELIZABETH

Dad! Dad, look!

Young Elizabeth points at the sun, and Claude gazes out at the rosy-colored sky.

CLAUDE

I know. I know, sweetie. It's marvelous, isn't it?

YOUNG ELIZABETH

(nods)

Yeah!

Suddenly, Claude gently whispers in Diane and Young Elizabeth's ears. Then--

Diane tenderly looks at Claude.

DIANE

I love you.

Claude kisses Diane.

YOUNG ELIZABETH

I love you, Dad.

CLAUDE

(smiles)

I love you, too, darling.

Claude kisses Young Elizabeth on the cheek.

As a family, they quietly gaze out at the sky.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. AMPHITHEATER AT THE SORBONNE - NIGHT

In tears, Diane watches Elizabeth conclude "Suite Bergamasque, L.75: III. Clair de Lune."

INT. AMPHITHEATER AT THE SORBONNE - STAGE - NIGHT

Elizabeth concludes her piece. Then--she pulls back her hands from the piano and places them on her lap. In an instant, the venue ignites with enthusiastic applause.

INT. AMPHITHEATER AT THE SORBONNE - SAME

SPECTATORS rise, applauding. Diane and River, stand up and applaud.

INT. AMPHITHEATER AT THE SORBONNE - STAGE - NIGHT

Elizabeth rises, receiving a standing ovation. She smiles gratefully and takes a bow.

Elizabeth scans the audience and catches sight of Diane and River, their applause vibrant and full of encouragement.

In Elizabeth's mind: Claude appears beside Diane and River. He uses his hand to blow a kiss to Elizabeth. Then--Elizabeth responds with a kiss.

INT. AMPHITHEATER AT THE SORBONNE - STAGE - NIGHT (LATER)

Elizabeth stands with the other five FINALISTS, eagerly listening to the competition's DIRECTOR announce the winner.

COMPETITION DIRECTOR
This year's "International Piano
Competition for Outstanding
Amateurs" goes to Elizabeth Moreau!

INT. AMPHITHEATER AT THE SORBONNE - SAME

River and Diane, ecstatic, embrace.

COMPETITION DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Congratulations, Elizabeth!

INT. AMPHITHEATER AT THE SORBONNE - STAGE - NIGHT

Elizabeth graciously receives high praise from the other finalists. She walks to the competition's director, receives a kiss on both cheeks, then accepts her miniature grand piano AWARD. Delightfully, Elizabeth faces the audience with her award and smiles.

Her eyes connect with Diane.

INT. AMPHITHEATER AT THE SORBONNE - SAME

River and the audience applaud. As Diane claps her hands, she connects eyes with Elizabeth. With heartfelt sincerity, Diane nods then raises her fists in the air.

INT. AMPHITHEATER AT THE SORBONNE - STAGE - NIGHT

Elizabeth sees Diane raise her fists in the air. Overwhelmed with joy, Elizabeth chuckles and wipes away tears from her eyes.

EXT. AMPHITHEATER AT THE SORBONNE - COURTYARD - NIGHT

Cheerfully, Diane kisses Elizabeth on the cheek and hugs her. River follows with excitement.

INT/EXT. NYC - TAXICAB - NIGHT

Elizabeth and Diane exit onto--

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - INTERSECTION - NIGHT

It's the Christmas season. Snow descends on Elizabeth and Diane as they walk excitedly across the busy crosswalk and talk indistinctly.

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Elizabeth and Diane approach the Broadway Marquee Theater where *Les Misérables* is playing.

They stand in line with the other ATTENDEES.

INT. BROADWAY MARQUEE THEATER - NIGHT

Diane and Elizabeth comfortably grab a seat, holding their PLAYBILL BOOKS.

DIANE

My God, Elizabeth, I was just an adolescent, modeling in Paris, when I first took in this play.

INT. THEATER - STAGE - NIGHT

A glaring SPOTLIGHT beams down on, JOHN, 50, portraying the BISHOP, as he holds firmly two silver candlesticks. River, as VALJEAN, stands beside the Bishop, wearing a filthy and torn up jail suit. Two ACTORS dressed as POLICEMEN face the Bishop and Valjean, but suddenly they turn and exit the stage.

The Bishop holds out the candlesticks to Valjean, who accepts.

INT. THEATER - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Diane and Elizabeth are being escorted down the hall by SAMANTHA, 25, wearing a microphone headset and carrying a clipboard. They pass by several WORKERS and STAGEHANDS carrying equipment and props.

SAMANTHA

Oh, I hear nothing but great things from River, about upstate.

ELIZABETH

Yes, it's quite scenic this time of year. Right, mom?

DIANE

Oh, yes. It's quite lovely. I certainly enjoyed my stay.

They stop in front of a closed door. River's name is printed on a big STAR. Samantha opens the door.

SAMANTHA

Well, it was so nice to meet you both. Hope to see you again real soon.

Samantha hugs Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

Thanks. You too. Likewise.

Samantha hugs Diane.

DIANE

A pleasure to meet you. Be well.

INT. THEATER - RIVER'S DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT (LATER)

River converses with Diane. Elizabeth leans on his shoulder.

RIVER

(to Diane)

Everyone here is very professional.
We're pushing each other during
rehearsals. That's the key.
Perfecting your execution on the
stage, you know?

DIANE

(hugging him)

You lit up the stage.

RIVER

It almost didn't happen.

DIANE

But it did. And you were brilliant.

ELIZABETH

You were great, honey.

Elizabeth kisses him on the cheek.

RIVER

Oh, thank you. You're both so sweet.
(chuckles)
Yeah, this ride's been quite the
experience. I'm still growing every
day as an actor and enjoying it.

DIANE

(to River)

Christmas in France next year,
right? You're coming. Don't forget.

RIVER

Oh, I most certainly won't. You can
count on me. I'll be there.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - BEACH - DAY

A view of a peaceful and calm body of water.

SUPERIMPOSE: "SUMMER."

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - LAKE - DAY

A view from the lake frames the sandy beach and the wooden dock. The stone wall rises high above the cliff, surrounded by blossomed trees.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - BEACH - DAY

A view from the beach of River standing at the helm of his family's SCHOONER, sailing across the water. Elizabeth stands beside him with her arms wrapped around him.

EXT. LAKE - SCHOONER - DAY

At the helm, River stands beside Elizabeth, both smiling and gazing up at the flock of BIRDS dancing high in the sky.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - DAY

The beautiful country estate with a newly built, gothic-style MANSION.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - GARDEN - DAY

Beside the mansion, a flourishing vegetable.

INT. RIVER'S HOME - DEN - DAY

River stands in front of a new display case, staring at two replacement TONY STATUETTES. Behind each statuette, a memorable photo of his father and mother accepting their awards. Also, a framed photo lies of Kaiden and River standing together at his film premiere. Then--

Elizabeth enters and embraces him.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - DEN - NIGHT

Elizabeth sits at a piano. She's composing - raw, unfiltered, original.

River watches, silent, as the music grows. Elizabeth looks up. He smiles. She's whole. Not perfect. But whole.

River moves and spins around her and the piano. He leans down behind Elizabeth and kisses her on the cheek, then places a red rose on top of the piano. Surprised, Elizabeth blushes and smiles. River continues moving around her and the piano.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - WALL - DAY

River and Elizabeth perch on the stone wall, staring out at the angelic sky. River places his hand on Elizabeth's PREGNANT STOMACH.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - BEACH - DAY

Holding hands, River and Elizabeth smile at each other as they walk beside the water.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - SIDE YARD - DAY

River and Elizabeth walk across the grass and into--

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - FOREST - DAY

River and Elizabeth maneuver around trees and step over dead branches.

River holds a branch out of the way for Elizabeth, who steps through.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - FOREST - DAY (LATER)

River and Elizabeth continue their trek, both peering up at the sky. Shafts of light glimmer upon the leaves.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - FOREST - DAY

River and Elizabeth approach a gentle stream. They step on large stones sticking out of the water and cross over.

EXT. KEPLEY ESTATE - REMOTE CLEARING - DAY

River and Elizabeth step from the forest into a meadow bathed in unearthly light.

Elizabeth freezes, her breath caught.

ELIZABETH

Oh my God...

Above them, a single point of light blossoms into nine concentric rings, turning in silence. Beyond: rock spires, fruit-heavy trees, birds that sparkle like fragments of stars. A waterfall pours silver into a turquoise pool.

Elizabeth squeezes River's hand – both trembling at the sight.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

The sunflowers...
You thought I forgot.

River looks at her – his eyes break, then soften.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

The most beautiful things...
We don't earn them.
They just arrive.

They reach the pool's edge. Elizabeth gazes down. A school of fish glides in circles, their scales aflame with color.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Look...

River takes her into his arms.

RIVER

I love you.

ELIZABETH

And I love you.

They kiss. Soft, endless.

The heavenly light surges – dissolving the meadow into a dreamscape.

MONTAGE - MEMORY INTERCUTS

A) A young River and young Kaiden in the backyard, chasing fireflies in a jar – their laughter pure, fleeting, untouchable.

B) Young Elizabeth at the piano. Her father's hand steady on hers, guiding her through the notes.

C) River in a hospital bed, swathed in bandages. His eyes beg the ceiling for release.

D) Elizabeth gripping her father's body beneath a white sheet, a scream ripping from her chest.

E) A vodka bottle shatters. A cocaine key trembles in Elizabeth's hand.

F) Their first kiss – fragile, broken, necessary.

G) River as Macbeth, his voice trembling, eyes burning alive.

H) Elizabeth at the piano competition – faltering, then rising, reclaiming the music.

I) Fire devours the Kepley estate. Above it, a halo of flame shimmers – half angel, half demon – etched forever into River's soul.

The images smash together—FIRE. MUSIC. BLOOD. LOVE. They burn into a neon-red heart, its outline blazing, cascading down like liquid light.

FADE OUT.

THE END