

SPOON-FED ADDICTION

by

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Based on the novella by Silvano Williams

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INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Silver moonlight cuts through parted curtains. Dust motes drift in the beam.

A stuffed rabbit sits propped against the pillows—threadbare, well-loved.

On the wall: a BEAUTY AND THE BEAST poster. Belle and the Beast mid-dance, her yellow dress swirling. A fairy tale promise.

On the desk: a SKETCHBOOK lies closed, edges worn from use. Beside it, a stack of COLLEGE BROCHURES—University of Houston on top—untouched for months, a thin layer of dust visible on the covers.

A purple diary sits CLOSED on the desk.

Dust coats the desk. The air is stale. Nothing has been touched in a long time.

The room holds its breath—waiting for someone who won't return.

Then—movement.

Darkness bleeds from the corners. It slides across the floor, pools beneath the desk chair. Rises.

The darkness takes shape—shoulders forming, a neck, the curve of a head. SHADOW-ANGELA sits where the real Angela once sat. Same posture. Same stillness. But wrong—edges too soft, features suggested rather than defined.

The diary OPENS on its own. Pages flutter, then settle on a water-stained entry.

Shadow-Angela's hand hovers over the page—miming the act of writing. No pen. No ink. Just the gesture.

She's not remembering. She's summoning.

INSERT - DIARY PAGE

Faded ink on water-stained paper: "December 20, 1995. Dear Diary,"

Angela's voice emerges—not from the shadow's mouth, but from the walls. The air. The room itself remembering.

ANGELA (V.O.)  
I have found love, and his name is  
(MORE)

ANGELA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Adiran. Adiran, who said to me he had heard God... that he deserved to die, and I didn't believe him until it was too late.

Shadow-Angela's hand pauses. Her dark form turns toward the diary as if reading what she's written.

The pages turn backward-fluttering through entries, through time.

An earlier entry catches the light: "September 3rd. Got my acceptance letter to U of H's art program today. Dad says it's not practical. Jessica says follow your heart. For once, I think she might be right."

Each entry reveals a memory-

INT. HIGH SCHOOL ART ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

ANGELA STERLING (17, innocent, reserved and introspective) stands before an easel, brush in hand. Late afternoon light pours through tall windows.

She's SMILING-genuinely, unguarded. A half-finished painting of a bird in flight takes shape under her brush.

A FRIEND (17, warm presence) leans over her shoulder, pointing at the canvas.

FRIEND  
That's good, Angie. For real.

Angela laughs-light, coyly.

Angela steps back, studies her work. A wide smile spreads across her face.

The memory softens. Dissolves into light.

INT. STERLING KITCHEN - EVENING (FLASHBACK)

A diary page: *November 23, 1995.*

A Christmas photo clings to the fridge-the Sterling family; the two girls younger, shoulder-to-shoulder, all smiles.

SHERIFF STERLING (late 40s, authoritarian patriarch) paces the room, commanding, alive. Badge shimmers like a lighthouse.

A newspaper slams onto the kitchen table. Front page: grainy

photo of Sheriff Sterling, face hard, mid-motion.  
"Corruption" and "Under investigation" leap from bold text.

The family portrait smiles from the fridge, untouched.  
Sheriff Sterling looms over the table, jaw locked.

SHERIFF STERLING  
You want to explain this?

Angela stands behind a kitchen chair opposite Sheriff Sterling.

Hands tight on the backrest. Face unreadable.

JESSICA STERLING (early 20s, defiant rebel) enters from the hallway, arms crossed, coat folded over them.

JESSICA  
Jesus Christ. She's still a kid. She  
doesn't know what she's doing.

Sheriff turns toward Jessica, pointing. Voice rising.

SHERIFF STERLING  
You brought that scumbag into our  
home. And look where we are.

He slaps the paper again. The table jolts.

Jessica's breath catches. But her stare doesn't drop.

JESSICA  
Yeah, sure, Daddy. You've preached  
accountability your whole life. And  
now the world finally sees you like I  
do. Like the fucking hypocrite you  
are!

Shadows spill from the corners of the room. They slide across the tile like black water, pooling toward Jessica's feet.

Sheriff lunges. Grabs the nearest chair and slams it out of his way. Legs screech across the tile.

Jessica steps back—shoulder hits the doorframe. Her foot shifts as she turns.

The shadow water brushes her ankle—that tendril recoils and hisses out of existence.

SHERIFF STERLING  
Don't you walk away from me!

But Jessica already has. Turns away, sobbing.

JESSICA (O.S.)  
Happy fucking Thanksgiving!

The front door opens. Slams shut. She's gone.

The Christmas photo on the fridge flutters from the slam, drifts to the shadow water on the floor.

Sterling's fingers close around the photo. Black water drips from his hand, seeping into the edges as his grip tightens.

The photo shrivels—corners curling inward, colors bleeding.

He turns to Angela.

Bends over the table, looming into her space—close enough that she flinches but doesn't move.

He holds the crumpled ball inches from her face. Flicks it at her chest.

It bounces off, falls to the floor.

Where it touched her, darkness absorbs into the fabric like water into cloth—gone before she notices.

SHERIFF STERLING  
(low)  
This is ALL your fault!

At the counter, MRS. STERLING (late 40s, silenced and surrendered) methodically carves a turkey, serving dishes spread across the kitchen counter.

Shadows cling to her like a second skin—so settled they move when she moves. She doesn't notice. Nothing left to notice with.

ANGELA (V.O.)  
My sister escaped, leaving me, while everyone turned against me for defending Adiran. Even my father tried to blame me... Like I gave a shit.

Angela releases the chair.

The memory bleeds at the edges. Shadows reclaim it.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Another page; another diary entry.

Angela strides past lockers. Harsh fluorescent lights hum.

Kids line both sides—some at lockers, others watching, whispering.

Footsteps echo behind her. Kids part as she passes.

STUDENTS (O.S.)  
"That's her." "With him?" "Didn't he  
kill a bunch of people?"

Snickers ripple through the crowd. A guy mutters:

GUY (O.S.)  
Fucking psycho bait.

Each step leaves a shadow footprint behind her—lingering on the tile like mud. They spread outward, engulfing the lockers and the kids on either side.

A locker SLAMS—

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Shadow-Angela stills. The diary lies open. Pages settle.

A glimpse: "Maybe everyone has a beast inside them. Maybe love is what sets them free."

Her dark hand hovers over the line. Lingers.

The shadows on the ceiling blacken. Stretch toward the window. Drape over it until they cover the window in total darkness.

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Soft sound of pages turning. A fog-like memory:

Angela freezes at the window. Breath hitching. Opens it.

A figure outside, backlit by streetlight.

She steps back. He climbs through—silent, towering.

ADIRAN (20, sharp-tongued dealer). Only his outline visible, eyes gleaming.

ADIRAN  
God does not want me alive, Angie, so  
I am going to make sure I go to Hell  
when I die.

Angela says nothing. His hand emerges from the dark—wipes a tear from her cheek. Other hand rests at her waist, trails up her back.

Her breath catches.

He kisses her.

ANGELA (V.O.)  
My insecurities disappeared, and I  
finally felt like I was good enough  
for someone.

He takes her shaking hands in his.

Moves his mouth from hers.

Hot breath on her cheek, then her ear.

ADIRAN  
I love you.

Angela cries.

ANGELA (V.O.)  
That was all I ever wanted.

He pulls away. She reaches after him. He slips out the window.

She falls to her knees. Drags her diary to the floor.

He looks back-face in shadow. A tear catches the light on his cheek.

ANGELA (V.O.)  
Life itself has lost its meaning.  
Before that day, before Adiran told me  
he loved me, I had a purpose. Then  
they took him, emptying my soul and my  
heart.

Diary pages flutter to the last entry—what Angela is reading—as the memory fades.

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Angela lies in bed. Staring at the ceiling with her diary held against her chest. Her pen falls from the bed to the floor.

ANGELA (V.O.)  
Finally, I've understood what his god  
(MORE)

ANGELA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
had said to him. It's been two months  
since Adiran was taken from me. It's  
been two months of wanting him more  
than anything else in my life.

Shadows above her begin to stir. Not falling. Not rushing.  
Unfolding.

ANGELA (V.O.)  
But I know they can't ever stop my  
Adiran. On some nights, I hear him  
calling for me. I want to touch him  
again, so I whisper to him in the  
dark, hoping he sees me in his dreams.  
I've felt him, and I know he comes to  
me because I am the only one!

Veronica's silhouette falls—arms spread, edges feathered, not  
quite wings.

The shape swells as it takes a deep breath in. Then folds  
inward. Collapses.

Reforms—broader shoulders, Adiran's outline. The shadow wears  
what she wants to see.

No face.

ANGELA (V.O.)  
On those nights, he breathes into my  
ear, and sometimes around my neck and  
down my back. Warm, comforting  
whispers that assure me that when I  
die, I will be with him.

Shadows lower around Angela. Not enclosing. Not seizing.  
Settling.

ANGELA (V.O.)  
Because with Adiran's help, I know  
I'll be able to come back just as he  
does for me. Whether it'll be in  
Heaven or Hell, it doesn't matter  
anymore.

Angela doesn't move. Shadows take form—Adiran's face leaning  
down, just like their first kiss.

Its mouth brushes her ear.

ADIRAN  
Breathe.

Angela inhales. Sharp. Deep.

Her eyes WIDEN. A bright light reflects off them—expectant, welcoming.

Then something is wrong.

She tries to exhale. Can't. Her hands fly to her throat—the shadows TIGHTEN. CRUSHING.

Her back arches off the mattress. Fighting for air that won't come. Her fingers claw at the darkness. Pass through nothing.

A single tear slides down her temple.

Then stillness. Her eyes stay open. Glassy. Gone.

The diary slips from her fingers. Falls open on the floor. Pages flutter, then settle. Her handwriting catches the moonlight.

ANGELA (V.O.)

All that matters now is that I will escape this horrible, pointless life and finally be happy.

The shadow pulls back from her face. Holds his shape for a moment—then dissolves, sliding off the bed, pooling in the corner.

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room holds the stillness of a place no one enters anymore. Put back together, then abandoned.

Shadow-Angela is gone. The chair at the desk sits empty.

But the diary remains open on the desk. Pages tear-stained. Ink smudged.

Shadows trace the letters—waiting.

ANGELA (V.O.)

(whispered)

No more tears. I have cried enough.  
Goodbye, Angela Sterling.

A distant door slams. Empty house.

Total silence.

The page holds. As if waiting for a reader.

Darkness surges off the page—past the room—into the dark.  
Attracted by trauma and morbid curiosity.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
(distorted, reverberating)  
What she knew of me is what I fed her.

Because watching eyes widen with  
fascination is easier than admitting I  
have nothing real to give.

WATER ROARS—a ruptured pipe and a bathtub faucet, bleeding  
together into white noise.

FADE IN:

Steam fogs a mirror surface.

A low HUM begins—vibrating the glass.

On the fogged mirror, handwritten words form: "SPOON-FED  
ADDICTION".

Blood seeps out of the mirror. Then a handprint from the  
other side smears it.

The hum hits a resonant frequency—

The mirror shatters.

INT. ADIRAN'S BATHROOM — NIGHT

SUPER: "OCTOBER 13, 1995".

Wreckage. The mirror is obliterated. Tiles cracked. Sink  
ripped from the wall.

Darkness gathers in the corners where the light doesn't  
reach. Still. Patient.

Pipes exposed—water spraying across the bathroom. Blood  
smeared along the edges. Cabinet doors splintered. A bullet  
hole in the drywall.

Adiran lies motionless in the tub. Blood swirls in the water.

The spray softens. Hum fades.

A police radio crackles faintly:

POLICE RADIO (O.S.)  
Suspect may be armed... Request backup  
at location...

Blood spreads across the linoleum. Darkening. Sticky.

Scattered mirror shards catch the light—each holding a fragment of Adiran's face. An eye. Jaw. Forehead.

In one larger shard: his reflection stares out—direct. A faint conspiratorial smile.

Muted, darker, edged in shadows.

SHADOW ADIRAN's reflection raises one finger to its lips.

Eyes forward. Knowing.

*Shhh.*

Adiran slumps back against the tub.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
This isn't about my redemption; this  
is about the rot I fed.

A nostalgic smile flashes across Adiran's face.

Faces flicker in the mirror shards. MARY (late teens, calm commanding presence) and SETH (late teens, loyal to a fault).

Friends. Ghosts.

His fingers twitch beneath the water. Blood oozes from the vertical cut in his forearm.

Blood curls through the water, spreads—then spills over the edge.

Their faces fade away. Gone.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
Whatever is in me... It dies with me  
today.

Adiran lifts his cut arm out of the water. Tries to pull himself up. Looks down at his defeated body—gives up.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
Regardless, this is exactly how I  
deserve it to end.

A flicker across a mirror shard—a woman laughing: VERONICA (20, fierce soul, the wound). Then nothing.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
She was the last time I was human.

The darkness in the corner shifts. Settles closer.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
But it didn't start tonight.

Adiran closes his eyes. Head slips underwater, then jerks back up. Ragged exhales. Eyes closed. Still.

Then gasps—labored. Shadows obscure him.

BLACK SCREEN

FADE IN:

INT. JOHN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Dim light. PRE-TEEN ADIRAN (12, learning stillness for survival) sits stiffly on a worn couch.

Television flicker spills across his body.

Volume low—nightly news muttering about budget cuts and rising crime.

JOHN (early 40s, hard-edged Vietnam vet) watches the TV, unblinking. Hypnotized.

ADIRAN'S MOTHER (late 30s, thin and twitchy) paces behind them, half-nodding. Words slurred.

A shadow clings to her edges. Moves when she moves.

She mutters, grabs at Adiran's arm.

The shadow stretches toward him with her reach.

JOHN  
Hey.

John rises. Places a firm hand between them. Guides her away without force.

The darkness pulls back with her. Stays on her shoulders as she stumbles off, mumbling.

John says nothing. Sits back down next to Adiran. Puts a hand on his shoulder. Returns his attention to the TV.

Adiran doesn't react. Stares straight ahead at the TV.

INT. JOHN'S BATHROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

TEEN ADIRAN (16, young caretaker) kneels beside his mother as

she vomits into a toilet. Bathroom is yellowed, slick.

She wipes her mouth, shaking. Eyes snap clear—predatory.

She isn't high. She's aware.

Her voice drops—raw, unguarded.

ADIRAN'S MOTHER  
Society is a filthy animal, kid. All  
they want is for people like us to  
die.

In the corner of the bathroom, where the light doesn't reach,  
darkness gathers. Denser than it should be.

She doesn't notice. Neither does he.

She leans back against the wall. The moment's gone. Stare  
dulls. Then she leans forward again, trembling.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
Six months later, she was dead and I  
had nothing.

The sound of retching returns. Echoes. Fades.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
Until I found her.

A burst of memory—

INT. DENNY'S - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Veronica sits across from him in a vinyl booth. Fluorescent  
light hums overhead, the restaurant nearly empty. A coffee  
cup steams between her hands. Two empties pushed to the edge  
of the table.

She's glowing. Something different about her—fuller.

She lifts the cup to her lips, watching him over the rim. A  
smile plays at the corners of her mouth, but her eyes hold  
steady. Searching his face.

Waiting for him to notice.

Adiran doesn't. Mouth moving, words lost to static.

She sets the cup down. The smile stays, but her stare  
sharpens. Saying everything without saying it.

He still doesn't see.

Her hand moves beneath the table.

His eyes finally meet hers. The smile fades. Just the stare now—raw, vulnerable, terrified.

Her hand slides across the table.

A pregnancy test. Two lines.

Adiran's face—

The memory cuts.

INT. ADIRAN'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Adiran's eyes snap open. Water sloshes in the tub. His breath catches—sharp, involuntary.

He squeezes his eyes shut. Forces it down.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
No. Not that.

His bloody hand drags across a mirror shard—smearing water and red.

The reflection in the shard goes blank.

Another shard catches light—

ROOFTOP. NIGHT. Veronica. Peyote in her hand.

EXT. ABANDONED OFFICE BUILDING - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

SUPER: "TWO YEARS AGO".

Boots on broken ground. Adiran and Veronica crawl through a gap in the chain-link fence.

She laughs, breathless.

They climb stairs and scaffolding to the rooftop.

VERONICA  
First time for everything, right?

ADIRAN  
You nervous?

She grins.

VERONICA  
With you? Never!

They reach the rooftop and find their spot.

She pulls out the peyote bundle, holds it to the starlight.

VERONICA  
To new experiences!

He hugs her from behind. Heart cracked open.

ADIRAN  
To us. Forever, together.

EXT. ABANDONED OFFICE BUILDING - ROOFTOP - LATER

Downtown glows. Stars scatter across the sky. The unfinished rooftop skeletal-exposed beams, jagged edges, wind through empty frames.

Adiran and Veronica lie side by side, staring up. Layered jackets, ripped jeans, drug-sweaty skin. High on peyote-first time shared.

They sit cross-legged, knees touching. Sage and crumpled clinic paperwork burn in a tin can between them.

Smoke rises into the stars.

A smile—not sad.

VERONICA  
She would've been wild. Just like us.

Adiran nods, lips parted.

ADIRAN  
She'll come back. When we're ready.

Veronica closes her eyes. Wind on her face.

VERONICA  
Maybe this is us saying goodbye...

ADIRAN  
Or maybe it's us making a promise.

Adiran takes her hand. No tension. No regrets.

ADIRAN  
I never pretended with you. Not once.

VERONICA  
That's why it worked. We were never scared of what we saw in each other.

They sit in silence. City below glitters. Sage burns.

They lie back, arms folded beneath their heads. Stars swirl above.

They burst into laughter, bodies curled inward, breathless.

They dance barefoot, swaying slow, faces pressed together.

He holds her from behind, chin on her shoulder. Then they sit again. Cross-legged. Knees touching.

The tin can smolders. Smoke disperses into dark.

VERONICA

You ever think... maybe we did things backward?

ADIRAN

No? Maybe?

VERONICA

We made a soul before we made a life.

Adiran turns his head. Veronica glows. Eyes glittering, weightless smile.

ADIRAN

You're my angel with wings.

She leans in, kisses him. Laughs in his mouth.

VERONICA

Let's fly, then.

She rises.

VERONICA

I want to do the lift.

ADIRAN

The what?

VERONICA

Like in Dirty Dancing. I feel like I can fly.

She backs up a few steps, arms wide. Adiran stands and puts on his boots without lacing them.

VERONICA

Catch me.

She runs. Adiran braces, grabs her by the waist, lifts her high above his head.

She stretches above him. Laughing. Glowing with an aura. Silhouette against the stars. Adiran steps back to stabilize.

VERONICA

Adiran—

She slips from his hold. He pushes her up-hard—trying to catch her.

His boot catches a beam.

He stumbles. She vanishes over the edge.

Veronica plummets—the aura fades, colors draining to gray.

Wings flicker in and out, then vanish.

Veronica hits the pavement with a distorted, echoing thud.

Below, in the darkness pooling around her body, something shifts. Barely visible. Then still.

Adiran stands at the edge, frozen. Staring down.

Wind. Distant hum of the city below.

His breathing—shallow, rapid, panicked.

Then—MOVEMENT catches his eye.

Far below, red and blue lights streak past. An ambulance races down the road, siren faint, fading.

Adiran watches it disappear.

He looks down at Veronica's body. Then back at where the ambulance was.

Realization crosses his face.

He backs away from the edge.

Turns. Walks to the scaffolding.

He climbs down—faster now, purposeful.

EXT. ABANDONED BUILDING - NIGHT

Adiran drops to the ground. Looks both ways. Slips into the shadows.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
I destroyed the only person who  
should've been a part of me forever.  
And I can't blame the drugs for it.

He disappears into darkness.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
Then I abandoned her.

The memory fades to black.

Wind howls through the building openings. Softens, almost silent again.

INT. ADIRAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Half-light. Candles flicker.

Walls covered with movie posters and industrial band flyers—some framed and aligned, others taped crooked. Stickers fill the gaps between them. Orange Christmas lights sag along the ceiling, held up by tape and thumbtacks, barely trying.

A sagging sofa against one wall. Small coffee table in front of it. Across the room, a 19-inch TV on a cheap stand—VCR and stereo stacked beside it, two speakers mounted above. Cords tangle down the wall, untucked, functional.

From the stereo, "Something I Can Never Have" plays low—Reznor's voice barely above a whisper.

Adiran sits on the floor, back against the wall. Shirtless. Gutted.

On the coffee table: a lighter. A steak knife. A row of candles burning low.

Shadows pool in the corners—where the light doesn't reach. Watching. Waiting.

He holds the blade over the flames. Waits. Metal glows orange at the edges.

His breath steadies. Not panic. Ritual.

He presses the blade to his inner forearm.

Skin hisses. He doesn't scream—jaw locked, eyes fixed on the wound. Watching himself burn.

The shadows creep forward. Drinking it in.

The door creeps open.

MARY  
Are you decent? I'm coming in!

Mary stands in the doorway, keys in hand. Takes in the scene—candles, knife, the raw wound on his arm.

The shadows freeze. Pull back toward the walls.

She doesn't gasp. Doesn't cry out.

Crosses the room. Kneels beside him. Takes the knife from his hand—sets it aside.

He's breathing hard. Holding in the pain. Fighting to stay conscious.

He doesn't look at her. Eyes still on the burn.

MARY  
(quiet)  
Does it help?

ADIRAN  
No.

MARY  
Then why?

A long beat. His voice cracks.

ADIRAN  
Because I can't fucking feel anything else.

Mary looks at the wound. Looks at him. Something shifts in her expression—not pity. Recognition.

She touches the skin just beside the burn. He flinches but doesn't pull away.

MARY  
You're not going to find her in there.

His eyes finally meet hers. Wet. Broken.

MARY  
Pain doesn't bring people back. It just makes you forget why you wanted them.

She stands. Holds out her hand.

The shadows in the corners stay pressed against the walls—held there by her presence.

MARY  
You're not doing this alone anymore.

He stares at her hand. The burn throbs.

He takes it.

The mirror shard fades. Then lights up again—

INT. MARY'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Soft candlelight flickers over tapestries. Wind stirs through an open window.

The room feels like a held breath suspended in time.

Adiran sits on the rug, elbows on his knees, haunted. Mary folds a piece of stiff paper with quiet focus.

Seth leans back on the couch behind her, arms resting on his thighs, watching Adiran like someone watching a fuse burn.

Mary doesn't look up.

MARY  
You eat today?

ADIRAN  
No.

MARY  
Liar. I can smell the Whataburger on you.

Seth snorts. The corner of Adiran's mouth twitches—the first crack in his mask.

ADIRAN  
Fine. I ate. You happy?

MARY  
Ecstatic.

She stops folding. Holds up the paper crane, examining it in the candlelight. Then continues.

ADIRAN  
Seth, we're going to Utah next weekend. Mary and me.

Seth eyes them both expecting more information.

SETH  
Jesus. What for?

ADIRAN  
Chris knows someone out there.  
Supposed to have something clean.  
Maybe it's bullshit. I don't care, we  
are gonna get good X and get rich.

Seth shakes his head in disagreement. Leans in.

SETH  
It's been three months, man. Are you  
two lunatics really going all the way  
to Utah for drugs?

MARY  
Chris says he has good connections.  
Worth the trip.

Seth half-laughed.

SETH  
So you're just road-tripping to the  
desert now? Like that's gonna fix the  
crater in your chest?

MARY  
It's not about fixing anything. It's  
about seeing what's left once we stop  
pretending we're fine.

Adiran says nothing. Seth rubs his face.

SETH  
Man... you think we don't see it?  
You've been a ghost since she-

Seth swallows hard to stop himself.

Mary's eyes flick toward Seth, then back to Adiran. Voice  
drops, quieter.

MARY  
People think pain screams. But  
sometimes... it just goes really,  
really quiet. And you start mistaking  
the silence for truth.

She finishes folding the paper crane and sets it down between  
her and Adiran like a fragile amulet.

MARY  
Take this gift.

She stands slowly, gaze never leaving Adiran. Steps forward and leans in.

MARY  
Know nothing. From this day forward, you will know nothing. And you will reveal nothing.

She presses her palm to his forehead—firm, ceremonial.

MARY  
To do otherwise will mean your death.

A low thrum beneath everything—not music, something older. Adiran feels it in his teeth, his spine.

The candlelight flares. The shadows in the corners pull back.

Then settle again. Waiting.

Adiran's breath catches. Her hand lingers a beat longer, then drops. Stares at her, shaken but silent.

ADIRAN  
Okay. We leave Friday night.

Seth sits forward, hands hanging loosely between his knees.

Voice drops, careful.

SETH  
You haven't said her name once.

The drone cuts out. Silence.

SETH  
You think that makes you strong? You think if you bury her deep enough, you'll stop blaming yourself?

Adiran glimpses at Seth—teeth grinding. Seth catches it. Pity on his face, but doesn't react.

Adiran clenches his fists, then shifts his eyes to the candle.

The room darkens. Wind blows stronger through the open window. Drapes flutter.

Adiran stares into the candle. A micro expression: shakes his

head no.

A gust of wind blows the candle out, then roars as the memory fades.

EXT. UTAH DESERT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Sound thins out into a faint, dry wind. Grains of sand skitter across unseen ground.

Adiran blinks against the gust.

Mary's house is gone—replaced by the pale dust of the desert. Only the moon and the whisper of the wind remain.

Stars stretch over salt and silence.

The Jeep Cherokee is parked at a low ridge.

JOE (late 20s, local Utah connection, casual racist who doesn't know when to stop) leans on the hood.

BULLET (mid-20s, quiet competence) walks into the dark to piss. CHRIS (late 20s, black ex-football player) tosses rocks into the distance. Adiran stands farther out, staring into the desert's darkness.

Mary walks up beside Adiran.

MARY  
You trust him?

ADIRAN  
Who, Joe? Oh no. That guy's a perpetual fuck up. Chris warned us.

MARY  
Yeah. That's a problem.

Adiran doesn't respond. Mary turns, walks back toward the Jeep. As she reaches the driver's side, pulls the door open—

JOE (O.S.)  
I bet your skin tastes like rain out here.

Mary doesn't flinch. Gets in without a word. Chris hears it. Doesn't say anything—tension tightens.

JOE  
(louder—performing)  
Gather around, everyone. Come on,  
Chris's high school amigos. Let's meet  
(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)  
my buddies too!

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
But peace didn't come alone.

Adiran stays behind—still, silent.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
The shadows came with it. My grief  
planted the seed. And they watched me  
grow into the thing that deserved  
them.

INT. JEEP CHEROKEE - NIGHT

Chris drives. Bullet up front. In the back: Mary behind  
Chris, Joe in the middle, Adiran behind Bullet.

Bullet lights the blunt—hits it.

BULLET  
Let's warm this up right.

He passes to Chris. Chris to Mary. Mary to Joe.

Joe hits it, licks his lips, chasing the last trace of her  
off the wrap.

Adiran stares—disgust visible.

Joe glances forward. Chris looking ahead. Bullet turned to  
the window.

Joe smirks—no one's watching.

He flicks the blunt backward—lit end first into Adiran's lap.

Adiran doesn't flinch. Slides his palm under—catches it  
clean.

He wipes the tip on his jacket, takes a hit. Exhales, passes  
it to Bullet.

JOE  
Keep it flowing, keep it friendly.  
We're all friends here, right?

Joe reaches down and slaps Mary's and Adiran's knees with  
exaggerated enthusiasm.

Mary jerks her leg away with a sharp glare. Adiran slaps his  
hand away.

JOE

Relax Texans! I got you the best X  
your shit-kicking friends are ever  
going to get! You'll see, I'm the  
fucking man!

Joe snickers, reaching over the console for a beat-up CD sleeve.

He flips through it like he already knows the layout—muscle memory from better nights.

JOE

Yo Bullet, track two. Best live album  
ever. This one will make you shit your  
dad's dick out your ass, twink boy.

Bullet hits the blunt again. Still holding the smoke, he snatches the CD from Joe's hand.

He stares at the disc like he's debating whether to crack it across Joe's face.

Joe clocks the tension. Grins like he's joking.

JOE

Oh come on, Chris, has corporate  
neutered you already, my man?

Slaps the back of Chris's seat.

JOE

That fancy tech job got you in a tie  
and a stick up your ass? You used to  
ride looser than this. Should've  
dropped a few hits with me earlier—get  
in the groove. Pull that stick out.

CHRIS

(flat, to Bullet)

Still the best live album ever. Don't  
waste it on him.

Bullet slides the CD into the stereo. Clicks forward to track two.

Chris leans across—calm but deliberate—and takes the blunt from Bullet.

He passes it to Mary. Mary takes a quick hit, eyes on Joe—then hands it behind his head directly to Adiran.

Adiran and Mary exchange a quiet look.

"Deity" by Ministry erupts from the speakers—an onslaught of distorted guitars and hammering drum machines.

With the first guttural notes, shadows ripple out like spilled ink.

They spread across the floorboards—thin, dark lines that drift up the vinyl seats and linger at their ankles.

The Jeep surges—each drumbeat syncing with the revs.

The engine hum thickens beneath the rising chaos.

Chris exhales smoke through his nose, steady but distracted.

Foot presses heavier on the gas without noticing.

The shadows creep around Joe's legs. Past Mary's ankles.

Behind Adiran's shoulders.

Their movements match the drums.

Bullet hits the blunt again. Passes it to Chris. Chris to Mary. Mary, watching Joe now lost in the music, hands the blunt behind Joe's head directly to Adiran.

It rotates again. Bullet. Chris. Mary. Joe watches this time.

JOE  
Uh, yeah? I'm right here.

BULLET  
Let her keep it. She's cooler company.

Mary smirks faintly.

MARY  
Dogs don't understand physics.

JOE  
The hell does that mean?

She leans forward, hands the blunt to Adiran, right past Joe.

MARY  
Or personal space.

Catches Adiran's eye—knows he saw everything.

Winks.

JOE

You're really pulling that shit? I'm the one making this happen. You assholes are going to fuck with me like that? I'm the reason we're out here. I'm the reason you're about to feel good. Show some fucking respect.

Adiran hits it, eyes locked on Joe—then passes it back to Mary.

He exhales a slow cloud in Joe's direction.

ADIRAN (V.O.)

The darkness wasn't behind me. The shadows weren't waiting. I invited them in.

JOE

Jesus, I was just playing—

The shadows in the car surge toward Adiran—not attacking. Answering.

They settle into him. Behind his eyes. In his hands.

Joe reaches across Mary—whether for the blunt or for her, no one's sure.

ADIRAN (V.O.)

I didn't want to hurt him because he touched her. I wanted to hurt him because it finally felt easy.

Adiran lunges, grabs Joe by the throat, but is interrupted.

The tire explodes—BOOM! The Jeep lurches.

Shadows swallow the light. Everything goes black.

INT./EXT. JEEP CHEROKEE - CONTINUOUS

Jeep off the road, tilted in the sand. Dash lights blink.

Chris slams his fists against the steering wheel.

CHRIS

Fuck!

Turns his head, but does not really look back.

CHRIS

You all ok?

Bullet steps out. Interior lights flare.

Adiran white-knuckled on the "Oh Shit!" bar, boots pressed into Joe's ribs.

JOE  
What the fuck, dude!?

Bullet's door slams. Darkness returns.

Joe shoves Adiran's legs off.

JOE  
Get off me, freak!

Chris kills the engine. Steps out. Door slams.

Adiran releases the bar. On the floorboard—the blunt, still lit.

He picks it up, wipes the tip, inhales slow.

BULLET (O.S.)  
Everybody, get the fuck out.

Joe hears it. Takes it as his cue. Reaches for the door handle, but Mary opens it first. Calm. Silent.

Light spills in. Joe flinches.

Adiran leans forward, shoves him out. Joe hits the sand hard.

JOE (O.S.)  
What the actual fuck!?

Mary pulls the door shut. Lights go out again.

MARY  
You didn't freeze.

Her voice lands like a verdict, quiet but certain.

They sit in the silence. Adiran still holding the smoke in.

He leans back slowly. Exhales. The last of the hit leaves his lungs like nothing matters.

He offers the blunt to Mary. She glances at it, gives a small shake of her head.

She doesn't look at Adiran but her knee touches his.

They sit in the dark. Still breathing the same air. In the

silence, the last threads of shadow unravel at their feet, blending.

ADIRAN  
Hell of a start to our desert  
enlightenment.

No response. Chris yells something outside.

They both reach for the door at the same time, breath syncing again before they move.

EXT. UTAH DESERT - CONTINUOUS

Wind has picked up. The Jeep idles crooked in the sand.

Stars hang frozen overhead.

Everyone is outside now. Chris crouches at the rear of the Jeep, adjusting the jack-jaw tight.

Adiran steps forward.

ADIRAN  
Let me help with that.

Chris doesn't look up.

CHRIS  
No. I got it. You're my guest.

Adiran steps forward again.

ADIRAN  
Come on. Let me take it.

Chris stands, grabs Adiran's arm-firm, unshaking.

CHRIS  
I said I got it.

The grip is firm-no anger, just finality.

Adiran backs off, silent.

Chris turns toward Joe.

CHRIS  
Come here and help me, fool.

JOE  
What? Help you? Why the fuck should I  
help you?

CHRIS  
Because I'm gonna beat the shit out of  
you if you don't. Just shut up and get  
me the jack.

JOE  
Hell no! I'm not your fucking slave,  
nigger!

Silence. Everything stops.

Chris rises slowly, spare tire in hand.

CHRIS  
What the fuck did you just call me?

JOE  
Yeah, whatever, dude. Come on, you big  
fucking ape.

Chris hurls the tire at Joe.

It slams into Joe's chest, knocking him flat.

JOE  
What the hell is your problem, you  
fucking limp dick!?

Joe scrambles, clawing for balance. Chris doesn't wait.  
Charges, slams into him—two bodies colliding in the dirt.

Sand explodes around them. They grapple—punches fly. Joe  
lands one. Chris snarls, pins him down.

Then—a flash of silver.

Joe lunges—blade flashing—buries it in Chris's stomach.

Chris gasps—his hands fly to the wound. He rolls off Joe,  
groaning.

MARY  
Chris!

Mary dives in, grabbing Joe by the shoulders, yanking him off  
Chris.

Joe twists, snarling, ready to turn on her.

Bullet draws—steady hands, no hesitation.

BULLET  
You motherfucker.

He shoots. One clean shot. Joe jerks—chest hit—then goes still in the sand.

Adiran steps forward, body tense, eyes locked on Bullet. Not defiance—instinct. Defensive, ready to shield Mary.

Bullet pivots, the smoking gun raised at Adiran.

BULLET  
What're you waiting for?

Adiran halts, holding his ground, refusing to flinch.

BULLET  
Not good enough, asshole. What are you going to do?

Adiran's hand slips into his pocket. Pulls out the paper crane, holding it up like proof, like a flag.

Bullet clocks it. Eyes narrow, then shifts to Mary crouched over Chris, blood on her hands.

He recognizes the move: protection, not challenge.

A long beat.

He lowers the gun.

BULLET  
Fix the tire.

Adiran nods once—silent. Glances at Mary. Gives her a soft nudge—barely a touch.

In his other hand: the paper crane. Lifts it to his lips.

Kisses it—quiet, final. Tosses it into the sand.

Doesn't say a word. Doesn't watch it fall.

The crane lands near Joe's body. Blood seeps toward it, darkening the paper.

A shadow peels away from the corpse. Thin. Patient. It drifts across the sand toward the discarded crane. Touches it. The paper blackens, curls.

Mary watches him—her stillness says everything she can't.

Adiran turns. Walks to the tire still lying beside Chris. Lifts it. Carries it to the Jeep.

The tools are already laid out from earlier. Adiran kneels.

Hands shake as he reaches for the wrench.

Pauses-breathes-tightens his grip. Shaking stops.

He looks up as he works—briefly sees Chris hunched over, blood dripping down his arm, Bullet and Mary helping him back inside the car.

Throat dries.

Adiran tightens the last lug nut. Stands, looks out over the pale expanse of sand.

Mary watches him from a few steps away, the wind tugging at her hair. She sees the darkness surround him. He doesn't look back.

The desert fades to black.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - JOHN'S DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Adiran's car pulls into a clearing. Property sprawls—three adjoining lots.

Fences sagging. Tall grass overtaking everything. Main house and shed visible.

The rest hidden in darkness.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
That was almost two years ago. The  
moment I stopped ignoring what I was.

He unfolds blotter paper, tears it. Three hits of acid on his tongue.

Dry swallow. Exhales.

Opens the car door—it creaks. Air bites cold.

He steps out. Dust from the gravel hangs.

Boots crunch. He pauses. Looks up at the house. Starts toward the porch.

EXT. JOHN'S PORCH - CONTINUOUS

He steps onto the porch, pulls the glass door open.

Adiran studies his reflection in the streaked glass. Pale, hollow-eyed. The darkness behind his reflection shifts. Moves when he doesn't.

Then brighter until it projects blindingly:

Adiran lifts Veronica from a wheelchair. White blanket, wristband.

Behind them: "Planned Parenthood Women's Health Center."

A crowd. Picket signs. Arms reaching from the glass.

CROWD  
MURDERER!

Adiran flinches, hand gripping his knee. Breath ragged.

The door slams shut.

JOHN (O.S.)  
Goddamn it, boy! Come in!

Adiran exhales, straightens. Clenches his lips.

ADIRAN  
It's too early for this shit.

The reflection settles. Just him again. But the darkness behind him lingers a beat too long.

Opens the door without looking at the glass.

Walks in.

INT. JOHN'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

John pats the cushion beside him, hacking through smoke.

Offers the joint.

JOHN  
This new shit will make you feel like  
a dropped baby.

ADIRAN  
What's with the coughing, geezer?

JOHN  
Pro'bly cancer.

Adiran chokes. The smoke drifts toward the ceiling. The darkness there seems to drink it in.

ADIRAN  
Don't mess around like that!

JOHN  
Are ya afraid?

ADIRAN  
Of you dying? Your time's coming. Just  
complete the deal with Happy before  
you kick it.

They both laugh.

JOHN  
You seen the news?

ADIRAN  
No. You know I don't watch the fucking  
news, John.

JOHN  
You will today.

John clicks the remote. The TV flickers to life.

A live news broadcast: A reporter at a brightly lit  
intersection, affluent shopping centers behind.

REPORTER (O.S. FROM TV)  
A new city ordinance now makes it  
illegal for people to ask for money on  
the streets. Authorities cite an  
infestation of poor people asking for  
spare change on nearly every street  
corner...

John shakes his head. Adiran stares at the TV, irritated.  
Takes a long drag.

ADIRAN  
You know what pisses me off? Why do we  
pay for food? It grows on trees for  
free.

John raises an eyebrow, amused. Lights another joint.

Adiran exhales, lazy grin spreading.

ADIRAN  
Maybe we need apple trees over  
doorways so someone discovers common  
sense.

John lifts the metal mug to his lips but doesn't sip.

Holds it there. Not drinking. Breathing.

JOHN

An apple tree will make people  
discover common sense?

ADIRAN

I don't know, man. Pears and kiwis on  
the roadside, instead of stupid shit  
that pollinates and makes people  
sneeze all year. I just want to eat  
some fucking fruit while walking down  
the street!

JOHN

Common sense? You can't have fruits  
without pollination, dumbass.

ADIRAN

It's the weed talking! You're right,  
this is pretty fucking good.

John stands from the couch. Groans.

JOHN

You know, your idol went missing this  
morning.

ADIRAN

My what?

John points to the TV as he walks away.

JOHN

You should watch the news more often.

Pauses. Admires the glow of his joint, then turns and walks  
into the hallway.

Disappears into the back rooms.

Adiran stares at the screen.

A live shot outside The Galleria: A well-dressed man being  
interviewed stands beside a sign that reads: NO PANHANDLING  
ZONE.

Behind him, traffic glows in the dusk. The newscaster speaks  
about a new city ordinance and gives statistics about tax  
evasion.

Adiran doesn't blink. Eyes locked on the screen.

The newscaster's voice stretches. Not the words—the drone.

The screen flashes numbers, then cuts to a looping shot of a homeless man with a cardboard sign getting arrested.

The weed, the acid—sinking him into the couch.

ADIRAN  
Shit happens...

The newscaster returns, surrounded by blazing graphics and overproduced music.

Adiran stares ahead—exhales slowly. Smoke drifts away from his lips as the TV rambles.

TV ANCHOR (ON TV)  
The search continues for Bayou City's famous personality, Vladimir Rodriguez—commonly known as V.R.—creator of The CW Chronicles, reported missing last—

Adiran yells toward the hallway.

ADIRAN  
John! Just saw what you were talking about! It's a publicity stunt!

John doesn't answer. The anchor drones on—something about alien invasions, eccentric claims. Adiran sinks deeper into the couch, not listening.

ADIRAN  
Blah blah blah...

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
But John was right. I admired V.R. Him going missing should've been the warning—the night was already taking from me. I just wasn't paying attention.

Adiran frowns.

ADIRAN  
Shit! I'm supposed to be marathoning The CW Chronicles tonight—

Adiran shuts the TV off.

ADIRAN  
John!

Silence. The hum of machines in the back rooms.

Adiran frowns. Stares at the hallway.

ADIRAN  
John?

Still nothing.

He stands, hesitant. Acid slowly rising. Boots loud on old floorboards as he walks toward the hall.

INT. JOHN'S HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The deeper he moves, the louder the hum—thick, synthetic.

Walls give way to exposed framing.

INT. JOHN'S MAIN GROWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rows of tables stretch deep into what used to be the adjacent lots. Grow lights hang in long industrial strips. Fans and ballasts drone.

Adiran sees John's metal mug resting on a table, but no John. He moves between the rows, kneels to check beneath the tables.

ADIRAN  
John!

Nothing.

Adiran walks out of the room.

INT. JOHN'S HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

He props open the bathroom door. Empty.

ADIRAN  
Where the fuck did you go?

He steps inside the bedroom. Messy. Smells repugnant—sweaty. No sign of struggle.

INT. JOHN'S MAIN GROWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Back in the grow room, Adiran eyes the mug—reaches for it.

The sound of a shotgun loading behind him.

He freezes.

Adiran turns—slowly, deliberately unthreatening.

John stands behind him. Shotgun raised—barrel just above Adiran's head.

Adiran falls backward. Boots catch.

He swings the mug. It clatters, splashes, dents against the wall.

John doesn't flinch. Stares—frozen, furious.

ADIRAN

What in the fuck is the matter with you?

JOHN

What're you doin' in my house?

His stare is off—pupils tight, chest rising.

ADIRAN

What in the actual fuck? Are you fucking Houdini now? Are you gonna shoot me, or are you about to shit a grenade?

Adiran looks past him.

ADIRAN

Where the fuck did you come from?

John doesn't answer.

John lowers the shotgun. Offers a hand.

Adiran hesitates, then takes it.

Their hands lock.

Adiran's hand is young and tight, tendons raised under the skin. John's is thin and veined, skin loose over bone.

Shadows creep from the corners. Thin strands slide along the walls and floor, reaching toward their joined hands like spilled ink.

The darkness curls around John's wrist—

—then snaps back as if it touched something hot. It recoils along the wall, draining back into the corners, leaving their

grip in plain light.

John pulls him up.

Adiran stands. Brushes dust from his jeans.

Shakes his head as he holds back a smile.

John walks to the back of the grow room. Retrieves his mug.

Adiran follows. A wall panel sticking out-fresh paint.

ADIRAN

So, you built a panic room?

JOHN

A panic room? I ain't scared of nobody, boy.

ADIRAN

Yet you built a hole in the fucking wall to hide in, you survivalist freak.

John's demeanor changes. Chuckles.

JOHN

I caught you, didn't I?

John crouches. Pulls a bin from under the table. Scoops weed, slaps it on a scale. Adds more until it tips a pound.

JOHN

You get a little extra this week. I'm not gonna penny pinch you over an ounce.

ADIRAN

Good news for me!

Adiran grabs baggies from a side bin. Portions the weed.

JOHN

Is this for you or the Filipino?

ADIRAN

Mostly, yes.

John grunts-low and disapproving.

ADIRAN

Happy called in for some today, ok?  
I'm splitting this one with him since  
(MORE)

ADIRAN (CONT'D)  
I'll be staying in for the weekend.

John mocks sipping from his mug. Inspects it.

JOHN  
He's off schedule.

ADIRAN  
Yeah, I'll talk to him. But he's  
moving it quicker. Isn't that what you  
wanted?

John raises the mug. Points it at Adiran.

JOHN  
He ain't the one I'm worried 'bout,  
boy...

ADIRAN  
Fuck!

He snaps. Bag in his hand crumples.

ADIRAN  
I said it's handled! And I'm not gonna  
let Happy bring his gang bullshit here  
until I know he's got his shit under  
control too!

Adiran shifts his weight. Grabs another baggie.

Adiran circles the table. Stands across from him. His tone  
softens.

ADIRAN  
What happens to this place when you're  
gone?

John laughs. Coughs. Clears his throat.

JOHN  
Listen, kid...

John points at Adiran with mock disgust.

JOHN  
I didn't drag your sorry ass out of  
that apartment after your mama died  
just so you could get sentimental on  
me.

ADIRAN  
That's not what I'm asking.

JOHN  
Hell it ain't.

John presses air from a larger bag. Forms a brick. Weighs it-half a pound.

JOHN  
You wanna know if I got a plan? The plan is you keep your head down, stay out of Sterling's crosshairs, and maybe—maybe—you outlive me long enough to figure out what you're gonna do with yourself.

ADIRAN  
That's not a plan. That's pity.

JOHN  
I don't pity the dead, kid. They don't give a shit what I think anymore.

A long beat. Something unspoken passes between them.

John's voice drops. Sincere.

JOHN  
You're the closest thing to a son I ever had. And that scares the shit out of me, 'cause this world is going to shit, and I know what you're capable of. I've seen it.

Adiran tightens. Looks away.

JOHN  
Didn't teach you to shoot so you could prove me right.

A beat. Adiran meets his eyes.

ADIRAN  
That's not what I'm doing. I don't even have a gun.

JOHN  
Just remember—pissin' in your own backyard ain't a good idea, boy.

ADIRAN  
I know. The sheriff's goons are  
(MORE)

ADIRAN (CONT'D)  
getting greedy and careless. It's  
being dealt with though.

JOHN  
I'm not fuckin' around with your  
bullshit and the sheriff's daughter.

ADIRAN  
I said I know... and it will be dealt  
with. I don't need a goddamn lecture.

JOHN  
Good. Gettin' pissy, are we? Did I  
find the nerve?

A long beat.

Adiran pulls out a wad of cash, tosses it on the table.

The room pulses. Fingers tingle-acid kicking in.

Adiran grins. John laughs.

John hands Adiran the brick. They shake hands-ritual after a deal. This time, John pulls him in. One arm around Adiran's shoulder.

Adiran lets it happen. Eyes drift to the cash on the table. He mocks, teasing.

ADIRAN  
Goodbye, John.

Adiran reaches for the money.

JOHN  
(low, sincere)  
See you later, boy.

John pushes Adiran's hand off the table. Shoves him toward the door.

Adiran smirks. Tucks the brick under his arm. Walks past the living room without looking back.

EXT. JOHN'S PORCH - NIGHT

John holds the front door open. Watches Adiran go.

JOHN  
(shouts)  
Be careful!

Adiran doesn't respond.

Adiran cuts across the field. Shrugs deeper into his coat.

INT. ADIRAN'S CAR - JOHN'S DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Adiran drops into the driver's seat. Shoves the bags of weed into his coat pockets. Stares ahead.

He adjusts the radio. Slides a CD in. Raises the volume. Cracks window open.

ADIRAN (V.O.)

John had been through his own hell and came out the other side. Whatever darkness lived in him, he'd already made peace with it.

A cigarette lighter sparks. Smoke curls from a joint, lost in the draft.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - ALIEF STREETS - NIGHT

Adiran drives past empty storefronts. Neon buzzes.

ADIRAN (V.O.)

John taught me to fight and shoot. I pulled away eventually, but I respected him. He just handed me the scales and watched me rot.

Streetlights smear into streaks.

ADIRAN (V.O.)

But some things... you don't move on from.

Grip tightens on the wheel. Pupils dilate. The world warps.

Headlights flare, stretching across cracked asphalt.

The drone of the car deepens, fading into wind. Memory pulls him under.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT (NIGHTMARE)

Darkness. Headlights barely light the road.

Rain pours hard, wipers losing against sheets of water on the windshield.

Inside: silence except for rain hitting metal and glass.

Rain smears down the windows, thick and pulsing. Adiran sits in the back seat.

Seth drives. Mary sits in the passenger seat.

Mary talks to Seth. Voice muffled, words unclear to Adiran. She laughs at something Seth said.

Mary turns around.

Eyes find Adiran's. A smile spreads across her face—warm, genuine.

For a moment, everything feels possible.

Then she turns back forward—stiff, like strings pulling her.

Seth glances at Adiran in the rearview mirror. Deep sadness, maybe pity.

Adiran tries to speak. Mouth moves. No sound.

Fear rising. He turns to Veronica beside him.

He reaches for her hand.

Her face holds the expression from her fall. Eyes dull. Hair spills across her face, moving with unseen wind.

She doesn't take his hand. Just stares with that falling expression.

Adiran jerks back.

A baby crying—sharp, piercing.

Adiran snaps forward.

In the front seat: Adiran's mother and John fight over a crying infant, pulling him by the arms between them.

The baby's face blurs, then sharpens—

It's his own.

Circling around him: his mother sobbing, John yelling, the baby screaming.

The screams fill the car—sticky pressure on Adiran's chest.

Adiran turns back to Veronica.

She's vanished. Empty seat.

Panic floods him.

He thrashes, clawing at windows. Reaching, stretching.

Shadows pool at his feet—rising like floodwater, swallowing the car's interior.

He's in the front seat. He is the baby.

Suspended between his mother and John, arms stretched, being pulled apart.

The baby's screams transform into his own adult screams.

He looks side to side frantically, tries to pull back.

The car drives off the edge of the road.

They let go.

Sudden free fall.

The shadows swallow everything.

INT. DARKNESS — NIGHT (NIGHTMARE)

Not water. Shadow.

Adiran suspended in nothing. Bubbles escape his mouth, rising into black.

He kicks. Flails. No up or down. The darkness thickens, pressing closer.

Veronica's figure emerges from the black.

Her presence steadies him. Smile wrong, but her calmness cuts through his panic. He goes still, staring through the blur.

She lifts her hand.

He reaches. She takes it.

A moment of connection.

Then she tugs him toward her, pulling him closer.

Her other hand rises to his forearm. Fingernail finds the skin.

She drags it down. Slow. Deliberate.

The line opens. Blood rises, diffusing like smoke into the

dark.

She pulls his ear close to her mouth.

The shadows gather around them both. Not enclosing. Settling.

VERONICA  
(whisper)  
Breathe.

Adiran obeys. Inhales sharply.

The darkness floods his lungs.

Body convulses. Choking, spasming. Drowning in shadow.

He sinks back into the black. Willingly. Still.

The nightmare shatters.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - ALIEF STREETS - NIGHT

Adiran's car idles beneath a flickering streetlight. Acid haze warps the edges—colors haloing around headlights.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
Sometimes you'll get a sign, or that  
feeling when shit isn't right. Or  
maybe get a recurring dream that fucks  
you up for life.

Adiran sits behind the wheel, pupils wide. Music buzzes softly from the car speakers.

He leans forward. Pulls down his sleeve to hide the scar.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
But I knew this wasn't just a dream.  
It was my punishment.

Adiran shifts his attention to watch two figures approaching from the sidewalk. They lean on his hood like they own it.

Adiran rolls his window halfway down. Addresses them with exaggerated annoyance.

ADIRAN  
What in the fuck are you doing? Where  
in the fuck is Happy?

The two guys, VIET (early 20s, sharp clothes, an opportunistic traitor) and the UNDERCOVER COP (early 30s, looks too young for his age) glance at each other, smirking.

VIET

Chill, man. You got the stuff?

UNDERCOVER COP

How good is your product, bro?

Adiran's vision warps. Voices echo and distort.

His fingers caress the wheel, feeling the texture for the first time.

ADIRAN

Listen fuckheads. I don't sell dope. I was just looking for Happy.

Viet steps closer to the window.

VIET

Dude, it's all good. I'm taking care of business now.

Adiran's leg buzzes-beeper.

He ignores it.

Swallows down the rage. Unsuccessful.

ADIRAN

I was looking for Happy. If he isn't around, then fuck him too. You two dumbasses want to roleplay being gangsters, then good for you, fucking Asian nerds.

Undercover Cop opens his mouth—

ADIRAN

Don't you fucking answer me back,  
'cause I don't give a fuck about what you think.

(enunciating)  
I do not give a shit.

Adiran slams the car into drive.

ADIRAN

When Happy finds out, he's gonna cook you two fuckers like that balut shit he likes to eat for breakfast.

He peels out, tires screeching, barely missing their feet—middle finger raised through the window.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - ALIEF STREETS - NIGHT

Adiran speeds down the street.

Pulls the beeper from his pocket, tilts the display toward him.

The screen glows: 713-555-5977\*911\*

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
911 from Jessica. It's always an  
emergency when people run out of shit.

Streetlights blur past. He grips the wheel tighter.  
Headlights flare across cracked asphalt. Psychedelic rock  
leaks from the speakers-warped. Acid colors pulse across the  
windshield.

He grunts, attempting to release stress.

Glances down at the beeper again.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
But why her? Why then? There was  
nothing left I wanted to care about,  
but she still knew how to pull me in.

He tucks it away.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - ALIEF STREETS - NIGHT

Adiran's car glides through empty intersections. Acid trails  
bleed across the traffic lights.

He cruises through a dim back road. Headlights flicker  
against cracked pavement and empty sidewalks.

Adiran's eyes sharpen. Hands grasp the wheel tighter,  
Beeper buzzes again on his leg. He glances down, frustrated.  
Happy's car zooms past in the opposite lane.

Adiran jerks the wheel into a tight U-turn. Loose junk in the  
glove compartment rattles violently.

Revs up to catch up to Happy.

EXT. CORNER STORE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The lot is dark, lit by a dim overhead light. Happy's car  
screeches into the lot. Car door flings open.

HAPPY (early 20s, Filipino, stocky performative gangster, tattoos wrapping his forearms and along his neck) jumps out, pistol in hand, adrenaline pumping.

HAPPY  
What's up, bitch?

Adiran's car skids into place behind Happy's. Adiran steps out, calm but annoyed, lit by acid and headlights glare.

HAPPY  
Oh shit, dawg! What you doin' riding up on a nigga like that?

ADIRAN  
What?

HAPPY  
Dawg! Don't pull up on me like that.  
That shit gets niggas killed around here.

ADIRAN  
Well, I ain't a "nigga".

Happy exhales and tucks the pistol into his waistband-fast, casual, practiced.

They clasp hands-fast, rough, knuckles cracking together. Familiar contact-more reassurance than threat.

Happy scans the street automatically-eyes restless even as the tension between them eases.

ADIRAN  
I don't have good news for you, buddy.

HAPPY  
Shit. What's up, dawg? You and John OK?

ADIRAN  
Oh, all's good on our end. You, on the other hand... you have a shit fest to deal with. Get in the car.

Happy's face tightens-eyes narrow, calculating. Then he nods and gets in. With Adiran, it's trust first, questions later.

INT. ADIRAN'S CAR - ALIEF STREETS - NIGHT

Happy shifts in his seat. Pulls out the gun again-a nervous tick. Adiran clocks it but isn't threatened. It's just Happy

being Happy.

ADIRAN  
You've got rats in your crew.

HAPPY  
The fuck you talking 'bout, dawg?

ADIRAN  
That fucking Viet friend of yours  
called in a deal tonight and had some  
other idiot questioning me about the  
shit.

Happy exhales hard, mutters under his breath.

HAPPY  
That bitch...

ADIRAN  
Don't bring this gangster pissing  
contest bullshit to me. John's already  
paranoid.

HAPPY  
It'll be dealt with tonight.

Happy leans back, satisfied with his own promise. A crooked  
grin tugs at his mouth as he taps a fist against his chest.

Ink twists across his knuckles and forearm—climbing his skin.

Shadows stir along Adiran's side of the car, thin streaks  
sliding across the seat toward Happy's fist. They sear into  
the ink on his hand.

ADIRAN  
Like I said, just don't bring that  
backstabbing gook shit y'all have  
going on now to John, ok?

For a moment, the tattoos sizzle, the lines thickening as if  
burning in.

Then the shadows vanish. The ink settles back to its usual  
shade.

HAPPY  
You don't have to be racist, dawg.

Adiran sharply turns his upper body to look at Happy.  
Playfully backhands Happy's arm.

ADIRAN

Racist? Motherfucker! Who's the one  
going around calling people niggers?

HAPPY

I didn't call you a nigger, dawg!  
Nigga! It's not the same.

ADIRAN

Remind me again, how many times did  
you call Chris a 'nigga'?

Happy bristles—the gangster edge drops. Looks over at Adiran,  
lips tightened.

A childish grin creeps across his face.

HAPPY

Once.

Happy raises his hand to his left eye. The goofy grin  
disappears.

Adiran scoffs.

ADIRAN

Right... You fucking hypocrite.

HAPPY

Fuck you, Adiran.

Shadows in the car thicken again.

ADIRAN

No, sir. Fuck you and your Asian  
Yakuza gangster bullshit.

Adiran pulls out his beeper, flips through to Happy's number  
and code.

ADIRAN

See? That asshead has your code and my  
fucking beeper number. He called in a  
deal for tonight.

Happy pushes the beeper away.

HAPPY

I don't need to see your shit.

ADIRAN

What you need to do is figure it the  
fuck out, Hap. John's already paranoid  
(MORE)

ADIRAN (CONT'D)  
enough with the shit that's going down  
with me. We can't afford stupid fuck  
ups like this too.

HAPPY  
It'll be dealt with tonight. I promise  
you. Nothing will ever happen to John  
while I'm the king of these streets.

ADIRAN  
I guess I'm shit out of luck then?

Happy grins, the exaggerated gangster bravado back in full effect.

HAPPY  
You fucked with the Sheriff's  
daughter, dawg! You're a bro to me,  
but that shit's your own. I do promise  
you, if anything comes close to John  
in my turf, I'll drop it like a  
kiloton bomb.

ADIRAN  
Shut the fuck up, Hap! You don't even  
know what the fuck that means.

HAPPY  
Kiloton bombs drop bitches, dawg.  
That's all I need to know!

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - DROP LOCATION - NIGHT

Adiran's car glides past the meetup spot. It's empty-ghosted.

ADIRAN  
Well, fuck! He's gone now. This is  
useless. We're just driving around  
like two ass wipes, and that  
motherfucker is gonna make me drive  
back to Alief with a brick.

HAPPY  
Shit dawg, no way! I'll take it from  
you.

ADIRAN  
You got the cash for it right now?

HAPPY  
Dawg! My nigga! Who are you talking  
to? Of course I got the money.

Happy pulls a thick wad of cash from his pocket, thumbing the bills.

ADIRAN

You carry around all that fucking money? Why don't you ever buy acid from me?

HAPPY

Acid is nasty, dawg. That shit fucks with your brain.

Adiran smirks faintly.

Looks at himself in the rearview, his reflection meets him—still, deliberate.

Eyes hold a beat too long. Past his own face.

He knows it's true.

ADIRAN

Sometimes the brain-fuck is the point.

EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - CORNER STORE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Adiran pulls back into the corner store lot to drop Happy off.

EXT. CORNER STORE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

They both get out of Adiran's car. Adiran scans the row of payphones against the wall while Happy gets back into his own car.

ADIRAN

Alright then, shithead. Good luck cleaning your house. We'll come up with a different code next week or something. Let me think this shit through some other time when I am not about to be all fucked up.

Happy flashes a sideways peace sign as he burns out of the lot. Adiran flips him off, smiling. Brothers, even in chaos.

ADIRAN

Enjoy your shit cake!

Adiran turns toward the payphones, already letting Happy's mess drift from his mind. The money in his pocket feels heavier.

## EXT. CORNER STORE PAYPHONES - NIGHT

A row of payphones glows faintly beneath flickering lights. Adiran pulls his coat tighter. Eyes are wide—acid's peaking. He digs into his jeans pocket and pulls out the beeper.

He squints at the screen. Puts it back in his pocket.

Looks at his car, then at the phones. Pauses.

Shadows spread to the phones.

Adiran sighs. Walks to the payphones.

Lifts the first receiver. Dead tone. Stares at it for a moment then sets it down, swinging against the booth.

Taps the coin return button twice, checks the slot. Empty.

He moves to the second phone. Dead tone. Drops it, leaving it off the hook. Clattering against the metal.

He pockets a dime from the coin return, finds a quarter in his pocket.

Turns it over slowly—acid making the grooves feel infinite under his skin.

The third phone hums with a live tone. He drops the quarter into the slot.

Adiran dials Jessica's number. The phone rings.

He waits. One ring. Two. Three. Finger hovers over the cradle, ready to hang up. Jessica's voice crackles through the receiver—panicked.

JESSICA (O.S.)  
Don't hang up, please!

Adiran pauses, casually returns the phone to his ear.

ADIRAN  
Who died?

JESSICA (O.S.)  
(quivering)  
Come over, please. There's a man  
looking through my window!

Adiran's face shifts—shadows engulf him in a flash of darkness.

ADIRAN  
Is he still there?

JESSICA (O.S.)  
No... he ran off when I saw him, but  
I'm afraid he'll come back. Can you  
please come over?

Adiran's tone shifts—flat and resolved.

ADIRAN  
I'm on my way.

He hangs up.

For a moment, the glass of the phone booth darkens around him, the world outside blurring. A thin shadow pools at his feet—then slinks back under the booth as headlights sweep across the lot.

A patrol car creeps into the parking area, slow, scanning.

Adiran freezes. Watches. The car crawls past the row of payphones, then pulls toward the far side of the store.

He exhales, still in the booth, hand gripping the receiver.

The patrol car drifts past, disappearing behind the corner store.

Adiran steps out of the booth, shoulders tense, and heads for his car.

Opens the door, glancing once more at the empty lot where the cruiser had been. Gets in.

The engine roars.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - NIGHT

Adiran drives. Light and shadow flicker across the windshield. His reflection in the rearview ripples—shadows and acid making the glass seem alive, breathing.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
You must be wondering what made me  
special? Absolutely fucking nothing.  
The only thing I believed in was what  
I could see with my own eyes, and all  
I ever saw proved to me that people  
were just shit.  
All I saw was the hypocrisy, and all I  
(MORE)

ADIRAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
tried to do was to make sure everyone  
else saw it too.

The windshield's projection wavers, no longer his current view, but a memory resurfacing.

The windshield fogs—hands pass a joint, laughter muffled and distant.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
Like the good old "justice for all,  
everyone is equal" bullshit...

Or Jessica, the Sheriff's little girl—  
smoking weed and giving me head while  
driving around the city.

Jessica's face flickers in the rearview mirror, distorted by acid trails—half a smile, half a blur.

Voices echoes faintly in the haze.

The image fractures. Flares of red and blue bleed into glass.

The siren swells, swallowing her laughter.

EXT. CITY STREET - POLICE CRUISER - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Flashing lights cut across the street. Two DEPUTIES (30s, Sheriff Sterling's goons) reach into Adiran's car and yank him out.

They slam Adiran against the police-cruiser hood—hands pinning him, head shoved down by his hair.

The world stutters—frames skipping in acid jerks.

Darkness spills out from under the cruiser, flattening across the hood around his cheek. It spreads over his forearms and shoulders, pressing him harder into the metal than the deputies do.

His muscles tense to fight—but nothing moves. The shadows clamp down, holding him in place.

JESSICA  
Leave him alone! He didn't do  
anything! Get off him, you fucking  
pigs!

DEPUTY 1  
Stay in the car, ma'am!

JESSICA  
I'll testify! You hear me?! You lay a  
hand on him, I'll get you all fired!  
My father will-

A cruiser door opens. Sterling steps out.

Jessica freezes. Then recovers. Steps out of the car.

JESSICA  
Dad! Tell them to let him go!

Sterling crosses to the hood. Doesn't look at her. Eyes only on Adiran.

Adiran's face pressed against the metal. He strains against the hood, but his body stays locked. The shadows keep him there.

He doesn't resist. But he doesn't look away either.

Sterling leans closer.

STERLING  
(low, to Adiran)  
You think she protects you?

JESSICA  
Dad! He didn't do anything!

STERLING  
Take him to the drunk tank overnight.

JESSICA  
Are you fucking kidding me?!

Sterling walks back to his cruiser. Doesn't acknowledge her.

Jessica lunges toward him. Deputy 1 catches her arm.

JESSICA  
You can't do this! We're not even  
drunk! Dad!

STERLING  
Get her home.

JESSICA  
Don't touch me! Dad! DAD! Fuck you  
all!

Red and blue strobes ripple unnaturally, bleeding into each other like wet paint.

Her screaming fades with the sirens—distorting into a high-pitched whine—static flooding his head.

Memory dissolves.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - JESSICA'S TOWNHOUSE ENTRANCE - NIGHT

The whine fades into the hum of the engine. Adiran grips the steering wheel tight. Knuckles whiten.

Reflection in the rearview quivers, then settles.

The world looks warped through his eyes. Lights shimmer and stretch across the windshield.

Blinks hard, trying to focus.

A calico cat darts across the road ahead.

He slams the brakes. Tires screech. Body jolts forward. Glares into the rearview—chest heaving.

ADIRAN  
What in the fuck?

He digs into his coat, pulls out a cigarette roller. Takes a joint out of it and lights it, inhaling deep.

ADIRAN  
Fucking cat.

The car eases forward into a nearly-empty visitor parking lot near a quiet townhouse complex. Area asleep—no music, no movement. A few lights from TVs flicker behind blinds.

Plenty of cars fill the roofed spots reserved for residents.

Adiran drives slowly, scanning for movement. Acid trails bend the streetlights at the edges of his vision. No one around.

Parks three units away from Jessica's place, steps out.

EXT. JESSICA'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

Adiran walks through the lots, peeking between units. Takes heavy hits from his joint, agitated.

He nears her building. Window flickers.

No one's hiding there. The voyeur is gone.

He peers inside Jessica's window.

A digital clock glows red: 10:08 PM.

ADIRAN  
(muttering)  
Maybe the fucker just wanted to know  
the time.

The room glows pale blue—an aquatic wash.

Eyes track across the tangled bedcovers, clothes strewn on  
the floor.

Jessica isn't there. Bathroom light clicks on. Sliver of  
yellow escapes through the cracked door. Light goes out.

Jessica enters, carefully closing the door behind her. She  
moves silently, careful not to make noise.

Adiran watches her with a faint smirk. Stifles a snicker.

ADIRAN  
Old habits...

Gaze lingers—sizing up the unseen voyeur, then dismissing  
him.

Maybe Jessica imagined it. But there she is, and as usual,  
her presence captivates him.

Jessica wears a pajama shirt with a little brown bear on the  
front. The little bear has a big red bow tie, and its arms  
extend out, asking for a hug.

Her butt peeks out beneath the hem, fabric glowing blue in  
the lamp light.

Jessica turns—spots Adiran outside the glass—and nearly jumps  
out of her skin.

For a blink, their faces touch in the glass, then slip apart.

She stumbles back, arms flailing, face frozen like she's  
about to scream.

She barely catches herself.

Adiran laughs.

Window slides open. Cold air hits his face—feels good.

He takes another drag from his joint, eyes locked on her.

The quiet lingers.

ADIRAN  
(whispers)  
So... where is he?

She whispers back, matching his sarcasm—both pretending the quiet mattered.

JESSICA  
I don't know. He ran off right after I caught him looking, I think. I haven't seen him since. Why don't you come in?

ADIRAN  
Should I climb the window, or do I use the door?

JESSICA  
Come to the front, smartass.

She slams the window shut in his face.

EXT. JESSICA'S PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Adiran strolls toward her door, joint glowing, no longer scanning the bushes and corners with paranoid eyes.

Jessica waits in the doorway, smirk already loaded.

JESSICA  
Hurry up and get inside!

INT. JESSICA'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

They drift inside. Modest space, lit by the flat glow of a ceiling fan bulb.

A broomstick leans against the wall by the door.

JESSICA  
In case you need it. You want a cigarette?

She knows he doesn't smoke. Adiran smirks, raises the joint.

ADIRAN  
Mind if I finish this?

JESSICA  
Of course not.

ADIRAN  
I didn't see anybody out there. Or anywhere in this old folks' place.

JESSICA  
He must've gone home. But really, he  
was out there!

Adiran narrows his eyes. Hands her the joint.

ADIRAN  
You don't have to make up stories to  
make me come over. All you have to do  
is call.

Her voice is sharp—she means it.

JESSICA  
Adiran! Don't be such a fucking  
asshole. There really was some guy  
looking at me!

Adiran softens, sinking into the couch with an exhale.

Jessica stands over him. He reaches out, takes her hand.

ADIRAN  
I'm sorry. I'm just peaking right now  
and not thinking straight. What do you  
want me to do?

Her tone gentles again.

JESSICA  
Can you stay for a little while? I'm  
scared he'll come back.

They pass the joint back and forth, tension easing.

ADIRAN  
(low)  
Okay.

He tastes her flavored lipstick on the joint. Slides a hand to her hip—she leans into it, warmth radiating into his arm.

For a moment, they just breathe together.

JESSICA  
Do you want a drink?

ADIRAN  
That'd be nice. This acid has me  
running at a million miles an hour. Do  
you have any juice?

JESSICA  
I do.

She slips away toward the kitchen, leaving Adiran in the incandescent quiet.

INT. JESSICA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Adiran twirls the broomstick absently, then studies it like a relic.

Fingertips trace along the wooden handle, lingering on its grooves.

High and tactile, he caresses it like he's presenting his thoughts to an audience of one.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
We'd known each other for over three years. She once claimed I was one of the reasons she was independent now. I'd given her the balls to leave her parents' house.

He spins it slowly, watching the light catch on its surface.

A faint smirk breaks across his face.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
She thought I'd been a good influence. I was the one who resolved her issues, who listened, who knew all her problems. But we both knew I was never going to be her permanent fixture.

He huffs a laugh under his breath, shaking his head. Gently props the broomstick back where it was by the door.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
At least she stood by me when it mattered. Sometimes I wondered if we could make it work. But wondering was all I could do.

From the kitchen: faint sounds—water running, glass clinking.

Adiran lowers himself onto the couch, elbows on his knees, tuned only to her presence.

Nothing else matters in this moment.

Jessica returns with a glass of orange juice. She hands it to him casually, like this is just their rhythm.

Adiran takes it. Cold juice cuts through the taste of smoke on his tongue. He doesn't mention his night's plans, doesn't rush to leave. Focus is entirely on her.

She settles beside him on the couch. They pass the joint back and forth, fingers brushing with each handoff. She leans in closer, hair brushing his cheek.

His tone softens, teasing.

ADIRAN  
Hello. Long time no see!

Adiran slides his hand onto her hip, then along her thigh. She doesn't flinch—she leans into it, warmth radiating through the thin fabric.

He presses his nose into her hairline, inhaling deep, her scent flooding him.

Jessica closes her eyes, allowing it.

They kiss. Slow at first, then hungrier, lips parting, breath quickening.

Her nipples harden beneath her thin shirt. He notices, hand grazing over them before gripping her thighs more firmly. She reacts in kind, pulling him closer, fingers tracing his back, heat building between them.

They break for air, staring at each other—no hesitation, no shyness.

Jessica stands, flushed, takes his hand. Without a word, she pulls him with her, leading him down the hall.

Her bedroom door closes behind them.

INT. JESSICA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

On the bedside table, a joint smolders beside an empty juice glass. Smoke curls into the pale blue glow of the lamp.

The room feels aquatic, unreal—like everything is submerged.

Beyond the table, their shapes already move in rhythm on the bed.

The joint fizzles into ash. They do the opposite—burning hotter.

Blue light bends across their skin, stretching shadows long and liquid.

They strip each other—rough, without delicacy. Mouths meeting hard. Teeth clashing. Hands clawing at bare skin.

In Adiran's eyes, every touch leaves trails of light across her skin—a phosphorescent glow. She radiates the pleasure directly into him.

Bodies twist and shift in the blue glow—on top, beneath, tangled in sheets, breath colliding in rough rhythm.

The blue light fractures across his vision, breaking into waves and shards.

For a moment, he isn't inside his own skin—pleasure nerves flicker as if wired to an artificial body. Each sensation feels transmitted, radiating from Jessica into him.

Their rhythm slows. Bodies collapse into a quieter tangle, breath heavy, sweat shining in the blue.

Jessica leans into his ear, voice soft, worshipful.

JESSICA  
Adiran...

His chest swells. A grin spreads—unchecked, victorious.

Her nails dig into his back. Forehead presses to hers. The dream swells, holding.

JESSICA  
(closer)  
Adiran...

The sound shifts. No longer distant or worshipful. Urgent.

Fractured.

Jessica's voice rises, panicked.

JESSICA  
Adiran! Adiran, he's here!

The dream shatters like glass. Adiran freezes, ripped from the acid haze into stark awareness.

Adiran blurts, still disoriented.

ADIRAN  
Oh shit! The deadbeat boyfriend? The dad? Who?

Following her anxious eyes, he spins toward the window. A

strange face peers in, watching.

ADIRAN  
What in the fuck?

He pulls away from her, scrambling for his pants.

Stumbling, half-falling, he yanks them on, then jams his feet into unlaced boots.

His eyes cut to the clock: 10:45 PM.

Red digits glare back-frozen in his trip.

Hands fumble, time stops for him, muttering all the while.

ADIRAN  
Yeah, the deadbeat boyfriend... Colby, right? Peeping like a champ. Bet your old man's out there too, coaching him from the bushes. "Go, cadet, go!"

He sneers.

ADIRAN  
Deadbeat Colby... yeah, that fits you. No, wait-Bootlicker Colby! Even better.

Jessica looks down from the bed, wrapped in the sheets. Frowning in disbelief.

JESSICA  
He's gone, Adiran!

He looks up at Jessica. Snaps out of his trance.

Storms out of the bedroom, driven, naked chest tense and swollen.

INT. JESSICA'S FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

By the door, the broomstick leans in the corner. Adiran grabs it with purpose.

He stares at it like a comrade-in-arms. Then, with a manic edge, he shakes it like a hand.

Shadows spread from his arm to the stick.

ADIRAN  
Mr. Stick, please shake my hand.  
Pleasure to meet you!

The grin fades. The ritual is complete.

EXT. JESSICA'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

THE VOYEUR (40s, intellectually disabled) flounders in the shadows, clumsy and slow.

The front door bursts open.

Adiran storms out, shouting.

ADIRAN  
Hey, motherfucker!

Adiran bolts after him, broomstick clutched tight. Voyeur lumbers forward, then slips under a streetlamp.

For the first time, he's fully visible—grotesque, naked, patchy body hair spreading across his back. He's only wearing a pair of red sneakers.

Adiran snarls, eyes burning hotter. Light doesn't reveal—it enrages.

Shadows stretch long behind him, pooling at his feet.

ADIRAN  
You stupid piece of shit! I'm gonna  
kick your nasty, sick motherfucking  
ass! You shitbag ass-fuck!

The chase stretches, acid-time distorting every step. Shadows ripple across the pavement, following.

Finally, Adiran reaches him. He swings with all his strength.

The broomstick EXPLODES across the voyeur's back—shadows lurch forward with the impact, darkening around them.

Adiran's momentum sends him stumbling, tripping over the man's bulk, crashing hard onto the pavement.

He rolls. Splinters bite his palms as he scrambles back up, eyes wild.

Another strike—shadows pulse. Then another and another—legs, head, ribs, knees, arms. Each blow sends ripples of darkness across the street.

The shadows crawl up his legs, wrapping around his torso.

Screaming, savage.

ADIRAN

How do you fucking like it?! Are you  
horny now, you fuck?!

Voyeur sobs, broken, but Adiran doesn't stop. Kicks rain  
down—unlaced boots slamming until one flies off.

Only then does he stop, chest heaving. Voyeur lies ruined in  
the street, sobbing in his red sneakers.

Adiran drops the splintered remains of the broomstick.

The shadows engulf him completely—swallowing him in darkness.

For a beat, he stands consumed. Breathing hard.

Then he steps back toward Jessica's doorway. The light cuts  
through—shadows receding as he moves into the glow.

INT. JESSICA'S FRONT ROOM — CONTINUOUS

Jessica stands framed in the doorway. Her hand grips the  
frame, forearms trembling. Eyes wide. But she doesn't pull  
back—she leans in, just slightly.

Adiran approaches, taking deep breaths.

ADIRAN

Done.

He laughs a quick, hollow bark—then sucks the air through his  
teeth.

ADIRAN

Happy-happy, joy-joy.

Jessica exhales.

JESSICA

(under her breath)

Thank you for taking care of that.

She kisses him on the cheek—her tenderness colliding with the  
brutality she just witnessed.

INT. JESSICA'S BEDROOM — LATER

Adiran pulls on his pants, still breathing hard, splinters in  
his hand.

Jessica curls on the bed, watching him—unbothered by what  
happened.

JESSICA  
Come here. Let me see.

He sits on the edge of the bed. She takes his hand, examining his palm in the lamplight.

She picks at a splinter with her fingernail, focused. Pulls it free. Then another.

He watches her work. The intimacy of it—quiet, methodical.

She doesn't look up.

JESSICA  
He's lucky. Better you than my dad. My dad would've just shot him.

A beat. Adiran looks up at her, but doesn't respond.

JESSICA  
You got him good though.

ADIRAN  
Yeah.

She pulls another splinter, drops it. Moves to his other hand.

He glances at the open window, then back to her.

ADIRAN  
How about we take a second and close these fucking blinds?

Jessica forces a smile, firing back without missing a beat.

JESSICA  
Yeah. Or I could just start charging admission.

She finishes with the last splinter. Holds his hand for a final inspection, then releases it.

They share a laugh—absurd. For a moment, normal.

He slips his boots back on, shoulders starting to relax.

The lamplight flickers. Shadows crawl the walls, then retreat—leaving the room in uneasy calm.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - ALIEF STREETS - NIGHT

Adiran drives through the dim backstreets, eyes wide and

glassy from the acid.

Fingers tap the wheel in uneven bursts—keeping time with a rhythm only he hears.

Dashboard lights smear in his vision. He blinks, but the blur doesn't go away.

Jaw grinds softly, unbidden.

The road unfolds in fragments:

A man pushes a rattling shopping cart full of scrap.

A mother waits at a bus stop with two sleepy kids.

A street vendor shutters a small food stand.

A couple argues quietly under a flickering streetlight.

ADIRAN (V.O.)

This was Alief. This was home. Being afraid of these streets made as much sense as being afraid of being struck by lightning.

The woman at the bus stop turns her head, locking eyes with him as streetlight flares white-hot.

The cart man freezes mid-step, shadow stretching unnaturally across the street toward the car.

The streetlights swell and pulse, breathing in time with his heartbeat.

Pupils blow wide, swallowing the light.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - MARY'S STREET - NIGHT

Red and blue strobes wash the houses, but they pulse too slowly—the space between each flash feels wrong, like time has slipped.

Adiran's crooked smile is gone.

He brakes hard, grip locking tight on the wheel.

ADIRAN

What the fuck happened?

He scans the street for Mary.

Crowd noise muffles and bends—a low hum swallowing every

voice.

Lights smear, elongating into streaks that curl and fade into blackness.

BLACK SCREEN:

The hum from the block lingers in the dark, low and droning. Adiran's breathing cuts through it—shallow, uneven.

FADE IN:

EXT. MARY'S STREET - NIGHT

Flashes of red and blue from ambulances and police cars paint the windshield. Adiran's car idles at the curb, just beyond the crowd and police tape.

Through the glass, he sees paramedics loading a stretcher, blurred faces craning for a look, cops moving with clipped urgency.

He scans the scene from a distance. No Seth. No Mary. Hand taps nervously on the steering wheel, the other resting on the bulk of bags in his coat pocket.

A figure breaks away from the crowd—JAMES (early 20s, neighborhood hanger-on).

He spots the car and heads toward it, weaving through people, waving like he's greeting a celebrity.

Adiran's eyes narrow. He doesn't roll down the window all the way—just enough for James' face to appear in the opening.

James talks, breathless and half-smiling, words jagged and broken in Adiran's dazed perception.

JAMES  
(garbled)  
...uninvited guest... Scott...

Adiran's gaze fixes on him, noise of the street muffled.

JAMES  
(garbled)  
...queer joke... got mad...

James leans closer, voice finally cutting through.

JAMES  
Mary's dead. He shot her!

The words hit like a fist to the chest. Adiran's grip on the steering wheel tightens to the point of shaking.

James keeps talking, meaning dissolving again into static.

JAMES  
(garbled)  
...got away...  
(then, casually)  
Hey, you got a dime I can buy off you?

Adiran exhales sharply through his nose. Reaches into his coat, pulls out one of the small bags of weed he had packed earlier, flings it through the open gap.

It bounces off James' face.

The bag bursts on impact—weed scatters across the pavement.

James flinches—then crouches, scooping the weed off the ground.

JAMES  
How much for it?

Adiran's eyes flick past him to the crowd, the police, the pulsing lights.

Staying here is suicide.

He drops the car into gear, pulls away, forcing James to stumble back as the bumper swings past.

EXT. MARY'S STREET - CONTINUOUS

Adiran pulls away from the curb. Crowd and flashing lights shrink in the rearview.

Inside the car, breathing steadies, but grip on the wheel remains tight.

Streetlights flash across the windshield, casting shifting shadows in the cabin.

At first they're just shapes—passing tree limbs, utility poles—but as they play across his arms and face, they linger, and curl, tracing the outline of fingers along his shoulder.

ADIRAN  
I'll find out who did this, Mary.  
Don't worry. I won't stop looking. Not until I destroy him.

Another shadow slides over him, brushing across his jaw like a hand.

Eyes flick to the passenger seat—empty—but he doesn't look unsettled.

ADIRAN

You're with me now. I can feel it.

The shadows form a faint profile beside him—gone before he can focus.

He exhales. A whisper:

ADIRAN

Please don't leave me, Mary.

He grips the wheel tighter. Holding her there.

ADIRAN (V.O.)

Right then, in my spiritual silence, an unnameable feeling was eating at my soul, and I let it destroy what life I had left in me.

The car rolls on into the dark. Shadows move around him, softer—slowly absorbing.

EXT. ADIRAN'S APARTMENT COMPLEX — NIGHT

The car turns into the lot, engine humming low. Adiran scans the rows—slow, deliberate. No movement.

He parks near his unit, kills the lights but leaves the engine idling for a beat, eyes still tracking the lot.

Hand presses against the coat pocket holding the bags of weed—a reminder why he keeps his distance from the police.

Finally, he shuts off the engine. Dashboard light fades, but in the reflection of the windshield, a faint shadow shape hovers over his shoulder before dissolving.

INT. ADIRAN'S LIVING ROOM — NIGHT

Front door shuts behind him.

He tosses the wad of cash and keys into the side-stand drawer.

Drops the bags of weed onto a metal tray on the floor, kneels, breaking them up to roll into joints.

Legs bounce, fingers unsteady. Sweat beads on his forehead.

Halfway through rolling, he stops. Rips off his trench coat and shirt, tosses them aside. Heads for the bathroom.

INT. ADIRAN'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

He turns on the tap—splashes water on hands and face. Dirt streaks and bits of grass cling to his skin. A scrape blooms red on his shoulder.

Water stings the wound; he flinches but doesn't pull away. Checks his elbow—still numb.

In the mirror, water runs down his face like tears.

Behind his reflection, shadows ripple along the wall—reacting.

INT. ADIRAN'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A pounding knock at the door. Shadows vanish as abruptly as they came.

Adiran storms out of the bathroom to answer it.

ADIRAN

Who is it, hold the fuck on!

He yanks the door open, still pulling on a clean shirt—ready to snap. It's just Seth—helmet in hand, eyes scanning the room as he steps inside.

ADIRAN

Oh shit, Seth. Come in.

Seth sets his helmet on the TV, eyes still scanning like he expects trouble.

ADIRAN

What the fuck, Seth?

SETH

They're after you, man. You're gonna have company real soon.

Adiran moves to the coffee table, shoving the loose weed back into a larger baggie. Slides the tray under the couch.

ADIRAN

Bad?

SETH  
Yeah, man, pretty fucking bad.

Adiran searches for his keys, muttering:

ADIRAN  
Where did I put my keys?

Seth flicks open a switchblade, running the edge lightly across his palm.

ADIRAN  
Damn, must've hidden them with my stash-

He yanks open the drawer, spots them, grabs them.

SETH  
(quiet)  
The cops saw James talkin' to you.

Adiran freezes—eyes on Seth.

He slams the drawer, throws his coat back on.

SETH  
They stopped him after you left. Found a bunch of weed in his pockets. I came here as soon as I could.

No hesitation. No doubt. Just cold truth:

ADIRAN  
James is a fucking idiot. They don't know shit about where to find me, unless they followed you.

Seth doesn't argue. They head for the door.

EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - APARTMENT PARKING LOT - NIGHT

They move quickly to the car.

Adiran pops the trunk, checks the gas can's cap, tightens it once, shuts the lid.

He hands Seth a bundle of joints.

ADIRAN  
Hold these—need to grab something else.

Adiran jogs back upstairs.

INT. ADIRAN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

He grabs a bottle of whiskey and a half-empty soda from the fridge.

ADIRAN  
This'll calm me down.

EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - APARTMENT PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Adiran returns, drops into the driver's seat, hands Seth the bottles.

ADIRAN  
All set. Let's go.

The car pulls out, weaving through the quiet streets.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Streetlights flicker through the windshield, cutting the cabin into bands of light and shadow.

Hum of the tires blends with the low growl of the engine.

ADIRAN  
So, what's the deal?  
(beat)  
Light one up, would you?

Seth studies the joint as he lights it-quiet, focused.

ADIRAN  
What the fuck is it, Seth?

Adiran takes a swig of whiskey, the burn hitting sweet in the midst of his acid rush.

SETH  
I know where we need to go.

Adiran just looks at him, studying his face.

SETH  
We need to go to The Heights. We need  
to take the 17th Street exit.

Adiran breathes out his hit. Skeptical.

ADIRAN  
Yeah? What makes you say that?

Adiran takes a long, judgmental drag.

SETH  
I talked to the fuckhead earlier  
tonight.

Adiran stops taking his hit from the joint.

ADIRAN  
What?

SETH  
Yeah, he was giving me shit about how cool his buddies were. He was upset because Sean had brought him over.

It was too lame for him, you know, just sitting around getting high and watching TV. He said some shit about snorting coke all night long and throwing beer bottles into the street at his parties. Was bragging that no one would ever give them shit about it where he lived, so I asked him where it was, and he told me.

Seth takes a couple of gulps of whiskey.

Adiran takes his drag, recovering from the initial shock.

ADIRAN  
Sounds like a real cool motherfucker.

SETH  
I don't know for sure, but it sounded like bullshit to me. I'm glad we're drinking, 'cause sober I couldn't handle this shit right now.  
(a beat)  
I saw the whole thing, man.

Adiran stiffens. Guards himself.

ADIRAN  
Oh man, don't start with that.

But Seth had already begun.

The windshield ripples faintly with shadows, as if Seth's words are bleeding into Adiran's vision.

SETH  
We were sitting around, waiting for you to get there, talking and shit, you know, like always. People were  
(MORE)

SETH (CONT'D)  
coming in and out of the house, but this motherfucker just sat there, so I got curious and talked to him to know what was up with him.

Turns out, Sean had brought him over, but Sean had been in the backyard arguing with his girlfriend about stupid shit. So, this guy was just lurking there, all weird and shit.

ADIRAN

What? Hell yeah, he must've looked weird. That motherfucker killed Mary in her own fucking house. And how in the fuck did he leave if Sean was the one who brought him there?

SETH

He was just fucking weird, man. His legs were shaking and shit. And he talked funny, you know... fast, like he was on speed or something. I just figured more power to him and shit, so that's when he told me about where he lived.

Then Mary came up and asked me if I had heard from you. He looked at her like, I don't know, man, like she bothered him. Mary picked up on it right away and looked straight back at him. Then she asked him who he was and shit. You know what he fucking said?

ADIRAN

No.

SETH

No, of course not. He told her it was none of her fucking business. Can you believe it?

ADIRAN

That was bold of him.

Adiran exhales hard, tone edged with irritation. Eyes fixed on the road, jaw tightening. Forces it back down.

SETH

I was shocked, man. So, Mary looks up and down at him and stares into his  
(MORE)

SETH (CONT'D)  
eyes for a second or two, then she laughs. She starts laughing at him! You know how she'd sometimes let out that hysterical laugh? Just like that.

Shadow Mary doubles over on the windshield, laughing in cruel mirth.

The sound echoes in the cabin.

Silence falls.

Adiran gulps whiskey, eyes locked on Seth, forcing himself to take in the details he didn't want to hear.

SETH  
He looked back at her, and he almost seemed hurt. But he knew her, man! Or she knew him! I don't fucking know, but it was weird. Like-like she had dirt on him. Like she saw right through his bullshit. I couldn't do anything to fix things, you know? Shit, Mary ate me up for breakfast if I ever argued or debated anything with her, you know how it is.

Seth clears his throat, grinds his teeth, blurts:

SETH  
Then Mary got all pissed off, and bends down to his level and yells: "So, you're the faggot Sean is dumping his girlfriend for?" Can you believe that?

ADIRAN  
No, that's all fucked up. What the fuck is happening?

Adiran lights another joint—drags hard, defiant.

SETH  
I know it all sounds fucked up, but that's how it happened, man! When Mary said that to him, he stood up and got in her face. That's when I got up. But before I could do anything else, the fucker tripped me and pushed me down to the ground.

Adiran shoves the whiskey bottle against Seth's chest.

ADIRAN  
Here. Take a swig.

Seth gulps, stares out his window, eyes glassy. Adiran watches, grip tightening on wheel.

SETH  
Next thing I know, Mary's fallen down beside me, but she's got a bloody nose.

ADIRAN  
What?

SETH  
Fuck, man. That bastard punched Mary!

Seth starts crying, the last of his smoothness gone. Pushes through sobs.

SETH  
She was bleeding, man. I couldn't believe it, but it was real.

Wipes his nose, voice shaking.

SETH  
She was hurting, so I turned over to get up and put an end to his shitty existence—but he's got a fucking metal finger pointed at me.

What could I do with a gun at my head? I was fucking helpless, man. Fucking helpless!

A shadow gun rises on the windshield. Mary's shadow jerks back, collapsing in violent blurs.

SETH  
Then he shot her, man! He fucking shot her in the fucking face, man ... in the fucking face!

Adiran rubs at his eyes—wet, blurry.

He forces them open, knuckles white on the wheel.

The car veers—Adiran jerks the wheel, snapping it toward the highway ramp.

ADIRAN  
Don't worry, Seth. When we get our  
(MORE)

ADIRAN (CONT'D)  
hands on him, we'll fuck him up so bad  
he'll hurt for the rest of his  
goddamned existence. I'll get Happy to  
pay me back a couple of favors.

But Seth continues, ignoring him completely.

SETH  
Then he stands over her and shoots her  
again. Everyone started screaming and  
running out of the house, man. Then  
he's about to shoot me when Sean  
barges in yelling, asking what was  
going on—and he gets the bullet with  
my name on it.

The windshield erupts with shadows—splintering chaos like a  
strobe.

Adiran cracks—a shuddering breath escapes. Peels one hand off  
the wheel, scrubs his face, clamps back down. Checks the  
rearview, forces his eyes dry, resets his grip at ten-and-  
two. The mask drops back into place.

ADIRAN  
Sean got shot too?

SETH  
Yeah, he got it in the leg, man. So  
this Scott guy goes over to him,  
forgets all about me, and takes Sean's  
keys from his pocket. He must've  
gotten nervous after everyone started  
screaming and shit. Then he just took  
off in Sean's car. The fucking  
bastard!

ADIRAN  
This is bad, Seth. This is really  
fucking bad. What about Mary's mom?  
Did she wake up?

SETH  
No, man.

SETH  
She was on those stupid sleeping  
pills. Slept through the whole thing.  
The cops were dealing with her when I  
left. They had to get the paramedics  
to wake her up before I could get my  
bike out of the garage.

Seth clutches his chest, gasping between words.

SETH

I'm having heart spasms every time I take a breath, man. I don't think I can take this shit any longer. Sure, the alcohol and the smoke help, but it isn't the same anymore.

I feel worthless. I could have saved her, man, but I was afraid for my own fucking self!

ADIRAN

Don't worry. It's all right now. Don't worry about a thing, man. It's all right.

Seth slams his fist against the dash.

SETH

Bullshit, man! It's not all fucking right! I should've saved her! I should've fucking saved her!

He screams, pounding the dashboard. The car interior darkens.

ADIRAN

You're right, Seth. But we'll make it better. We'll make sure Mary smiles again when we get to him.

Adiran puts a hand on Seth's shoulder.

SETH

She was like a bridge for us, man. You know?

Seth slumps back, staring at nothing—lifts his hand, resting it over Adiran's.

Darkness closes in around his eyes. A shadow creeps from Adiran's hand to Seth's.

ADIRAN (V.O.)

I fucking knew.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Adiran drives. A nearly empty whiskey bottle in his hand. Takes a swallow, passes it to Seth.

Seth doesn't look at him. He drinks without changing his

expression.

A green overhead sign flashes past: EXIT 15TH ST.

Adiran keeps his eyes forward, voice low and measured.

ADIRAN

There are times when you follow a rite  
of passage to evolve into something  
new. In primitive tribes, you hunt a  
beast. In civilized places, you get a  
job.

Seth stares out the window.

A second green sign: EXIT 16TH ST.

ADIRAN

The point is we act to become 'better  
than before.' Sometimes it just  
happens—the change left behind as  
silent proof.

Seth's jaw stays still. No reaction.

A third green sign: EXIT 17TH ST.

The car slips off the feeder road, threading into the neighborhood.

Tail lights recede into the distance; the city hum softens.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - 17TH STREET - NIGHT

Streetlights blink over cracked sidewalks. Leaves blow across the pavement. The air carries that October bite—not Halloween yet, but some houses already have half-finished decorations in their yards.

Adiran's car crawls past a light blue Toyota parked a couple of houses away from a small group in a front yard. Some wear cheap Halloween masks; others hide behind hoods or paint.

A beat. The engine ticks as he rides the brake, then feathers the gas and rolls past like nothing's happening.

Adiran clocks the Toyota, then the faces.

ADIRAN

11:46 PM. Sean's piece of shit Toyota.  
A group of junkie morons. Gee, I  
wonder where assfuck could be?

Adiran stares at the rearview. Three kids sprint for the front door, masks bobbing into the dim hallway.

He pulls away, U-turns at the block's end, drifts back-speedometer near a crawl.

Headlights rake the lawn as he creeps past.

ADIRAN

How about giant windows facing the street? People exhibiting themselves like store displays, inviting strangers to buy a piece of their life?

Adiran "presents" the giant living room window with an exaggerated showroom flourish—wrist out, palm sweeping—then punctuates it with a smug ta-da.

Seth ignores him, focused on scouting the area.

A beat on the glass. Faces dissolve at the edges—the shadows curl in, hollowing eyes, blurring mouths. Faceless.

ADIRAN (V.O.)

Fuck it, it didn't matter. We were looking for the bonus prize in the shooting gallery.

All faces darkened by shadows, except for one.

Seth erupts, pointing.

SETH

There he is! He's inside the fucking house!

Adiran locks on.

Opens the throttle—speed building.

The car climbs the curb, glides onto grass. Front tires bump, scrabble on wet lawn, then bite.

Adiran's face unreadable. Just engine and glare.

Kids freeze—masks, paint, hoodies dissolving to blurred chaos.

Shadows crawl in, making features blank.

The house fills the windshield.

IMPACT.

Flash of white-silence.

Bodies thud, roll, slide off the hood. The car keeps moving.

The giant window swallows the view. Inside, figures crowd the glass.

The front end smashes through-bumper hammers sill, studs crack, glass avalanches, furniture kicks back as the wall gives.

The car shudders to a stop, nose buried past blinds, rear on lawn. No airbags-old beater, wrong angle-just steam hissing and glass raining.

Everything goes black.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - SCOTT'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The car sits halfway through the shattered wall. Smoke and dust drift in the headlights' glow.

Adiran blinks, glass from his door window sliding off his jacket. Seth hunched low in the passenger seat, breathing fast.

A bullet cracks the windshield-spiderwebs bloom across the glass.

Adiran stares at the new star for a second, more annoyed than scared. Lip curls.

ADIRAN  
(low, to himself)  
I knew someday I would need a damn  
gun. Every asshole in this state packs  
a gun but me.

Another shot rips into the car's side panel.

ADIRAN  
Shit!

Leans toward Seth, scanning the angles.

ADIRAN  
Seth, are you OK?

Seth already pressed under the dash, shoulders tight.

SETH  
Great!

Another shot—the windshield glass shatters again, and this time the passenger window explodes outwards. Shots keep coming. Three. Four. Five.

ADIRAN  
Goddamn it!

SETH  
(whispering)  
Are they out?

ADIRAN  
How the fuck should I know?

SETH  
You're the fucking gun expert!

A microwave crashes through what's left of the windshield, landing between them with a shattering crash.

Glass rains over Adiran's lap and the dash.

ADIRAN  
(smartass)  
Yeah. They are out, let's go!

Adiran reaches for the whiskey bottle rolling on the floor.

Seth's door swings open—he's already moving, blade in hand. A figure charges past; Seth lunges, stabbing him in the throat in one swift, furious motion.

Adiran climbs out slower, more deliberate. Boot lands on something—the shape of a human hand.

ADIRAN  
(loud, to the room)  
I hope this isn't Scott!

The hand doesn't move. Whoever it belonged to is pinned under the wreck.

INT. SCOTT'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Smoke drifts from the wrecked wall into the kitchen. Three teenage boys frozen in fear.

BOY #1 (late teens, hoodlum junkie—not a killer) struggles with a heavy revolver—hands shaking.

BOY #2 and BOY #3 (late teens, too high to run) stare wide-eyed.

Adiran turns toward them. Steps slow, deliberate.

Smoke and shadows blur, wrapping around him like a shroud. His face disappears in the haze.

BOY #1  
Stay where you are! Get back... or  
I'll shoot you!

Adiran swings the whiskey bottle—knocks the gun away.

Smashes the bottle across the boy's face; the glass neck splinters, drives it into the boy's eye.

Shadows surge, blotting out everything but violence.

ADIRAN  
You're out of bullets, you dolt. Jesus fucking Christ—you inner-loop hood rats are fucking morons!

Boy #3 retreats—Adiran snatches him.

Seth corrals Boy #2, switchblade flashing.

Adiran pulls Boy #3 by the hair.

ADIRAN  
All right, you fuck — who and where is fucking Scott?

Boy #1 wails on the floor.

Seth grabs the back of the stove and yanks it loose, tilting it forward—its metal edge CRACKS into the boy's head.

A scream cuts short as Seth stomps his head into silence.

A high, urgent HISS builds from the torn gas line.

BOY #2  
Wait! Stop! Stop! He doesn't know who Scottie is!

Adiran releases Boy #3—the kid crumples.

ADIRAN / SETH  
Scottie?!

BOY #2  
Yeah, Scottie's here!

ADIRAN  
Where is this Scottie fuck?

The boy points toward a shattered coffee table.

INT. SCOTT'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Adiran shoves him ahead. Seth stalks past, overturning bodies like debris.

ADIRAN  
Do you see him?

Boy #2 shakes his head.

Seth digs deeper, grabbing two limp teens, tossing them aside.

Eyes lock on a moaning figure wedged between the table and the couch.

SETH  
I found him!

Seth yanks the table away, revealing SCOTT (late teens, junkie gangster, AKA Scottie) bloody, misshapen, barely conscious.

Seth rips the gun from his hand and presses it to Scott's face, pulling the trigger again and again. He hasn't chambered a round—no round in the pipe.

Click. Click. Click.

Seth raises the unfired gun to bash Scott's head in—

ADIRAN  
Wait, Seth! Don't kill him yet, I have an idea!

Adiran drags Seth back and shoves Boy #2 toward Scott.

SCOTT  
Help me... it—it hurts! Please, help me. Don't let them take me. Help me, please!

ADIRAN  
(to Boy #2)  
Pick him up and help him out. Tell him  
(MORE)

ADIRAN (CONT'D)  
everything is fine. And take his keys.

EXT. SCOTT'S FRONT YARD - NIGHT

Boy #2 ducks under Scott's arm, hauling him toward the street. Left leg hangs wrong. Right shoulder and arm look broken. Groans, pleading.

ADIRAN  
(to Seth)  
Hold on to the gun. Come on.

Seth points the gun at the kid. Leads him out.

As Boy #2 staggers forward with Scott, a key ring dangles from his hand.

Adiran steps in, yanks the keys from Boy #2. Moves to the other side of Scott.

Together, they drag Scott across the street and stuff him into the trunk of Sean's car.

Adiran jogs back to his car. Pops the trunk, pulls out a gas can. Opens his car's gas tank, pours a trail from it to the front yard.

Pulls a lighter from his pocket, sparks it. The trail of gasoline catches.

EXT. SCOTT'S NEIGHBOR'S YARD - NIGHT

Adiran sprints to the neighbor's yard, dropping flat into the grass.

The blue-orange flame races across the yard and up the tire. Then it dies.

Adiran watches, cheek pressed into damp earth, as the flame reignites, racing to the gas cap.

EXT. SCOTT'S FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

The gas cap ignites but it's not Adiran's car that explodes.

A tongue of flame licks through the broken window and catches the gas-heavy air inside.

The entire house erupts in a furious ball of fire.

The roar shakes the ground. Heat blasts over them. Shrapnel rains down across the street.

Adiran jumps to his feet—screams at the top of his lungs:

ADIRAN  
This is what kiloton bombs look  
like—Happy, you fuck!

Seth looks at him. For an instant, the firelight warps.

Seth catches a glimpse of shadows twisting and crawling over Adiran's body, swallowing his face, turning him into a solid black silhouette against the blaze. His features are gone—only darkness.

Seth flinches, stepping back. Blinks. Adiran is there again, grinning in the heat. Dismisses it.

SETH  
(re: the fire)  
What the fuck was that, man?

ADIRAN  
You feel that? That's what madness  
feels like, Seth... and I just  
unleashed it.

Adiran heaves, a broken laugh escaping, riding the blast.

ADIRAN  
Guilty by association, Seth. Shit  
happens.

Seth looks past Adiran at the burning house.

SETH  
Yeah... fuck 'em.

Seth shoves BOY #2 into the street. The kid crawls away.

SETH  
I'm driving.

Adiran, still half-deaf from the blast, smiles as he gets into the passenger seat.

INT./EXT. SEAN'S CAR - HIGHWAY - NIGHT

They speed away. Adiran lights a joint, but his stomach churns.

Seth pulls over to the side of the street. Adiran throws the door open and pukes hard onto the asphalt, retching until he's shaking.

Adiran hacks. Clears his throat several times-spits.

ADIRAN  
Fucking gross. That's not any  
better...

They pull back onto the highway.

The car merges into late night traffic. Headlights streak past in the darkness. Adiran and Seth stare straight ahead, faces lit in passing flashes. The road hums beneath them.

Silence stretches. It's heavy, awkward. Neither looks at the other.

A beat. At the same time:

ADIRAN / SETH  
What are we gonna do with—

They glance at each other, both a little surprised at the overlap. The corner of Seth's mouth twitches—not a smile, but close.

ADIRAN  
Could get Happy involved...

A pause. Shakes his head.

ADIRAN  
Nah. He's got rat issues right now.  
Last thing he needs is this mess.

Seth keeps his eyes on the road, voice flat, worn out.

SETH  
Let's drown him. Drop him in the deep  
end of a pool and see how long shit  
floats.

Adiran gives a small nod.

ADIRAN  
Hmm.

The silence returns briefly.

From the trunk. Kicking, pounding, muffled shouting.

ADIRAN  
Maybe kick the shit out of him first  
so he sinks faster.

He exhales hard, cranks the radio to full blast. Twangy country song blares.

ADIRAN  
Are you kidding me? Fuck this!

Slaps the eject, flings the tape out the window in a flash of frustration. Digs through glove compartment.

ADIRAN  
Thank God... Nine Inch Nails.

Seth reaches into his jacket, pulls out Scottie's gun, hands it to Adiran.

SETH  
Do something with this. It doesn't fucking work.

Adiran inspects the gun, releases the magazine—it's full. Shows Seth.

ADIRAN  
It didn't shoot because you have to chamber a round first.

Seth glances at the magazine, then back to the road—his jaw tightens.

ADIRAN  
(muttering to himself)  
Fucking Scottie reloaded his gun after he got home.

Adiran puts the magazine back in and chambers a round.

CLICK.

Shadows rapidly wrap it and up his arm until they absorb into his eyes.

INT. MARY'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The images flash at Adiran like the flashes from a gun:

Mary beside Seth on the floor, blood running from her nose.

Scott's arm raising the gun toward her.

Deafening muzzle flash, frozen in time.

Seth flat on the ground, helpless, staring. Mary's head snapping back from the shot.

Scott standing over her, firing again. Chaos—people screaming, scattering.

INT./EXT. SEAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Adiran gasps.

The hum of the highway swallows the silence between songs.

His hand shakes on the grip.

Lights a joint with his free hand. Smoke coils in the dim cabin light.

Adiran twists in his seat—eyes sweep the rear seat, lingering—something about it pulls at him.

He glances at Seth—face changes expressions like a movie in fast forward.

ADIRAN (V.O.)

Maybe it was just me, with the acid,  
the booze, the emotions. But I had  
seen this all before.

They let Trent Reznor fill the silence.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The road ahead stretches black and endless, painted in the steady rhythm of streetlights. A lone police cruiser sits up ahead on the shoulder, ghostly still.

Inside the car, Seth drives. Adiran stares straight ahead, jaw tight.

ADIRAN

He's just looking for speedsters. Just  
watch your speed, and we'll be fine.

Seth doesn't glance at him—jaw locks tighter, knuckles pale on the wheel.

SETH

Are you fucking nuts? We are in a hot fucking car, involved in multiple murders, with a fucking idiot screaming in the trunk. If he pulls us over, we're gonna get fist fucked for the rest of our miserable lives, man. I'm not up for that!

Hazard lights from a construction sign ahead strobe amber

across their faces. The glow catches the fine sweat on Seth's brow.

Adiran flicks his joint out the window, ember tracing a brief orange arc into the night.

They pass the cruiser's position.

WHOOOMPH. The cruiser comes alive—headlights snap on.

The light bar ignites in a violent strobe of red and blue, flooding the inside of their car.

Seth's grip climbs higher on wheel, shoulders hunching.

SETH  
Any suggestions?

Adiran turns his head just enough to catch Seth's side-eye—no reply—just a tight press of his lips.

The cruiser's lights blaze closer through the rear glass, filling the back window like a predator's eyes.

Adiran's hand finds Scottie's gun low in his lap.

SETH  
I'll fake him out, you shoot. And  
please, don't miss!

Adiran glances at him, jaw tight—no words, but grip on the gun hardens.

The SIREN SCREAMS—a piercing, mechanical wail.

Seth signals, guiding the car toward the shoulder.

ADIRAN  
Just Yes, sir, No, sir him. Go with  
the flow. The important thing is not  
to get arrested. Act natural, it's  
probably a routine stop.

The siren swells—louder, closer. Inside the car, the air feels thinner.

SETH  
Bullshit! Shoot the first chance you  
get!

Adiran glances at Seth—steady, pitying.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
He'd never fired a gun in his life.

The cruiser's SPOTLIGHT explodes, blinding white.

ADIRAN / SETH  
Shit!

ADIRAN  
Damn! You know what you're doing,  
right?

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
I was trying to convince myself.

SETH  
Don't you fucking miss!

They sit frozen in the glare. The only sound is the siren's decay and the idling engine.

ADIRAN  
Seth, he's just checking the plates.  
Chill out!

Flicks the pistol's safety off, eyes fixed on the rearview.

SETH  
He's standing by his fucking car, man.  
It's bullshit, he's probably calling  
for backup. They know this car was  
stolen! We have to go now! We gotta do  
it now, or we're fucked, man!

ADIRAN  
I hate cops you know that. But a  
shootout's a whole different game,  
Seth! We can't fucking win!

SETH  
Says the guy John tried turning into  
Rambo.

Adiran turns fully toward him for half a beat—not just hearing the words, but reading the tension carved into Seth's jaw, the wild light in his eyes.

ADIRAN  
Shooting paper and shooting cops  
aren't the same fucking thing, Seth!

He shifts in his seat, scanning the scene—cruiser's position, driver's door cracked, a shadow shifting behind it.

SETH

I'm not gonna let you down, Adiran.  
Mary's dead because of me. Because I  
was afraid. It won't happen again.

The words hang heavy. Adiran's stare narrows—he already knows Seth isn't hearing him.

SETH

Go motherfucker! Shoot the first  
chance you get!

He kicks his door wide and LAUNCHES himself out, hitting the pavement hard, rolling to one knee.

SETH

Gung-ho! Do or die, motherfucker!

Adiran flings his door open, dropping low, crouching around their car toward Seth's side.

The DRIVER COP (late 40s, antagonist, show-off for new partner), shields himself behind his open door, hesitating-cocky, sizing Seth up.

Adiran rounds the back corner of their car just as the driver cop fires a single, precise shot.

Seth drops, knife clattering on asphalt.

Adiran's gun comes up—first shot misses, sparking off the cruiser's frame.

The driver cop fires again—the round grazes Adiran's left side. A searing, white-hot burn.

Adiran stumbles—clutching his side—but keeps moving, leaning out to get a better angle.

One clean SHOT—the driver cop jerks back and collapses behind his door.

Movement in the passenger seat—a silhouette shifting behind glass. The FEMALE OFFICER (30s, blonde with a slick bun, victim of her partner's chauvinism) still in shock by the escalation of violence, prepares to exit the vehicle.

Adiran pivots, raises the gun, and empties the magazine through the windshield and passenger window. GLASS SPRAYS outward—red and blue strobes flash across shards and the silhouette until it slumps and stays still.

Scottie's gun slips from Adiran's grip, clattering to the

pavement.

He drops to one knee, hand pressing his side—comes away slick with blood.

ADIRAN

Seth?

Stumbles toward Seth. Voice rising, exasperated.

ADIRAN

Seth!

Reaches Seth, who lies sprawled on the asphalt, chest wound dark and spreading.

ADIRAN

You're still alive! Hang in there, man.

SETH

(slurred)

Don't leave me!

ADIRAN

I'm taking you with me, Seth.

ADIRAN

I'll take you to a hospital. Don't you die on me, Seth! Don't you fucking die!

Seth coughs violently, choking on blood. Adiran tries to haul him up but collapses, pulling him into his lap instead.

Adiran hugs him, eyes shut.

For a split second the shadows curl in from Adiran's coat, folding over Seth and Adiran like a shroud.

ADIRAN

(whispers)

Thank you.

The shadows peel away. Red and blue strobes wash over Seth's face—still, pale.

Adiran cries, clutching him.

ADIRAN

Goddamn it, Seth! Why? Why, Seth, why?

Adiran forces himself up, gaze fixing on the cruiser.

Staggers toward it, one hand clamped to his side.

He reaches the driver cop, sprawled behind his open door, blood pooling beneath his head. A grim beat.

ADIRAN  
You motherfucker...

Adiran stoops, takes the cop's sidearm, climbs into the cruiser's driver's seat, wincing.

INT./EXT. POLICE CRUISER - NIGHT

Across the console: the female officer slumps forward, not moving.

Adiran kneels on the driver's seat, eyes catching the shattered MDT-spiderweb cracks across a dead screen, the police radio squawking for their location.

ADIRAN  
What in the fuck is this?

Gaze returns to the woman. In the red-blue strobe, her long hair spills across her cheek.

He leans across, barely breathing, checks her pulse.

Nothing. She's gone.

Something in his chest tightens.

Shadows curl at the edges of his vision, bending the lines of her mouth, her cheek, her jaw—into memory.

He knows that face—Veronica. Her lips hold an expression he had engraved into his soul—the face she made as she fell.

He reaches over, brushes the strands of hair back from her face.

Her fear-stricken face stares up at him.

The shadows close in, swallowing the cruiser, swallowing his surroundings until there's nothing but Veronica's face. Head snaps up eyes locked to his. Nails clamp around his forearm, digging into the old scar, pulling him closer.

Her breath burns against his ear

FEMALE OFFICER  
(whisper)  
Breathe.

Adiran slumps, head dipping as if pulled under—then jerks back with a sharp, involuntary gasp. The same gasp from the dream as he sucks in the water.

The shadows flood him—not just sight, but sound. A rushing, water-like roar fills his ears, waves in a blacked out ocean crashing down, pulling him under.

The sound and weight of it is the same as sinking beneath bathwater—the kind he will know again at the end.

It scares him to the roots of his soul.

Adiran snaps out of it. Smashes her with the butt of the gun.

The shadows recoil, peeling away to reveal her body exactly where it fell—hair up in a bun, blonde and not dark, skin pale, nothing like Veronica.

He stumbles backward out of the cruiser, breath ragged, hits the pavement hard.

Grabs his forearm. Her nails still burn there.

Adiran steadies himself, looks one last time at the cop on the floor next to him, then at Seth. Crawls up. Hurriedly limps to Sean's car.

Sirens echo in the distance. Blue and red flashes light up the horizon on the opposite side of the highway.

INT./EXT. SEAN'S CAR - HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The car jerks forward.

Speeds down the shoulder, merges into the slow lane, takes the first EXIT RAMP—vanishing into light traffic.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - NIGHT (LATER)

Adiran sits slumped in a ditch, staring across the dark fields beyond the tracks.

Scottie is sprawled on the tracks, his legs positioned over the steel rails.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
I was trying out a little experiment.  
What if the train just took his legs  
instead? A better punishment than  
death, if he survived.

Adiran's eyes slip shut; memory bleeds in.

EXT. RAILROAD DITCH / TRAIN TRACKS - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
'cause damn, this motherfucker really  
wanted to live!

Adiran yanks Scottie from the trunk. Scottie thrashes weakly.

Scott grunts, panicked.

SCOTT  
I'm not a faggot!

Adiran crushes Scottie's right ankle under his boot. Scottie screams.

Choking, voice breaking.

SCOTT  
Please, I didn't mean to!

Adiran pulls Scottie's broken arm behind his back.

Scott coughs, gasping.

SCOTT  
I swear, Sean's friends were teasing  
us, calling us homos. I just got mad.  
It was an accident!

Adiran yanks his head back by the hair, punches him in the throat. Scottie collapses.

SCOTT  
(hoarse)  
Please ... please ... please don't  
kill me! I am so sorry!

Adiran helps him up.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
So fucking what? Revenge was supposed  
to fill the hole. It just made it  
deeper.  
(beat)  
All I had left was pity—the same self-  
pity I loathed in John, and swore  
would never take me down.

Adiran drags Scottie across the ditch, roughly lays him with his legs over the rails.

Kneels next to Scott, hovering over him, a knee on Scott's

chest.

ADIRAN  
Did you know I went to that High  
School back there, you fuck?

Scott stirs weakly, barely lifting his head.

ADIRAN  
I bet you didn't.

SCOTT  
(mumbling, broken)  
Please... I'm sorry...

Adiran's eyes harden. Pulls Scott up to eye level.

Adiran's face remains fixed, unmoving as he unleashes a barrage of fists and pistol whips with the cop's gun.

Wet thuds and muffled pleas offscreen. Each faint plea is smothered by another hit.

At last: silence.

Breathing heavy.

ADIRAN  
My friends went there with me. We grew up together in these streets. Did you ever think of that?

Adiran staggers up the ditch bank, leaving Scottie behind.

He stumbles to a low berm beside the tracks, drops to a crouch, breathing hard.

Wipes blood from his knuckles; breath fogs in the night air.

ADIRAN  
My only friends are now dead because of you. You shitbag. And I'm just about to piss on myself waiting for the fucking train.

Settles into a perch, eyes fixed downrange along the rails.

In the far distance, a faint headlight blooms; the tracks begin to hum.

Adiran squints as he registers train crossing lights come alive in the distance.

## EXT. RAILROAD DITCH / TRAIN TRACKS - NIGHT

Adiran slumps at the top of the ditch, blood soaking his shirt. Eyes glaze over as the dark horizon rumbles with the approaching roar of the train.

Stares into the night sky, unfocused.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
I blamed him, but the truth is that everyone is dead because of me.

Face twists, between grief and a strange smile.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
I finally understood what I had allowed myself to become: A predator of souls. Of lives. Of futures.

Adiran's hands tremble. He looks down—palms stained with blood and dirt.

Wipes them violently on jeans, scrubbing hard. The stain won't lift.

The shadows writhe up from the dirt, curling over his arms and back like ropes holding him in place.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
I dug their graves, and the shadows helped me fill them.

Eyes harden as he stares down the tracks.

The train's headlight interrupts—its blinding glow washes over him, burning the shadows back into the earth for a fleeting instant.

## EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - CONTINUOUS

The train's light is blinding—thunder in the rails.

Adiran grips his side, grimacing. No turning back.

The train bears down impossibly fast.

Adiran forces himself upright, swaying. Blood stains spread across his shirt as he straightens.

On the tracks, Scottie lies still, barely breathing.

Shadows creep across Adiran's vision, bleeding in from the edges. They don't spread everywhere—just over the rails, over

Scottie. Thickening. Darkening. Until the figure on the tracks is just a shape.

Then nothing.

Only black where Scottie was.

The roar swells.

The TRAIN STRIKES—DEAFENING. CHAINS WHIP. METAL HOWLS.

Shadows explode outward from the impact, flooding the night, swallowing everything in black.

Adiran stands alone. The single headlight passes, leaving only thundering mass-boxcars, tankers, flatbeds—roaring through in silhouette. Beyond him, nothing.

The deafening clatter of steel blurs, smoothing out into a low, rhythmic, white noise vacuum.

ADIRAN (V.O.)

I saw every detail. The train devoured him like a fleshy worm—shredding, spreading what was left across the rusty tracks. Undisrupted.

The darkness lingers, twisting until it ripples like water—then settles into a mirror shard.

INT. ADIRAN'S BATHROOM — NIGHT

A blood-stained hand breaks the surface of the tub. The water swirls red.

ADIRAN (V.O.)

That train was what I pretended to be.  
The unstoppable force.

Adiran sinks deeper. Eyes close.

A police radio crackles faintly—the same words, the same static:

POLICE RADIO (O.S.)

Suspect may be armed... Request backup  
at location...

No time has passed at all.

Shadows gather in the steam, forming the outline of Veronica. She flickers, fragile, then fades with the mist.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
Is she waiting for me to die? Is she  
here with me now?

EXT. ALIEF STREETS - PAYPHONE - NIGHT

Adiran steps into a flickering booth on a deserted corner.

DISTANT SIRENS wail. Echoing in the distance. Closing in.

Hum of the train still echoes in his head as he digs for change.

Slams coin into the slot.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
I was hoping to hear something to live  
for.

The phone rings. Adiran grips the receiver tight, forehead pressed against the glass.

The line clicks alive. COLBY (Jessica's ex, sycophant police cadet) answers.

COLBY (O.S. FROM RECEIVER)  
Hello?

Adiran freezes.

ADIRAN  
I'm calling for Jessica.

A muffled argument filters through.

JESSICA (O.S. FROM RECEIVER)  
Hang up the fucking phone! Get out!

COLBY (O.S. FROM RECEIVER)  
Listen, asshole, your dumbass is dead.  
Either the cops get you, or I will!

Adiran's grip tightens.

COLBY (O.S. FROM RECEIVER)  
You left your car at a crime scene.  
Your idiot ass is going to fry. You're  
lucky you used a fake address for the  
registration, but I'll help them find  
you as soon as Jessica tells me where  
you live.

JESSICA (O.S. FROM RECEIVER)  
(muffled)  
Stop! All of you need to get the fuck  
out of my house!

The line rattles—the receiver clatters. Dead.

Silence.

Adiran slams the receiver, shattering the cradle. The booth shudders, neon buzzing overhead.

He stands there a moment, trembling in anger, turns back toward the car.

EXT. STERLING NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - NIGHT

Adiran pulls up a block away from the Sterling house. The quiet suburban street is dim, still.

He kills the engine. Breath ragged, wound hidden under his coat.

A HELICOPTER chops the air—miles away, but searching.

A sodium vapor streetlight hums. The windshield holds his hollow reflection before he pushes door open.

EXT. STERLING HOUSE - NIGHT

Adiran unlatches the back gate. Two large dogs rush forward, bodies tense at first.

One shoves its snout hard against his coat, nosing at the hidden wound. Adiran stiffens, drops to one knee.

He offers both palms. Dogs lick them eagerly, tails thudding against the wood. Adiran scratches behind one ear, hugs the other. They lick at his neck and cheeks.

Adiran stands, raises a hand. The dogs hesitate. He signals again—firmer. They retreat into the shadows. Not guardians. Loyal deserters.

He presses a hand to his wound, starts across the grass, the faint glow of Angela's window ahead.

A faint laugh—Jessica's—ripples across the yard.

Ghostly figures shimmer into view: Jessica and Adiran stumbling through the back gate, her arm draped over him as he helps her inside. The dogs bound around their legs, tails wagging, playful shadows against the fence.

Jessica pulls free, laughing, yanks a window screen loose—Angela's window. Pushes it aside, the ghost-image of her escape.

Up above, Angela's younger ghost-self peers out from behind the curtain. Her eyes are wide, conflicted—an unwilling witness.

Adiran glances up, a crooked grin flashing. Raises a finger to his lips in a quick hush signal as Jessica tugs him away.

*Shhh.*

Angela's ghost-self trembles, then gives him a shy smile—fragile, hesitant, but welcoming.

The figures scatter back inside the glow of the house, dissolving into the night.

The yard falls silent.

Only the present remains: Adiran slowly limping across the grass, his shadow stretching long toward the real Angela's window.

EXT. ANGELA'S WINDOW — NIGHT

Adiran lingers at the window, staring in at Angela asleep.

Presses his hand gently to the glass, watching her breathe.

Adiran steadies himself, breath fogging the glass.

Taps lightly.

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM — NIGHT

Angela stirs, eyelids heavy, blinks—unsure of what she is seeing for a split second.

She sees Adiran. Smiles. Gets up to the window.

Pushes the curtain aside, slides the window open.

ADIRAN  
Hey, Angie.

ANGELA  
Adiran! Hi, what are you doing here?

ADIRAN  
I'm here to see you because I have to tell you something very important.

She pauses, uncertain. Adiran gestures gently toward the room.

Angela smiles, soft and sweet.

ANGELA  
Do you want to come inside?

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
I'd expected her to see through me, to tell me to leave. But the darkness doesn't ask permission—it just needs an opening.

Adiran eases the screen free, leans it against the wall. Struggles as he climbs in, stiff with pain.

The lamplight spills across his frame. Turns slightly to angle his wounded side away from her.

The shadows slide unnaturally, pooling along his coat, swallowing the wound in darkness.

Angela sees only his careful, quiet movements. She mistakes them for gentleness and smiles, relieved.

ANGELA  
You're lucky my dad had to leave on an emergency call. If he found you here, he'd probably kill you.

Adiran shifts in the lamplight, testing how much he can move without showing pain. Shadows cling tighter to his side, covering what she cannot see.

ADIRAN  
I'm in big trouble, Angie!

Adiran takes a deep exaggerated breath.

ADIRAN  
I've been dreaming of my death lately.

Looks deeper into her eyes.

ANGELA  
What do you mean?

ADIRAN  
God wants me dead, Angie. God's out to kill me.

His shadow surges up the wall, obscuring the crucifix above

her bed in a single, crawling sweep of black.

She hesitates. Searches his face.

Angela's eyes flick to the Beauty and the Beast poster on her wall. Back to him.

ANGELA

Adiran, God doesn't wish for people to die.

She steps closer. Places her small hand on his chest, just over his heart.

Shadows curl across the wall, covering the poster as though swallowing her gesture.

ADIRAN

I'm not gonna let that happen. I can't let God have the satisfaction of killing me. He's not gonna judge me, and I'm not gonna give Him the pleasure. I'm gonna make sure I go to Hell when I die, and there's only one way I know how to do that!

A tear breaks free on Angela's cheek.

Adiran brushes it away with his thumb.

ADIRAN (V.O.)

I wanted to tell her everything. I just needed her to doubt me once, so I'd be forced to give this up.

The tear glistens there for a moment before he pulls her closer, fragile frame trembling against him.

ADIRAN (V.O.)

But the darkness in me fed on her need.

He leans in, kisses her softly.

The shadows that had stretched across the room pull back into Adiran. They swiftly climb up his legs and body and sink into her.

Angela's diary sits open on the desk. The lamplight flickers as Adiran's shadow crawls across the page, dark lines falling over her written words.

ANGELA (V.O.)  
We kissed with such passion that I  
fell in love. I wanted him close to me  
for the rest of my life.

He brings his lips to her ear, breathing heavy from exhaustion.

ADIRAN  
I love you.

Adiran steps back, hollow, but Angela's eyes cling to him.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
That was all I was there for.

EXT. STERLING HOUSE - NIGHT

Adiran climbs out, body wracked with pain. Lands heavily, knees buckling, a muffled groan escaping.

ANGELA (V.O.)  
Anguish, disappointment, unanswered anticipation... Seeing him climb out of my window and into the night broke my heart.

He pulls the screen back into place.

A single tear-pain betraying his facade-slides down his cheek.

He looks up at Angela, sees her tear-filled face behind the glass.

ANGELA (V.O.)  
Through tearful eyes, I saw him turn and face me once more. Even in the dark, I saw his eyes sparkling at me.

Angela sees the tear fall, sparkling in the light before it vanishes into shadow. He doesn't react.

ANGELA (V.O.)  
I saw a tear-a glimmer of sadness-fall from his face and into the shadows that surrounded him.

Adiran turns, staggering toward the gate.

He shuts the gate quietly behind him.

CLICK.

Collapses to his knees, wracked with pain.

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Angela crumbles beneath the window, pulling the diary from the desk with her.

Diary lands open beside her. She leans over it. Tears fall, smudging the ink on the page.

She clutches the diary to her chest like an amulet, her tears soaking into the pages.

EXT. STERLING HOUSE - NIGHT

Adiran forces one foot forward, then another. Just a little further.

He clutches his side. Rag around his abdomen slips loose, ripping away dried blood. Fresh crimson spreads beneath his coat.

INT./EXT. SEAN'S CAR - NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - NIGHT

Adiran finally reaches Sean's car. Collapses into the driver's seat.

He pulls the cop's gun from the glove compartment, sets it on his lap.

His hands tremble against the steering wheel. He grips the wheel hard, but the trembling doesn't stop.

Adiran's face is pale, broken.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
I thought I planted a seed of  
remembrance in her. Something I hoped  
would keep me alive in her dreams  
after I died.

Dead-eyed, he starts the car and pulls away.

The car creeps through back roads.

INT. ADIRAN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Adiran staggers inside. Collapses onto the couch, the cop's gun clutched to his chest. Sweat beads across his face.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
Seth was not afraid when he died for  
me. Mary was not afraid when she was  
(MORE)

ADIRAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
murdered. Ver-

Adiran struggles to sit upright on the sofa, leans over to reach underneath it.

Pulls the tray of weed from under the sofa. Picks at it, hands too shaky to roll a joint.

Tosses the tray across the room in frustration.

Slumps back, closes his eyes, breathing in the darkness.

A beat.

CUT TO:

INT. ADIRAN'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Adiran stands in front of the bathroom mirror. Leans forward to look closer at his face.

His reflection is bordered in shadows. It sneers back at him.

SMASH-fist shatters the glass. Knuckles split, blood mingles with shards across the tile.

He thrashes wildly, slamming walls, ripping the towel rack down, collapsing.

Like a child in defeat, he lashes out-cabinet doors splinter, pipes burst. Claws at the sink, straining to rip it free.

Slips, crashes to the floor, groaning.

Jerks the cop's gun up, FIRES. Sink's porcelain EXPLODES.

Fragments cut his face. Ears ringing, disoriented.

Screaming, seizes the broken remains, yanks until the waterline tears loose.

The room floods.

INT. ADIRAN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Drenched, trembling, Adiran drags the jagged sink fragment. Gun dangles from his other hand.

As Adiran walks by, Seth's helmet falls from atop the TV.

Adiran drops the sink, grabs for the helmet-too slow.

The voice comes from the TV:

SETH (ON TV)  
Don't fuck with my helmet, man! You  
drop it, you buy it!

Adiran's eyes snap to the screen—dark, silent. His jaw tightens. A quick smirk of acknowledgement.

Anger, then hurt flash across his face.

Snatches the helmet, shaking. Tears streaming.

ADIRAN  
Motherfucker!

Flings the helmet at the TV.

ON TV: The CW Chronicles flickers alive. A cartoon monologue about order and chaos echoes through the wreckage.

ADIRAN (V.O.)  
We were supposed to be having fun  
right now. Just TV, weed, and Seth  
talking shit.

Fury erupts. He smashes the screen with the sink fragment—cobweb cracks splinter across the glass.

He rips the cords free. Drags the heavy TV to the open door.

EXT. ADIRAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Adiran balances the TV over the balcony stairs railing.

Gravity takes it.

His mind flashes—Veronica slips from his grasp on the rooftop. Arms wide. Plummeting into the dark.

The TV tumbles over the edge—hitting the pavement below.

NO CRASH. NO SHATTERING GLASS.

A heavy, distorted THUD.

Gunfire flashes as Adiran empties the clip into the remains.

Drops the gun—stumbles backwards into his apartment.

INT. ADIRAN'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Steam rises as hot water pours. Adiran strips his soaked

clothes, trembling with exhaustion.

Sinks into the tub, mirror shard clutched in his hand, body broken and shaking.

Steam and drip. No dialogue, just breath and water as he brings the shard up to the scar on his forearm.

Jagged glass against skin.

INT. ADIRAN'S BATHROOM - NIGHT (LATER)

Flooded floor. Steam saturates the air. Adiran slumps in the tub, barely upright.

COPS (20s-40s, Sheriff Sterling's sycophants) fill the doorway.

COP (O.S.)  
Don't fucking move.

Boots splash in the flood, radios hiss.

Adiran tries to speak-parched, weak.

ADIRAN  
Don't--  
(swallows)  
—don't yell. I'm right here.

Hand barely gestures to show the distance between him and the officers at the bathroom entrance; effort drains him.

Blood drips freely from his fingertips.

Edges sharpen as the officers close in through the drizzle. Sheriff Sterling looms among them.

The Undercover Cop shoves past others, bumping Sheriff Sterling's chest.

Adiran squints-recognition cuts through the haze. It's the same undercover from earlier—the one who rolled up with Viet on Alief.

UNDERCOVER COP  
Sterling, your hillbilly assholes blew  
my cover! We are taking over this!

Sheriff's stare hardens.

SHERIFF STERLING  
No. You City assholes had your chance  
(MORE)

SHERIFF STERLING (CONT'D)  
and blew it. Fix the Filipino gang war  
you started, and get the hell out of  
my crime scene.

ADIRAN  
(under his breath)  
Kiloton bombs... boom!

Adiran barely smirks—a dying joke to himself, nothing more.

Sheriff Sterling hears—ignores it. Centers himself squarely between Undercover Cop and Adiran.

SHERIFF STERLING  
My boys and I will take out this  
trash.

The Undercover Cop fights to get closer.

UNDERCOVER COP  
Who is your provider? Please tell me  
who your distributor is!

Sterling's men muscle him back.

SHERIFF STERLING  
He's the distributor, you idiot! You  
City numbnuts came into my County and  
didn't have the decency to ask me what  
I knew?

Sheriff Sterling pokes the Undercover Cop on the chest.

SHERIFF STERLING  
You best remember what this shit stain  
did after you let him go earlier  
tonight! Remember to write down the  
names of those who died thanks to your  
bullshit "undercover investigation".

Adiran looks up. The silhouettes are hazy, but he finds the Undercover Cop's eyes.

Undercover Cop moves his mouth—muffled noise.

ADIRAN  
Hey...

Adiran coughs. Clears his throat.

ADIRAN  
(whisper)  
My alibi... I was with her tonight.

The room freezes.

UNDERCOVER COP  
Where? With who?

ADIRAN  
(barely audible)  
Angie Sterling.

Adiran raises two fingers to his nose and sniffs deep;  
Sterling registers it.

STERLING  
Don't fucking talk, scum. You are  
fucking dead!

Sterling fills Adiran's field of view. Veins in his neck  
popping, face red with rage.

Closes his gloved fist on Adiran's hair, then DRIVES his head  
UNDERWATER.

UNDERCOVER COP (O.S.)  
(muffled)  
No. Stop!

Undercover Cop tries to pull Sterling by the shoulder, but  
he's immovable. The deputies shove him out of the bathroom.

The shadows flood the bathroom.

INT. ADIRAN'S BATHROOM - BATHTUB - UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS  
SUBMERGED. SOUND GOES COTTONY. Everything slows-muted, heavy,  
unreal.

Adiran fights to keep his eyes open. Reaches for Sterling's  
arm above him—too weak to grab it.

Shadows creep across the tiles, sliding over Adiran's body,  
coiling up the bathtub walls. They gather in the water,  
knotting into a single writhing mass.

It pulses. Takes shape. A nose. A mouth. Dead eyes.

Adiran stops fighting. Floats—suspended by the shadows.

The white of the tiles fades.

Not water anymore. Shadow.

Adiran suspended in nothing. Bubbles escape his mouth, rising into black.

No up. No down. But this time—no panic. No flailing.

He floats. Waiting.

From the writhing mass, Veronica's pale face emerges— inches from his. Wavy dark hair like smoke. Electric blue eyes locking him in.

Her face fills his vision. She creates a bubble of light around him.

Her presence steadies him. Smile still wrong, but her calmness familiar now. He goes still, staring through the blur.

Eyes glimmer, welcoming her.

Veronica leans in for a kiss—stops just before they touch.

She lifts her hand.

He reaches. She takes it.

Her other hand rises to his forearm. Fingertip finds the wound—the one he made.

She traces it. Slow. Deliberate.

The cut opens wider. Blood rises, diffusing like smoke into the dark.

Her mouth drifts to his ear.

Her voice doesn't come from her lips—it reverberates from the submerged world. An explosive wave that lifts him.

VERONICA (V.O.)  
Breathe.

Adiran takes a FORCED gasp; chest convulses; water churns.

Water rakes his lungs, burning his chest—he gags and coughs at once.

Adiran blinks hard to fight off the darkness closing in. The bubble of light fades.

Veronica vanishes.

ADIRAN (V.O.)

Tonight, I realized... I thought she was my grief. That she was me, punishing myself. I was wrong. I just gave the shadows her face so it could end it for me.

The shadow's embrace turns; caress becomes talons.

His voice fades. Hers emerges—again, not from her mouth, but from everywhere. The water. The tiles. Inside his skull.

ADIRAN / VERONICA (V.O.)

(overlapping)

Tonight...

VERONICA (V.O.)

...I ripped from you those you loved, just like you once took me. And everything you love will be lost after I take her—your new angel.

Above the water—Sheriff Sterling's hand clamps down harder.

Shadows crawl up his hand and arm, pulling themselves out of Adiran.

The Voice vibrates down his spinal column—the same resonant frequency that broke the mirror.

Nervous system shutdown.

It snaps. Adiran twists in excruciating pain.

VERONICA (V.O.)

Everything...

...except for the pain of your regrets—your seed of remembrance—which, unlike you, will never be forgotten.

The shadows recede.

Only Adiran remains—submerged, eyes open, alone in the red-tinged bathwater.

No convulsion. No fight. His body softens. Accepts.

He sinks back into the black. Willingly. Still.

This time, the nightmare doesn't shatter.

SILENCE.

The sound of PAGES TURNING bleeds through the silence.

Adiran drifts downward. A silhouette against the void.

ANGELA (V.O.)  
Life itself has lost its meaning.  
Before that day, before Adiran told me  
he loved me, I had a purpose.

He fades. A shape now. Edges dissolving.

ANGELA (V.O.)  
Then they took him, emptying my soul  
and my heart.

Gone.

ANGELA (V.O.)  
Now I am the emptiness he left behind.

FADE OUT.