

The Courier
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AERIAL - LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

Los Angeles at night isn't beautiful. It's operational.

Freeways braid together like circuitry. Headlights flow in obedient lanes. The air has a brown shimmer—smog catching sodium streetlight, turning the whole basin into a dim aquarium.

Somewhere far below, a siren tries to climb through the noise—

and gets swallowed.

A single car peels off the grid.

EXT. EAST L.A. INDUSTRIAL STREETS - NIGHT

The car cuts through a pocket of the city that never makes movie posters: shuttered auto shops, chain-link fences, loading docks with pallet stacks like silent barricades.

Industrial fans WHINE from rooftops. A freight train groans somewhere behind warehouses.

Heat rises from concrete like the ground is still angry.

INT. MAYA'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

MAYA REYES, early 30s. Not "tough" in a showy way—tough like someone who learned that panic is expensive.

She's small, lean, hair pulled back tight. No jewelry. No makeup beyond "I need to pass as invisible."

Her eyes work constantly: mirrors, side streets, reflections in storefront glass.

On the passenger seat: a scuffed duffel bag. Unbranded. Heavy enough to matter. Ordinary enough to disappear.

Maya's phone rests face-down in the cup holder. No ringtone. No notifications. Only vibration.

She drives like she's being timed.

EXT. INTERSECTION - NIGHT

A red light.

A beat-up HONDA pulls beside her—windows down, music too loud, three teenagers laughing like the world hasn't introduced itself yet.

Maya doesn't look at them. She looks past them—at the dark SUV two cars back, idling a little too patiently.

The light turns green.

Maya moves first.

EXT. CHECK-CASHING STOREFRONT - NIGHT

Harsh fluorescent lighting. Bars on the windows. A SECURITY CAMERA mounted above the door, angled to capture faces.

Maya parks two spaces away from the entrance. Not close. Not far.

She exits with the duffel. Walks at a normal pace. Not hurried.

A man loiters near a vending machine across the street—pretending he's not watching.

Maya clocks him without acknowledging he exists.

INT. CHECK-CASHING STORE - NIGHT

The air smells like warm plastic and old paper.

A CLERK sits behind thick glass, scrolling his phone with the bored confidence of someone protected by bulletproof barriers and low expectations.

Maya sets the duffel on the counter.

The clerk barely looks at her. He opens a drawer, slides out a receipt—already printed—and pushes it through the slot.

Maya doesn't read it.

The clerk reaches below the counter and produces an identical duffel.

They exchange bags. Their hands never touch.

A transaction so routine it's practically religion.

Maya leaves.

EXT. CAR WASH - NIGHT

Industrial chaos.

Water pounds steel panels. Steam blooms under floodlights. Vacuums roar like engines. The air tastes metallic.

Maya walks through the noise as if noise is a kind of camouflage.

A MAN IN A POLO steps out from shadow under an awning—mid-40s, clean haircut, eyes empty of curiosity.

No greeting. No name.

Maya hands him the bag.

He hands her another.

The exchange happens like changing a tire—fast, practiced, emotionally absent.

Maya keeps walking.

INT. MAYA'S CAR - NIGHT

Maya drives. The city presses closer as it gets later.

Her phone VIBRATES.

She answers without saying hello.

HERRERA (V.O.)
You clear?

Maya watches the rearview mirror. A police cruiser passes in the opposite lane, slow and indifferent.

MAYA
Yeah.

HERRERA (V.O.)
Route stays clean tonight.

Maya's eyes flick to the skyline—low clouds catching the glow, the sky reflecting the city like a lid.

MAYA
Always does.

She ends the call first.

Her grip loosens—just slightly—like she just paid a toll.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

A modest complex wedged between warehouses and a taquería that never closes.

Balconies cluttered with lives midstream: plastic chairs, laundry lines, kids' bikes, potted plants fighting to survive city air.

A helicopter THUMPS overhead—constant, like an anxious heartbeat.

Maya parks in a dim corner and waits a second before getting out.

Listening.

Then she moves.

INT. MAYA & LUIS' APARTMENT - NIGHT

Small. Clean. Functional. Minimal decoration—anything sentimental would feel like a liability.

LUIS REYES, 16. Bright-eyed in the way smart kids are—wired, restless, always half-elsewhere.

He sits at the table with a laptop open. Code scrolls. A cheap soldering kit. Three burner phones partially disassembled like he's doing surgery on machines.

He doesn't look up when Maya enters with groceries.

LUIS
You're late.

MAYA
You're early.

She sets the groceries down. Starts putting things away with quiet efficiency—muscle memory from a life where routine is safety.

Luis finally glances at the duffel.

LUIS
That one looks heavier.

Maya pauses—barely a pause, but it's real.

MAYA
It's not.

Luis turns his chair toward her, more awake now.

LUIS
I got contacted again.

Maya shuts the fridge.

MAYA

No.

LUIS

You didn't hear what it was.

Maya looks at him—direct, measured.

MAYA

I don't need to.

Luis stands. He's not a child anymore, and that's exactly what scares her.

LUIS

You act like nothing changes if we don't touch it.

Maya's voice stays low. Controlled.

MAYA

Things change faster when you do.

Luis exhales, frustrated.

LUIS

I'm not a kid.

Maya's face softens—just enough to show she heard him.

MAYA

That's what scares me.

Luis clocks that. The crack in her armor.

LUIS

You ever think... maybe we're the ones being used?

Maya returns to the groceries like it's a shield.

MAYA

Eat something.

LUIS

That's not an answer.

MAYA
It's survival.

Luis watches her for a long beat.

Then, reluctantly, he sits.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

The fan rattles. The mirror is spotted with age.

Maya runs hot water. Steam fogs the glass.

She stares at her reflection until her face becomes a blur.

Then she wipes a clean stripe in the mirror.

Her eyes reappear. Sharp. Controlled.

She pulls up her sleeve.

A faint scar on her forearm—old. Jagged.

She touches it like checking a compass.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Maya opens a shoebox in the closet.

Inside: cash, a spare passport, a tiny handgun... and something that doesn't match the rest:

A laminated COUNTY ID CARD.

Her photo, younger. Hair different. Eyes the same.

The name is still Maya Reyes.

The job title is partially worn—but readable enough:

...DISPATCH / OPERATIONS
Maya stares at it for a beat too
long.

Then she slides it back into the box like she's hiding a wound.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER - NIGHT

Luis sits with a bowl of instant noodles he's barely eating. Maya watches him like she's memorizing him.

LUIS
Do you ever... sleep?

Maya doesn't answer right away.

MAYA
Sleep is for people who believe
tomorrow is guaranteed.

Luis tries to joke, but it dies in his mouth.

LUIS
You're messed up.

Maya almost smiles.

MAYA
Yeah.

That "yeah" carries history she won't explain.

Luis hesitates.

LUIS
If I told you something... would you
freak out?

Maya's gaze sharpens.

MAYA
Don't.

LUIS
I didn't do anything. I just—

MAYA

Luis.

He stops. Her tone is a warning bell.

Maya softens it slightly.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Whatever it is... don't make yourself
visible.

Luis looks away, ashamed—like he already did.

EXT. MAYA'S CAR - NIGHT

Maya drives again. The city feels tighter now.

The air is warmer than it should be. Smog holds heat like a
blanket over a fever.

Her phone VIBRATES.

UNKNOWN NUMBER.

She answers.

MAYA

Yeah.

HERRERA (V.O.)

Change of plans.

Maya's eyes flick to the rearview mirror.

MAYA

Where.

HERRERA (V.O.)

Diner off the 110.

Maya's jaw tightens.

MAYA

That's not—

HERRERA (V.O.)
Just do it.

A beat.

MAYA
Luis stays out of it.

Silence on the line—just long enough to feel wrong.

HERRERA (V.O.)
Yeah.

Click.

Maya stares forward as the freeway entrance approaches.

Like she's driving into a decision she already made years ago.

EXT. 24-HOUR DINER - NIGHT

Neon buzzes against darkness.

Inside: night-shift workers, a family with tired kids, a couple arguing softly like they've run out of energy to fight loudly.

Outside: the freeway roars.

Maya sits in her car for a full thirty seconds.

Counts exits.

Counts cars.

Then she takes the duffel and steps out.

INT. 24-HOUR DINER - NIGHT

Warm light. Grease. Coffee. The smell of ketchup that never leaves.

HERRERA, 50s, sits in a corner booth. Sweat on his forehead. Hands shaking around a cup he hasn't touched.

Maya slides into the seat across from him.

Herrera forces a smile.

It doesn't hold.

HERRERA
You look tired.

MAYA
Where's my brother.

Herrera looks down. Swallows.

HERRERA
Maya, I told you—

Maya leans in. Her voice stays quiet.

MAYA
Say the name.

Herrera's eyes flick around the diner like he's expecting someone to hear.

HERRERA
Don't do this here.

Maya doesn't move.

Herrera's throat tightens.

HERRERA (CONT'D)
..Viktor.

The name lands like a door locking.

Maya's face stays still.

But something behind her eyes goes dark and focused.

INT. 24-HOUR DINER - NIGHT

The word VIKTOR hangs between them like smoke.

Herrera's hands tremble now. He tries to hide it by wrapping them around his coffee cup. It rattles anyway.

Maya studies him—not with anger, but with assessment. The way she looks at spaces before crossing them. The way she looks at people before trusting them.

MAYA

How long.

HERRERA

What?

MAYA

How long has he had him.

Herrera swallows.

HERRERA

A few hours. Maybe more. They didn't tell me—

MAYA

They?

Herrera flinches. That was the wrong answer.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Who else knows.

HERRERA

No one who matters.

Maya's eyes sharpen.

MAYA

That's not comforting.

Herrera leans in, desperate.

HERRERA

This isn't personal. Viktor doesn't do personal. It's... logistics.

That word again. Maya almost reacts to it—but stops herself.

MAYA
Logistics kills people faster than
anger.

Herrera's phone VIBRATES on the table.

He freezes.

Maya doesn't look at him. She looks at the phone.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Answer it.

HERRERA
Maya—

MAYA
Now.

Herrera's fingers fumble. He puts the phone on speaker.

INT. 24-HOUR DINER - CONTINUOUS

A calm voice fills the booth. Measured. Controlled. Almost polite.

VIKTOR (V.O.)
You're late.

Herrera swallows.

HERRERA
Traffic—

VIKTOR (V.O.)
—doesn't affect timing.

Maya leans forward slightly.

MAYA
Where's my brother.

A pause. Not surprise. Evaluation.

VIKTOR (V.O.)

Alive.

Maya absorbs that. She doesn't react.

MAYA

Where.

VIKTOR (V.O.)

Not here.

Herrera's breathing accelerates.

MAYA

You took him.

VIKTOR (V.O.)

I secured leverage.

The word is clean. Bloodless.

MAYA

You hurt him—

VIKTOR (V.O.)

—then this conversation ends.

Silence stretches. The diner keeps living around them—plates clatter, a kid laughs, someone refills coffee.

Maya chooses her next words carefully.

MAYA

What do you want.

VIKTOR (V.O.)

You already know.

Herrera looks at Maya like he's apologizing without words.

VIKTOR (V.O.)

Bring the bag. Alone.

One hour.

Click.

The call ends.

INT. 24-HOUR DINER - CONTINUOUS

Herrera stares at the phone like it might explode.

HERRERA
Maya, listen to me—

Maya slides out of the booth.

HERRERA (CONT'D)
This is bigger than us.

MAYA
Everything is.

She takes the duffel.

Herrera reaches for her arm—then stops himself. He knows better.

EXT. DINER PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The noise hits her immediately—freeway roar, engines idling, distant sirens bouncing off concrete.

Maya steps into the lot.

A BLACK SUV idles near the edge, headlights off.

Another rolls in behind it.

Too smooth. Too confident.

Herrera stumbles out after her.

HERRERA
Maya—

A GUNSHOT cracks.

Herrera jerks.

Stumbles.

Another shot—controlled.

Herrera collapses onto the asphalt, blood blooming fast.

Maya freezes for a half-second—long enough to register the cost.

A bullet SPARKS off concrete inches from her foot.

That's the warning.

Maya moves.

INT. DINER - CONTINUOUS

She doubles back inside, cutting between booths.

A WAITRESS calls out.

WAITRESS

Ma'am?

Maya doesn't stop.

She pushes through the kitchen doors.

INT. DINER KITCHEN - NIGHT

Steam. Grease. Chaos.

Cooks shout. Metal clatters.

Maya barrels through like she belongs there.

A COOK yells.

COOK

Hey! You can't—

She's already gone.

EXT. DINER BACK ALLEY - NIGHT

Cold air slams into her.

She runs.

Footsteps echo behind her.

Another GUNSHOT—close this time.

Concrete chips explode near her shoulder.

Maya dives behind a dumpster, rolls, keeps moving.

Herrera's body lies in the open behind her.

His eyes meet hers—wide, terrified, apologetic.

Maya doesn't go back.

She can't.

EXT. ALLEY NETWORK - NIGHT

Los Angeles becomes a maze.

Chain-link fences. Dead ends. Service corridors that smell like oil and rot.

Maya vaults a fence—tears skin.

Blood runs warm down her arm.

She doesn't slow.

A HELICOPTER thumps overhead, spotlight slicing rooftops.

She ducks into shadow.

INT. ABANDONED LAUNDRY BUILDING - NIGHT

Rows of dead machines loom like fossils.

Maya slides behind rusted washers.

Flashlights sweep the darkness.

MEN enter—disciplined, coordinated, quiet.

These aren't street shooters.

She controls her breathing.

A man passes close enough she can smell his cologne.

Another flashlight lands on her shoulder.

MAN

There—

Gunfire ERUPTS.

Metal SCREAMS.

Maya bolts for a side exit.

EXT. SERVICE ROAD - NIGHT

She bursts into traffic.

Cars screech to a halt.

Horns BLARE.

Exhaust and heat swallow her.

She cuts between parked trucks and dives down a concrete embankment—

EXT. RIVER CHANNEL - NIGHT

She hits hard.

Water splashes her boots.

The roar of traffic above becomes a ceiling.

Maya scrambles under the overpass, presses her back to concrete.

Silence snaps in.

Only the city's mechanical hum remains.

She checks her side—bleeding steady.

She pulls duct tape from her bag and tapes it tight, hands shaking now.

Adrenaline burns off.

Something else takes its place.

INT. RIVER CHANNEL - NIGHT

Maya opens the duffel.

Inside:

A ledger.

Multiple drives.

An envelope she hasn't opened before.

She flips pages quickly—routes, names, dates.

Then she stops.

A name.

Her breath catches.

She plugs a USB into her phone.

ON PHONE - BODYCAM FOOTAGE (FRAGMENTED)

A COUNTY FACILITY hallway.

Fluorescent lights flicker.

Radio chatter bleeds through.

MAYA (V.O.)
Hold perimeter. Don't let them
scatter.

A UNIFORM hesitates.

UNIFORM (V.O.)
We don't have eyes on the kid-

MAYA (V.O.)
Go.

The door is kicked in.

Screaming.

Gunfire.

The camera spins-

A small shoe on the floor.

Still.

BACK TO MAYA -
RIVER CHANNEL

Maya rips the cable free.

Her breathing thins.

She wasn't just adjacent to this world.

She built part of it.

She closes her eyes.

Not in denial.

In acknowledgment.

When she opens them again, something fundamental has shifted.

This isn't about escape anymore.

INT. LAPD ROBBERY-HOMICIDE - NIGHT

DETECTIVE SARAH KHOURY, late 30s. Sharp eyes. Tired posture. Someone who has learned how to survive inside institutions without trusting them.

She studies freeway stills on a monitor.

A torched sedan.

A woman running.

A duffel bag.

A UNIFORM approaches.

UNIFORM
CHP says it's not theirs.

KHOURY
That means it's ours.

UNIFORM
Captain wants it routed-

KHOURY
Captain's asleep.

She grabs her jacket.

INT. LAPD HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Khoury walks fast, dialing.

KHOURY
I need raw freeway cams from the
110.

No log.

She listens, irritation rising.

KHOURY (CONT'D)
Because if it gets logged, it
disappears.

She hangs up.

Doesn't slow.

INT. EVIDENCE REVIEW ROOM - NIGHT

Khoury shuts the door.

Her private board fills the wall—unofficial, unauthorized.

Photos. Shell companies. Names connected with red string.

She pins up a new still.

Enhances.

Maya's face resolves.

Khoury exhales slowly.

KHOURY

...Maya Reyes.

She looks back at the board.

Then at the name again.

Recognition—not relief.

EXT. COUNTY HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Maya slips through a service entrance.

Blood dark on her sleeve.

Security lights flicker.

She doesn't look back.

INT. COUNTY HOSPITAL - SERVICE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

The corridor is supposed to be closed.

Old paint peels in strips. Fluorescent lights buzz with a tired, uneven rhythm. A TEMPORARY SIGN taped to a door reads: AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY—the kind of warning that relies on habit more than enforcement.

Maya moves through it like she belongs here.

Her hoodie is dark with blood now. She keeps her arm tight to her side, posture controlled, steps measured. Pain is present, but it's been priced in.

A gurney rolls past, pushed by an ORDERLY who doesn't look up. The hospital hums—machines breathing, distant voices paging names that don't matter to her.

Maya slips into a stairwell.

INT. SERVICE STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Concrete steps spiral down. The air is cooler here, damp with disinfectant and something older.

Maya pauses on a landing. Closes her eyes. Listens.

Footsteps echo above—two sets. Official. Unhurried.

She times her movement between them.

Down again.

INT. BASEMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

The basement is a forgotten vein of the building.

Pipes sweat overhead. Old signage points to departments that no longer exist. A locked door at the end bears a fading county seal.

Maya removes a thin piece of plastic from her pocket—cut to shape years ago.

She slides it into the lock.

A soft click.

The door opens.

INT. BASEMENT IT STORAGE / RECORDS ROOM - NIGHT

A graveyard of obsolete technology: metal racks, dusty servers, labeled boxes stacked in uneven towers.

This place smells like paper, ozone, and neglect.

Maya sets the duffel down and opens it. The ledger, the drives, the envelope—she lays them out carefully, like instruments.

She plugs a drive into an old terminal.

The screen flickers to life.

LOGIN PROMPT.

Maya hesitates—just a breath—then types.

The cursor blinks.

Access granted.

She exhales. Not relief. Confirmation.

Files populate the screen: ROUTE MAPS, PERIMETER ORDERS, INCIDENT LOGS.

A folder flashes at the top:

REYES_M / OPS
Maya freezes.

She didn't expect that.

Slowly, she opens it.

Inside: old schedules, authorization trees, routing algorithms—her work. Her fingerprints, years ago, baked into the structure.

She scrolls.

The system didn't just use her.

It grew from her.

Maya's jaw tightens. The pain in her side spikes, sharp and immediate, like her body is reminding her where she lives now.

She copies everything.

No exceptions.

INT. BASEMENT IT STORAGE - CONTINUOUS

A DOOR CREAKS somewhere down the hall.

Maya kills the monitor instantly. Darkness snaps back in.

She slides behind a rack, holding her breath.

A SECURITY GUARD enters, flashlight sweeping lazily.

He checks a clipboard, bored. Shines the light across shelves.

The beam stops on Maya's shoes.

A long beat.

The guard squints, trying to place what's wrong.

His radio CRACKLES.

RADIO (V.O.)
Unit Four, status?

The guard looks down at the shoes again.

SECURITY GUARD
Yeah—stand by.

Another beat.

Then he turns away, annoyed.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)
All clear.

He exits.

The door closes.

Maya waits five full seconds before moving.

INT. RIVER CHANNEL - NIGHT

Maya sits in the dark, the USB drive still warm in her hand. She closes her eyes, but the footage won't stop playing. She opens the duffel again. Pulls out a SECOND ENVELOPE—thinner, sealed with evidence tape. She hesitates. Then breaks the seal.

INT. RIVER CHANNEL - CONTINUOUS

Inside: INTAKE FORMS. County letterhead. Detainee processing. Maya flips through them. Names. Ages. Countries of origin. Her finger stops on one.

CLOSE ON FORM:

NAME: RIVERA, CARMEN (MINOR)

AGE: 14

CUSTODY STATUS: UNACCOMPANIED

TRANSFER AUTH: REYES, M.

DESTINATION: [REDACTED]

ARRIVAL CONFIRMATION: NONE

The word NONE is stamped in red. Maya flips to the next page. INCIDENT REPORT - handwritten, barely legible: Subject became unresponsive during secondary transport. Medical intervention delayed due to routing conflict. Subject expired 04:17.

Cause: Dehydration/heat exposure.

Notation: File for administrative review. Status: CLOSED - insufficient evidence of negligence. Maya's breathing changes. She flips faster now. Another form.

CLOSE ON FORM:

NAME: NGUYEN, MINH

AGE: 8

CUSTODY STATUS: SEPARATED (PARENT DEPORTED)

TRANSFER AUTH: REYES, M.

DESTINATION: [REDACTED]

ARRIVAL CONFIRMATION: NONE

CURRENT STATUS: UNKNOWN

Then another. And another.

FIFTEEN PAGES.

Fifteen names. Fifteen "NONE"s. Maya sets them down like they're burning her hands.

INT. RIVER CHANNEL - CONTINUOUS

She pulls out her phone with shaking hands. Searches: CARMEN RIVERA MISSING 2019 Results populate. A MOTHER'S FACE fills the screen—testimony before a congressional committee, tears streaming. Maya can't hear the audio, but she reads the closed captions:

[MARIA RIVERA]

"...they told me she was safe. They

told me she would be transferred to a licensed facility. I called every day. Every day for six months. They said they had no record..." Maya scrolls. Another result: SETTLEMENT REACHED IN NGUYEN CASE She clicks. The family of 8-year-old Minh Nguyen reached an undisclosed settlement with county officials after the child spent 11 months in an unlicensed group home following a "clerical error" in transfer documentation... Maya's hand covers her mouth. She searches another name.

NO RESULTS FOUND.

Another.

NO RESULTS FOUND.

Some disappeared so completely even Google forgot them.

INT. RIVER CHANNEL - CONTINUOUS

Maya sets the phone down. Stares at the forms spread before her. Her voice comes out barely audible.

MAYA

I routed them.

She touches one of the forms—Carmen Rivera's.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Transfer authorization... that's just...

She stops. Swallows.

MAYA (CONT'D)
That's me saying where they go.

A helicopter THUMPS overhead. Searchlight sweeps the channel, missing her by yards. Maya doesn't move. She picks up the bodycam footage USB again. Plugs it back in.

ON PHONE SCREEN:

The same hallway. But this time she doesn't stop the playback. The door kicks in. Screaming. A CHILD'S VOICE—high, terrified, speaking Spanish.

CHILD (V.O.)
"¡No me separen de mi mamá! ¡Por favor!"

(Don't separate me from my mom! Please!)

MAYA (V.O.) - FROM BODYCAM
"Secure the minor. Process separately."

UNIFORM (V.O.)
"She's asking for her mother—"

MAYA (V.O.)
"Follow protocol."

The camera swings. A small GIRL is led away, looking back, reaching. A WOMAN screams, restrained by two officers. The girl's face— It's Carmen Rivera. The footage cuts.

BACK TO MAYA

She rips the cable out. Throws the phone against concrete. It shatters. She pulls her knees to her chest. And for the first time— she breaks. Not crying. Collapsing. The weight of fifteen ghosts pressing down.

MAYA
(whispered)
I didn't know.

A beat.

MAYA (CONT'D)
I didn't know.

She says it again. And again. Like if she says it enough times it might become true. But the forms are still there.

Her signature on every one.

FADE OUT.

INT. PARKING STRUCTURE - NIGHT

Concrete levels spiral upward. Wind whistles through open sides.

Maya climbs, keeping to the shadows.

Halfway up, she stops.

Below, on a lower level, an unmarked sedan idles.

Beside it stands DETECTIVE SARAH KHOURY.

Hands visible. Jacket open. Not advancing.

Two MEN linger farther back, pretending not to watch.

Khoury knows they're there.

Maya does too.

INT. PARKING STRUCTURE - LOWER LEVEL - NIGHT

Maya descends the ramp slowly.

Khoury doesn't move.

KHOURY

You shouldn't be here.

Maya stops ten feet away.

MAYA

Neither should you.

Khoury studies her—blood, posture, eyes.

KHOURY
They're going to say you shot up a
diner.

MAYA
Did they pick a story yet?

KHOURY
They'll pick one that sticks.

Maya glances toward the two men.

MAYA
Those yours?

KHOURY
No.

That answer costs Khoury something. She knows it.

KHOURY (CONT'D)
I pulled freeway cams. They tried
to log them under maintenance.

Maya's eyes flicker—recognition.

MAYA
So you know.

KHOURY
I know someone doesn't want this
seen.

A beat.

KHOURY (CONT'D)
Your brother—

Maya's focus sharpens instantly.

KHOURY (CONT'D)
—he's leverage. That's not street
work.

Maya nods once.

MAYA
Viktor.

Khoury doesn't ask how she knows.

KHOURY
He's not just a name.

MAYA
He never is.

INT. PARKING STRUCTURE - CONTINUOUS

Maya's phone VIBRATES.

Unknown number.

She doesn't answer.

Khoury's phone VIBRATES at the same time.

They share a look.

KHOURY
They're moving early.

Maya reaches into her pocket and pulls out a small REMOTE.

KHOURY (CONT'D)
What's that.

Maya clicks it.

INT. PARKING STRUCTURE - SAME

Car alarms EXPLODE across multiple levels—one after another,
cascading.

Chaos without panic.

The two watching men look around, radios up, distracted.

Maya moves.

EXT. PARKING STRUCTURE - RAMP - NIGHT

Maya vaults the divider to the next level down, lands hard, disappears into shadow.

Khoury steps forward, deliberately placing herself in the path of the men.

KHOURY
What are you doing?

WATCHING MAN
Step aside, Detective.

KHOURY
You're not my chain.

WATCHING MAN
You don't have a chain anymore.

Khoury doesn't move.

This is the line she knows she's crossing.

EXT. CITY STREETS - PRE-DAWN

Maya blends into the edge of morning.

Street sweepers hum. Delivery trucks idle. The city wakes up like nothing happened.

She passes a HOMELESS WOMAN sitting on a milk crate.

They exchange a look.

Maya hands her cash and her hoodie.

They switch clothing—quick, efficient.

No words.

Maya becomes someone else.

EXT. BUS STOP - PRE-DAWN

A bus hisses to a stop.

Maya steps on, head down, duffel slung low.

She takes a seat in the back.

Her phone vibrates again.

TEXT:

YOU CAN'T HIDE IN A SYSTEM YOU BUILT.

Maya stares at the words.

Another text follows immediately:

FREIGHT YARD. 5:10.

She pockets the phone.

Her hand tightens on the duffel strap.

Not fear.

Recognition.

INT. LAPD HOMICIDE BULLPEN - PRE-DAWN

Khoury returns to her desk.

Her computer screen flashes:

ACCESS REVOKED
She tries again.

Same message.

A CAPTAIN stands behind her now.

CAPTAIN
You were told to stand down.

KHOURY

I stood in.

The captain gestures.

Two INTERNAL AFFAIRS AGENTS wait in the doorway.

CAPTAIN

Hand over your badge.

Khoury removes it slowly.

Places it on the desk.

She doesn't look away.

EXT. FREIGHT YARD - PERIMETER - PRE-DAWN

Fog pools between containers.

Floodlights buzz.

A train horn moans in the distance.

Maya stands at the fence, one hand on the chain-link.

She closes her eyes for half a second.

Then she climbs.

EXT. FREIGHT YARD - PRE-DAWN

The fence RATTLES softly as Maya drops inside.

Gravel crunches under her boots—too loud in the quiet.

She freezes, crouched low, breath controlled.

The freight yard stretches out like a concrete ocean.

Rows of shipping containers form corridors and blind corners.

Floodlights buzz overhead, casting hard cones of yellow light through drifting fog.

Somewhere nearby, a FORKLIFT BEEPS.

Men's voices float through the haze—casual, professional, unhurried.

This place isn't asleep.

It's waiting.

EXT. FREIGHT YARD - MOVING

Maya moves when the yard moves.

She stops when engines idle.

Walks when metal screams.

Times her steps with mechanical rhythm.

Her body remembers this kind of place.

Not from running—but from planning.

She checks her watch.

5:08 a.m.

INT. SECURITY SHACK - PRE-DAWN

A SECURITY GUARD nurses cold coffee.

Monitors flicker—grainy feeds of container rows and access roads.

One screen glitches.

A shadow passes through a blind spot.

Gone.

The guard scratches his chin, bored, unaware.

EXT. CONTAINER ROW - PRE-DAWN

Maya slips between two containers. The steel walls radiate stored heat.

Her phone VIBRATES.

Text:

STOP.

She stops.

Another vibration.

TURN LEFT.

She turns.

Another.

WALK.

She walks.

Her jaw tightens.

She isn't being hunted.

She's being directed.

EXT. CONTAINER ROW - CONTINUOUS

The fog thins just enough for shapes to resolve.

A folding chair.

A silhouette seated in it.

LUIS.

Wrists zip-tied.

Face bruised.

One eye swelling shut—but alert. Breathing steady.

Maya doesn't rush to him.

She scans first.

MEN step out of the fog—six of them. Clean clothes. No wasted movement. Not local muscle.

Then a final figure emerges.

VIKTOR.

Early 50s. Tall. Impeccably dressed despite the grime. His calm feels cultivated, not natural.

The fog seems to part around him.

EXT. CONTAINER ROW - CONTINUOUS

Viktor studies Maya like a completed equation.

VIKTOR

You followed instructions.

Maya says nothing.

She moves to Luis, keeping her body between him and Viktor.

She cuts the zip-ties.

LUIS

Maya—

MAYA

Behind me.

Luis obeys without argument. He trusts her completely.

Viktor watches this with interest.

EXT. CONTAINER ROW - CONTINUOUS

VIKTOR
You kept the bag.

Maya sets the duffel down—but keeps a grip on the strap.

MAYA
You kept him alive.

VIKTOR
For now.

A beat.

The men around them shift—subtle, rehearsed.

MAYA
You get this.

I get him.

VIKTOR
You misunderstand leverage.

MAYA
You misunderstand cost.

Viktor gestures.

A MAN kneels, opens the duffel.

His face tightens.

MAN
It's sealed.

Viktor's eyes sharpen.

EXT. CONTAINER ROW - CONTINUOUS

VIKTOR
You brought copies.

Maya meets his gaze.

MAYA
I brought consequences.

A distant SIREN bleeds through the fog.

Not close.

Not far.

Viktor listens. Calculates.

EXT. FREIGHT YARD - OUTER PERIMETER - PRE-DAWN

Unmarked vehicles idle in darkness.

Khoury crouches behind her car, eyes fixed on the yard.

A PLAIN-CLOTHES OFFICER whispers.

OFFICER
We don't have authorization.

KHOURY
We have a window.

She checks her watch.

Too late.

EXT. CONTAINER ROW - PRE-DAWN

Viktor steps closer.

VIKTOR
You think this redeems you.

Maya doesn't blink.

MAYA
I think it stops you.

Another SIREN—closer now.

Viktor's jaw tightens.

VIKTOR
We relocate.

Gunfire ERUPTS.

EXT. FREIGHT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Chaos snaps into existence.

Not panic-procedure.

Men move with discipline.

Bullets spark steel.

Floodlights SNAP ON.

Maya grabs Luis and runs.

A TRAIN HORN BLASTS, shaking the ground.

The yard becomes a maze of light and shadow.

EXT. FREIGHT YARD FENCE - CONTINUOUS

Maya and Luis dive through a torn section of fence.

A MAN lunges—

Maya swings the duffel hard, connects.

They hit gravel, roll, scramble.

Gone.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL STREETS - DAWN

They run until lungs burn.

Maya drags Luis into—

INT. SHUTTERED AUTO SHOP - DAWN

Dark. Oil-stained. Smells like metal and old mistakes.

Maya bolts the door, slams a steel bar across it.

Luis collapses onto a crate, shaking.

LUIS

I thought I was dead.

Maya checks him quickly—methodical.

MAYA

You weren't.

LUIS

What's in the bag.

Maya opens it.

Shows him the ledger and drives.

Luis stares.

LUIS (CONT'D)

That's... everyone.

MAYA

It's the blueprint.

INT. LAPD PARKING GARAGE - DAWN

Khoury listens to radio chatter.

Conflicting reports.

False locations.

Confusion spreading.

Her phone BUZZES.

Text from UNKNOWN:

HE'S ALIVE.

Khoury exhales—just once.

Then DISPATCH crackles.

DISPATCH (V.O.)
All units stand down. Federal
takeover.

Khoury's face hardens.

INT. SHUTTERED AUTO SHOP - DAWN

Maya hands Luis a burner phone.

MAYA
When I say go, you go.

LUIS
You're not coming?

Maya meets his eyes.

MAYA
I'm finishing it.

She types a number into the phone.

Khoury's.

EXT. AUTO SHOP - MORNING

Luis slips out the back, disappearing into the waking city.

Maya watches until he's gone.

Then she opens the duffel.

Removes the REAL drives.

Swaps in blanks.

Exact. Deliberate.

She seals the bag.
This isn't escape.
It's commitment.

EXT. CITY OVERLOOK - MORNING

Maya stands above Los Angeles.
The grid again.
The system she helped build.
Her phone rings.

VIKTOR (V.O.)
You made noise.

MAYA
You made enemies.

VIKTOR (V.O.)
This ends badly.

MAYA
It already did.

She hangs up.

EXT. CITY OVERLOOK - MORNING

Maya stays where she is long after the call ends.

Below her, Los Angeles looks calm—traffic threading itself into routine, helicopters already peeling away to fresher emergencies.

The city always resets faster than the people inside it.

Maya turns and walks down the hill.

INT. SHUTTERED AUTO SHOP - MORNING

Maya returns alone.

The space feels larger now. Empty.

She drags an old rolling chair into the center of the floor, sits, and finally lets herself feel the wound in her side.

She peels back the tape. Blood has soaked through.

Her hands are steady as she cleans it. Pain is information. Nothing more.

She reaches into the duffel and pulls out one of the real drives.

Studies it like it might speak.

Then she crushes it under her boot.

Plastic snaps. Metal bends.

One less liability.

INT. CITY BUS - MORNING

Luis sits near the back, hood up.

He watches people board: construction workers, nurses, students.

Normal lives. Normal problems.

His phone VIBRATES.

TEXT FROM MAYA:

Change routes. Don't look back.

Luis types, deletes, types again.

TEXT:

I'm scared.

The response comes almost instantly.

GOOD. STAY SMART.

Luis exhales. Puts the phone away.

The bus pulls into traffic.

INT. FEDERAL BUILDING - DAY

Cold marble. Echoing footsteps.

Viktor moves through security without slowing.

Badges flash. Guards nod. Doors open.

He doesn't rush. He never does.

A YOUNG ANALYST walks beside him, struggling to keep up.

ANALYST

We're scrubbing the diner incident.

VIKTOR

How thoroughly.

ANALYST

Complete narrative replacement.

Gang-related. Unaffiliated shooters.

Viktor nods, satisfied.

VIKTOR

And Reyes.

ANALYST

Active fugitive.

Local task force reassigned.

Viktor stops walking.

Turns.

That alone is enough to freeze the analyst.

VIKTOR
Reassigned to whom.

ANALYST
Internal oversight.

Viktor's eyes narrow.

That wasn't his instruction.

INT. LAPD - INTERNAL AFFAIRS HOLDING ROOM - DAY

Khoury sits alone at a metal table.

Badge gone. Phone gone. Jacket draped over the chair like an
afterthought.

A CAMERA hums softly.

An IA INVESTIGATOR enters, mid-40s, practiced neutrality.

IA INVESTIGATOR
You understand why you're here.

KHOURY
Because I didn't look away.

The investigator ignores that.

IA INVESTIGATOR
You interfered with an active
federal operation.

KHOURY
I interfered with a kidnapping.

IA INVESTIGATOR
You don't get to define that.

Khoury leans back.

KHOURY
Someone already did.

INT. HOLDING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The investigator slides a photo across the table.

Maya. Blurry. Mid-run.

IA INVESTIGATOR
You recognize her.

KHOURY
I recognize the pattern.

IA INVESTIGATOR
She's dangerous.

KHOURY
So is gravity.

The investigator exhales slowly.

IA INVESTIGATOR
You're going to tell us where she
is.

Khoury shakes her head.

KHOURY
You're asking the wrong question.

INT. SHUTTERED AUTO SHOP - DAY

Maya opens a metal locker in the back.

Inside: old clothes, tools, a police-style radio scanner.

She clicks it on.

DISPATCH VOICES crackle-fragmented, overlapping.

Maya listens. Maps the voices to agencies.

Her phone rings.

Blocked number.

She answers.

MAYA
You're late.

VIKTOR (V.O.)
You destroyed property.

MAYA
I destroyed trust.

VIKTOR (V.O.)
You misunderstand how replaceable
that is.

Maya glances at the scanner.

MAYA
You moved oversight too fast.

A pause.

VIKTOR (V.O.)
Explain.

MAYA
You pulled Khoury into IA to
isolate her.

That means you're worried she knows something she shouldn't.

Another pause—longer.

MAYA (CONT'D)
That means you didn't build the
system alone.

Silence.

Maya smiles faintly. First time.

INT. FEDERAL BUILDING - DAY

Viktor stands at a window overlooking the city.

He doesn't like being read.

VIKTOR
You always had a gift for
extrapolation.

MAYA (V.O.)
You always underestimated context.

Viktor ends the call.

He turns to an aide.

VIKTOR
Find the original architecture
files.

The early ones.

AIDE
Those were—

VIKTOR
—mine. I know.

INT. HOLDING ROOM - DAY

The IA investigator leans forward.

IA INVESTIGATOR
You're risking prison.

KHOURY
I'm risking sleep.

The investigator studies her—searching for cracks.

Finds none.

IA INVESTIGATOR
You're done, Detective.

KHOURY
No. I'm unemployed.

That lands.

EXT. HOLDING FACILITY - DAY

Khoury exits into sunlight.

No badge. No escort.

She stands for a moment, unmoored.

Then her phone—returned—VIBRATES.

Unknown number.

She answers.

KHOURY

Yeah.

MAYA (V.O.)

He's going to burn old files.

KHOURY

Already started.

MAYA (V.O.)

Good.

That means we're early.

Khoury smiles despite herself.

KHOURY

What do you need.

MAYA (V.O.)

Access.

Not yours.

KHOURY

That's a short list.

INT. DATA CENTER - NIGHT (INTERCUT)

Rows of servers.

Cooling fans scream.

Blue LEDs pulse like a nervous system.

An ENGINEER types commands.

Behind him, unseen, a shadow passes.

INT. SHUTTERED AUTO SHOP - NIGHT

Maya watches a live data feed on a salvaged monitor.

Names scroll. Access logs spike.

She marks timestamps.

She's not hiding anymore.

She's baiting.

INT. FEDERAL BUILDING - NIGHT

Viktor receives a report.

ANALYST

We're seeing unauthorized pings in
archival systems.

Viktor's jaw tightens.

VIKTOR

She's mapping the response time.

ANALYST

Should we—

VIKTOR

No.

A beat.

VIKTOR (CONT'D)

Let her.

EXT. CITY ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Khoury stands on a rooftop, city spread beneath her.

She checks her phone.

A file arrives.

Subject line: OPS / ORIGINAL

She opens it.

Her face changes.

This is bigger than she thought.

INT. SHUTTERED AUTO SHOP - NIGHT

Maya leans back in the chair.

For the first time, she looks tired.

Not scared.

Not desperate.

Just aware of how much damage this will do.

Her phone vibrates.

Text from Khoury:

You didn't just design routes.

You designed deniability.

Maya types back.

I know.

She stares at the screen.

Then adds one more line.

I'm ready to testify.

She sends it.

The scanner erupts with activity.

Sirens bloom across the city.

Maya stands.

This is the point of no return.

ACT II MIDPOINT IMAGE

AERIAL - LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

The grid fractures.

Helicopters scatter.

Systems strain under invisible weight.

The city doesn't know it yet—

—but the machine is turning on itself.

INT. SHUTTERED AUTO SHOP - NIGHT

The scanner spits overlapping voices now—agencies tripping over each other.

Maya shuts it off.

Silence drops hard.

She checks her watch. Calculates.

Then she pulls the county ID from the shoebox and tapes it to the inside of her jacket—over her heart, like armor that no longer lies.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Maya walks.

Not runs.

She moves through neighborhoods that don't ask questions: late-night tire shops, street vendors breaking down carts, men hosing blood and grease from sidewalks like it's all the same thing.

Every block has eyes.

Every block forgets fast.

INT. KHOURY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Small. Spartan. Clean in the way of someone who never expected to stay long.

Khoury dumps her bag, immediately sensing something's off.

A drawer is open.

A picture frame shifted.

Nothing stolen.

Everything touched.

Her phone BUZZES.

UNKNOWN NUMBER.

She answers without greeting.

VIKTOR (V.O.)
You chose visibility.

KHOURY
I chose memory.

VIKTOR (V.O.)
That's sentimental.

KHOURY
So is murder.

A beat.

VIKTOR (V.O.)
You think Reyes will protect you.

KHOURY
I think you're afraid of her.

Silence.

Then—

VIKTOR (V.O.)
You should pack.

The line goes dead.

Khoury doesn't move.

Then she starts grabbing essentials—fast, disciplined.

INT. FEDERAL SAFE ROOM - NIGHT

A steel door shuts.

Fluorescent lights snap on.

Maya sits alone at a metal table.

A CAMERA hums.

Two DOJ ATTORNEYS observe through glass.

Maya signs a document.

No lawyer present.

This is off-book.

She slides the ledger and drives across the table.

ATTORNEY #1
Once this starts—

MAYA
—it doesn't stop.

ATTORNEY #2
You understand the risk.

Maya nods.

MAYA
I built the risk.

INT. FEDERAL BUILDING - NIGHT

Viktor stands before a wall of monitors.

Live feeds. News chyrons warming up.

ANALYST
She's in custody.

VIKTOR
No.

ANALYST
She surrendered.

Viktor's jaw tightens.

VIKTOR
Then she chose the stage.

EXT. PARKING STRUCTURE - NIGHT

Khoury exits her building.

A BLACK SUV rolls in silently, blocking the exit.

Doors open.

MEN step out.

Not police.

Khoury backs away.

Then another set of headlights snaps on behind her.

A MARKED PATROL CAR.

Uniforms step out—real ones.

The men retreat instantly.

Khoury exhales.

The patrol car door opens.

Maya sits inside.

Not cuffed.

Not smiling.

KHOURY
You're insane.

MAYA
Get in.

Khoury does.

INT. MOVING PATROL CAR - NIGHT

The city slides past.

KHOURY
They'll burn you alive.

MAYA
They'll try.

KHOURY
Viktor won't go quietly.

MAYA
He never does.

Maya hands Khoury a drive.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Redundancy.

Khoury looks at it.

Then at Maya.

KHOURY
You planned this.

MAYA
I planned for failure.

INT. FEDERAL BUILDING - NIGHT

Viktor walks briskly now.

Phones ring. People avoid his eyes.

He enters a secure office.

Locks the door.

Opens a hidden drawer.

Inside: a passport. Cash. A gun.

He stares at them.

Then closes the drawer.

Leaves them.

INT. SAFE HOUSE - NIGHT

Khoury watches Maya pace.

KHOURY

You're not supposed to be here.

MAYA

Neither is the truth.

Khoury studies her.

KHOURY

You regret it?

Maya stops.

Considers.

MAYA

I regret not stopping sooner.

EXT. OVERPASS - NIGHT

Concrete pillars rise like a cathedral to infrastructure.

Traffic ROARS overhead.

Lights strobe through gaps.

Police vehicles gather at a distance.

Unmarked vans.

Federal presence.

This place feels preordained.

INT. OVERPASS SHADOW - NIGHT

Viktor stands alone.

Hands visible.

No weapon drawn.

He waits.

Maya steps out of shadow opposite him.

Khoury watches from afar, heart hammering.

EXT. OVERPASS - CONTINUOUS

VIKTOR
You chose penance.

MAYA
I chose balance.

VIKTOR
You think this absolves you.

MAYA
I think it ends you.

Viktor smiles faintly.

VIKTOR
There will always be another me.

MAYA
Then someone will always be me.

Sirens close in.

Viktor doesn't run.

He nods once—to Maya.

Acceptance.

EXT. OVERPASS - CONTINUOUS

Agents swarm.

Viktor is taken—controlled, almost gentle.

He doesn't resist.

Maya watches.

Khoury approaches.

KHOURY
It's done.

MAYA
It started.

INT. FEDERAL HOLDING CELL - NIGHT

Maya sits alone.

No cuffs.

Just walls.

She closes her eyes.

Breath steady.

INT. FEDERAL HOLDING CELL - NIGHT

The cell is too clean.

No graffiti. No damage. No history.

Maya sits on the bench, hands folded, posture exact.

The kind of stillness learned from rooms where silence was the only defense.

A CAMERA watches.

She looks directly into it.

Not defiant.

Acknowledging.

INT. FEDERAL OBSERVATION ROOM - NIGHT

Khoury stands behind glass with two DOJ ATTORNEYS and a TECH SPECIALIST.

On a monitor: Maya, unmoving.

ATTORNEY #1

She understands this voids any protection.

KHOURY

She understands leverage better than anyone in this building.

ATTORNEY #2

Viktor's people are already filing injunctions.

Khoury exhales.

KHOURY

Of course they are.

The tech specialist interrupts.

TECH
We've got movement.

Encrypted traffic spiking out of custody channels.

Khoury's eyes narrow.

KHOURY
He's not done.

INT. FEDERAL HOLDING CELL - SAME

Maya's phone—returned for "cooperation"—VIBRATES on the bench beside her.

One incoming message.

YOU TAUGHT ME TOO WELL.

Maya closes her eyes.

Just for a moment.

INT. SECURE SERVER FACILITY - NIGHT (INTERCUT)

A white room. Climate controlled.

Racks of servers blink in steady rhythm.

An ENGINEER hesitates at a terminal.

ENGINEER
This purge order—

SUPERVISOR
—came from upstairs.

ENGINEER
But it references sealed testimony.

SUPERVISOR
Then don't read it.

The engineer types.

Red lights begin to pulse.

INT. FEDERAL OBSERVATION ROOM - NIGHT

Monitors flicker.

Data streams collapse.

TECH
We're losing archival mirrors.

ATTORNEY #1
Can he do that?

KHOURY
He doesn't need permission.

He needs timing.

INT. HOLDING CELL - NIGHT

Maya stares at the message.

Then types back.

YOU NEVER LEARNED CONSEQUENCE.

She sends it.

Immediately-

her phone goes dead.

The lights flicker.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT (MONTAGE)

- News vans scramble.
- Reporters whisper into phones.
- Police scanners light up.
- Power grids stutter, then stabilize.
Los Angeles doesn't panic.
It absorbs.

INT. COURTHOUSE - PRE-DAWN

An emergency hearing assembles.
Judges, half-awake.
Lawyers wired on caffeine.
Viktor appears on a screen-composed, articulate.

VIKTOR

The materials obtained by Ms. Reyes
are compromised by conflict of
interest.

A JUDGE leans forward.

JUDGE

You're arguing suppression?

VIKTOR

I'm arguing contamination.

Maya watches from a secure room, feed muted.

KHOURY

He's trying to poison the well.

MAYA

He's trying to flood it.

INT. SECURE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Khoury hands Maya a printed photo.

Luis.

Alive.

Standing outside a public library.

Maya exhales.

KHOURY
He released him.

MAYA
No.

He displaced him.

Khoury understands.

KHOURY
He's removing leverage to look
reasonable.

Maya nods.

MAYA
Which means he's out of moves.

INT. VIKTOR'S HOLDING SUITE - DAY

Not a cell.

A room.

Viktor sits with legal counsel.

He's calm—almost amused.

COUNSEL
They'll make you the face of it.

VIKTOR
They always need a face.

COUNSEL
You could disappear.

Viktor considers that.

Then shakes his head.

VIKTOR
Disappearance admits guilt.

He stands.

VIKTOR (CONT'D)
I prefer documentation.

INT. FEDERAL SAFE ROOM - DAY

Maya sits across from a PANEL.

No cameras. No public feed.

Just recorders.

PANEL CHAIR
State your role.

Maya breathes in.

MAYA
I designed routing protocols for
interagency transfers.

PANEL
Purpose?

MAYA
Efficiency.

A pause.

PANEL
Cost?

Maya meets their eyes.

MAYA
Untraceable loss.

Silence.

This is the truth landing.

INT. SAFE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

PANEL MEMBER
Did Viktor direct these outcomes.

MAYA
He refined them.

PANEL
Who else.

Maya hesitates.

Just long enough to show weight.

MAYA
Everyone who benefited.

The recorders keep rolling.

EXT. CITY PARK - DAY

Luis sits on a bench.

Kids play nearby.

He watches them with the expression of someone who's aged ten years overnight.

Khoury approaches—civilian clothes.

KHOURY
You're safe.

LUIS
For how long.

KHOURY
Long enough.

She sits beside him.

KHOURY (CONT'D)
Your sister's brave.

Luis looks away.

LUIS
She's tired.

INT. FEDERAL BUILDING - DAY

Viktor is escorted through halls now watched openly.

Whispers follow him.

He remains upright.

An aide approaches.

AIDE
They're calling it systemic abuse.

VIKTOR
Good.

AIDE
Good?

VIKTOR
Systems survive their architects.

He glances back once—toward nowhere.

INT. HOLDING CELL - NIGHT

Maya lies on the bench now.

Not sleeping.

Thinking.

Her eyes close.

When they open again—

there's resolve.

INT. FEDERAL COURTHOUSE - MORNING

Not the grand courtroom.

A smaller one. Older. Wood worn smooth by decades of bodies rising and sitting in judgment.

No press inside.

No cameras.

This is where outcomes are finalized, not debated.

Maya sits at the defense table.

No cuffs.

No lawyer whispering in her ear.

Across the room, Viktor sits alone.

Not restrained.

Contained by process.

They do not look at each other.

INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS

The JUDGE enters.

Everyone rises.

The room settles into silence that feels deliberate.

JUDGE

This court has reviewed the sealed testimony and corroborating materials.

A stack of folders is placed beside him. Thick. Heavy.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

The scope of misconduct outlined here exceeds any single defendant.

Viktor's jaw tightens.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

However, responsibility does not evaporate because it is shared.

Maya listens without reaction.

She's past hoping.

INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS

The JUDGE looks directly at Viktor.

JUDGE

Mr. Viktor, you are remanded pending transfer.

Viktor stands smoothly.

VIKTOR

For the record-

JUDGE

-denied.

That's it.

Two MARSHALS move in.

Viktor allows the cuffs.

As he's turned away, his eyes flick briefly toward Maya.

Not anger.

Recognition.

INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS

The judge shifts his attention.

JUDGE

Ms. Reyes.

Maya stands.

The air feels heavier now.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Your cooperation exposed a system
designed to obscure harm.

A pause.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

You were not an observer.

Maya nods once.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

You were an architect.

Maya doesn't argue.

INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS

JUDGE

The court recognizes the
extraordinary personal risk you
assumed.

Another pause.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

It also recognizes the cost of what
you helped build.

Maya's hands remain steady at her sides.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

You are sentenced to—

He stops.

Looks down at the file again.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

—eight years.

A murmur ripples through the room.

Khoury exhales sharply from the back row.

Maya absorbs it.

Eight years is finite.

INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS

JUDGE

Time served will be credited.

Maya closes her eyes for a fraction of a second.

Then opens them.

EXT. COURTHOUSE STEPS - DAY

Viktor is led down a separate exit.

No speech.

No outburst.

He pauses briefly at the bottom of the steps.

Looks up at the building.

Then disappears into a vehicle.

INT. VIKTOR'S HOLDING CELL - NIGHT

Not the suite anymore. A real cell.

Viktor sits on the edge of the bunk, still wearing the clothes from court. His tie is loosened—the first crack in his presentation.

A PHOTO rests in his palm. Creased. Old.

A young girl, maybe eight, laughing at a beach somewhere that looks nothing like Los Angeles.

He studies it like he's trying to remember something he's worked hard to forget.

The door BUZZES.

A FEDERAL MARSHAL enters with a PSYCHOLOGIST—mandated evaluation.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Mr. Viktor, I'm Dr. Chen. This won't take long.

Viktor doesn't look up.

VIKTOR

It never does.

Chen sits. Opens a file.

CHEN

Your background indicates—

VIKTOR

—efficiency. Yes. You'll find that word a lot.

Chen pauses, recalibrating.

CHEN

You came to this country when you were twelve.

Viktor finally looks at him.

VIKTOR

Through a system not unlike the one I managed.

CHEN

Refugee resettlement.

VIKTOR

Bureaucratic reassignment.

He sets the photo down carefully.

VIKTOR (CONT'D)

My sister didn't make it through processing. Lost paperwork. A routing error. She was sent back.

Chen absorbs this.

VIKTOR (CONT'D)

I learned something then.

CHEN

What's that.

VIKTOR

Systems don't fail people. People fail to control systems.

CHEN

So you decided to control them.

Viktor almost smiles.

VIKTOR

I decided to perfect them.

CHEN

At what cost.

Viktor picks up the photo again.

VIKTOR
The same cost someone else decided
I was worth.

A beat.

VIKTOR (CONT'D)
She died three years after they
sent her back. Malnutrition.
Preventable.

He slides the photo into his pocket.

VIKTOR (CONT'D)
I made sure the system never
hesitated again.

CHEN
You removed human judgment.

VIKTOR
I removed human error.

Chen writes something.

CHEN
Do you feel remorse.

Viktor considers the question with genuine attention.

VIKTOR
I feel certainty.

CHEN
That's not the same thing.

VIKTOR
No.

He stands, signaling the conversation is over.

VIKTOR (CONT'D)
But certainty doesn't require
forgiveness.

INT. NEWS BROADCAST BOOTH - DAY

A CABLE NEWS ANCHOR shuffles papers.

ANCHOR

Breaking tonight: sweeping reforms announced in the wake of what officials are calling "systemic accountability failures"...

ON MONITOR
BEHIND HER:

Graphics cycle through: DETENTION OVERSIGHT / TRANSFER PROTOCOLS / INTERAGENCY REVIEW

ANCHOR (V.O.)

The changes, prompted by sealed testimony from a former county operations coordinator, will require real-time tracking of all detainee transfers and mandatory oversight at every checkpoint.

The camera pushes in on the anchor.

ANCHOR

Critics say the reforms don't address root causes. Advocates say it's a start.

She pauses.

ANCHOR (CONT'D)

One thing is certain: someone will be watching now.

EXT. FEDERAL PRISON - DAY

Maya walks the yard.

Another INMATE approaches—older, weathered.

OLDER INMATE

You see the news?

MAYA

No.

OLDER INMATE

They're changing transfer laws.
Real-time GPS. Oversight teams.

Maya stops walking.

OLDER INMATE (CONT'D)

They're calling it the
"accountability mandate."

Maya looks up at the sky—still that same hazy Los Angeles
amber.

MAYA

Will it work?

OLDER INMATE

Probably not.

She starts walking again.

OLDER INMATE (CONT'D)

But somebody tried.

Maya doesn't respond.

But her pace slows—just slightly.

Like she's carrying something lighter now.

INT. VIKTOR'S CELL - NIGHT

Viktor lies on his bunk.

Eyes open.

A GUARD passes, flashlight sweeping.

When the light moves on, Viktor reaches under his mattress.

Pulls out a piece of paper.

In careful handwriting:

ELENA VIKTOR
2/14/1989 - 8/3/1992

ROUTING ERROR: BUDAPEST - SARAJEVO

FILE #4721-B
He folds it.

Returns it to its hiding place.

His eyes close.

Not peace.

Documentation.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. HOLDING CORRIDOR - DAY

Maya walks between two officers.

Not rushed.

Not dragged.

Khoury waits at the end of the hall.

They stop Maya briefly.

Khoury steps forward.

KHOURY
I'm sorry.

Maya shakes her head.

MAYA
Don't be.

KHOURY
You could've walked.

MAYA

I did.

Khoury doesn't fully understand yet.

But she will.

EXT. FEDERAL PRISON - DAY

A bus pulls through the gates.

Razor wire.

Watchtowers.

Procedure takes over.

Maya steps down.

She is processed.

Photographed.

Counted.

INT. FEDERAL PRISON - CELL - NIGHT

The cell is smaller than the holding room.

More honest.

Maya sits on the bunk.

Breathing slows.

She reaches into her pocket.

One thing made it through intake:

A folded piece of paper.

Khoury's handwriting.

LUIS IS SAFE.

HE KNOWS WHY YOU DID THIS.

Maya presses the note flat.

Tucks it beneath the mattress.

EXT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

Luis exits with a stack of books.

He looks older now.

Not hardened—aware.

He checks his phone.

One saved message.

From Maya.

No text.

Just an image.

A sunrise over Los Angeles.

Luis smiles.

Keeps walking.

INT. FEDERAL PRISON - VISITATION - THREE YEARS LATER - DAY

The same glass partition.

Maya sits across from Khoury.

Both look older now—not broken, just marked by time.

KHOURY
You look good.

MAYA
You're a terrible liar.

Khoury smiles. Sets down a FOLDER.

KHOURY
I brought something.

She slides a newspaper clipping under the glass partition.

CLOSE ON
CLIPPING:

HEADLINE: RIVERA FAMILY REACHES LANDMARK SETTLEMENT

SUBHEAD: County Admits "Systemic Failures" in Minor's Death -
\$12M Award

Maya stares at it.

KHOURY
They named her.

MAYA
Carmen.

KHOURY
Her mother testified. Used your
documents.

Maya's jaw tightens.

MAYA
Did it help?

KHOURY
Her mother said: "Now people will
remember she existed."

Maya closes her eyes.

Just for a moment.

KHOURY (CONT'D)
There's more.

She slides another document through.

OFFICIAL COUNTY MEMO - MARKED "PUBLIC RECORD"

Maya skims it.

MAYA
(reading)
"...mandatory geolocation tracking
for all minor transfers...
independent oversight board...
quarterly audits..."

She looks up.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Will it work?

KHOURY
It's working.

MAYA
How do you know?

KHOURY
Because last month, a transfer was
flagged. Eight-year-old girl. Van
broke down in 106-degree heat.

Maya tenses.

KHOURY (CONT'D)
The system sent an automatic alert.
Backup arrived in eleven minutes.

A beat.

KHOURY (CONT'D)
She's fine. She's with her aunt
now.

Maya's hands flatten against the table.

MAYA
What was her name?

KHOURY
Sofia Reyes.

Maya's breath catches.

KHOURY (CONT'D)
No relation. Just... same last
name.

They sit in silence.

MAYA
One kid.

KHOURY
So far.

MAYA
Out of how many?

KHOURY
Does it matter?

Maya considers this.

MAYA
Yeah.

Another beat.

MAYA (CONT'D)
And no.

Khoury nods. She understands.

KHOURY
Luis is finishing his degree.

MAYA
I know. He writes.

KHOURY
He wants to work in policy reform.

Maya almost smiles.

MAYA
Of course he does.

KHOURY
You did that.

MAYA
I gave him nightmares.

KHOURY
You gave him purpose.

The GUARD signals. Two minutes.

Khoury leans forward.

KHOURY (CONT'D)
When you get out—

MAYA
—five more years.

KHOURY
When you get out, there's work to do.

MAYA
Sarah—

KHOURY
I'm serious. You know how these systems fail. We need people who know where the cracks are.

Maya shakes her head slowly.

MAYA
I can't build anything again.

KHOURY
I'm not asking you to build.

A beat.

KHOURY (CONT'D)
I'm asking you to inspect.

Maya absorbs this.

KHOURY (CONT'D)
Independent auditor. Outside
oversight. Someone who can't be
bought because they already paid.

The guard approaches.

GUARD
Time.

Khoury stands. Presses her hand to the glass.

KHOURY
Think about it.

Maya places her hand opposite—not quite touching.

MAYA
I won't stop thinking about it.

Khoury nods.

Leaves.

Maya watches her go.

Then looks down at the clipping still on the counter.

Carmen Rivera's face—a school photo, smiling.

Below it: REMEMBERED.

EXT. FEDERAL PRISON - SUNSET

Khoury walks to her car.

Pauses.

Looks back at the facility.

The sun hits the razor wire, turning it gold.

From here, you can almost forget what it holds.

Almost.

The names still legible.

Still waiting.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - NIGHT (AERIAL)

The city sprawls.

Freeways pulse with red taillights and white headlights.

The grid operates as it always has.

But now—

SUPERIMPOSE
TEXT:

Following testimony from Maya Reyes and corroborating evidence, county and federal agencies implemented the Minor Safety

Accountability Act.

Since 2026, real-time tracking has been credited with preventing 47 documented routing failures.

14 children who would have been lost in the system were located and reunited with families.

The work continues.

The text fades.

The city remains.

INT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE - AUDITORIUM - DAY

Luis stands at a podium.

A small audience—maybe thirty people. Policy students. Activists. Officials.

On the screen behind him:

"ACCOUNTABILITY IN ABSENCE: Learning from System Failures"

He clicks to the next slide.

Carmen Rivera's photo appears.

LUIS

Her name was Carmen Rivera. She was
fourteen.

He pauses.

LUIS (CONT'D)

The system that lost her was
designed by intelligent people who
believed they were solving
problems.

Another click.

A FLOWCHART—the routing protocol Maya designed.

LUIS (CONT'D)

This is efficiency. Clean.
Rational.

Another click.

The flowchart overlaid with RED X's where Carmen's transfer
failed.

LUIS (CONT'D)

This is what efficiency costs when
no one's watching.

He looks out at the audience.

LUIS (CONT'D)

My sister built part of this
system. Then she broke it. Then she
paid for breaking it.

A beat.

LUIS (CONT'D)
But Carmen Rivera's mother got to
bury her daughter with a name on
the headstone.

He clicks again.

Sofia Reyes—the eight-year-old saved by the new
system—smiling with her aunt.

LUIS (CONT'D)
And Sofia Reyes got to grow up.

He turns off the presentation.

LUIS (CONT'D)
That's not redemption. But it's not
nothing.

Silence.

Then—scattered applause.

Luis gathers his materials.

An OLDER WOMAN approaches—Carmen Rivera's mother, MARIA.

MARIA
Thank you.

Luis nods, throat tight.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Tell your sister... tell her Carmen
mattered.

LUIS
I will.

Maria touches his hand briefly.

Then leaves.

Luis watches her go.

LUIS (CONT'D)
Khoury asked me to give you this.

He slides it across.

Maya opens it.

JOB OFFER - INDEPENDENT SYSTEMS AUDITOR

START DATE: Upon Release

SPONSOR: National Oversight Coalition

She looks at Luis.

MAYA
She's relentless.

LUIS
She learned from the best.

Maya almost smiles.

MAYA
I have five years left.

LUIS
She said she'd wait.

MAYA
You know that's insane.

LUIS
Yeah.

A beat.

LUIS (CONT'D)
But you're going to do it.

Maya looks down at the offer.

Then at her brother.

MAYA
Maybe.

LUIS
Definitely.

This time, Maya does smile.

Small.

Real.

MAYA
Finish your degree first.

LUIS
Already done.

MAYA
Liar.

LUIS
Two more semesters.

They both laugh—quiet, brief.

The sound of people who've learned that joy is possible even
in concrete rooms.

FINAL IMAGE:

EXT. FEDERAL PRISON - DAWN

The sun rises over the facility.

Razor wire catches the light.

From inside, we hear the CLANG of morning count.

Doors opening.

Systems operating.

But now—

A GUARD walks the tier with a CLIPBOARD.

New protocol.

She stops at each cell.

Calls a name.

Waits for response.

Marks it down.

Every person accounted for.

Every name recorded.

The camera PULLS BACK.

Up.

Over the walls.

Into the sky.

Below—Los Angeles wakes.

The grid hums.

Traffic flows.

Systems persist.

But the cracks are visible now.

And someone is watching.

FADE TO BLACK.

FINAL TEXT:

For Carmen, Minh, and the children still waiting to be found.

THE END.