

CHARACTER ACTOR

Written By

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EXT. HELL'S KITCHEN - DAY

An overcast afternoon in New York City...

FADE IN:

INT. BLACK VOID

EXTREME CLOSEUP of a man in his late 30s with an intensity and volatility that make Ray Liotta seem warm. A menacing, haunting face surrounded by darkness...

Staring back at the face is ALBERT STOUT, mid 20s, disheveled with shaggy hair and five o'clock shadow.

EXT. EAST VILLAGE - DAY

We see that Al stares at a poster of a play on a storefront window. Text reads *Jay Willows Is... THE MAN IN THE ALLEY.*

ON THE STREETS

Al lugs around a big portfolio bag as he goes from business to business.

He shows a flier to a RESTAURANT MANAGER, who just shakes his head, politely shooting him down.

Bummed, Al spots a humble little dive bar across the street where he sees a mid 20's hottie named FIONA working the bar through its store front window.

INT. BERTHA'S BAR

Al moseys in with his fliers, timidly studying Fiona, somewhat intimidated - with tat-covered arms and, choppy yet stylish hair-do, she gives off the vibe of some kind of ex-military bad-ass. Because that's exactly what she is.

As Fiona converses with a BAR PATRON, Al makes his move, approaching the bar.

But as he's about to speak, she turns her back to him and pops open the cash register.

Al struggles to balance patience and assertiveness; Fiona is amused by it all as she watches him through the mirror behind the register.

Finally...

AL

Hey there, my name's Al. I'm here today on behalf of the Renault Theatre and I wanted to ask -

FIONA

You wanna put a poster up.

She keeps her back turned to him, getting a kick out of ignoring him. But he notices that he has her attention, meeting eyes with her reflection.

AL

Yeah. Um...would that be cool?

He shows her. She looks at the poster, breathes deeply.

She shrugs.

He takes his portfolio to the front and pulls out a poster and tape. As he gets to work, she moves to the end of the bar, checking him out and admiring his toned physique.

FIONA

Little higher up.

He adjusts the poster and reaches higher, exposing his back and emphasizing his ass. Fiona delights in the show.

FIONA (CONT'D)

Yeah, that's more like it.

Al finishes the job and turns around.

AL

All set.

FIONA

Can't promise my boss won't take it down.

AL

That's okay. Got my picture.

Fiona comes out from behind the bar and walks up to the poster. She seems to recognize the illustration of Jay.

FIONA

Feel like I've seen that dude before. Maybe SVU?

AL

Oh that's Jay Willows. Good friend of mine.

(MORE)

AL (CONT'D)

He's what you'd call a "Character Actor." Tends to play the eccentric or intense supporting roles in -

FIONA

I know what a character actor is, thanks.

AL

Anyway, yeah. He's in a play and I got the company that's producing it a discount contract with the marketing agency I work for.

FIONA

Oh so you're in marketing?

AL

It's a side gig. I'm an actor, too.

FIONA

You got the looks for it.

AL

Ha. Thanks. Doing my best to exploit them...

FIONA

Think you're hot shit, huh?

AL

No, I just meant that -

FIONA

Fucking with you, dude.

AL

Right.

FIONA

You been in anything recently?

AL

Why, do I look familiar?

FIONA

Not really. But I won't forget your face anytime soon.

Some regulars enter the bar.

FIONA (CONT'D)

What's goin' on, guys?

REGULAR 1

Hey Fiona. Nother long day. Still
happy hour?

FIONA

It is for you two.

As Fiona gets back to work, she gives a quick but sweet-natured nod to Al. He smiles.

AL

See ya, Fiona.

She gives a nonchalant wave and he leaves.

EXT. CINEMA VILLAGE - NIGHT

Later, still carrying his portfolio, Al walks briskly through the East Village toward a small indie movie theater.

A block away, he sees his REFLECTION in a storefront window and pauses to fix his hair.

In the reflection, Al sees Jay Willows walk down the sidewalk across the street. He turns around and calls out to the man.

AL

You aren't gonna miss your own
premiere, are you Jay?

The man doesn't respond. Soon enough he's turned a corner and vanished from sight. A little confused, Al shakes it off.

INT. CINEMA VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

Posters of new indie movies line the windows. A small crowd of young artsy types posing for pics and networking.

Al gives his name at check-in. He gets a wristband and then looks around. One of the guests spots him.

BRIAN

If it isn't Albert Stout, my
favorite indie film actor.

Al leans his portfolio against a wall and spreads his arms, offering a big grin to BRIAN, early 20s, an earnest Richie Cunningham type indie filmmaker. They hug and say hello.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Thanks for comin,' man!

AL
Wouldn't miss it for the world.

BRIAN
Whatcha been up to? I think I read you were getting ready to shoot a feature?

AL
Uh, yes, but we're still waiting on financing. But I am up for some other features that only require my special skills in front of the camera.

BRIAN
Cool, very cool. Hey, while you're here, I want to introduce you to somebody.

Brian summons ANDY, mid-20s, a goofball actor with very similar energy to Brian.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Al, this is Andy, Andy this is Al.

They shake hands.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Andy's the lead in my film.

ANDY
One of the leads. Strong supporting?

BRIAN
No, you're definitely the lead.

ANDY
I play opposite Jay Willows, so I feel like it's more of a Tom Cruise, Jamie Foxx in Collateral kinda deal. I'm Jamie Foxx. Technically the lead, but I mean Jay Willows. Come on.

A YOUNG BLONDE WOMAN summons Brian. Brian motions back to her, urging her to come to him. She begrudgingly does so.

ANDY (CONT'D)
I'm gonna grab a seat. Later guys.

Andy smiles at the woman as he passes her. She sizes Al up.

CHRISTINA

I told them to hold off another 5.
You boys would be lost without me.

BRIAN

That we would, baby. Al, I'd like
you to meet my fiance. This is -

CHRISTINA

Christina Broadbent.

Here is CHRISTINA, 27, a curvy blonde bombshell with garish
makeup, evoking the age of 1940s movie stars.

AL

Pleasure. I'm -

CHRISTINA

Al Stout. Brian wanted to see you
for one of the leads, but I wasn't
quite convinced you were the right
fit for his picture.

Indignant, Al forces a wry smile, trying not to appear
insulted, which he most definitely is.

BRIAN

Christina's our producer.

CHRISTINA

And financier, head of casting, et
cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

BRIAN

We couldn't have made the movie
without her.

CHRISTINA

You could have, but it would've
been shit.

(off Al's look)

Last I checked it wasn't polite to
stare, Mr. Stout.

AL

Sorry - your face...

CHRISTINA

Is flawless, I know. No offense
taken, Mr. Stout. You recognize me
from the subway ads.

BRIAN

She runs a plastic surgery practice
in Brooklyn. One of us has to have
a real job!

Christina is utterly unamused. There's an awkward tension.

THEATER OWNER (O.S.)

Ladies and gentlemen, please take
your seats. Show's about to start!

CHRISTINA

That's our cue.

BRIAN

K. Meet you inside, honey.

Christina gives Brian the stink eye.

CHRISTINA

Regards, Mr. Stout.

She marches off into the theater. Brian smiles sheepishly.

AL

She's somethin else.

BRIAN

Isn't she?

Brian pulls Al into a corner. Al goes along with it.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Hey man, I wanted to ask you if
you'd been in touch with Jay at
all. It's been really hard to get
ahold of him and I'm kinda worried.

AL

I thought I saw him outside
earlier. Not sure if it was him.

BRIAN

Huh. Weird. Well besides that?

AL

On and off. But that's normal for
Jay. He's a weirdo; got a
reputation for disappearing for
long stretches of time.

Brian pretends to be comforted by that statement, but he's
clearly still concerned.

THEATER OWNER (O.S.)
 Film's about to start, folks! Let's
 take our seats!

AL
 Hey, I'll see you after.

BRIAN
 Yeah, definitely!

INT. CINEMA VILLAGE - MOVIE THEATER

People take their seats. Al finds a place on the right. He pulls out his cell and texts Jay. He's kind of anxious.

AL (TEXT)
 Hey man - thought I saw you outside
 Cinema Village. Was that you?

JAY (TEXT)
 Nah man, I'm outta town.

AL (TEXT)
 Freaky. About to watch your movie.

Al waits a moment, praying his experimental reach-out will work. To his surprise, Jay responds almost immediately.

JAY (TEXT)
 Cool man. Enjoy!

Al smiles to himself, relieved.

FIONA (O.S.)
 This seat taken?

Al turns to see Fiona, made-up, tight dress, leather jacket. Al's eyes wander up and down her legs for a second.

He gestures; she sits a couple seats away from him in the otherwise empty row. Not a date, but close enough...

AL
 So. How did you hear about -

FIONA
 Shhh...

She gently presses her finger to his lips as the lights go down and the movie starts. Al settles, looking like he just won the lottery.

LATER

The movie ends and the credits roll. As Al processes his emotions, he turns to his side and discovers that Fiona has left. He dismisses it and messages Jay again.

AL (TEXT)

Dude. Loved it. Best work of yours
I've seen -

While he texts, Al overhears an argument between a man and a woman by the back of the theater. He turns around and sees Fiona by the exit, talking to a man in the shadows.

FIONA

Who the fuck do you think you are?
No, seriously...

MAN (V.O.)

Will you keep it down? Christ.

The two disappear through the door. Al is almost amused. Then the lights go up. A MODERATOR walks to the front.

MODERATOR

What a movie, huh? Let's give
another big hand for the
filmmakers, eh?

The audience politely applauds.

MODERATOR (CONT'D)

I would now like to invite to the
stage the film's writer and
director, Mr. Brian DeVito!

Brian bashfully walks down the middle aisle and up to the stage. He is handed a mike and he waves to the crowd.

MODERATOR (CONT'D)

So. Brian. Where did you get the
idea for the film?

BRIAN

Good question. Um. Well this one
time I met an enigmatic actor named
Jay Willows...

Al gets a text from Jay. As Brian carries on, Al tunes him out and directs all of his attention toward the message.

JAY (TEXT)

Oh man. Thanks so much for the kind
words. Wish I coulda been there to
hang with you, brother.

EXT. EAST VILLAGE - LATER

Al walks briskly toward the subway. A text pops up.

JAY (TEXT)
Always running away from the world.

Distracted, Al doesn't notice someone CUT HIM OFF.

STRANGER
Watch where you're goin, asshole!

AL
Sorry man, I - you're such a dick.

Jay laughs in his face as Al cools off.

INT. LO-FI SALOON

Jay and Al are well into their fourth round of whiskey.

JAY
I'm like I ain't gonna share my
process with ya, kid. I show up; do
the job. Stay outta my fuckin way!

AL
Amen, amen.
(takes a sip)
Everyone is lookin for you!

JAY
Good. Keep 'em on their toes.

AL
Maybe I should disappear once in a
while.

Al laughs to himself. Jay signals for another round.

LATER

The BARTENDER is intently listening to Jay tell stories.

JAY
...And I'm like sure I'll read, but
they're not gonna cast a guy with
these fangs to sell toothpaste
unless it's fuckin Halloween.

The Bartender and Al laugh.

AL
Bro I'd kill for that audition.

JAY
I swear from all those corporate dinners and gay weddings you probably got a small fortune stashed under your mattress.

AL
Let's not forget the poster gig!

JAY
I oughta send ya 10% for that shit.

AL
Maybe you should.

The bartender refills Al's glass. Jay declines.

AL (CONT'D)
Hell of it is... I didn't start out the way I wanted. Had to take some time, redirect, you know? But there are 3, 4 projects I'm attached to that'll take off soon. Those'll be the thing that makes me.

JAY
My man here's got what they call Artistic Integrity.

AL
Damn right. And I...did you know I met with Gersh? Abrams? Mm?
(to Bartender)
Those are big agencies.

JAY
Top tier.

AL
I got talent, is what I'm sayin!

Al stares at his glass. The bartender walks away.

JAY
I genuinely liked TOXIC UNIVERSITY.

Al snickers, shakes his head, shoves Jay.

AL
Fuck you...

Jay points to the VHS Collection by the tv set. TOXIC UNIVERSITY is among the titles.

JAY
You think they take requests here?

LATER

Al, Jay and some random bar patrons watch Al in a bad B-movie. Al fidgets in his seat; Jay is enthralled.

One of the bar patrons trolls the screen to Jay's chagrin.

BAR PATRON
This movie blows! Hey Bartender -
somethin less shitty please?

Jay gets up and walks over to the Bar Patron.

BAR PATRON (CONT'D)
Fuck ya lookin at?

Jay punches the guy in the face. Al goes over to break it up and gets clocked in the jaw. A fight breaks out.

EXT. EAST VILLAGE - LATER

Al and Jay stumble through the streets together, both nursing cuts and bruises on their faces. They laugh together.

A well-dressed young couple take pictures of each other against a brick wall. The DUDE recognizes Jay or Al.

DUDE
(to GIRL)
It's that one actor.
(to Jay/Al)
Hey, aren't you that one actor?

Jay and Al turn around.

JAY/AL
Maybe.

DUDE
Can I get a picture with you?

AL
(to Jay)
Which one of us is he talking to?

JAY
Get a picture with both of us.

The Dude gives the Girl his cell and gets between Jay and Al.

GIRL

Smile.

Jay looks away, covers his face with his hand. FLASH!

IN AN ALLEY

Al is puking into a corner as Jay plays lookout.

AL

(in between heaves)

Why'd you fuck that photo up?

JAY

I been photographed enough, man.

Al resumes puking. Jay sees his REFLECTION in a puddle.

JAY (CONT'D)

This mug's overrated, anyway.

UP THE STREET

Jay guides Al to the subway entrance. Al signals that he's got a grip on the railing.

JAY (CONT'D)

We coulda run this town.

Jay turns and stumbles into the night. Al calls out to him.

AL

Still could!

Al pumps his fist high like a sad, delusional sports fan.

INT. AL'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Posters of edgy 70s movies pinned haphazardly to the walls. Shelves of books on drama, screenwriting, indie film.

Old takeout containers. Clothes everywhere. In a far corner, rolled-up posters of B-movies with Al's likeness.

IN THE BEDROOM

Al lies facedown on a twin mattress on the floor. A LOUD JACKHAMMER runs in the background.

Al slowly wakes up, reaches for his cell. He sees that he's got 5 Missed Calls from Brian. He calls Brian back.

AL
Hey man, what's up?

BRIAN (V.O.)
Where've you been, man? I've called you nonstop all night. Shit, shit, shit. FUCK. Oh God man I don't know what to do. I don't know what the hell to do right now.

AL
Brian, calm down. Take a breath, okay? Now what's the matter?

BRIAN (V.O.)
I don't know how else to say this. Jay's dead, man.

Al reacts to the news, almost like he's been pranked.

AL
Not funny, man.

BRIAN (V.O.)
I wish I were joking...

Al starts to digest the information.

BRIAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Al? Al, you there?

INT. DINER - DAY

A grimy diner in Brooklyn. Al enters and finds Brian in a booth, completely strung out and emotionally spent. Al orders a coffee and settles in.

AL
Talk to me.

BRIAN
I don't know where to start.

AL
How about the last 24 hours?

BRIAN
Well...you know how I told you I hadn't heard from Jay in a while? That's not exactly true. I'd been sending him texts and they'd be registered as "Seen," but I never actually got a response.

(MORE)

BRIAN (CONT'D)

The past day, though, he would start to type something and then stop. It was weird. And he started viewing my stories and liking them or sending random emojis. I thought he was getting ready to surprise me at the premiere or whatever. But when he didn't show, I was super frustrated. Then I was scrolling through Facebook and I saw this.

Brian displays his cell. It's a Facebook post with Jay's photo and a message from his father. An obituary of sorts.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Doesn't say anything about how it happened. Just that he passed away and they're all really sad...

As Brian carries on, Al grows more and more confused.

BRIAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

...and I tried getting in touch with his dad, his sister, anybody from out there, but nobody picks up. I'm worried that - Al?

AL

Huh?

BRIAN

You with me, man?

AL

Yeah. Definitely. You were saying.

BRIAN

I can't get ahold of anybody. So I called you. Hate to harp on this, but could you walk me through your last correspondence with Jay?

CUT TO:

EXT. EAST VILLAGE - NIGHT

Al and Jay stumble through the streets together.

AL (V.O.)

After the screening, we -

BRIAN (V.O.)

He texted you again?

AL (V.O.)
No, we hung out, got drunk...

BRIAN (V.O.)
That's not funny, man.

BACK TO SCENE

Al glances at Brian's phone. The obituary reads "*Passed away at his family's home in his native Vermont...*"

AL
I...sorry man, hungover. Texted him good job, didn't hear back. Hadn't been in touch in at least a month.

BRIAN
What did you guys talk about a month ago?

AL
What movies we'd seen recently - Bri, I'm sorry but I don't have the answers you're looking for, man.

BRIAN
If you'd be more specific, maybe I'd be able to to piece this together. No, instead you just withhold things from me and I'm totally in the dark.

Dead silence. Al a confused mess. Brian an emotional wreck.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Sorry. It's just.

Al's eyes wander to the clock on the wall. Brian stares vacantly. Al puts some cash on the table and gets up.

AL
I gotta run, buddy. If you ever -
Brian stands, hurriedly putting on his jacket.

BRIAN
Can I take the train back with you?

AL
I'm in Sunset Park, man. You're all the way up in Astoria.

Brian signals the waitress and puts down some cash as well.

BRIAN

I actually need to run a few errands in Brooklyn anyway, so -

AL

Brian. Think we both need space.

Brian stops himself, winds down. He gets it. And slowly shrinks back into his seat. The WAITRESS comes over.

BRIAN

Keep it.

She walks away with the check. Brian looks out the window, stares. Al smiles, taps Brian's arm and heads out the door.

FROM THE STREET

Al sees Brian continuing to stare vacantly, and it's the sorriest sight in the world. Al walks toward the subway.

INT. AL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - 3RD FLOOR - LATER

As Al reaches his apartment and unlocks it -

His weirdo neighbor, RUDY, 35, long hair, beard, street clothes and glasses, greets him, overly enthusiastic.

RUDY

Long night, huh?

Al throws him an expression, nothing more.

RUDY (CONT'D)

Me too. This undercover shit gets so monotonous. Wish I was like you, ya know, a freelancer. Make my own hours. Go out for kicks whenever.

Al's door is unlocked and halfway open, but he stands there awkwardly trying to be polite as Rudy rambles.

RUDY (CONT'D)

Hey, how did your play go?

AL

The one I did last month? Fine.

Al moves to enter, but Rudy keeps going.

RUDY

Meant to catch a performance. Got swamped. You'll tell me about the next? I love live theatre.

AL
Yeah. Look I gotta hit the hay.

RUDY
Sure, right on. Oh - almost forgot!

Rudy hurries into the apartment across the hall, quickly returning with a small package.

RUDY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Snagged this from the lobby for ya before someone swiped it.

He hands the package to Al.

RUDY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
You got family in Vermont?

AL
Thanks Rudy. See ya next time.

RUDY
Okay dude. Don't forget to let me know about your next show!

Al slams the door.

INT. AL'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

We follow Al into his dimly lit one-bedroom pre-war apartment. Stacks of posters for Jay's play.

LATER

Al reheats some Chinese food and kicks back on the couch. He opens the package: 2 books on sociopaths and psychopaths.

A NOTE: Hope these help you on your journey, amigo. - JW

Al smiles, puts on some vinyl records and flips through the books and takes some notes.

LATER

Al's hooked on research. He gets a FaceTime Request from OMAR, 30, a chill AF hipster indie filmmaker from LA.

OMAR
How was your day, dude? Heard about your buddy Jay. My condolences.

AL

Hey man - it's uh, it's what it is I guess. Day's been chill. Just still kinda shocked.

OMAR

Fuckin A. Well, as long as this isn't a bad time or anything -

AL

We're good, totally good.

OMAR

-cool, cool. Then let's jump back in.

AL

Excellent.

OMAR

Great. So yeah, I was thinking about Chester. Wanted to know where your head was at, how you saw the character. Cuz I want...I want to make sure I pick the right person, because it's such a huge commitment, ya know.

Al is more than prepared for this as he launches into a thesis-like analysis of his character and the movie.

AL

I look at Chester as more of a vessel than a person. Normally my instincts as an actor would drive me toward building a backstory, creating an emotional inner life and justifying his choices based on the hand he was dealt, what he went through as a child, etc. But this guy is a different animal. He's a void. He isn't a person to me, really. He wears a mask to make it SEEM like he's a person, but there is nothing underneath that mask. Chester is the embodiment of ANARCHY, of DESTRUCTION, of BIBLICAL EVIL. The more I let that sink in, the more I begin to understand what I need to do to pull this off. And I know I can.

OMAR

Because it's in you.

AL

It's in me. It's in me.

They look at each other, nodding their heads. There's an awkward silence. Al realizes Omar wanted him to keep going.

AL (CONT'D)

So my audition will be ready very soon. I'm just taking some extra time to find the right notes for the character.

Omar doesn't seem convinced. He thinks a moment, then...

OMAR

Full disclosure?

AL

Please.

OMAR

There's...interest with another actor. We plan to meet in a few days. Not gonna lie: this guy has bigger credits than you and is maybe more naturally-suited to the part. I can't not meet with him.

AL

I'll be ready in less than 3 days and I will PROVE that I'm the guy for the job.

The lights dim up and down.

OMAR

Yo, what's up with the lights?

AL

Huh?

OMAR

Your lights keep dimming.

AL

Oh that's normal. Happens when someone's buzzing.

Al realizes someone is trying to get into the building.

AL (CONT'D)

Hey Omar, I'll get back to you soon, okay?

OMAR

Get me that monologue.

Al nods reassuringly and gives Omar a thumbs-up. The call ends and Al goes to the buzzer in the kitchen.

IN THE KITCHEN

Sure enough, the buzzer is ringing. Al presses TALK.

AL

Hey, who's there?

ANDY (V.O.)

Hey Al - you probably don't remember me, but I met you at the premiere last night. I was the lead in Brian's movie?

Al makes a frown. What the hell is this guy doing here?

AL

Uh...you couldn't like, text me or something?

ANDY (V.O.)

Brian's missing.

AL

Come again?

ANDY (V.O.)

We were supposed to meet for coffee and he never showed. He won't answer his phone. I'm worried he might be in trouble.

BUZZZZZ

AT AL'S DOOR

Andy spills it as Al keeps the door halfway cracked.

ANDY

I got a call from Bri earlier and he sounded...I dunno, high. And he doesn't smoke. He said some shit about Jay being the key to his success, and how he was gonna help us find distribution and promote the movie, but now that he's gone, the distributors won't talk to him and he doesn't know who to turn to because even YOU wouldn't help.

AL
Hey now, wait a minute -

ANDY
I'm not saying it's your fault. But you were like the last person to talk to him. Even his girlfriend says she hasn't been in touch since the premiere. Persona non grata.

AL
Where is Brian usually at this time of night?

INT. ANDY'S CAR - NIGHT

As they drive, Andy has some kind of punk rock music playing. Al can't think clearly.

AL
Turn that down, would ya?

ANDY
Huh? Oh, sorry man.

Andy switches it off.

ANDY (CONT'D)
Punk rock helps keep me calm. My therapist says it's a constructive way of dealing with my anger...

AL
Yeah yeah I'm sure. How'd you get the address?

ANDY
I think his gal has a practice nearby, so he frequents the area and kinda uses it as a place to clear his head, get all zen...

AL
No man, my address. How did you find out where I live?

ANDY
Oh. We kept a record of all the donors' info so we could mail incentives after our Kickstarter campaign.

Al laughs to himself.

ANDY (CONT'D)
It's not that funny.

AL
It's just...this little movie was never gonna make or break your careers. Frankly it's a little silly Brian would lose his shit cuz he thought he might not get launched into stardom overnight.

Andy is not having it. Al can tell he's irked him.

AL (CONT'D)
It's not the end of the world.
There'll be other films. Right?

Andy remains sullen. He eyes the volume knob. Al turns it for him. Music swells. Andy and Al share a look.

INT. BUSHWICK WASTELAND - LATER

Andy's car cruises through a much seedier area. Graffiti everywhere. Rust and bent metal.

INT. ANDY'S CAR (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

As a bridge comes into view, ahead..

AL (CONT'D)
Hey isn't this where...

ANDY
We used the whole block in our movie.

Good times.

Andy parks, kills the engine.

EXT. BUSHWICK WASTELAND - CONTINUOUS

Al and Andy leave the car, keeping their distance from each other as they walk through.

A BRIDGE comes into view. Andy pulls over and parks.

ON FOOT, Andy and Al keep a distance.

AL
So what do you think happened? You think he killed himself? Seems a bit of a stretch. Dude was a lot saner than that.

Andy remains tight-lipped.

AL (CONT'D)
 Alright dude. What aren't you
 telling me?

Al gets in Andy's face. Andy stumbles to a halt.

ANDY
 We're supposed to be looking for
 Brian, man.

AL
 Start talking or I'll kick your
 ass. How's that?

ANDY
 I promised I'd keep it a secret.

Al starts shoving Andy, roughing him up.

AL
 Keep WHAT a secret?

He SLAPS Andy across the face. Andy shoves Al, who shoves
 back hard. Andy falls down a DITCH near the bridge.

Al goes after him, extremely apologetic.

AL (CONT'D)
 Andy? Andy buddy, you okay?

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE DITCH

Andy looks on in horror at something. He SCREAMS.

Al arrives at the scene. There lies BRIAN'S BLOODY BODY,
 facedown in a heap of trash and asphalt.

LATER

CAUTION TAPE. RED AND BLUE LIGHTS. WALKIE TALKIES.

Al and Andy are being questioned by a DETECTIVE.

DETECTIVE
 Got it. Thank you for your time,
 gentleman.

The detective walks away and spots DET. SEAN REDLITZ, 49, a
 stylish, witty cop with beady eyes and overgrown scruff.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)
 Already got their story, Redlitz.

REDLITZ

Then they'll be warmed up to tell it again.

The Detective frowns and walks away as Redlitz approaches.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)

Mr. Stout. Mr. Pankin. Detective Sean Redlitz, Homicide. Walk me through the night again, would ya?

ANDY

We just gave our story.

AL

It's alright, Andy. They're just being thorough, right Detective?

REDLITZ

That's right.

ANDY

Fine. I picked him up cuz I was worried about Brian.

REDLITZ

How do you two know each other?

ANDY

We don't, really. Just met at a premiere the other night. Brian's new movie. I'm the star.

REDLITZ

Good for you. So you guys became fast friends?

ANDY

We were both friends with Brian. So when Brian went missing...

REDLITZ

You thought you'd team up and track him down. How did you end up here?

ANDY

Had a hunch.

AL

They filmed some of their movie here, apparently.

REDLITZ

Interesting.

A FRANTIC WOMAN rants in the background: we recognize her as Christina, Brian's fiance whom we met at the theater.

CHRISTINA

Get your God-damn hands off me.

She arrives at the body. A wave of angst washes over her.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

Baby. Oh baby Brian, my poor baby!

An OFFICER guides her away. She spots Andy and rushes to hug him. Andy comforts her like a sister.

AL

My heartfelt condolences.

SLAP! Christina's open palm hits Al with such force and fury he nearly trips over himself.

CHRISTINA

This is all because of you! He was fine until you came into the picture. What'd you tell him? How could you leave him by himself when he clearly needed a friend?

AL

I did what I could. I really did.

The Officer escorts Christina back up the ditch.

ANDY

Detective, is it alright if I -

REDLITZ

Go ahead. I'll get the rest of your story later.

ANDY

Thanks Detective. Al -

Al waves and Andy heads toward Christina. An OFFICER hands Redlitz a coffee.

REDLITZ

You want one?

AL

Nah, I'm good.

REDLITZ

Would you humor me in explaining your relationship with Mr. DeVito and Ms...

AL

Christina. Her name's Christina.

REDLITZ

The angry girlfriend.

AL

Yeah. I met her the same night I met Andy.

REDLITZ

At the premiere.

AL

Right. Brian had been a loose friend through indie film. I'd promised to attend all kinds of screenings for his feature, but it never lined up till a couple nights ago. Still, I stayed in touch. We supported each other.

REDLITZ

You're a filmmaker as well?

AL

Actor/filmmaker.

REDLITZ

Good for you.

AL

We'll see.

Redlitz notes the hint of self-deprecation.

REDLITZ

Any reason she'd be harboring hostility toward you?

AL

Sometimes people need an easy target.

REDLITZ

That they do. What DID you talk about? She mentioned you met with him yesterday, right?

AL
Oh, that. Yeah. We grabbed coffee
at a diner. He was pretty broken up
about Jay.

REDLITZ
Jay Willows?

AL
You know him?

REDLITZ
I know his work. He was a talented
actor.

AL
Yeah he was. Brian directed his
last performance. I tried to
console him, but...

REDLITZ
We all grieve differently.

Redlitz hands Al his card.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)
If you think of anything that might
point to a motive, etc. Gimme a
call, alright?

Al takes the card and nods. Redlitz walks off to speak with
other officers. Andy approaches.

ANDY
I think I'm gonna give Christina a
ride home. Um...

Al picks up on Andy's implication.

AL
It's fine, I'll take the subway.

INT. SUBWAY CAR - NIGHT

Al scrolls through his Instagram feed, searching for the
hashtags #JAYWILLOWS and #ALSTOUT. No recent photos come up.

Al puts his phone down, looks up and sighs. A POSTER OF
JAY'S PLAY taped next to a bulletin frame stares back.

JAY (V.O.)
We could run this town.

AL
Still could...

EXT. EAST VILLAGE - NIGHT

Al retraces his steps from the night of the screening, up and down the streets he walked with Jay.

INT. LO-FI SALOON

Al tries to get the Bartender's attention.

AL
Hey - you remember me from the other night?

BARTENDER
Vaguely. You wanna drink?

AL
You remember this guy?

Al shows a photo of Jay from IMDB.

BARTENDER
Yeah, he's in some horror flicks.

AL
DID YOU SEE US TOGETHER?

BARTENDER
I remember YOU cuz you made me play one of your shit B-movies.

AL
That was Jay's idea. Jay Willows. He was with me.

BARTENDER
Jay Willows is dead.

AL
I know, but...

ANGRY CUSTOMER
Who's this guy think he is?

AL
...Nobody...

IN THE ALLEY

Al walks by the place he took the photo with Jay. He stares at the brick wall.

AL (CONT'D)
You were with me. Weren't you?

LORNA (V.O.)
You can't just come and go as you please. People depend on you, Larry.

INT. AL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Bottle of scotch in hand, Al drunkenly watches one of Jay's movies. We ENTER THE FILM as Jay has a big moment.

JAY (AS LARRY)
That's the beauty of being me, hun.
I'm the exception to every rule...

ON AL

Studying Jay onscreen, like he's in conversation with him.

LORNA (V.O.)
I deserve a heads up. I think I've earned it.

AL (JAY/LARRY V.O.)
A good magician never reveals his secrets.

INT. AL'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Several days later. Al again wakes up to find a bunch of texts and missed calls. Al dials up BARRY.

AL
What's the word, Barry?

BARRY (V.O.)
Do you EVER answer your phone? I feel like you deliberately ignore my calls and only call back when you feel like it.

AL
Some folks like to enjoy the weekend.

BARRY (V.O.)
It's been 5 days since you last
checked in.

AL
I'm in mourning.

BARRY (V.O.)
You're a lazy bum is what you are.

Al sits up and reaches for a STALE BAGEL on his night stand.
He dips it in soggy butter and takes a bite.

AL
All in your head, Bare. Talk to me.

BARRY (V.O.)
We need you back out there. Ticket
sales are through the fuckin' roof!

AL
He's dead. How is there a show
anymore?

BARRY (V.O.)
Understudy. They want to keep using
his image, though. Figure it'd be a
fitting tribute.

AL
How tasteful of them.

There's an INCOMING CALL from REDLITZ.

AL (CONT'D)
Bare I got another call.

BARRY (V.O.)
You still got posters, right?

He stands looks at the stack in his corner. He sighs.

AL
Yeah...

BARRY
Don't let me down.

AL
Never do...

BARRY
That's not true...

Al ends the call and hits ACCEPT for Redlitz.

AL
Detective. How can I help?

INT. REDLITZ'S OFFICE - DAY

A very clean, well-decorated office, almost like a professor's. Poster of classic films noir line the walls.

AL
Eye witness testimony my ass.

REDLITZ
Only repeating what I was told.

AL
From a homeless crackhead.

REDLITZ
It's what we have to go on. Have a seat and let's talk it through.

AL
I don't wanna sit. Do some digging. I've got nothing to hide.

REDLITZ
Why not stay a while, then? You want us to catch the guy, right?

Al slumps down in the chair opposite Redlitz.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)
There's other evidence besides this. I technically have enough to arrest you. But I'm holding off because you seem like a decent guy.

Al's eyes have wandered off to a poster.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)
That was signed by Bogie himself.

AL
Got a favorite of his?

REDLITZ
Maltese Falcon. Yourself?

AL
High Sierra.

REDLITZ
More of a minor classic, isn't it?

AL
Underrated. Watch it again. What do you need from me, Detective?

A KNOCK. Redlitz eagerly looks to the door. Al turns.

REDLITZ
Come in...

Christina enters, looking at Al like he's a monster.

AL
What is this?

Redlitz gestures for Christina to sit. She plops down and crosses her legs, deliberately turning her cheek to Al.

CHRISTINA
I know you were there that night.

AL
What? How? Says who?

Christina puts her cell on the desk. A TEXT from Brian.

BRIAN (TEXT)
Meeting Al by the bridge. He wanted to hang some more. Be in touch. XO

AL
That's a lie. The first time I went to the bridge was with Andy.
(to Redlitz)
That text is doctored.

REDLITZ
It came from his phone that night.

AL
Awfully convenient she only just remembered to share this with you.

CHRISTINA
It was raining. I tripped and dropped my cell in a puddle.

AL
Bullshit! Unfucking believable!

Al gets up, grabs his portfolio bag, heads for the door.

CHRISTINA
You're gonna let him walk?

Redlitz stands, leans over his desk.

REDLITZ
There's a way to handle this like gentlemen, Mr. Stout.

AL
Then I must not be a gentleman.

Al SLAMS the door. Christina looks indignantly at Redlitz.

INT. BERTHA'S BAR

Fiona is restocking inventory.

AL (O.S.)
Trouble you for a JB rocks?

Fiona turns and is suddenly very nervous. Al takes a seat and watches her pour.

AL (CONT'D)
Aren't you gonna join me?

She smiles a little.

LATER

They've both had a few and are giggling about something. Fiona pours a little more for herself and Al.

AL (CONT'D)
So you thought you'd surprise me at the screening?

FIONA
I was starting to believe we were pretending we just met...

AL
I like our history. It's quirky.

Fiona rolls her eyes and leans in.

FIONA
I knew about the screening, dude.

AL
How's that? Friend of the director?

FIONA
Friend of the star.

Al tilts his head, intrigued.

FIONA (CONT'D)
I'm not an actress, okay? But I ended up getting cast in a movie last summer cuz the director like my vibe or something. Jay and I hit it off. Had a kind of summer romance set fling. Were hot and heavy for a while and then, pretty much the day after we wrapped, he tells me it's over. I went with it. Fun while it lasted, nice to know ya. Nothing unusual in this industry, right?

AL
So that was the end of it?

FIONA
Not exactly. A few weeks after I got back to the city, Jay started calling me again. Always at weird hours. He'd text, watch my Insta stories, send memes. That type of thing. Sometimes he'd say cryptic shit, like "Maybe in another life," or "I dreamed of us as an old married couple. Did you dream that too?" I got the feeling he thought I was the one that got away, but he didn't want me getting involved cuz of his...issues.

AL
Issues?

FIONA
Claimed he was bipolar. Possibly schizophrenic. We both knew the truth about what he was, though.

AL
A psychopath.

FIONA
Exact-a-mundo.

Fiona offers Al another pour. He holds his hand up.

AL
I was joking.

FIONA
I wasn't.

She fills his glass up and continues.

FIONA (CONT'D)
Anyway, Jay being Jay, he sent me the info for the screening last week, a few days beforehand. I wasn't gonna go, to be honest. Too much drama. But then you came into the picture, and I couldn't resist the thrill of surprising you.

AL
But you disappeared. I saw you arguing with someone that night. Who was it? Why'd you leave without saying something?

Fiona finishes her drink.

FIONA
Look at that: time to go back to work.

Fiona gets up and starts toward the other side of the bar. Al follows her and grabs her arm.

AL
You're running again.

FIONA
Grieving.

AL
Aren't we all.
(she tries to break free)
Hey. If you're afraid of someone, I'll look out for you, okay?

Fiona shakes him off.

FIONA
I don't need anyone's protection, dude. Now if you'll excuse me, I got rent money to earn.

AL
How much do I owe you?

FIONA

I stood you up. Consider us even.

Al smiles and leaves her to her work.

INT. REDLITZ'S TOWNHOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

An Old-Hollywood-style townhouse in the West Village. Redlitz drinks a glass of red wine as he goes over his case files.

On the opposite side of the couch idling on her cell is Redlitz's daughter: MIMI, 19, clad in croptop and sweats.

As the TV plays in the background, Mimi notices her dad pull out a PHOTO OF AL at the premiere.

MIMI

Hey, I know that guy. He's hot.

Redlitz takes off his glasses and turns to Mimi.

REDLITZ

What'd we say about eavesdropping?

MIMI

(moving closer)

Is he like wanted for murder or something? Oh my God he is.

REDLITZ

Looking more likely.

MIMI

He's not the skeezy dude you think he is, Daddy. He was the only real professional on set.

REDLITZ

Please let's not talk about that.

MIMI

Like it or not, SEAN, I had fun making that trashsterpiece. Actors can't always choose their path. You shouldn't judge.

Redlitz puts his glasses back on. Mimi goes back to her cell.

EXT. MAYHEM MOVIES - DAY

A rundown office building in Long Island City. Spraypainted on the front garage is a MURAL OF FREAKS AND B-MOVIE IMAGES.

Redlitz walks up to the door and buzzes. He looks around and some sketchy-looking people. Averts his eyes.

TELECOM (V.O.)
Mayhem Movies.

REDLITZ
Hey there. This is Detective Sean Redlitz, NYPD. I was wondering -

TELECOM (V.O.)
We are unable to take your call at this time. Please leave a message and we'll be sure to get back to you. Have a sexy and slimy day!

Redlitz frowns at the intercom. He's a little weirded out...

TELECOM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Just fucking with you. Come in.

BUZZZZZ. Redlitz shakes his head and enters.

STANLEY (V.O.)
You a closeted fan or are you here to lock me up for kiddie porn?

INT. MAYHEM MOVIES OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

A janky production office with lots of B-movie memorabilia and a handful of underpaid office assistants in their 20s.

Redlitz sits opposite STANLEY SCHWARTZ, 75, a B-movie legend. Behind Stanley is a poster: 45 YEARS OF DISRUPTIVE CINEMA.

Redlitz looks down at a POSTER OF AL from his B-movie days.

REDLITZ
What was he like on set with the cast and crew?

STANLEY
Polite. Moody. Fun. Dissociative.

REDLITZ
So his behavior was erratic?

STANLEY
He was an actor doing his job. Just like your daughter. By the way, is she still up for my next flick? Got a nice part for her if she wants...

REDLITZ

We're not here to talk about my daughter. Mr. Schwartz. Albert Stout may have killed someone. I want to know if there's a history of sociopathic behavior.

STANLEY

Of course there is! Ya gotta understand, most actors in my movies just imitate me: they do silly shit, they mug, they overact. That's all well and good - I'm not competing with Scorcese. But with Stout? We were lucky to have him. He gave us more than we deserved.

REDLITZ

Since that film, has he been in touch with you or any of the crew?

STANLEY

No, not that I know of.

Stanley sees Redlitz make notes about Al: "sociopathic behavior onset; wild mood swings; socially distant..."

STANLEY (CONT'D)

It's normal, you know.

Redlitz looks up from his notes.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

For people who work with me to wash the slate clean, pretend they didn't know me. It's how they move forward. Otherwise they wouldn't have a career.

REDLITZ

Except his career stalled. Nothing's happened in years.

STANLEY

That's how long it takes sometimes.

REDLITZ

To legitimize one's pursuits?

STANLEY

To become someone else.

A BIG-BREASTED INTERN walks over, hands Stanley his coffee.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Thank you, dear Kimberly.

Kimberly smiles at him and at Redlitz, who nods. Stanley ogles like a horny teenager as Kimberly walks away.

REDLITZ

I see your moral barometer is as sharp as ever, Mr. Schwartz.

STANLEY

I don't pretend to be anything but a sleazy film producer. Am I also Ivy-league-educated? Sure. But that's not what pays the bills.

REDLITZ

I think we're done here.

Redlitz gets up, pulls on his jacket.

STANLEY

We can't all be saints, Detective.

REDLITZ

We don't all have to be scumbags, either.

Redlitz walks past Kimberly on the way to the door.

STANLEY

No blowjobs for him, Kimberly.

Redlitz can barely contain his disgust as he exits.

EXT. EAST VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

Al walks his beat. His cell RINGS: it's REDLITZ. Al declines the call, walks. RING! RING! Al answers the UNKNOWN number.

AL

I have nothing to say to you!

Al hangs up. As he walks, he sees a POSTER BLOWING IN THE WIND up ahead. His cell rings again.

AL (CONT'D)

For the last time...

ANDY (V.O.)

Why'd you hang up on me?

AL
Andy? Was that you? Sorry, it's -

ANDY (V.O.)
Forget it. Look man, I'm not sure
how, but someone close to Jay heard
you were exploiting his image for
personal gain...

Al closes in on the poster: it's Jay's play. The wind picks
up. Posters fly freely. Ahead: a pile of them in a trashcan.

ANDY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
You wouldn't know anything about
that, would you?

AT THE TRASHCAN

Al picks up the piles of discarded posters and catches
something in his purview:

A MAN DRESSED IN BLACK tosses another stack of posters into a
dumpster in the alley across the street.

AL
HEY!

The VANDAL runs! Al gives chase, portfolio in tow. He unhooks
the strap and tosses it to the side and picks up his pace.

IN THE ALLEY

The Vandal comes upon a TALL CHAINLINK FENCE and begins to
scale it. Al pumps his fists harder.

AL (CONT'D)
Stop right there, fucker!

The Vandal keeps scaling. Al arrives at the fence and starts
climbing just as the Vandal drops midway down the other side.

He LANDS AWKWARDLY on the concrete, injuring his ankle. He
struggles back to his feet before doggedly hobbling onward.

Al scales the fence much more cautiously, waiting till he's
at the ground before letting go.

He runs in the direction of the Vandal, who has disappeared
from sight. THWACK!

The Vandal BLINDSIDES Al with a WOODEN PALLET, and he goes
down in a heap.

Dizzy, Al makes out a SHINY SWITCHBLADE in the Vandal's left hand. Al winds up and KICKS THE VANDAL IN THE ANKLE!

Letting out a HOWL OF PAIN, the Vandal falls to the ground, dropping the knife. Al reaches, but gets a BOOT TO THE FACE!

Al tries to recover in vain: the knife is already back in the Vandal's hand, and now it's coming down at him.

The blade THRUSTS through Al's forearm. The Vandal pulls the knife out, then STICKS THE BLADE IN HIS RIBCAGE!

AL (CONT'D)

Ahhh!!!

Al desperately fights for his life, but he's getting weak...

BLAM-BLAM! Shots ring out! Al and the Vandal see FIONA on the other side of the fence, aiming a revolver like a pro.

FIONA

One more move and I blow your fuckin' head off.

The Vandal turns back to Al, holds...then HEADBUTTS Al and bolts, cutting around the corner and out of sight.

INT. BERTHA'S BAR - STORE ROOM

Fiona tends to Al in the bar's store room, dressing his wounds expertly. It's a raw and tender moment.

FIONA

Didn't realize you were still pushing that show. Little tone deaf, not gonna lie.

AL

You think I deserved to get my ass kicked?

Fiona makes a "little bit" sign with her fingers and a smile.

AL (CONT'D)

I held my own back there. OW!

Al cringes as Fiona sanitizes a nasty cut.

FIONA

Mr. Tough Guy over here. You're lucky I needed a smoke break. You'd probably be dead.

Al eyes Fiona's revolver, resting on a nearby shelf.

FIONA (CONT'D)
 Would you like to see my permit,
 Officer Stout?

Al blushes, embarrassed at his judgmental look. Fiona finishes the job and admires her work.

AL
 Damn, you're good.

FIONA
 Field medic. Ex-military. Now how
 'bout you spill some so we're on
 the level.

Fiona folds her arms. Waits. Al thinks a moment. Better not lie to this chick...

AL
 Well I moved to New York about 8
 years ago to pursue theatre. But
 after a few auditions, I got cast
 in an independent film. The
 interesting thing about that film -

FIONA
 Whoa whoa whoa - save it for your
 memoir, man. So you're an actor.

She starts to put his story together, becoming endeared...

FIONA (CONT'D)
 An actor carrying the torch for
 another actor. Hope somebody does
 the same for you someday.

Al lets out a laugh.

AL
 Just waiting for the right role to
 come along. Oh shit...

Al notices the time on the clock on the wall. He gets up and starts gathering his things.

FIONA
 You still on Planet Earth, man?

AL

I had a self-tape due by 5pm today. All my equipment's back at my apartment. There's no way I can get it done in time.

FIONA

Woo-sah. Go with the flow, man. You got fuckin' stabbed. Whatever this self-tape thing is, I'm sure the powers that be will understand.

AL

You don't get it. I'm competing with another actor who's way more qualified for the role. I can't afford to slack off in any department. I'm lucky the director is even talking to me!

Fiona is almost touched by Al's desperation. She switches into problem-solving mode.

FIONA

Alright, I hear ya dude. First things first: you ain't filmin' no self-tape at home. So forget the bells and whistles and fancy camera setup. We're gonna do this super lo-fi guerrilla-style.

AL

We?

FIONA

You've given me the most interesting 24 hours in recent memory. Let's ride this bitchin' buzz out together.

A grin creeps across Al's face.

IN THE BAR

Fiona flips the OPEN sign to CLOSED.

IN THE STORE ROOM

She rigs a cell phone to a box. As Al scrolls through his sides, Fiona puts up a backdrop of BLUE RECYCLE BAGS.

She then clips CONSTRUCTION LIGHTS to surrounding shelves. Satisfied, she snatches Al's sides from his hands.

FIONA (CONT'D)

Time to go, dude. Hey - you're as ready as you'll ever be.

Al nods, pulls himself together. Fiona hits record. Al takes a beat, then looks up. He's a different person entirely.

He launches into an arresting monologue revealing the evil character at the heart of the movie.

Fiona is oddly moved. She seems to recognize the piece...

They finish filming.

FIONA (CONT'D)

Cut. Very good.

As Fiona messes with her phone, Al senses something off.

AL

It's a pretty deranged character. I swear 90% wasn't me.

She forces a smile and hands him the phone. He types, waits.

FIONA

You need better WiFi. File's way too big.

AL

Where am I gonna find that outside my own living room?

FIONA

My place is upstairs...

AL

But don't need to, uh, make drinks?

FIONA

It's Monday. Business is shit till it gets dark. Just gimme a sec to lock up and -

REDLITZ (O.S.)

Anybody home?

Fiona and Al exchange incredulous glances. They take a peek just outside the store room door.

FIONA

Looks like a cop.

AL
 Shit. That's the detective that
 questioned me after Brian...

Al ducks back into the store room.

FIONA
 Brian what? What happened to Brian?

REDLITZ (O.S.)
 Ms. Watson, you back there?
 Official police business...

Fiona gives Al a hard look.

AL
 Brian's dead. Andy and I found his
 body by a factory in Bushwick last
 night.

FIONA
 Jesus Christ. Are you a suspect?

AL
 Not officially.

FIONA
 Have you been cooperating?

AL
 More or less. Why?

Fiona scrolls through her phone.

AL (CONT'D)
 What are you doing?

FIONA
 I think it's official now...

Fiona holds her cell out. Al's face is all over the
 headlines: SUSPECT AT LARGE; IF YOU SEE THIS MAN, etc.

REDLITZ (O.S.)
 Ms. Watson? You alright?

FIONA
 Coming!
 (to Al)
 You ran from the cops and didn't
 tell me?

AL
 I wasn't running, I swear.

She gives him a cold, hard look.

AL (CONT'D)
Fiona, I didn't kill anybody.

Fiona studies Al's face until she's satisfied. She walks out.

FIONA
You owe me.

IN THE BAR

Redlitz studies the liquor collection.

REDLITZ
Suntory. That's a fine whiskey you got there.

FIONA
We pride ourselves on our selection. Even if we're still a shitty dive bar. Anyway, sorry for the delay. Ice machine's busted.

She offers her hand. They both shake firmly.

REDLITZ
Detective Sean Redlitz.

FIONA
Fiona Watson. But you already knew that.

REDLITZ
Yes I did, Ms. Watson.

FIONA
Fiona.

REDLITZ
I'll cut to the chase: I'm investigating a murder. Filmmaker found dead in Bushwick last night.

FIONA
Brian DeVito. It's trending.

REDLITZ
I hesitate to alarm you, but the vicious nature of...well it's likely the killer knew DeVito personally. Which means anyone in that inner circle is in danger.

FIONA

And that concerns me how?

REDLITZ

You were seen with one of his friends about a week ago.

She pours herself a shot, knocks it back, pours herself another. Offers the bottle to Redlitz. He shakes his head no.

FIONA

Alright Detective. How can I help?

REDLITZ

Let's start with how well you know Mr. Stout.

FIONA

Barely. Literally met a week ago.

REDLITZ

Walk me through it.

FIONA

He came in, asked to put a poster up, I said sure.

REDLITZ

Was it that poster?

Redlitz walks up to the one-sheet by the window.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)

This gentleman passed away recently. Some kind of illness?

Fiona joins him by the poster.

FIONA

So they say.

REDLITZ

Stout gets the go-ahead. Then what? You exchange numbers?

FIONA

This may come as a surprise, Detective, but I don't make a habit of throwing myself at guys that give me attention.

REDLITZ

Of course not. But this wasn't just any guy.

(MORE)

REDLITZ (CONT'D)

Mr. Stout's a good-lookin' fella.
And since you run in the same
circles, well...

FIONA

Is he also ex-military?

REDLITZ

People who support indie film.

Redlitz tosses a photo of Fiona with Al at the premiere. She gives it a quick glance.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)

I'll ask again. What happened that
night? You two sleep together? Your
place? His place? Come on, Ms.
Watson. Let's not drag this out.

FIONA

Back the fuck up.

REDLITZ

I'm a cop, remember? Keep it civil
or this gets real ugly real fast. I
can see you're scared. He's a nice
guy, from what I've heard. But
sometimes nice guys are simply
wearing really good masks. Stout
was the last person to see DeVito
alive. Friends say the poor chap
was particularly paranoid after
that meeting.

Redlitz tosses a photo of Brian and Al at the diner. Al looks cold. Brian is a mess. Fiona studies the photo for a moment.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)

Fiona... I know it's a lot to take
all at once. But your choices right
now are critical. If you've seen
Albert recently, if you know where
he's been or could be, if he's here
right now...

She looks up from the photo. They stare at each other.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)

You can tell me. I'll protect you.

We hear a LOUD NOISE from the closet. Fiona and Redlitz look in its direction.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)
Busted ice machine, huh?

Redlitz walks toward the back. He looks at Fiona.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)
Mind if I take a look around?

She plays it cool, though clearly she's nervous as hell.

FIONA
Be my guest.

She swallows hard. Redlitz walks into the store closet.

IN THE STORE ROOM

He notices the bluescreen and lights. He checks behind shelves. Spots a BIG CARDBOARD BOX in the corner...

IN THE BAR ROOM

Fiona bites her nails anxiously.

REDLITZ (O.S.)
Ms. Watson, would you come here
please?

Fiona gets goosebumps at the request, and anxiously walks...

IN THE STORE ROOM

Fiona enters. Turns the corner. Redlitz is standing by the CARDBOARD BOX, now overturned.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)
You'd have lots more space if you'd
break these down.

Fiona laughs in relief.

FIONA
Yeah, that's my bad. I get lazy
sometimes.

Redlitz walks up to her, still eyeing the room. He studies the bluescreen setup.

FIONA (CONT'D)
Making some promo videos for the
bar. Couldn't afford an actual
bluescreen, so...

Redlitz smiles.

REDLITZ

I admire the ingenuity. But you might wanna invest in better equipment at some point. Get a good camera, tripod. Halo light.

Behind Redlitz, Fiona spots AL'S FOOT AND LOWER LEG sticking out from the other side of the bluescreen.

FIONA

You know your tech.

REDLITZ

My daughter has a YouTube channel. I try to stay somewhat informed.

Redlitz scans the room. Sees a BLOODY TOWEL and SCISSORS next to some canned goods. Fiona tries to stay cool.

As he examines the bloody towel, Redlitz notices a trashcan filled with used bandages and disinfectant.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)

You run a clinic on the side?

FIONA

I um...

Fiona locks eyes with Al, who peeks from behind the bluescreen. She moves to Redlitz, attempting to distract him.

REDLITZ

Don't lie to me, please. I promise you I will always find out.

Fiona blushes and covers her face. Redlitz raises an eyebrow.

FIONA

A customer cut himself on a broken glass last night. I performed a mini surgery on him and just forgot to clean up afterwards.

Redlitz is very skeptical of this story, but Fiona keeps a straight face as she carries on.

FIONA (CONT'D)

I was a little drunk. I'm not aiding and abetting any criminals, but you can certainly book me for health code violations.

Redlitz looks again at the bluescreen and follows his line of vision. Fiona braces herself as he approaches.

FIONA (CONT'D)
Detective wait!

Redlitz YANKS the bags down. Nothing. Fiona quickly pretends to be upset, tending to the screen.

REDLITZ
Sorry. Had to be sure you weren't...

Fiona shoots him a scornful look. He sees himself out.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)
I'll meet you in the bar.

Fiona sees Al TUCKED BEHIND DRY GOODS on the lower shelves, hugging his legs. They share a look of relief.

BACK IN THE BAR AT THE ENTRANCE

Redlitz hands Fiona his card.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)
Call me if you see anything.

Fiona takes the card.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)
Sorry again about the bluescreen.

FIONA
Sorry about the blood.

REDLITZ
Enjoy the rest of your afternoon, Ms. Watson.

FIONA
Fiona.

Redlitz cracks a polite smile and leaves. Fiona returns to the store closet.

FIONA (CONT'D)
You can come out now.

Al crawls out on all fours. Fiona takes his hand and helps him back to his feet.

AL
Thanks for the, uh...

FIONA
 Saving your ass twice in one day?
 Sure. Don't mention it.

Fiona walks out of the room. Al smiles. This girl rocks.

FIONA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Hit the lights on your way out.

LATER, IN THE BAR

The two close up together, flipping chairs, putting boots on liquor bottles, wiping stuff down.

OUTSIDE THE BAR

Fiona locks up.

FIONA (CONT'D)
 Now follow me.

She leads him around the corner to her apartment entrance.

INT. FIONA'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

A messy but artsy village apartment. Fiona is typing on her PC as Al looks on. She steps aside, offering Al the chair.

FIONA
 What are you waiting for? Send that
 shit and get the job.

Al has a seat and types a brief message and shares the link. He then looks back.

FIONA (CONT'D)
 You wanna watch it again, eh?

They take in the final product. Tearing up, Fiona walks over to her bedroom. Al follows, concerned.

IN FIONA'S BEDROOM

Al enters and sees Fiona smoking a cigarette by the window. He approaches her.

AL
 Hey, I'm sorry I dragged you into
 this mess.

FIONA
 It's not that.

AL

Then what is it? Do I remind you of some psycho you used to date? Come on, tell me. Lemme help.

FIONA

When Jay and I were together, he auditioned for this role. I filmed the same monologue 3 months ago.

Al takes a seat on the window sill.

FIONA (CONT'D)

But then he, uh...he got sick. And he had to pull out because nobody would insure the film after they heard he was dying.

Al digests the information. He moves toward her and takes her pity on her.

AL

I'm so sorry. I didn't know.

FIONA

It's not your fault, dude. If anything, I should be sorry. I mean I could've told you to fuck off, but you're weird as shit and it was kind of sweet how you tackled that character with the same kind of intensity as Jay. I dunno. For a minute there it felt like he was still here, ya know? Or his spirit was, and then there's the physical you, and you're like totally the opposite in so many ways, but I'm strangely attracted to you and it's fucking with my head.

Al puts a hand on her shoulder. Fiona puts her cigarette out in a nearby mug. They watch the rain start to pour outside.

Al squeezes her shoulder. She turns, sees some red on one of his bandages. She gets up.

FIONA (CONT'D)

You're bleeding again. We should -

Al pulls her close and kisses her. A somber embrace leads to them urgently, viciously tearing each other's clothes off.

INT. FIONA'S APARTMENT - EARLY MORNING

IN FIONA'S BEDROOM

Al wakes up to see Fiona putting her clothes on in a hurry. She notices he's alert and smiles apologetically.

FIONA

Was trying not to wake you.

Al sits up.

AL

I'm a light sleeper. Where you off
to at -

(He checks the alarm
clock)

6:43 in the morning? Goin' for a
run?

She laughs, finishes tying her shoe and sits next to him on the bed. She gently kisses his lips and caresses his hair.

FIONA

I'd rather not bore you with the
details of my hopelessly
complicated life.

AL

Complicated's interesting to me.
The more complicated the better.

He studies her face, enthralled and possibly in love. She blushes, then shakes it off and gets up, pulling her jacket on, suddenly all-business.

FIONA

You'll have to settle for a little
mystery right now, dude. Help
yourself to coffee and cereal. Stay
as long as you want.

She moves around the bed. He's a little sad.

FIONA (CONT'D)

We'll catch up later, okay?

Al nods, smiles reassuringly. She bends down and kisses him once more, brushing that hair she's come to love. They look at each other. This is something kind of serious...

Fiona leaves, closing the door behind her. Al lies back a moment, turns his head toward the living room, admiring all the details. He then gets up and goes to the window.

FROM THE WINDOW

We see Fiona exit the building, checking behind her to make sure no one is following. Al can't contain his curiosity.

EXT. EAST VILLAGE - MOMENTS LATER

We follow Fiona as she makes her way down various sidestreets, walking briskly. She turns a corner - and then we notice Al, a disheveled mess, has followed her.

FURTHER AHEAD

Al sees Fiona cross the street and enter a PARK.

IN THE PARK

Fiona texts something on her cell and looks around. She walks a bit further, toward the central area with restrooms and benches. She takes a seat on one of them. No one else is around, except for a BEARDED BEGGAR, who mumbles to himself on a bench adjacent to Fiona's.

Safely hidden behind some trees, Al watches Fiona talk to herself, almost as if she's rehearsing a speech. She keeps it to a low whisper, making it extraordinarily difficult for Al to discern what she's saying. He does catch a few words...

FIONA

It won't work... My story, my call.

The inner monologue ends and Fiona gets up to leave, but then the Beggar grabs her arm. She shakes him off and walks quickly out of the area. The Beggar follows closely behind.

Al moves in further to keep them in sight.

BEGGAR

Can't ya spare a couple dollars,
lady? Hey bitch. I'm talkin to you!

Fiona spots a POLICEMAN and runs over to him. She points in the direction of the Beggar, and the cop moves in, hand to his holster.

POLICEMAN

What seems to be the problem, sir?

BEGGAR

Tryna get something to eat! Look at
her: you know she got da money to
spare, but she's too good for dat!

Fiona lets the situation play out and slips away.

AL

Shit.

Al moves along the bushes he's been using for cover, scanning the area for signs of Fiona. We overhear the cop again.

POLICEMAN (O.S.)

It's only a warning this time, but
if you do it again...

BEGGAR (O.S.)

Yes sir. Won't happen no more, sir.

The cop walks past Al and nods. Al waves politely, then continues down the WINDING PATH where Fiona disappeared.

DOWN THE PATH

Al keeps his head cocked at 45 degrees as he moves. Then, a voice from behind...

VOICE (O.S.)

How does it feel to walk a mile in
another man's shoes?

Al stops and turns around. No one's there.

AL

Who said that?

He waits with bated breath for an answer. He switches his POV systematically, then sees a GUY IN A HOODIE down a ways, standing under a lamp post. He hurries over to him.

BY THE LAMP POST

Al sneaks up on the hooded guy and turns him around.

GUY IN HOODIE

Hey man, what'd I do?

It's just a teenager playing hooky.

The cop from earlier spots the affront and approaches.

POLICEMAN

This guy bothering you, kid?

GUY IN HOODIE

Let go of me, man!

Al realizes he's still gripping the kid's arm tightly. He lets go, embarrassed and confused. The kid runs off.

POLICEMAN

You lost, sir? Saw you earlier.
Anything I can help you with?

AL

Uh... Thank you, no...

Al walks away, still a little irked. The cop watches him suspiciously.

DOWN ANOTHER PATH

Al looks over his shoulder to see the cop still watching him.

Al picks up his pace and COLLIDES with the Beggar.

BEGGAR

Getcher trust-funded, super-moisturized, dainty little fingers off of me, college boy!

The cop moves in again.

POLICEMAN

Scram or it's a night in solitary,
buddy!

The Beggar spits at Al and shuffles off. The cop walks up to Al and helps him brush off the dirt from the Beggar.

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)

These guys are like rats. We do what we can, but they just won't go away.

AL

Thanks.

The cop notices blood seeping through Al's jacket.

POLICEMAN

You should get that checked out.

Al quickly covers the bloody patch with his hand.

AL

It's fine.

POLICEMAN

Doesn't look fine. What happened?

The cop sizes Al up a little more.

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)

Not that I'm counting the minutes,
but you've been in the park for
almost half an hour. Looked like
you were watching that woman on the
bench. What's that about?

Al starts to explain, but he's at a loss for words.

AL

She's an old college friend...I
wanted to, um...surprise her.

POLICEMAN

I think you better get out of my
sight before I call this in.

AL

That's a great idea.

Al walks away as the cop watches him with great interest. Al then starts to jog.

OUTSIDE THE PARK

Al crosses the street and walks down the sidewalk. He again hears that VOICE.

VOICE (O.S.)

Why ya running like you're guilty
of something, Stout?

Al ducks into a nearby ALLEY.

DOWN THE ALLEY

There's no one around except for a few homeless men keeping themselves warm by a BURNING BARREL. Al recognizes one of the men as the Beggar from the park.

They SCOWL at him as he walks by. The Beggar smiles...

After he's passed them, Al walks a little more quickly.

HOMELESS GUY 1 (O.S.)

Ooo he's spooked. REAL SPOOKED!

The men laugh obnoxiously. Al's CELL RINGS.

HOMELESS GUY 1 (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Not mine.

HOMELESS GUY 2 (O.S.)

Not mine neither!

Al pulls his phone out. INCOMING CALL FROM JAY. Al stares at the phone in horror. It rings. And rings. And rings...

Al takes deep breaths as he slows to a halt and answers. He listens to the other end of the line. Hears mild breathing.

AL

He--Hello??

A moment, then:

JAY (V.O.)

Takes a lot to get your attention.

Al knows this voice well. But he shouldn't be hearing this voice at all...

AL

Who is this?

JAY (V.O.)

Oh, I think you know full well who it is, Amigo.

Al looks around, then walks further down the alley behind a dumpster.

AL

But you're...you're...

JAY (V.O.)

Go ahead. Say it.

AL

You're DEAD.

JAY (V.O.)

(laughing)

Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated.

Al looks around the corner of the dumpster. There stands the Beggar, cell to ear. He lowers it and smiles.

He reaches up to his face, pulls off a false beard, mustache and prosthetic nose. It's Jay Willows, alive and well.

JAY

I think the word you're looking for is GHOST.

Al stumbles backward, gasping in shock. Jay advances on him, a confident grin spread across his face.

AL

I read your obituary. I sent flowers to the funeral home. They put you in the ground.

JAY

Were you actually present for the funeral, or did you just assume it took place because you read it in a paper somewhere?

Al thinks a minute.

JAY (CONT'D)

Did you see my dead body?

AL

But they said you were sick. Chronic illness...

Jay helps Al to his feet and grabs both arms.

JAY

Pull yourself together, man. Christ, can't anybody appreciate a magic trick done right? Come on, let's go somewhere a little less public.

Jay walks up the alley.

JAY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You comin or not?

Al hurries to catch up with Jay.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - LATER

A bourgeois coffee shop with expensive decor. In a dark corner, Al brings two jittery mugs of house coffee to a little table. Jay takes the mugs and sets them down himself. Al has a seat. They regard each other for a moment.

JAY

Say something, kid. You're starting to give me the creeps.

AL

I just...

JAY

It's good to see you, too. Have a sip.

AL

Huh?

JAY

Have a sip of your coffee.

Al brings his mug to his lips, takes a sip, then carefully sets it back down. He takes a breath. Nods. Jay smiles.

AL

How? Why?

Jay grins, looks around like God examining the universe.

JAY

How long you been at this, Al? The acting game?

AL

6, 7 years.

JAY

Right. And you're doing an admirable job, compared to the average Joe. I've been at it for the better part of 20 years. What do I have to show for it? A handful of niche indie hits, a shitload of Henchmans 1 and 2 and not a Goddamn penny in the bank. Now there are some who'd say I have - had - a respectable career as a reliable CHARACTER ACTOR. I would respectfully disagree. I would say it's all a wash, and that the system exploited me as a Bargain Barrell Heavy, and never once paid me what I was worth. And yet I come of age with the other dudes that GOT their big breaks, often opposite my rock-solid craftsmanship, for doing nothing more than looking pretty and vanilla and non-fucking-committal. But far be it from me to criticize: if that's what it took, if they were the solution to Hollywood's problem, good for them. I tried to do it differently, bro. Went rogue. Quit playing the game.

(MORE)

JAY (CONT'D)

For a while it was liberating, but you can only do so many ULB, direct-to-streaming, high-concept festival darlings before you start to ask, 'When the fuck is this gonna pay off?'

AL

So what are you saying, you got jaded? How's faking your death supposed to fix that? Make people miss you? Sorry man, you're losing me here.

JAY

Oh please - if I wanted my ego stroked, all I had to do was scroll through all those glowing reviews from famed online critics for my daring indie turns. Fuck no. No. This shit - this whole Disappearing Act - nah. I'm afraid it's a little more...complicated. See, if you wanna advance in this racket - take your game to the next level - you gotta make friends with certain Pull. I got caught up in a fucked-up circle of movers and shakers who got me into rooms, put me in the running for the most coveted parts, arranged intros with the Powers That Be...and I tell ya, it was workin' like gangbusters for a while there. THE THINGS I GOT CAST IN, MAN! But in exchange, I had to pay a price. And if I couldn't afford that price, I could either let them break my legs, cut my throat, or worse - OR - I could go to work for THEM. And we ain't talkin' groceries. Nah man, if I wanted their continued assistance, I had to KILL.

AL

Who did they ask you to kill?

JAY

Ah ya know, the usual: average Joes with outstanding debt, competitors they wanted outta their way...that sorta thing.

AL

And you actually went through with it? Like you went out and killed people?

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jay slinks around a dilapidated apartment, moving in on a FAT SLOB in his mid-40s, garrote wire in his hands.

He gets close, but stops, and just as he starts to lower his hands, the SLOB senses him and HEADBUTTS HIM IN THE NOSE!

Jay falls back; the Slob LEAPS ON TOP OF HIM, pummeling him with meaty fists. He gets several good swings, then...BAM!

A MAN IN THE DOORWAY shoots the Slob in the head. He falls over dead. Jay looks at the man, defeated, humiliated...

JAY (V.O.)

Not quite.

BACK TO SCENE

JAY

When word got back to the boss, I knew it was a matter of time before they came after me. So I knew I had to get out. Problem was, the only way to do that was to kill myself.

AL

So you faked your own death...

JAY

And gave up my dreams.

AL

And here we are.

JAY

Here we are.

Some CUSTOMERS mill around a POSTER of Jay's play and start to eye Jay suspiciously. Jay whispers to Al very calmly.

JAY (CONT'D)

Let's keep movin, shall we?

EXT. EAST VILLAGE - LATER

On the streets of the East Village we follow Jay and Al.

AL

What made you resurface? If what you say is true...

JAY

It'd be a big fuckin risk to show my face around town. But death changes you. Makes you appreciate what ya had.

They arrive in the same block as BERTHA'S BAR. We see Fiona wiping down the counter. Both men are clearly smitten.

JAY (CONT'D)

And WHO ya had.

Al looks at Jay, who keeps looking at Fiona.

JAY (CONT'D)

She's really somethin, ain't she? It's alright. Can't be jealous from the grave.

AL

I still don't get what you want.

JAY

Attention. Respect. Love. Another shot.

AL

How will you pull that off? Won't they come after you?

JAY

Not if I prove to them that I can do their dirty work. Then I make my comeback - and play the whole thing off as a ruse. A certified Joaquin Phoenix mental breakdown publicity stunt. I'll get raked over the coals, but not too long after, they'll love me like they've never loved me before. But here's the rub, amigo: I need you to help me pull it off.

AL

What, like help you KILL someone?
Fuck no, man. You aren't dragging
me into your little scheme.

JAY

Too late, pal. See, I already made
my first kill. Our friend DeVito.
And if you hadn't noticed, the
evidence kinda points to you.

Al gets in Jay's face.

AL

That was you? Why?

JAY

What matters is I did the job as a
show of good faith. You were my
partner in crime.

AL

You fucking maniac!

JAY

Hey hey hey, cool it, kid. It ain't
too late to pin it on someone else.
That Justin schmuck. Nervous wreck.
Looks guiltier by the second.
Listen: we pin it on him, you make
a pact with me and I guarantee you
a plum role in that horror thriller
you just auditioned for. The psycho
killer part? That's mine, man.

AL

You're the other actor. Jesus
Christ.

JAY

And that filmmaker digs my take.
Don't worry - he doesn't know it's
me. But once I come back, imagine
the publicity! You'd play the
boyfriend, ya know, the good guy
love interest. We share the screen.
The rest is history. Hey: I know
it's not the meatiest role, but you
gotta make compromises to get
ahead. You gotta put in your time.

AL

What if I go to the police? Tell
them everything?

Jay darkens.

JAY
Then I leak this.

Jay shows him a video on his cell. It's someone wearing Al's clothes stabbing Brian to death by the bridge in Bushwick.

JAY (CONT'D)
I mail them the knife which I've decorated with your fingerprints and I FUCKING BURY YOU.

Al is dumbfounded and disturbed. Jay smiles and starts walking away. He turns back for a moment.

JAY (CONT'D)
Or you play nice and the world is ours for the taking. Your call, amigo.

Jay walks on, like he owns the town, like he wrote the script for Al's little world.

INT. FIONA'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Al enters Fiona's place again. He digs through her stuff, finds OLD PICTURES of Jay and Fiona, stuffed deep inside an old cardboard box in her closet.

Fiona enters.

FIONA
I was wondering where you were...
Feel like grabbing some Chinese takeout tonight? There's a solid place around the corner.

Al stands and gives her a look. Her smiles wanes.

AL
When were you gonna tell me?

Fiona closes the door behind her and moves closer. Al tries to contain his anger.

AL (CONT'D)
I saw you in the park.

Fiona notices the photo of her and Jay in Al's hand.

FIONA

Are you seriously going through my
shit?

AL

I said I SAW YOU IN THE PARK.

FIONA

So what? You don't trust me to go
for a walk? Wait a minute - did you
follow me?

AL

Maybe I did.

Al tosses the picture back in the box.

AL (CONT'D)

Point is I know what you've been
hiding, I know that you betrayed
me.

Fiona is a little hurt, but also a little worried.

FIONA

And what is it you think you know?
What is it you think you saw?

AL

Him. I saw HIM, okay?

She keeps her cards.

FIONA

I'm lost.

AL

Quit playing dumb. Jay. I saw JAY.
You two talked. You had a
conversation, you disagreed about
something and you left.

FIONA

Jay is dead. His corpse is rotting
six feet underground.

AL

Then who was it you were talking
to?

FIONA

What, on the bench? The homeless
guy who wanted money?

(MORE)

FIONA (CONT'D)

Al, what is going on here? I'm sincerely worried about you.

Al is getting confused. He paces around, trying to organize his thoughts, unsure of how to proceed.

AL

I...yes. I followed you. I saw you with that beggar, wondered what it meant. But I had a run-in with the same guy a minute later. He was wearing prosthetics and false facial hair. Trust me: it was Jay. Yes, the same Jay who led everyone to believe he was dead.

Fiona is visibly concerned for Al. She has a seat as he continues his rant.

AL (CONT'D)

He told me his plan, the stuff with the mob or whatever shadowy organization he's been involved with, and he told me that unless -
WOULD YOU STOP LOOKING AT ME LIKE
I'M FUCKING CRAZY?!

Al rushes Fiona, grabs her arms. She tears him off, jabbing his stomach and nose. He keels over. She comes to his aid...

FIONA

Shit. I'm sorry. Here, let me -

He retracts. She gently guides his face back so she can see his nose. It's bloody, alright. She reaches for some tissues.

Tilting his head back, Fiona notices more photos of her and Jay scattered around. Al averts his eyes, ashamed.

FIONA (CONT'D)

The week's been a blur for me, too. What you saw out there - I don't doubt it felt real. The truth is I've seen him walking and talking, clear as day - same as you. But I realized that I was in denial. I fucking loved him, man. Last thing I wanna do is let him go.

She lets him take the tissues as she joins him on the floor.

AL

We went for coffee. I sat across from him. I was this close.

Fiona reaches over and touches his head with the back of her hand. She holds a minute.

FIONA
Honey, you've got a wicked fever.

AL
I heard his voice.

FIONA
It was in your head, Al.

She stands and helps him to his feet.

FIONA (CONT'D)
Have a seat right and I'll make you
some tea.

As Fiona gets the kettle ready, Al stares out the window. He catches himself in a mirror on the wall. He looks pathetic.

AL
Get your shit together, Al.

Looking back at the street, Al sees a Beggar staring back. It's Jay again. The kettle SQUEALS.

AL (CONT'D)
It's him! Fiona, look - he's right
there! I told you! See? I told you!

Fiona runs to the window and looks.

AL (CONT'D)
Now do you believe me?

FIONA
...There's nobody out there.

Al looks over her shoulder and points to the Beggar.

AL
Right there. That's Jay! Dressed
like a homeless guy, like I said.

FIONA
That's not Jay.

AL
Yes it is, Goddamnit. I gotta stop
him before he gets away again.

Al pulls himself to his feet.

AL (CONT'D)
You wait here. I'm just gonna...

Al staggers to the door and opens it.

INT. APARTMENT STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

One foot out the apartment. WHACK! Things go blurry. Al falls down the stairs. Behind him is Fiona, baseball bat in hand.

FADE OUT/FADE IN:

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - LATER

A metallic-gray room with 2-way mirrors. A FLATSCREEN MONITOR mounted in a corner.

Al wakes, realizes he's HANDCUFFED TO THE METAL CHAIR. He looks up. Seated opposite him is Detective Redlitz.

REDLITZ
You should've called.

AL
What the hell am I doing here?

Redlitz indicates the mirrors.

REDLITZ
Ms. Watson apparently came to her senses and gave you up.

INT. VIEWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Fiona watches Al from the other side of the mirror, flanked by some guards. She's a mixture of pity and concern.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Al looks back at Redlitz.

REDLITZ
Sorry about the handcuffs. Just a precaution.

AL
Right. Cuz I'm so dangerous.

REDLITZ

Frankly, yes. She said you assaulted her, and luckily she was able to restrain you before we got there.

AL

But that's not why I'm chained to this chair.

REDLITZ

No it isn't.

AL

I didn't kill him.

REDLITZ

Tell me what happened that night, Mr. Stout.

AL

For the thousandth time, I got a call from Andy saying he was worried about Brian, we went on a drive out to Bushwick and then. Then we found his body.

REDLITZ

How did you know where to look?

AL

It was a hunch. Andy said he liked to go there to write. Ask him about it, he'll back me up.

Redlitz grimaces.

REDLITZ

We've been unable to locate Andy.

AL

So suddenly I'm guilty of murder? This is bullshit. I want a lawyer.

REDLITZ

Certainly within your rights, Mr. Stout. But I was hoping you'd be a little more forthcoming given the evidence...

Redlitz clicks the remote. ON THE MONITOR: the same grainy footage of "Al" stabbing Brian viciously. Then the man runs.

Redlitz clicks it off and turns back to Al.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)

Now that that's on the table, would you like to revise your statement?

A moment of silence between them. Al keeps steady.

AL

Where did you get that video?

REDLITZ

Does it matter?

AL

Yeah. It kinda does. That's Not Me. And you're gonna have a hard time proving that in court.

REDLITZ

If it's not you, who is it? You were seen at the premiere with the same shirt, same pants, same shoes, same jacket, same PHYSICALITY, same MANNERISMS... And you're telling me that someone else went through the trouble of getting all those minute details right?

AL

That's EXACTLY what I'm telling you. I was FRAMED. Anybody with a camera and a budget can play pretend and convince assholes like you that I'm some psycho killer. Well it's not gonna work. If that's all you have, no self-respecting judge -

CLANG. Redlitz tosses a BLOODY HUNTING KNIFE inside a plastic ziploc bag on the table, cutting Al off mid-sentence.

REDLITZ

We found the murder weapon. It's covered in your fingerprints, Al. The footage is one thing; I can see your point in that regard. But it's a LOT harder to argue with science.

Al starts laughing; quietly, then hysterically. Redlitz shifts in his seat, a little disturbed.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)

Something funny, Mr. Stout?

AL
It's Jay Willows. He's behind all
of this.

REDLITZ
You mean...

AL
The dead character actor, yes.

Al looks over at the mirror, addressing Fiona.

AL (CONT'D)
You see? I said this would happen
if I didn't go along with his plan.
(back to Redlitz)
She and Jay used to date. Did you
know that? You look lost. I'll
catch you up. Jay faked his death
to hide from a weird fucking shadow
organization, then changed his mind
and the only way to buy back
loyalty is to knock off names on
their list - one of them being
Brian DeVito. Jay asked me for
help, I refused. So he's trying to
pin it all on me.
(makes a broad gesture)
Apparently it's working!

REDLITZ
(amused)
Terrific. All we have to do is buy
a Ouija Board and we can ask Jay to
fill in the blanks.

AL
You never liked me.

REDLITZ
Come again?

AL
Since Day One, you've looked at my
like I was cheesy death on a stale
cracker. All cuz I did a sex scene
with your daughter.

REDLITZ
Shut up.

AL
Wasn't my fault she was underage.

Redlitz stands, marches over to Al and clocks him in the jaw!

REDLITZ

Guard?

Redlitz motions for the guard to take Al away. As the guard escorts him out of the room, Al pleads with Redlitz.

AL

You don't know who you're dealing with! He's watching us right now. He'll come after you. He'll come after your daughter. Listen to me!

IN THE VIEWING ROOM

Fiona keeps her distance from him as he's dragged through.

AL (CONT'D)

You gotta tell them. I won't be around to protect you. Fiona, look at me: I AM NOT A KILLER.

Fiona averts her eyes. Redlitz moves into the viewing room and stands by her.

REDLITZ

(to Guard)

Get him outta my sight, would ya?

The Guard exits the viewing room with Al in tow.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)

I'm sorry you had to see that. You know you did the right thing.

Fiona nods, almost trying to convince herself.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)

Hey. I mean it. Guys like him'll say anything to cover the truth. 'Shadow Organization.' Just when you think you've heard it all...

Redlitz leaves. An ORDERLY exits with the BAGGED KNIFE. Fiona studies it as it floats by her line of sight.

EXT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Fiona exits the precinct and lights up a cigarette.

JAY (O.S.)

Poor kid, huh?

Fiona doesn't flinch. She takes another long drag, unfazed by the menacing voice lurking in her periphery.

FIONA
The one you knifed?
(she inhales. Exhales.)
Or the one you framed?

Jay emerges from a SHADOWY CORNER - enough to reveal a sliver of his face. He wears a hoodie and sunglasses.

JAY
Don't get smart with me, dollface.
Your hands are just as dirty.

FIONA
None of this way my idea.
(laughing to herself)
If it were up to me you'd still be
dead.

Jay reaches out and YANKS her into the corner, pitting them face to face, lit by a harsh streetlight above.

JAY
You stupid bitch. If it weren't for
me, your junkie ass would be
rotting away in a back alley in Bed
Stuy.

FIONA
In case you hadn't noticed, I've
been doing pretty well on my own.

JAY
Nine months. That's how long it
took to get you clean. And don't
pretend you didn't love all the
premieres, the VIP treatment, the
interviews, all the pretty faces.

FIONA
I never asked for it. I fuckin'
smiled for you cuz I felt I owed
you. You terrify me, you know that?
That's literally the ONLY reason I
went along with your bullshit
disappearing act. Out of FEAR. I
knew if I said no, you'd come after
me. I stood in front of your family
and gave your Goddamn eulogy. I
cried for you. But then I moved on.
We all moved on. Can't you get that
through your head?

(MORE)

FIONA (CONT'D)

This little indie film world
doesn't want you anymore. Bow the
fuck out. It's someone else's turn.

She shoves off him and starts to walk away, but he takes hold
of her arm and puts a KNIFE to her throat.

JAY

I could cut your throat right now
and not only would nobody have a
fuckin' clue who did it - they
wouldn't care.

She's hurt, but she stays tough.

FIONA

Then why don't you?

JAY

(more sweetly)
Because you belong to me, baby.

Jay forces his lips onto hers, relishing his property.

JAY (CONT'D)

Still as sweet as strawberries.

Jay disappears into darkness. Fiona quietly lights another
cigarette, her hand shaking. Tears well up in her eyes.

INT. POLICE STATION - AL'S CELL

A barebones cell. Al lies awake on the bunk, staring out the
window, which casts an eerie shadow of bars across his face.

He overhears two OFFICERS gossiping about his career.

OFFICER 1 (O.S.)

RETURN TO TOXIC UNIVERSITY. THE
KNIFE WELDER. BLOOD BAYOU MASSACRE.
Got a genuine Marlon Brando over
here.

OFFICER 2 (O.S.)

We oughta get his autograph.

OFFICER 1 (O.S.)

If we can afford it. Hey Stout! How
much you chargin' for autographs
these days?

Al's neighbor Rudy enters the MAIN OFFICE AREA and squares
off with the idiot Officers.

RUDY

That man's done HAMLET Off-Broadway. Show some respect, you insensitive assholes.

IN AL'S CELL

Instantly recognizing the voice, Al sits up and goes to the bars with a smile of relief on his face.

AL

Rudy!

IN THE MAIN OFFICE AREA

The Officers get to their feet and confront Rudy, who flashes his BADGE in their faces.

RUDY

Detective Rudy Herman, NYPD Vice. Here to see a one Albert Stout on Official Police Business.

OFFICER 1

Visiting hours are over, Serpico. Why don't you crawl back into that hole you came out of.

OFFICER 2

Yeah Herman. Sunset Park needs you and your ponytail.

The Officers laugh like idiots. Rudy scowls at them, used to the ridicule. Redlitz walks over from his office.

REDLITZ

Uh, guys, let's cool it with the routine for a minute. Used to ride with Herman's father. He's a legacy.

OFFICER 1

Lewis Herman? Shit, that man's a legend.

(to Rudy)

Sorry man. Nothin' personal. It's just that -

RUDY

I don't look like a cop? It's called undercover work, jackass.

Redlitz gets in between them.

REDLITZ
Alright, back to work you two.

The two officers begrudgingly return to their desks.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)
Rudy, what do you want with my
prisoner?

Rudy smiles at Al and nods in the direction of the cells.

RUDY
It's my understanding you think he
killed someone. Well, I'm here to
prove that that assumption is
misguided.

Rudy holds a video cassette out. Redlitz grimaces.

REDLITZ
Is that a fucking VHS?

INT. REDLITZ'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Redlitz rigs an old VCR up to his flatscreen and pops the
tape into the slot. He wipes sweat from his forehead.

RUDY
Like to keep tabs on my neighbors.
Can never be too careful.

Redlitz takes a seat next to Rudy and watches the footage.

ONSCREEN

Rudy's exchange with Al from the night of the screening.
Redlitz eyes the box. Rudy picks up on his curiosity.

RUDY (CONT'D)
I hold his packages. Neighborly
courtesy.

Redlitz observes their rapport. Notes Al's reluctance to
engage and tendency to deflect.

REDLITZ
What're you guys talking about?

RUDY
Movies, plays. I'm a big supporter
of the arts, you know.

REDLITZ

Right.

Rudy moves closer to the TV and indicates the TIMECODE at the bottom of the screen.

RUDY

Okay, so he goes into his apartment around 1am. Note the time lapse.

Rudy manually FASTFORWARDS to 4:30am. Andy appears at Al's door.

RUDY (CONT'D)

That's the guy he left with to look for DeVito, right?

Redlitz studies the tape with greater interest.

RUDY (CONT'D)

So if Al stayed in his apartment until Andy showed up, he couldn't have committed the murder. Not according to your time frame.

Redlitz moves to speak, but Rudy keeps going.

RUDY (CONT'D)

Now take a look at this.

He REWINDS to the day before. A MAN WITH A HOODIE approaches Al's door and picks the lock.

Minutes later, he exits with a TOTE BAG. Rudy PAUSES and points to the bag.

REDLITZ

What am I looking at?

RUDY

That's an Orange Hoodie. The outfit the killer was wearing. I'm willing to bet there's also a pair of Al's jeans and sneakers in there.

Redlitz stares at the image for a while.

REDLITZ

Stay here. Don't touch anything.

AT AL'S CELL

Redlitz appears in front of the bars. Al is staring up at the ceiling. He senses Redlitz's presence.

AL
You already kick Rudy out?

REDLITZ
As a matter of fact, your buddy presented a pretty strong case that you didn't do it.

Al quickly sits up.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)
Hold your horses, Stout - I didn't say you were free to go.

Al curbs his enthusiasm.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)
Let's get something straight: nobody talks about my Marissa that way. She's not some piece of meat.

Al looks down at his feet, ashamed and embarrassed.

REDLITZ (CONT'D)
That said, maybe I did judge you. But can ya blame me? The filth you cranked out with Mayhem?

AL
HEY.

REDLITZ
I know I know, you moved on.
(an olive branch)
Watched HIGH SIERRA the other day. Actually for the first time. It was, um, it was pretty good.

AL
Told ya.

REDLITZ
I wanna believe you're innocent. I do. But there's a whole lotta loose ends here. And the last thing I need is you fucking up an active investigation into who killed Brian DeVito. And whether or not this guy Jay faked his death.

Al goes to the bars.

AL
What can I do to help?

Redlitz looks around.

REDLITZ
Follow me.

A GUARD unlocks the door. Redlitz nods to him. Al gingerly exits his cell and follows Redlitz down the hallway...

BACK IN REDLITZ'S OFFICE

Rudy sips coffee, feet propped on the desk. Redlitz enters with Al. Rudy spills coffee all over his Hawaiian shirt.

Rudy tries to to sop up the spill, dabbing files with post-it notes. Redlitz and Al just watch.

RUDY
Shit. Apologies, Detective. I was just going over the case files and-

REDLITZ
Get outta my chair, Herman.

Rudy moves out of the way.

RUDY
Of course. Al, my man!

REDLITZ
Shut it, Rudy! Aren't you supposed to be good at undercover work?

RUDY
Under - oh shit. OH SHIT.
(whispering to Al)
Looks like we're going Method tonight, neighbor.

EXT. DEVIL'S DOORWAY - NIGHT

A gothic-chic Downtown Brooklyn nightclub across from BAM. A BEAT-UP SEDAN pulls into a parking spot on a nearby street.

IN THE CAR

We find Redlitz in the driver's seat, Rudy riding shotgun and Al in the back.

REDLITZ

I'm putting my ass on the line. You better pray this works, Stout.

AL

It'll work.

AT THE CLUB

The men approach the entrance. They're dressed in swanky outfits. Rudy notices a price tag hanging out of Redlitz's jacket. He rips it off. Redlitz gives him a look.

REDLITZ

I was gonna return it.

THE DOORMAN, a massive black dude with a good deathstare, waves them over. He holds a clipboard. Al is first up.

AL

Albert Stout?

The Doorman scans the list and locates his name.

DOORMAN

Gotcha, Mr. Stout.

The Doorman looks up and eyes Al suspiciously.

AL

Precinct Blues.

DOORMAN

Huh?

AL

Did a guest star for the new cop show on ABC. That's probably why I look familiar.

The Doorman remains suspicious, but doesn't press the issue. He signals to the other guys.

DOORMAN

And who are they?

AL

My film partners.
 (referring to Rudy)
 Wesley Farraday and
 (referring to Redlitz)
 CJ Horowitz.

The Doorman looks up and down the list. No dice.

DOORMAN

Your friends will have to wait outside.

AL

Can you just make an exception?

DOORMAN

I can make you wait outside too.

Redlitz steps in and redirects the moment.

REDLITZ

I'll reiterate. I'm CJ Fucking Horowitz, one of the most powerful producers in indie horror. Mr. Farraday is my investor. We backed half of Jay's movies and were in the middle of pre-production on his next when he died. We were looking forward to meeting some of Jay's other friends tonight. However, if the list is that big a deal...

DOORMAN

(quickly changing tone)

Mr. Horowitz, of course! I'm an actor myself.

The Doorman hands Redlitz his business card.

DOORMAN (CONT'D)

You should check out my stuff when you get a chance. You guys go on in. Sorry about the mixup.

Redlitz nods to Al and Rudy. As they shuffle past, Redlitz turns back to the Doorman one more time.

REDLITZ

You never know who you're talking to, son.

Redlitz winks at the Doorman and glides into the club.

INT. DEVIL'S DOORWAY - CONTINUOUS

RED AND BLACK LIGHTS permeate the foggy, crowded club. A mural reads "JAY WILLOWS: GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN."

Posters of Jay's movies on the walls showcase his characters. Every guest in the club is dressed as a version of Jay.

REDLITZ

I think we found your man, Stout.
There. There. And there.

AL

If he's here, he'll be keeping a
low profile.

SHELLY KAUFMAN, 53, an eccentric film journalist with a boyish mop of gray hair and square-framed glasses, instantly recognizes Al and walks right up to him.

SHELLY

Al, is that you?

Al smiles in shakes handy with Shelly.

AL

Shelly Kaufman! I didn't know you'd
be here, man!

SHELLY

Didn't know you'd be here, either.

Redlitz and Rudy hang back and let Al do his thing.

AL

Wouldn't miss this for the world.

SHELLY

So sad. You two were close?

AL

Uh...yeah. Kinda.

SHELLY

Such a tragedy.

AL

Read your piece in GORE CENTRAL.
Very moving.

SHELLY

We all wanna do our part. So what's
next for you? Any cool projects in
the works?

AL

Actually yes. One or two features
in active development. I'm attached
to play the lead in one of them.
Psycho Killer kinda guy.

Redlitz motions for Rudy to walk the perimeter. He whispers in Al's ear as he passes by.

REDLITZ

We're gonna sweep the room. If you see him, remember: DO NOT ENGAGE.

Redlitz smiles politely at Shelly and moves along. Shelly looks a little confused.

AL

Producer friends.

Shelly nods.

SHELLY

You were saying something about a psycho killer?

JAY (O.S.)

Did someone say Psycho Killer?

A MAN WITH HORN RIMMED GLASSES AND CURLY HAIR appears behind Shelly. Jay smiles at Al with a wolfish grin.

JAY (CONT'D)

Daniel Craven, SLASHER WEEKLY.

SHELLY

Shelly Kaufman. Pleasure...

JAY

Poor Jay. Rest in Peace, right?

Al and Shelly mumble in agreement. Shelly can sense something majorly off about this conversation.

JAY (CONT'D)

Fine GRUFF HIGGINS, Mr. Kaufman.

Shelly smiles with pride. He poses, doing his best take on a cult character, whom we see on a poster nearby.

SHELLY

Nice Red Finkle. Very subtle.

JAY

Thanks! Not too many know the film.

(to Al)

Who are you supposed to be tonight?

AL

A young Jay Willows in his "Everyman" phase.

Jay stares blankly at Al for a moment. Then smiles.

JAY

"Everyman." I like that.

(to Shelly)

Anyway, sorry for interrupting. I just adore this man's work.

SHELLY

Jay was truly underappreciated.

JAY

No, silly - Al Stout! Talk about underrated. Al, you were saying something about playing a psycho. Tell us more about the project if you would.

(to Shelly)

Unless it's an exclusive.

SHELLY

Oh - well I mean, we're really just here to honor Jay's memory...heh...

Shelly is clearly uncomfortable, but too afraid to leave.

JAY

Great, so go on.

AL

Right. So yeah. I would play a psycho killer who murders a group of friends and then tracks down the lone survivor 10 years later...

JAY

Wait a sec, I think I've heard of this film... Wasn't Jay Willows originally attached to play that character?

SHELLY

I recall reading something to that effect as well. LA-based filmmaker?

Al goes on the defensive.

AL

They might've had talks, but that's normal in this business. Shifting parts and what-not.

JAY

Except in this case Jay was definitely the driving force, and this was more or less written for him. Don't you think it sacrilege to swoop in on a property that belonged to someone else less than two weeks after his death? And I'm sorry, but you just strike me as more of a likable romantic lead...

The conversation grinds to a halt. Al is boxed in, anxious, riddled with self-doubt. But then, something changes...

AL

That would be a dangerous assumption to make. Hiding behind this polished veneer is a sick fuck who's managed to convince the world to trust him while in reality he's pulling the strings. Then he moves in for the kill - transforms himself into a hideous monster - and the next day he's back to smiling and being everyone's friend.

Jay grits his teeth, fuming inside.

SHELLY

I just got chills. Here's to the next generation.

Shelly raises his glass and drinks.

SHELLY (CONT'D)

I'm gonna get another. Nice meeting you, Daniel.

Shelly heads to the bar, leaving the two men in a staredown.

JAY

Brilliant performance. You had me going there for a minute.

AL

You're scared. Shouldn't I be behind bars? Didn't you frame me? Admit it. You're desperate.

Jay notices Redlitz and Rudy on the other side of the club. He pieces it together. He grins. Shrugs his shoulders.

JAY

You got me. My plan clearly isn't fool-proof. Follow me to the bar. Let's have ourselves a drink. Talk it over like gentleman.

Jay walks boldly to the bar. Al follows tenuously. Jay catches a glimpse of the TV MONITOR ABOVE THE BAR.

ONSCREEN: An old HEADSHOT OF AL paired with the headline: B-MOVIE ACTOR SUSPECTED OF MURDER ESCAPES CUSTODY.

JAY (CONT'D)

You've been exceptionally clever with all your pivoting. Makes me wish you would've accepted my offer to begin with. Neither of us would be in this mess.

ACROSS THE BAR

Rudy and Redlitz stand next to each other at a cocktail table observing the guests.

Redlitz makes eye contact with Al, who directs his eyes to Jay. Redlitz realizes who it is. He whispers to Rudy.

REDLITZ

White male suspect, 11 o'clock.

RUDY

(noticing Jay)
What do we do?

REDLITZ

Stay here. Watch the door 'case he makes a break for it. I'm going in.

BACK TO JAY AND AL

Jay raises a hand, signaling the bartender.

JAY

Two kamikazes, please.
(to Al)
I'm dead to rights by the looks of it, so just humor me for a minute and think of us as a couple of pros havin' a drink, shootin' the shit.

AL

Sure...

IN THE CROWD

Sweat beading down his face, Redlitz works his way through the crowd. A SERVER presents some champagne. He declines.

JAY (V.O.)

Years back I was just starting out in independent film.

BACK AT THE BAR

JAY

Caught wind of a cool new sci-fi horror feature quietly casting roles. Non-Union, hundred bucks a day, great script, great fuckin' opportunity. Problem was, the lead was already being courted by the director, so much so that he'd storyboarded the picture with illustrations of the dude's likeness. They were on the phone on the reg, having meaningful convos about theme, character, genre and all that other bullshit. Know what I did? I got hold of the script and instead of shooting the audition sides, I memorized every single one of that character's scenes and filmed 'em over the course of 48 hours. Then I took a bus to the director's hometown in Bum-fuck Virginia, went to his house, knocked on his door, handed him the tape and said, "Watch this and tell me I wasn't born for it."

The bartender serves the guys their drinks. Jay slides him a 50-dollar bill.

JAY (CONT'D)

(to bartender)

All you, brother.

AL

What happened? He give you the part on the spot?

IN THE CROWD

Redlitz gets closer, but is CUT OFF by an ACTOR.

ACTOR

Hey, I heard you were a producer working on a new project. Have you started casting yet?

REDLITZ
Get lost, kid.

BACK TO BAR

Jay slides his wallet back into his inner jacket pocket. His hand stays. Al loses eye contact with the distracted Redlitz.

JAY
Cheers, by the way.

Jay clinks Al's glass and downs the shot. Al robotically follows suit.

JAY (CONT'D)
You were saying?

AL
The role. He gave it to you then and there?

JAY
No. My stunt creeped him out. So I went to the other actor's apartment back in New York and shot him in the head, made it look like a suicide. I got the part cuz there was no more competition.

Redlitz arrives behind Jay. Al relaxes. The jig is up...

Then Al watches helplessly as Jay pulls a SWITCHBLADE from his jacket and JAM IT INTO REDLITZ'S STOMACH 5 TIMES!

Jay pats Redlitz down, snatches his keys and gun, then slips away into the crowd as Redlitz FALLS TO THE FLOOR.

Al crouches down and grabs the handle of the blade, still lodged in the dying detective's stomach. He pulls it out.

People look at Al in horror, his image on TV looking over his shoulder, broadcasting his guilt for all to see.

ANGLE ON AL - Suddenly it looks like he's been caught in the act of murder. Everyone freaks out. Screams everywhere.

Redlitz's eyes go black. Al pats him down, can't find his gun. Rudy runs for the exit in pursuit of Jay. Al follows.

EXT. DEVIL'S DOORWAY - SIDE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Al bursts through the door. Rudy's gun is drawn. Al raises his hands. Rudy lowers his gun, a gentle look in his eyes.

RUDY

It's okay, man. I know it wasn't you. I'm a witness.

Al nods his head repeatedly.

RUDY (CONT'D)

We got each other's backs.

BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM!!! Shots ring out. Rudy covered in holes. Al frozen, in shock. Then, the RUMBLING SOUND OF AN ENGINE...

THUNK! Redlitz's sedan PLOWS into Rudy, sending him flipping over in the air, rolling over the back and onto the concrete.

The passenger door OPENS. It's Jay. Sirens WAIL in the distance. Screams echo from the club. Al looks dumbstruck.

JAY

Get in. Get in NOW!

Al shuts his mind off and hops in the car and closes the door. The car SPEEDS AWAY into the cold, dark night.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Jay takes an on-ramp and speeds across the freeway toward the Williamsburg Bridge. Al is dazed and numb.

JAY

Can you believe that shit? Can you believe what just went down back there? Holy FUCK what a rush!

Silence. Al is completely checked out.

JAY (CONT'D)

Not everyday you see people die in front of you. You're in shock. Try to breathe.

(off Al's zombified look)

HEY. You with me?

AL

...They were gonna help me...

JAY

Oh yeah?

AL

Yeah. That's why they let me out. They were gonna clear my name.

JAY

No man. That's what they wanted you to think. They would've thrown you under the bus even if their little Mouse Trap succeeded. They used you, amigo.

Anger starts to revive Al's vigor.

AL

You're wrong.

JAY

I don't give a fuck if this violates your moral code. I'm a SURVIVOR. I do what I gotta do. And the sooner you learn that, the sooner you can live a fulfilling life. Instead of eatin' shit day in, day out.

AL

What life? Everyone thinks I'm a cold-blooded killer. I have no life to go back to...

JAY

Calm down. Hey! Look at me: calm. The Fuck. Down.

Jay pulls a flask from his jacket and hands it to Al.

JAY (CONT'D)

Take a swig.
(Al looks at the flask,
confused)
Take a Fucking Swig.

Al's shaky hands fumble with the flask and he takes a drink. His breath slows down.

JAY (CONT'D)

Better.

AL

Why'd you make me come with you?

Jay laughs. Al frowns at him, clearly not amused at all.

JAY

I didn't make you do anything. You CHOSE to get in. There's a big difference.

AL

You told me -

JAY

You could've said NO. I wasn't pointing the gun at you, was I? Christ, didn't you see me empty the chamber into Mr. Pornstache?

AL

(pure rage)

HE WAS MY FRIEND YOU FUCK. HIS NAME WAS RUDY.

JAY

Okay. Sorry. Fuck. Look man, I told you to get in because I realized something about you tonight: you're a fucking SHARK. Just like me. Your spin on that character? Ballsy as fuck. Gave me some hope that I ain't such a dying breed after all. Thought to myself, here's a guy who'll tear shit up to get what he wants.

AL

So what now? Throw ourselves a party? You're delusional, Jay. Everything we ever worked for just went up in flames. You should've left me back there. At least then I'd have had the chance to explain myself. Not anymore. I fled the scene. I'm as guilty as they come.

Jay veers off the freeway and takes an EXIT.

AL (CONT'D)

Where are we going?

JAY

Cops'll be lookin for this car. I know a place we can lie low. Hopefully by the time we get there you'll have admitted to yourself that you'd rather take a big risk than bend over and get fucked by the system. Tonight you took a STAND. A Leap of Fuckin Faith, amigo. You best believe I got a plan. All I'm askin now is that you roll with it.

As Jay navigates the streets, Al surreptitiously reaches into his jacket and pulls out the BLOODY SWITCHBLADE.

IN AN AREA OF INDUSTRIAL BACKSTREETS

Jay cruises through, his lights low. This neighborhood looks a lot like the one where Brian DeVito was found...

AL

You know something, Jay? I've known you a few years now and it's only just dawning on me that you talk too much.

Jay turns to Al. Al JAMS the knife into Jay's thigh! Jay shrieks in pain, reflexively gunning it. The engine REVS.

Al reaches over and YANKS the steering wheel, sending the car on a collision course with a BIG BLACK DUMPSTER.

Just before it hits, Al OPENS HIS DOOR AND BAILS OUT!

Al rolls over and over across the pavement.

WHAM! The car SMASHES HEAD-ON into the dumpster, sending GLASS and TWISTED METAL everywhere.

Al is 50 feet away, clothes torn up, body covered in cuts and bruises - but his face and head are amazingly intact.

Dazedly, he stands himself up, looking around for the car. He follows the BLARING HORN.

Al hobbles over to the wreckage, waving smoke and steam to clear the air. He finally gets a look:

Pressed up against the airbag, bloody face, broken nose, knife stuck in leg, Jay weakly draws breath. Al turns away.

Al limps onward and pulls out his cell. He types something, waits, then presses a button and puts his phone away again.

He notices the brick buildings, steel mills, cracked sidewalks, and finally, A BRIDGE. He knows where we are now.

FURTHER UP

Al arrives at the bridge and begins to cross it. Then, he sees something in the distance: A WOMAN DRESSED IN WHITE.

Al nervously approaches, beginning to wonder if he's seeing a ghost, or if perhaps he's really dead.

Behind him, we hear the sound of CRUNCHING AND SCUFFING, quietly at first, but gradually growing louder...

AT THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BRIDGE

LIGHT BEHIND THE WOMAN blinds Al. She steps forward: it's Christina, Brian's fiancée, dressed in a LONG WHITE LAB COAT.

CRUNCH. SCUFF. FOGHORN BLOWS. Christina flashes a wicked smile. Al feels sick to his stomach.

WHICK!

Al feels a prick. A BLOODY, HIDEOUSLY INJURED JAY holds a syringe, injecting his neck with a weird substance. He falls.

Christina and Jay tower over Al as he loses consciousness. Christina kisses Jay, smearing BLOOD all over her face.

CHRISTINA

Baby you need fixin.

She licks blood from his forehead. Al has no idea what the fuck is going on. Jay shifts his gaze downward to Al.

JAY

Him and me both. Him and me both...

FADE OUT/FADE IN:

INT. FIONA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

We find photos of Jay and Christina scattered across the floor, along with empty bottles of wine. We hear sobbing.

WE MOVE TOWARD THE SOBBING TO THE BATHROOM

Christina is rigging a ROBE BELT up to the shower curtain bar. She LOOPS the belt around her neck. She takes a swig from a bottle of wine, wipes her tears. She prepares to drop from her stance on the bathtub sides.

A DING from the other room. She ignores it. DING DING! She peers through the door, sees her cell: it's a text from AL.

She hesitates a moment, then pulls the loop off her neck.

IN THE MAIN ROOM

Fiona sees two texts: an audio file and a SHARED LOCATION. She presses play. *Jay's conversation with Al in the car...*

She looks at the bathroom, then the door. Takes a breath.

INT. LAB - NIGHT

A lab staged inside a warehouse. Strapped to a gurney, Al wakes, sees Christina arranging SHARP MEDICAL INSTRUMENTS.

ON THE WALL: diagrams of Facial Reconstruction. Jay lies on another gurney. Al struggles to free himself from the bands.

JAY
Calm yourself, amigo.

Al becomes increasingly disturbed by the images he sees.

AL
Christina? What is all this?

CHRISTINA
(to Jay)
Thought you said he'd comply.

JAY
(to Christina)
He will, baby.

AL
Whatever you think he's gonna do
for you, forget it. This man only
cares about himself.

Christina gives Al a soft look of disappointment.

CHRISTINA
You put your faith in the wrong
people.
(to Jay)
Can I show him now?

Jay nods, gives Al a reassuring smile and gestures to the picture in Christina's hands.

It's a headshot of a good-looking actor in his mid-20s.

JAY
Behold. The New You.

Christina holds up another picture, this time a headshot of a rougher-looking actor in his late-30s.

JAY (CONT'D)
The New Me.

CHRISTINA

You're lucky he admires you.
Otherwise I'd have hacked you up
the same way I did Brian.

Al grows ill from the revelation.

JAY

Say it. She doesn't mind. Yo
Christina: you're a Fucking Witch.

She smiles, holding a massive serrated blade, looking like
pure evil.

CHRISTINA

(to Al, while looking at
Jay)

We fell for one another on set.
Since I was the producer of my
husband's movie, I liked to oversee
my investment. Very quickly I
realized I was with the wrong man:
a weakling, a scrawny little boy so
pathetically inept at pitching his
ideas he came crying to his own
spouse for money. Then I watched
the first round of dailies and I
just knew I'd met my match. We fell
for each other, and as we lay in
bed in his motel room, we hatched a
plan to build ourselves a legacy.
First he'd die of an undisclosed
illness, then Brian of a mysterious
murder. Their film together would
create a mythos, and from the ashes
I'd direct my own film with him as
my new lead, an Eastern European
actor with only a few credits to
his name. A bond born of blood. A
chance at our dreams.

JAY

You almost ruined it for me, man.

AL

So the story about the people you
worked for...

JAY

Made it up.

AL

And the movie with Omar?

JAY

Forget it, man. This is bigger.

CHRISTINA

We have all the creative control we ever wanted.

Al notices a slight hesitation in Jay's expression.

AL

What about Fiona?

Christina's face falls.

JAY

It's over between us. It's been over.

CHRISTINA

We got what we needed from her. We have a plan.

AL

To perform experimental plastic surgery and hope you can invent two new actors without arousing suspicion? Good luck with that.

Christina approaches Al with the surgical blade.

JAY

Don't listen to him, baby.

As he talks, Al manages to undo one of the straps.

AL

How do you keep track of all the lies he tells? How do you know he won't abandon you once you do this operation?

CHRISTINA

Jay is my SOUL MATE. He would NEVER betray me.

AL

He turned you against your own husband. He soiled your good name. Made you buy into an insane scheme that sounds like a bad giallo plot. Face it: you're being used. That's all it is, all it ever was...

Christina looks over at Jay. He knows he's in trouble here.

AL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
All it'll ever be.

In a sudden ambush, Al LUNGES at Christina from behind, wraps the NYLON STRAP around her neck and PULLS HARD.

JAY
Baby!

She struggles violently, swinging her blade like a maniac. Jay struggles to get up, still weak from his injuries.

JAY (CONT'D)
Let her go!!!

Christina turns blue. Jay falls to the floor, picks himself up and stumbles over to the table of sharp instruments.

Al loosens another strap with his free hand. He KICKS JAY'S THIGH WOUND with all his might! Jay falls, writhing in pain.

Christina swings the blade erratically. Al uses his momentum and TURNS THE WHOLE GURNEY OVER! The other straps loosen.

Christina tries to scramble away, but Al pulls harder. He holds a moment longer. Arms fall limp. She drops the blade.

AL
Crazy bitch.

SHHICK! Jay JABS Al with a scalpel in the back!

JAY
You fuck. You don't get to decide.

Another Jab! Al tries to crawl away. Jay TACKLES him and raises the scalpel.

JAY (CONT'D)
I choose my destiny. I can be whoever the fuck I want!

BAM! Jay's cheek is BLOWN APART by a single bullet! Al turns: it's Fiona, 30 feet away, gun trained in their direction.

FIONA
Not with that face.

Al smiles in relief. Fiona shuffles over and offers a hand. She pulls him up.

FIONA (CONT'D)
You're lucky I'm still a good shot when I'm drunk.

Al notices the redness and bruises around her neck.

FIONA (CONT'D)
It's been a rough night.

She surveys the scene.

FIONA (CONT'D)
I will never understand show biz.
(to Al)
Wanna get outta here?

AL
Thought you'd never ask.

Just then, Christina SPRINGS TO HER FEET AND CHARGES AT THEM WITH HER BLADE! A psychotic basketcase back from the dead!

CHRISTINA
You took him from me! YOU TOOK HIM
FROM ME!!!

As she runs toward them, Fiona aims her gun. CLICK. CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK. Al looks at her with dread.

FIONA
Fuck I thought I reloaded.

Christina SLICES Fiona's arm open. She shrieks, instinctively swinging her gun and PISTOL-WHIPPING Christina in the face!

The women fall to the floor and wrestle each other. Al grabs a JAR OF FORMALDAHYDE and SMASHES it over Christina's head.

Christina rolls over and BLINDLY SWINGS the blade.

AL
Your lighter!

Fiona pulls out her lighter, flicks the flame on.

CHRISTINA
He ALWAYS preferred me.

FIONA
Send my regards when you see him in
hell.

Fiona tosses the lighter at Christina. WHOOSH! She CATCHES FIRE, erupting into a magnificently colorful inferno.

Zigzagging around the office, she howls in agony. FLAMES SPREAD to photos of Jay, the diagrams, everything.

She collapses next to Jay's body, her flesh turning black. A photo of the two of them falls nearby, slowly burning...

Fiona and Al hold each other, numb. Sirens ECHO from outside.

EXT. LAB - MOMENTS LATER

Al and Fiona emerge from the building and are greeted by FLASHING RED AND BLUE LIGHTS.

LATER

A PARAMEDIC finishes bandaging up Al's wounds in the back of an ambulance. Officer 1&2 approach. Al braces himself.

OFFICER 1

Mr. Stout? We saw the footage from your drive. Quality's rough. Can't say for sure if that's Jay Andrews or if you doctored the whole thing.

Al becomes despondent, then beside himself with anger.

AL

You still think I'm guilty.

OFFICER 2

Hang on a sec, Stout. We didn't say that. While your footage can't exactly exonerate you, your friend can.

Officer 1&2 move aside. On crutches, a heavily bandaged Rudy hobbles over. He smiles weakly. Al gets up and hugs him.

AL

I thought you were dead, man!

RUDY

Made a habit of wearing my vest a long time ago. Just glad he didn't reverse after he clipped me with that friggin car.

OFFICER 1

He relayed the whole incident at the club.

Al smiles gratefully at Rudy.

OFFICER 2

We'll still need you to come answer some questions and fill in a lotta blanks. But for now - you're off the hook.

OFFICER 1

And, uh...sorry about the comments at the station. You're a good actor even when you do shit movies.

The officers walk away. Al shakes his head.

RUDY

You gonna need a ride home, neighbor?

Fiona approaches. Rudy sees them looking at each other.

RUDY (CONT'D)

Looks like you have that sorted.

Fiona kisses Al.

AL

Fiona, this is Rudy. He also saved my life tonight.

Fiona shakes Rudy's hand, nodding in respect.

FIONA

Welcome to the club, Rudy.

RUDY

What are friends for? See you around, Al.

AL

See ya, buddy.

Rudy crutches out of sight. Fiona sits next to Al. She leans her head on his shoulder. He puts an arm around her.

Outside the lab, a FIREMAN convenes with Officer 1.

OFFICER 1

What's the word?

FIREMAN

We found the woman's corpse. No sign of the man yet.

OFFICER 1

He's gotta be in there somewhere.
I'm sure he'll turn up.

FIREMAN

Yes sir.

The Fireman heads into the building. Al and Fiona's faces go pale as their minds wander, dreading the implications...

FADE TO:

EXT. EAST VILLAGE - DAY

Several weeks later, Al is on his poster route, only this time he's taking down the posters.

He makes a drop in the garbage can, and sees an OLD NEWSPAPER with a headline that grabs his attention:

BODY OF PSYCHOTIC ACTOR JAY WILLOWS FOUND IN HUDSON RIVER. Al grabs the paper and reads.

ARTICLE

...Dental records prove the decaying body belonged to that of Jay Willows, a character actor who faked his death last month only to resurface for reasons local authorities and the FBI are still trying to make sense of. Extreme conspiracy theorists, however, continue to float ideas that Mr. Willows is somehow still alive...

Al tosses the paper back into the trash and carries on with his route.

ON A STREET CORNER

Al has trouble prying a poster from a pole. A SWITCHBLADE CUTS THE TAPE around the border. The poster loosens.

ANDY (O.S.)

That oughta do it.

Al turns. Andy is standing there as he puts his knife away.

ANDY (CONT'D)

They finally cancelled the show.

AL

Tainted brand. People want refunds.

They just stand there looking at the illustration of Jay.

ANDY

Used to think I could separate the
art from the artist.

Andy tears up. Al hesitates, then pats him gingerly on the
back. Andy hugs him.

ANDY (CONT'D)

I miss him. I miss him so much. He
was my hero, man.

AL

He was a lot of people's hero.
Remember him as you prefer.

They finish their embrace. Andy wipes his face with his
sleeve, shaking off the emotion.

ANDY

I'll let you get back to your work.
We should grab coffee sometime.

AL

Yeah.

Andy walks onward. Al notices his weird limp, and a cast
around his right ankle.

AL (CONT'D)

Hey Andy.

Andy turns. He sees that Al is looking at his ankle. A
sobering silence. Al then smiles in pity and waves.

AL (CONT'D)

Take care of yourself.

Andy forces an agreeable smile, then turns and limps around
the corner and out of sight.

INT. BERTHA'S BAR

Fiona is cutting limes at the counter.

AL (O.S.)

I swear, if I see one more knife
today...

She smiles and looks up.

FIONA

You'll be way too turned on?

Al leans over the counter and passionately kisses his girl.

FIONA (CONT'D)

Go get me some ice, bar back.

AL

Yes ma'am.

Al walks toward the back.

FIONA

You keep wearin' those jeans I'll have to grab your ass.

AL

I could report you to HR.

FIONA

You know you love it!

IN THE STORE CLOSET

Al goes to the ice machine, then stops and notices something: A RING LIGHT, TRIPOD, CAMERA AND BLUESCREEN. It's Christmas.

AL

Baby...

Fiona enters behind him.

FIONA

Thought I'd up your self-tape game a bit. As long as you still trust me to operate the camera.

They kiss.

AL

I trust you to do all kinds of things. And we can film all of it.

She gives him a seductive look.

FIONA

Bar closes early tonight.

AL

Whatever you say, boss.

They make out. Just then, Al gets a call. It's a FaceTime Request from OMAR.

FIONA
 Somebody's in high demand. I'll
 give you gents some space. Fingers
 crossed...

She walks to the door.

AL
 Hey babe.
 (She turns back)
 I think I love you.

FIONA
 I think I love you too.

They share the moment. She leaves. Al answers the call and
 has a seat as he props the phone up. We see Omar onscreen.

OMAR
 'Sup man?

AL
 Sup?

OMAR
 I wanted to offer you a role.

Al tries to contain his elation.

AL
 Oh man. I was starting to think
 you'd moved on!

OMAR
 No way, bro. You are far too
 talented.

AL
 Thank you for saying that.

OMAR
 Of course! So after much
 deliberation, I've decided to offer
 you the role of ERIC, Jessica's
 boyfriend. I think you've got such
 a sweetness and sincerity that'll
 accent the darkness super well.

Al's elation disappears. He's distraught, but working hard to
 be a good sport.

AL
 Oh. That's...

OMAR

I know it's not the role you were gunning for, but I've got this wicked character actor from Europe who's gonna bring so much to the table. In fact I want you to meet him right now.

Omar makes room for a man with A SCAR AND INTENSE EYES: it's JAY, fresh from plastic surgery and BACK FROM THE DEAD!

OMAR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

This is Martin Bauhaus. German theatre actor. We've been talking for weeks about this, but we lost contact when he was in a horrible car accident. Anyway, when he was on the mend he got back in touch and we both agreed his accident was a blessing in disguise. I mean how perfect is this look for the character?

Al is a mixture of disgust and dread.

OMAR (CONT'D)

Al, you there?

AL

Yeah. I...

MARTIN

Listen Al, it is truly an honor to meet you, and let me be the first to say that you and I are gonna set this world on fire together.

Long silence. Al is frozen in time.

OMAR

Is the connection alright on this thing? You okay, bro?

Al finally breaks the spell.

AL

I could not agree more, Martin. Let's make a movie.

They share an unholy smile. Al is possessed and consumed. He's lost forever. His soul is sold. FADE TO BLACK...

THE END.