

MARIONETTES

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SCENE 1

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

Fluorescent lights hum, stark and cold, over a sterile room. DETECTIVE MILLER (40s, sharp, tired eyes, haunted by something unseen sits opposite ANNA (20s, disoriented, tear-streaked, trembling). Anna clutches a tissue, her gaze distant, unfocused.

MILLER

Anna, we need to understand. Sarah is dead. Brutally murdered. And you were found at the scene, covered in her blood. Can you tell me what happened after you left the bar?

Anna blinks slowly, a tremor wracking her body. Her eyes dart around the room, terrified, as if seeing ghosts.

ANNA

I... I don't know. One minute I was talking to that nice man, he bought me a drink... and then... nothing. Just... waking up here. This... this blood... it's not mine.

Miller leans forward, his voice a low, grim rumble.

MILLER

> Anna, the medical examiner confirmed Sarah died from multiple stab wounds. Your fingerprints are on the knife. Your clothes are soaked in her blood. Do you remember leaving with him? Going anywhere else?

Anna shakes her head violently, tears streaming down her face.

ANNA

> No! It's a blank. A black void. And my head... it screams. And I feel so... strange. Like I'm watching myself from far away. I would never... never hurt Sarah.

Miller watches her, a cold dread twisting in his gut. This isn't the first. Three confirmed homicides in as many months.

Each victim brutally dispatched. Each time, a disoriented, amnesiac individual found at or near the scene, sometimes holding the murder weapon, sometimes covered in the victim's blood. Their stories are identical: a polite stranger, a drink, then nothing.

## SCENE 2

INT. POLICE STATION - MILLER'S OFFICE - DAY

Miller's office is a warzone of case files, grisly crime scene photos, and empty coffee cups. He's poring over toxicology reports, the grim faces of the deceased staring up at him.

DETECTIVE CHEN (30s, methodical, practical, equally disturbed enters, a new file clutched in his hand.

CHEN

Miller, another one. Confirmed.  
MARK JENKINS. Found catatonic in the park, hands caked in dried blood. They ID'd the victim: renowned art critic DAVID REYNOLDS. Reynolds was found in his gallery, throat slit. Jenkins was found clutching the exact blade.

Miller slams his fist on the desk, rattling the stacks of paper.

MILLER

A man this time? He's escalating. Four dead. Four people who should be suspects, but have no motive, no memory, and no discernible violent tendencies. Just the victims' blood on their hands.

CHEN

The tox screens are still coming back inconclusive for any heavy sedatives. Whatever this is, it's fast-acting and leaves the system quickly. My contact at the lab suggested looking into obscure tropane alkaloids. Specifically... scopolamine. He called it "Devil's Breath." Said it could cause extreme suggestibility, a total loss of inhibition, and complete amnesia.

Miller's eyes are wide, a terrifying clarity dawning. He pulls out a printed article, dog-eared and highlighted.

MILLER

"Devil's Breath," you said? I've been digging into it. Extreme suggestibility, memory loss, profound disorientation. It's perfect. He's not just robbing them; he's weaponizing them. Turning them into unwitting, untraceable murder weapons, leaving them holding the blade while the real killer vanishes into thin air.

He points to the map on the wall. Pins, now red for homicides, cluster menacingly around a specific downtown area.

MILLER (CONT'D)

All victims, and all our "perpetrators," were last seen at bars or cafes within a five-block radius. He's choosing public places, making easy contact. He slips them something, whispers a command, and they become a puppet with a knife.

CHEN

So, we're looking for a ghost. Someone who can dose people without them knowing, then subtly direct them to commit unspeakable acts they'll never remember. It's a psychological terror.

MILLER

More than brilliant, Chen. It's a signature. And he's accelerating. Four murders in two months. And now we have four "killers" who are just as much victims as the dead.

He gestures to the mounting files.

MILLER (CONT'D)

Anna Peterson, Mark Jenkins, Sarah Davies, John Harper. They didn't kill anyone. They couldn't have. They were manipulated. But by whom?

(MORE)

MILLER (CONT'D)

Someone who wants to watch the  
chaos, the destruction. Someone who  
enjoys seeing innocent lives  
shattered, twice over.

Miller looks at the map, then at the case files. His brow  
furrows in thought, a migraine thrumming behind his eyes. [s  
He's missing something.

Something fundamental about the pattern. The killer isn't just  
taking lives; he's turning others into extensions of his own  
malice.

He picks up a photo of the latest victim, David Reynolds, his  
throat a gaping wound. Then he looks at Mark Jenkins, the man  
found with Reynolds' blade. Jenkins is a mild-mannered  
librarian.

The profiles of the dead and the manipulated are wildly  
different, with one key similarity: they were all found near  
the same cluster of downtown bars.

Miller sighs, the immense weight of the investigation  
pressing down on him, crushing him.

He knows the killer is out there, orchestrating these  
elaborate, cruel charades. But every time he thinks he has a  
lead, it dissolves into the fog of "Devil's Breath."

### SCENE 3

INT. POLICE STATION - MILLER'S OFFICE - DAY

Miller's office The clutter has grown; the air is thick with  
despair and stale coffee. He's staring blankly at the murder  
board, the faces of the dead staring back, judgmental. Chen  
enters, his face pale.

CHEN

Miller, you need to see this.  
Another one. ELIZABETH CHENEY. Found  
in her suburban home. Bludgeoned to  
death. And her neighbor, a retired  
teacher named MS. PERKINS, found  
standing over the body, a blood-  
soaked antique candlestick in her  
hand. No memory, of course. Just...  
confusion.

Miller doesn't react immediately, his gaze fixed on the  
corkboard, specifically on a large, faded photo pinned there.

A man with cold, piercing eye. Below it, a yellowed newspaper clipping: "'THE PUPPETEER' JOHNATHAN REED EXECUTED. DETECTIVE MILLER CREDITED WITH BREAKING CASE.

MILLER

A candlestick? Not a knife. He's adapting. Changing the weapon, but the M.O. is the same. The blank stare. The innocent face.

CHEN

(Hesitantly)

Miller, the tox reports from the first three... they've found trace amounts. Something highly volatile. Dissipates too fast to get a full profile, but it's consistent with... scopolamine. We think it's being administered in aerosol form, or something that vaporizes quickly.

Miller nods slowly, his eyes still on Reed's photo.

MILLER

> I told you. "Devil's Breath." He's a ghost. But why? What's the endgame? He's just... killing. And turning people into weapons.

He gestures around the cluttered office.

MILLER (CONT'D)

Every waking moment, I'm chasing this phantom. Every lead goes cold. It's like he's inside my head, mocking me.

He traces the outline of Reed's face in the photo.

MILLER (CONT'D)

Reed understood control, Chen. He was a master. Made people do unspeakable things. Sometimes without them even realizing it until it was too late. I just... I can't shake the feeling this new guy is learning from the best. He's perfecting it.

Miller yawns, a deep, bone-weary stretch. He reaches for his personal coffee mug on the desk. It's a gift from his daughter, chipped, but he always uses it. He takes a long, slow sip, the ceramic cool against his lips.

## SCENE 4

EXT. MILLER'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Miller is asleep, tossing fitfully in a nightmare. His CELLPHONE on the bedside table VIBRATES with an incoming call.

The screen glows, displaying a generic, often-used number like "TOLL-FREE NUMBER" or "UNKNOWN NUMBER" - the kind usually associated with telemarketing or automated services. Miller stirs, groaning, and blindly fumbles for the phone. He brings it to his ear without opening his eyes.

MILLER  
(Muttering, groggy)  
Miller...

A tinny, synthesized, almost robotic voice, but with the unmistakable, chilling cadence of JONATHAN REED (V.O.), fills the quiet room. sounds like a pre-recorded message from an automated system, but the words are deeply personal.

REED (V.O.)  
>  
(Automated, but  
malevolent)  
Hello, Detective. It's been a  
while, hasn't it? Even from beyond  
the grave, some games simply must  
continue You think you caught me.  
You just pressed pause. And now...  
you're the star of my final,  
masterpiece act.

Miller shifts in his sleep, a faint, unsettling smile on his face, his breathing evening out, becoming unnervingly calm.

REED (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
You search for a phantom, Miller.  
And you'll never find him, because  
you're looking in the wrong place.  
And you're looking at yourself. I  
laid the groundwork years ago. Tiny  
gifts, in plain sight. In your  
coffee. On your desk. Hidden in the  
lining of your coat. Small,  
tasteless doses,  
to prepare you. To open your mind  
And now... the real work begins. The  
chaos I always dreamed of.

[The synthesized voice shifts, its tone becoming sharper, more commanding, like an instruction.

REED (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 Today, Miller, your focus will  
 be... ELIZABETH CHENEY. A  
 meticulous woman. Precise. Take her  
 life. Use her own strength against  
 her. And leave her neighbor with  
 the weapon. The evidence of a job  
 well done, but without the messy  
 details of your own memory. A true  
 puppet show.

Miller's hand drops, the phone still at his ear, the  
 automated message seemingly complete. A tiny, almost  
 imperceptible smudge of white powder clings to his lower lip.  
 The terror is silent.

#### SCENE 5

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY[

Miller is interrogating MS.PERKINS.[She is frail, confused,  
 her hands shaking uncontrollably as she clutches them in her  
 lap. Blood is splattered across her faded cardigan.

MILLER  
 Ms. Perkins, you understand what  
 we're saying Elizabeth Cheney is  
 dead. Bludgeoned to death. And you  
 were found in her living room,  
 holding the candlestick.

MS. PERKINS  
 (Faintly, her eyes wide  
 with uncomprehending  
 horror)  
 Dead? But... I just... I saw her.  
 We were talking. And then... I was  
 just... standing there. With this  
 in my hand.

The shudders, recoiling from her own memory

What have I done? Oh dear God.

Miller looks at her, a profound pity in his eyes, a mirroring  
 of her own confusion and terror.



MILLER

You don't remember striking her?  
Any of it?

MS. PERKINS

No. Just... a sudden urge. A  
sudden, terrible urge. It felt...  
right, somehow. For a split second.  
Then... nothing. Just the silence.  
And the blood.

Miller sighs, turning to Chen, who is observing through the  
two-way mirror, his own face grim.

MILLER

(Through the comms, voice  
thick with frustration)  
Another victim. Another  
manipulated puppet. He's using them  
all, Chen. Every single one.  
Turning innocent people into  
butchers. But for what end? What is  
his endgame?]

He turns back to Ms. Perkins, his face a mask of weary,  
desperate determination.

The audience sees him, a detective tragically hunting a  
killer, completely unaware that he himself is the very  
monster he seeks. The ultimate puppet, dancing to the tune of  
a dead man.

FADE TO BLACK.