

A W R Y: *The Other Sides* (PART 1)

written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. FOG — DAY

A world of white. Snow drifts -- slow, weightless. Almost too quiet.

Hamza (17, African, in a three-piece Hausa kaftan and hula) stumbles through thick fog. No road, no horizon. Lost.

He pulls out his phone. Flashlight on. The beam stops a few feet out.

He spins with the light -- the fog swallows everything.

A HUMAN SHAPE forms beside him. Same height. Same build.

Hamza bolts the other way.

INT. ABANDONED TRAIN STATION — DAY/DARK

A brutalist hall: long concrete platforms, repeating pillars, dead fixtures. Fog clings low to the ground.

A service staircase bolts up a wall.

Hamza slips under and wedges into the shadow. Broken treads and iron stringers screen him from view. Phone light off. Still. Silent.

FOOTSTEPS. Slow. Deliberate.

Out of the fog -- HAMZA'S DOPPELGÄNGER. Same clothes. Same face. Yellowed whites visible all around the wide irises. Never blinks. Face smooth -- disconnected from natural human emotion. Like it's "wearing" humanity wrong.

It waits. Then walks toward him -- up the stairs. One step. Another. Stops.

Hamza tightens his grip on a piece of metal. Shallow breaths.

A sudden CLANG echoes somewhere in the station.

The thing turns. Starts down again. Expression unchanged.

A rock flies in and smacks its head. It barely reacts, just reorients.

A silhouette ahead -- its attention drawn.

Behind the double --

AMANDA, 14, older now, sharper, scared but steady, drives a fence spear (a single spear-point snapped from a gate) clean through its back. She twists.

A thin, two-note wheeze leaks out. Inhuman. Not pain. Wrong.

Amanda immediately yanks free. STABS again. Yanks. Raises for a head strike --

It spins. Amanda is flung; her forearm scrapes concrete. She scrambles, keeps the spear.

MRS. AKARI (Asian, early 40s, beautiful, 1920s kimono) rushes in with a rebar hook, the end wrapped in cloth.

MRS. AKARI

Amanda!

She slams the rebar into its face -- one eye clouds over. The creature holds the bar, its other hand clamping her throat. Its mouth tears open -- impossibly wide. A smile from hell.

Amanda spears its thigh, yanks. It buckles.

Mrs. Akari shoves hard, staggering it back and freeing herself. She swings the rebar into its head, knocking it from the platform to the tracks below.

Hamza crawls out. Metal in hand. He inches forward -- careful. Watching.

ON THE TRACKS: The double writhes. A leg bent. It struggles to stand.

ALFIE, 25, English, 1930s (flat cap, suspenders, scuffed black overcoat), drops down from the opposite side with a battered baseball bat.

He swings.

One. Two. Three. He keeps going. Wet, sick thuds. Head reduced to pulp.

The body sags, grays, melts to sludge. Only a dark patch remains.

Silence. Only their breathing remains.

Amanda lowers her spear, hands trembling.

She looks at Hamza.

HAMZA

Who -- who are you people?

MRS. AKARI
 (Japanese; subtitled)
 Friends. If you do what we say,
 that is.

Hamza blinks -- he understands her perfectly.

That only deepens the fear.

HAMZA
 I --
 (tries again)
 Where... where is this? My phone
 says service -- then nothing.

His eyes drift back to the tracks.

HAMZA (CONT'D)
 And that thing, it was wearing my
 face!

Another beat. Quieter now. Certain.

HAMZA (CONT'D)
 That's... that's not human.

A NOISE ripples in the empty station -- close.

Alfie tosses the bat up first, hauls himself onto the
 platform, picks it -- a quick flip. Not for show, just habit.

Amanda grips Hamza's sleeve.

AMANDA
 Don't talk. Move with us.

They go. Tight. Toward a shadowed exit.

EXT. SERVICE LANE OUTSIDE STATION - DAY

Low-sheeting fog. Lazy snow.

Above -- a gray sky with a green sickly hue. The clouds don't
 move; they twitch, pulsing faintly with a dull, sour glow.

The four emerge. Alfie in front, Mrs. Akari beside him. Hamza
 with Amanda.

Hamza catches a flake, rubs it between his fingers -- a
 chalky white smear remains.

ALFIE

(low)
Keep tight. Eyes up. No chatter.

MRS. AKARI

(Japanese; subtitled, to
Hamza)
Stay between us. Match our pace.

HAMZA

Y-yeah. Okay.

AMANDA

(to Hamza, soft)
Do like they say. We gotta be
quiet.

They move. Careful. Controlled.

Behind them, A WOMAN (Mid-30s) staggers into the lane --
shaking. Breathing hard.

WOMAN

(Frantic)
Help! Please -- where am I? What's
happening?!

Alfie glances back.

ALFIE

(quiet)
Another stray?

AMANDA

Or bait.

The group hesitates.

Alfie starts toward her. Mrs. Akari catches his elbow,
staring past the woman.

Over her shoulder, a pale figure forms in the fog -- ANOTHER:
Female, asian features, pale skin, bloodshot eyes with deep
brown-red shadows etched beneath. A child, barely fourteen.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

Go! NOW!

Alfie catches it too and pivots.

WOMAN

Don't leave me -- PLEASE!

She turns, sees the figure full on. A scream tears out. She runs, reaching for the group.

They do not slow. Her cries vanish, swallowed by mist.

EXT. BACK STREETS - DAY

They run, hearts pounding. A skimming sound follows -- not footsteps.

They burst onto a wider road -- and stop. Ahead, more of THEM, "THE OTHERS" (Multiple Another) -- levitating inches off the ground. A wall of pale faces.

AMANDA

(urgent)

Right! We cut right -- we can still
make town from here!

They break right. Amanda slips and goes down hard.

ALFIE

I've got you!

He doubles back, scoops her up.

Hamza looks back. Mrs. Akari pulls his arm.

MRS. AKARI

(Japanese; subtitled)

No stopping! Move!

Hamza sprints with her.

EXT. THRESHOLD ROAD - TWILIGHT

The fog thins ahead. Snowflakes hang, then vanish at an invisible line. Same street, here: fog, snow and daylight; there: clearer air, late afternoon. A divide, like two rivers meeting.

Mrs. Akari and Hamza push through first. Hamza stumbles into the clear, running on instinct. Mrs. Akari stops, waiting at the line.

Behind, Alfie charges with Amanda over his shoulder; pale hands close behind.

ALFIE

Hold on!

He drives forward and leaps through.

They crash onto the clear side. Mrs. Akari hauls Amanda up.

Alfie straightens, breathing hard. He faces the boundary. The Others hover just beyond, unable to cross. A dozen identical faces stare back at him.

Layered whispers -- soft, dreadful.

THE OTHERS
(soft, together)
Not your turn. Soon. All of you.
Soon.

The faces tilt in unison, then drift back into fog.

Amanda winces, testing her ankle. Alfie keeps one hand on her elbow and nods down the clearer street.

ALFIE
We're not waitin' on a second
invite. Let's Move.

They go. Amanda's voice overlays.

AMANDA (V.O.)
This world ain't just one strange
place... it's towns. Every one got
its own rules... an' something
watchin' over it. Andrew, he told
me that once... but here, the rain
don't just fall. It picks who it
want.

EXT. EMPTY STREET - CONTINUOUS

Behind: light mist. Ahead: clear air. Hamza walks with Amanda. Alfie walks in front. Mrs. Akari walks beside him.

AMANDA (V.O.)
That first drop... people say it a
blessin'. But it ain't. It's a
trade. You get your luck... but
come the end, somebody you love get
took.

A BODY slumps against a wall.

A CALICO CAT with a collar hops onto its shoulder. Sniffs. Settles.

MUSKULE THE CAT
 (subtitled; muttering)
 Warm enough. I'll start at the soft
 parts.

Amanda stares at the body -- pity flickers, she forces it
 down.

AMANDA (V.O.)
 That last drop... it mean death.
 Might come slow, but it always
 come. Nobody ever know when.

A faint PATTERN starts somewhere distant -- not here.

AMANDA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 They say the Rain Man used to be a
 boatman, drowned back home... then
 turned up here. Walk the showers
 carryin' an umbrella, handin' out
 fate one drop at a time.
 (scoffs)
 Sound like pure foolishness to me.

Mrs. Akari glances up, uneasy.

AMANDA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Whatever it is, them things from
 the other side barely step through
 here. Maybe that's the Rain Man
 workin'. Sure Woulda been nice if
 he got to it sooner.

Hamza watches the cat bite the dead body's ear, unsettled.

Amanda never looks away from the road.

EXT. EMPTY STREET - CONTINUOUS

Hamza checks his phone. Full bars. He dials. No call
 connects.

He tries again. Nothing. His thumb trembles on the glass.

HAMZA
 Come on... answer. Just... answer.

Silent. His face tightens. Scared. Angry.

Mrs. Akari watches, calm and curious.

MRS. AKARI
 (in Japanese; subtitled)
 Is that... a telephone?

HAMZA
 (as if to himself)
 Yeah. It shows service. But... my
 calls, somehow keeps getting cut
 off.

He startles. Her words keep landing clean in his head.

Alfie glances at it.

ALFIE
 Our girl's got one too. Different
 kind. She calls it a BlackBerry.
 Looks nuffin' like that.

Amanda looks once. Then looks away.

HAMZA
 I have some questions.

ALFIE
 Save 'em. You'll meet the rest in a
 minute. Don't bet on answers.

Hamza swallows.

HAMZA
 The last thing I remember...
 (pauses)
 My father found a... snow globe. A
 strange man gave it to him. He said
 it granted wishes.
 (beat)
 At first, it worked. Everything he
 asked for came true. He was... he
 was about to win the governorship.
 I went to tell him that --
 (beat; voice falters)
 Then... the floor was not under me
 anymore. And I was here.

They fall silent. Alfie exhales. Amanda slows, voice soft.

AMANDA
 That's how it go... for all of us.
 Somebody close make a bargain they
 don't rightly understand. That snow
 globe -- it just the Snowman's
 trade, dressed up pretty.
 (MORE)

AMANDA (CONT'D)

You end up here 'cause somebody
wished the wrong way.

Alfie halts just long enough for Amanda to breathe, then flicks his chin down the street.

ALFIE

We're losin' light. Let's move.

They continue in silence.

Hamza notices chalk-dust scattered around a manhole. Above each patch, the air shimmers cold.

Amanda brushes his arm -- gently guiding him back to the group. No words.

AMANDA

(soft)

We're safe here... for now.

A far, hesitant patter starts... and stops. Like a thought that changed its mind.

EXT. HIDEOUT - TWILIGHT

A pre-war storefront. Boarded windows. A heavy door, slightly-open. Alfie knocks -- three times, same rhythm twice.

INT. HIDEOUT - TWILIGHT

Leaks of thin light. A sealed room. A long table. Weapons laid out -- makeshift: rebar, fence spears, scrap blades.

The group enters.

At the front: MEI, 14, Chinese. Hoodie up, earphones in, BlackBerry glowing. She yanks it out, hurries to Amanda, and folds into a hug.

MEI

(Mandarin; subtitled)

You took forever. I was worried
sick.

Amanda hugs her back. A small, rare smile.

AMANDA

We had company.

Mei glances at Hamza, then notices the scrape on Amanda's arm, frowns.

From the table, RUTH, English, 30s, stands with a crowbar. Beside her: JOÃO, Brazilian, 16, work shirt; LEO, American, 27, windbreaker.

Ruth approaches Alfie. Her eyes flicker to the mess on his bat.

RUTH
All of you in one piece?

ALFIE
More or less.

She nods, then studies Hamza.

RUTH
And the lad?

ALFIE
New guy. We pulled him out from under the trains. The fog side.

A half-beat. Hamza reads the room.

Amanda glances at him, expectant. A barely-there nod.

Hamza takes it.

HAMZA
Hamza.

Ruth inclines her head -- acknowledgment. Not unkind. Not warm either.

RUTH
I'm Ruth.
(motions)
These are... Mei, João, and Leo.

Alfie jerks his chin at Ruth, casual.

ALFIE
Where's Elsie's lot?

Ruth's face shutters.

RUTH
Out past the mills. An errand. They haven't come back.

ALFIE

How long?

RUTH

Could be a few hours, or more.
Can't be sure.

A beat. Everyone feels it.

Mei's gaze keeps sliding to Hamza. The iPhone in his hand.
Curious.

MEI

(in Mandarin; subtitled)
Yours is nicer than mine. What
year'd you drop from?

HAMZA

(slow)
2024?

Mei nods, impressed. She taps at her scuffed BlackBerry

MEI

(in Mandarin; subtitled)
I'm 2011. Not the newest anymore

JOÃO

(in Portuguese; subtitled)
'59. Lisbon.

LEO

2002.

RUTH

1978.

ALFIE

Alfie. 1932.
(motions across)
Mrs. Akari. 1920-something.
(nods to Amanda)
Amanda. '42.

Mrs. Akari gives a small bow.

MRS. AKARI

(in Japanese; subtitled)
1923.

Hamza blinks, trying to hold it all.

HAMZA

...How am I -- I don't speak --

AMANDA

(saving him)

You ain't gotta. Not here. Don't matter what you speak -- it all sound the same soon enough. You'll hear us clear.

(beat)

Fog an' chalk... they keep the creatures on they side. This side... it safer.

(beat)

Safer... not safe.

RUTH

(gestures at the chalk residue on the door)

It's slipping in. Chalk appears in new places. They get through when the fog does.

(soft)

We used to be more than this.

Hamza stares at the chalk scuffs, flashes to the body they passed.

AMANDA

In this town... you don't starve. Can't say why.

(beat)

An' time... it don't behave right, neither.

From Hamza's POV -- everyone now speaks in English.

MEI

(jumping in)

True. My battery's been stuck at nineteen percent for... I don't even know.

(rolls her eyes)

I've listened to the same songs a thousand times. Played BrickBreaker till my thumbs hate me.

(to Hamza)

Please trade me? Just for variety?

HAMZA

(shocked, to himself)

You were being serious?

MEI

(brightening)

-- Serious. And, I put my number in yours. You put yours in mine.

(MORE)

MEI (CONT'D)

If we split... and we always split
-- we can call each other.

AMANDA

(sighs)

It ain't gon' work Mei. You done
tried when you first came. Calls
don't work here... remember?

MRS. AKARI

(curious)

Let her try. Nothing else doing.

All eyes watch, equally curious.

Mei is already near hamza, quick fingers stretched out.

Hamza unlocks. They swap phones. She saves her number in his
contacts, then dials.

The BlackBerry VIBRATES and RINGS in his hand. Everyone
watches -- small technology, big miracle.

JOÃO

It works?

(laughs)

Yes. They work!

Hamza hastily takes his phone, tries calling out again. No
connection.

He exhales, returns the iPhone to Mei.

RUTH

(thinks, soft)

Inside the line -- maybe. Or 'cause
we're close.

Mei grins, triumphant.

MEI

(grinning)

There. Now two groups can talk, at
least across town.

(to Ruth, bright)

When third comes back we could --

-- A SCRAPE at the door. Everyone turns.

A shape slides through --

Muskule the cat walks in, collar crooked, muzzle smeared
dark. A strip of human flesh dangles from her mouth.

She walks straight to Mei, drops the "gift" and sits.

MUSKULE THE CAT

(In cat; subtitled)

You always refuse and then you
sulk.

MEI

(wrinkling her nose)

I'm not eating people, Muskule.
Take that away!

Muskule hisses, flips her tail as she walks away with the
flesh.

MUSKULE THE CAT

(in cat; subtitled)

Spoiled human. No fur, no sense.

Muskule hops onto the counter, starts washing a bloody paw
like none of this is strange.

Hamza stares -- from cat to Amanda -- stunned all over again.

LEO

(to Hamza)

Like she said, everyone understands
everyone here. You'll hear cats,
sometimes the rain itself if it
fancies speakin'.

Hamza looks around the room -- faces from different years,
same tired eyes.

HAMZA

Are we stuck here? Trapped in this
demonic place?

ALFIE

We're alive. That'll do for the
hour.

RUTH

People have left.
(tilts her head to Amanda)
She did. Walked out clean.

Amanda does not meet his gaze.

HAMZA

You made it out once? How'd you
come back?

Amanda's jaw tightens. A beat. She gives him the smallest of answers.

AMANDA

I made it home... just for a breath. Then... a mistake, and we got sent back.

(soft, to Hamza)

It happens. Gates open. Gates close.

JOÃO

It's true. One of us heard it in the rain. The rain falls where it wants here, on whoever it chooses. It washes away the chalk. Stops the fog. If you're touched by the first drop, you get what you're looking for. But someone in your group...

(sighs)

He saw a vision. The Rain Man's origin. And how to leave this place. Whenever someone gets sent here, a gate stays open -- about an hour. We just have to find it.

A hush falls -- the room listens.

RUTH

We don't chase voices in the fog.

(beat)

We keep each other alive. Rotate watch. Check the blades. No one wander past chalk without a partner.

She turns to Hamza.

RUTH (CONT'D)

First rule -- fog thickens, you don't stare at it. You move. And you don't leave the one beside you.

Mrs. Akari quietly inspects Amanda's injured forearm, tightens a strip of cloth around it.

MRS. AKARI

Pain means the body still belongs to you.

Amanda pulls her arm back a little. She glances down, almost embarrassed.

AMANDA

I'm fine.

Mei bumps Hamza's shoulder, a small smile.

MEI

You'll learn quick. This place has edges. So do we.

The group settles into ritual: weapons kept in reach. Muskule curls around preparing to sleep.

A hush.

INT. HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Hamza sits by the wall. Mei hums a tune through earbuds. Amanda is by the window, watching the empty street.

Ruth stands near the door, tired but alert. She watches the rest of the room -- inventory of people and the small economies of care they trade.

Mei scrolls through Hamza's phone again, earbuds dangling. She nudges him with a grin.

MEI

You've got so many songs. I could live another five years on this.

Hamza almost laughs.

HAMZA

Five years, huh? I doubt I'll manage five minutes myself.

Mei smirks, already queuing another track.

MEI

Then you'll learn.
(stops scrolling)
Music's the only thing that doesn't run out.

Amanda sits nearby, rewrapping her scrape. She overhears.

AMANDA

Stories don't run out neither. We tell 'em when the nights feels too long.

Alfie groans from the floor, bat under his arm.

ALFIE

Oh no, here she goes. Don't encourage her, lad.

She throws him a quick look, half a smile.

AMANDA

You'd miss my stories if I quit tellin' 'em.

RUTH

Wouldn't miss the way you drag on the endin's.

JOÃO

(Laughs)
Agreed.

Amanda turns back to Hamza.

AMANDA

You got stories where you come from?

Hamza hesitates, then nods.

HAMZA

Plenty. There's one... I heard in primary school. About a teacher. They called her Madam Koi Koi.

The others glance over. Even Mrs. Akari, who had been quietly humming, tilts her head, listening.

MEI

(whisper, to Hamza)
Tell it.

Hamza shifts, uneasy but warmed by their attention.

HAMZA

...She taught at a federal school, beautiful, always wore red heels. "Koi... koi..." that's the sound her shoes made when she walked the halls. But... she was cruel. Beat students for the smallest things -- a wrong answer or a skipped line.

(he pauses, voice dropping)

One day, some kids had enough. One of her students, they say, hid a leg of her shoe. She chased him to the back of the school.

(MORE)

HAMZA (CONT'D)

That's where the others were waiting. They beat her... wouldn't stop. She tried to run, but slipped... broke her neck on the stairs.

(beat)

They just left her there.

The room grows quieter.

HAMZA (CONT'D)

After that, people started disappearing. The ones who hurt her... the stubborn ones who didn't listen... gone. One time, they say she caught a girl in the hall past lights-out. The sound of her shoes filled all the walls, and the girl never seen again. No trace, just blood going up the ceiling.

(a pause)

She hunts the dormitories. You hear the sound of her one shoe before she's there. One long step... then another... that's when you know she's coming.

(beat)

The other shoe was never found. The story say she's looking for it, even now.

Silence grips the room.

JOÃO

(breaking the silence)

That's just a story. Like... she wasn't real, right?

HAMZA

Real enough to scare me. I never left my dormitory past lights out.

Leo, who had been silent, speaks up.

LEO

C'mon, João, it's just a story. It's not even that scary.

Amanda lets out a soft, almost nervous laugh.

AMANDA

(to Hamza)

See? You fit right in.

(MORE)

AMANDA (CONT'D)

World full o' folks just took one
wrong step, one wrong time.

A beat of quiet laughter passes between them. Even Alfie cracks a tired smile.

The room softens. For a moment, there's no fog, no Others -- just tired souls sharing silence.

A faint patter, distant -- stops. Everyone looks toward the door.

Alfie checks the door, just to be sure.

RUTH

(quiet)

We sit tight till daylight. One on
the watch at a time. Leo, you
start. Amanda, you're on after.

LEO

Got it.

ALFIE

I'll take second watch. Mandy --
you get some rest.

AMANDA

I'll take the first. Don't feel no
sleep on me yet.

LEO

Nah, I called it, Manda. Get some
sleep, seriously. You too, Ruth.

Mrs. Akari unrolls a thin mat and hums a tune under her breath -- soft, non-english, the shape of a lullaby. Amanda hears it; it eases.

HAMZA

(Soft)

How do you sleep with all that out
there?

AMANDA

You don't think on it. You think of
the thing you want most -- keeps
it from getting into your head.

She gives him a look that's both warning and a kind of invitation. Hamza nods, unsettled.

Mei trades a glance with Amanda, then slips an earbud into Hamza's ear, leaning on his shoulder.

Muskule finds a lap, curls, tail over paws, purring -- a small machine.

Amanda settles. She pulls a threadbare blanket up to her chin. Hamza sits awake eyes floating between the shelter's corners and the fog patches visible through a boarded windows.

RUTH

(soft, to everyone)

If anything moves, wake the person
next to you. Don't investigate
alone. No heroics.

Mei, exhausted, drops her head and sleeps. João shifts, finds a place on the floor; Alfie closes his eyes. Mrs. Akari hums the lullaby one last time -- a beautiful tone that holds the room.

Hamza sits longer, then lets himself recline against a crate. He watches Amanda's silhouette -- the shoulder, the steady lift and fall.

Outside, a piece of fog presses to the windows, then slides along the street. For a heartbeat, it feels alive.

Amanda lets out a long breath and closes her eyes.

Ruth looks to the empty doorway, eyes far away, thinking of Third.

RUTH (CONT'D)

(whisper)

Hold 'til morning.

FADE TO BLACK.

Darkness...

INT. HIDEOUT - NIGHT - LATER

The room is still, drowned in dark. They sleep where they can. Weapons close. Safe -- at least for now.

Hamza lies half-awake. Mei sleeps beside him, earbud dangling, a faint music leaks from it. Her hand rests on Muskule's fur.

Ruth snores softly from the far wall.

Hamza finally closes his eyes, reaching for Amanda's earlier advice.

From her blanket, a voice -- low, unexpected.

AMANDA
What you thinkin' on?

Hamza startles, surprised she's awake.

HAMZA
...My people. My home. Before all
this.

Amanda turns her face toward him, her eyes glints faint in
the dark.

AMANDA
Mm. Best hold it tight. That's how
you make it through the night.

Hamza studies her a beat.

HAMZA
What about you?

Amanda's quiet a moment, then exhales.

AMANDA
My baby sister, Mable. She'd sit
out on the porch steps, singin'
made-up songs 'bout nothin'. Said
she was serenadin' the chickens.
(beat)
I'd fuss at her, but truth is... I
liked listenin'. Her little voice
carryin' out 'cross the yard.
(small laugh)
Sounded sweeter than church some
nights. An' if I listen hard, I
still hear it.

A small softer breath.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
She loved catchin' fireflies in a
jar. Wouldn't go in the house till
she had at least five blinkin'.
(beat)
Then she'd set 'em by our bed, say
it was our night lamp. Swore they
kept the evil spirits away.
(small smile)
Maybe, she was right... Feels so
far now.

Hamza listens. It's not a story of monsters -- just a girl and her sister.

Muskule purrs, curling in Mei's lap. Hamza's gaze lingers on the cat, too long. Amanda notices.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

Still spooked that a cat talks back here?

Hamza half-smiles, shakes his head.

HAMZA

Not spooked. Just... strange. And its name -- Muskule.

(beat)

In Hausa, that only means "cat".

Amanda gives a soft laugh. Hamza joins, quieter. They try not to wake the others.

AMANDA

Well, fits her fine then. Ain't nothin' fancy 'bout that one.

Muskule flicks an ear, as if insulted. Keeps purring anyway.

LEO (O.C.)

That was a good story, Amanda.

Leo sits on a stool, Ruth's crowbar balanced across his knees.

AMANDA

(soft, whisper)

You're still awake?

Leo glances at them, eyes tired but alert.

LEO

Someone's gotta keep an eye out. You two gonna sleep or not?

Amanda smirks faintly, eyelids heavy.

AMANDA

I'll watch too. But not like this. Not fully awake. Jus'... watching half-close.

Leo chuckles quietly.

LEO
 Smart. Don't let the evil spirits
 sneak in while you dream.

Amanda drifts, her voice already fading.

AMANDA
 (to Hamza)
 Go on, try an' sleep. You gon' need
 it come mornin'.

Hamza leans back against the crate. His eyes close. Darkness
 folds in.

CUT TO BLACK.

We hold in the darkness for a moment...

FADE IN:

INT. HIDEOUT - DAWN

Thin light leaks through boarded windows. The room is quiet -
 - small breaths, small movements: checking blades, testing
 spear points.

Amanda, swallowed in Leo's windbreaker, sleeves rolled to her
 elbows, leans at the window. Her eyes trace the empty street.

Mrs. Akari crosses quietly. She unwinds, then rewraps the
 bandage on Amanda's arm -- effortless, gentle.

MRS. AKARI
 It will hold.
 (beat)
 It's going to be alright.

Amanda breathes once -- dips her head. Doesn't answer. Mrs.
 Akari returns.

João edges up beside Amanda, quiet. He follows her stare,
 then flicks his gaze to her arm.

JOÃO
 I'm sure they're fine.
 Maybe even found a gate home. We
 should worry more on ourselves
 first.

Amanda shakes her head, voice quiet and tight.

AMANDA

I hate it... goin' that deep in the fog side. Ain't nothin' good waitin' out there. Every time it take somethin'. Someone.

(her voice lowers, eyes on the street)

I ain't brave, not like they think -- I ain't. Truth is... half the time I'm shakin'.

(her eyes flick back at the others, quick, bitter)

Sometime I swear it feels like we're the only normal ones here. Ruth, Alfie, Leo... even Mei -- they move 'round like all this just the way things is.

(low, raw)

But it ain't. It's wrong... an' I'm scared João -- near all the time.

Silence. Amanda focus on the street, ashamed to look at him.

João studies her -- steady, sure.

JOÃO

Amanda... you been in there longer than any of us have been. Faced more than the rest of us, lost family there... and you're still standin'. You're the bravest one here, even if you don't feel it.

(he shifts closer)

We'll be alright, long as we stay together and careful. I'm more worried about the new guy.

(Nods)

Keep him safe.

A beat. Amanda nods and João leaves.

Across the room -- Ruth in Alfie's oversized coat murmurs with Leo, Alfie, and now Mrs. Akari. Their words low, private. Strategy.

Muskule walks across and plants herself fully and without apology -- on Hamza's chest where he still lies, asleep.

A VIBRATION -- insistent. It hums inside the pocket of Hamza's kaftan. The BlackBerry screen faintly glows.

MEI (O.C.)

Up, sleepyhead. Today's the day.

The buzz stops. Hamza -- blinks, foggy -- opens his eyes. He reaches -- finds a cat and Mei's grin.

HAMZA
(still foggy)
M-Mei?

MEI
Morning, Hamza. You slept like a
stone. Come on -- up.

Muskule nudges Hamza's face with her head. He exhales, stirs. Mei scoops the cat.

MEI (CONT'D)
(Smiling)
She thinks you're warm enough.

Hamza pushes himself up. The others are armed, steady: Alfie grips his bat. Amanda checks her spear. João sharpens his blade. Leo sits with a crowbar across his knees, calm but ready.

RUTH
(soft, to group)
Listen. We move soon. Check your
weapons. If you're stayin', speak
now. Otherwise, we go. Find them,
or we find whichever way they went.

ALFIE
(nods)
No draggin' feet. As usual, we
split to two groups, cover more
ground. No bloody surprises.

Hamza watches -- still catching up.

HAMZA
(half to himself)
What's all this...?

Mei leans close, voice soft at his ear.

MEI
It's Third's group. They went past
the mills. Should've been back. But
they're not.

Hamza's face hardens. The weight of belonging, already pressing.

RUTH
 (to Hamza)
 You okay to come? We don't push
 anyone who won't.

Hamza looks down at the makeshift weapons lined on the table.
 He hesitates.

Someone -- Alfie? throws him a short length pipe with a
 jagged fence-spear head tied into it with ragged cloth.

ALFIE
 Here. Not pretty, but it'll do.
 Hold it tight.

HAMZA
 (takes it, surprised)
 Thanks.

MRS. AKARI
 Good. Stay close to us.

Amanda shifts by his side. She gives him a small, crooked
 smile.

AMANDA
 You stick to me, I won't let you
 look foolish in front o' Mei.

MEI
 (pretending offended)
 Hey! I heard that.

Ruth cuts in, back to business.

RUTH
 (low)
 We split two ways. Alfie's group
 takes the mills side. Ours go west
 -- through the market. If you find
 anything, call. If phones hold, we
 keep in touch.

Leo shifts on his stool, crowbar balanced, his tone flat.

LEO
 Yeah... if the phones still work.

Mrs. Akari looks to him, calm, measured.

MRS. AKARI
 We all saw. They worked yesterday.

MEI

And this morning. Woke Hamza with
it. They still work.

Alfie grunts, not satisfied.

ALFIE

Don't matter what we saw yesterday.
Things change here. Best try again.

João nods, quiet but firm.

JOÃO

Better sure than sorry.

The room turns to Hamza. He stiffens under the weight of
their eyes.

Hamza digs into his kaftan -- pulls the BlackBerry. Mei
already has his iPhone ready in her hand.

HAMZA

I'll call mine. See if it still --

He dials. Silence grips the room.

Then -- the iPhone in Mei's hand RINGS. Sharp, alive.

Her face breaks into a grin, triumphant again.

MEI

Told you. Works fine.

A ripple of relief moves through them. João exhales. Ruth's
shoulders ease.

Outside -- a faint patter of rain. A few strike the boarded
windows. The room stills, listening.

Amanda looks up.

AMANDA

(to Hamza)

Rain don't last long here. Never
does.

The patter fades, leaving a heavy silence.

João steps to the door, hand on the handle. The group
readies.

He looks back.

JOÃO

We can't wait forever. Best we
move.

He pulls the door open.

Muskule pads forward, tail high, intent on leaving.

AMANDA

Muskule -- get back inside!

Muskule keeps moving, uninterested.

Mei walks fast and scoops the cat up, half laugh, half
warning.

MEI

No -- no, Mou-sku-le. Inside.

Muskule huffs, curls into Mei's arms with theatrical
annoyance.

MUSKULE THE CAT

(in cat; subtitled)

You trap me and call it love.

MEI

(rolling her eyes)

Oh please. You're a pet, not a
prophet.

Muskule hisses, offended, then settles at a corner.

João gives the faintest nod. He looks back at the room once,
then steps out.

EXT. ABANDONED STREET -- DAWN

The group spills out -- weapons in hand. Steps tight.
Postures alert.

They move as a pack, quiet, close.

The street is empty -- a corridor of boarded windows and
faded paint. Small chalk patches scattered across the
pavement, brittle and dry.

A single DRIP echoes. Close.

Suddenly, João lags behind. He stiffens. His jaw clenches,
eyes far away.

Leo glances back, casual and blunt.

LEO

What's with you, man? You draggin'
your feet today. You sleep wrong or
something?

The group slows. Amanda turns fully, watching João longer than the rest. Something worries her -- she sees it in his face.

AMANDA

(soft, uneasy)
João... you all right?

João pumps out a smile, too quick, too easy.

JOÃO

I'm fine. Just... had the others on
my mind -- if they found a way out,
maybe.

Amanda doesn't buy it. Her eyes stay on him -- afraid of what he's not saying.

LEO

If you ain't up for this, you can
sit it out. No shame in stayin'
behind.

João straightens.

JOÃO

No -- I'm fine. I'm with you. All
the way.

Amanda looks away, mouth tightens, a sadness slipping over her face -- quiet, hidden. Ruth sees anyway. She holds it, knowing.

They walk on.

Hamza trails near the back, grip tight on his makeshift spear. His eyes catch the ground -- more chalk patches than yesterday, scattered across the street and buildings. Each one shimmers faintly, air above it cold, alive.

Mei slips up beside him, earbuds looped, but the music is quiet. She nudges him with her hip, half to distract, half to keep close.

MEI

Creeps the hell outta me too.

Hamza exhales through his nose, eyes still on the shimmering patches.

HAMZA

Feels very wrong.

Mei makes a face.

MEI

Yeah. Try not to step on it.

They share a glance -- uneasy, but almost a spark of normal.

Ahead: the street cut in two. Fog thickens at an invisible border. Beyond, daylight. Here, dawn --

-- The threshold.

The group comes to a stop. They wait at the edge, every breath held.

Ruth turns -- she meets their faces. Her voice is low, steady.

RUTH

Everyone ready?

A beat of silence. Weapons tighten in hands. Breathes catches. Nothing said. Nothing needed.

Together, they move -- step by step, disappearing into the fog side. The street takes them in. Their footsteps small... steady. Brave.

EXT. FOG SIDE - STREET - DAY

Mist clings heavy, swallowing distance. The town around looks wrong -- crooked, old and forgotten. A hollow quiet.

The group moves tight, weapons ready. Every step light on the pavement.

Hamza trails near, spear firm in hand. He pulls out his phone -- full bars. Hope flickers across his face. He slips it back into his kaftan without a word.

Amanda notices, murmurs low.

AMANDA

Don't go trustin' that thing out here.

Hamza nods, silent.

Ruth leads. Her eyes scan rooftops, corners. The others copy her movements, every pause, every halt.

Ahead, a rusted streetcar blocks their way. The windows are clouded dark, the body slumped like it's been dead for decades.

Alfie grips his bat. He walks close and listens, then hauls himself onto the car. Quiet. Careful. He scans the street from above, then slides over the frame and drops to the opposite side.

He signals: clear.

They climb after him, one by one. Mrs. Akari's kimono hem snags, a piece thorn -- she stills, frees it, makes no sound.

They continue walking -- swallowed again by fog.

A faint rustle behind them. The group turns -- agitated. A shapes blur in the mist. A low silhouette pads forward...

It's Muskule. Tail high, unbothered.

MEI
(whisper)
Muskule... you'll put me in an
early grave.

Ruth cuts her a sharp look -- a hand to hush.

Mei lowers her voice, crouches slightly toward the cat.

MEI (CONT'D)
(soft, urgent)
Stay close. No wandering off.

Muskule flicks her ear -- indifferent, but trots alongside.

They push forward.

EXT. FOG SIDE - CONTINUOUS

Abandoned shops line the street, shutters rusted shut. Paint curls from the walls. Behind a glass -- mannequins. Limbs stiff. Faces blurred under mildew. Almost human in the mist.

Hamza stares too long. Amanda nudges his elbow, firm.

AMANDA
(quiet)
Eyes front.

They move. Silence stretches.

Deeper down the street -- more mannequins. These ones eerily lifelike, from different eras. Mildew clings like rotted flesh.

Hamza's breath hitches.

HAMZA
(low, uneasy)
They look... alive.

Leo glances once, then away, his body tight, hands restless on the crowbar.

LEO
(low, muttering)
This part always freaks me out.

Mrs. Akari's voice cuts through -- calm, edged.

MRS. AKARI
We keep moving.

And they do.

EXT. FOG SIDE - WIDE STREET - CONTINUOUS

From the fog ahead -- a silhouette.

The group freezes. They slip into an alley, swallowed by shadow. Silent.

The shape grows -- then clears.

A grotesque figure glides into view: nine feet tall, draped in a black dress that's fused to its skin. Its face is blank, blood-red, with black voids for eyes. Limbs too long. Fingernails scrape pavement as it drifts forward.

The group hardly breathes.

The creature slows at the mannequins. It leans in -- nails trace across a mannequin's cheek. A wet crack echoes as its hand twists, turning the figure's head all the way around.

It lingers. A hollow inhale, as if smelling them.

At last, it glides on, vanishing into fog.

The group exhales as one.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOG SIDE - INTERSECTION - CONTINUOUS

They stop at a crossing. Ruth studies each road, her voice steady, low.

RUTH
(motions)
Market's west. Mills, that way -- I think.

A beat. They wait on her call.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Market. Less open ground. More cover.

Alfie nods, jaw set. Amanda shifts her spear, eyes sharp.

Hamza swallows, voice tight but steady.

HAMZA
If the phone works, we'll keep in touch.

They ready to move.

João slows, head tilt -- sensing something.

JOÃO
(low)
Wait...

The group halts, tense.

JOÃO (CONT'D)
You don't hear that?

Silence. The others shake their heads.

Then -- CLACK. A heel strikes pavement, distant.

Hamza stiffens. Amanda hears it too. Mei's eyes widen, she picks up the cat.

The sound comes again. Closer. Sharp. Hollow.

Alfie frowns, restless.

ALFIE
What're you on about? Ain't nothin' there.

But Hamza, Amanda, Mei, João all hear it -- clearer now. The echo of a woman's heel through an empty hallway.

Their breaths shorten. Panic swells in their eyes.

HAMZA

It's -- it's right--

The sound CRACKS loud beside them.

And in an instant -- they're gone.

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL DORMITORY - NIGHT

Hamza, Amanda, João, Mei stand in shock. The fog is gone. Instead: rows of rusted bed frames stretch into the dark. Mattresses sag, blackened with mold. Peeling walls.

A broken clock ticks once, then stops.

Dead silent.

Mei holds Amanda tight -- both shaking with fear.

EXT. FOG SIDE - STREET - SAME TIME

Ruth, Alfie, Leo and Mrs. Akari remain where the others stood. Weapons up. Shock in their eyes.

Alfie scans around, restless.

LEO

(low, shaken)

They just... vanished.

ALFIE

(muttering)

Feels wrong. Something's not right.

Ruth and Mrs. Akari don't speak. Fear and confusion all over.

From behind them: a faint murmur. Whispers -- layered, distant.

Leo slows, turns.

LEO

(low, tense)

You hear that?

They pause. Silence again.

Then -- darker fog seeps forward. A figure ahead.

There -- the *Another* girl. Alone in the street. Still.
Watching.

Her pale feet hover inches off the ground.

The four tense, weapons ready.

Alfie mutters under breath.

ALFIE
Bloody hell...

Mrs. Akari grips her hook tight, torn kimono brushing the pavement. Her voice steady. Resolute.

MRS. AKARI
These spirits tests us. Ghosts
cannot move the living unless we
bend.

Leo tightens his grip on the crowbar.

Ruth's knuckles go white around the spear. Her eyes never leave the figure.

LEO
(low)
What's the plan? Are we running or
fighting.

RUTH
Hold. If it comes close -- we cut
it down.

The girl tilts her head -- slow, wrong.

They wait, bracing for whatever comes.

CUT TO:

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL DORMITORY - NIGHT

The silence is heavy.

Hamza grips his spear. Amanda steadies Mei. João scans, his blade held tight.

A sound breaks through -- the sharp sound of a single heel on tile.

Clack...

Each echo too long.

MEI
 (whisper, panicked)
 That's it... that's what we heard.

AMANDA
 (low, tight)
 Shh... don't speak too loud.

Sound of bare wet feet.

Tap...

Then a soft drag -- fabric brushing the floor.

Silence again.

Muskule hides under a bunk, tail low.

Hamza whispers, breath shaking.

HAMZA
 It's her. Madam Koi Koi. The story
 I told you --

JOÃO
 (sharp hush)
 -- Quiet.

The echoes stop. The dormitory holds its breath

They draw closer. Amanda looks to Hamza -- her voice a
 whisper.

AMANDA
 Hamza... you told the story. If
 that's really her -- then what?
 What chance we got?

Hamza's breath shakes. He forces it out.

HAMZA
 She... she only came for kids that
 broke rules. The ones who
 disobeyed.
 (beat)
 If we stay in here, quiet till
 daybreak... maybe, we live.

Mei's breath rattles -- relief, if only for a moment.

João shakes his head, voice firm.

JOÃO

Daybreak? We don't know how time works here. We could wait forever.

(beat)

And the others need us. We can't sit and hide while they're out there.

His words hang.

Mei fumbles with Hamza's iPhone, hands shaking.

MEI

(soft, desperate)

Maybe if I just... play something... I can --

Music hums faint from the speaker. Hamza rips it from her hands.

HAMZA

(low, fierce)

-- No! Phones weren't allowed in the dorms. If she hears it, we're finished!

Mei freezes. Shame burns her face. Amanda grabs her hand, squeezing tight.

AMANDA

(whisper)

Easy now... don't let her hear us.

Silence again. João raises his blade, whispering quick.

JOÃO

We move. Better to face the halls than sit here waiting.

Hamza looks at Mei's empty hands, then down at his phone.

HAMZA

Both phones are here. The others can't reach us. If we split, we don't survive this.

AMANDA

Then we ain't splittin'. We stick close. All of us.

She looks scared, but certain.

They nod.

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Hamza, Amanda, Mei, João edge down the corridor. Their footsteps are muffled, too soft for real sound.

The hallway twists, geometry bent.

João leads, blade gripped tight. Hamza beside him.

Amanda follows, eyes sweeping every corner.

Mei slips Muskule into her hood, clutching her rebar close.

-- CLACK... Far off.

-- CLACK. Closer.

And then -- silence.

They hold still. Listening. Nothing.

Quietly, they move again.

They pass a cracked window. João risks a glance.

Outside: nothing but endless black. The building floats on a piece of land in empty space.

JOÃO

(whisper)

It's not connected to anything. The school... it's just hanging here.

Amanda yanks him back.

AMANDA

(quiet)

Don't you look out there. Eyes forward.

They keep moving.

At the far end -- a faint orange light flickers under a door. Like firelight.

João gestures for silence.

They wait.

Amanda's grip trembles on her spear.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

(whisper, raw)

We ain't got no choice... do we?

Hamza swallows, voice tight.

HAMZA

No. Either we go forward... or she
comes for us.

They trade frightened looks.

Then, together, they edge toward the firelit door. João leans
in, ear close. Silence.

The others wait, breath held.

Mei whispers, firm.

MEI

On three.

Counting with her fingers. One... Two... Three.

João slowly turns the handle.

INT. ABANDONED CLASSROOM - NIGHT

The door creaks open.

Inside -- overturned desks. Walls blackened with burn marks.

At the center: a bonfire that gives no heat.

STUDENTS sit around it, uniforms torn, eyes lifelessly still.
Too still.

One girl jerks -- her neck cracks as it turns.

Half her face caved in.

STUDENT

(whisper, broken)
...Koi...

Another joins. Then another.

THE STUDENTS

(soft, layered)
Koi. Koi. Koi...

The fire FLARES white -- then dies.

Darkness swallows the room.

For a moment, only the group's breathing.

A faint spark -- a lantern ignites where the fire had burned. Its flickering light barely touches the edge of the room.

The students are gone.

Mei trembles.

MEI
(whisper)
Hamza... gimme my phone.

Hamza clutches it, reluctant.

HAMZA
It's risky.

MEI
Please. We need the light.

He hesitates, then presses it into her hand. She clicks the flashlight on.

A pale beam cuts across the room. She sweeps it: desks, walls, scorch marks.

João squints -- catches a strange dark corner she's already passed.

JOÃO
(tense)
Wait. Go back.

She moves the light slowly, nervously.

From the shadows -- something shifts.

A shape takes form -- Tall. A rough dirty Afro. She holds two long koboko in one hand. Her red heel gleams under her ruined skirt. The other foot bare, swollen, broken. Her neck bone crooked where it snapped decades ago.

The group freezes. Fear visible.

She steps forward. The heel lands -- slow. Bare foot follows.

The sound echoes... wrong.

MADAM KOI KOI
Out of your beds... boys with
girls. After lights out. What will
the headmistress say?

Mei panics -- she snaps the flashlight off, shoves the phone into her hoodie.

For a breath, silence -- the group continues backing away quiet.

Then -- a sharp BEEP. Music plays faintly from Mei's pocket.

Everyone freezes.

Mei fumbles, desperate to silence it.

Madam Koi Koi's head turns. She moves fast toward her.

Mei SCREAMS.

From her shoulder -- Muskule hisses, ears flat. The cat leaps for Madam Koi Koi's face.

She snatches Muskule mid-air. The cat SHRIEKS.

MADAM KOI KOI (CONT'D)

No pets!

Her mouth TEARS open, too wide -- and BITES down.

A wet horrific CRUNCH -- a strip of blood and flesh splats across Mei's face.

She screams again, collapsing.

Hamza grabs Mei, drags her toward the door. Amanda's spear shakes in her grip. João lunges, blade out, slashes across her neck. No blood. Only smoke.

She backhands him across the room. He SLAMS against a wall, unconscious.

Amanda braces with her spear.

AMANDA

Lord help us...

Mei darts towards João --

-- Crack! Madam Koi Koi SLAMS her bare foot down.

The floor vibrates, decays, splits.

The classroom collapses beneath them. Screams swallowed as they plunge into darkness...

INT. LOWER LEVEL - NIGHT

They crashed hard. Darkness. Dust. Groans. Ragged breaths. Sounds of pain.

Hamza drags himself up, coughing blood. He digs out his phone -- screen cracked. He turns the flash on. Dim, flickering, but enough.

Amanda staggers, clutching her side. Bloody nose. Dazed. Mei coughs, smeared with blood, curled on the ground.

Amanda spins, frantic.

AMANDA
João...? João!

Her eyes scan.

She spots him -- crumpled in the wreckage. Wood pierced clean through his belly. Blood pooling. His hand trembles, weak. His blade lies just out of reach.

Amanda crawls to him, sobbing.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
No, no, no... stay with me -- stay
--

João forces his eyes open. His voice is low, trembling.

JOÃO
(weak)
I... tried to hide it. But you saw it, didn't you? The rain touched me. My fate was decided.

Amanda breaks, clutching his hand tight.

AMANDA
I don't care! I ain't leavin' you!

He draws a thin, broken breath.

JOÃO
(soft, fading)
You were always braver than me. Keep going, Amanda... just keep going.

Tears stream down her face.

AMANDA
No. Don't you say that. João -- we ain't leavin' you!

His eyes close. His chest rises shallow -- not gone, but slipping.

Amanda weeps, bent over him, refusing to let go.

Above -- a SHADOW drifts.

Madam Koi Koi floats down, silent. One heel. One bare foot.

Hamza sees her. Panic surges. He rushes in, seizes Amanda, and yanks her from João.

HAMZA
Amanda -- MOVE!

Amanda thrashes, screaming.

AMANDA
No! Please --!

Hamza drags her away. Mei stumbles with them, still bruised and in pain.

Behind them --

João's eyes flutter open one last time. He sees her -- towering over him. Silent. Inevitable.

Madam Koi Koi leans close. Her lips peel back...

She lowers her face to his. Her mouth stretches... splits wider -- until it swallows his face whole.

Amanda looks back. A scream tears out -- raw, broken. Tears pouring.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
NO! João... JOÃO!

Hamza tightens his grip, hauling her away. Mei runs, choking on sobs.

Behind them -- João convulses once. Then falls still.

Madam Koi Koi feeds in silence.

The three vanish deeper into the dark.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOG SIDE - STREET - DAY

The fog unravels, thinning around them. Silence -- only their tired breathing.

The ghostly girl lies broken on the pavement. Face pressed flat. Limbs twisted. Her pale feet still hover above the ground, like gravity itself refuses her.

Ruth lowers her spear, chest heaving. She wipes dust from her clothes with a trembling hand.

Leo slumps against a wall, crowbar across his shoulder -- eyes still fixed on her.

Alfie lingers closest to the body, bat hanging loose but ready.

Mrs. Akari stands a little apart. She watches her hovering feet without surprise -- only quiet attention.

A long, exhausted beat.

LEO
(half a laugh, bitter)
We still breathing. Yea -- fuck you ghost!

RUTH
Keep your voice down. Don't tempt fate.

ALFIE
(rough)
-- Thing's dead. That's what matters.

He eyes the body.

ALFIE (CONT'D)
(gruff, half a laugh)
Was a proper nuisance. Ends fast when you don't let 'em get up.

He finally lowers his baseball bat. His voice softens, almost to himself.

ALFIE (CONT'D)
...Shouldn't wear a girl's face. Not right.

No one answers.

Leo straightens, wincing. He tilts his head toward the corpse.

LEO
Why don't her feet ever touch the ground? What's that about?

MRS. AKARI

(grim)

They don't need the ground to move.
Don't make sense to our rules, but
they don't have to.

The silence tightens. Ruth pulls her breath steady, looking from one to the other.

RUTH

We were meant to split -- Alfie's
to the mills, mine through the
market.

LEO

(quick, sharp)

Yeah, and the kids -- João, Amanda,
Mei and Hamza -- they vanished
right in front of us. Phones went
with 'em. No point in chopping up
what's left if we can't call.

ALFIE

(grim)

Too thin a crew to split anyway. We
go one way or we get picked off.

RUTH

(decisive)

Then we go to the mills. Together.
If we're lucky we might find
Elsie's group or a way out of this
hell.

MRS. AKARI

We continue the mission. We can
only hope the others make it
through themselves.

LEO

Hope's all we got. Let's make it
count. For them.

They gather what strength remains -- silent. Weapons at their sides. No one looks back as they walk on.

Behind them, the girl's hand twitches -- faint, insectile. Pale fingernails scratch stone -- then stillness.

EXT. FOG SIDE - STREET - CONTINUOUS

The four move on, steps muffled against chalk-flecked pavement.

No one speaks -- cautious, alert.

They pass another row of dilapidated buildings, shops glass webbed with black mold.

Then -- something ahead.

Set like a jewel dropped into dirt -- a farmhouse. Medium-sized. Paint that isn't peeling off. Normal, where nothing else should be.

In contrast with the faded decay that surrounds it, The house belongs to a different world. It sits among the eerie scenery like a single well-kept memory.

ALFIE

(low)

That ain't right.

RUTH

(staring)

No.

They all look -- long enough that silence swells.

MRS. AKARI

(Low)

We stay close.

Then -- a sound. Soft at first.

A faint leathery flutter ripples the air.

THRRRFT... THRRRFT... THRRRFT...

Ruth stops cold -- quick signal. Eyes on the farmhouse -- then a sharp gesture: move.

The flutter deepens, layered and heavy -- a low, rolling tremor, like hundreds of wings scraping the air.

THRRT... FFFWHFF... THRRT-THRRT...

RUTH

(whisper)

Move. House. Now.

They break into a run -- short, quiet, controlled bursts -- closing the distance.

Ruth first, Alfie close behind. Leo follows, light on his feet. Mrs. Akari closes the gap with an almost equal speed.

Across the street. Onto the porch. Boards clean under their feet.

Alfie shoves the door -- it swings open, already unlocked.

INT. FARMHOUSE - ENTRY HALL - CONTINUOUS

They rush inside. Leo slams the door shut just as Mrs. Akari slips through. Lock twist. Bolt clicks shut.

Thin Light leaks through the curtained windows. Wallpaper. Neat furniture. A modest family living room. Unlike other buildings of the fog town, this one looks like a normal house.

MRS. AKARI
(Whispers)
Too close.

They crouch low against the wall. A breath shared. The walls vibrate.

Above -- a low hum builds over the roof.

THRRT... THRRT... THRRT.

The ceiling trembles. Windows darken as a vast cloud passes.

FFFFWHFFF... FFFWHFF... FFFWHFFF...

OUTSIDE: the street is swallowed by a sweeping, living dark. A cloud of bird sized moths fly pass, wingbeats like torn pages. Their bodies blot the sky. Shadows crawl across the farmhouse windows, warping the light.

Each beat shakes dust from the walls.

INSIDE: the group presses low. Breath shallow. The noise swells. The glass vibrates.

They wait impatient and scared.

ALFIE
(low)
Bloody hell.

LEO
(under breath)
Like a damn blackout with wings.

Ruth shushes them, urgent.

Mrs. Akari presses a palm to her chest, eyes closed.

MRS. AKARI
(very low)
Be still.

They watch through glass and between curtains -- heads barely above the window sill, as the darkness moves on. The wings beat and the sound swinging past, a thunder of soft flaps that shakes the town.

Everyone stays still, quiet.

The moth cloud slides away down the street, carrying its shadow over the row of dead storefronts.

Slowly, the sound drifts... fades...

Ruth keeps her fingers up -- waiting. She watches faces in the dim light.

RUTH
(whisper)
Wait. Ten. Then we move.

They hold. Breath shallow. Fingers curled tight on weapons.

Dust motes drift through the light like small, accidental stars.

Silence returns -- nothing but the hush of the Fog Side.

No one moves. Another slow, measured beat. They listen -- waiting, making sure the dark has passed, and not circled back.

Alfie exhales, shoulders dropping. Leo slumps against the wall, drained.

Mrs. Akari sinks herself where she is, perfectly still.

Ruth lowers her hand -- not all the way, still shaking.

A silent unanimous agreement passes through them. Rest -- just for a moment. Hearts pounding in the quiet.

Then --

-- TICK. Sharp. Sudden.

Continues -- Tick... Tock... Tick...

They flinch. A clock -- Loud. Unmistakable

Ruth straightens, scanning the room.

The others follow -- uneasy, alert.

LEO

(low)

This place doesn't feel like the rest. Feels... wrong in a different way.

ALFIE

(Grim)

Yeah. It's too normal.
Too damn clean.

Mrs. Akari crosses to a framed portrait on the wall -- a man and his wife, smiling. Vintage.

MRS. AKARI

They must have lived here. Maybe still do... somewhere.

RUTH

(quiet)

Or didn't make it that far.

Leo studies the living room -- the furnitures, curtains drawn, a small dining table with a neat cloth and a vase of flowers.

The clock ticks on -- steady, ordinary.

LEO

(low)

Wonder what happened to 'em.

RUTH

(quiet)

No way to know.

A beat. Ruth's voice -- thin, urgent. Focus returning.

RUTH (CONT'D)

(hurried)

We split, search the place.
Anything useful --

MRS. AKARI

(Interjects)

-- No.

Ruth turns. Alfie steps forward, gives her a hard look.

ALFIE

We don't split.

RUTH

And we don't sit here doing nothing
either -- waiting to be cornered.

A tense beat. Silence from both Alfie and Mrs. Akari --
opposition clear. Ruth doesn't back down.

RUTH (CONT'D)

We don't have the luxury to argue.
We cover more ground, then meet
back here.

(beat)

Sticking close never stopped what's
out there.

Leo cuts through the tension. He meets Ruth's gaze -- calm,
steady.

LEO

He's right, Ruth. We stay together.
Anything we can use -- we take it.
Then we go.

Ruth hesitates. Nods once.

She moves for the stairs, spear raised. The others follow --
careful, alert.

The farmhouse is quiet, save for their quiet footsteps... and
the clock.

Tick... Tock...

The sound follows them up.

INT. FARMHOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The group advances carefully -- floorboards creaking beneath
measured steps.

Dust, faint light, the steady tick of the clock below.

RUTH

(low)

If you see anything we can use --
rope, tools, weapons -- take it.

ALFIE

Wouldn't mind findin' a drink too.

They move on.

A faint flickering light spills from a half-open door down the hall.

Ruth stops, gestures toward it.

RUTH
There -- last one on the end.

LEO
Still lit? What kind of house keeps
the light runnin' in a ghost town?

They begin toward the light -- quiet, controlled.

As they pass another door, Leo slows -- something catches his eye. Child's sketches on the wall.

He pauses, drawn in.

LEO (CONT'D)
(soft)
Hold up a sec...

Ruth turns back -- an impatient whisper.

RUTH
Leo. What are you --

Before she can finish, Leo pushes the door gently open.

INT. CHILD'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The door creaks open.

A soft gloom inside. Dust floating through a sliver of window light.

Bunk bed. A small dresser. A shelf with a few toys that look like they've been arranged, waiting.

Leo leans in, cautious, studying the stillness.

MRS. AKARI
Why stop here, Leo?

He hesitates, then gestures.

LEO
Don't know... feels like someone
never left.

Leo steps in a little -- eyes scanning.

Ruth and Alfie move up beside him, peering in.

Mrs. Akari follows -- calm, but uneasy.

The air seems heavier here.

Then -- a faint shuffle from the corner -- something moves.

The soft scrape of a hoof on wood.

They tense. Weapons up.

From the shadow -- a shape stirs. Small. Four-legged.

Two cold blue eyes blink through the dark.

They freeze.

LEO (CONT'D)

(low)

...What the hell.

The figure steps into weak light. A pony, small and sickly, coat gray-white and dull.

It just watches them. Breath slow, eyes glassy.

Then it lowers itself back down, resting again like nothing ever happened.

A long, uneasy beat.

ALFIE

(quiet)

Even the beasts look haunted.

RUTH

Leave it. We're wastin' time.

They slip backward, closing the door softly -- click.

Then continue down the hall.

INT. FARMHOUSE - UPPER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

They reach the door at the corridor's end -- the one leaking flickering light.

Ruth pushes it open with her spear.

Inside -- wreckage.

Wind must've torn through. Everything mid-collapse. Drawers pulled open. Curtains shredded.

Chalk patches on the floor.

A lamp lies on its side, bulb flaring near death.

They step in slowly, scanning.

LEO

(low)

What the hell happened in here...

RUTH

Check the room. Anything that'll keep us breathing another day.

Alfie scans -- then freezes.

Against the far wall -- figures.

A man. A woman. A little girl.

All locked in the moment of terror -- arms raised, mouths stretched in soundless screams. Faces twisted, eyes wide, frozen in horror.

The group stiffens.

Then Leo exhales -- realization dawning.

LEO

(quiet)

...Mannequins.

(beat)

Guess that's what's left of 'em.

ALFIE

(grim)

Poor bastards.

Ruth frowns, scanning the faces -- a wrongness she can't name.

RUTH

Maybe the family that lived here.

Mrs. Akari says nothing -- drawn to a crooked portrait on the wall.

She straightens it, brushes dust from the frame -- then freezes.

MRS. AKARI
 (quietly, shaken)
 No...

Ruth looks over.

RUTH
 What is it?

Mrs. Akari turns -- pale -- and steps aside.

MRS. AKARI
 (quiet, stunned)
 Look.

They gather close.

In the photo -- a family of four. Father. Mother. A small girl in braids.

And right there -- Amanda. Younger. Smiling. Alive.

Silence consumes the room.

Leo stares between the portrait and the mannequins -- horror setting in.

LEO
 (quiet, disbelieving)
 That's her...
 (beat)
 That's Amanda's family

ALFIE
 Damn... explains why she's always distant.

Ruth's throat tightens. She forces herself to look.

RUTH
 Then those must be her parents. Her mother, father.
 (beat)
 And that little one --

Mrs. Akari looks at the smallest mannequin -- the little girl's hand half-raised, as if she was reaching for someone who never came.

MRS. AKARI
 Her sister... Mable.

The flickering lamp light dances across their faces -- over her wax cheek.

For a heartbeat, those eyes seem to glisten... alive.

LEO
(low, hollow)
Guess this house ain't empty after
all.

No one speaks. Even the ticking clock below has stopped.

ALFIE
(low)
Don't like it here.
(pauses)
Best give 'em their due -- and get
the hell out this room.

Ruth turns, nods faintly -- respectful.

RUTH
Agreed. There's nothing for us
here.

ALFIE
Right. Knives'll be in the kitchen.
Maybe things we need. Other rooms
too -- we'll check as we move.

MRS. AKARI
(soft)
Is there truly nothing we can do...
for them?

A stillness. No one meets her eyes.

RUTH
(quiet)
No. There isn't.

They wait -- one beat, then start for the door.

Then -- Alfie stops, turns back toward a small dresser near
the bed.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Alfie... what are you doing?

He crouches by the wardrobe, pulling drawers open.

ALFIE
Dead folk don't need their coats.

Ruth frowns -- caught between anger and understanding.

RUTH

You were the one said we should
leave.

ALFIE

Aye -- but it's bloody cold out
there, ain't it?

(turns)

Let's leave warmer than we came in.

A pause -- the others hesitate. Leo smirks faintly, moves to
another drawer.

LEO

When you put it like that... guess
survival wins the argument.

Alfie sorts through the drawers -- wood creaks, fabric
rustles.

He pulls out a woman's wool sweater and tosses it to Ruth.

She catches it -- halfway to protest -- then her breath
softens.

The fabric's rough, but warm.

A small, grateful pause.

Without a word, she takes off Alfie's old coat and tosses it
back to him.

He puts it on, hides a small grin.

RUTH

Don't make a habit of being right.

ALFIE

Wouldn't dream of it.

She slips the sweater on. It fits. Warmer.

Leo finds an old corduroy jacket and pulls it over himself.

They all look toward Mrs. Akari, still standing by the door -
- a pale, still figure in her torn kimono.

Leo looks at the torn hem -- speaks gently.

LEO

You oughta change too, miss.

(gestures)

Probably somethin' Amanda's mother
owned -- fits your sort of grace.

(MORE)

LEO (CONT'D)
Something steadier than that silk,
maybe.

MRS. AKARI
I... I... cannot wear --

She stops. Fails to finish.

Ruth steps closer.

RUTH
We don't have much time. And we're
not splitting again. We'll find
something for you here -- we all
turn our backs while you change.
That's the deal.

Mrs. Akari studies her -- then nods once, resigned.

They move through the room -- quiet, searching.

Alfie spots a cedar box under the window and pries it open.

Inside: folded dresses, scarves, and a winter coat --
preserved like memories.

He lifts a knee-length cream dress and a dark cardigan.

ALFIE
Not silk, but it'll fit you fine.

Ruth nods approval.

Before she can say more, Leo turns from the other side of the
room -- arms full: a pair of bib overalls and worn shoes.

LEO
(grinning faintly)
Hold up. These'll do better for the
occasion.

He drops the overalls and shoes on the bed.

Alfie glances over, exhales through his nose, and puts the
dress back into the box, then drops the cardigan beside the
overalls.

ALFIE
Fair point.

RUTH
That'll serve her better. Keeps her
warm -- and moving.

Mrs. Akari watches in silence. Her torn silk hangs loose; the light brushes her face, soft and sad.

RUTH (CONT'D)

We'll turn around. You change, then we go. Understood?

She nods.

They turn their backs.

The sound of soft fabric. Cloth slipping free. Footsteps shift against the floorboards.

Silence, then the sound of a button fastened.

A moment later --

MRS. AKARI

(softly)

You may turn.

They do.

She stands in the bib overalls and dark cardigan, the worn shoes laced neat -- still graceful.

The kimono lies folded across the chair -- a quiet surrender to the world she's in.

ALFIE

(sincere)

Suits you fine, ma'am.

She inclines her head -- a gentle bow.

MRS. AKARI

It belonged to a mother. I'll treat it with respect.

LEO

(approving)

Now you look like you belong with us.

MRS. AKARI

(quiet, a small smile)

I hope not... but thank you.

Ruth shoulders her spear, glances toward the door.

RUTH

All right. We've lingered long enough. Let's move.

They file out -- one by one -- leaving the room and the frozen family behind.

CUT TO:

INT. UNDERGROUND SPACE -- NIGHT

Dark. Wet. The slow, hollow drip of water.

And underneath -- breathing.

A faint glow trembles -- Hamza's cracked phone light. It shines weakly across broken concrete and dripping pipes.

Dust floats with every breath.

Amanda slumps against a wall, panting through pain. Blood on her cheek. She presses her side.

Mei sits nearby, knees pulled tight to her chest, silent sobs shaking her frame. Her sleeve dark with blood. In her fist -- Muskule's bloodied collar.

Hamza bleeds from the side of his face. He edges toward mei, careful not to stir the rubble.

HAMZA

(whisper)

Mei... you hurt bad?

She shakes her head -- a lie.

Hamza eyes her arm -- the fabric soaked deep red. He reaches for it. She jerks back.

MEI

(whisper)

It's fine. Just stings.

Amanda watches, voice cracked and low.

AMANDA

You're bleedin' bad. You ain't fine.

Mei says nothing. Her breath trembles; tears gather again.

HAMZA

(soft)

We'll wrap it soon. Just... breathe.

Mei looks up, eyes hollow.

MEI
 (Soft, broken)
 João... muskule...

A silence. The names hangs heavy.

Amanda's chest heaves.

AMANDA
 (low)
 They're gone... both of 'em...

Her gaze drops to the collar in Mei's hand.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
 (soft, pained)
 Muskule... she fought hard. That
 damn cat.

MEI
 (voice small)
 She was brave. And I was so scared.
 (Beat, voice thins)
 It was all my fault.

HAMZA
 (gentle, steady)
 No it's not.

MEI
 (near-hysterical, whisper)
 If my phone -- if my damn phone
 hadn't --
 (voice cracks)
 João...

Amanda turns away, hiding tears.

A long, hollow silence.

Then -- Clack. Somewhere above.

They freeze. Hamza slowly lowers his phone; the light fades.

Darkness folds around them -- only dripping water. Only their
 breathing.

LATER --

They sit in the dark, whispering -- voices raw and worn thin.

AMANDA
 (whispers; theory forming)
 Listen -- maybe this place... maybe
 it runs on us.

No one answers.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
 You ever think... maybe it's the
 stories that build it?
 (beat)
 You told her story, Hamza. Maybe
 that's how she got here. Maybe we
 speak things into bein'.

HAMZA
 (dry)
 That's not possible.

AMANDA
 Why not? That Rain Man they talk
 about -- somebody must've made him
 up first. And the more folks here
 told it, the stronger he got till
 he had his own cut of this world.
 When we got smaller, fog started
 leak-in' in.

Her voice softens.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
 What if you could change her story?
 Tell it again... but different. Say
 she finds her missing shoe or
 whatever. Say she leaves us be.

A silence stretches.

MEI
 (quietly)
 So what -- you think Hamza made her
 real? Then why haven't your stories
 ever come true? You tell about your
 family all the time. Your sister,
 the songs... If stories live here,
 then they'd be here too.

Amanda stares -- hurt, not angry.

HAMZA
 Maybe it's not all stories. Only
 the bad ones. Maybe this place is -
 - like -- a stomach for nightmares.
 The things we fear.
 (MORE)

HAMZA (CONT'D)

This place feels like that. Like somebody's bad dream got stuck.

MEI

Then changin' her ending won't matter. Nightmares don't turn good just cause you ask.

Amanda watches a small puddle. A drop falls into it -- plink.

AMANDA

And if we told the Rain Man's story here?

She asks it anyway, knowing the answer.

MEI

It'd tear her world apart -- yeah -
- but his rules are trades. First drop's a bargain, last one's death. One of us would pay it.

No one speaks. The thought drains the air out of the room.

Water drips again.

Hamza rises -- slow, worn down to the bone.

HAMZA

Let's keep movin'. Staying still feels worse.

They move through the dark -- unarmed -- step by cautious step. The dripping echoes behind them.

The walls shift. Angles twist -- and become --

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

MEI

(whispering)
it changed again. The walls weren't like this before.

She looks back -- the corridor stretches on, endless.

Every step echoes strange. Sometimes distant, sometimes right behind them.

A door waits ahead where there was only wall a heartbeat ago.

HAMZA
 (soft)
 Door.

He presses his ear to it -- nothing.

He opens it.

INT. TEACHER'S OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

A small, faded office, a cork-board cluttered with yellowed notices, a battered globe on a shelf.

Papers everywhere -- attendance sheets, scribbles, notebooks.

On the wall, a framed portrait: A woman in a neat dress, hair pinned, a calm, practiced smile -- Madam Koi Koi -- before the legend.

Hamza sweeps his phone light slowly -- then freezes.

In the corner -- a GIRL, 13, in school uniform, kneeling to the wall. Arm raised. Skin marked by cane lines. Her shoulders quake with quiet sobs.

The three stare, motionless.

AMANDA
 (whisper)
 You seein' that too?

Hamza steps closer.

HAMZA
 (soft)
 Hey... are you -- are you okay?

The girl trembles harder, stifles a sob. Her voice is the size of a mouse.

GIRL
 (through tears)
 She... punished me. I didn't do the last assignment. She already knew. Didn't even check my note. She gives work too hard.

Amanda and Mei exchange a look -- confusion and pity.

AMANDA
 (whispers, to Mei)
 You think she's real?

HAMZA
I... don't think so.

Amanda mutters a prayer. She crouches, keeping distance.

AMANDA
Who are you? How long you been
kneelin' here?

The girl shakes her head violently.

GIRL
(soft, urgent)
I can't talk loud. She'll beat me.

A beat. Her eyes flick toward them.

GIRL (CONT'D)
Are you seniors? Why aren't you
wearin' uniform?

HAMZA
(Thinks, stammers)
We-we're --

MEI
(cutting in, too quick)
We're new. We just resumed today.

They all look at each other. The key thing is the instinct to lie; another key is that it eases the girl's fear.

The girl relaxes a little, snuffles. Believes her.

Then --

Clack... Clack... Footsteps outside. Slow. Measured.

MEI (CONT'D)
(urgent, whisper)
Lemme see your note.

AMANDA
What are you doin'?

Mei doesn't answer. She grabs the notebook, flips it open -- math equations scribbled across the page.

MEI
This is easy.

She starts writing fast. Solving.

The footsteps draw closer.

She places the notebook back. Hamza kills the phone light, stuffs it in his pocket.

The doorknob turns.

THE OFFICE DOOR OPENS

Light floods in. But everything's changed.

The office is bright. Alive.

Madam koi koi steps inside. But not the ghost -- alive, human, the portrait made flesh.

Neat dress. Polished heel. Cane tucked beneath her arm, notebooks in the other.

Everything seems ordinary: bright walls, clean desks. Even their clothes are suddenly spotless, their wounds gone.

They stare, stunned. Heart beating fast.

MADAM KOI KOI

Who are you children, and what are you doing in my office?

Hamza opens his mouth, but --

The kneeling girl speaks up timidly.

GIRL

They're new students, ma. They came to greet you before class.

Madam Koi Koi turns to her.

MADAM KOI KOI

(Stern)

And were you spoken to, young lady?

The girl flinches.

MADAM KOI KOI (CONT'D)

Only speak when addressed.

Her eyes land on Mei -- curious. Then a smile, bright, teacherly.

MADAM KOI KOI (CONT'D)

So our school now welcomes foreign students? How wonderful. Introduce yourselves.

HAMZA

Hamza, ma.

MEI

M-Mei.

AMANDA

Amanda.

MADAM KOI KOI

My name is Miss Obianuju Nwosu.
Welcome to our school.

She circles them -- measured, graceful -- heels clicking soft on the floor, then sits behind her desk.

MISS OBIANUJU

I see the school hasn't given you uniforms yet. That's all right -- you'll still attend your classes.
(taps cane lightly)
Punctuality is discipline.

Her gaze shifts to the kneeling girl.

MISS OBIANUJU (CONT'D)

And I trust you three do your assignments... unlike her. I know she hasn't touched this one, same as last time. We do not tolerate slackness here.

She picks up the notebook, opens it -- stops. The kneeling girl shakes lightly.

Her face changes -- the faintest surprise. Every answer correct.

MISS OBIANUJU (CONT'D)

Stand up.

The girl rises, trembling.

MISS OBIANUJU (CONT'D)

Seems I was mistaken. You've done well.
(beat)
All of you -- off now. Go prepare for the day.

The three exchange a glance. Hamza nods, pushes the door open.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY — DAY

They file through the door. The corridor beyond glows with morning light. The school looks... normal. Clean. No cracks, no rot. No trace of life.

The girl trails behind them, hands clasped behind her back. A shy, hopeful smile. She watches -- as if waiting for approval.

After a moment, she gathers the courage to speak.

GIRL
(cheerful, timid)
Hello... my name's folashade.

Amanda stiffens. Mei glances at Hamza. They share a look -- wrong but we'll play along.

GIRL (CONT'D)
Mmm... but you can just call me
Shade.

No one answers. They walk together -- footsteps sharp in the empty halls.

HAMZA
Where is everybody?

Shade shrugs lightly, unbothered.

SHADE
(Innocent)
Maybe the others are running late.
Maybe their fees were delayed.
They'll come.

Her tone -- so casual. Ordinary. It only deepens the wrongness.

SHADE (CONT'D)
(to Mei)
Thank you... for helping me with my
homework. Nobody helps me usually.

Mei manages a smile, heart breaking a little.

MEI
Anytime.

Shade turns to Amanda.

SHADE
You sound different. Where are you
from?

AMANDA
Miss'sippi.

SHADE
That sounds far.

They walk on... and without warning --

CHANGE --

They're suddenly outside, mid-stride.

No transition. Just fwoop: quadrangle. Sun overhead.

The group quietly looks around, they don't stop walking.

Shade doesn't react -- doesn't notice the world changed
around her.

EXT. GIRLS' HOSTEL - DAY

A two-story brick building framed in yellow, faintly cracked
concrete. Windows in tight rows. Barred. Uniform. The
building stands broad and solid -- practical rather than
pretty. Roof gleaming under the strange, steady sun. Concrete
steps lead up to the entrance, where bold paint read: FEMALE
HOSTEL.

Mei eyes the building.

MEI
Female hostel?

SHADE
(Sighs)
That's how they write it. This is
the girls' hostel, where we stay.

She brightens at Amanda.

SHADE (CONT'D)
Since we're first, we can be
roommates. We'll pick the best room
before the others come.

Mei side-eyes Hamza.

MEI
What about the boys'?

SHADE

Oh -- boys aren't allowed here. But
we can all meet after break.

A cold, collective hesitation.

Shade looks at Hamza with open curiosity -- too innocent.

Amanda steps in quickly.

AMANDA

(Soft)

Hamza's my boyfriend. Hope you
ain't gon' mind us bringin' him in.
We'd appreciate you not making a
fuss.

SHADE

Your... boyfriend?

AMANDA

(flat)

Yes. He is.

Shade blushes faintly.

SHADE

Oh... that's fine. I like him. We
can keep him in. I haven't seen the
matrons yet, I think -- no one will
know.

She walks over and holds the door open with a proud grin.

SHADE (CONT'D)

Quick. We'll get a good room before
the others come.

One last exchanged look -- then they step inside.

The door closes without a sound.

INT. GIRLS' HOSTEL -- CORRIDOR -- CONTINUOUS

A U-shaped structure around an open gravel courtyard.
Sunlight cuts through the center, leaving the upper walkways
in shadow. Narrow balconies run the length of both floors --
all clean, and dormitory-efficient.

Shade flips a switch. The fluorescent lights buzz, flare,
settle.

She sighs, relieved.

SHADE

Thank God. There's light.

(Turns)

We don't always have electricity here.

She flips it off again, humming as she moves down the hallway.

They follow, uneasy.

The corridor stretches long and quiet, lined with identical doors.

Amanda notices a fire extinguisher mounted by a pillar. They pass it. Then, Couple feet later -- the same extinguisher. Same scuff mark.

Her face tightens, she swallows.

Mei's eyes lift -- the same looped birdsong repeats from the courtyard, identical note for note. Too perfect. Too programmed. Her skin prickles.

Their footsteps echo... then echo again... slightly behind.

Shade is blissfully unaware.

SHADE (CONT'D)

Once we settle in, you'll see. Hostel is fun. When my friends resume, I'll introduce you.

MEI

You like it here?

SHADE

Mm-hm. You tidy your things once we find a good room.

Amanda looks around -- no dust. Even the air smells washed.

AMANDA

(skeptical)

Sure is mighty clean. Who been doin' all the sweepin'?

SHADE

The cleaners. Maybe they came early and left. We take turns sometimes - sweep and mop. On Sundays, mostly.

(beat)

Do you clean at your school?

HAMZA

Sometimes.

Shade giggles lightly. For a second, the hall almost feels safe.

She stops at a door ROOM 17, turns the handle, and peeks in.

INT. FIRST DORM ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Rows of iron bunks -- no mattresses, no sheets, only iron frames. The windows worn. The air smells like rust.

Shade wrinkles her nose.

SHADE

Ugh. This one's bad. We can do better.

She closes the door, embarrassed for the room.

INT. CORRIDOR – CONTINUOUS

They walk again. The corridor repeats itself -- doors, bannisters. Same wash of sunlight.

Another door comes into view -- also marked ROOM 17.

Mei's breath catches.

Shade brightens.

SHADE

Here. This one is better.

She opens it.

INT. SECOND DORM ROOM – DAY

A perfect room. Two bunk beds made tightly. Neatly folded blankets. Clean pillows. Wardrobes closed. Stillness like a photograph.

Shade steps in, pleased.

SHADE

See? This one's good. You can have whichever beds you like. We'll stay here.

Hamza, then Mei enter cautiously.

Amanda lingers, skin crawlin', then follows.

Mei touches a pillow -- cold, unused.

MEI

(Quiet)

Feels... prepared.

AMANDA

(To Mei, quiet)

Ain't nobody stayed here, yet them sheets still smell like soap.

Shade doesn't notice their fear. She turns, opens a wardrobe with pride.

The trio exchange a silent look: something is maintaining this place.

SHADE

We can decorate later. I draw sometimes. My friends too.

MEI

Anything else we're going to be doing later?

Shade grins. Wink at the group.

SHADE

Oh. After prep tonight, we're going to prank Madam Koi Koi.

(whispers, conspiratorial)

I'm going to steal her shoe.

The air chills. Hamza's breath catches.

HAMZA

...what?

She laughs -- thinking he's amused.

Their hearts collectively skip.

Shade blinks at their reaction -- confused.

SHADE

Sorry... I forgot, you're new. Madam koi koi is what we call her. That teacher you met in the office.

(Small laugh, mockingly)

It's because of her shoe. Koi... koi... koi...

(MORE)

SHADE (CONT'D)
(Shakes head)
I think she only has one shoe.

Shade laugh innocently. No one joins her.

Hamza clears his throat. Then casually --

HAMZA
(Soft, testing)
So... where's your stuff, Shade?
You been here a while, right? You
must've brought your box in.

SHADE
Oh, my box is...

Shade stops. Her face stills. Not confused, not alarmed --
just... blank.

Her eyes search the room for an answer that isn't there.

SHADE (CONT'D)
My... box?

Then --

She glitches.

The light overhead flicker -- shadows reverse direction.

The air bends, warping sound.

Suddenly --

NIGHT.

The room decays in an instance. Beds stripped. Metal rusted.
Their breath fogs white.

Amanda stiffens -- silent terror.

Mei steps back, gripping her arm. The group glances around
themselves.

A deep hum rises -- Madam Koi Koi's true world bleeding in.

Then, just as fast --

FLASH -- DAY AGAIN.

Everything restored. Perfect again.

And by Shade's bunk -- a small box sits neatly on the floor.
Clothes folded on the mattress.

Shade claps softly, delighted.

SHADE (CONT'D)

Ah! There it is. I knew I brought it earlier.

(turns, to the girls)

Where did you put yours? I can help you unpack when I finish mine.

They stare, frozen.

Hamza forces breath back into his lungs.

HAMZA

(quiet, stunned)

Shade... you didn't see any of that?

SHADE

See what? Oh, you mean my box?

(Smiles)

Sometimes, I keep things and I forget where I kept them. It's silly.

Amanda gently takes control.

AMANDA

(gentle)

We gon' let you get settled. Get your... things put in place. We'll be right back.

Shade nods, trusting.

SHADE

Okay! I'll be fast.

She turns away, unpacking.

Amanda backs toward the door put a hand on Hamza's arm.

AMANDA

Come on. Let's step out. Give Shade some privacy while she sorts her things.

Hamza hesitates -- then lets Amanda pull him. Mei follows.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

(to shade)

We ain't goin' far. Just talkin' a little bit.

SHADE
 (smiling)
 Alright. I'll be here.

The door shuts behind them. Silent.

INT. HOSTEL CORRIDOR -- CONTINUOUS

Amanda exhales, shaking out the tension.

They walk quickly -- then slow.

The corridor repeats. Same faded poster -- a "NO RUNNING IN THE HALL" -- twice.

Mei stops.

MEI
 (quiet)
 It's looping again.

Hamza looks back -- the corridor is the same in every direction.

They stop in a small alcove by a barred window.

MEI (CONT'D)
 Ever since we met her... this place changed.
 (beat)
 It doesn't feel like Madam Koi
 Koi's world right now.

HAMZA
 Yeah. It feels like somebody's
 memory of a school.

MEI
 Exactly.

Amanda stares out the barred window -- the sun angle still exact, unmoved.

MEI (CONT'D)
 Shade... I don't think she was made here. She feels real. She thinks she is. She must've died during the chain of events that created the myth of Madam Koi Koi.

HAMZA

(soft)

A ghost stuck replaying the day she died.

Amanda covers her mouth.

HAMZA (CONT'D)

Everything we see -- the halls, the sunlight, bird sounds, the perfect beds... It's all what she remembers.

Mei nods.

AMANDA

(Low)

We're walking inside her memory of the school?

MEI

When Hamza told that story earlier... Shade's spirit must've been pulled into this place. She might be the girl from the story -- the one who never came back.

Amanda swallows. Her voice drops.

AMANDA

(soft, shaken)

So she don't know she gone... don't know she trapped... don't know this whole place is just somethin' she holdin' onto. And she think that monster's just a regular teacher.

MEI

Because that's how she remembers her. This world shapes itself around what Shade believes.

Amanda leans back against the cold wall.

AMANDA

(soft, hurting)

Lord... that poor girl. She livin' the same mornin'... over n' over.

Mei lowers her eyes.

MEI

And when we ask her something she can't remember --

(MORE)

MEI (CONT'D)

(heavy)

The world glitches to fill in the blank.

Hamza rubs the back of his neck -- let's out a breath.

HAMZA

(Low)

I always imagined it was a group of boys stole that teacher's shoe... caused her death

(shakes head)

Hard to believe that shy girl we met at the office was the cause of all this.

Silence swells between them.

AMANDA

(sniff, soft)

If she fixin' to try prank again -- maybe stoppin' her break the curse. Send her free... send us free too.

Hamza shakes his head slowly.

HAMZA

I don't even know how she'd do it. None of her friends are here. She hasn't even noticed they're gone.

MEI

She will. She'll just ask us instead. If it's in her memory... it's already waiting to happen.

Amanda looks at Mei sharply.

AMANDA

And if it happen --?

Mei swallows.

MEI

Then this bright mornin'... it's only borrowin' time. Sooner or later, it'll fold back into Madam Koi Koi's world.

HAMZA

We need a plan before that happens.
(beat)

(MORE)

HAMZA (CONT'D)
 If Madam Koi Koi could drag us in
 here... maybe Shade can lead us out
 -- if we play this right.

A silence hangs. None of them know what "right" is supposed to look like.

Amanda exhales, drained.

AMANDA
 We oughta head back. Shade start
 smellin' somethin' off, it's gon'
 make this whole thing harder.

Hamza nods. They start moving.

INT. SHADE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Shade is by her bed, straightening the last of her books into a neat little stack. She turns when she hears them enter. A small smile.

SHADE
 Oh -- you're back.
 (soft)
 I'm... finished arranging now.
 Everything's set.

She notices their faces -- their shoulders tight, eyes not quite steady.

SHADE (CONT'D)
 Is something wrong?

Hamza meets her, voice level.

HAMZA
 Nothing we can't handle.

He steadies his expression. They all follow suit instinctively. They ease closer to her, a hesitant cluster.

Shade's gaze slips to the outline in Hamza's pocket -- remembering.

SHADE
 Um... earlier... in the office.
 That... that light you were
 holding.
 (tilts head)
 What was it? I've never seen one
 like that before.
 (MORE)

SHADE (CONT'D)
 (hopeful, gentle)
 Can I... maybe look at it?

All three still slightly.

AMANDA
 (under breath)
 Lord... not now.

Mei's shoulders tense.

MEI
 Shade... it's -- it's not really --

Shade steps forward, brow faintly creasing.

SHADE
 Did I... say something wrong? I
 only want to see it. I won't report
 you or anything. If it's...
 illegal?
 (small nervous laugh)
 I don't even know who I'd tell.

Hamza exhales, a quiet surrender -- and slips his hand into
 this pocket -- reaching.

Mei's hand clamps onto his forearm.

MEI
 Don't. Hamza... think.

AMANDA
 You show her that thing, you know
 what's gon' happen.
 (low)
 Ain't no goin' back from it.

Shade looks between them, unsettled now -- the seriousness in
 their faces too sharp, too strange.

SHADE
 Why are you all... looking like
 that?
 (voice thins)
 It's only a flash light, right? I
 only asked to --

She takes a step back -- confusion slipping into fear.

HAMZA
 (to Mei and Amanda, low)
 This story we're in...
 (MORE)

HAMZA (CONT'D)
 it's going to end whether we want
 it to or not.
 (beat)
 I'd rather face it my own way.

Shade flinches at his tone, instinctively drifting toward the door.

SHADE
 Maybe -- maybe I should just go. I
 don't want --

Mei moves fast, stepping in front of her, gentle but firm.

MEI
 (Cutting in)
 -- Shade, wait. Please.
 (soft)
 We're sorry. For being strange.
 We're just... trying not to rush
 something we don't understand.

Shade stills, breath thin.

Mei turns back to Hamza.

MEI (CONT'D)
 If you're set on this... okay.
 (quiet, serious)
 But ease into it. Don't shock her.

Hamza nods once. Then he pulls the phone from his pocket.

He holds it out toward Shade.

Shade's breathing calms -- the tension in her shoulders softens.

Her eyes settle on the glowing object in Hamza's hands.

Hamza notices the screen -- earlier cracked, now clean and whole.

A beat -- confusion -- then he lets it go. Shade is more important.

Shade leans closer, a sense of uncertainty coiling in her chest.

SHADE
 (soft)
 ...What is that?

Hamza steps a little closer.

HAMZA
It's my smartphone.

Shade repeats it, the word strange to her.

SHADE
...Smart... phone?

Amanda steps closer -- voice steady, simple.

AMANDA
It's a telephone. Just ain't shaped
like the ones you know.

Shade stares between them.

SHADE
Telephones don't look like that.
This is something else... i don't
know -- a screen. That's not a
telephone.

Amanda gestures -- small -- toward Hamza and Mei.

AMANDA
Phones like this are normal where
they're from. Hamza got his. Mei
too.

Shade looks from Amanda to Hamza -- confused. She studies him
-- the Hausa kaftan, the accent, his name.

SHADE
No. That's not possible. Hamza is
Nigerian -- like me. See how he's
dressed, the way he speaks.
(beat)
Phones like this don't exist in our
country. Not anywhere.

Amanda tries -- but Mei steps in first.

MEI
That's not what she meant by "where
we're from."

Mei pulls her scuffed Blackberry, she holds it beside Hamza's
phone. Two pieces of the future, breathing light.

MEI (CONT'D)
They look different because they're
from different brands... different
times.

(MORE)

MEI (CONT'D)

Hamza's is more current than mine -
- because Hamza himself is more
current than me.

Shade freezes, the idea stopping her thoughts.

A small silence forms.

SHADE

...What do you mean by that?

A glance passes between the three.

Shade's eyes flick between them -- waiting.

Shade whispers the answer herself.

SHADE (CONT'D)

...You're from the future?

Hamza meets her eyes.

HAMZA

Yes. We are...

(beat)

...But not all of us.

The words chills her from the inside. Shade's face empties. A hollow, scared silence.

The room flickers. Walls bend like heat. Paint curls away.

The reality splits -- Madam Koi Koi's world bleeding through.

Amanda lunges forward -- grabs Shade's shoulders.

AMANDA

Hey -- look right here. Shade,
focus on me!

She shakes her once -- hard, grounding.

Shade gasps -- eyes snapping back -- and she SEES it: The rot crawling backwards, like time rewinding. Walls healing -- paint smoothing. The floor restoring to clean tile.

The entire room reassembles back to normal.

Shade stares, stumbles a step -- terrified.

SHADE

What -- what just happened? Did you
see that?! Everything changed. You
saw it too?

Mei nods -- pale.

MEI

We saw it last time, too.

Shade whispers it back, lost.

SHADE

...Last time?

Her hands shake. She backs a little, crosses herself fast, whispering a prayer.

Amanda steps in -- interrupts, soft.

AMANDA

Shade... listen to me, alright?

Shade looks at her -- wide, frantic.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

To us, Hamza and Mei are from the future. But to you... I'm from the past.

Shade struggles -- overwhelmed.

SHADE

How -- how old are you?

AMANDA

Born in '28. Time in this place... doesn't move the way it should.

SHADE

This place? The school?

Mei tries to explain -- too much at once.

MEI

It's not the school itself. The school is inside a pocket reality -
- inside another --

Hamza touches her shoulder -- stopping her.

Amanda tries again. Slower.

AMANDA

Shade... that prank y'all pulled on your teacher -- that's how we got here.

SHADE
(whispers)
I don't understand... how?

AMANDA
Hamza told the story of Madam Koi
Koi and --

Hamza cuts in gently.

He steps to Shade. Careful. Kind.

HAMZA
Shade.

She looks up, like a child waiting for help.

HAMZA (CONT'D)
You know the way out of the school?

Shade hesitates -- then nods.

SHADE
Yes. I know it.

Hamza breathes once -- deep.

HAMZA
We need to leave. Now. Or all of us
will be in danger.

Shade's throat tightens.

SHADE
Danger, from what?

Hamza rests a hand on her shoulder.

HAMZA
Just trust me. We avoid Miss
Obianuju... no matter what.

Shade sees their faces -- the urgency.

She swallows, nods.

SHADE
(faint)
...Okay. Follow me.

She moves to the door. They fall in behind her.

INT. GIRLS' HOSTEL — CORRIDOR — CONTINUOUS — NIGHT

Shade opens the door. They step out --

-- and it's night.

Blue moonlight washes over the courtyard.

Shade freezes.

SHADE

(whisper)

It was morning... how is it night?

Amanda steps beside her -- anchoring.

AMANDA

Ain't real. Shade -- you're scared,
that's all. This place uses what's
in your head. Just stay with us.

Shade nods -- trusting her.

They walk. Shade leads. Hamza beside her -- then Amanda, then Mei.

The hallway stretches long. Repeating pillars. Repeating doors. The same bird noise -- perfect loop.

Shade notices -- panic rising.

SHADE

It's all the same. It's not ending.

The walls blisters. Black rot spreads like mold in seconds.

Everyone sees it.

CLACK. A single heel, sharp in the distance.

Then -- a dragging foot beneath it.

They all stop.

Shade trembles -- voice tiny.

SHADE (CONT'D)

What... what's that sound?

They draw tight, surrounding her.

Mei covers Shade's eyes.

MEI

Close your eyes. Breathe. It's all
in your mind. Just fear -- don't
feed it.

A voice -- smooth, cold.

MADAM KOI KOI (O.S.)

It's well past bedtime. Tell me why
I find children wandering the
halls... and a boy where he does
not belong.

Shade whimpers, almost breaking.

The group trembles.

Hamza pulls Mei's hand from Shade's eyes.

HAMZA

Shade -- take us out. Anywhere but
here.

Shade breaks -- crying.

SHADE

I can't... It's endless... we're
trapped -- I don't know where --

-- SLAP.

Shade's head turns. Stunned.

Hamza and Mei stare at Amanda -- disbelief.

Shade touches her cheek -- hurt, betrayed.

Everything falls silent.

Reality snaps clean. The hallway returns to normal: No rot.
No peeling walls. Still night -- but stable.

Shade steps back -- eyes wide with hurt.

SHADE (CONT'D)

(soft)
...You hit me.

Hamza rounds on Amanda -- angry.

HAMZA

Why would you do that?

Amanda stands there, shaking -- grief in every word.

AMANDA

João. Muskule. I ain't losin'
nobody else today.

Shade looks at her -- the corridor quiet around them.

Amanda steps closer -- voice low, urgent.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

Look 'round you. It's all normal
again. This place eats memories --
your fear. If we gon' get out...
you gotta be calm. Think on where
you goin'-- exactly where.

Mei nods, eyes already wet.

MEI

Picture the outside. That's where
we're going.

Shade breathes -- shaking -- but trying.

She closes her eyes.

Mei lays a hand on her back. Amanda on her shoulder. Hamza on
her arm.

Shade steps forward -- eyes still closed.

Another --

-- and the world CUTS.

EXT. SCHOOL QUAD -- CONTINUOUS -- NIGHT

They're already outside -- mid-walk, like the world cut under
their feet.

Open ground. The quad stretches before them -- moon high --
cold.

Dorm blocks stand behind them. Farther off, the classroom
buildings -- their windows dark...

...EXCEPT ONE.

A SINGLE LIT WINDOW on the second floor. A still
silhouette stands inside -- a woman's profile. Watching.

No movement. Just a shape. Eyes you can't see.

Shade's eyes open -- breath sharp.

She looks up -- the moon hanging wide and white above them.

Amanda steadies her -- quiet.

AMANDA

You doin' good. Jus' keep walkin'.

Shade breathes -- steps forward. Four bodies, moving like one.

They cross the quad -- slow, steady steps through cold light.

Ahead -- a wrought-iron gate under a concrete arch. Square columns. Curled metal. A crest overhead.

A smaller side gate mirrors it, locked into the column. Next to both -- a tiny guard room with a barred window. Darkness inside.

Shade slows, points.

SHADE

(whisper)

There, we are close.

Mei nods, voice small.

MEI

Yeah. We see it.

Hamza moves ahead -- urgency muted by caution.

He tries the side-gate -- padlocked shut.

He checks the guard room door -- jammed. Won't budge.

Amanda calls out -- low.

AMANDA

What's wrong?

Hamza doesn't look back -- still testing the handle.

HAMZA

Locked. Everything's -- hold on...

He checks the main gate -- a chain looped through the bars. The padlock hangs rusted -- open enough to slide off.

A breath of relief.

HAMZA (CONT'D)

We're fine. We can get through.

He slips the chain free -- lets it drop.

He pushes the gate -- careful -- the iron groans.

Outside -- the road curves through trees, moon overhead like a frozen lamp.

And ahead -- a strange threshold: A divide.

One road -- two realities.

Here: night and clear air.

Beyond: White fog -- daylight buried inside it, the road swallowed ahead.

They step through the school gate.

Shade stumbles -- knees buckling.

Hamza catches her before she hits the ground.

AMANDA

Shade--?

Shade wipes her nose -- blood.

She forces a smile -- weak.

SHADE

I'm fine... just, headache.

The others glance at each other -- worry tight in their faces.

They walk.

Shade slows -- slouches -- hand pressed to her skull.

Each step dragging something out of her.

Her form flickers -- translucent then whole -- like she's slipping between frames.

Her eyes lock on the fog line -- breath shrinking in her chest.

Mei edges closer -- steadying her arm.

MEI

It's okay, Shade. Once we cross it... the others'll be right there.

Amanda keeps her upright from the other side.

Shade nods -- weak but willing.

Hamza reaches the fog first -- the edge like a wall in the air.

He waits -- voice tight.

HAMZA

Hurry, we're already here.

Amanda and Mei supports Shade between them.

AMANDA

We comin', just hold on.

Shade collapses again -- legs giving out.

Hamza rushes back -- sweeps her up, turning toward the fog --
-- the world cuts.

INT. CLASSROOM -- NIGHT

Dark. Silent. Wrong.

They sit at desks beside the windows -- like they've been there for minutes.

Moonlight paints the room cold -- a washed-out blue-gray.

Shade blinks -- her strength returning like nothing happened.

SHADE

(confused)

What--? We were at the fog... Why
are we--? Did we make it?

No answer -- only stunned faces.

A voice comes from the far darker corner -- calm, solemn,
hollow.

MISS OBIANUJU (O.S.)

Fola-shade.

They turn -- fear locking their spines.

A woman in the shadows -- profile barely visible.

Her voice carries like she's speaking down an empty well.

MISS OBIANUJU (CONT'D)

I understand now.

(beat)

Why the halls stay empty. Why there aren't any staffs... only myself. Why it is only I... and you, Miss Folashade... who remain here. When no one else, is around.

A still, cold beat.

MISS OBIANUJU (CONT'D)

What I do not understand... are these new students. Or where they came from.

Silence -- the group rises from their seats, drawn together.

A click -- A buzz -- the classroom lights flare on.

They see her.

Miss Obianuju stands near the front -- face angled toward the floor. Skin pale, clothes wrong -- stained with age. One heel missing -- foot bare, ankle twisted.

Beside her -- two wooden memorial boards, candles lit on the floor.

On the first board: A large photograph of Miss Obianuju, centered. Black-and-white.

On the second: Rows of student photos, smaller -- all black-and-white.

Dates beside each name: 1998. Every one.

Shade steps forward -- trembling.

SHADE

I... I know them...

Her eyes stop -- center row. Her own face staring back.

Under it: "Folashade Akinyemi -- died 1998."

Shade goes still.

SHADE (CONT'D)

No... No, that's -- that's not real. It's not --

She looks at Mei -- Amanda -- Hamza. Begging.

No one speaks. Their faces answer for them.

Miss Obianuju lifts her head -- her eyes dry and bloodshot.

MISS OBIANUJU

We are already dead, Shade. We died
long ago.

Shade gasps -- pain ripping through her mind.

She clutches her skull -- memories forcing their way back.

The walls peels -- curling into another world.

Miss Obianuju's body distorts -- clothes aging decades in
seconds. Her spine stretches -- neck cracking loud. Her
height rises -- face sinking into shadow.

Her voice fractures -- anger bleeding through the monotone.

MISS OBIANUJU (CONT'D)

You took my life, folashade. You
and your friends. And this...
(growing, broken)
...Look what I became. In the dark
you left behind.

Shade drops -- tears streaming.

SHADE

I'm sorry -- I didn't -- I didn't
mean -- Please--

Hamza grabs her arm -- yanking her up.

The only exit is beside Madam Koi Koi -- unreachable.

She takes a slow step -- heel hard, echoes. Then drags the
broken ankle -- scraping the floor.

Hamza whispers fast -- urgent.

HAMZA

Shade -- take us out. Now.

Shade forces her eyes shut.

Cut --

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY -- NIGHT

-- They're there.

Shade collapses -- body glitching translucent.

One breath -- thin.

MEI

Shade--?

Shade struggles a whisper.

SHADE

Go...

A heel echoes -- distant -- then the drag of her broken ankle.

The hallway rots -- walls peeling -- the world shifting back to Madam Koi Koi's control.

They run.

Their footsteps pound against the decaying floor.

Madam Koi Koi's heel clack hunts them.

Shade falls again -- worse.

Blood streaks her face -- from her nose, her eyes.

Hamza tries to lift her --

SHADE (CONT'D)

(strained)

-- No... don't--

Hopelessness drags on them -- exhaustion sinking deep.

Ahead -- a silhouette forms -- Madam Koi Koi emerging from the dark.

Amanda kneels beside Shade -- shaking.

AMANDA

Can you take us -- jus' to the gate? Hamza'll carry you from there.

Shade's eyes unfocus -- slipping.

A thought rises -- quiet... final.

She lifts her hand -- trembling.

SHADE

(Weak)
When the bell rings...
(Beat)
...we'll all go home.

Mei cracks -- voice shaking.

MEI

Shade, please concentrate. There's
no bell. We're trapped.

Shade closes her eyes -- a memory igniting somewhere deep.

Her whisper is almost a prayer

SHADE

Yes... there is.

She reaches out -- not with her hands -- but with what's left
of her.

EXT. SCHOOL -- BELL TOWER -- SAME TIME

A rusted bell hangs over the courtyard -- still, forgotten.

Something moves in the air -- a pulse. The rope twitches.

Then pulls. The bell SWINGS.

-- GONG -- GONG.

Sound rolls through the campus -- thick, physical -- shaking
windows, doors, walls.

INT. HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

The bell's sound floods the hall -- Madam Koi Koi stops,
frozen mid-step

The group turns -- startled.

Hamza looks up.

HAMZA

...That's the school bell.

The walls crack -- light splitting through.

Shade smiles -- soft, peaceful.

SHADE
School's... over.

The hallway shatters -- reality tearing into fog-white daylight --

Madam Koi Koi's world collapses -- her form dissolving into silence.

EXT. FOG SIDE - INTERSECTION - DAY

They stand exactly where they vanished -- breathing hard.

Shade isn't here.

Mist clings low to the cracked road, heavy -- covering the distance.

Amanda lowers her eyes -- voice breaking.

AMANDA
We left her... we ain't even help
her.

HAMZA
She saved us. She... paid the price
so we wouldn't.

The group falls quiet -- heavy with grief.

MEI
João... Muskule... Shade...

A faint distortion ripples on the ground -- then a shape forms. Shade fades into existence -- unconscious but alive.

Mei gasps -- hand over her mouth.

MEI (CONT'D)
Shade!

Amanda drops beside her.

AMANDA
Come on, Shade... stay with us...
We ain't losin' you again -- not
after all that --

Shade stirs, eyelids fluttering, fighting her way from somewhere far.

HAMZA

Shade... we thought -- we thought
you were gone.

Shade barely exhales -- a tiny, broken whisper.

SHADE

...Where... where am I...?

Mei is already low in front of her -- urgent, but gentle.

MEI

We're out.
(beat)
But we're not safe yet. We still
have to find the others.

Hamza steps in, eyes sweep through the fog -- he reaches out.

HAMZA

Come on. Can you stand?

Shade takes his hand. Her grip is weak. He pulls her up --
steadies her.

She sways.

HAMZA (CONT'D)

We have to move. Now.

Shade nods -- then her knees buckle again.

Amanda steps forward, catching her before she falls.

AMANDA

Easy. I got you.

Shade clings to her sleeve, breath shallow.

SHADE

Can we... just stop a second?
(weak)
I'm so tired. Please.

Amanda's jaw tightens. She shakes her head -- gentle, but
final.

AMANDA

We can't. Not out here. If we stop,
somethin' finds us.

Shade exhales, defeated.

Hamza looks around, disoriented by the crossroads.

HAMZA

Where do we even go?
 (beat, frowning)
 That English lady -- what's her
 name -- she said we'd split. Market
 one way, mills the other.

A pause.

Mei looks down one of the fog-choked roads. She points.

MEI

I know the way to the mills. That's
 where we should go.

Hamza turns to her, surprised -- about to question it --
 -- but Amanda speaks first, reading his face.

AMANDA

They didn't split. I don't believe
 that.

Hamza looks at her.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

Ruth might talk like that -- cover
 more ground and all -- but Alfie
 wouldn't go for it. Neither would
 Akari. They ain't reckless.

Mei nods, backing her.

MEI

Leo backs Ruth most times... but
 not if he thought we were dead.
 (beat)
 They stayed together. They had to.

Hamza absorbs that. Then he looks at Shade -- barely upright
 now.

He crouches in front of her.

HAMZA

All right. Up you go.

Shade hesitates -- embarrassed, dizzy.

SHADE

You don't have to... I can --

HAMZA

(shuts that down softly)
 -- Shade. It's either my back or
 Amanda drags you by your hair. Pick
 one.

Amanda snorts.

AMANDA

Don't tempt me.

Shade gives a tiny, pained laugh -- then nods.

Hamza lifts her carefully -- she wraps her arms around his
 shoulders, face pressed into his collarbone.

SHADE

(soft)
 ...Thank you.

They move.

The fog thins as they walk. Just enough to reveal --

-- A BODY.

Pale. Twisted. Crumpled on the road. Her pale feet hover
 inches above the road even in death.

Shade recoils, gripping Hamza's shirt.

SHADE (CONT'D)

(terrified whisper)
 Wh-what is that?

No one answers her.

Amanda's expression hardens.

AMANDA

Don't slow down. There's always
 more than one of her floatin'
 around.

They pass wide around the corpse. No one turning their back
 until they're well past --

-- Except Mei.

She looks back, studies the body -- quiet, impressed despite
 herself.

MEI
 (under her breath)
 They're... really good at this.
 Make it look easy.

Hamza glances at her, puzzled -- but says nothing.

They move on.

EXT. FOG SIDE - STREET - CONTINUOUS

Steps muffled against chalk-flecked pavement. No one speaks.

Dilapidated buildings slide past -- windows webbed with black mold, walls blistered and sagging.

They move deeper into town.

Then -- ahead.

A farmhouse.

Whole. Intact. Standing clean among decay like it doesn't belong.

They stop.

Hamza looks up at it -- Shade still on his back.

Silence stretches.

HAMZA
 (quiet)
 What... the hell...

MEI
 (low)
 That wasn't there before.

Shade lifts her head slightly.

SHADE
 (Weak, hopeful)
 It looks safe... Safer than
 everything else... We could stop.
 Just for a little --

Mei's answer is immediate.

MEI
 -- No.
 (pointing)
 (MORE)

MEI (CONT'D)

If you've been out here long enough, you know anything that looks normal is a trap.

Amanda stares at the house -- a long, deep, quiet stare. Something inside her loosens. Something aches.

She steps forward.

HAMZA

Amanda -- hold up. We don't know what's in there. This could be dangerous.

She pauses. Just a second.

AMANDA

It ain't. We'll find weapons in there. Warm clothes. Somethin'.
(beat, quieter)
And, it's been a long time since I been home.

She keeps walking. Mei rushes, grabs her arm.

MEI

It's not real. This place, it's --

Amanda turns, cutting her off. Her expression hardens.

AMANDA

This ain't like Hamza's story!

Mei lets go. Silence settles.

Amanda turns away.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

Ain't nobody draggin' you. Y'all can wait out here if you want. I'm goin' in.

She heads for the porch.

After a look between them, Mei follows. Then Hamza, cautious with every step.

Amanda walks up the steps -- calm, certain.

Hamza follows slower with Shade on his back. Mei stays close.

Amanda reaches the door -- turns the knob. Locked.

She frowns.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
That's... I don't remember lockin'
it.

INT. FARMHOUSE — KITCHEN — SAME TIME

The faint rattle of a doorknob.

Ruth freezes.

Alfie quietly lifts his baseball bat from the kitchen counter, grip tightening.

Mrs. Akari takes a cleaver knife -- silent, ready.

Ruth murmurs.

RUTH
(low)
Quiet. Take cover.

INT. FARMHOUSE — LIVING ROOM — CONTINUOUS

Alfie moves first from the kitchen, bat raised.

Leo follows, crowbar in hand. They exchange a look -- then split, flanking the door.

Ruth braces near the far wall, spear angled.

Mrs. Akari steps into shadow.

The knob rattles again.

EXT. FARMHOUSE — PORCH — CONTINUOUS

Mei shakes her head.

MEI
It's locked. Turning it won't help.

From Hamza's back --

SHADE
Can't we... break it?

Amanda's composure finally cracks. Tears well.

AMANDA
No. This house is all I got left. I
want it the way it is.

Mei swallows.

MEI

I don't have anything to pick it.
 (beat)
 If we're going in... it'll have to
 be forced.

Hamza adjusts his footing, bracing -- Shade still clinging to him.

He lifts his leg --

-- The lock TWISTS.

Clicks.

The door opens.

Mrs. Akari stands there, cleaver loose at her side

For a split second -- shock.

Then Amanda breaks.

AMANDA

Akari --

She rushes in, arms around her.

Mei joins them, overwhelmed.

Mrs. Akari steadies them both.

MRS. AKARI

We heard you arguing. That's how I
 knew it wasn't a fake.

Her eyes lift to Hamza.

A silent look.

Hamza inclines his head once.

Mrs. Akari steps aside.

Hamza enters, careful -- Shade still on his back. The others
 move in as well.

INT. FARMHOUSE — LIVING ROOM — DAY

Ruth, Alfie, and Leo lower their weapons.

Relief floods the room.

Hamza gently sets Shade on her feet.

She sways -- finds balance.

The two groups stand together now.

Whole again. For the moment.

A beat.

Leo scans the room -- counts faces.

His brow creases.

LEO
Where's João?

No one answers immediately.

HAMZA
João didn't make it. Muskule
either.

The words land heavy. Silence presses in.

Alfie looks away -- jaw tight.

ALFIE
...I hope he didn't suffer. Hope it
was over quick.

Amanda snaps toward him.

AMANDA
That don't change nothin'. He's
still gone.

She turns, moving past them -- straight for the staircase.

Her footsteps hit the stairs -- quick, uneven.

Mei instinctively moves to follow.

Mrs. Akari catches her wrist -- gentle but firm.

MRS. AKARI
Let her be.

MEI
João was my friend too.

MRS. AKARI

I know. That's not why I stopped
you.

Mei hesitates -- then accepts.

Ruth shifts focus -- practical now.

Her eyes settle on Shade.

RUTH

Is anyone injured?

Hamza shakes his head.

HAMZA

We're fine. But Shade... she needs
rest. Before she can move again.

Ruth nods.

RUTH

All right. She rests. The rest of
us check the house -- see what we
can use.

(to Hamza)

You've got nothing on you. Find
something solid.

Shade drifts to the couch, exhaustion winning.

She eases down. Closes her eyes.

Mei sits beside her.

Hamza watches them.

Leo steps up beside him, resting a hand on his shoulder.

Ruth, Alfie, and Mrs. Akari gather in.

LEO

You need to walk us through it.
Where you were taken... and what
brought you back.

They move toward the dining area.

Hamza drags out a chair -- sits.

Ruth and Leo take seats across from him.

Alfie and Mrs. Akari remain standing -- listening.

Hamza exhales.

TIME CUT:

INT. FARMHOUSE — DINING AREA — LATER

The story is done.

Everyone is seated now -- even Alfie and Mrs. Akari.

In the living room beyond, Mei and Shade sleep -- each on a separate couch.

Alfie stares toward them.

Then points -- unsure how to ask.

ALFIE

So... you're sayin' that girl --
 (choosing his words)
 She isn't... alive? She's a ghost?

Leo leans back, thinking.

LEO

From what I hearing... her spirit
 got pulled in here after Hamza told
 the story. Like she became part of
 it.

RUTH

If that's how it happened... then
 wouldn't she be capable of the same
 sort of influence as --

HAMZA

-- Don't say her name.

Ruth stops herself.

A breath.

RUTH

I was going to say... the teacher.

Hamza pauses -- careful.

HAMZA

In a limited way. Shade can change
 things -- but only in one place.
 Her school. That's where her reach
 ends.

Quiet settles again.

Thoughtful. Uneasy.

Hamza pushes back his chair.

HAMZA (CONT'D)
Can I go check on Amanda?

Ruth nods.

RUTH
Yeah. Go.

She rises, crosses into the living room, and gently shakes Mei's shoulder.

RUTH (CONT'D)
We're heading upstairs.

Mei stirs, nods sleepily.

Ruth glances at Shade -- chest rising, steady. Satisfied.

The group gathers and heads for the stairs.

INT. FARMHOUSE -- UPSTAIRS HALLWAY -- DAY

Floorboards creak beneath careful steps.

At the end of the hall -- an open door.

A faint, flickering light spills from it.

They enter.

INT. FARMHOUSE -- BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Quiet.

Amanda lies near the wall, curled on her side, half-asleep.

Nearby: the mannequins. Her parents. Her sister.

Their faces locked in terror. Mouths open in silent screams.

A faint CREAK from somewhere in the house.

Mei freezes. Hamza breath catches.

HAMZA
 (quiet, stunned)
 Amanda --

LEO
 (cuts in, low)
 They're her family.

Hamza says nothing.

Mei swallows hard, unable to look away.

MEI
 (soft)
 They were so scared.

Ruth exhales -- tense, already counting time.

RUTH
 I hate this. I feel for her, truly.
 (beat)
 But we can't stay. There's still
 danger out there.

Alfie steps closer, crouches beside Amanda.

ALFIE
 Amanda.
 (gentle)
 Time to go, love.

Amanda stirs -- eyes open, unfocused.

She doesn't look at them.

AMANDA
 They been like this a long time.
 (beat)
 Just... stuck like that. Forever.

She pushes herself up and sits, back against the wall. She
 faces her family.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
 I know you think they ain't alive.
 (shakes head)
 They are. Can't move. Can't scream.
 (quiet)
 Never gettin' rest.

No one interrupts.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

If I hadn't run...
 (voice tight)
 Maybe I'd be here with 'em. Maybe
 that'd be better. Or maybe if they
 were dead -- really dead -- they'd
 be free.

Mei steps forward, shaken.

MEI

Amanda...

Mrs. Akari moves with purpose.

She stops before Amanda and lifts the cleaver -- handle
 first. An offering.

MRS. AKARI

Perhaps... destiny allowed you
 escape. So you could return. So you
 could give them peace.

The room chills.

HAMZA

Akari --

MEI

No. That's not -- you can't ask her
 to do something like that.

Amanda stays silent.

Mrs. Akari remains calm. Final.

MRS. AKARI

To leave them as they are is
 cruelty. If mercy exists here... it
 is this.

Amanda stares at the blade.

Then -- she stands.

Gently, she takes the cleaver from Mrs. Akari.

No one intervenes.

Mei looks to Ruth, pleading.

Ruth meets her eyes -- a faint shake of her head.

ALFIE
 (low, careful)
 I can do it for you, if you want.
 You don't have to.

Amanda ignores him.

The cleaver rests at her side.

AMANDA
 Go on. I'll be down soon. I just...
 need to say goodbye.

They hesitate.

Then, one by one, they turn and leave.

The door closes softly, leaving her alone.

INT. FARMHOUSE — LIVING ROOM — LATER

The silence holds.

Shade sleeps on the couch, breathing steady.

Hamza grips a wrought steel curtain rod.

Mei sits, knife resting across her knees.

Ruth, Leo, Alfie, Mrs. Akari stand spread out. Armed.
 Waiting.

LEO
 (low)
 She's been up there a while.

MRS. AKARI
 She will come when she's ready.

The couch creaks.

Shade stirs, blinking awake.

She notices the silence, studies the room.

SHADE
 ...Why is everyone standing like
 that?

Ruth steps closer, lowering her voice.

RUTH
 How do you feel?

Shade considers the question.

SHADE

Better.

(beat)

Still tired. But better.

FOOTSTEPS above.

Slow. Measured.

Everyone turns.

Amanda descends the stairs.

In one hand -- folded clothes.

In the other -- the cleaver. Blood drips wet from the blade.

Her face is hollowed with grief. Eyes swollen, jaw locked tight.

Shade sees the knife.

SHADE (CONT'D)

(innocent, confused)

...Whose blood is that?

The room freezes.

No one answers.

Amanda stops in front of Mrs. Akari.

AMANDA

Can we switch?

Mrs. Akari nods.

They trade -- rebar for cleaver.

Amanda steps forward, facing them all.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

I don't wanna lose nobody else. Not here. Not ever again.

She drops the clothes.

Picks up a sweater -- hands it to Mei.

Mei blinks, caught off guard.

MEI

I -- I already have --

AMANDA

It's mine.

(soft)

When we leave... I want us carryin'
each other with us.

Mei swallows hard.

She pulls off her hoodie, slips on the sweater.

Tears spill anyway.

MEI

Then...

(beat)

Take this.

She presses her phone into Amanda's palm.

MEI (CONT'D)

So you remember me too.

Amanda nods, closes her fingers around it.

She tosses the other sweater to Shade.

AMANDA

Put it on. It's freezing out there.

Hamza pulls out his phone, steps to Leo, hands it over.

HAMZA

Here.

Leo takes it -- then grips Hamza's hand, firm.

LEO

Whatever happens... you did
alright.

Alfie steps in. Lifts his flat cap -- then Hamza's hula --
placing the cap on Hamza, the hula on himself.

ALFIE

Fair trade.

HAMZA

(faint smile)

Feels heavier than it looks.

Mrs. Akari removes a small locket from her neck.

Steps to Ruth. Gently slips it over her head.

Ruth stiffens -- then exhales.

RUTH
...Thank you.

She presses her fingers briefly to it.

RUTH (CONT'D)
(quiet)
I'll keep it safe.

She lets her hand fall.

The others watch. Changed -- and aware of it.

A quiet settles over the room.

Ruth breaks the stillness, eyes drifting toward the front door.

RUTH (CONT'D)
We shouldn't stay much longer.
Let's get moving.

The group subtly adjusts -- not frantic, just ready. A shared understanding.

Shade stands near the couch, sweater over her narrow frame.

She takes a step forward.

SHADE
Wait.

They stop.

Shade hesitates, taking in each of them.

SHADE (CONT'D)
Am I... allowed to do this too?
(quiet)
I haven't given mine yet.

No one answers right away. Not awkward -- attentive.

She gathers herself.

SHADE (CONT'D)
I don't exactly know what this
place is. Or why we're all here
together.

A brief pause.

SHADE (CONT'D)

But it doesn't feel like a dream.
Dreams end when you wake up.

The room stays still.

She looks down at her hands.

SHADE (CONT'D)

And I know I'm... different. I'm
not living. Not the way you all
are.

Another small, honest breath.

SHADE (CONT'D)

Still... I'd like to be remembered.
By someone. When whatever comes
next, comes.

The air trembles.

Not violent -- but wrong.

The edges of the room blur for half a second, then snaps
back.

Hamza stiffens instinctively.

HAMZA

Shade --

She doesn't look at him.

A small BOOK rests in her palm -- already there, as if it
always had been.

She glances down at it, thoughtful.

SHADE

My journal used to be bigger. I
remembered it smaller... so it
wouldn't weigh you down.

She walks to Hamza -- holds it out.

SHADE (CONT'D)

I thought you should keep it.

Hamza hesitates -- then takes the book carefully, half-
expecting it to vanish.

He slips it into the pocket of his kaftan.

HAMZA
(quiet, earnest)
I'll take care of it.

Shade nods. Satisfied.

Ruth exhales -- the moment passing.

RUTH
All right. Now we go.

They turn toward the door.

As they move, Mei slows. She stops beside Shade.

MEI
Hey.

Mei places a knife gently in Shade's hand.

MEI (CONT'D)
You shouldn't be empty handed.

Shade looks down at the blade -- then curls her fingers around the handle.

SHADE
...Okay.

A look passes between them. Brief. Heavy.

Then Mei turns, catching up with the others.

The door creaks open. Cold air moves in.

One by one, they step out.

Shade lingers a moment longer -- then she follows.

The door shuts behind them.