

SANTA MUERTE

Written by

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EXT. SACRED HEART ACADEMY - DAY

OPENS ON Sacred Heart Academy, an elite girls' school in uptown New Orleans, where the annual tuition costs as much as a modest sedan.

On St. Charles Avenue, a wide-angle view shows tall, intricate black wrought iron fencing, the gate supported by four massive iron columns where the school's name is spelled out across the top of the central arch... in French.

The gates open, framing a walkway as wide as a street. It's lined with freshly pruned box hedges that protect the property's perfectly manicured lawns from ever being walked on. The sprawling Colonial-Revival style building looks like a palace. Three stories tall, graceful white columns support the deep galleries that span the full length of the massive building. Nothing is out of place.

DISSOLVE TO

INT. SACRED HEART ACADEMY CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Classroom full of 17-y-o girls dressed in Catholic school uniforms: white poplin shirts and plaid, pleated skirts, identical all the way down to their Sacred Heart logo socks and tan suede oxfords.

The camera pulls back to reveal -

MS. KENNEDY (late 50s) Religion teacher. Tall. No makeup. Very short hair. Nun-like in covered-up wardrobe and sensible shoes. She pushes up from her desk, slides her logbook of its surface...

MS. KENNEDY

Okay, ladies. Let's move our little project along. When I call your name, please quickly give the name of your saint.

Zoom in on ROAN ROBICHAUX. Long, pin-straight dark-blond hair. Blue eyes. Very tall at 5'8". There's a faint smear of blue paint along the edge of her jaw and various colors of paint beneath most of her fingernails. Her hands are smudged with charcoal. On her desk, blatantly covering her Religion textbook, there's a sketchbook open to a drawing of Santa Muerte. Roan's pencil SCRATCHES against the page as she adds more detail. As Ms. Kennedy talks, she smiles knowingly and looks up.

Ms. Kennedy steps forward, centering herself in front of the room as she flips the book open to the correct page, her pencil poised to record each girl's response. She begins calling names but we hear Roan instead...

ROAN (V.O.)

My aesthetics and Ms. Kennedy's will never align. Pretty sure she considers a dab of lip-gloss a mortal sin, vanity a gateway to some greater evil. First comes lipstick, some winged liner, then murder. Duh.

But everything the woman does seems performative. She could've passed out forms. We could've turned them in with not a single other student aware of whether or not a contemptuous look had crossed our teacher's face upon learning our chosen saint's name. Not sure if it's laziness on her part—not wanting to take work home—or if she really gets off on lording over the entire class, her pencil like a gavel. Judgment quickly passed. Your sentence handed down. Five-hundred words and a presentation for a teacher

ROAN (V.O.) CONTINUED (CONT'D)

...who refuses to believe in magic but swallows miracles whole, sipping them politely from her silver spoon. Whatever. At least she's predictable.

MS. KENNEDY

Ms. Landry?

GEMMA LANDRY

St. Anne.

The pencil scratches the page as Ms. Kennedy writes the saint's name. She moves her pencil, letting it hover over the next line.

MS. KENNEDY

Approved. Ms. Benson?

AMALIE

St. Rita.

Seated in the desk directly in front of Roan, AMALIE BENSON leans back, relieved her turn's done, as Ms. Kennedy's pencil scratches the paper again.

Roan leans forward, whispers something into Amalie's ear...

ROAN (TO AMALIE)
(whispering)
God help her. Watch this.

Amalie twists in her seat to face Roan behind her. Eyes wide, her mouth gapes.

MS KENNEDY
Approved. Face forward, Ms. Benson.

Ms. Kennedy takes a single stride forward, raps her pencil against the edge of Amalie's desk once, and waits for her to turn. Her disapproving look stays fixed on Amalie as she resumes her data collection.

MS KENNEDY (CONT'D)
Ms. Robichaux?

Roan's looking down at her drawing, her hand moving as she scratches out a sturdier outline around a grinning likeness of death personified.

ROAN ROBICHAUX
(nonchalantly, still
drawing)
Santa Muerte.

Ms. Kennedy smirks. Clearly they've argued before, and she's quite pleased with herself that she saw this coming...

MS KENNEDY
(sharply)
Catholic saints, Ms. Robichaux. The project must be done in accordance with the rubric, which clearly states that the topic is limited to Catholic saints.

Roan's pencil stills, going quiet--as quiet as the now silent room. Roan looks up. She has everyone's attention. She doesn't speak fluent Spanish but she can imitate her mother's accent perfectly, and she uses it now to hit the highlights.

ROAN ROBICHAUX
Santa Muerte is a Catholic saint.
She's a folk saint.
(MORE)

ROAN ROBICHAUX (CONT'D)
Nuestra Senora de la Santa Muerte
is widely recognized in Latin
America. And my name's Roan
Sepulveda Robichaux. Sepulveda's my
mother's maiden name. It's
Columbian. Are you saying my
mother's saints don't matter? That
seems...

Roan quirks an indignant eyebrow, her lips slowly working to
form an "r" shape

MS. KENNEDY
(rushed)
Fine. (she cuts Roan off before
Roan can finish the accusation)
Your project's approved. Keep it
tasteful, Ms. Robichaux.

Now it's Roan who's smirking. The room's so quiet you could
hear a cricket fart. No one dares to make a sound. She gives
Amalie's shoulder a playful I-told-you-so nudge. As she
fixes her attention back onto her artwork, a girl one row
over's hand darts up, her arm so straight she's suddenly
inches taller. She doesn't wait to be called on.

VICTORIA DUPUY
If Roan gets to do the patron saint
of death, I wanna change mine to
Drew Brees, the patron saint of
football.

MS KENNEDY
(Rolls her eyes
heavenward as if asking
for divine grace)
Absolutely not, Ms. Dupuy.

VICTORIA DUPUY
(whining)
But he's a New Orleans folk saint.

Some girls smile or twitter quietly, others look irritated.
The school's bell gives a long jarring ring. Books slap
shut. Chair legs bump and jostle, squeaking on the waxed
floor as twenty-odd students shift in their seats and shove
books into backpacks.

MS. KENNEDY
Class dismissed. Ms. Dupuy, please
stay.

ZOOM IN on Roan's desk and her open sketchbook to show her progress. She's darkened the oval outline around Santa Muerte and filled in more details to show the customary skeletal form mixed with a younger Day-of-the-Dead-like image. Santa Muerte's eyes are deeply hooded black orbs, her nose prominent. Her cheekbones are razor sharp with deep hollows beneath, but her lips are full, her mouth supple.

MATCH TO:

INT. ROAN'S UPPER/MIDDLE CLASS DINING ROOM- EVENING

Open on the same image of Santa Muerte, but it's a larger version drawn on poster board.

Roan is perched precariously on a dining room chair, one leg tucked beneath her, the other bent, her shin wedged against the table's edge, her arm propped on her knee as she carefully paints the silhouette of a scythe along the inside edge of the black oval frame surrounding an eerily seductive image of Santa Muerte. The scythe's black blade arches ominously over the figure's head.

To Roan's left is a neat stack of library books, a silver amulet, and fanned out prayer cards. To her right is a grouping of religious candles (from the bodega where her Aunt Linda helps with bookkeeping.) Her parents are (not so) quietly arguing off-screen...

CUT TO

INT. LIVING ROOM- CONTINUOUS

KATHERINE ROBICHAUX (mid-40s)(tall, striking brunette) is standing with her hands propped on her hips. DAVID ROBICHAUX (late 40s-early 50s)(sandy brown hair, in decent shape for a man his age) is sitting in his brown leather recliner, his feet planted in front of him. He's 'making a stand'... while comfortably seated.

DAVID

...I know, but he's my brother.
It'll be only be a few days. Maybe
a week.

KATHERINE

(incensed, accent more
pronounced)

Maybe two weeks. Maybe six months.
Maybe a year and half. He's been
living in our condo for nearly two
years, David. Maybe we should take
a vacation now that our vacation
home will be free.

(MORE)

KATHERINE (CONT'D)

At least then we wouldn't have to
be under the same roof with him.

DAVID

He needs a job. A fresh start. And
he's family. I think we can
tolerate him for a few days.

KATHERINE

We? (she laughs ominously) Well, I
guess I don't have a say then.

DAVID

(pleading)

Katherine?

KATHERINE

Shut-up, David.

And he wisely does. Katherine walks away, mumbling something derogatory in Spanish under her breath as she disappears through the open doorway (pocket door.) Her heels tap across the kitchen, getting louder as she closes the distance to the dining room.

CUT BACK TO

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Roan eavesdropping, her ears perked. She's listening to her mother's footsteps. At the first hint of a shadow passing by the dining room doors, she ducks her head back down and feigns total concentration.

Katherine appears in the doorway, pausing when she sees Roan seated there, and then she paints a smile onto her face, smoothing over her irritation before she enters.

KATHERINE

Roan, sweetie, can you straighten
up the guest room when you get a
chance? Uncle Ricky is going to
stay with us next week.

ROAN

(head bent, still
painting)

Sure. Everything okay?

KATHERINE

Of course. (she notices Roan's project and steps closer) Santa Muerte!?! What is this? For Spanish class? I thought you switched to French.

ROAN

(looks up with a wicked grin)

It's for Religion, actually. Ms. Kennedy's going to have a stroke. You should've seen her face when she had to approve it.

KATHERINE

Roan.

(she sighs heavily)

Why do you have to invite trouble? When something seems like a bad idea—

ROAN

(quickly)

Don't worry. It'll be perfect. Every i dotted. Every t crossed. A+100. The report's already done and I even got silver glitter to do an exact replica of the medallion. It'll be a work of art. (chef's kiss)

Katherine looks more closely at Roan's artwork.

KATHERINE

It's beautiful, but...

(she pauses, her forehead scrunching up as she gets suspicious)

Did Linda help you with this?

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. BODEGA STOREROOM

One overhead light, the bare swinging bulb gives the storeroom a yellow-tinged glow. Packed wooden shelves crowd the small space. The narrow aisles are littered with half-opened boxes of candles and discarded out of season decor. A giant, brightly colored Day of the Dead sugar skull looks ominous in the shadows.

Roan is perched on a library-style step stool, ankle propped on her knee next to the shelf with dusty boxes filled with smaller boxes full of prayer cards. There's a slim box on her lap and she's rifling through a handful of them, flipping and fanning and shuffling...

ALEXANDRA (V.O.)

Difficult girl. I know what you're about. Making waves. Linda would send you on your way with this nonsense.

ROAN (V.O.)

Ha. Waves. I need an ocean. And a tsunami. Or at least a hurricane. Something to rock the boat. Aunt Linda likes to rock boats.

ALEXANDRA (V.O.)

(tsks under her breath
and waves Roan into the
storeroom)

Help yourself then. But don't blame me for whatever trouble you find.

Roan shivers and looks around. Everything is still and quiet except for the hiss of the cards slipping past each other and when she looks back down, there's a single card in her hand. Santa Muerte dressed all in black. Roan stares at it and shivers again. And then startles, clasping a hand to her chest as Alexandra swishes through the beaded curtain.

ROAN

Oh my God. Give me a heart attack why don't you.

ALEXANDRA

(sarcastic)

Madre de Dios. Fools make their own folly, girl. If you're unnerved...

Alexandra trails off as she focuses in on the card in Roan's hand.

ALEXANDRA

Where did you get that?

Confused, Roan looks down at the card and then back to Alexandra, but before she can answer Alexandra plucks the card from her hand and stares at it. This card was not in that box. This card shouldn't have been in any box.

ROAN

But that's the one I want. She's perfect. What's wrong with Santa Muerte?

Alexandra looks incredulous.

ALEXANDRA

Nothing is wrong with Santa Muerte, Roan. Sepulveda. Robichaux. But she doesn't belong in that box and she's not for you.

The bell on the entrance door rings and Alexandra tucks the card into the pocket of her apron and heads back to the register.

ROAN

(under her breath)

Fine. Be weird. I'll just find another one.

The very next card she flips is the grinning likeness of death personified.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Roan looks sheepish, pressing her lips together and shaking her head.

ROAN

(incredulous)

What? No. ... Aunt Linda didn't help me. I got the candles and stuff from the bodega. She wasn't even there.

Katherine shakes her head, in disbelief.

KATHERINE

Just be careful. I know it's all about the art and making pretty things. But people take this very seriously.

Roan shifts in her seat, leaning back to give Katherine her full attention.

ROAN

Wait. People? Do you take it seriously?

KATHERINE

Enough to know you shouldn't make
light of spiritual things you don't
believe in.

ROAN

Hmmm. (nods thoughtfully) Then I
guess I need to work on my
spirituality... for the sake of my
art. Is there a patron saint of
pretty pictures?

KATHERINE

Yes. Of art. And against
temptation.

ROAN

And? Does she have a name?

KATHERINE

(exasperated)

Catherine. Saint Catherine of
Bologna.

Katherine pauses, reflecting, and then she harrumphs and her
face sours as if she's just swallowed the worst medicine.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)

Maybe we should both pray to her.

Roan presses her lips together. It's a trap and she's not
going near it. She looks down at her poster board.

ROAN (V.O.)

Nope. Nuh-ugh. That thing people do
when they're mad: mad at one
person, mad at the whole world?
Katherine Robichaux doesn't do
that. But I have plenty of reasons
for an ass-chewing of my own... and
the evidence is spread out across
her dining room table. I'm not
taking the bait.

ROAN

More red. I think She needs more
red... And maybe a crown.

Katherine touches Roan lightly on the shoulder.

KATHERINE

Just make good choices. And I'd
better not hear a single bad word
from Ms. Kennedy.

Roan's smile is genuine but her conspiratorial wink isn't reassuring as she tugs her reference sketch out from beneath her books.

ROAN
Yes, ma'am. Better choices have
never been made.

FADE TO

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING - A WEEK LATER

It's Amalie's project spread out now. They're due tomorrow and both girls, still in uniforms, are sitting with their heads bent as Roan carefully lines the intricate frame around a portrait of St. Rita in black and Amalie sorts through a tin full of beads, sequins, and plastic gemstones, looking for something that's the "perfect red" to complete the piece.

AMALIE
Nothing here is screaming stigmata.

ROAN
Grab a knife? You stab the paper
and I'll dust the edges with glue
and red glitter?
(she shrugs and looks up)
Or... some images show her with a
bloody thorn. That's pretty cool.
And she looks like a woman who
could use a thorn. Bet we can find
a good one in the rose garden out
back.

Amalie cranes her neck to check Roan's progress.

AMALIE
Don't make it too good. Ms.
Kennedy'll know you did it.

ROAN
Almost perfect? That's the best I
can offer. You take art, too.
(proclaims)
Amalie Benson is capable of
masterpieces!

Amalie snorts.

AMALIE

At least make the outline a little wonky, Saint Roan, patron saint of perfect art.

Beaming at her new title, Roan leans back to show off her completed artwork as VOICES coming from the living room become background noise.

ROAN

Yeah, no. I'll skip my martyrdom and go straight for false-idol status. I'd rather have my accolades while I'm living, thank you very much.

CUT TO

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

David Robichaux is in his leather armchair, a mixed drink nearly full on the table beside him, so fresh it's not even sweating. His eyes are glued to the news broadcast as the bank of windows behind him peer into the backyard to show the garden. RICHARD (RICKY) ROBICHAUX (early 40s) is pacing a line through the center of the room, as if he walked in from the kitchen and never sat down. The drink clutched in his hand is half empty, the liquid bouncing in the glass.

RICKY

The meeting went just how you'd expect. They loved me.

David nods, distracted, still focused on the television.

DAVID

Great. Perfect. So the job's yours if you want it?

Ricky pauses, wobbles a little. Clearly this isn't his first drink of the evening. He gets irritated as he sees his brother's attention isn't on him.

RICKY

Hopefully. Wouldn't it be nice to have your baby brother closer?

DAVID

(distracted)

Yeah, sure. But Florida's not that far. Nice to visit.

RICKY
(getting louder,
insolent)
Yeah, visit, when your deadbeat
brother's not squatting in your
condo, but you wouldn't want to
live there.

David doesn't say anything. He doesn't even look up. Ricky
downs the rest of his drink. Ice tinkles as he shakes his
empty glass and stares down into it, his lips twisting into
an ugly expression.

RICKY (CONT'D)
(erupts)
Ostracized by my own family. And
for what? I was "laid off" from my
own goddamned company. Your
goddamned company. It's a fucking
tightrope, trying to navigate a
conversation around the fact that
my own brother refuses to work with
me.

David finally looks up just as Katherine frames herself in
the connecting doorway. She scowls and gives David a pointed
stare.

KATHERINE
(quietly)
Roan has a guest. Keep it down or
do your drinking somewhere else.

Ricky pauses his rant, incensed at being shushed. But
Katherine doesn't give him a second glance as she pulls the
pocket door shut to muffle his reply.

CUT BACK TO
INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Roan and Amalie are staring at each other, watching each
other's lips so they can talk quietly without being
overheard.

ROAN
(whisper)
Awkward.

AMALIE
(whisper)
What's going on?

ROAN
(whisper)
I have no idea.
(she shrugs)
My mom didn't want him here.

A smiling Katherine appears through the doorway that connects the kitchen with the dining room.

KATHERINE
Ready for a break? Can you girls
take some snacks upstairs?

Katherine motions toward the living room with her eyes, indicating the escalating tension, and Roan nods.

ROAN
Sure. We're almost done. And this
layer needs to dry anyway.

Amalie puts the lid back onto the tin while Roan quickly rinses her paintbrush and leaves it to dry. Amalie takes the tin with her as she pushes up from the table. Roan takes a big artsy reference book on saints. They both glance uneasily toward the living room as they follow Katherine into the kitchen. Halfway through the kitchen, Roan stops.

ROAN (CONT'D)
(remembering)
The thorn! We need a thorn.

Roan grabs Amalie's arm, drops the book onto the island and tugs Amalie along as she crosses to the French doors that lead into the backyard.

ROAN (CONT'D)
We'll only be a minute... (and then
louder for her dad to hear)

...because it's ninety degrees and we're the only house in the neighborhood without a pool.

KATHERINE
(sarcastically, playing
along)
A shame we don't know any
contractors.

ROAN
(still loud)
I know, right?

CUT TO

EXT. ROBICHAUX'S BACK YARD - CONTINUOUS

The door shuts behind the two girls and Amalie's glasses fog up. She takes them off, wipes them clean with the edge of her untucked school blouse.

It's a big backyard. Plenty of room for a pool.

Deep garden beds line the exterior of the house. They're set forward, a narrow paved path between the garden's stone border and the house's brick façade. The same paved path is mirrored along the front border. There's not a single sprig of grass trailing over the flagstone. The work of a gardener, surely. The beds are professionally done, the plants layered back to front by height with no wasted space, managing to look both wild and tamed at once.

AMALIE

(hushed)

Your dad fired his own brother?
That's...

ROAN

Crazy, right? I had no idea. And he's been staying in our condo? Who does that? Have a falling out and then toss them the keys to your condo? I thought they were renting it out.

Roan and Amalie are walking side-by-side, Amalie, still wearing her school shoes, stays on the pavers, Roan, barefoot, walks on the grass.

AMALIE

Wait. Your dad just let him move into your condo? Like, for free?

ROAN

Apparently. For two years. I guess to get rid of him. He's always been that uncle. Kind of like the black sheep, but people tiptoe around all the dumbass shit he does.

Amalie snorts.

AMALIE

Like what? Bank robbery? Mugging old ladies?

ROAN

(grinning)

More like showing up wasted to parties. He made out with someone's wife a wedding and then punched her husband when he tried to break it up. That's why I thought they stopped inviting him to stuff... but I guess I don't know everything.

Beneath the windows that peer into the living room is a carefully pruned hedge rose that's still managing to put out a smattering of deep red blooms in the late summer's oppressive heat. Spaced out in front are a dozen mature rose bushes with shorter herbs (sage, thyme, lavender, basil, rosemary...) interspersed around their bases.

They stop in front of the roses. Roan leans down, plants her hands on her thighs, scoping out her prey.

AMALIE

Well, I think Florida's a good place for him. I hope he goes back. Your uncle seems... like an ass.

Roan barks out a laugh, because it's so out of character for Amalie, and glances back.

ROAN

The queen of silver-linings finally doesn't like someone.

AMALIE

I can dislike people... and it's hard to paint a silver lining around a piece of crap.

ROAN

Harsh. But true. Now I know why Mom wanted him to get a hotel room. My mom's parents come during the holidays, but my dad's family never stay here. Why would they need to? They live, like, fifteen minutes away and we only see them for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

AMALIE

(giggling)

Until they get fired.

Roan tosses another look over her shoulder.

ROAN

How embarrassing is that, right?

When she turns back, she's focused. She takes a second to map out her path before planting her toes in one of the only few spare inches of bare dirt. Leaning in, she snaps off a long, fat thorn.

She straightens up, smiling as she shows off her treasure.

ROAN (CONT'D)

(in passable French)

Voila! C'est parfait!

Amalie smiles back, her lips parting to say something... probably about how bad Roan's French is... but then her face falls.

Roan plucks at the front of her blouse, popping the fabric in and out to make a breeze as she quirks a brow.

ROAN (CONT'D)

What? Not big enough?

(nods knowingly)

Size does matter.

Amalie (hand tucked in against her skirt to hide her pointing) points to the window, and Roan turns to find her Uncle staring out through the glass, looking directly at her, a fresh drink perched on the windowsill.

Roan smiles brightly and waves.

But Ricky only scowls in response.

ROAN (CONT'D)

(under her breath)

Wow. So personable. No wonder everyone likes him.

AMALIE

(cringing)

He definitely heard us, though, right?

ROAN

Yeah. Definitely.

They both laugh uncomfortably as they move away from the window and head back toward the kitchen. Roan goes back to admiring her thorn.

ROAN (CONT'D)

God, it's so freaking hot. I can't wait for fall... and Halloween. Guess who I'm dressing up as?

AMALIE

(sarcastically)

Oh wow. Here we go again. Last year was Frida Kahlo so you'd have an excuse to craft and entire flock of parrots out of dyed pillow feathers... And the year before was the fairy costume complete with mechanical wings, which are still at my house, by the way, so your mom won't remember that she's missing a pair of sheer silk curtains.

ROAN

(defensively)

They were in the linen closet. How was I supposed to know she was going to use them again?

AMALIE

(imitating Katherine)

Silk curtains, Roan. They're seasonal. You cut up silk curtains to make wings.

ROAN

Ethereal, gossamer wings, Amalie. (grinning) And you know you wanna wear 'em. Ooh! Is dressing up as a Catholic saint for a pagan holiday considered blasphemy? We can reuse the thorn. I'll spirit gum it to your forehead. Saints can have wings, right? Some shimmer and glitter and you'll glow with the light of the heavens. Which is infinitely more practical than a halo, IMO.

Amalie scoffs.

AMALIE

Yeah, right. Like I'm gonna desecrate a Roan Robichaux original for a Halloween costume. As soon as Ms. Kennedy gives it back, St. Rita's getting framed and you're gonna sign it.

Roan beams, every drop of vanity in her bubbling to the surface like she's a shallow glass of champagne.

ROAN

Maybe I'll do a whole portfolio of saints to make it more valuable. They'll call it my "Saint Period" (looks back over her shoulder to find her uncle still staring)
Roan shudders.

ROAN (CONT'D)

But fine, I'll get another thorn... later... when it's not so hot.

AMALIE

(under her breath)
And when your creepy uncle isn't staring.

INT. ROAN'S BEDROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

The walls are painted a dusky purple. One wall is devoted to her artwork--some pieces framed, some just tacked up--oil, watercolor, gouache, acrylic, mixed media, charcoal, and ink--in various sizes--are butted up against each other like a giant puzzle to fill up most of the top half of one wall.

To the left of her door is Roan's desk where her poster board is propped open to show her completed project. Lining the edge against the wall, her Santa Muerte paraphernalia is neatly arranged like a small shrine. Her report is laying there, front and center, neatly stapled, ready for her to proofread one last time before she brings it to school the next day.

Roan is laying on her stomach across her full-sized bed, flipping through the book she took with her: An Encyclopedia of Saints. Amalie's perched at the foot with her knees drawn up, staring off into the distance, the closed tin still clutched in her hand. There's a plate of sliced apples and cheese on the bed between them.

ROAN

Listen to this.
(solemn, reading aloud)
St. Rita of Cascia: 'The day after her baptism, Rita was surrounded by a swarm of white bees, which went in and out of her infant mouth without hurting her.'
(MORE)

ROAN (CONT'D)

(incredulous)

Wow! And they made her the patron saint of lost causes and bad marriage. The church has no imagination. I would've gone with bees.

AMALIE

Supposedly it was a sign from God, but when she begged to join the convent they forced her into an arranged marriage to an old dude who beat her... Until he was murdered. ... But St. Rita forgave his murderers.

ROAN

As one does. She should've paid them.

Roan reads farther and cringes.

ROAN (CONT'D)

Holy shit! Did you read all of this? It says she was known to practice 'mortification of the flesh.' Probably don't wanna Google that. I don't guess there's a patron saint of B.D.S.M.

AMALIE

Roan! Oh my God!

ROAN

What!?! You know you thought it, too.

AMALIE

That's not what that means.

Grinning like an idiot, Roan turns a few pages and then sighs dramatically as she stares down at a radiant portrait of Joan of Arc...

ROAN

You could've done St. Joan of Arc, patron saint of New Orleans, or ...

She flips a chunk of pages and then quickly fans past a few more to find the exact one she's looking for...

ROAN (CONT'D)

St. Expedite... the patron saint of procrastinators.

Roan chuckles at her own joke. Amalie rolls her eyes.

AMALIE

You could've done Joan of Arc.
Shiny armor. Pretty horse. Halo. So much sparkle, so many possibilities.

ROAN

(longingly)

I know. I know. It's everything my vain little heart desires...

(gets serious)

But Ms. Kennedy needed to get taken down a notch. I'm protesting.

Amalie quirks an eyebrow.

AMALIE

(incredulous)

Protesting? ... Religion? ... At a Catholic school? ... You can hear yourself, right?

ROAN

Mandatory Religion. Fight the good fight. I could've taken an extra elective. But no, I had to give up newspaper. For Religion. Wanna bet Ms. Kennedy signs that waiver next year?

AMALIE

I can't believe she didn't strangle you. She looked like she wanted to strangle you.

Roan's shoulders bounce up in a carefree shrug as if she doesn't care, but she's smiling as she flips back to St. Rita and tilts her head.

ROAN

She is pretty, though. And adding the thorn is genius if I do say so myself. And I do. I'll find a piece of cardboard or Styrofoam to reinforce the poster board. You can glue it to the back when you get home.

Roan reaches, takes a piece of apple, but stops with it halfway to her mouth as her uncle's voice carries up the stairs...

RICKY (O.S.)
I wouldn't have to beg employment
from strangers if my brother would
give me another chance.

DAVID (O.S.)
Can you keep it down? But then
again self-control hasn't ever been
your thing, has it? A little
restraint. Better choices. Don't
blame other people for your
mistakes.

RICKY (O.S.)
Mistakes? One. I made one damn
mistake and you'll never let me
live it down...

Both girls tense, their attention snapping to the doorway.

Flustered, Amalie hops up, shoves the door shut. Her hand lingers on the wood, and then she stops, sets the tin down, drawn in by something on the desk. A tall Santa Muerte candle. The black one in the middle, with the skeletal face and black robe. She absently traces the rim of the glass candleholder with her index finger.

ROAN
The black one's for protection...
and for vengeance.

AMALIE
(quietly, lost in
thought)
How does it work?

Roan's attention shifts between Amalie and the candle.

ROAN
Prayer? I don't know. Magic, I
guess.

AMALIE
But what do you do to get revenge?
Light a candle, sacrifice a
chicken?

Roan chuckles.

ROAN

Maybe.

Roan pauses. She's studying Amalie now, absorbing all the details as if she's suddenly seeing her friend more clearly. Amalie's extra quiet. Unsettled even. And maybe Roan's a little too self-absorbed to see it, but it's a bad feeling and Roan is sensing something's wrong.

ROAN (CONT'D)

I think it's subjective. Maybe you just kill the person you want to die and Santa Muerte smiles down on you and you feel all warm and glow-y. ... Why? Do we need someone dead?

Amalie gives a nervous laugh.

AMALIE

Yeah right. Like I could kill someone. I couldn't even dissect the frog.

ROAN

But you could say a prayer, though, right? Write a name on a slip of paper and feed it to a candle. We could make our own ritual. If faith is faith because you believe it works, why can't we decide how it works?

Heavy footsteps thump up the stairs and both girls tense, frozen until the steps pass. And then Katherine's voice carries up...

KATHERINE (O.S.)

Girls! Come finish-up so we can set the table.

CUT TO

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The table's set, the plates are served, silverware clangs and everyone digs in. David and Katherine sit at opposite ends of the table. Roan and Amalie sit to one side. Ricky is conspicuously absent.

ROAN (V.O.)

Breakfast and lunch can be served in the kitchen. Dinner is served in the dining room. If Katherine Robichaux cooks for you, you pull out a chair and sit your ass down. No exceptions, or, God help you, every meal you eat for a week will come out of a microwave. Apparently, no one told my uncle.

ROAN

What happened to Uncle Ricky?

David gives Katherine a pointed look.

KATHERINE

He went out. To meet some friends.

ROAN

(under her breath)

Surprised he has friends.

Amalie presses her lips together to suppress a smile. David clears his throat, and Amalie rushes to change the subject.

AMALIE

Dinner's delicious. Thanks for having me.

David grunts in reply. Katherine smiles genuinely.

KATHERINE

Of course. Is your presentation ready? Do you want to practice on me?

AMALIE

Really? Sure. Roan get your phone and time me.

The sound fades as the table becomes more animated, Katherine propping up her elbows, Roan hurrying off-screen to her phone from where she's left it on the stairs. She hurries back, messing with the screen as she sidles into her chair, and Amalie is standing up, showing off her project.

DAVID

A bloody thorn right through the paper. (he shakes his head) Is it for Religion or Halloween!?!

AMALIE

You should read the reference book
we got from the library, Mr.
Robichaux. Some of the stuff in
there would make for a great horror
novel.

David smiles around a bite of baked chicken.

DAVID

(overly animated)

Alright. Ready, Roan? Two minutes.
Start the timer.

Roan points at Amalie...

ROAN

Go!

FADE TO BLACK

INT. ROAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHTTIME

FADE IN It's the middle of the night, lights are all out.
Streetlight through the window smears a triangle of light
across the bed showing Roan asleep on her side. Only the
front of her is lit up. Everything behind her is cloaked in
darkness.

The bed jostles.

Roan startles awake as a weight settles behind her. She
freezes, her eyes going wide. The covers shift. Beneath the
comforter, a hand moves, coming to rest on her hip. The
weight of it sinks her lower into the mattress, pinning her
down. Then the figure shifts again, and Roan GASPS, jerking
away.

ROAN

(shocked)

Oh my God!

Ricky groans and Roan swings her arm back forcefully, her
elbow connecting with his chest before she jumps out of bed.

ROAN (CONT'D)

(screaming)

Oh my God! What are you doing! Get
out!

Uncle Ricky mumbles incoherently like he's half-asleep but his eyes are wide open, and the corners of his mouth are tilted upwards as he clutches his chest.

ROAN (CONT'D)

You're in my bed! Get out! Get out!

RICKY

(slurring)

Sorry. Wrong room. Okay okay. I'm going.

Mumbling, very drunk, Ricky slowly extricates himself from the bed, barely getting his feet under him before he staggers out, his hand heavy on her desk, crumpling the cover of her report as he shifts his weight to open the door.

David's footfalls thump up the stairs like machine-gun fire and he's already on the other side of the opening door. Half-dressed but wide awake, he looks like he might murder someone. He grabs Ricky, a handful of shirt balled in his fist as he yanks him through the door.

DAVID

What the fuck are you doing in my daughter's bedroom?

Roan's bedroom door shuts behind her uncle and then there's a thud as Ricky's back forcefully hits the wall.

RICKY (O.S.)

Honest mistake.

David's voice sounds like a growl, his words distorted as he drags his brother down the hallway.

ROAN (V.O.)

I say the words to see how they feel.

ROAN

(wide-eyed, whispers)

Honest mistake.

ROAN (V.O.)

Saying it makes me shudder. Saying it feels like my uncle's hands are on me again, like he's shoving up against me...

Roan shudders. Her hand is shaking as she locks her door. And she just stands there trembling, waiting... for something. For her dad to come back?

For her mom to come check on her? She staring at the doorknob.

The door slams at the end of the hall--the guest room--and Roan flinches. David's footfalls approach, stopping in front of her door. There's a light tap, tap, tap...

DAVID (O.S.)

He won't bother you again. You...
okay?

Roan's shoulders hitch and her breath stutters.

ROAN (V.O.)

I want to say no. I want my uncle out of the house. Forever. But I catch myself... because Mom didn't want him here. And that was before she knew he was a monster. If I tell, she'll blame my dad, and there'll be no way to fix it, right? I can't be the reason my whole world falls apart.

ROAN

Fine. I'm fine. Go back to bed.

She pulls out her desk chair and slowly sinks down onto it. She grips the edge of the desk and stares at the report's crumpled cover page.

ROAN (V.O.)

I want to shower. Wash away the feel of his skin on mine. But I can't move. I'm stuck in that place between knowing I can't let him get away with it and not knowing what to do. I have to do something.

Roan hesitates and then she picks up her pencil.

Her hand heavy and deliberate, she writes her uncle's name in all caps on the bottom right corner of the page: RICHARD ROBICHAUX and carefully tears it off.

She looks at the candle with the black-robed effigy of Santa Muerte for a few seconds, touches the image...

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

Santa Muerte seems resolved, so I will be too.

Roan lays the paper across the top of the wax. Then she slides her lap-drawer open and picks up a lighter.

ROAN
(resolute)
Santa Muerte... Hear my prayer.
Vengeance. Give me vengeance. He
can't get away with it. I won't let
him.

She lights the wick. The edges of the paper curl and blacken. And then there's a sudden burst that leaves nothing but ash. She nods. It's done. She pulls her laptop off the adjoining bookshelf, opens it, cues up her report, and hits print.

The printer shudders to life--like it's incensed at being woken up--the button on the front lights up and Roan props her chin in her hands as she waits for the pages to print and closes her eyes.

FADE TO BLACK
FADE BACK IN...

Roan's head slips off her hands and she catches herself, both hands on the desk as she jerks awake. Zoom in on her eyes. Roan blinks.

QUICK CUT TO IMAGE FROM DREAM SEQUENCE

A baby dressed in white lace, on her back in a white bassinet.

QUICK CUT:
Roan blinks.

QUICK CUT: (CONT'D)
The baby opens her mouth.

QUICK CUT: (CONT'D)
Roan blinks.

QUICK CUT: (CONT'D)
There's a bee on her lip.

QUICK CUT: (CONT'D)
Roan blinks again.

QUICK CUT: (CONT'D)
Bees fly out of the baby's mouth.

QUICK CUT:

Roan stares at the candle and shivers as the grandfather clock chimes the first chord of its muffled midnight song.

There's a wisp of smoke lifting from the wick as if the flame's just gone out.

ROAN (V.O.)

Midnight. Precisely midnight. The candle snuffing itself feels ominous. Maybe it's the dream. St. Rita and her mouthful of bees. Mouthful. Doesn't exactly have a ring to it. A burp of bees. A belch of bees. But I guess she'd only be gassy if she chewed and swallowed. A breath of bees. An exhale of exoskeletons. An insidiousness of insects.

Roan snorts and then her expression turns grave and she shivers again. Her eyes are locked on the candle. The wax hasn't burned down.

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

Whatever deal I made with my devil...

I guess it's done.

INT. KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

Bright white high-end cabinets. Dark granite countertops. White marble floor. With the light coming through the windows it looks like a vintage photograph.

ROAN (V.O.)

When Mom had the kitchen redone two years ago, with bright-white cabinets, dark granite countertops, and creamy marble floors, I'd told her it looked like one of those old-timey photographs. Sepia. Early morning light streaming in through the glass gave the monochromatic room a false sense of color.

'Rose-colored glasses,' she'd said. 'Everything looks brighter in the morning.'

Not this morning... He's still here.

Uncle Ricky is sitting at the far end of the island, bleary eyed, lids at half-mast, drawing up a syringe of insulin, and there's a small zippered case open on the counter. He looks up as Roan walks in and smiles creepily.

RICKY
(patronizing)
Good morning.

Roan rolls her eyes, ignoring him, stopping and turning toward her parents' bedroom at the sound of her mom's voice.

KATHERINE (O.S.)
(hollering)
Roan. My car needs to go into the shop. I need your truck today. I'll drive you to school. Two minutes.

RICKY
(voice low and unsettling)
Good morning. Though I suppose it could've been better. If you hadn't kicked me out of bed.

ROAN
(hissing vehemently)
You're disgusting.

Roan spins on her heel to face him and he's standing right there behind her. Enraged, Roan plucks the full syringe from his hand, stabs him in the chest with it, and then depresses the plunger with a violent punch from the heel of her hand.

RICKY
(grunts)
Feisty.

Ricky laughs as he pulls the syringe out. He's still chortling as he settles heavily onto a kitchen stool. There's a small red mark on his fresh-out-of-the-package white t-shirt.

Roan looks at the blood on his shirt and she's horrified at what she's done. She spins on her heel again, steps through the doorway to the foot of the stairs, grabs her backpack and project from the bottom step and quickly leaves...

EXT. ROBICHAUX HOUSE - DAY

View of the street in their affluent neighborhood. Her "beat up" 1972 Ford F250 truck (that's vintage but immaculately restored) is parked on the curb beneath the shade of a wide oak whose roots are buckling the sidewalk.

The front door slams behind Roan and she storms to her truck.

The door creaks as she swings it wide, the frame gives a moan as she jumps into the passenger seat, and then she slams that door too.

CUT TO:

KATHERINE rushing after her down the sidewalk, juggling her coffee mug, her briefcase, her purse and keys. She climbs into the driver's seat, buckles her seatbelt, and looks over at Roan, who's worrying at the deep circular indentation on her palm--the center is pale from the force of the trauma but the outline is turning a deep red.

KATHERINE

Don't worry. Your dad's had enough.
Ricky will be gone before you get home.

Roan nods, barely moving as she stares through the windshield. Katherine turns the engine over and pulls out into the street. Houses sweep past the windows...

ROAN (V.O.)

I just stabbed my uncle in the chest. It's insane, right. The needle was like, what, barely an inch long, but I freaking stabbed him. And it felt... good.

...

But now it doesn't feel like enough.

INT. SACRED HEART HALLWAY - A FEW HOURS LATER

In the hallway, to the left of the art room's closed door, her back against the painted cinderblock wall, Roan is sitting cross-legged on the floor with the hem of her school skirt tucked under her knees.

Under the florescent lights she looks a little pale. There's a hint of dark circles under her eyes. Her sketchbook is open on her lap and there's a pencil in her hand, but she's still, her fifty-yard stare fixed on the opposite wall, when--

Amalie finds her. We don't even hear her walk up. She slips into frame, drops her backpack, and sits, crossing her legs, tucking her skirt under her knees.

AMALIE

You weren't in the courtyard.
Where's your lunch?

Amalie unzips her bag, pulls out her brownbag lunch.

ROAN

(flat)

Not hungry. I was going to work
on... something...

(she motions to the door)

But Ms. MaryJane's in there with
Bettany and Heather, and... you
know... drama.

AMALIE

Did you eat breakfast? You look...

(she pauses, giving Roan
an assessing look, and
then she takes out her
sandwich and unwraps
it.)

Here.

She hands Roan half of her tuna sandwich. Roan wrinkles her
nose.

AMALIE (CONT'D)

Eat it or you'll get all shaky and
lightheaded. And I have an extra
apple juice.

Amalie takes a juice-box out of the bag, sets it next to
Roan's knee. It's the kind made for little kids with the
cartoon on the front.

AMALIE (CONT'D)

Are you worried about your
presentation?

ROAN

What? No. I...

(she hesitates)

I didn't get much sleep.

...

I fell asleep at my desk. And then
I had... weird dreams.

Amalie takes a bite of sandwich, glances down at the
sketchpad, and then does a double-take.

AMALIE

(around a mouthful of
food)

Wow! That's, like, next-level
creepy.

ROAN

Baby St. Rita. And her little bee friends. I dreamt about her... but I can't get the eyes right. Too...flat. Doll-like...

AMALIE

Jesus, she's staring at me. I wanna give her a bite of my sandwich so she'll stop eating bees. That's freaking haunting, Roan. Now I'm gonna have nightmares about her.

Roan is too flat. She doesn't laugh. The corners of her mouth quirk up, but it's hardly a smile. The pencil is poised in her hand, but she's absentmindedly worrying at the circular mark on her palm, the fingernails of her ring and pinky fingers repeatedly scraping over the inflamed skin.

VOICES drift down the hall, two girls chattering away, their words indistinct. TABITHA AND ISELA turn the corner, coming into focus as they make their way to where Roan and Amalie are sitting.

TABITHA

You weren't in the courtyard. Isela bet me a latte you'd be in the cafeteria. As if.
(crinkles her nose)
What's with the hallway?

Amalie points to the closed door and shrugs.

AMALIE

Drama.

TABITHA

Bettany?

AMALIE

And Heather.

Tabitha cringes.

TABITHA

MaryJane's not the school counselor. Someone should tell Bettany.

ISELA

Someone should tell them to make-out already. All they do is fight. They should have to be dating first.

The girls laugh quietly. Roan smiles a little. Amalie picks Roan's sketchbook up out of Roan's lap and turns it to face the newly arrived girls.

Tabitha leans in and makes a horrified expression, clutching her chest.

TABITHA

Oh my God. Are we Goth now?

When did this happen? Please tell me it's a phase. I cannot pull off all black.

Roan laughs genuinely and the haunted look disappears from her eyes. It's like a spell has broken as she shrugs off everything that happened the night before and relaxes with her friends.

ROAN

Me? Monochromatic? Not if I can help it. If you catch me in all black, someone definitely died.

Tabitha laughs and swings around to sit down. Her school skirt flares out, obscuring the shot...

FLASH CUT

(INSERTING A SINGLE FRAME
THAT SHOWS ROAN IN ALL

BLACK AT THE FUNERAL)

INT.SACRED HEART - MS KENNEDY'S CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Ms. Kennedy is sitting in the last student desk at the back of the first row so she can surveil the entire classroom during the presentations. Back straight, a clipboard is angled up from her lap as she jots down a few notes.

MS. KENNEDY

Thank you, Gemma.

Gemma takes half a half-hearted bow, snatches her poster board off the easel on Ms. Kennedy's desk, and quickly makes her way to the far wall where a dozen other projects have already been discarded and are propped up, angled against each other like a religious house of cards beneath the room-length bulletin board. The bulletin board is empty, waiting for the projects to be posted there... but there's only enough room for maybe ten at the most.

Ms. Kennedy looks down at her clipboard. Her face is pinched.

MS. KENNEDY (CONT'D)

We have time for one more. Ms. Robichaux. If you're ready.

Roan pushes up from her seat, her skirt swishing as she slides her poster board out from where it's resting against the back of the chair in front of hers. She props it up on Ms. Kennedy's desk.

ROAN (V.O.)

I've memorized my presentation, backwards and forward. I could recite it in my sleep. But there's no joy in it. No delight at having won, because I haven't won anything. If anything, my uncle's climbing into my bed last night feels a little like karma, and him sitting smugly in my kitchen feels like a slap in the face. No miracles. No vengeance. So now I just have to finish the awful thing I started.

Roan's report is still on her desk, the cover brand new, perfect again, as if last night never happened, as she takes it and adds it to the pile of reports on Ms. Kennedy's vacant chair.

Roan is left holding a stack of papers. They're flyers, with SANTA MUERTE in bold type across the top. A color photocopy of her artwork takes up more than half of the page. There's a bullet list of Key Facts at the bottom in 12pt. font.

Roan smiles softly as she counts out an exact number and hands them to the first girl in each row to pass back. Her project won't make the bulletin board, but everyone will see it.

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

My only small victory is my art. Because it's stunning. The best thing I've ever painted. And now every girl in my class will have a copy... To hang in their lockers and paste into their notebooks and pass around to the lower classmen. A taste of rebellion for everyone. So what if my project doesn't get hung up on the bulletin board... Everyone will see it.

Done, she takes her place at the front of the classroom, clasps her hands behind her back, and clears her throat--

ROAN

(subdued)

Our Lady of the Holy Death... or
Nuestra Senora de la Santa Muerte,
is a Mexican and Mexican-American
folk saint.

...

There are disagreements about her
origins, but she's believed to have
manifested as a melding of some
parts of the Aztec religion with
the European Christian tradition of
painting skeletons to represent
death...

and while she is death personified, Santa Muerte's actually
known for healing, protection, and safe delivery into the
afterlife.

Traditionally depicted as a skeletal female figure clad in a
long robe, holding one or more objects--usually a scythe and
a globe--her robe can be of any color, with the color
varying depending on the rite being performed or the
petition being made.

(pauses)

She motions to her poster board's central image.

ROAN (continuing)

Here I've depicted Santa Muerte with a scythe and the scales
of justice, because some people pray to her to right the
wrongs that have been done to them...

Sometimes... they even ask for revenge.

Her expression changes, going distant, and she shudders, her
spine snapping straight, her shoulders twisting. But then
her eyes refocus and she picks up where she left off...

ROAN

...

I've painted her wearing a black robe in keeping with the
darker theme most people tend to expect from death.

(her tone lightens as she settles into her performance)

Also, I thought the black would really pop against her full red lips and the corona of red poppies I've used to represent her halo.

...And...as you can see, I've given her a slightly more modern look. An homage to sugar skulls and Mexico's Day of the Dead, because I feel the typical crone-look is too misogynistic in its portrayal of women who society feels are no longer useful.

(she shrugs dramatically and smiles)

I mean, she is death personified, but there's no reason she can't also be pretty, right?

Roan fans out the corners of her skirt and dips into a curtsy. A few classmates giggle. There's a smattering of quiet applause from hands that are hidden in laps so they won't be seen by Ms. Kennedy's eagle eyes.

ROAN (CONT'D)
Any questions?

The P.A. speaker crackles as if in response.

PRINCIPAL (O.S.)
Roan Robichaux, please report to
the office to be checked out.

MS. KENNEDY
Thank you, Ms. Robichaux. That will
suffice. If anyone has questions,
they can hold them until tomorrow.

Amalie gives Roan a questioning look about why she's leaving early. Roan shrugs, mouths 'no idea' and collects her things.

CUT TO
INT. SCHOOL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Backpack draped over one shoulder, Roan walks up on her mother, who's waiting outside the office door.

ROAN
Wow, you're early...

The confidence in Roan's voice cuts out as she takes in her mother's bleak expression.

ROAN (CONT'D)
What's wrong?

Katherine, looking very doom-and-gloom, clutches her keys tighter, her knuckles turning white.

KATHERINE

Your Uncle Ricky... (she pauses and swallows thickly) He had a heart attack. He's... dead.

Roan flinches, falters, dropping her backpack. She claps her hand over her mouth, shocked, and then quickly drops it to cover the mark on her palm that almost looks like a stigmata.

ROAN

I didn't... I didn't... He was fine when I left.

KATHERINE

Of course he was. Roan, sweetie, don't upset yourself. I'm trying to feel bad for your father, but... (she sighs)

...that man was difficult to like.

Katherine picks up Roan's schoolbag, wraps an arm around Roan's shoulders, and leads her to the wide double-doors and out into the bright SUNLIGHT.

ROAN

But what happened?

FADE TO

FLASHBACK TO INT. KITCHEN - MID-MORNING

THUD-THUD, THUD-THUD

The island countertop is cleared off. The insulin kit is gone, put away. The refrigerator door is cracked open. The stool at the end of the counter is tipped over onto its side. UNCLE RICKY (wearing different clothing) is sprawled across the floor, face-down, eyes wide and vacant.

QUICK CUT:

David Robichaux walking in. Finding him. Checking for a pulse.

QUICK CUT:

EXT. ROBICHAUX HOME - DAY

Police cars on scene, the ambulance pulling up, their emergency lights flashing.

QUICK CUT:

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

David speaking with officers.

The body being loaded up and carted past him.

Only there's no sound. Over everything we hear the THUD-THUD of Roan's heartbeat...

...and then her mom's voice breaks in and they're driving down her street. Katherine's eyes are fixed on the road.

KATHERINE

...your dad found him. In the kitchen. They think he came back downstairs to have breakfast... and... just... collapsed.

Roan flinches, GASPING, as she slaps her hand against her chest as if she's feeling his heart stop.

ROAN

Downstairs? But he was already downstairs. I saw him. In the kitchen.

KATHERINE

(absently)

Oh, yes, this morning. I saw him too.

(she shakes her head in disbelief)

But he went back up, showered, got dressed, packed his things.

Roan shuts her eyes...

FLASHBACK to her uncle standing in the kitchen, the pinprick of blood blooming on his shirt...

ROAN (V.O.)

Evidence. He went back up to change because that single drop of blood is just as damning as the mark on my palm. He couldn't explain it away without accusing himself in the process. What could've driven me--his niece--to plunge a syringe into his chest at six-thirty in the goddamned morning? Now he can't explain it away because he's dead.

ZOOM IN on the red spot--

ZOOM OUT and the red spot becomes red and blue flashing lights... of the police car parked in Roan's parking spot under the oak tree.

KATHERINE

He just wasn't taking care of himself. Drinking far too much. Joe suspects...

KATHERINE (CONTINUED)

(she shakes her head,
realizing Roan doesn't
know who that is)

...the coroner, Joe Charbonnet, he's friends with your dad. He thinks it had to do with Ricky's diabetes. Alcohol and insulin. He tried to explain it... I just... I don't understand.(wistfully) He was so young. (goes back to being pragmatic)Anyway, they'll know more once the autopsy's done. Joe said the medical examiner will call as soon as it's finished. Anne Hastings... I think, you know how I am with names.

EXT. THE ROBICHAUX'S HOUSE - DAY

Katherine drives Roan's truck past the lone police cruiser (the source of the flashing lights)parked in front of their house. The tires bump over the curb as she turns into their driveway.

Katherine pats Roans leg and gets out. Roan stays in passenger seat, staring through the windshield.

David is on the porch, disheveled. We see his lips moving but can't hear him. He's talking to the police officer.

ROAN (V.O.)

It feels like I swallowed a baseball. I can hardly breathe around it, because my dad looks like a ghost, pale and unfocused. His brother's dead and the last thing they did is fight. Before I killed him.

The officer nods, jots something down in his tiny spiral notebook, then tucks it into his uniform shirt pocket. David shakes the officer's hand. They exchange a few more words.

The officer leaves, nodding at Roan as he passes. Katherine opens Roan's door, grabs her book bag from the backseat.

Her dad walks over, helps Roan out of the car, pulls her into a hug. Roan shuts her eyes. Her whole body is stiff.

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

I murdered my uncle...

I'm a murderer. My dad's going to find out... and he's never going to hug me again.

INT. CORONER'S OFFICE - EVENING

ANNE HASTINGS is in her office. Harried. Overworked. Piles of files are neatly stacked to either side of her desk. The center is clear.

She's holding the telephone receiver to her ear. The computer's screen is a bright reflection in her glasses. Hard to make out and blurry, the reflection slowly comes into focus showing a newspaper article with Richard Robichaux's picture.

The headline reads: Local Contractor Suspect in Fatal Hit and Run.

HASTINGS (INTO TELEPHONE)

Yes. Expedited. Got it. A close friend. Practically family. Of course. Take care of it before I leave. No problem.

All business, no emotion, she sets the receiver down, stands up and is pulling her lab coat on as she heads out the door and into --

CUT TO

--THE AUTOPSY ROOM

The bright glare of the examination light fills the screen and then we see Richard Robichaux's corpse on the examination table.

Hastings is wearing a surgical cap, gloves, and a clear face shield. She's reading from a chart.

HASTINGS (INTO DEVICE)
Name. Richard Oliver Robichaux.
Age. 42

Height. Five-feet-ten-inches

Weight. One-hundred-eighty-three pounds.

(pauses while reading)

Medical history shows Type I diabetic. Heavy drinker.
Presenting as sudden cardiac death.

Picks up a clipboard. The sheet of paper on top depicts an outline of a human form. She begins her inspection of the body, noting her findings by marking them on the diagram.

DISSOLVE TO

She's changed positions and is on the opposite side of the table.

HASTINGS (INTO DEVICE) (CONT'D)
Livor mortis is present. White
contact marks where the chest and
stomach were in contact with the
ground. No post-mortem relocation
suspected. Estimated time of
death... (looks at clock) ten-
hundred hours...

Hastings leans in closer. The camera zooms in on very small circular mark on the chest. There's a tiny purple pinprick at the center.

DISSOLVE TO

She's moved again. We can see the clipboard on the counter but it's out of focus. There's a scalpel in her hand. We see the mark clearly again when she makes the mid-line incision, slightly, but noticeably, off-center, slicing it neatly in half.

FADE TO BLACK

INT. ROAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Roan is sitting cross-legged in her desk chair staring at the lit Santa Muerte candle in front of her. (The candle hasn't burned down at all, and the wax is still very close to the top) The flame is dancing. Roan's door is open. She shuts her eyes...

CUT TO ROAN'S IMAGINATION--

INT. MS. KENNEDY'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Roan is giving her presentation. Her poster board is on Ms. Kennedy's desk and Roan is at the front of the class. But now she's under a spotlight. Ms. Kennedy is seated in the same desk at the back of the room, looking haughty, her smile smug...

Gemma raises her hand to ask a question. Roan points to her and Gemma stands up next to her desk.

GEMMA

(prim and proper)

When do you think corruption of the soul sets in? Before, during, or after the murder?

Ms. Kennedy interjects with a soft reminder...

MS. KENNEDY

Gemma, let's please keep the questions focused on the topic.
Thank you.

Gemma plops petulantly back into her seat with a huff and Victoria jumps up, not waiting to be called on...

VICTORIA

Did Santa Muerte really help you to commit murder?

Roan stares at her, dumbstruck, and Tabitha jumps in, cocking her head as she leans forward in her seat...

TABITHA

(genuinely curious)

Were you possessed by Santa Muerte when you jabbed the needle into your uncle's chest?

(MORE)

TABITHA (CONT'D)

Is that going to be your defense?
(pauses and looks concerned) You do
have a defense, right? Because
orange is definitely not your
color.

VICTORIA and GEMMA

(layered over each other)

What do you think prison will be like?

CUT BACK TO REALITY—

INT. ROAN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Roan's eyes flash open. She's still sitting cross-legged at her desk. The candle flickers, disturbed by her dramatic exhale. The wax still hasn't burned down.

ROAN (V.O.)

I can't help imagining Ms.
Kennedy's smug expression when she
realizes she was right about the
lip-gloss. Lip-gloss, eyeliner,
murder. Thank God I don't have to
go to school tomorrow. Or the day
after that. Bereavement. For the
man I killed. I wished for revenge—
prayed for it--and now's he's
dead. But Santa Muerte isn't my
benevolent benefactress. She's just
a bystander--a silent witness to
the horrible thing I've done... And
it's only a matter of time before
everyone finds out. Do they let you
paint in prison?

The telephone rings, the sound jarring. The closed stairwell is the perfect conduit to drag her mother's voice up the stairs and into Roan's room...

KATHERINE (O.S.)

(crisp and clear)

Hello? ...

(listens)

Yes, this is Katherine Robichaux...

CUT TO

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Katherine is holding the receiver to her ear. David is bleary-eyed, swirling a drink, the ice clinking as Katherine mouths that it's the coroner's office. David sits up straighter, attentive.

KATHERINE (INTO TELEPHONE)
Thank you for calling so late...

We've heard nothing but good things about you from Joe...

We do really appreciate how quickly you've handled it...

Of course...

CUT TO

INT. ROAN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Roan's back straightens. She's holding her breath, terrified. Her hands are pressed together in her lap. She presses her thumb against the small round blood-bruise on her palm, her fingernail digging into the wound's red edges. Her eyes are wide, glassy, and fixed on the image of Santa Muerte.

CUT TO

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

KATHERINE
(listening, she nods)
Natural causes.
(she lets out a relieved
breath--maybe too
relieved for a woman who
didn't suspect her
husband at least a
little)
Okay. Well, I guess that's what was
expected...but with his drinking...
(she shakes her head,
checking herself)
Nevermind me. How long until the
death certificate is ready?
(pauses to listen)
Yes, for the insurance.

Katherine looks over at David, who's now staring into his glass.

HASTINGS (O.S.)
The toxicology and histology
reports can take from four to six
weeks.

KATHERINE
(surprised)
A month. That long?

HASTINGS (O.S.)
These are only preliminary findings
based on the physical examination
and the deceased's medical history.
We won't have a definitive cause of
death until the labs come back. And
science moves at its own pace. The
lab can't be rushed.

Katherine smiles knowingly at the subtle rebuff.

KATHERINE
Preliminary findings. Of course. No
problem. That makes perfect sense.
Thank you again.

The receiver clatters into the cradle and Katherine darts a
worried glance in David's direction. She pauses, makes up
her mind and finally crosses to the sofa, taking a seat next
to him.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)
There's nothing you could've done.

David grunts noncommittally...

CUT TO

INT. ROAN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Roan's relieved exhale makes the flame dance. She squeezes
her eyes shut, but when she opens them, her relief is gone.

ROAN (V.O.)
Natural causes? It sounds...
impossible. Are auditory
hallucinations a thing? Or is the
medical examiner an idiot? I
stabbed him. It had to have left a
mark. A tiny one. Maybe she really
missed it. Is that how miracles
work? Or is she only stalling?
(MORE)

ROAN (CONT'D)

Waiting for the lab work to come
back and confirm what she already
knows. That I'm a murder.

She's agitated, disgusted with herself, and her reprieve.

She stares at the dancing flame like it's mocking her. Her
arm darts out.

She pinches the burning wick, holding her fingers there
until it's extinguished. A trail of white smoke wisps up,
trailing toward the ceiling--

--But then she pulls her hand away and the wick sparks and
lights again, even brighter, as if it's agitated.

FADE TO BLACK

END EPISODE