

The King of Fraud
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FADE IN:

EXT. YEREVAN - DAWN

A gray-blue sky over a city built of stone and stubbornness.

Mount ARARAT looms in the distance like a silent judge.

Yerevan wakes up in layers: steam off manhole covers, buses coughing, old men already seated at a backgammon table like they never left.

A BOY runs through it all.

ARAM KAZANJIAN, 12, quick eyes, thin jacket, a plastic bag with hot bread pressed to his chest like a secret.

He dodges puddles, dogs, and an old WOMAN sweeping her doorstep.

OLD WOMAN

Aram! Where are you running like
devil is behind you?

ARAM

If devil is behind me, I'm still
faster.

She shakes her head - half disapproval, half pride.

Aram cuts through an alley.

EXT. COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

A SOVIET BLOCK courtyard. Laundry lines. Kids kicking a flat ball. A man welding something illegal.

Aram stops at a metal door. He knocks in a rhythm.

The door opens a crack.

A HARD-FACED MAN, 30s, sees Aram and relaxes slightly.

HARD-FACED MAN

Bread?

Aram hands the bag through. The man looks inside.

HARD-FACED MAN (CONT'D)
Still warm.

ARAM
My mother would stab me if it
wasn't.

The man smirks, pulls out folded CASH.

He slips Aram an extra bill.

HARD-FACED MAN
For your trouble.

Aram takes it without blinking.

ARAM
Trouble is expensive.

The door closes.

Aram turns – and nearly collides with a KID his age.

KID stares at the money.

KID
You're a messenger for them.

ARAM
I'm a delivery service.

KID
That's the same thing.

Aram leans in, dead serious.

ARAM
No. Delivery service gets tips.

He jogs off, leaving the kid to process capitalism.

EXT. STREET MARKET – MORNING

A chaotic open market. Loud vendors, sharper prices.
Pomegranates stacked like grenades.

Aram threads through bodies like he's been doing it his whole life.

He stops at a stall where a BUTCHER is slicing meat with a blade too big for food.

Behind the butcher, a man watches everything: UNCLE VARTAN KAZANJIAN, 40s, thick neck, gold tooth, charm like a weapon.

Vartan is talking to a CUSTOMER, smiling warmly while the butcher's eyes say "no refunds, ever."

UNCLE VARTAN
Of course it's fresh. If it was
fresher, it would still be walking.

The customer laughs. Pays. Leaves.

Vartan turns. Sees Aram. His smile becomes real.

UNCLE VARTAN (CONT'D)
Ahhh. My professor arrives.

ARAM
I'm not a professor.

UNCLE VARTAN
In this family, anyone who can
count without using fingers is a
professor.

He hooks an arm around Aram, steers him away from ears.

UNCLE VARTAN (CONT'D)
You delivered?

Aram nods.

ARAM
He paid. Extra.

Vartan's eyes flicker – approval.

UNCLE VARTAN
Extra means he respects you. Or
he's scared.

ARAM
Which is better?

Vartan smiles like that's the correct question.

UNCLE VARTAN
Respect is nicer. Fear is more
reliable.

Aram glances back – sees two men near the stall, watching
Vartan, not buying anything.

ARAM
Those guys...?

Vartan doesn't look. He already knows.

UNCLE VARTAN
New boys. Trying to decide if I'm
still Vartan.

He ruffles Aram's hair.

UNCLE VARTAN (CONT'D)
Go home. Before your mother sends a
search party.

ARAM
She can't afford one.

UNCLE VARTAN
She has sisters. That's a free
army.

Aram slips away.

EXT. YEREVAN STAIRWELL - LATE MORNING

Aram climbs a stairwell that smells like boiled cabbage and
old cigarettes.

He passes NEIGHBORS: a WOMAN carrying water, a MAN in a tank
top arguing with a wall, a TEEN smoking like he invented it.

INT. KAZANJIAN APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

A small apartment that holds a big family history.

A table covered in food: lavash, cheese, cucumbers, herbs, coffee so dark it could be used as ink.

MARIAM, 40s, Aram's mother, moves with sharp efficiency – the kind born from living through shortages and people.

She spots Aram instantly.

MARIAM

Where have you been?

ARAM

Outside.

MARIAM

"Outside" is where men become widows.

She snatches his jacket collar, inspects him like luggage.

MARIAM (CONT'D)

No blood. Good. Sit.

Aram sits.

Across the table: ARAM'S FATHER, GAREGIN, 50s, quiet eyes, hands that show years of labor and compromise. He looks up from peeling an orange.

GAREGIN

School?

ARAM

I went.

A beat.

MARIAM

Don't lie with that face. It's too honest. You'll get killed.

Garegin smirks, but it doesn't reach his eyes.

Aram pulls the extra bill from his pocket. Slides it under a plate toward his mother.

Mariam freezes.

Slowly, she lifts the plate. Sees the money.

Her eyes go to Aram. Not angry yet – worse: afraid.

MARIAM (CONT'D)
Where did you get this?

Aram keeps his voice even.

ARAM
Work.

MARIAM
What “work?”

Garegin stops peeling the orange. He knows this moment.

Aram glances at his father, then back to his mother.

ARAM
Delivering bread.

Mariam lets out a laugh – sharp and humorless.

MARIAM
Delivering bread. Like you’re a bakery.

ARAM
Bread is important.

MARIAM
So is not dying.

She looks at Garegin.

MARIAM (CONT'D)
Tell him.

Garegin sets the orange down carefully, like he might need his hands clean.

GAREGIN

Aram... your uncle's world is not a game.

ARAM

It's not a game. It's... real.

Mariam's eyes flash.

MARIAM

You think real means good?

Aram doesn't answer. His silence is an answer.

Garegin's phone BUZZES on the table. Old model. He looks at it like it's a snake.

He doesn't pick it up.

Mariam does.

She reads the screen. Her face changes. She hands it to Garegin.

Garegin reads. His jaw tightens.

ARAM

What?

Garegin forces calm.

GAREGIN

Nothing.

Aram watches him. The boy is learning: "nothing" in this house means "something dangerous."

EXT. YEREVAN STREET - AFTERNOON

Aram walks with a backpack, headed toward school now - late, but moving like it matters.

He passes a wall covered in faded posters: missing persons, political slogans, a concert that never happened.

A BLACK LADA rolls slowly behind him.

Aram notices. Doesn't look scared – just aware.

The Lada pulls up alongside.

The window comes down.

Inside: UNCLE VARTAN, smiling too big for the moment.

UNCLE VARTAN
Professor! Get in. I'll take you.

Aram hesitates.

ARAM
I'm going to school.

UNCLE VARTAN
Today you're going to learn
something school doesn't teach.

Aram looks at the street ahead. Then at Vartan.

He opens the door.

INT. LADA - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Aram sits. The seat smells like cigarettes and expensive cologne.

Vartan drives with one hand, relaxed. The city passes like a memory.

ARAM
My mother's going to murder you.

UNCLE VARTAN
She can try. Your mother scares me
more than police.

A beat.

Vartan's tone shifts – quiet.

UNCLE VARTAN (CONT'D)
Listen to me. From now on, you
don't take money from anyone you
don't know.

ARAM
He knows me.

UNCLE VARTAN
He knows your face. Not your name.

Aram watches him.

ARAM
Why?

Vartan glances in the rearview. A second car far behind.

UNCLE VARTAN
Because people are asking
questions.

ARAM
About you?

Vartan smiles without humor.

UNCLE VARTAN
About everyone.

They turn into an industrial area. Half-abandoned warehouses.
A place where sounds travel and nobody calls the police.

EXT. WAREHOUSE YARD - AFTERNOON

The Lada pulls in.

A few MEN stand around. They don't look like workers. They
look like decisions.

One man steps forward - ARTUR, 30s, sleek, new money, sharp
suit in a place that doesn't deserve suits.

He smiles at Vartan like a knife smiling at another knife.

ARTUR
Vartan jan. Always busy.

UNCLE VARTAN
Artur jan. Always pretending you're
important.

Artur's eyes drop to Aram.

ARTUR
Who's this?

Vartan's hand rests lightly on Aram's shoulder – a claim.

UNCLE VARTAN
My nephew. He's smarter than you,
so don't talk to him too long.

Artur chuckles, but his eyes don't.

ARTUR
We need to talk. Privately.

Vartan nods. To Aram:

UNCLE VARTAN
Stay here. Don't move. If anyone
offers you soda, say no. It's never
just soda.

Aram stands by the Lada as Vartan and Artur walk toward the warehouse.

Aram watches. Studies. The boy is cataloging faces.

Two men nearby whisper, glance at Aram, then away.

A THIRD MAN, older, scar on his cheek, steps close enough to be heard.

SCARRED MAN
You're Vartan's blood?

Aram keeps his voice neutral.

ARAM
Yes.

Scarred Man smiles, almost kind.

SCARRED MAN
Then you'll learn early: blood is
expensive.

Aram doesn't flinch.

ARAM
Everything is expensive.

Scarred Man's smile widens. He likes him.

From inside the warehouse, RAISED VOICES.

Not yelling yet. But heat.

Aram hears his uncle's voice – controlled. Then Artur's – slick and sharp.

A LOUD METAL CLANG. Something hits something.

Aram's posture changes. He takes a half-step toward the warehouse.

Scarred Man blocks him with an arm like a gate.

SCARRED MAN
No.

Aram stares at the warehouse door.

Another voice joins – someone else. Not Vartan. Not Artur.

Then – silence.

The kind that has weight.

The warehouse door opens.

Vartan steps out first. His face is calm, but his eyes are not.

Behind him, Artur follows – still smiling, but it's thinner now.

Vartan looks at Aram, and for the first time, his warmth is gone.

UNCLE VARTAN
Get in the car.

Aram obeys.

INT. LADA - MOVING - MOMENTS LATER

They drive fast. No music. No jokes.

Aram watches his uncle's hands on the wheel - steady, but tight.

ARAM
What happened?

Vartan doesn't answer right away.

He checks mirrors again. The second car is closer now.

ARAM (CONT'D)
Uncle-

UNCLE VARTAN
Aram.

The way he says his name shuts the boy up.

A beat.

UNCLE VARTAN (CONT'D)
You want to be in my world?

Aram hesitates, then nods.

Vartan's eyes stay on the road.

UNCLE VARTAN (CONT'D)
Then learn the first rule.

Aram waits.

UNCLE VARTAN (CONT'D)
Sometimes... you pay for things you
didn't buy.

Aram swallows. He understands enough to be afraid, but not enough to run.

Vartan turns onto a narrow street lined with stone walls and old trees.

Up ahead - POLICE LIGHTS.

Vartan's foot eases off the gas. His face becomes neutral.

ARAM

Police.

Vartan exhales once, controlled.

UNCLE VARTAN

Yes.

Aram's eyes widen.

ARAM

Are they for you?

Vartan's jaw sets.

UNCLE VARTAN

No.

He glances at Aram, and the look is not comfort.

It's calculation.

UNCLE VARTAN (CONT'D)

They're for something... close to
you.

The police lights get brighter as they approach.

Aram looks ahead, heart pounding.

We don't yet know what's waiting.

But we know it's the moment his life turns.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. POLICE ROADBLOCK - CONTINUOUS

A uniformed OFFICER steps into the lane, raises a hand.

Vartan slows.

Aram stares at the officer, then at his uncle.

Vartan gives a small, almost imperceptible nod - to himself.

Like a man who just realized the game has moved.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. POLICE ROADBLOCK - CONTINUOUS

The OFFICER leans toward the driver's window. Mid-30s. Tired eyes. A man who's seen enough to stop being curious.

OFFICER
Documents.

Vartan hands them over calmly. Too calmly.

Aram watches everything - the officer's hands, his uncle's breathing, the second police car idling behind them.

The officer flips through the papers.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
This car belongs to you?

UNCLE VARTAN
Belongs is a strong word. I'm
borrowing it from fate.

The officer doesn't smile.

He glances into the back seat. Locks eyes with Aram.

OFFICER
School's out early?

ARAM
I'm late.

A beat.

The officer hands the papers back.

OFFICER
Step out of the vehicle.

Vartan does. Smooth. Unhurried.

Aram starts to open his door.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
Not you. Sit.

The door closes again. Aram stays still, but his hands curl into fists.

EXT. ROADBLOCK - CONTINUOUS

Vartan stands with the officer. Another OFFICER approaches, whispering something.

The first officer nods.

OFFICER
We have questions about an incident
this morning.

UNCLE VARTAN
I had many incidents this morning.
Which one is popular today?

The officer doesn't bite.

OFFICER
There was a man found behind the
warehouses. Dead.

Aram's breath catches - just a little.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
Witness says you were there.

Vartan tilts his head.

UNCLE VARTAN
Witnesses say many things. That's
why God invented proof.

The officer studies him.

OFFICER
The witness didn't say you killed
him.

A beat.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
He said the boy did.

Aram's stomach drops.

UNCLE VARTAN
Which boy?

The officer looks past Vartan – straight at Aram in the car.

OFFICER
That one.

Silence.

Vartan's face doesn't change, but something behind his eyes breaks.

UNCLE VARTAN
He's twelve.

OFFICER
He was there.

UNCLE VARTAN
So was I.

OFFICER
You're not the one the witness is
afraid of.

That lands.

Vartan turns slowly, looks at Aram through the windshield.

A look passes between them – not panic, not fear.

Understanding.

Vartan turns back.

UNCLE VARTAN
You're making a mistake.

OFFICER
I make mistakes when I rush. Today
I'm being careful.

He nods to the second officer.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
Bring the boy out.

INT. LADA - CONTINUOUS

The door opens.

Aram looks up at the officer. He doesn't cry. Doesn't argue.

He steps out.

EXT. ROADBLOCK - CONTINUOUS

The officer crouches to Aram's level.

OFFICER
You were at the warehouse today?

Aram glances at Vartan. Vartan gives a tiny shake of his head.

ARAM
I was in the car.

OFFICER
Did you see anything happen?

Aram thinks. Chooses words carefully.

ARAM
I saw men talking.

OFFICER
And then?

ARAM
Then they stopped talking.

The officer exhales.

OFFICER
Did you hurt anyone?

Aram meets his eyes.

ARAM
No.

The officer studies him – a boy too composed for his age.
He stands.

OFFICER
He's coming with us.

Mariam's voice ECHOES faintly in Aram's head:
Don't lie with that face. It's too honest.
Vartan steps forward.

UNCLE VARTAN
If you take him, you take me.

OFFICER
We're not looking for you.

UNCLE VARTAN
You should be.

The officer pauses – just a crack of doubt.
Then:

OFFICER
Put the boy in the car.

The second officer opens the back door of the police car.
Aram turns to Vartan.

ARAM
Uncle–

Vartan kneels in front of him. Puts his hands on Aram's shoulders.

For the first time, his voice shakes – barely.

UNCLE VARTAN
Listen to me. Say nothing. No
matter what they say.

ARAM
I didn't do anything.

UNCLE VARTAN
I know.

A beat.

UNCLE VARTAN (CONT'D)
Sometimes truth is a luxury. Today,
silence is survival.

The officer clears his throat.

OFFICER
Let's go.

Vartan squeezes Aram's shoulders once more – firm, final.

UNCLE VARTAN
Remember what I taught you.

Aram nods, swallowing hard.

The police door closes.

INT. POLICE CAR - MOVING - MOMENTS LATER

Aram sits alone in the back seat.

The city moves past the window like it's abandoning him.

Sirens OFF. No urgency. That's worse.

EXT. POLICE STATION - AFTERNOON

A concrete building with peeling paint and a flag that's seen
better days.

Aram is led inside.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - LATER

Small room. One table. Two chairs. A flickering fluorescent light.

Aram sits alone.

The door opens.

A DIFFERENT OFFICER enters – older, softer eyes. CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN, 50s.

He closes the door gently.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
Do you know why you're here?

Aram shrugs.

ARAM
Because someone lied.

Hakobyan sits.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
That's one version.

ARAM
It's the correct one.

Hakobyan almost smiles.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
You're not afraid.

ARAM
I am. I just don't know what it helps.

Hakobyan studies him – impressed despite himself.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
The man at the warehouse... he was killed with a metal rod.

Aram flinches – just once.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN (CONT'D)
The witness says you picked it up.

ARAM
I didn't.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
Why would he say you did?

Aram thinks.

ARAM
Because if he says my uncle did it,
he dies.

Hakobyan leans back. That lands hard.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
And if he says you did?

ARAM
I'm a child.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
Children go to prison too.

A beat.

ARAM
Not forever.

Hakobyan sighs. Rubs his face.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
You're smarter than you should be.

ARAM
That's what my uncle says.

Hakobyan stiffens.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
Your uncle is a problem.

ARAM
He's family.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
Family is how problems survive.

He slides a PHOTO across the table.

The DEAD MAN. Face swollen. Eyes frozen.

Aram looks – forces himself not to look away.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN (CONT'D)
Did you do this?

Aram shakes his head.

ARAM
No.

Hakobyan watches closely. Believes him.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
Someone wants you to take the
blame.

ARAM
I know.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
If you do, this ends quickly.

Aram looks up.

ARAM
And my family?

Hakobyan hesitates.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
They'll be... safe.

Aram hears the lie immediately.

ARAM
You don't know that.

Hakobyan doesn't answer.

INT. KAZANJIAN APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mariam paces like a caged animal.

Garegin sits at the table, hands folded, staring at nothing.

The phone rings.

Mariam snatches it.

MARIAM

Yes?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. POLICE STATION HALLWAY - NIGHT

Vartan on the phone, face tight.

UNCLE VARTAN

They have him.

Mariam's breath catches.

MARIAM

What do you mean they have him?

UNCLE VARTAN

They want him to carry it.

MARIAM

Over my dead body.

UNCLE VARTAN

That can be arranged if you don't listen.

She freezes.

UNCLE VARTAN (CONT'D)

I'm working on it.

MARIAM

You fix this.

UNCLE VARTAN

I will.

MARIAM
Or I will bury you myself.

She hangs up.

Garegin looks up.

GAREGIN
What?

Mariam's eyes burn.

MARIAM
Our son is paying for men who are
afraid to die.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

Aram sits alone again.

The light flickers.

The door opens.

Artur steps in.

No suit now. Casual. Dangerous.

ARTUR
Hello, professor.

Aram stiffens.

ARAM
You're not police.

ARTUR
No. I'm the reason this room
exists.

He pulls up a chair.

ARTUR (CONT'D)
You were never supposed to be
there.

ARAM
Neither were you.

Artur smiles.

ARTUR
Smart mouth. Runs in the family.

ARAM
Why am I here?

Artur leans in.

ARTUR
Because your uncle embarrassed me.

ARAM
So you kill someone?

ARTUR
No. I let someone die.

A beat.

ARTUR (CONT'D)
And now you take the fall. Or your
family takes turns.

Aram's heart pounds, but his face stays still.

ARAM
I didn't do it.

ARTUR
Truth is flexible.

Aram stares at him – really looks.

ARAM
You're afraid of my uncle.

Artur's smile tightens.

ARTUR
I'm afraid of what he won't do.

ARAM
Then why not blame him?

Artur leans back.

ARTUR
Because legends survive prison.
Boys don't.

He stands.

ARTUR (CONT'D)
Sleep on it. Morning comes fast.

He exits.

The door slams.

Aram sits in the flickering light.

Twelve years old.

Alone.

Understanding something permanent:

In this world, innocence is just bad timing.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

The fluorescent light BUZZES. Flickers. Settles.

Aram sits alone, staring at the metal table like it might give advice.

The door opens.

MARIAM enters.

She looks smaller in this room - but sharper. A blade wrapped in a scarf.

Aram stands instinctively.

ARAM

Mama—

She crosses the room and grips his face in both hands.

Inspects him. Eyes. Mouth. Neck.

MARIAM

Did they touch you?

ARAM

No.

She exhales — relief mixed with fury.

She pulls him into a tight hug. Doesn't cry. She's beyond that.

The door closes behind her.

MARIAM

Listen to me carefully.

ARAM

I didn't do anything.

MARIAM

I know.

She sits him down. Takes the chair opposite him.

MARIAM (CONT'D)

They want you to say you did.

ARAM

Yes.

MARIAM

You will not.

ARAM

Artur said—

She SLAMS her hand on the table.

MARIAM

I don't care what that snake said.

Aram flinches – not from fear, from recognition. She knows more than she should.

MARIAM (CONT'D)
You say nothing. Not yes. Not no.
You say you want your mother.

ARAM
You're here.

MARIAM
Then you say you want a lawyer.

ARAM
We don't have money for–

MARIAM
We will sell the refrigerator.

ARAM
Mama–

MARIAM
Silence.

A beat.

She softens – just a crack.

MARIAM (CONT'D)
You think I raised you to confess
to something you didn't do?

Aram shakes his head.

MARIAM (CONT'D)
Good.

The door opens again.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN enters, polite but firm.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
Time's up.

Mariam stands, squared shoulders.

MARIAM
He's a child.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
He's accused of murder.

MARIAM
By liars.

Hakobyan doesn't argue.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
He'll be transferred tomorrow.

That lands like a punch.

MARIAM
Transferred where?

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
Juvenile facility.

Aram's eyes flick to his mother.

ARAM
Mama—

She turns to him. Kneels. Presses her forehead to his.

MARIAM
Whatever happens... remember who you
are.

ARAM
I'm your son.

She smiles — sad, proud.

MARIAM
And that is why you survive.

Hakobyan clears his throat.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
Mrs. Kazanjian.

She stands. Looks at him.

MARIAM
If anything happens to him-

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
I know.

He escorts her out.

The door closes.

Aram sits alone again.

INT. POLICE HOLDING CELL - LATER THAT NIGHT

A small cell. Concrete bench. One dim bulb.

Aram sits, hugging his knees.

A TEENAGE BOY, 15, bruised knuckles, sits across from him.

TEEN
What you in for?

Aram doesn't answer.

TEEN (CONT'D)
That bad?

Aram nods once.

TEEN (CONT'D)
My cousin stabbed a guy. I took the
knife. Thought it made me loyal.

Aram looks up.

ARAM
Did it?

The teen shrugs.

TEEN
It made me stupid.

They sit in silence.

The teen studies Aram.

TEEN (CONT'D)
You don't belong here.

ARAM
Nobody belongs anywhere.

The teen considers that.

TEEN
You talk like an old man.

ARAM
I listen like one.

A GUARD passes. Keys jangle.

GUARD
Kazanjian.

Aram stands.

EXT. POLICE YARD - DAWN

Cold morning. Pale light.

Aram is escorted toward a transport van.

Vartan stands nearby, hands in his coat pockets, face unreadable.

Aram spots him.

ARAM
Uncle!

Vartan steps forward - stops when a GUARD blocks him.

UNCLE VARTAN
He's my nephew.

GUARD
He's evidence.

Vartan's jaw tightens.

Their eyes meet.

UNCLE VARTAN
Look at me.

Aram does.

UNCLE VARTAN (CONT'D)
This is not the end.

ARAM
I know.

UNCLE VARTAN
Good.

The guard pushes Aram forward.

The van door opens.

Before Aram climbs in—

Vartan speaks quietly, deadly calm.

UNCLE VARTAN (CONT'D)
Remember the second rule.

Aram hesitates.

ARAM
What's the second rule?

Vartan's eyes never leave him.

UNCLE VARTAN
Never let anyone decide who you
are.

The door SLAMS.

INT. TRANSPORT VAN - MOVING - MORNING

Aram sits alone, shackled loosely.

The city pulls away.

Mount Ararat fades behind buildings.

A tear slides down his face — he wipes it away angrily.

INT. JUVENILE FACILITY - DAY

Iron doors. Echoing halls.

Aram is processed. Fingerprinted. Numbered.

A CLERK hands him a uniform.

CLERK

Change.

INT. JUVENILE CELL - DAY

Small. Cold. A narrow bed.

Aram sits on it, holding the uniform.

He looks around.

This is real.

EXT. JUVENILE YARD - DAYS LATER

A bleak yard surrounded by walls.

Boys in small clusters. Watching. Measuring.

Aram steps out.

Eyes follow him.

A BIGGER BOY, 16, scars on his hands, approaches.

BIG BOY

New.

Aram nods.

BIG BOY (CONT'D)

What you do?

Aram thinks.

ARAM

Nothing.

The big boy laughs.

BIG BOY
Everyone here did nothing.

ARAM
Then why are you angry?

The big boy's smile fades.

BIG BOY
Careful.

ARAM
I am.

The big boy studies him – then walks away.

Aram exhales.

INT. VISITATION ROOM - DAY

Glass divider.

Mariam sits on one side. Aram on the other.

They pick up phones.

MARIAM
They're pushing it forward.

ARAM
I know.

MARIAM
Your uncle says–

ARAM
I know what he says.

She leans in.

MARIAM
What do *you* say?

Aram looks at her – the boy is gone now. Something sharper looks back.

ARAM
I say I'm not dying for someone
else's fear.

Mariam's breath catches.

MARIAM
What does that mean?

ARAM
It means I'll survive.

A beat.

MARIAM
At what cost?

Aram looks past her – at the guards, the glass, the world.

ARAM
I don't know yet.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Aram sits again at the table.

Captain Hakobyan enters, tired.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
The witness signed a statement.

Aram says nothing.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN (CONT'D)
You confess, you get ten years.
Juvenile. You're out by twenty-two.

Aram looks up.

ARAM
And if I don't?

Hakobyan hesitates.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
Then someone else might confess for
you. With your name.

Aram considers this.

ARAM
You believe me.

Hakobyan meets his eyes.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
Yes.

ARAM
Then why are we talking?

Hakobyan exhales, defeated.

CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
Because belief doesn't change
systems.

Aram nods.

ARAM
Then systems will learn me.

Hakobyan stiffens. That line stays with him.

INT. JUVENILE CELL - NIGHT

Aram lies on his bed, staring at the ceiling.

He closes his eyes.

We hear Vartan's voice in his head.

UNCLE VARTAN (V.O.)
Sometimes you pay for things you
didn't buy.

Aram opens his eyes.

Something has shifted.

He is no longer just surviving.

He is adapting.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. JUVENILE FACILITY - NIGHT

A thin moonlight slices through barred windows.

Aram lies awake. Counting breaths. Counting seconds. Counting exits that don't exist.

Down the hall - SHOUTING. A scuffle. Guards rush past.

Aram sits up. Listens.

A scream cuts short.

Silence again.

He lies back, eyes open.

This place teaches fast.

EXT. JUVENILE YARD - DAY

A gray afternoon. Cold wind.

Aram sits alone on a bench, reading a battered schoolbook he doesn't need.

The BIG BOY from before approaches again - HOVIK, 16. He's bruised now. Respectable bruises.

HOVIK
You don't fight.

ARAM
I don't need to.

HOVIK
Everyone needs to.

Aram closes the book.

ARAM
You fight so they see you. I wait
so they forget me.

Hovik studies him.

HOVIK
That's stupid.

ARAM
It's quieter.

A beat.

HOVIK
You really didn't do it?

Aram looks out at the wall.

ARAM
No.

HOVIK
Then why are you here?

ARAM
Because someone decided I was
useful.

Hovik sits beside him.

HOVIK
My brother's in real prison. He
says the worst thing isn't
violence.

ARAM
What is?

HOVIK
Knowing who put you there.

Aram nods. He already knows the answer.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Small. Cracked wood. Soviet-era seal hanging crooked.

Aram sits between a PUBLIC DEFENDER and his parents.
Mariam grips a rosary so hard it bites into her palm.
Vartan sits three rows back. Still. Watching everything.
The PROSECUTOR speaks – bored, rehearsed.

PROSECUTOR
The defendant was present at the
scene. The witness identified him.

A MAN stands to testify – the WITNESS. Eyes darting. Hands shaking.

PROSECUTOR (CONT'D)
You saw the boy strike the victim?

The witness hesitates. Looks toward the back of the room.
Artur sits there. Calm. Invisible threat.

WITNESS
Yes.

Mariam gasps.

MARIAM
Liar!

The JUDGE bangs the gavel.

JUDGE
Order!

Aram watches the witness – sees the fear, the calculation.
This isn't about truth.
This is about survival.

INT. COURTROOM – LATER

Hakobyan sits in the back now, off-duty. No uniform. Just a man.

He watches Aram closely.

The DEFENSE speaks – weak, rushed.

DEFENSE

The accused is a minor. No physical
evidence connects him–

JUDGE

Enough.

The judge looks down at Aram.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Do you understand the charges?

Aram stands.

ARAM

Yes.

JUDGE

Do you confess?

The room holds its breath.

Mariam shakes her head desperately.

Vartan stares, unreadable.

Artur smiles – just a little.

Aram looks at the judge.

ARAM

No.

A murmur ripples through the room.

The judge frowns.

JUDGE

Then we proceed.

INT. HOLDING ROOM – MOMENTS LATER

Mariam clutches Aram, whispering prayers.

Garegin stands nearby, hollow.

Vartan approaches.

 UNCLE VARTAN
They'll bury him.

 MARIAM
You fix this!

 UNCLE VARTAN
I tried.

 MARIAM
Try harder!

Vartan lowers his voice.

 UNCLE VARTAN
There's another way.

Mariam looks up.

 MARIAM
Speak.

 UNCLE VARTAN
He leaves.

 GAREGIN
Leaves where?

 UNCLE VARTAN
Anywhere that isn't here.

Mariam stiffens.

 MARIAM
He's twelve.

 UNCLE VARTAN
He'll be dead at twenty if he
stays.

A long beat.

Aram listens. Silent.

 ARAM
I won't run.

Vartan turns to him.

 UNCLE VARTAN
This isn't running. This is
surviving.

 ARAM
I didn't do anything wrong.

 UNCLE VARTAN
That's why you have to go.

INT. POLICE HALLWAY - NIGHT

Hakobyan corners Vartan.

 CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
You're moving him.

 UNCLE VARTAN
You don't know that.

 CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
I know everything five minutes too
late.

 UNCLE VARTAN
Then be late again.

Hakobyan grabs his arm.

 CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
If he disappears, they'll say he's
guilty.

 UNCLE VARTAN
They already say that.

Hakobyan lets go.

 CAPTAIN HAKOBYAN
If he stays... he won't make it.

Vartan nods once.

 UNCLE VARTAN
I know.

INT. KAZANJIAN APARTMENT - NIGHT

Suitcases on the bed.

Mariam folds clothes mechanically. Tears drip onto fabric.

Garegin stands in the doorway, broken.

Aram watches it all.

ARAM
How long?

Mariam doesn't look up.

MARIAM
As long as God allows.

ARAM
Where?

She stops folding.

MARIAM
America.

Aram absorbs the word.

ARAM
I don't know anyone there.

MARIAM
You will.

ARAM
When will I come back?

She finally looks at him.

MARIAM
When this country forgets your
name.

That hurts more than any prison.

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Vartan and Aram descend quietly.

UNCLE VARTAN
You leave before dawn.

ARAM
Will they stop me?

UNCLE VARTAN
Not if you're invisible.

They stop at the bottom.

Vartan hands him a small piece of paper.

UNCLE VARTAN (CONT'D)
Names. Numbers. People who owe me.

ARAM
Why give this to me?

Vartan kneels - eye level.

UNCLE VARTAN
Because one day you'll understand
what it costs.

ARAM
And then?

UNCLE VARTAN
Then you'll decide who you become.

EXT. YEREVAN ROOFTOP - DAWN

Aram stands alone, overlooking the city.

Smoke rises. Bells ring. Life goes on without permission.

Mount Ararat glows faintly in the distance.

Mariam steps beside him. Wraps a coat around his shoulders.

MARIAM
Don't look back too long.

ARAM
I won't forget.

MARIAM
Forgetting is mercy. Remembering is
power.

She presses a small CROSS into his hand.

MARIAM (CONT'D)
This is not protection.

ARAM
What is it?

MARIAM
A reminder of who you were before
the world decided for you.

A CAR HORN sounds below.

Time.

Aram takes one last look at the city that made him.

ARAM
I'll come back.

Mariam holds him tight.

MARIAM
Come back alive.

EXT. YEREVAN STREET - DAWN

The car waits.

Vartan opens the door.

Aram gets in.

The engine starts.

As the car pulls away, POLICE SIRENS echo faintly - somewhere
else, too late.

Aram stares forward.

The boy is gone.

What's left is something unfinished.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

Blinding sun. Endless concrete. Planes roar like metal beasts.

Aram, now 25, steps out of the terminal.

Same eyes. Sharper. Quieter. A man who learned patience the hard way.

He carries one suitcase. Cheap. Functional.

He stops.

In front of him—

TWENTY ARMENIANS.

Uncles. Aunts. Cousins. Second cousins. A priest. Someone's neighbor who came "just in case."

Handwritten signs:

* ARAM!!!

* WELCOME HOME

* WELCOME TO AMERICA

* One that just says KAZANJIAN like a threat.

They erupt the second they see him.

AUNT #1

ARAM JAN!!!

COUSIN
He's too skinny!

UNCLE
That's America. No food.

They swarm him.

Hugs. Kisses. Everyone talking at once.

ARAM
I can't breathe—

AUNT #2
He forgot Armenian already!

Someone hands him a coffee the size of a bucket.

COUSIN
Drink. You look tired.

ARAM
I just flew fourteen hours.

COUSIN
Exactly. Drink.

Nearby, a TSA AGENT watches the chaos nervously.

TSA AGENT
Sir... are these all with you?

UNCLE
Unfortunately.

The TSA agent backs off.

EXT. LAX PARKING STRUCTURE - DAY

They march toward a line of CARS.

Arguing immediately.

UNCLE #2
He rides with me.

AUNT #1
No, with us. We have food.

COUSIN
My car has air conditioning!

UNCLE #2
Your car smells like divorce.

Aram watches, amused despite himself.

A LARGE MAN steps forward – LEVON, 50s. Calm. Clean-cut.
Quiet authority.

LEVON
Enough.

Silence.

LEVON (CONT'D)
Aram rides with me.

No one argues.

Aram clocks that instantly.

EXT. FREEWAY – DAY

Aram rides shotgun in Levon's car.

Los Angeles stretches endlessly. Concrete rivers. Endless lanes.

ARAM
How many people live here?

LEVON
Too many to count. That's why it works.

ARAM
What works?

Levon glances at him.

LEVON
Everything that shouldn't.

A beat.

LEVON (CONT'D)
Your uncle sent word.

ARAM
He's alive?

LEVON
Alive is a flexible term.

Aram nods. Doesn't push.

EXT. GLENDALE - DAY

They exit into GLENDALE.

Armenian signs everywhere. Bakeries. Jewelry stores. Clinics.

It feels like home wearing American clothes.

ARAM
It's... loud.

LEVON
This is quiet.

EXT. FAMILY HOUSE - DAY

A modest house. Too many cars outside.

The door FLIES open before they knock.

More relatives.

AUNT #3
Shoes off!

UNCLE #3
Eat first, then talk.

INT. FAMILY HOUSE - DAY

Chaos.

Food everywhere. Too much food.

Someone's already pouring brandy.

Aram sits at the table, overwhelmed.

AUNT #1
You'll stay here.

UNCLE
No, with me.

COUSIN
I have a couch.

Levon raises a hand.

LEVON
He stays with me.

Again - no argument.

Aram notes it.

INT. LEVON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Clean. Minimal. Orderly.

Aram sets his suitcase down.

ARAM
Thank you.

LEVON
You don't thank family.

He hands Aram a phone.

LEVON (CONT'D)
American number.

ARAM
I didn't ask for-

LEVON
You didn't ask for most things.

A beat.

LEVON (CONT'D)
Tomorrow, you rest.

ARAM
And then?

Levon looks at him.

LEVON
Then you learn how crime works
here.

INT. STRIP MALL OFFICE - DAY

A nondescript office. Fake plants. Cheap art.

Inside - FRAUD.

Rows of young men and women on computers. Phones. Scripts
taped to desks.

Aram stands at the doorway, observing.

ARAM
This is it?

LEVON
This is the bottom.

A MAN approaches - MIGO, 30s. Loud. Confident. Americanized.

MIGO
New guy?

LEVON
Family.

Migo clocks Aram.

MIGO
What's your skill?

ARAM
Listening.

Migo laughs.

MIGO
He'll learn.

INT. FRAUD FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Aram walks between desks.

He listens.

Scripts are bad. Too obvious. Too loud.

CALLER
Yes sir, your Social Security is
compromised-

CLICK.

CALLER
Son of a-

Aram stops.

ARAM
Why do you lie so much?

The caller looks at him.

CALLER
That's the job.

ARAM
No. That's why they hang up.

Migo steps in.

MIGO
Relax, professor.

Aram turns to Levon.

ARAM
Americans don't respond to fear.

LEVON
What do they respond to?

Aram thinks.

ARAM
Convenience. Authority. Laziness.

Levon watches him closely.

LEVON
Show us.

INT. TRAINING ROOM - LATER

Aram rewrites a script.

Cleaner. Polite. Professional.

ARAM
You're not stealing. You're helping
them fix a problem they don't
understand.

CALLER
And if they ask questions?

ARAM
Then you answer the one they're
afraid to ask.

The caller tries again.

CALLER (INTO PHONE)
Hi, this is Daniel from account
services. I'm calling to make sure
nothing interrupts your day-

The VICTIM listens.

Aram nods.

ARAM
That's better.

ARAM
Systems always have blind spots.

Aram looks down at the city.

ARAM (CONT'D)
You just have to stand where they
aren't looking.

Levon studies him - sees it now.

Not a soldier.

A strategist.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. FRAUD OFFICE - MORNING

The room hums louder now. Confidence has entered the building.

Aram stands behind a CALLER, listening. He gestures calmly.

ARAM
Slower. Let them interrupt you.

CALLER
Why?

ARAM
People trust their own voice more
than yours.

The caller nods, adjusts.

Across the room, Migo watches - irritated.

MIGO
We been doing this five years.

ARAM
And you're still chasing them.

Migo bristles.

MIGO
You saying we're bad?

Aram meets his eyes.

ARAM
I'm saying you're loud.

Levon steps in before it escalates.

LEVON
Enough. Numbers talk.

He holds up a tablet.

Conversion rates are UP. Wire transfers UP.

Migo goes quiet.

INT. BACK OFFICE - DAY

Aram and Levon sit at a small table.

LEVON
We can scale this.

ARAM
Not like this.

LEVON
Explain.

Aram pulls out a pen. Draws boxes. Lines.

ARAM
Too many mouths. Too much noise.
Everyone touches the money.

LEVON
That's business.

ARAM
That's exposure.

Levon studies the diagram.

ARAM (CONT'D)
Separate labor from knowledge.
Callers don't know where money
goes. Runners don't know who calls.
Nobody knows everything.

A beat.

LEVON
And you?

Aram doesn't answer immediately.

ARAM
I design the maze.

Levon leans back. Smiles slightly.

LEVON
Your uncle would've liked this.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Late-night Armenian diner. Neon flickers.

Aram sits across from ANI, 20s. Smart. Warm. Eyes that
question things.

ANI
You disappeared for a decade.

ARAM
Time moves differently when you're
not allowed to exist.

She smiles - intrigued, not scared.

ANI
And now?

ARAM
Now I'm learning how America lies
to itself.

ANI
Sounds romantic.

ARAM
It's efficient.

They laugh.

A genuine moment.

EXT. DINER PARKING LOT - NIGHT

They stand awkwardly.

ANI
You always talk like you're
leaving.

ARAM
I always am.

ANI
Maybe try staying.

That lands.

INT. FRAUD OFFICE - DAY

New desks. New faces.

Aram addresses a small group.

ARAM
Rule one: You don't rush Americans.
They rush themselves.

CALLER
What if they say no?

ARAM
They didn't say no. They said "not
yet."

Levon watches proudly.

Migo watches resentfully.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Migo corners Aram.

MIGO
You moving too fast.

ARAM
I'm moving correctly.

MIGO
This was my thing.

ARAM
Then you should've protected it.

Migo steps closer.

MIGO
You think Levon won't notice you
cutting me out?

Aram stays calm.

ARAM
He already has.

Migo stares at him - realizes he's lost.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Aram and Ani sit, city below.

ANI
What do you really do?

Aram considers lying.

Doesn't.

ARAM
I build systems people don't see.

ANI
Legal?

A beat.

ARAM
Useful.

She studies him.

ANI
You're dangerous.

ARAM
Only to people who don't listen.

She kisses him.

INT. FRAUD OFFICE - DAY - MONTAGE

- New locations open
- Money routed through layers
- Burner phones destroyed daily
- Aram never touches cash

INT. LEVON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Levon pours brandy.

LEVON
We're pulling eight figures.

ARAM
Then it's time to decentralize.

LEVON
Already?

ARAM
Success is when people start
watching.

Levon nods - trusts him now.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - DAY

A wall of photos. Charts.

Agents study patterns.

AGENT
It's clean. Too clean.

SUPERVISOR
That means someone smart.

EXT. GLENDALE STREET - DAY

Aram walks with Ani.

ANI
My mother asks about you.

ARAM
That's dangerous.

ANI
She likes dangerous.

A beat.

ANI (CONT'D)
She wants to meet you.

Aram stops walking.

ARAM
No.

ANI
Why?

ARAM
Because people like me don't meet
parents. We ruin things.

She looks at him - hurt.

ANI
Or you just don't want to be known.

That hits harder than threats.

INT. FRAUD OFFICE - NIGHT

Migo packs his desk angrily.

Aram watches.

MIGO
You think you're untouchable.

ARAM
No.

MIGO
Then what?

ARAM
I think I'm replaceable.

Migo scoffs.

MIGO
That's worse.

He leaves.

INT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Aram stands alone.

Phone BUZZES.

A number he hasn't seen in years.

He answers.

ARAM
Yes?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. DARK ROOM - UNKNOWN LOCATION

UNCLE VARTAN, older now. Worn. Still dangerous.

UNCLE VARTAN
You're doing well.

Aram closes his eyes.

ARAM
You're alive.

UNCLE VARTAN
Alive enough.

A beat.

UNCLE VARTAN (CONT'D)
Be careful. When money gets quiet,
guns get loud.

ARAM
I'm not like you.

Vartan smiles sadly.

UNCLE VARTAN
Neither was I.

The line goes dead.

Aram stares at the city.

He's built something big.

And big things cast shadows.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. FRAUD HUB - NEW LOCATION - NIGHT

Not a strip mall anymore.

A clean, anonymous OFFICE FLOOR downtown. Badge access.
Frosted glass. Quiet money.

Aram walks through it like an architect inspecting a finished cathedral.

Phones ring softly. No shouting. No chaos.

This is professional crime.

Levon walks beside him.

LEVON
Glendale was training wheels.

ARAM
Glendale was camouflage.

They stop at a glass-walled room.

Inside: OPERATORS monitoring dashboards. Wire flows. Risk metrics.

LEVON
We're invisible.

Aram watches the numbers.

ARAM
For now.

INT. OPERATIONS ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A young OPERATOR raises a hand.

OPERATOR
We're seeing banks flag faster in Texas.

Aram steps in.

ARAM
That means they trained an algorithm. Which one?

OPERATOR
Chase and Wells.

ARAM
Then shift script language. Remove
urgency words. Add uncertainty.

OPERATOR
Like...?

ARAM
"May," "possible," "review."

The operator nods, types.

ARAM (CONT'D)
Fear trips alarms. Politeness
passes.

Levon watches – impressed, unsettled.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - DAY

Whiteboard filled with arrows.

Photos of prepaid cards. Shell companies. IP ranges.

AGENT RUIZ, 40s, sharp, relentless, studies the board.

AGENT RUIZ
Whoever this is, they're not
greedy.

ANALYST
They're pulling millions.

AGENT RUIZ
Exactly. They could pull more.

Ruiz taps a photo of a CLOSED OFFICE.

AGENT RUIZ (CONT'D)
They move before pressure.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Upscale Armenian restaurant. Warm lighting.

Aram and Ani sit across from each other.

ANI
You're never late.

ARAM
I'm rarely early.

ANI
You disappeared again.

ARAM
Work.

ANI
You say that like it's a country.

A beat.

ANI (CONT'D)
I want something normal.

Aram stiffens.

ARAM
Normal is a myth.

ANI
So is safety. People still try.

She reaches for his hand.

He hesitates – then lets her.

ANI (CONT'D)
Meet my mother.

Silence.

ARAM
If I do that... I lie to her.

ANI
You lie to everyone.

ARAM
That's how they stay alive.

She pulls her hand back – hurt, angry.

ANI
You're already alone. You just
don't admit it yet.

She stands, leaves.

Aram stays seated.

Food untouched.

INT. FRAUD HUB - NIGHT

Emergency meeting.

Levon. Aram. Core operators.

OPERATOR
One of the Texas runners got picked
up.

LEVON
Names?

OPERATOR
None. He doesn't know anything.

Aram thinks.

ARAM
Shut down Texas. Burn it.

LEVON
That's five million a month.

ARAM
That's noise.

Levon nods.

LEVON
Do it.

INT. FBI INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

The RUNNER sits across from Agent Ruiz.

AGENT RUIZ
You're a mule.

RUNNER
I don't know who-

AGENT RUIZ
You don't know anything. That's
impressive.

She slides photos across.

AGENT RUIZ (CONT'D)
This is organized. International.
Armenian.

The runner flinches.

AGENT RUIZ (CONT'D)
They won't save you.

The runner stays silent.

INT. FRAUD HUB - DAY

Aram watches a live map.

Texas goes dark.

LEVON
You feel that?

ARAM
Relief.

LEVON
Most men feel loss.

ARAM
Loss means attachment.

Levon studies him.

LEVON
You ever think about stopping?

Aram doesn't answer.

EXT. GLENDALE STREET - DAY

Aram walks alone.

Passes old bakeries. Old men arguing over nothing.

This used to feel like home.

Now it feels small.

INT. ANI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ani packs a bag.

Aram stands in the doorway.

ARAM
You're leaving.

ANI
I'm choosing myself.

ARAM
I never stopped you.

ANI
You never stood with me.

That lands.

ANI (CONT'D)
I wanted a future. You want
control.

ARAM
Control is survival.

ANI
No. It's fear with a nice suit.

She walks past him.

Door closes.

Aram stands alone.

INT. FRAUD HUB - NIGHT

Levon pours drinks.

LEVON
Women come and go.

ARAM
Systems don't.

Levon raises an eyebrow.

LEVON
Careful. That's how men turn into legends instead of people.

Aram doesn't respond.

INT. MONTAGE - THE EMPIRE GROWS

- New hubs in New York, Miami, Chicago
- Call centers overseas
- Money routed through crypto, shell corps
- Aram never on camera
- Always two steps removed

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - NIGHT

Ruiz stares at a map.

AGENT RUIZ
He's not greedy. He's patient.

ANALYST
So what do we do?

Ruiz smiles grimly.

AGENT RUIZ
We wait for him to love something.

INT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Aram stands alone again.

City below. Endless.

Phone BUZZES.

A message from an unknown number.

UNKNOWN: She won't wait forever.

Aram deletes it.

He looks out at the city.

He's richer than he ever imagined.

More powerful than he ever wanted.

And completely alone.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. FRAUD HUB - EARLY MORNING

The office is quieter than usual.

Too quiet.

Aram walks in, senses it immediately.

ARAM

Why are people whispering?

Levon appears from a side office, jaw tight.

LEVON

Miami didn't check in.

Aram stops.

ARAM
When?

LEVON
Six hours ago.

Aram closes his eyes. Calculates.

ARAM
That's not a glitch.

INT. MIAMI SAFEHOUSE - NIGHT (FLASH CUT)

Door blown open.

Papers everywhere. Computers seized.

A single PHONE left on the table, screen cracked.

INT. FRAUD HUB - DAY

Aram gathers the core team.

ARAM
Miami is compromised.

Murmurs.

OPERATOR
FBI?

ARAM
Or someone pretending to be.

LEVON
We shut everything?

ARAM
No. We shift everything.

Aram moves to the whiteboard.

ARAM (CONT'D)
Miami was aggressive. High volume.
That attracts heat.

He draws a line through MIAMI.

ARAM (CONT'D)
We go colder. Smaller hits. Longer
cycles.

OPERATOR
That cuts revenue in half.

ARAM
Half is better than prison.

Levon watches him – sees the general, not the accountant.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - DAY

Ruiz listens to a report.

ANALYST
Miami went dark. New York reduced
volume. Chicago changed scripts.

Ruiz smiles.

AGENT RUIZ
He's adjusting.

ANALYST
Like he knows we're watching.

AGENT RUIZ
He always knows.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Aram eats alone.

Ani's empty chair across from him feels louder than a crowd.

A WAITRESS approaches.

WAITRESS
Someone called ahead. Paid for your
dinner.

ARAM

Who?

The waitress shrugs.

WAITRESS

Didn't say.

Aram stiffens.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Aram walks toward his car.

A MAN leans against it - ARTUR.

Older. Thicker. Still smiling like a blade.

ARTUR

America suits you.

Aram doesn't react.

ARAM

You shouldn't be here.

ARTUR

I go where money is.

ARAM

Then you're late.

Artur chuckles.

ARTUR

You took my lesson and built a school.

ARAM

You tried to kill me.

ARTUR

I tried to scare you.

ARAM

You failed.

A beat.

ARTUR
The FBI is closer than you think.

ARAM
They always are.

ARTUR
And your uncle?

Aram's eyes flicker – just once.

ARTUR (CONT'D)
Dead men don't warn their nephews.

That lands hard.

ARAM
What do you want?

Artur steps closer.

ARTUR
Partnership.

Aram laughs – the first time in a while.

ARAM
You don't partner with ghosts.

ARTUR
You don't stay king alone.

ARAM
Watch me.

Artur's smile fades.

ARTUR
You think America changed you.

ARAM
No. It gave me distance.

ARTUR
Distance doesn't erase blood.

ARAM
It teaches you when to spill it.

A long stare.

Artur steps back.

ARTUR
When this collapses, don't say I
didn't knock.

He walks away.

Aram watches him go.

INT. FRAUD HUB - NIGHT

Levon storms in.

LEVON
You didn't tell me Artur was here.

ARAM
I didn't need to.

LEVON
He's poison.

ARAM
He's noise. Big difference.

Levon studies Aram - worried.

LEVON
You're starting to sound like
Vartan.

Aram stiffens.

ARAM
Don't.

LEVON
He built an empire and lost
everyone.

ARAM

He taught me what not to do.

Levon isn't convinced.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - NIGHT

Ruiz reviews footage from the parking garage.

A grainy shot of Aram and Artur talking.

ANALYST

Facial recognition's inconclusive.

AGENT RUIZ

But behavior isn't.

She circles Aram.

AGENT RUIZ (CONT'D)

That's him.

INT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Aram stares out again - his cathedral of light.

Phone rings.

UNKNOWN NUMBER.

He answers.

ARAM

Yes?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. DARK ROOM - UNKNOWN

UNCLE VARTAN - alive, barely. Bruised. Older. Breathing hard.

UNCLE VARTAN

I'm out of time.

Aram's throat tightens.

ARAM
Where are you?

UNCLE VARTAN
Doesn't matter.

ARAM
I can move you.

UNCLE VARTAN
No.

A beat.

UNCLE VARTAN (CONT'D)
Artur will try to join you.

ARAM
He already did.

Vartan exhales.

UNCLE VARTAN
Good. That means he's desperate.

ARAM
I can end him.

UNCLE VARTAN
No.

ARAM
Why?

UNCLE VARTAN
Because killing him makes you me.

Silence.

UNCLE VARTAN (CONT'D)
Promise me something.

ARAM
What?

UNCLE VARTAN
When this ends... leave something
standing.

ARAM
I don't understand.

UNCLE VARTAN
You will.

The line goes dead.

Aram stares at the phone.

INT. FRAUD HUB - DAWN

Aram gathers the core team again.

ARAM
We're restructuring.

OPERATOR
Again?

ARAM
Final time.

Levon watches closely.

LEVON
What aren't you telling us?

Aram meets his eyes.

ARAM
That we're entering the dangerous
part.

LEVON
Which is?

ARAM
Where success becomes visible.

A beat.

ARAM (CONT'D)
We go quiet. We go lean. And we
prepare exits.

OPERATOR
Exits where?

ARAM
Everywhere.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - DAY

Ruiz pins a new photo to the board.

A blurred image of Aram.

AGENT RUIZ
He's preparing to disappear.

ANALYST
So we move?

Ruiz shakes her head.

AGENT RUIZ
No.

She taps the photo.

AGENT RUIZ (CONT'D)
We wait.

EXT. GLENDALE STREET - DAY

Aram walks past an Armenian church.

He stops.

Looks at it.

For the first time in years... he goes inside.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Quiet. Candles. Murmured prayers.

Aram lights a candle.

Not for forgiveness.

For clarity.

He looks at the flame.

ARAM (V.O.)
Systems always have blind spots.

He blows out the candle.

ARAM (V.O.)
So do people.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. LOS ANGELES - PRE-DAWN

The city breathes low and slow. Freeways whisper. Lights flicker like nervous thoughts.

Aram drives alone. No destination. Just motion.

INT. FRAUD HUB - DAWN

Empty.

Desks cleared. Screens dark. The cathedral has been dismantled overnight.

Only Levon remains, waiting.

LEVON
It's done.

ARAM
Good.

LEVON
You're walking away.

ARAM
I'm stepping aside.

Levon studies him.

LEVON
Same thing if you don't look back.

ARAM
I always look back. I just don't
stay.

Levon hands him a slim folder.

LEVON
Clean exits. Shells collapsed.
Trails folded into noise.

Aram nods.

ARAM
And you?

LEVON
I'll be boring.

Aram almost smiles.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - MORNING

Agent Ruiz stares at a dead board. Photos coming down. Red
strings cut.

ANALYST
Everything went quiet.

AGENT RUIZ
Quiet isn't gone. Quiet is hiding.

She circles one photo left: Aram.

AGENT RUIZ (CONT'D)
He'll make a mistake.

ANALYST
When?

AGENT RUIZ
When he loves something.

INT. ANI'S APARTMENT - DAY

Aram stands at the door. Hesitates. Knocks.

Ani opens it. Surprise. Guarded hope.

ANI
You disappeared.

ARAM
I was finishing something.

ANI
You always are.

A beat.

ARAM
I'm done.

She searches his face.

ANI
Done like... finished?

ARAM
Done like leaving space.

She steps aside. Lets him in.

INT. ANI'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Simple. Warm. Real.

ANI
Say it.

ARAM
I chose control because it kept
people away. Including me.

ANI
And now?

ARAM
Now I'm choosing risk.

She absorbs that.

ANI
I don't want protection.

ARAM
I know.

ANI
I want honesty.

Aram nods.

ARAM
I can give you the truth. Not the
whole story.

ANI
I don't need the whole story.

She reaches for his hand. He lets her.

EXT. PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Artur waits again. Same place. Same smile.

Aram approaches—unafraid.

ARTUR
You went quiet.

ARAM
You noticed.

ARTUR
That's bad for business.

ARAM
I sold the business.

Artur laughs, then stops.

ARTUR
To who?

ARAM
To time.

Artur steps closer.

ARTUR
You don't retire. Men like you
vanish or die.

ARAM
Men like you think that.

Artur's smile cracks.

ARTUR
The FBI's close.

ARAM
They always are.

ARTUR
I can make them go away.

ARAM
You can't even make yourself go
away.

A beat. Tension hums.

ARTUR
Your uncle begged me once.

Aram's eyes harden.

ARAM
He taught me something instead.

ARTUR
Which is?

ARAM
Never make threats you can't
collect on.

Aram steps past him.

Artur watches—furious, exposed.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - NIGHT

Ruiz watches live feeds. Parking garage cameras.

ANALYST
That's him.

Ruiz leans in.

AGENT RUIZ
Don't move.

ANALYST
Why not?

AGENT RUIZ
Because if we grab him now, we lose
everything else.

A beat.

AGENT RUIZ (CONT'D)
He's not the spider. He's the map.

EXT. ARMENIAN CHURCH - NIGHT

A quiet service. Candles. Murmurs.

Aram sits beside Ani. Hands folded. Still.

A PRIEST passes, nods knowingly. Says nothing.

INT. CHURCH - LATER

Aram lights a candle. Watches the flame.

ARAM (V.O.)
Remembering is power.

He lets it burn.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - DAY

A montage of closure:

- Bank accounts shuttered
- LLCs dissolved
- Overseas call centers dark
- Crypto wallets emptied into fog

INT. LEVON'S HOUSE - DAY

Levon packs a box. Family photos. Old receipts.

Phone buzzes.

LEVON
Yes?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. UNKNOWN OFFICE - DAY

A NEW VOICE. Calm. Professional.

NEW VOICE
We're seeing opportunities.

Levon smiles faintly.

LEVON
Not interested.

He hangs up.

EXT. FREEWAY - SUNSET

Aram drives. Ani beside him. The city recedes.

ANI
Where are we going?

ARAM
Somewhere small.

ANI
That's new.

ARAM
So am I.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - NIGHT

Ruiz pins one final note under Aram's photo:

"DISAPPEARED."

She steps back.

AGENT RUIZ
He won.

ANALYST
Then why does it feel unfinished?

Ruiz studies the board.

AGENT RUIZ
Because it is.

EXT. QUIET TOWN - NIGHT

A modest house. Lights on. Dinner cooking.

Aram sets the table. Ani pours wine.

Normal. Fragile. Real.

Aram looks out the window—checks the street. Old habit.

Ani notices.

ANI
You okay?

ARAM
Learning.

A KNOCK at the door.

They freeze.

Aram opens it.

No one there.

Just a SMALL ENVELOPE on the mat.

Inside: a single slip of paper.

"Two steps ahead."

Aram exhales. Smiles—sad, knowing.

ANI
What is it?

Aram folds the paper. Puts it away.

ARAM
A reminder.

They close the door.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

They sit to eat.

Outside, the street remains quiet.

For now.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. QUIET TOWN - NIGHT

The street stays still.

Too still.

Aram stands at the window longer than Ani likes.

ANI
You checked already.

ARAM
I know.

ANI
Then why are you still looking?

Aram doesn't answer.

Because instinct doesn't turn off just because you moved zip codes.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

They eat in silence.

Normal sounds feel foreign to him - forks, chewing, the hum of a fridge.

ANI
You don't have to disappear inside your head every time it's quiet.

ARAM
Quiet is when things move.

She studies him.

ANI
You ever think you don't know how to stop?

Aram looks at her - honest.

ARAM
I don't know how to be unnecessary.

That lands.

EXT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - NIGHT

Ruiz stares at satellite traffic data.

Not calls.

Not money.

Movement.

ANALYST

He collapsed everything.

AGENT RUIZ

No. He simplified.

She zooms in on a quiet town.

AGENT RUIZ (CONT'D)

He didn't disappear.

ANALYST

Then what did he do?

AGENT RUIZ

He went where leverage looks like
normal life.

INT. LOCAL HARDWARE STORE - DAY

Aram browses tools.

A CLERK chats him up.

CLERK

You new around here?

ARAM

Still deciding.

CLERK

Good place to land.

Aram smiles politely.

He notices a MAN at the end of the aisle pretending to look at paint.

Too stiff.

Too aware.

Aram pays. Leaves.

EXT. HARDWARE STORE - DAY

He pauses. Breathes. Counts reflections in parked cars.

The man doesn't follow.

Good.

But that's worse.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Aram installs a new lock.

Ani watches.

ANI
We already have three.

ARAM
Redundancy is comfort.

ANI
Or fear.

Aram finishes tightening the screw.

ARAM
Same thing. Different language.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Levon sits in his car, engine off.

Phone in hand.

LEVON
I told you, I'm done.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. UNKNOWN OFFICE - NIGHT

AGENT RUIZ.

AGENT RUIZ
You don't sound done.

LEVON
Then you're hearing what you want.

AGENT RUIZ
We're not looking to arrest you.

Levon laughs quietly.

LEVON
That's how it always starts.

AGENT RUIZ
We're looking to understand him.

Levon's smile fades.

LEVON
You won't.

AGENT RUIZ
You helped build him.

LEVON
No.

A beat.

LEVON (CONT'D)
I helped keep him alive.

He hangs up.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Aram wakes suddenly.

Not from a sound.

From absence.

He sits up.

Listens.

Nothing.

He slips out of bed.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Aram checks the doors. Windows. The envelope drawer.

The note is gone.

His jaw tightens.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Aram steps outside.

The air is cold.

A FIGURE stands across the street - barely visible.

Aram doesn't flinch.

ARAM

You're late.

The figure steps forward into light.

Not Artur.

Younger. Cleaner.

A PROFESSIONAL.

MAN
You don't know me.

ARAM
Then you shouldn't be here.

MAN
You built something very elegant.

ARAM
Past tense.

MAN
Systems don't die. They get
adopted.

Aram studies him.

ARAM
Who sent you?

MAN
Someone who wants to make sure you
stay retired.

ARAM
That's generous.

MAN
It's insurance.

A beat.

MAN (CONT'D)
There are people rebuilding what
you dismantled.

ARAM
They won't last.

MAN
They're using your rules.

That lands.

MAN (CONT'D)
You don't have to come back.

ARAM
I never left.

The man nods - impressed, unsettled.

MAN
That's what scares them.

He steps back into the dark.

MAN (CONT'D)
Stay small, Aram. Big men don't
survive long in quiet places.

He disappears.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Aram closes the door slowly.

Ani stands there - she heard enough.

ANI
Was that who I think it was?

ARAM
Worse.

ANI
Are we in danger?

Aram considers lying.

Doesn't.

ARAM
Not yet.

That answer terrifies her more than "yes."

EXT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - NIGHT

Ruiz receives a report.

ANALYST
Contact made.

AGENT RUIZ
With who?

ANALYST
Unknown intermediary.

Ruiz exhales.

AGENT RUIZ
He's still valuable.

ANALYST
To who?

Ruiz looks at the board.

AGENT RUIZ
Everyone.

INT. HOUSE - DAWN

Aram sits at the kitchen table.

Laptop open.

Not connected to anything.

Just notes.

Diagrams.

Old habits waking up.

Ani watches from the doorway.

ANI
You said you were done.

Aram looks up - conflicted.

ARAM
I was.

ANI
And now?

Aram closes the laptop.

ARAM
Now I'm deciding what survives.

He stands.

ARAM (CONT'D)
Say nothing to anyone. Not friends.
Not family.

ANI
You're building again.

ARAM
No.

A beat.

ARAM (CONT'D)
I'm preventing something worse.

She realizes the truth:

He was never the disease.

He was the firewall.

EXT. QUIET TOWN - MORNING

The sun rises.

Normal life resumes.

But beneath it -

forces realign, systems reboot, shadows sharpen.

Aram watches the street.

Two steps ahead.

Still.

FADE IN:

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Aram sits at the kitchen table.

Laptop open again.

This time it's live.

He's not building an empire.

He's watching one.

ANI stands in the hallway, arms crossed.

ANI
You said you weren't going back.

ARAM
I'm not.

ANI
Then what is this?

Aram doesn't look up.

ARAM
An autopsy.

He types. Maps appear. Transactions. New names using old patterns.

ARAM (CONT'D)
They copied the structure, not the logic. That's how I know who's behind it.

ANI
And who is it?

Aram pauses.

ARAM
People who think I'm gone.

A beat.

ANI
And if you're wrong?

Aram finally looks at her.

ARAM
Then this is where I stop.

That scares her more than confidence ever did.

EXT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - NIGHT

Ruiz watches a live data stream spike.

ANALYST
Something's lighting up.

AGENT RUIZ
He's touching it.

ANALYST
Barely.

Ruiz leans forward.

AGENT RUIZ
That's not panic.

ANALYST
Then what is it?

AGENT RUIZ
A goodbye.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Aram closes the laptop.

Deletes everything.

He stands.

ARAM
Pack a bag.

ANI
Why?

ARAM
Because this is the part where they
come politely... or loudly.

ANI
Which one is it?

A KNOCK at the door.

Measured. Calm.

Aram exhales.

ARAM
Polite.

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

FBI VEHICLES line the street.

Not dramatic. Surgical.

AGENT RUIZ stands at the door when Aram opens it.

AGENT RUIZ
Aram Kazanjian.

ARAM
You're early.

AGENT RUIZ
You made it easy.

ARAM
No. I made it clean.

She studies him.

AGENT RUIZ
You knew this was coming.

ARAM
I was counting on it.

Agents move in behind him. Ani watches, frozen.

ANI
Aram—

He turns to her. Soft. Real.

ARAM
Don't follow me.

ANI
Are you saying goodbye?

Aram considers.

ARAM
I'm saying wait.

He steps outside.

CUFFS click shut.

Flashbulbs from a DISTANT CAMERA.

The myth is visible now.

INT. FBI TRANSPORT - NIGHT

Aram sits alone.

Hands cuffed.

Calm.

Ruiz sits across from him.

AGENT RUIZ
You're facing federal conspiracy,
wire fraud, international—

ARAM
You don't need to impress me.

She smiles despite herself.

AGENT RUIZ
You think this ends quietly?

ARAM
I think it ends publicly.

AGENT RUIZ
And after that?

Aram looks out the window.

ARAM
That depends on who's still
listening.

INT. FBI INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

Glass walls. Cameras. Red light on.

Aram sits.

Ruiz slides a thick folder across the table.

AGENT RUIZ
We have enough to bury you.

Aram flips through.

Doesn't rush.

ARAM
You have enough to close cases.

AGENT RUIZ
Same thing.

ARAM
No. One ends a story. One preserves
it.

She leans in.

AGENT RUIZ
You want a deal.

ARAM
I want accuracy.

AGENT RUIZ
You want to survive.

Aram meets her gaze.

ARAM
I already did.

A beat.

AGENT RUIZ
Give us the network.

ARAM
You don't want the network.

AGENT RUIZ
Try me.

ARAM
You want the *people who think they
replaced me.*

That lands.

Ruiz doesn't hide it – interest.

INT. HOLDING CELL – NIGHT

Aram alone again.

Concrete. Steel.

The same smell as Yerevan.

History repeats – but differently.

A GUARD passes.

GUARD
You've got a visitor.

Aram looks up.

ARAM
I doubt that.

INT. VISITATION ROOM - NIGHT

Glass divider.

ANI sits on the other side.

Eyes red. Controlled.

They pick up phones.

ANI
You said wait.

ARAM
I meant it.

ANI
Are you getting out?

Aram doesn't answer directly.

ARAM
I need you to do something for me.

ANI
No.

ARAM
You haven't heard it yet.

She waits.

ARAM (CONT'D)
There's a storage unit. Pasadena.
Locker 417.

ANI
Aram-

ARAM
Don't open it. Don't move it. Just
remember it exists.

ANI
What is it?

Aram smiles faintly.

ARAM
The difference between a sentence
and a story.

A beat.

ANI
Is this how you escape?

ARAM
This is how I stay ahead.

The guard taps the glass.

Time.

ANI
I don't want a sequel.

Aram's smile fades – honest now.

ARAM
I didn't want a first act.

The line disconnects.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - NIGHT

Ruiz listens to a playback.

ANALYST
He's cooperating.

AGENT RUIZ
He's curating.

She looks at a new board.

Names start to fall.

Bigger names.

AGENT RUIZ (CONT'D)
He's trading a crown for a key.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Packed.

Media frenzy.

Aram in cuffs again - composed, immaculate.

Charges read.

He pleads:

 ARAM
 Not guilty.

Murmurs.

Artur watches from the gallery - furious, cornered.

Aram's eyes flick to him.

Just once.

Enough.

INT. HOLDING CELL - NIGHT

Aram sits.

Door CLANGS shut.

He closes his eyes.

We hear Uncle Vartan's voice - memory, not ghost.

 UNCLE VARTAN (V.O.)
 Sometimes you pay for things you
 didn't buy.

Aram opens his eyes.

 ARAM (V.O.)
 And sometimes... you invest.

A GUARD slides an envelope under the bars.

No return address.

Inside: a single USB drive.

Written on it:

Aram smiles.

Not relieved.

Prepared.

EXT. FEDERAL DETENTION CENTER - NIGHT

The building looms.

A fortress.

But even fortresses have blind spots.

Aram is led inside.

The doors close behind him.

LOCK.

CUT TO:

INT. STORAGE UNIT - UNKNOWN TIME

Locker 417.

Dusty. Unassuming.

Inside:

documents, keys, a phone sealed in plastic -
and a PASSPORT with a different name.

Two steps ahead.

Always.

INT. FEDERAL PRISON - INTAKE - NIGHT

A long concrete corridor.

Fluorescent lights buzz overhead – same sound as Yerevan.
Same smell. Different country.

Aram walks in cuffs, escorted by GUARDS.

He doesn't look scared.

He looks... observant.

They stop at a steel door.

The GUARD opens it.

INSIDE:

A crowded cell block. Hard men. Lifers. Predators. Legends.

Every head turns.

This is the moment most movies end in dread.

But not this one.

Aram steps inside.

The door SLAMS shut behind him.

LOCK.

A beat.

Then–

One of the biggest inmates, TATTOOED GIANT, clocks Aram.
Steps forward.

TATTOOED GIANT
You lost, pretty boy?

Aram looks at him calmly.

ARAM
No.

A beat.

ARAM (CONT'D)
I arrived early.

The Giant hesitates.

Across the block, another inmate reacts – recognition.

A whisper travels.

Aram walks forward.

The noise lowers.

The camera PULLS BACK as Aram disappears into the mass of inmates.

Not swallowed.

Absorbed.

FINAL SHOT

CLOSE ON ARAM'S EYES

Scanning. Calculating. Mapping.

The prison is no longer a cage.

It's a network.

CUT TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD:

THE KING OF FRAUD

-