

OCULUS

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. MR. FEIGN'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - DAY

The window, viewed from the foot of the bed, is open to the early morning light. The curtain blows with a gentle breeze. An antique wire birdcage sits with its door open on the windowsill. An elaborate nest of twigs and scraps has filled the bottom of the birdcage.

An innocuous but noticeable collection of city noises can be heard through the window.

After a moment, a magpie flutters through the window and into the cage's open door, makes itself at home, and begins to peck at seeds that have been left in the feeder.

MR. FEIGN (O.S.)
(reflective)
This is just so perfect, I wish it
would never change.

A pause, shapes twist and intertwine beneath the sheets at the foot of the bed. Somehow the shape hint at something not altogether human.

MISTRESS (O.S.)
That is a terrible wish?

MR. FEIGN
(curious)
Why?

The bird flutters and tends to its nest unaware of the conversation.

MISTRESS (O.S.)
I have heard enough wishes to know
a bad one when I hear one.

MR. FEIGN (O.S.)
I guess I am just fool in love.

MISTRESS (O.S.)
Life is a dream for the wise and a
game for the fool.

The bird continues on about its business and begins to sing sweetly against the backdrop of the city's noises drifting in from the outside.

INT. WAITING AREA - AFTERNOON

Disheveled window blinds allow random shafts of light into the shabby waiting area in front of the high school guidance counselor's office. A retro 1950s era poster on the door proclaims "Career Week!" with an image of mailman, a nurse, and a scientist striking their stereotypical poses.

Three boys manage to fill five chairs while they wait. BILLY sits closest to the door, noticeably taller and better looking than STUDENT 1 and STUDENT 2. All appear to be of the same age.

TYLER exits the guidance counselor's office door. Dressed like every other high school student trying to look cool, Tyler is enthused about his meeting in the counselling office and the results of his career aptitude test.

TYLER

(taunting)

You're up, Billyboy. Let's see if you can beat "chemical engineer".

He pumps a sheet of paper above his head in victory like a prize fighter.

TYLER (CONT'D)

Cha-ching! Show me the money! Oh-yeah!

STUDENT 1

So you're gonna learn to run a meth lab or what?

BILLY

Are you kidding? Meth is a four year degree, Tyler will be working the crack house for sure.

Billy stands, adjusts his clothes, and theatrically brushes off his shoulders before strutting towards the counselor's office.

TYLER

Yeah, we'll all be jealous when you get "gay porn star".

Everyone but Billy laughs a little too loud. The change in expression on Billy's face is subtle, the comment stung more than Billy tries to let on. He enters the office without a response.

INT. GUIDANCE COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

The Guidance Counselor's office is tiny and claustrophobic. A worn leather chair sits across from a low coffee table with its match on the opposite side. The remainder of the room is a mess of full bookshelves and clutter. The shades are drawn and the light is intentionally dim.

The GUIDANCE COUNSELOR (the same actor that will also be portraying Detective Loveless with a heavily altered appearance) sits behind a delicate china tea service arranged neatly across the table. He is pouring a cup of tea. The steam billows. The Counselor stands as Billy enters.

The Guidance Counselor initially comes across as smallish, meek, grey haired, and hidden behind an accountant's spectacles. Despite his mild mannered appearance the creepiness of his presence manages to fill the room.

When the Guidance Counselor greets Billy, Billy finds himself shaking the shorter man's hand across the table. The Guidance Counselor's grip lingers.

COUNSELOR

Hello, Billy, please close the door behind you and have a seat.

Billy turns to shut the door he had entered but finds it already closed. No one had shut the door. He looks for the second seat he saw a moment ago and does not find it. He looks over his shoulder as if the seat might have snuck around behind him.

BILLY

(confused)

Uhm.

COUNSELOR

So, Billy, how do you like it?

BILLY

Uhm, excuse me?

Billy turns back around to find the Guidance Counselor even closer ... the confines of the room have shrunk. The Counselor busies himself pouring a cup of scalding hot tea into a dainty cup and saucer without glancing at it. He fills the cup to the very brim.

COUNSELOR

There is nothing to be ashamed of. Your file said you spent a summer in England, I assumed you drink tea.

BILLY

Yes, I mean two lumps and cream please.

Despite having been taller, Billy is now eye to eye with the Guidance Counselor. The Counselor doesn't seem to have grown as much as Billy might have shrunk.

COUNSELOR

(pleasantly enough)

Could you hold this for me, Billy?

The Guidance Counselor hands Billy the cup and saucer, and begins to pour a second cup of tea. A subtle red moon-shaped birthmark can be noticed on the back of Billy's hand for the first time.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

Yes, a teenage boy certainly wouldn't want to get caught drinking tea these days. But I digress, you are probably curious about other things.

From Billy's perspective the room is slowly closing in around him.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

The scores on your aptitude tests certainly weren't exceptional but they certainly were unique. Could you hold this for me as well please, Billy?

Billy now finds himself standing holding an overfilled cup and saucer in each hand. The tiniest tremble translates into the rattle of china and threatens to spill the scalding hot tea. Steam continues to rise from the cups. Sweat has broken out on Billy's forehead. The Guidance Counselor has begun to pour a third cup.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

At face value I would say they would point to a career in law enforcement.

The Guidance Counselor stands holding the third cup of tea between his face and Billy's as he begins to slowly stir it with a tiny spoon. He blows across the tea to cool it, blowing steam into Billy's face.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

Fortuitously, an internship has become available that you could take advantage of. What do you say, Billy?

BILLY

Well, I...

Billy opens his mouth to respond only to have the Guidance Counselor slip the tip of the third saucer and cup between his teeth. Billy bites down to hold the steaming tea and saucer steady in his mouth, effectively preventing himself from speaking.

COUNSELOR

Don't feel pressured to answer now, take some time, think about it. I can wait.

Billy struggles to balance the three cups, the china rattles incessantly. Steam rises across his face, he is sweating profusely.

BILLY

(woozy)

Hmmm...hmm.

Billy struggles but the room waivers in the steam, the Guidance Counselor's face leers down at him from above, now seeming to look down upon him like he was a child.

The Counselor is still speaking somehow without his mouth even moving. There are voices in the distance that belong to others.

COUNSELOR

Although I wouldn't take too long,
these opportunities tend to be
gobbled up rather quickly.

The rattle of china rises to a roar as the walls of the office begin to squeeze shut. Billy swoons as the office goes dark.

INT. BILLY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Billy wakes with a jolt in a tangle of bedsheets, bathed in sweat. He looks to the red glow of his alarm, which responds by flipping from 5:59 to 6:00 AM. The alarm rings, obnoxious. Billy has not slept well.

Billy stumbles out of bed toward the bathroom. Shirtless, but from the waste down he wears what resembles a pair of old-fashioned striped pajamas.

The lights of the bathroom sputter as he flips the switch.

EXT. SUBWAY ENTRANCE - NIGHT

The flickering lights at the entrance to the subway illuminate the sleeping form of ARCHIE, and older overweight homeless man asleep while slouching against a low wall at the subway entrance.

The pavement next to him holds a cardboard box full of used books with a "4 SALE" sign tacked to the side of the box. The rest of the box is decorated with densely scrawled handwriting that appears completely illegible.

The hand of an unseen figure wearing worn leather work gloves places a small tattered brownish leather bound manuscript (Loveless' book) in the box as they pass. An archaic silver coin is tossed into the box following it.

Archie stirs and twitches when the figure's shadow crosses him but he does not wake.

His face shows the signs of a past stroke or similar affliction but is obscured as he hitches up his filthy coat collar for warmth and turns his head toward the comfort of the concrete wall.

INT. SUBWAY PASSENGER CAR - NIGHT

The subway car's lights sizzle and sputter before they return to something less than their normal dim output. Random commuters seem unusually disheveled and nervous as they make their way home. A young girl's bouquet of flowers appears more wilted with each flicker of the lights.

The car grinds to a stop with the sound of rust and decay, the haze of the windows allows only the shadows and hints of the exterior to find their way into the car.

We catch the first glimpse of the MISTRESS as the train doors slide open and the subway car lights temporarily fail. At first the Mistress only exists as a collage of incongruous close-up images as the light flickers: a black leather and lace dress trimmed with even blacker feathers, a slender pale hand holding a white silk scarf, the black gloved hand of a much older woman, perfect breasts barely hidden beneath delicate lace, a foot shod in a cruel leather boot.

The light recoils around her or perhaps the darkness simply yearns to touch her. Her face is obscured by shadows, the imagery continues to shutter: an exotic jeweled silver pin woven into her jet black hair, a feathered choker at her neck that hints of beauty, an image of the black unblinking eye of a bird is implied as part of the choker but is actually that of a live crow.

When she enters she is followed by the distant cry of cicada mixed with the rumble of the subway and the clamor of crows, an audible equivalent to her visual collage.

As the Mistress approaches a seat, the nearest passenger, a young mother, scoops up her infant and hurries off down the train without even a glancing back behind her. The Mistress sits, now the sole occupant in her row of an otherwise crowded train.

Wearing a dapper brown suit, MR. FEIGN manages to carry an umbrella, a briefcase, and a bowler hat all tucked under one arm. He has approached the empty seat adjacent to the Mistress from behind, obviously excited by the luck of spotting an empty seat.

His dress and manners seem more fitting for a much older man rather than someone that looks to be in his thirties. While some might consider his attire a fashion statement, Mr. Feign appears unaware of any impression he might be making.

MR. FEIGN
 (ever so politely)
 Excuse me is this your paper?

Mr. Feign motions at an unnoticed newspaper crumpled on the empty seat.

A collage of Mistress' sounds and imagery seem to stagger Mr. Feign as she turns to look at him. Images of bare flesh, carrion, talons, leprosy, and sex all gush into Mr. Feign's mind's eye and then stop as suddenly as they came.

The Mistress has turned to look at him fully, she sits before him, beautiful and wonderfully exotic, the darkness dances around her, a surreal goddess yet somehow still human.

MISTRESS
 (innocently)
 No, it's not.

Mr. Feign folds the paper in half and adds it to the briefcase, umbrella, and bowler hat that all come into play as he settles into the empty seat. A single tear of blood can be seen at the corner of Mr. Feign's eye, but he takes no notice.

MR. FEIGN
 They really need to keep these
 trains up, this paper is a week
 old.

MISTRESS
 "Only entropy comes easy."

Mr. Feign's eyes graze across the Mistress' delicate breasts barely within the folds of the leather, lace, and feathers that make up her dress.

MR. FEIGN
 "To fear death is to misunderstand
 life."

MISTRESS

(testing)

"Nothing in life becomes a man like leaving it."

MR. FEIGN

(with a chuckle)

"Death is the dropping of the flower that the fruit may swell."

An unexpected giggle comes from the Mistress.

MR. FEIGN (CONT'D)

So are you new to this route?

MISTRESS

Actually yes, I normally take a later train.

The two strangers continue their conversation and their ride together.

EXT. SUBWAY PASSENGER CAR TUNNEL - NIGHT

The passenger car rumbles away into the dark of the tunnel. Sparks scatter from the wheels meeting a rough spot on the track.

An image of something almost human scurries into the darkness of the tunnel's shadows.

The silhouette of RAT KING is seen for the first time as the light of the train fades into the distance. The shape of the shadow implies a naked crouched human but an elongated head and the flick of something that must be a tale brings that into question.

The silhouette of the Rat King quickly scurries back into the shadows.

INT. DENTIST OFFICE - DAY

The sounds of a dental exam fill the meticulously clean and well-lit dentist's office. DOCTOR HARDY sits in a white lab coat working diligently to improve SARAH'S oral health as they carry on a conversation.

Doctor Hardy is easily into his late sixties, fully grey, and thin enough that some might consider him gaunt if it were not for the added bulk of the crisp lab coat he wears. His patient Sarah is likely an adult granddaughter, the family resemblance is noticeable.

SARAH

(unintelligible)

Ann hen wha, gurgle, me sin. Even
no twa sun toe.

DOCTOR HARDY

...I can't, I still haven't
finished the end of the last batch.
Thank him for me though, I would
say he got it perfect this time.

SARAH

(even more unintelligible)

Wi no gon sensai for da mime.
Gurgle, hungl mu.

DOCTOR HARDY

Well, it will be a good excuse for
me to put my feet up for awhile,
and I'll have the clinic to keep me
busy...

Doctor Hardy makes a new tool selection and goes back to work in Sarah's mouth.

DOCTOR HARDY (CONT'D)

But I don't see myself taking up
fly fishing if that's what you
mean.

The sounds of the casual conversation fade into the sounds of the dental tools.

INT. DENTIST RECEPTION ROOM - EVENING

Doctor Hardy is seeing Sarah out the door of the modest waiting room, handing her a dental goodie bag and giving her a kiss on the cheek. The receptionist desk has already been abandoned for the evening.

SARAH

Do you want me to drop you off at the station? It's on my way, it's no trouble.

DOCTOR HARDY

No, it's beautiful out. Besides, I need the walk after being hunched over all day.

SARAH

Have you looked out the window? I'm not sure what you consider a beautiful day.

DOCTOR HARDY

Any day above ground is a beautiful day at my age. Give the kids my love.

Doctor Hardy waves to Sarah as he shut the office door behind her.

EXT. CITY STREET - EVENING

Doctor Hardy has traded his lab coat in for a dark trench coat to ward off the chill. He strolls down a gray city street that he's traveled countless times before.

Archie, not much younger than Doctor Hardy, is sitting on a bent plank of cardboard that has been covered with his dense hand written scrawls of text. Flanking both sides of Archie are stacks of used books with a "4 SALE" sign leaned against them.

Archie's face can be clearly seen showing the signs of a past stroke or similar affliction. He makes an unintelligible noise and excitedly motions toward Doctor Hardy when he sees him.

ARCHIE

I en doing uch better wid am ma teet.

Doctor Hardy's face brightens with recognition of Derelict and he approaches and squats down in front of the man.

DOCTOR HARDY

Open up.

Archie presents his open mouth proudly. Without pause, Doctor Hardy reaches to the man's face and spreads the man's misshapen lips even wider.

DOCTOR HARDY (CONT'D)
 Hmmm...you're right, you have done a lot better. Still, we'll have a chair waiting for you on Tuesday at 11 AM sharp.

Doctor Hardy fishes in his pocket.

ARCHIE
 (unintelligible)
 Aighh, been mosly con teenen.

DOCTOR HARDY
 No, this is for the bus fare, I don't want any excuses. Remember, Tuesday, no excuses. I'll have more time to talk then I promise.

Doctor Hardy moves off down the street with a wave that is returned by Archie.

The Doctor continues his walk only to have a rat-like chittering noise catche his attention. He pauses and sees that the noise emanates from a sewer lid that is not fully closed.

RAT KING (O.S.)
 (distant whispers)
 ...Hickory Dickory Dock, the mouse ran up the clock, the clock struck one, the mouse ran down, Hickory Dickory Dock.

Doctor Hardy stops over the crescent of darkness formed by the lid around the edge of the open manhole cover, he leans closer to the opening to listen.

RAT KING (CONT'D)
 ...Hickory dickory dock, the bird looked at the clock, the clock struck two, away she flew, Hickory dickory Dock.

DOCTOR HARDY
 Hello, do you need help down there?

The whispering song has gotten inside Doctor Hardy's head. His heart pounds as he tries to stand.

RAT KING

...Dickery dickery dare, the pig
flew up in the air, the man in
brown, soon brought him down,
dickery dickery dare.

His vision narrows as the sound of the whispers grow. His world begins to spin. Doctor Hardy awkwardly staggers backwards only to be caught by Archie as he falls.

Archie struggles to lay the limp form of Doctor Hardy on the ground gently. Just as he finishes the sound of a manhole cover sliding across concrete causes him to look back over his shoulder.

Archie's face fills with terror.

INT. POLICE STATION ELEVATOR- DAY

His hair well trimmed, wearing a crisp dress shirt and pants, Billy pushes a cart of mail across a bustling modern police station lobby to an elevator door. He enters the elevator cab with two uniformed police officers, OFFICER PIGGY 1 and OFFICER PIGGY 2.

The officers seem to fill the entire elevator; everything about their demeanor seems to confirm the stereotype of "pig". Their uniforms strain uncomfortably to contain their sweaty bulk. They snort and laugh over some inside joke as Billy turns to press the elevator button.

He presses the button marked "B3". The officers exit on "B1" leaving him alone with his cart. Billy sighs in relief once the officers have exited.

Billy turns over a hat shaped package wrapped in dirty brown paper in his hands. The only address is a barely legible scrawl of black that reads "Detective Loveless".

For a moment Billy sniffs the air, then he lifts the package up to his nose and takes a curious sniff. He recoils slightly, his face registers confusion as he tries to place the scent. Tentatively, he begins to sniff the package again. The "ding" of the elevator startles him into dropping the package back into the cart and exiting the elevator.

INT. POLICE STATION CORRIDOR - DAY

The elevator door opens and Billy pushes his cart into a dark corridor that more closely resembles a long forgotten basement storage room. The only source of light is an unnatural orange glow from the frosted window of an office door at the far end of the crowded hall and the light from the elevator at the opposite end. The space between the two motes of light seem to disappear into a dark empty void.

Billy is obviously spooked at his surroundings but proceeds down the hall. The sign on the door reads only "DETECTIVE", as the name behind it has been roughly scraped away.

Billy quietly knocks on the door.

BILLY

Detective Loveless? I have a package.

Billy sets the package at the foot of the door and turns to leave with a sigh of relief.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (O.S.)

Why don't you bring it in, Billy?
It's unlocked.

The voice seems to crawl from the door. The sound of it makes Billy instinctively take a step backwards.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Bring it in, Billy.

Billy steps forward and picks up the package but hesitates with his hand on the knob.

BILLY

(haltingly)

Could...could you turn off the lamp?

After a moment, the orange glow fades and is replaced by a less threatening white light. Billy pushes his cart to the side and opens the door.

INT. DETECTIVE LOVELESS' OFFICE - DAY

The windowless basement office looks like something out of a noire novel, only two things look out of place: Detective Loveless himself, and the lamp that sits on the corner of his desk.

Detective Loveless manages an average face with average hair on an average body in an average suit. Nothing stands out, yet the sum total of his parts manages to be profoundly disturbing.

His image is never truly static; from moment to moment there is always some minor detail that has changed and is waiting to be noticed (an earlobe lengthens, a button goes missing from his jacket only to return later). Even his voice wanders and catches in unexpected ways.

At first glance the lamp looks like it might be at home in a Victorian parlor, but a closer inspection shows the impression comes only from the overly decorative lamp shade that has been set on top of it. The body of the lamp looks more surreal, as if molten iron had cooled as it poured over a skull.

The lamp's heavy glass lenses are dark, covered with dilated metal shutters. The room is lit by dreary incandescent lights hung between the exposed pipes and ducts that run overhead.

Billy approaches and holds out the package at arms length. Detective Loveless makes no effort to retrieve the package from Billy.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

So you want to be a policeman when
you grow up, Billy?

BILLY

(hesitant)
Yes sir.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

Why did you ask me to turn off the
lamp, Billy?

BILLY

You told me never to look at the
light.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS
But we've never met, have we,
Billy?

BILLY
(confused)
I...I guess I just dreamt it then.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS
Really? What was I doing in the
dream, Billy?

Billy shifts nervously from side to side and looks at the floor. He looks back at the door to consider escape but finds the door has been closed.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)
What was I doing in the dream,
Billy?

BILLY
(blurts out)
You were fucking me up the ass.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS
(seems pleased)
You are very honest, Billy. You
will make a terrible cop. But that
is not a bad thing. Do you
remember the important part of the
dream?

BILLY
(shaken)
The lamp was on the table in front
of me...and I turned it on...and
then I woke up.

Detective Loveless is standing behind Billy now,
uncomfortably close.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS
Do you want to turn it on now,
Billy?

Billy hesitates, bent over the desk, his face drawn close to the lamp, the decorative shade has been removed. Detective Loveless is standing behind Billy, leaning over his shoulder whispering something in Billy's ear.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

Go on.

Billy's hand shakes as he reaches toward the lamp. The metal shutters contract and orange fire bursts from the lamp's center oculus and pours into Billy's eyes. Billy's face is locked in horror as he tries to scream.

INT. BILLY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Billy awakes again in a tangle of bedsheets, bathed in sweat, and seems to be in danger of hyperventilating. He looks at his alarm which responds by flipping from 2:32 to 2:33 AM. Billy is not sleeping well.

BILLY

God, not again.

He stumbles out of bed towards the bathroom in the dark. Shirtless, but still wearing his pair of old-time striped pajamas.

INT. DETECTIVE LOVELESS' OFFICE - NIGHT

Detective Loveless sits in his empty office. The lamp is dark; the decorative lamp shade can be seen hanging across the room on the coat rack. The dim overhead lights provide puddles of light here and there where it's needed. The rest of the room is lost in a confusion of shadows.

The Detective draws a letter opener from his drawer that resembles a cross between a dagger and an antique scalpel. He begins spinning the blade in his hands, walking it across his fingers and then back again in a well practiced show of dexterity, the way some might do with a coin. Then the blade is put to work peeling away layers of paper and tape to reveal a brown bowler hat that is charred along one edge.

Detective Loveless spins the hat deftly between his hands and then pauses the motion to sniff the burn. He sniffs again with obvious pleasure.

With a flick of his hand he tosses the hat smoothly onto the lamp. Topped by the hat, the black iron of the lamp looks even more disturbingly like the tortured visage of a human head.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS
Ah delicious, simply delicious.

INT. SUBWAY PASSENGER CAR - NIGHT

The passenger car rumbles along through the distant cry of bats and bird song. Mr. Feign and Mistress sit comfortably close to each other. Time has passed; the two strangers on the train have started to become more.

She sits in her dark beauty, her clothes convey a slightly more refined aspect of her impossible nature. The choker at her neck now includes a single red feather that draws a slash across her neck.

Mr. Feign, dapper as always, his suit, hat, and umbrella unembellished except for the addition of a bright red flower to his lapel.

MR. FEIGN

(nervous)

You know, if I could convince you
to get off on the next stop, I know
a lovely little sushi restaurant?

Mistress looks at him without answering. There is a tension that she seems pleased with. She smiles and the universe seems to crescendo in Mr. Feigns mind. Something momentous is about to happen.

MISTRESS

(almost inaudible)

Of course.

INT. SUSHI RESTAURANT - NIGHT

In a dimly lit corner of a very traditional sushi restaurant, Mistress and Mr. Feign brandish chopsticks across from each other in a tiny booth. Despite being the oddest of couples, none of the other patrons or staff seem to take the slightest notice.

The wall beyond their table is decorated with a wood block prints from a story of a Japanese fisherman battling a monstrously demonic fish from his tiny boat.

The distant sound of an ocean storm and the screech of gulls can be heard far beyond their continuing conversation over the variety of sushi rolls artfully displayed across their table.

MR. FEIGN

...some people describe it as rubbery, but I think of it more as an exotic mushroom, earthy, I suppose.

MISTRESS

Alright then, let's put your sushi knowledge to the test. Close your eyes.

Mistress places her chopsticks across her plate and begins to remove the single black glove that she wears on her right hand. For a moment the shape of the glove implies something horrible and misshapen within, but the hand that is withdrawn is delicate and moves with a smooth subtlety.

She reaches across the table, the white silk scarf draped between her hands and tenderly blindfolds Mr. Feign.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

Now keep them closed, no cheating...

MR. FEIGN

You take your sushi very seriously.

MISTRESS

And no talking.

She selects a beautifully crafted sushi roll with care and lifts it from the plate with her fingers. At first there is only a hint of movement, but it quickly becomes unmistakable that the fish within the roll has begun to squirm.

Mistress lifts it towards Mr. Feign's slightly open mouth and pauses. The roll has begun to darken, the corrupted fish wriggles in a vain attempt to free itself. Maggots begin to emerge from the rice, fall to the table and crawl away.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

...now breath in...

Mr. Feign leans forward, sniffs the sushi in deeply, pauses with a sigh of pleasure, and then opens his mouth wider in anticipation.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

...and say goodbye to the light,
for when your eyes open you will
cry out for the darkness.

The sushi is slid gently into his open mouth, followed by Mistress' finger that only slightly brushes Mr. Feign's mouth; but as it does the moment slows and then comes to a stop. Mr. Feign's face is frozen in a growing wave of ecstasy.

The world around the two lovers no longer exists as it once did.

The darkness that normally dances around the edges of the Mistress begins to expand and envelope Mr. Feign as well. The Mistress' finger making only the most gentle of contact with Mr. Feign has stirred the passions of the forces that surround and concealed her. The lace, feathers, and leather of her dress seem to dissolve into the shadows that now writhe in lust. Her dress is barely able to conceal her body as the darkness begins to shutter.

Her imagery begins to break down into the chaos of death and sex, rotting food erupting in maggots, vultures tearing apart a carcass. The everyday sounds of restaurant, hardly notice before, begin to grow. The click of chopstick, the guzzling of sushi, relentless chewing, the screech of gulls meld into a cacophony as Mr. Feign's mouth finally closes over the sushi.

A final image of the Japanese fisherman story illustrates the fisherman as he and his boat are swallowed whole by the demonic fish.

INT. DOCTOR HARDY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Distant whispers echo through the darkness.

RAT KING

...hickory dickory Dock.

Doctor Hardy wakes with a start to his alarm, he is disheveled and disoriented. The doctor checks his clock, then checks his phone in an attempt to clear his head.

DOCTOR HARDY
What the hell is wrong with me?

Doctor Hardy gets out of a bed in a neat and tidy bedroom, enters the adjoining bathroom, and begins to vigorously brush his teeth.

INT. DENTAL CLINIC - DAY

A grotesque view of a patient's gaping mouth hangs from the wall above where Doctor Hardy is finishing his paperwork. The clinic exam room is functional and clean but hardly on par with his own office.

He looks up at the clock that reads 11:17, his dental chair stands empty.

DOCTOR HARDY
(raising his voice)
Oh, Vicky?

VICKY (O.S.)
Yes Doctor Hardy?

DOCTOR HARDY
I think I am going to take an early lunch, it looks like my eleven is a no-show.

VICKY (O.S.)
Should I go ahead and try and reschedule the 11:00 for sometime next week?

DOCTOR HARDY
No, I'll take care of it myself.
Thanks though. I'll see you after lunch.

INT. DOCTOR HARDY'S CAR - DAY

Doctor Hardy maneuvers his comfortable sedan down a bustling city street. He spots a piece of cardboard covered with familiar handwritten scrawls of text, Archie's now empty seat.

ARCHIE
Dam it Archie, don't do this to me.

Doctor Hardy continues to scan the sidewalk as he slowly drives down the street looking concerned.

INT. BUTCHER SHOP - DAY

Billy inspects a disembodied pig's head proudly laid out before him by the BUTCHER. Billy's attempt to hide his disgust for the task at hand is more than apparent.

BILLY

Great. I guess, wrap it up just like that.

BUTCHER

Do you want an apple?

BILLY

No, I'm not hungry.

BUTCHER

Not for you, for the pig. It is kind of tradition.

BILLY

Uhm, sure.

The Butcher complies by wedging an apple in the pigs mouth and wrapping the head into a brown paper parcel for easy carrying.

EXT. BUTCHER SHOP ALLEY - EVENING

Billy exits the butcher shop and makes a quick turn down the neighboring alley. The sun is dropping and the shadows of the ally have begun to deepen.

A few quick steps later he pauses at the dumpster and looks over his shoulder to make sure he is alone. Billy then pulls a large black marker and a yellow sticky note from his coat.

Then with painstaking care he begins to copy the scribbled mark on the sticky note into a larger but still unintelligible graffiti "tag" on the side of the dumpster. The scribbled text in the center of the marking bares a noticeable resemblance to the subtle birthmark on Billy's hand.

BILLY

(under breath)

What the hell am I doing? What the
hell am I doing? What the hell am
I doing?

With that, Billy lifts the lid of the dumpster and drops the wrapped pig's head into the trash. Then, without ceremony he closes the lid and turns away to exit the alley.

As Billy leaves the alley the "tag" he left behind on the dumpster has begun to glow weakly in the fading light of the evening. A low rustling sound can be heard in the alley as the shadows suddenly begin to darken.

Billy makes a concerted effort not to look back and quickly moves to exit the alley as the sound of an otherworldly chittering begins.

The sound of the noise grows louder and more frantic causing Billy to pause.

BILLY (CONT'D)

(to self)

What are you doing? Just keep
walking. Just keep walking.

Almost in response, the noise grows more intense. A disturbing ripping and chewing can now be heard from inside the dumpster as well.

Billy turns around and begins to approach the dumpster despite his reservations.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid,
stupid...

Billy's hands shake as he touches the edge of the dumpster's lid. The wet ripping and chewing noises from inside the dumpster are unmistakable.

A vicious squeal erupts as Billy thrusts the dumpster lid upward.

For a moment, Billy finds himself looking down on an emaciated pale grey naked man. A thick fleshy tail sprouts from the cleft of his buttock.

The Rat King lifts his horribly deformed rodent-like head, bares his teeth and squeals in anger. Blood and bits of pig flesh drop from his mouth as he shakes his head menacingly.

Billy slams the dumpster lid down in fright and flees down the alley.

The Rat King's squeals echo in the distant squeals of a subway car's breaks.

INT. SUBWAY PASSENGER CAR - NIGHT

Two passengers sit at the front window of an otherwise empty passenger car rumbling along in the darkness. What might pass as silence quickly begins to fade as the sound of the wind and the tracks invades the train as it begins to gain momentum.

The atmosphere surrounding the Mistress is serene, the calm before the storm.

Mr. Feign sits close to the Mistress, his briefcase, hat, and umbrella have now moved to the empty seat at his side. He is oblivious to the fact that he has been blindfolded with a white silk scarf. They sit.

MR. FEIGN

I have to say I have never been to the end of the line. I always assumed it was some sort of suburban hell out there.

MISTRESS

I should be offended, but you're really not far off.

MR. FEIGN

I just meant I never had a reason to ride all the way out until now.

A breeze from nowhere is blowing Mr. Feign's hair, the car groans as indecipherable images from the dark begin to race by the train's windows lit by the flash of sparks. A fiery orange-red glow begins to seethe from the windows. The effect has placed them on the inside of a lantern.

Mr. Feign rides on blithely ignorant of his surroundings.

MISTRESS

"Into the dark night resignedly I
go, I am not so afraid of the dark
night as the friends I do not
know..."

Mr. Feign takes the opportunity to finish her quote.

MR. FEIGN

(a whisper)

"...I do not fear the night above
as I fear the friends below."

Mr. Feign's voice is lost as the train shutters and heaves, his hat and umbrella fall from his lap to the floor. His world suddenly begins to vibrate and collapse into a guttural scream.

EXT. SUBWAY PASSENGER CAR TUNNEL - NIGHT

The sounds and image of an out of a control subway train careening through a tunnel lit by arcs of electricity and fire are overwhelming. The grinding of the train wheels and the track are excruciatingly loud. The car itself is shattering violently. For a moment, catastrophic failure is imminent and then the train is completely gone.

The only remnant of the event is the trash carried by the rushing wind over the molten tracks, which are glowing as if they have been pulled from a forge.

As the wind dies down a bowler hat tumbling along the tunnel comes to a stop against the tracks just a few feet from an crumpled umbrella with the fabric burned away. Where the hat touches the glowing steel it begins to smolder and burn.

RAT KING

(whispering)

...they all ran after the farmer's
wife, who cut off their tails with
a carving knife, did you ever see
such a thing in your life, as three
blind mice?

The nearly human form of the Rat King retrieves the hat and blows out the flame with a wheeze of air from his horribly elongated face. He then crouches down, pulling the hat close to his face and begins to sniff excitedly.

EXT. CAFE - EVENING

Mr. Feign sits at a nice enough table on a nice enough day to be enjoying the weather. He reads a paper over his half finished lunch, a mostly full wine glass sits at the ready.

Detective Loveless approaches the table and stands unnoticed by Mr. Feign reading his newspaper.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

Excuse me, are you using this seat?

Mr. Feign startles and takes a moment to adjust to the odd presence of the Detective.

MR. FEIGN

No, not at all you can have it.

Instead of taking the chair to a neighboring table Detective Loveless pulls out the chair and sits down.

MR. FEIGN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, I think there has been a misunderstanding.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

No misunderstanding, Mr. Feign, we need to talk.

Detective Loveless lays a badge in its leather surround casually on the table between them.

MR. FEIGN

Is there a problem, is something wrong?

Detective Loveless returns his badge to his coat and sips Mr. Feign's glass of water. An uncomfortable silence develops as the Detective butters a slice of bread.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

What has she offered you?

MR. FEIGN

Excuse me, what?

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

Your girlfriend, what has she offered you?

MR. FEIGN

I am afraid I don't know what you
are talking about.

Detective Loveless shifts position in his seat, now leaning
further over the table in a more aggressive manner.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

You are unmarried, unattached,
still working your job, decent
apartment.

The Detective pauses to chew some bread.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

Most people would be rock stars by
now. What's wrong with you,
haven't you closed the deal yet?

MR. FEIGN

I don't know what this is about but
I do not like the tone of your
questions. I think this
conversation is over.

Mr. Feign begins to stand but the Detective motions for him
to remain seated.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

We can either talk now or those two
gentleman in that car over there
will be escorting you down to my
office.

Detective Loveless motions to a police sedan parked across
the street.

In the car, Officer Piggy 1 and Officer Piggy 2 return Mr.
Feign's stare intensely. They know their role is to
intimidate and they succeed.

Mr. Feign sits back down.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

What has she offered you?

MR. FEIGN

I am at a total loss...

DETECTIVE LOVELESS
 (surprised)
 You really don't know do you?

MR. FEIGN
 Look, it's not like that at all, I
 just enjoy her company...and she
 enjoys mine. I'm not paying her
 for anything.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS
 Haha, so that's what it is? You're
 in love? Haha. You are selling
 yourself short! You don't know
 what you are worth to someone like
 her.

Mr. Feign seems even more bewildered, the effort at
 continuing the conversation is bringing on a serious
 headache.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)
 So have you even had sex yet?

Mr. Feign's confusion begins to turn to anger that he tries
 to raise his voice without making a scene.

MR. FEIGN
 Look, unless I am being charged
 with something illegal, I think we
 are done here.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS
 You don't even know do you?
 Everything been sort of dreamy
 lately?

Detective Loveless makes a spinning motion with his fingers
 at his temples.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)
 Maybe your memory isn't quite as
 linear as it used to be?

Mr. Feign stands defiantly.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)
 No, no, please, I didn't mean to
 interrupt your lunch.
 (MORE)

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

I think we got off on the wrong
foot, I am just trying to help you
out.

Detective Loveless stands as well.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

Let me do something for you.

The Detective pulls an old coin from his pocket and twirls it
across his fingers with impressive dexterity.

He then picks up Mr. Feign's wine glass and knocks back the
nearly full glass, swishing the contents in his mouth before
spitting it back into the glass.

Setting the half full glass back on the table he drops the
coin in with a clink. Mr. Feign looks disgusted by the
entire display.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

If you are in the mood to start
really remembering, just drink
this.

Detective Loveless slides his card next to the glass, stands,
and turns to leave.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

And maybe if you remember something
illegal you can give me a call.

Mr. Feign, completely befuddled by the experience, sits back
down in his seat staring at the glass and the card. The
Detective pauses and turns to ask one more question.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

One last thing, I don't suppose I
could ask you to take off your
shirt and tie?

Mr. Feign returns his stare but doesn't respond.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

(smuggly)
Didn't think so. I'll be in touch.

Mr. Feign sits and looks down at the glass, the coin is
invisible in the red wine. He glances around the cafe, no
ones seems to have taken any notice of the conversation.

Mr. Feign pauses and drums his fingers nervously for a moment before he unceremoniously swigging the wine and sets the glass back down. He leans back in his chair, closes his eyes and begins to rub temples in an attempt to ward off a pending headache.

EXT. TRANQUIL HELL - DAY

Mistress and the blindfolded Mr. Feign stand holding hands looking across a vast field of wheat that undulates in the breeze under a clear blue sky. The colors are exaggerated, supersaturated.

In the center of the field, a tattered Gothic house sits perched on a knoll. The house is taller than it is wide, the paint on its wooden siding vanished long ago. Birds sing sweetly in the distance.

MR. FEIGN

(confused)

I don't understand what I am seeing, how can I be seeing this at all?

MISTRESS

That is because you are seeing through my eyes.

MR. FEIGN

Can I look, can I take off the blindfold?

MISTRESS

Patience, darling.

She slides up tightly against his body. Her hand slides between the folds of his jacket. Mr. Feign's body softens against hers as their embrace becomes more intimate.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

We'll be ready soon enough.

EXT. APOCALYPTIC HELL - DAY

The view from behind the lovers shows them silhouetted in front of the apocalyptic scene as it exists in another reality.

Mr. Feign is seen completely unchanged but the Mistress is a jagged gash in reality, a ragged inky tear that distorts everything around her.

The wheat field is a vast river of lava travelling slowly to an unknown destination. The same rickety Gothic house sits upon a rock outcropping that parts the flow of lava as it passes.

Towering pillars of black smoke rise across the horizon and are outlined by the strokes of lightning that slowly crawl across them. Where the smoke parts a blood red sky can be seen beyond. Across the landscape, misshaped birds soar on a wind that resonates as an endless moan.

MISTRESS

We'll be ready soon enough.

EXT. CAFE - NIGHT

The sun has recently set. Mr. Feign's wine glass rests in his hand and is still empty. He stares at the glass, not inspecting it but looking beyond it.

Mr. Feign is startled by a woman's voice, the PROSTITUTE stands across the table from him.

PROSTITUTE

Excuse me, are you using this seat?

Mr. Feign is confused by the question. He tries to focus and begins to rub his temples again. She is attractive despite being a bit heavy handed with her make-up. Still, she is much more conservative than the stereotypical prostitute working on the streets.

MR. FEIGN

No, it's free.

She slides into the chair without comment. The action throws Mr. Feign into a strange mix of confusion and deja vu.

MR. FEIGN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, I think there has been a misunderstanding...

PROSTITUTE

Just so there is no misunderstanding--

She unbuttons two more buttons of her blouse.

PROSTITUTE (CONT'D)

I can make this easy for you. You start out by buying me a glass of wine, and the price goes up from there.

The Prostitute's foot slips from her shoe under the table and travels up the inside of Mr. Feign's leg, drawing a momentarily embarrassed look from him.

PROSTITUTE (CONT'D)

Trust me, I can take you to places you've never even dreamed of.

Mr. Feign looks pale, sits down the glass and attempts to stand. He nearly staggers but catches himself with help of the table.

MR. FEIGN

I'm, I'm not feeling well.

PROSTITUTE

You aren't looking so hot, maybe we should you in bed.

Mr. Feign barely notices as she stands and takes him by the arm.

PROSTITUTE (CONT'D)

Don't worry baby, mommy is going to make it all better

CUT TO:

EXT. DOCTOR HARDY'S CAR - NIGHT

Doctor Hardy's key slides smoothly into the trunk's keyhole and trips the latch.

He nervously glances back over his shoulder down the deserted street, then from the trunk he removes a crowbar, a long metal black flashlight, and a holster with a small and ancient looking revolver. The last item to come from the trunk is a pair of worn black rubber galoshes. He then proceeds to sit on the bumper of the car as he fights to slip them over his shoes.

Doctor Hardy looks down at the manhole cover directly behind where he has parked the car. Despite his age, he easily levers the manhole cover up and away from the opening with the crowbar, the smell makes him momentarily recoil.

DOCTOR HARDY

This is not what retirement is
suppose to be like.

The light from his flashlight is swallowed by the darkness of the sewer below. After a deep breath he swings his legs into the hole and begins to descend down the ladder.

INT. SEWER - NIGHT

The sewers Doctor Hardy travels through are initially modern municipal sewers but their character quickly begins to reflect a much older catacomb-like style. He works to walk along the sides and away from the filth flowing down the center of the tunnels.

Before long the tunnels no longer resemble sewers at all as they evolve into something that more closely resembles a Gothic maze filled with pipes and conduits.

Something catches Doctor Hardy's attention, he stops, waits silently, and listens. He casts the beam of his flashlight high and low, noticing the change in his surroundings. Content that he hears nothing but dripping water, steam, and rats he moves on.

A few steps later he stops and listens again. This time he hears the distant murmur of whispers.

DOCTOR HARDY

(under breath)

What the hell am I doing down here?

Straining forward to hear, Doctor Hardy begins following the sound deeper into the labyrinth until he is stopped by the recognition of black scribbles on the wall. The beam of his flashlight illuminates a small chamber where every square inch of the walls and ceiling have been covered with the same crazed scrawl that passes for Archie's handwriting.

When Doctor Hardy turns he spots the dark shadow that is Archie's crumpled body laying face down in the corner of the floor. The tattered manuscript (Loveless' book) is in the death grip of Archie's hand.

DOCTOR HARDY (CONT'D)

Oh god, Archie, Archie, you're
going to be OK, I'll get you out of
here.

He rolls Archie's body over only to find that most of his face has been removed by rats. Doctor Hardy initially recoils from the site before he is overcome with grief.

DOCTOR HARDY (CONT'D)

Oh, god Archie, I'm sorry, I
couldn't be here for you this time.

Doctor Hardy sits on the floor cradling his friend's head in his hands. A moment passes, Doctor Hardy summons his resolve and attempts to drag Archie's body back the way he came. After only a few feet he realizes his age and Archie's size would make it impossible for him to get far.

Doctor Hardy pauses to catch his breath.

With the body moved, Doctor Hardy can see the text in Archie's hand more clearly. With his flashlight in hand, he gets down on his knees and gently pulls the book away. As he does a pencil falls from its pages.

Doctor Hardy flips through the pages looking for where the pencil had been marking. Several archaic illustrations flip by. One of interest shows a sketch of the ferryman Charon guiding his boat through the underworld with a great lantern held high over his head.

Finally, he finds a page near the back of the book where the elaborate printed text of the book ends and Archie's dense scrawl begins. Without pause, he sits down next to his dead friend and begins to read with the beam of the flashlight.

DOCTOR HARDY (CONT'D)

(under breath)

Charon stood atop the ferry's
crumbling deck as he led the dead
across the River Styx.

EXT. UNDERWORLD FERRY - NIGHT

On the crumbling wood deck of an ancient ferry, the impossibly tall shrouded silhouette of CHARON stands at the prow.

The crooked poll in his skeletal hands is topped by a hook where the ornate lantern first seen in Detective Loveless' office dangles. The lantern is lit and its calm golden glow leads the boat across the vast black waters towards a distant shore. The sound of Charon's pole traversing the waters makes a deep unearthly rumble as it passes through the water.

The deck of the boat is crowded with dozens of the dead finding their way to the next world. They stand patiently and peacefully with only the softest of a communal moan passing between them, except for one.

Detective Loveless pulls a tattered hood away from his face as he approaches Charon from behind with his scalpel like dagger drawn.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

The old ways are over.

Charon never turns or makes a sound as the blade is thrust deep into his back; he only pauses his motion of poling the boat.

A moment passes before Charon resumes his movement. The pole pulls the boat across the water two more times before he collapses into an inanimate pile of bones and decay.

Detective Loveless lifts the glowing lantern above his head in triumph as he turns to face the dead.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

This is the dawn of a new world.

Look upon the face of your master.

The aspect of the dead changes almost instantly: their eyes darken, they bare their teeth, and their moan becomes a raging scream. A few take tentative steps forward, reaching out towards Detective Loveless before they all suddenly charge in mass.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

No. I command you, stop! Obey me
or die.

Detective Loveless brandishes the lantern and his blade at the undead mob. He does not notice the foolishness of his own words.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

I command you...

The Detective slashes at the mob with his dagger to no effect. They pile onto him biting and clawing as he screams and tumbles off the side of the boat.

The glow of the lantern recedes into the black depths of the river as the thrashing Detective Loveless is pulled under by the mob and sinks out of sight.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

The unconscious form of Detective Loveless lays face down in the sand still clutching Charon's lantern. His clothes are in tatters. The sound of a steam whistle makes him stir. He rolls over squinting at the light in time to see a turn of the century steamship full of cargo and belching smoke as it heads up river.

A LAW MAN in early 1900s city riding attire sits atop a black horse, looking down from the bank at the waterlogged form of Detective Loveless. The badge pinned to his coat and his sidearm strapped to his hip are both displayed proudly.

LAW MAN

Good morning, sir. Hit the bottle
a might hard last night did we?

Confusion clouds Detective Loveless' face. He does not answer, keeping his back to the Sheriff.

LAW MAN (CONT'D)

Is there a service I might be able
to render you as part of the
dutiful discharge of my duty?

Detective Loveless picks at the ruined rags hanging from his body and his confusion clears with a flash of memory; undead hands angrily clawing at him.

With what seemed like a twitch of his body Loveless' dagger has struck the Sheriff in the chest hard enough to carry him off the side of the horse. The horse startles and bolts away.

A moment later Detective Loveless is standing above the body of the Sheriff examining the badge that he now holds in his hands. The sun glints from the badge. A moment of clarity passes across Detective Loveless' face.

INT. HELL'S BOUDOIR - DAY

Massive red velvet draperies hang down from narrow windows that stretch from the floor up to a very high ceiling, tattered layers of lace filter the reddish glow of the outside world. An ornate canopied four post bed stands nearly as high as the ceiling, its linens, pillows, and ornate curtains are in perfect order.

The walls of the room are a menagerie of Victorian wallpaper, family portraits, and tall sections of shelving with rolling ladders for access. The shelves themselves are crammed with antique looking medical instruments, books, and taxidermy.

The favorite subject matter of the taxidermy appears to be the heads of various creatures. While many of the heads bare a resemblance to something from the animal kingdom and many others are obscured under glass display domes, there is no doubt that the majority are plainly human.

Mr. Feign sits on a metal stool shirtless and still blindfold. From the waist down he wears a pair of old-fashioned striped pajamas. With a practiced move, the Mistress ties his hands behind his back with another white silk scarf.

The Mistress stands behind Mr. Feign, massaging his shoulders, caressing him, naked except for a necklace and her long gloves. She appears more human than we have seen her before.

MISTRESS

(sultry)

Men swear love from the ends of the earth to the end of time, but I need something far more mercurial, more important. I need your trust.

MR. FEIGN

(playful)

"The trust of the innocent is the liar's most useful tool."

The quip causes a flush of anger to sweep across the Mistress, her surroundings darken and shift with her mood.

MISTRESS

No, this is not idle whispers of affection.

(MORE)

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

I need your words, not the words of another. I need your trust.

The room continues to darken even as the Mistress resumes her caresses with a sense of urgency.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

I need your surrender in all things, body and soul. I need you to be mine forever. I need...

MR. FEIGN

(interrupting)

I love you.

The room calms.

MR. FEIGN (CONT'D)

(longing)

I am yours forever. I was from the day we met. How can you not know that I love you?

The Mistress removes her necklace. The detail of the necklace as she places it around Mr. Feign's neck is remarkable. A loop of razor thin silver chain passes through hasp decorated to resemble an ornate keyhole. Two strands of the chain emerge from the other end of the hasp where they attach to a pair of matching silver finger sized rings.

MISTRESS

(serene)

I know darling, I've always known. I just needed to hear you say it. Now, I think it is time for you to see.

The silk blindfold flutters to the floor.

Without warning the Mistress' fingers slide through the rings of her necklace and she pulls back violently, the necklace has become a garret.

MR. FEIGN'S POV:

The view of the room spins wildly from Mr. Feigns point of view. The image of a crow's beak yawning wide, the sound of aged metal shears endlessly sliding shut.

The Mistress consoling his own headless corpse as he looks upwards from his own lap.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

Don't be afraid darling, don't be afraid...

Not a drop of blood has been spilled yet the world fades to red in Mr. Feign's eyes.

INT. HELL'S BOUDOIR - NIGHT

Billy's obnoxious alarm sounds loudly as the red glow of the digital display flips to 6:00 AM. He reaches out with a familiar motion to shut it off only to find the alarm sitting on a table farther away than expected. The birthmark on Billy's hand is again noticeable.

A moment of panic as Billy realizes that he is not in his room. He looks up to see the massive wood posts at the corners of bed stretching away into the darkness and tangle of curtains above the him.

In the darkness beyond the bed there are ominous shapes and sounds, some familiar (the squeals of the Rat King), some not (the screams of the Prostitute). Billy is shaking uncontrollably; all his fears have come to haunt him.

BILLY

Please...please don't do this.

With a rustle of feathers, the Mistress almost takes form in the shadows just beyond the bed.

MISTRESS

Do what, Billy? Tempt you with my wicked charms? Corrupt your innocence? Far too late for that I'm afraid.

BILLY

He said you would come to kill me.

The Mistress responds from the other side of the bed.

MISTRESS

But didn't he say he would protect you?

BILLY

Yes...

MISTRESS

But how?

BILLY

I..I could call his name and he would come and protect me.

MISTRESS

So why don't you call him to save yourself, Billy?

The heavy drapes of the bed flutter violently in a wind that threatens to lift the bed off the ground. A cacophony of screeching bird song and the buzzing of insects echo from the darkness. The entire room begins to shutter. Billy pulls the sheets over his head.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

You remember it. You've said his name before haven't you, Billy? He's made you say it once before, hasn't he? You know what that feels like in your mouth.

Billy hides under the sheets like a child sobbing.

BILLY

Leave me alone! Please, leave me alone.

The wind calms. The Mistress reclines across the bed separated from Billy by the decadent bedding.

MISTRESS

(consoling)

Don't weep, I can only imagine how hard it has been for you.

She begins to gently caress his head with the side of her hand through the fabric.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

The things he has shown you can never be unseen. You are his medium, his conduit to travel where he is forbidden. The weight of it has left your soul in tatters.

BILLY
(stutters)
But...but he loves me.

The Mistress recoils from the bed up and into the darkness above. She seems offended by the very thought of this boy being in love with Detective Loveless.

MISTRESS
He loves only submission. He can only take, it is his nature. That is why he has failed all these years. To him you are no more than a tool to be used and discarded.

BILLY
(angering)
And how are you any different? He said you would offer me things. He said it would all be lies.

MISTRESS
(fading)
I offer you nothing, only surrender to a different path. But you must choose. Your time is short.

BILLY
Leave me alone. Please, just leave me alone.

There is a moment of silence. Billy can be heard inhale before he gathers the nerve to pull back the sheets.

INT. BILLY'S BEDROOM -MORNING

Billy pulls the sheets back from his face to find himself in his room. The glow of his clock reads 6:01 AM.

Fighting hard to calm himself and clear his head Billy stumbles towards the bathroom rubbing his eyes. In the dim light he doesn't notice the decapitated head of the Prostitute or the pair of leather bound books (the Mistress' and Loveless') that sit next to the gory trophy on the dresser.

INT. BILLY'S BATHROOM - MORNING

The fluorescent light that snaps on is harsh and a painful contrast to the bedroom.

On the way in, Billy reaches past the shower curtain and turns on the shower to let the water warm.

Turning back to the sink Billy begins to vigorously brush his teeth. Steam has begun to rise from the shower.

Still groggy and absorbed in the mindless activity of brushing his teeth, Billy does not initially notice that a fleshy blur of color of someone in his shower has appeared behind him. Billy's brushing eventually slows as he notices the naked form of a woman using his shower.

Despite the steam and the opaque shower curtain, the woman's curves can be seen clearly enough. However, the silhouette becomes much harder to make out above the shoulders.

Billy closes his eyes in attempt to clear his head before he speaks to the reflection in the mirror. Toothpaste dripping from his mouth makes the conversation rather unattractive.

BILLY

I know you're not real. I want you
out of my head.

MISTRESS (V.O.)

You would flee from the benign to
the malevolent?

BILLY

Get out.

MISTRESS

The veil of my protection is all
that has kept your soul from
rotting under the influence of his
corruption.

The figure in the shower continues with its bathing in a provocative manner, apparently taking no notice of the continuing conversation.

BILLY

Torturing me while I sleep? That's
your idea of protection?

MISTRESS (V.O.)

Your nightmares are the echoes of
his influence, not mine. If you
wish to see the world unadorned,
you merely have to ask.

Billy finally spits what little toothpaste remains in his
mouth into the sink.

BILLY

Fine. Get out of my head, get out
and never come back!

There is no response from the Mistress but the figure in the
shower remains.

BILLY (CONT'D)

I said get out!

Billy turns and shoves the shower curtain aside to reveal the
headless copse of the Prostitute diligently attempting to
scrub its bloody body clean.

For a moment the Prostitute attempts to cover herself with
her arms in a pointless show of modesty but reality quickly
takes hold as the bloody headless body falls out of the
shower toward Billy.

Billy's attempt to move on the slick floor tile causes him to
slip and fall as the corpse collapses on top of him.

Panic strikes Billy and his view of the bathroom has changed.
Billy, the Prostitute's corpse, and the bathroom are now
covered in blood. His foot kicks a bloody hacksaw as he
slips and struggles to get out from underneath the woman's
body.

The understanding that he has slipped back into reality hits
home as he struggles to lift the headless Prostitute's body
back into the shower.

BILLY (CONT'D)

No, no, no...no, please no. Oh,
god...it's a dream, it has to be a
dream.

INT. MR. FEIGN'S BATHROOM - MORNING

Mr. Feign wakes up from apparently sleeping in the spotless bathtub of his spotless bathroom. He, on the other hand, looks disheveled and hungover. He climbs out of the bathtub and stumbles to the sink massaging his temples with his fingers and beginning to wash his face in an attempt to find some relief.

Mr. Feign finishes washing his face in the running water of the sink and dries his face with a white hand towel. His white shirt showing the spots where the excess water has landed. He casually examines his facial features in the mirror as he dries his face.

Inadvertently, Mr. Feign notices a thin line around his neck. He rubs at it a bit as his hand follows around to the back of his neck where he finds something that startles him.

MR. FEIGN

What the hell?

Mr. Feign fumbles around in the drawers until he locates a small hand mirror. He strains to get a good look at a blemish on the back of his neck.

What he sees scares him; his hand is shaking when he touches it again. There is a keyhole in the center of the back of his neck. His hand recoils when he touches it again. The realization makes him woozy and he stumbles out of the bathroom towards the bedroom.

INT. MR. FEIGN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Mr. Feign stops in stunned horror as he turns to face the bedroom.

The morning sun shines brightly through the open window to illuminate the blood splattered sheets, walls, and floor. A naked female corpse lays tangled in the bloody bed sheets, her arms and legs spread and tied to the bedposts. The corpse's head lies at the foot of the bed. It is the Prostitute that Mr. Feign met at the cafe.

The room begins to teeter as the reality of what he is seeing begins to sink in. There is a pounding in Mr. Feign's head that refuses to stop no matter how hard he rubs his temples.

MR. FEIGN

No, this isn't real, this isn't
happening.

From outside the room the unmistakable sound of wood splintering as a door is kicked in. Officer Piggy 1 and Officer Piggy 2 burst into the room with guns drawn.

OFFICER PIGGY 1

Get on the fucking ground!

Without time to move or react Mr. Feign is tackled by Officer Piggy 2. Face down in the blood and gore he is cuffed by Officer Piggy 2. Standing at the bedroom door, Detective Loveless comments on the scene.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

So, Mr. Feign, have you started to
remember anything illegal yet?

MR. FEIGN

You set me up! You drugged me and
set me up!

Mr. Feign is pulled to his feet by Officer Piggy 1 and Officer Piggy 2 where he is met by a punch to the gut from Detective Loveless.

Mr. Feign goes limp but is held up by the Piggy Officers. Detective Loveless steps forward in a rage, practically snarling.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

Let's see if we can bring back any
more memories, shall we?

Detective Loveless pulls the front of his own shirt open to reveal a horrifically deep puncture wound the diameter of a quarter just a few inches below his heart. Red veins and oozing scar tissue surround it, the wound is not healing well.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

A few inches higher and we wouldn't
be having this pleasant
conversation.

The Detective delivers another savage blow to Mr. Feign's jaw.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

I gave you a chance, you picked
your side. Now you are done.

Mr. Feign is dropped to the ground to receive a savage flurry of kicks and blows from nightsticks.

Memories begin to return as Mr. Feign is beaten into unconsciousness.

EXT. CITY PARK - NIGHT

A clearing in the park trees makes way for a small paved circle around a low fountain.

The park looks deserted except for Detective Loveless and the Mistress who approach each other from opposite sides of the clearing. They stop facing each other with only the fountain separating them. The dark water of the fountain takes on an orange glow and begins to steam and bubble.

Above in the clear night sky, a sliver of a crescent moon has aligned with a handful of stars.

The howl of wind and cry of birds animates everything that surrounds the Mistress while Detective Loveless' coat and hair show no sign of movement.

MISTRESS

You have no rights here, child. Do
you lay claim to this place?

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

I know my place, mistress. It
would be folly for me to pose such
an insult...

Detective Loveless bows deeply.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

However, I am most saddened to
report that in your absence, your
long absence, this place has been
all but overrun with vermin and
swine.

The edge of the trees become alive with movement and noise. A dozen figures begin to approach from the shadows. There is a squeal, then another.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

Vermin and swine that have little sense of manners or respect for the old ways.

The figures begin to make their way into the light of the pool. Hog heads on filthy bloated humanoid bodies shuffle forward. Their clothing is little more than rags that imply a past humanity. They brandish ancient axes, clubs, and swords along with more modern baseball bats, knives, and chains.

At the edge of the darkness, the Rat King can be seen skittering at the ring of the clearing, careful to stay in the shadows.

The Mistress holds her ground as the mob surrounds her. Her aspect begins to shutter as the sound of birds begin to scream through the night air. The mob pauses as their courage is momentarily tested.

MISTRESS

We all have our champions.

A figure in black, the Champion, drops from the tree, his agility and speed are highlighted by the contrasting bloated bulk of the pig things that are his prey. His clothing consists of endless strips of black fabric stretched and tied in knots until no signs of skin, hair, face, or humanity remain.

His weapon resembles an iron crow bar with one end being straight and sharpened to a cruel point while the other curves like the handle of an umbrella or cane.

His first leap brings him into the center of the pig mob that squeal in rage as one of their kind is impaled on the iron spike. The piggish brutes rush forward and the melee begins in earnest.

Detective Loveless throws up his hands like a crazed ringmaster.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

(inhuman howl)

It begins!

Detective Loveless has drawn the antique scalpel-like dagger that was seen in his office. He and the Mistress now circle with the boiling fountain between them.

She pulls the delicate lace glove away and reveals a horrible disfigured claw-like hand.

A piggish brute rushes in and swings a club at her from behind only to have her step smoothly to the side. As the momentum of the piggy carries him past the Mistress, her finger gently brushes across his exposed flesh. The effect is immediate and horrific, the flesh begins to boil and blister.

Before the beast can even turn, its skin has begun to rupture and split. It squeals in agony as it collapses and putrefies at a horrifying rate.

The two adversaries continue to circle around the fountain that continues to change, now more closely resembles a ragged pit dropping away into a pool of lava far below. The pit grows wider with each passing moment, the ground continually cracking and falling away into the depths below.

Without warning, the adversaries spring at each other high into the air over the pit. The Detective's blade only scatters a few dark feathers as the two changed sides in mid air. Both falling back to the ground at opposite sides of the pit. The fight continues as they continue to circle, strike, and parry, taking flight again and again.

Across the clearing, the dark shape of the Rat King watches the carnage as the Champion parries a blow and crushes the skull of a piggy adversary. The Rat King shifts a large fireman's axe nervously from hand to hand.

RAT KING

Little Bunny Foo Foo, Hopping
through the forest. Scooping up the
field mice. And boppin' 'em on the
head.

His eyes narrow. The Rat King waits and watches for his chance to strike. Then without warning he rears up and heaves the axe into the crowded field.

RAT KING (CONT'D)

And down came the blue faerie.

The timing is perfect. The axe passes through an opening between two of the piggy beasts and slices through the air just above the Champion's soldiers. The blade slashes across the Champion's neck perfectly as his head flies up and away from his shoulders.

The disembodied head lands silently on the paving and collapses into an empty pile of black rags, nothing but rags.

The Champion's body staggers, there is a pause as the piggy beasts wait for him to fall. Instead the headless Champion answers with a slicing blow that disembowels one of his opponents. The piggy beast's guts and innards drop onto the ground with a sickening slap.

Now facing a headless and seemingly unstoppable adversary, the moral of the piggy beasts breaks. The piggies turn to flee. One particularly fat piggy is snagged at the neck by the Champion's hooked cane. Without pause the Champion leaps up onto the handle and uses his weight as a lever to snap the piggy beast's neck.

Oblivious to the carnage around them, the Mistress and Detective Loveless' battle has paused. The sounds of the squealing and carnage have dropped into the background of their focus.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

You know you cannot kill me, it has been written.

MISTRESS

You misunderstand my intentions, I wish you no ill will.

Detective Loveless lashes forward in a lunge only to have the Mistress deftly leap to the far edge of the widening chasm just above him. They seem to barely brush each other in the air before they part ways.

The Mistress lands with perfect dexterity and turns to face the Detective. The Detective smirks, licking the blood from his dagger as drops of blood begin to fall around the Mistress' feet.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

(strained)

You poor child, I know you have only forgotten, sacrifices can't be taken, they can only be given. I am not here to kill you, I am here to save you.

The Mistress steadies herself at the edge of the chasm. It is clear her wound is severe.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

Perhaps I was wrong, perhaps it is
too late...

Detective Loveless leaps to deliver a killing blow.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

Save yourself, bitch.

The Mistress seems resigned to her fate and steps off the edge into the chasm. The iron cane streaks through the darkness where the Mistress had stood only an instant before.

Detective Loveless could not have seen it coming, the rod strikes just below his heart and impales him in mid leap. The force of the blow is so great that it carries him backwards like a rag doll and pins him to a tree at the far side of the clearing. The iron hook of the cane now keeping him from extricating himself, he flails helplessly as the headless Champion approaches.

The Champion pauses his approach to collect an axe from the fallen body of a piggy beast.

Detective Loveless continues attempting to free himself in vain.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

You are an abomination! Your power
is not your own. You are nothing
more than a leach...

The Detective curses right up to the moment when the Champion swings the axe. The blade is driven into the tree nearly to the hilt only inches from the Detective's head.

When the Detective opens his eyes the Champion is gone, the clearing is empty, and the fountain has returned to its original aspect. Looking up, Detective Loveless sees that the stars and the moon have fallen out of alignment. The remnants of the battle, the carnage, is gone as well.

Still pinned to the tree by the iron cane, Detective Loveless strains to pull the axe from the wood. With a painful clumsy effort the impaled Detective begins to chop wildly at the tree holding him prisoner.

His anger grows with every swing. His strength is superhuman as is the pain he must be enduring from his impalement. Larger and larger splinters of wood begin to fly.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

(howling)

She thinks it too late? Yah, it IS too late, it's too fucking late for this whole goddamn world!

The Rat King scurries deeper into the darkness of the forest. The sound of manic chopping echoes through the night and begins to pick up its pace. The Rat King reaches a concrete storm sewer pipe just as the sound of a tree being felled can be heard in the distance.

INT. SEWER - NIGHT

Doctor Hardy sits exhausted and shaken against the darkly stained wall of the sewer only a few feet away from the body of his friend Archie. Lit only by the flashlight laying in his lap, Doctor Hardy draws a flask from his now filthy coat and takes a drink.

Doctor Hardy holds the tattered book he found on Archie with shaky hands.

DOCTOR HARDY

Oh Archie, this can't be real, it can't. Where did you get this thing from?

His words are cut short by the sounds of a mournful distant singing coming closer.

RAT KING

This is the priest all shaven and shorn. That married the man all tattered and torn. That kissed the maiden all forlorn. That milked the cow with the crumpled horn.

Doctor Hardy switches off his light. Now in total darkness he waits as the voice grows closer and closer.

RAT KING (CONT'D)

That tossed the dog that worried the cat. That killed the rat that ate the cheese. That lay in the house that Jack built.

There is a pause, the singing has stopped and been replaced by a sniffing sound that is quite close. Then a horrible wet tearing sound.

Doctor Hardy turns on his flashlight and screams at the sight of the Rat King crouched over Archie's body and chewing off strips of his face. The doctor continues to scream and swings his flashlight at the horror.

Teeth claws and blood can be seen through the beam of the flashlight as it swings wildly. Then a quick flash of light with the echoing report of his pistol. A deafening squeal erupts from the Rat King.

Doctor Hardy retreats in panic down a tunnel chased by the angry chittering squeals of the Rat King echoing behind him in the tunnels.

By the time the sounds of his pursuer has faded into the distance, Doctor Hardy is winded to the point of collapse. He drops to his knees and weeps.

DOCTOR HARDY

This can't be real, this can't be happening.

INT. POLICE INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Mr. Feign awakes to a blinding light as Detective Loveless pulls his head off a table by his hair. The steel table top is smeared with the blood from Mr. Feign's bruised and battered face. Mr. Feign groans and tries to struggle only to find his wrists and ankles shackled to metal rings bolted to the floor.

His shackles and chains are the height of modern clinical restraints. The door, furniture, lights, and one way mirror all confirm that this room is being put to its intended use.

Officer Piggy 1 and Officer Piggy 2 chortle as Detective Loveless pulls Mr. Feign painfully upwards by his hair until his restraints are the only thing keeping him seated. Mr. Feign's attempt to remain silent quickly ends as the pain makes him squeal against his will. Officer Piggy 1 and Officer Piggy 2 find this even more entertaining.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

So is any of this jogging your memory?

MR. FEIGN

I want my lawyer.

Another chortle from Officer Piggy 1 and Officer Piggy 2 as the Detective tightens his grip and lifts harder.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

Let's just say we are keeping you
off the books for now.

With his head and neck stretched upwards, the Detective pulls down Mr. Feign's blood soaked collar to reveal what at first looks like a birthmark on the back of Mr. Feign's neck. Detective Loveless touches the spot; it has depth, unmistakably a keyhole.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

But trust me, we've got a headless
hooker covered in your DNA and we
got you covered in her blood. No
lawyer in the world is going to be
able to help you.

Detective Loveless draws the antique scalpel from his jacket and holds it where Mr. Feign can see it.

MR. FEIGN

Look, I don't know what you want
from me, I'm not even sure what is
happening. I swear I'm telling you
the truth.

The Detective begins to twirl the blade back and forth across his fingers.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

Oh, I know you are being honest,
that's why I have decided to show
you the truth.

With a flick of his wrist, Detective Loveless slices the collar of Mr. Feign's blood soaked shirt. He then grips the sides and splits the shirt down the man's back.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

Because that's what she does, she
works in truths. And if reality
should disagree with her she is
happy to tear it apart until
whatever is left does.

The Detective runs his fingers into Mr. Feign's hair and makes a tight grip.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

So I've decided to start playing by her rules.

Without warning Detective loveless drives the blade into the keyhole at the back of Mr. Feign's neck. Mr. Feign screams something incomprehensibly. Detective Loveless fights to hold the struggling Mr. Feign still as he barks orders at Officer Piggy 1 and Officer Piggy 2.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

Don't just stand there, hold him down!

The three of them overpower Mr. Feign and force him face down on the table where he is a much more immobile target for Loveless' plans. The struggle continues. Mr. Feign pulls helplessly against his shackles.

Suddenly, there is an audible clicking sound as Mr. Feign goes limp. With a thud his head cleanly drops off onto the metal table and tumbles on to the floor. The Detective and the two offices work to catch their breath in the sudden silence.

A moment later the headless body strains upward with astounding force. The shackles cut deep into the flesh, the metal rings in the floor groan and begin to distort but they hold. All three of them instinctively step back from the thrashing body.

Detective Loveless retrieves the fallen head and opens the door to exit the room.

Standing just outside the door and holding Mr. Feign's disembodied head by the hair so that they may both watch the spectacle, Detective Loveless smiles broadly.

A look of realization and horror begins to dawn across Mr. Feign's face showing that he is still aware of his surroundings.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

Well, what are you waiting for?
Eat the body!

Officer Piggy 1 and Officer Piggy 2 bare their tusks and pounce on the body.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

So you are finally starting to understand now, aren't you?

Detective Loveless steps back and closes the door just in time to avoid the splatter of blood that draws a line across it and the one way mirror.

The sounds of feeding and squealing intensify.

INT. UNDERWORLD - NIGHT

Doctor Hardy, covered with filth and blood, makes his way down a rock outcropping following the beam of his flashlight. As he descends he works hard to keep a scrap of cloth pressed against a deep wound at the side of his neck, a nasty bite from the Rat King that was obviously aimed for the jugular vein.

The feeble beam of the flashlight hints at a massive cavern, the giant bases of stalagmites quickly disappear into the darkness as they rise from the floor. There are shapes and shadows shifting in the darkness cavern; humanoid forms begin to come into view.

DOCTOR HARDY

Hello, can you help me? I've been attacked.

Dead people begin to shuffle towards the light from the darkness of the surrounding cavern. Their manner is not threatening; they seem lost and confused. They are drawn by the light and the sound of his voice.

Together the dead raise a continual low wordless moan only occasionally punctuated by something that sounds like a word lost in the drone. Doctor Hardy takes a step backwards and then sits down on the floor of the cavern floor too stunned to flee.

DOCTOR HARDY (CONT'D)

My god, Archie was right, its all true.

The dead seem to have come from all directions, they surround him now, their moaning grows stronger, more desperate, but they hold what little distance there is between them and the doctor.

Doctor Hardy sits and listens. The moan seems to pick up a chorus of voices that stretches into the distant darkness.

DOCTOR HARDY (CONT'D)

Wait, please...

The doctor's voice was barely a whisper but the moans of the dead drop away almost instantly at the sound of his voice.

DOCTOR HARDY (CONT'D)

Please, take me there. Please, show me.

With difficulty Doctor Hardy rises. The dead part, making a path for him to follow.

INT. UNDERWORLD RIVERBANK - NIGHT

At the bank of the river the dead have parted to form a clearing. The Gothic silhouette of Charon's derelict barge sits one hundred yards out into the river, listing against a rocky outcropping.

The moan of the dead increases as Doctor Hardy approaches the river. He pauses at the sight. Even devoid of its pilot, the sight of the barge and the surreal underworld that surrounds is awe inspiring.

DOCTOR HARDY

The River Styx, the River of Forgetfulness. It's all true. My god, how can it be true?

Doctor Hardy pauses briefly; he knows that he must go forward.

Reverent hands brush against him as he passes through the mass of the dead, slowly moving forward towards his own dark baptism. He wades into the water.

INT. POLICE STATION ELEVATOR- DAY

In a crumpled and worn dress shirt and pants, Billy pushes a cart of mail across a bustling modern police station lobby to an elevator door. He enters the elevator cab already filled with two uniformed police officers, OFFICER PIGGY 1 and OFFICER PIGGY 2.

The officers fill the entire elevator. Their faces no longer make any pretense of humanity and their uniforms strain to contain their sweaty bulk. Even their smiles have become inhuman, showing their yellowed tusks. The officers snort and laugh over some inside joke as Billy squeezes his mail cart in and turns to press the elevator button. The elevator is too small for the officers, the cart, and Billy to share easily. Billy finds himself pressed between his cart and Officer Piggy 2.

They officers seem to find the humor in making Billy uncomfortable, their snorting continues as they share the extremely slow elevator. The officers finally exit on "B2", thankfully leaving Billy alone with his cart for the remainder of the trip to "B3".

Billy turns over a heavy head-shaped package wrapped in dirty brown paper in his hands. The only address is a barely legible scrawl of black that reads "Detective Loveless".

INT. DETECTIVE LOVELESS' OFFICE - NIGHT

Detective Loveless sits at his desk, his face looking twisted and barely human. On one corner of the Detective's desk sits the darkened lantern, on the other corner sits the head of Mr. Feign in a large flat dirty ashtray. Mr. Feign has been leaned to one side to act as a bookend for several books and binders.

Mr. Feign's animated head can be seen blinking and moving his lips in a vain attempt to speak when Billy enters.

Billy, looking disheveled and unkempt, leaves his mail cart just inside the office and approaches the desk. With great weariness he pulls the filthy paper off the inanimate head of the prostitute and places her next to the head of Mr. Feign without ceremony.

The animate head of Mr. Feign reacts with a mute look of helpless disgust to the proximity of his new severed inanimate neighbor.

Without a word, Billy turns to leave.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS
Billy, you look tired, why don't
you sit down for awhile?

There is an old wood chair across from the desk that Billy practically collapses into.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)
So how have you been feeling,
Billy? How's the job going?

BILLY
I've done everything you asked.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS
That's not what I asked Billy.

BILLY
(pauses to think)
I...I can't stop seeing things.
They're everywhere now...nothing is
right anymore.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS
That's to be expected really. It's
a sign that you are ready to move
forward now.

Detective Loveless moves around to the front of his desk carrying a flask that he has drawn from his pocket. He takes a drink before he offers it to Billy who seems unaware of its existence. Billy mechanically lifts the flask to his lips when it is offered. The birthmark on his hand is again evident.

After a moment, the flask is returned and slid back into the Detective's pocket. The Detective pulls a chair across from Billy and puts Billy's hands in his in what looks like real compassion.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)
You see, it took me all these
wasted years and wasted lives
before I finally understood why I
couldn't succeed in controlling it.

Detective Loveless reaches out and lifts the lantern off his desk with great reverence.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

And I hate to admit that she was
the one that made it clear to me.

The twisted iron face of the lamp squirms and warps under the Detective's touch.

The Detective motions to the two severed heads that decorate his desk.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

These two are worthless to me
because they mean nothing to me.

The lamp itself has begun to change and groan, its iron exterior becoming more malleable. The Detective's fingers caressing the lamp begin to sink into its new found otherworldly flesh.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

But then I found you...I never
expected that I would find a human
that actually would mean something
to me.

Detective Loveless has turned the front of the lamp to face Billy. The center oculus has begun to open. A twisted orifice dilates to reveal an endless tunnel of flesh and teeth that seems intent on inhaling all the air in the room.

The roar of the lamp grows until it is almost deafening but Loveless' voice remains clear and audible.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

(calm)

I can only ask, Billy, it is your
gift to give. I understand that
now. You are the sacrifice that I
must make.

The horrific lamp continues to grow and pulse. Detective Loveless has gotten down on his knees and is holding it out to Billy like a bouquet of flowers.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

Please, Billy.

Tears stream down Billy's face. He looks to the Detective, not to the lamp.

BILLY

(broken)

I loved you.

Billy leans forward toward Detective Loveless tenderly, perhaps to kiss, only to have the pulsing maw of the lamp lash forward and close around his head. It wrenches violently left and right before Bill's headless corpse collapse on the ground twitching in a widening pool of blood.

Detective Loveless stands holding the lamp that has begun to returned to its original lamp form.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

(whispers)

It is done.

Unexpected tears fall from the Detective's eyes. The realization that he has shed a tear drives him into a rage.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

(screaming)

What more can you ask of me?

The lamp begins to twist and heave. The smaller lenses that ring the lantern squeeze tightly shut, almost disappearing as the large central oculus begins to take shape and bulge from the power within.

When the eye opens the light erupts more fiercely than anything seen before. Waves of almost liquid energy roll outward from the lamp in every direction and the reality of the Detective's office begins to shutter. The rear wall of the office, struck with the full force of the light, suddenly waivers and rips open to reveal an endless tunnel marking the entry to another reality.

Detective Loveless raises the lantern above his head and howls in victory. He then pulls the lamp close to his lips and speaks into it.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

Can you still hear me in there,
Billy? That's right, you are in
for quite a ride. This whole world
is in for quite a ride.

Again with a howl, Detective Loveless lifts the lantern to light the portal before him.

As the Detective exits our world, a glimpse through the lantern's oculus shows the husk of Billy's face locked in a perpetual scream as his head is slowly consumed by flames from the inside out.

INT. DETECTIVE LOVELESS' OFFICE - NIGHT

The once tidy office has been thrown into chaos by the portal that has twisted the rear wall of the office into a gate to the underworld.

Billy's headless corpse suddenly kicks its legs and springs from its back onto its feet. It moves to the mail cart and withdraws a large package from the shelf and opens it. The contents include sharpened iron cane hidden beneath a pile of ragged and knotted black cloth: the Champion's uniform.

Now, unquestionably the Champion, he retrieves a separate square cardboard box from the cart and opens it.

CUT TO:

INT. MAIL CART BOX - NIGHT

The confused looking head of Mr. Feign continues to try and speak as it is blindfolded with a white silk scarf and placed in a bed of foam packing peanuts in the shipping box.

The expression of confusion on his face is lost as he is covered by a shower of the white Styrofoam and the box lid is closed shut over him.

When the box's lid is closed the address printed on the box's label can be seen as an unintelligible Gothic scrawl of letters and symbols.

INT. UNDERWORLD OVERLOOK - NIGHT

Arm outstretched holding the lamp overhead, Detective Loveless makes his way through an unreal darkness that waivers and parts begrudgingly to allow him and the lamp's passage through the supernatural shadows.

The Detective's travel becomes one of ascent as he climbs through dark shapes that begin to take the form of a rocky outcropping overlooking an endless darkness.

There is a wind evident but the sound is not one normally associated with the wind; it is the low and seamless moan of a million dead voices.

Detective Loveless thrusts the light out over the abyss before him and commands the lamp.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

Show me everything.

The lamp brightens only slightly but the distance it casts its otherworldly glow begins to expand rapidly.

Soon, from his perch, Detective Loveless is looking across a an impossibly vast cavern split by the black River Styx stretching into the distance. Massive stalagmites rise from the water and shore, fading into the darkness of the unseen cavern roof far above.

Starting a hundred feet below the stone ledge where the Detective stands and stretching in all directions and down to the near edge of the river, the dead have gathered. They have come for years to seek passage to the next world but now can only moan their lament as no passage has been granted. Their numbers could easily be measured in the hundreds of thousands.

The Detective looks down at the scene before him and is awestruck.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

No more waiting my children, your
time has come.

EXT. CAFE - NIGHT

Billy sits alone tapping his fingers intently on a pair of smallish leather bound books, one predominantly brown (Loveless' book) and the other nearly pure black (the Mistress' book). The glass of water by his hand sits untouched. When he looks up he is startled to see the Mistress sitting across from him.

For a moment she is darkness resplendent; her images struggles to confine itself to her human form. The sounds of the night call to her as if her very existence denies the mundane world the right to exist where she sits.

Billy blinks, and then she is only beautiful, dark, and alluring. Others in the cafe notice her but no more than she allows. Billy takes a deep breath, exhales, and tries to calm himself. With reverence he slides the books across the small table to her.

BILLY

I thought you said you would never come back?

MISTRESS

I came before of my own accord, but now I come because you willed it.

Billy ponders for a moment and looks to the ancient books his hand rests on.

BILLY

This one must be yours.

Billy slides the black book farther across the table. The Mistress makes no move to reach for it.

MISTRESS

I am grateful you cared for it. Some would call it blasphemy and try to burn it. Others would call it blasphemy and try to burn you.

BILLY

But if they read them... but the end is... There are only a few empty pages left in each. Has time really run out?

MISTRESS

In the beginning there were sixty six of us and sixty six stories; now there are only seven of left. The time is short even if the day is unknown.

BILLY

But I am in both stories. I don't understand how I could be in both when they are so different. Are they true? I'm not sure I can tell what is real anymore.

The Mistress removes her delicate silk glove revealing a perfectly delicate hand. She picks up her book which smolders in response to where her fingers touch the leather cover.

MISTRESS

For each of the sixty six there was a book and each of those books told a story of the world and its end. But each of those books was full of lies except one.

BILLY

Will this book be the one then?
The book that tells the final story?

MISTRESS

They all claim to be the last book.
They all claim to be the true book.

Seeing Billy's look of confusion, the Mistress tries to clarify her comment.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

Everything in *this* book has been true because I have bent this world to my will and made it so. If I succeed this will be the last book. If I succeed, this book will be the story of the world. If I fail, that story will fall to one of the others.

The Mistress takes a drink of water from Billy's glass. The glass that leaves her lips is full of a dark wine when she sets it back on the table.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

You can make either of these books true. You do not accept your destiny, you choose it.

The Mistress gently slides the wine filled glass back in front of Billy and sets the books side by side on the table between them.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

This is your choice; it always has been.

(MORE)

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

Nothing in either book written about you is true unless you choose it to be. The final pages are still unwritten but you know enough to decide.

BILLY

Yes.

The Mistress motions to the wine.

MISTRESS

"This is the cup of my Blood, the Blood of the new and everlasting covenant." May it open your eyes to eternity.

Billy picks up the glass with an unsteady hand. There is pause as the world around him seems to stop. A moment of total silence strikes as he drinks.

Eyes closed, a look of bliss crosses Billy's face.

The serenity is quickly shattered by flames that erupt from Billy's flesh and begin a horrid transformation. Flames, energy, heat, light; all begin to consume him from the inside. His eyes snap open in panic at the realization of where he is.

CUT TO:

INT. UNDERWORLD OVERLOOK - NIGHT

The wine has imparted its wisdom. The scene at the cafe was no more than a fleeting memory of Billy while imprisoned in the lamp.

The expression of fear and pain can still be read across Billy's face even through the fierce light erupting from the lantern's oculus. His severed head and soul now provide the fuel that powers the lantern, its flames forever trying to consume him.

Detective Loveless holds the lantern up above his head as the endless throngs of the dead have turned to face him. The time has come for the Detective to address his audience.

The lantern flares as the Detective's voice echoes with a unnatural power.

Its light ebbs and flows with his voice, dripping from its confines as something between light and liquid.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

(booming)

Hear me! This is not your end,
this is your beginning!

In a moment the incessant moan of the dead begins to quiet. After a few more seconds an eerie quiet has spread across the underworld.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

Listen to me. Hear me. This is your destiny for these are the end times. Fate has delivered you from being mere grist in the mill of eternity to something more.

The glow of the lantern has begun to reflect in the eyes of the dead. The reach of the crowd is suddenly evident even farther into the distance as millions of pairs of eyes reflect the power of the lantern.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

Fate has brought me to you that you may rise up, that you may take your rightful place as the heralds of Armageddon.

A dark shape, the Champion, spring from the shadows of the cavern with a superhuman leap, his iron cane posed above his head to deliver a mortal blow to his target.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

(interrupted)

...no! You shall not stand in my way!

Detective Loveless spins to intercept the attack, his hand grabbing the sharpened point of the cane and uses the Champion's own momentum to fling him and his weapon over the rocky outcropping into the crowd of dead far below the cliff's edge.

With hardly a pause, Detective Loveless flings himself over the ledge to follow the Champion into the darkness below. The flames of the lantern trace his leap with a long tail of unearthly flames.

The dead have cleared a circle around the fallen body of the Champion which has landed only a few dozen yards from the shore of the river. The cane stands upright driven into the stone only a few feet from the Champion's horrifically broken body.

Detective Loveless lands like a cat at the edge of the clearing. Peels of flame roll outward across the ground from the impact of the landing. The light from the lantern, still held above the Detective's head, never waivers.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

(enraged)

I am death ascendant. You are nothing but another's puppet. The strength you have is not even your own to command.

The Champion flinches, his broken and dislocated bones begin snapping back into place. The dead back away in fear and confusion, clearing a space for the pending battle.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

I have been chosen to deliver humanity to its final resting place. You are nothing more than a distraction to this world's destiny.

The broken and battered Champion charges, desperately shuffling toward the cane; but instead of stopping to dislodge it from the ground, he leaps and springs off the top of it like a lever, hurling himself at Detective Loveless.

Detective Loveless stands his ground and holds the lantern aloft.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

Fool!

A violent pulse of energy erupts from the lantern and spreads outward in all directions. Both the Champion and the dead surrounding the clearing are violently flung backwards.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

I don't know how you survived before, but I will leave nothing but ashes.

Detective Loveless strides across the clearing. Without pause he plucks the iron cane from the ground as he approaches the Champion's crumpled form, now half buried in the mangled bodies of the dead scattered around him.

The lantern's intensity grows, its metal shell strains under the energy contained within it. Flames pour from its surface and surround it, yet the Detective Loveless is completely unaffected by them as he brings the lantern close to the Champion.

The Detective savagely stabs the iron point of the cane through the Champion's chest just below the heart, the same location where the Champion had previously wounded him. The force of the blow drives the cane deep into the stone beneath the Champion.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

Fate has it that I should return
the favor. Now we shall end this.

The Champion's uniform has been mostly burned away. His bare bloody hands grip at the iron bar attempting to pull it out of his chest in vain.

Detective Loveless raises the lantern above his head to strike a deathblow and then pauses. A familiar moon shaped birth mark can be seen on the Champion's hand. The Detective is taken aback.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

(stunned)
Billy?

Detective Loveless drops the lantern at the feet of the fallen Champion and speaks to the nearly reunited pair as he would Billy. The lantern's light dims to a flicker once it has left the Detective's hand.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

You would ruin everything? Undo
everything you helped me prepare?
She turned you against me.

The Detective's confusion turns to rage almost instantly, his face distorting with his own unbridled fury.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

She will fail and you will regret
your betrayal for an eternity.

(MORE)

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

Your soul will wither in the light
of my victory.

Detective Loveless retrieves the lantern which immediately flares back to life with fiercer more angry light than it has shown with before.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

Betrayer! You will know only
suffering forever.

Before he can act he is interrupted by a noise that resembles the slow echo of thunder. There is a pause before the sound roughly repeats. Detective Loveless looks about in confusion, the dead that have been drawn to the spectacle have suddenly become agitated and begin to moan.

EXT. UNDERWORLD FERRY - NIGHT

Even at a distance it is obvious that the shrouded silhouette of Charon has returned to the prow of the ancient ferry. The sweep of the gnarled pole through the dark waters heralds the approach of the barge with the deep thunderous peels of sound heard through the cavern.

A dim beam of light cuts through the swirls of mist from the prow of the boat as it approaches the shore. The light cast from the prow of the ferry is quickly subsumed by the fierce globe of light cast from the lantern as the ferry approaches the river's shore.

A closer view of the deck of the ferry reveals the imagery of Charon to be an illusion. Doctor Hardy is draped with Charon's cloak but is standing on an old wood barrel to achieve Charon's inhuman stature. He struggles with the pole, straining with every pull of the ferry. Even the light on the prow is merely his flashlight lashed to the figurehead with a length of rope.

Detective Loveless immediately sees through the ruse as the ferry draws closer.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

I will not be made a fool.

The Champion is forgotten. The Detective leaps skyward, the flames from the lantern leaving a long arc through the darkness as he lands on the deck of the ancient ferry.

His impact on the deck sends a great wave of the lantern's etherial energy across the deck. It rolls over and down the sides of the boat seeming to even ignite the river below. The nearly derelict barge is reborn, the lantern has returned to its home. The ship groans as its timbers straighten and years of decay begin to recede.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS (CONT'D)

Pretender! The dead are mine to command. It is time for you to join their ranks.

Detective Loveless brandishes the lantern as he approaches Doctor Hardy threateningly, the Doctor backs away towards the prow of the boat to keep his distance with only his flashlight now held out as a club in defense.

DOCTOR HARDY

I've read your story. It doesn't have to end this way.

The Detective draws his ornate dagger and spins it across his hand showing his deadly familiarity with the weapon.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

If you have read my story then you know there is nothing you can do to stop it. The world has run its course and I am the herald of its fall.

Three shots ring out. The impacts in Detective Loveless' chest are obvious. He strains to remain standing but gravity slowly pulls him down to his knees.

DOCTOR HARDY

I've decided to put that to the test.

Two more shots echo through the cavern, the last of which blows a dark hole into Detective Loveless' forehead and sends him crashing backwards flat on his back. The lantern and dagger clatter on to the deck.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

You...you cannot kill me, I will preside over the end of the world...I am deathless.

Doctor Hardy sheds Charon's vast cloak that had allowed him to conceal his gun and then pockets the tiny pistol in his own coat.

DOCTOR HARDY

Killing you did seem a bit overly optimistic, but I've always liked to look on the bright side of things.

Wounds that should be lethal have at least managed to gravely injure the Detective. Detective Loveless struggles to sit up and attempts to brandish his dagger at the approaching Doctor with a shaking hand. The lantern has been dropped and illuminates the scene while laying on the deck a few feet away.

Without pause, the surprisingly agile Doctor knocks the blade from the Detective's hand with a well placed blow from the blunt end of his flashlight. Another swing opens a vicious crack across the Detective's skull and lays him down flat on his back again.

Now Doctor Hardy strains to pull the helpless Detective across the deck by the collar of his jacket.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

(delerious)

I'll kill you...kill you...

Between the Doctor's age and the Detective's size, the effort is laborious and slow. As he strains, his leg brushes the forgotten lantern which makes a weak sputter before going dim.

Without warning Doctor Hardy's flashlight erupts with unimaginable power. The Doctor is taken aback with the sudden energy that has changed his flashlight into a supernatural torch. The beam of light drives the Doctor backwards, making him readjust his grip and stance to resemble something more akin to a firehose in his attempt to control the device as it roars with energy.

He sweeps the beam across the cavern and is awestruck with the dark beauty of the vast underworld that he finds surrounding him.

DOCTOR HARDY

It's so beautiful.

Distracted by the new power he holds in his hand Doctor Hardy does not react as Detective Loveless retrieves his dagger and approaches from behind and dragging himself into a crouch to strike.

Shielding his eyes from the light, the Detective approaches the Doctor unseen from behind. As he raises his dagger a clean and clear mechanical CLICK is heard as the flashlight is suddenly extinguished. The underworld is cast into a sudden and complete darkness.

Detective Loveless roars in a rage as the sound of a blade slicing through the air is the only product of his failed lunge.

DETECTIVE LOVELESS

Coward. Are you afraid to face me?
Let's see how you...

The humble mechanical "click" of the flashlight hardly does justice to the following roar of light and sound that erupts from Doctor Hardy's light.

The power of the energy carries the Detective over the side of the ferry trailing in flames that have sprung from his cloths. He crashes deep into the water between the ferry and the shore.

Detective Loveless struggles to the surface only to have Charon's pole strike him solidly in the chest from above, pinning him to the bottom of the river several feet below. His hands claw at the pole that has trapped him in the depths of the river.

Doctor Hardy stands at the edge of the barge looking less human, taller, more gaunt, and considerably more super natural. The now more imposing Doctor Hardy holds the massive pole easily in one hand, pinning the struggling Detective seemingly without effort. In the other hand he confidently holds the flashlight that he uses to illuminate the scene in the river below.

DOCTOR HARDY

These water's let the dead forget
the pain of living. I hope they
can do the same for you.

Detective Loveless thrashes savagely but Doctor Hardy is able to hold him underwater with ease.

Inhuman screams of rage are muffled by the river.

The Doctor's aspect continues to shift as the Detective's struggle continues. The Doctor has become imbued with the energies of the ferryman of legend and everything about the Doctor has begun to reflect it.

The Doctor's new otherworldly voice rasps with a dark menacing timbre.

DOCTOR HARDY (CONT'D)

"Ego non baptizo te in nomine
patris, sed in nomine diaboli."

Moments pass; the struggle is finished. When the pole is lifted from the body of Detective Loveless he floats to the surface, his face unconscious and serene. With a gentle tap from Charon's pole, the Detective floats away motionless into the darkness of the river.

With that, Doctor Hardy turns towards the shore to face the dead. A now soothing glow from his light illuminates the vastness of the underworld and the seemingly endless throngs of the dead that face him.

The dead's moan begins to rise in unison.

Doctor's Hardy's own voice and more congenial aspect has returned. He addresses the dead.

DOCTOR HARDY (CONT'D)

Well, I guess it's time to get
things sorted out. Alright
everyone, let's form a single file
line on the right, please.

INT. HELL'S BOUDOIR - NIGHT

CLOSE-UP

The Mistress' finger is sunken into the wounded flesh of the Champion (Billy's animate headless corpse) as deeply and as far as it can probe.

It is bloodless as it pulls back and the wound closes seamlessly as the finger is withdrawn. The Champion stands unflinching through the procedure, wearing only the old fashion pajama bottoms that Billy had favored.

The Mistress admires her handy work.

MISTRESS

If only everything was so easily
fixed.

The Mistress turns; the dark form of her body shifts and shimmers nervously. The comment was addressed to the remains of Billy, whose head is displayed on the windowsill a few feet away. There sits the disembodied head of Billy under a glass display dome with an elaborate wood base. Detective Loveless' tattered leather tome sits only a few inches away on the window sill.

Billy's features are mostly recognizable even though his face is little more than a husk of skin wrapped over a partial skull. His one remaining eye blinks and a single tear can only hint at his terrible sadness.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

Don't cry my child. You have been
blessed with immortality. You will
live to witness an oblivion more
beautiful than anything you can
imagine.

The Mistress lifts the display holding Billy to her lips, presses a gentle kiss on the glass and then sets the globe back at the window.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

Now, let me help you pass your
eternity.

With a brush of her hand a mechanical click is heard. Billy's head begins to rotate inside the dome as the metal plucking of a music box begins. The tune of "Hush, Little Baby" is unmistakable.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

So much more than a murderer could
ever have deserved.

The simple tune begins to mix with the growing call of birds and cicada in the distance.

The Mistress then collects the battered tome from the windowsill and turns to inspect the room's collection of macabre curios and trophies.

Nearby a section of shelf contains scores of ancient and odd books and scrolls. No two seem alike but all appear ancient, heavily worn, or badly damaged.

The Mistress places the Detective's book with the rest of the collection. There is room for several more items on the shelf, the collection is not complete.

She pauses, and removes a heavy manuscript bound between plates of silver embossed with an ivory inlay of an elephant skull with a single tusk. The cover is worn but undamaged except for a single diamond shaped gouge penetrating its cover plate. The Mistress pauses in recollection, hugs the tome to her chest and breathes in its scent.

EXT. APOCALYPTIC VALLEY - SUNSET

The flight of an unseen bird tours the valley with supernatural speed. Its eyes able to find focus on the most minute details as it soars above. Its own shadow can occasionally be spotted on the trees below.

Nestled in the broad flatland between two high mountain ranges, the valley the bird traverses is an Eden, lush jungle interspersed with orchards and gardens. The signs of human settlement are serene and utopian.

From a distance, what appears to be a massive wall bisects the width of the valley. As details of structure becomes more clear, the wall seems more porous. An endless repetition of tall arches indicate the wall is actually something akin to a Roman aqueduct.

The opposite side of the valley is a stark contrast. Two armies wage a brutal medieval war. Smoke and flames rage from engines of war and siege towers as one army attempts to advance on the aqueduct and the other is arrayed along its length to defend it. Swarms of arrows rise and fall appearing as flocks of birds from a distance. The lands on this side of the wall are blighted, vegetation is twisted and gnarled, human settlements seem nonexistent.

The army defending the aqueduct is well equipped and well organized. Their shining blades and strangely hooked spears glint with the pride of craftsmanship. Their armor and banners blaze with color. They fight behind great wheeled ramparts that have been rolled into place to provide them cover while their archers and war machines fill the sky with death. A COMMANDER barks orders to his troops.

COMMANDER

Bring the left flank forward, we
will drive them back to the cesspit
they were spawned from.

The attacking army's weapons seem more primeval, more vicious by design. Jagged weapons built and decorated with skulls and bones look more effective at striking terror into the hearts of their enemy than piercing their shields. War drums beat relentlessly as ramshackle wooden hut-like structures are carried towards the battle to defend from arrows. Great smouldering pots are tipped into catapults where the contents are lit and launched skyward toward the enemy. A WARRIOR CHIEF drives his tribe forward.

WARRIOR CHIEF

Pull the flesh from their bones,
leave nothing for the crows!

The force behind unseen bird is not alone in its role as observer; two other supernatural entities are also observing the battle.

Floating cross-legged on the surface of the rushing water at the top of the aqueduct sits BHAIRAVA, a serene many-armed giant man with skin of alabaster. His arms are too numerous to count, many hold gilded weapons, strange tools, and symbolic totems while others remain empty and folded in a meditative state. His headdress accentuates a third eye in his forehead that is closed.

Far below in the distance is his counterpart GANESH is seated on a massive lotus flower floating only a dozen feet above the heads of soldiers that are unaware of their proximity to the deity.

The size of the deity Ganesh is staggering, his grey head is that of three full sized elephant heads merged into a trio of five tusks (one tusk cracked and missing) and three trunks. Four massive arms sprout from the muscled humanoid body. The items he holds are more obvious, an axe, a torch, a barrel, and a mace. The armor that adorns him consists of ornate silver plates knitted together with silver chains.

Like Bhairava, Ganesh also sits cross legged and serene while observing the scenes of carnage that unfold before him. In particular, his focus is drawn to a clearing before him where two exceptional warriors do battle.

EXT. APOCALYPTIC VALLEY CLEARING - SUNSET

At the center point between the two deities sits a clearing paved with the dead where two heroes duel. As the battle rages around them, YOUNG HERO and OLD HERO stand as the embodiments of their warring factions.

The Young Hero's weapon (a long bladed pole) and armor sparkle with craftsmanship and style. The youth's speed and agility are superhuman; arrows or opponent soldiers that stray into clearing are struck down with little effort or pity.

YOUNG HERO

Surrender, your people's lives need not be wasted.

OLD HERO

I would not surrender a pig to you as it would give you something to molest besides your mothers.

Old Hero's grizzled half naked body dances across the battlefield as if it might collapse at any moment. He is bald and wizened. He swings two curved blades that drench him in blood every time he is forced to slay a lesser warrior that has stumbled too close to the fray between the heroes.

YOUNG HERO

Your cause is lost, end this now and your people will be shown mercy.

OLD HERO

Your people have never shown us mercy before, would we become more deserving of it in defeat?

The hero's skills are well matched but youth seems relentless and untiring while the wisdom of age begins to falter against the relentless onslaught. The Young Hero's blade draws ever closer and closer, sweeps around the Old Hero. There is recognition in the Old Hero's eyes of the inevitable. A decision is made.

YOUNG HERO

Your age has made you blind old man. This is not a fight you were fated to win.

OLD HERO

Go back to your momma's tit boy.

The Old Hero feigns an attack and impales himself on the Young Hero's spear bringing him close enough to cross his own blades and decapitate his opponent. There is a look of satisfaction on the Old Hero's face as he begins to die.

OLD HERO (CONT'D)

Fuck fate.

The severed head tumbles high into the sky but the headless body of Young Hero does not fall.

Instead, he withdraws his spear from the Old Hero's chest with a flourish and turns to face Ganesh. The now headless Young Hero beats his chest with his weapon, syllabically stomps his feat and raises his own head in his hand which makes a challenge to the deity.

YOUNG HERO

The rule of tooth and fang has come
to an end. Today the barbarians
and their false god will fall.

Ganesh stands enraged by the challenge, trumpeting the sound of thunder in response. He pushes his three trunks into the top of the barrel at his side, pulls them out, and then sprays the contents of the barrel skyward as his torch ignites the fluid. Three massive plumes of flame light the sky.

GANESH

None.

The challenge has been accepted.

GANESH (CONT'D)

Stand.

The grace of Ganesh's leap from the platform of the lotus flower belies the massive impact evident when he strikes the ground. Soldiers are thrown into the air by the unseen force.

GANESH (CONT'D)

Against.

The earth shakes, cracks race across the ground and up the supports of the aqueduct.

GANESH (CONT'D)

I.

Bhairava stares at the sight of Ganesh's display. He stands, his feet skimming the surface of the water that rushes beneath his feet, his skin has darkened to a deep blue.

BHAIRAVA

(lips unmoving)

This was not my doing and it shall be stopped.

Three arms draw and hold the mighty bow as two more notch and draw the spear length arrow, its point easily the size of a dagger. Far below, the headless body of the Young Hero dances across bodies as it nimbly avoids the axe and mace swung by the towering Ganesh.

YOUNG HERO

Ponderous brute, your champion is lost to this world and you will follow him.

Bhairava takes careful aim on the back of the headless Young Hero, he aims for the heart. Bhairava pauses, the third eye opens, the arrow is loosed.

Far below Ganesh brushes away the thrust of headless Young Hero with ease. Without pause the Hero leaps to continue the attack, only to have the arrow strike him in the back, passing cleanly through his heart. The body of the Hero goes slack and drops instantly.

Ganesh stands motionless. Half of the massive arrow can be seen protruding from his armor's metal breastplate meant to protect him.

The dark bird takes flight as Ganesh staggers forward, collapsing into the earth that buckles as it receives him. A chasm grows quickly and begins to consume both armies. The aqueduct begins to heave as the earth that supports it falls away.

High above, Bhairava stands motionless as he views the carnage below.

BHAIRAVA

She has played us all for fools.

As the aqueduct begins to collapse he makes no move to change his fate and silently disappears into the oblivion of the seemingly bottomless chasm that yawns wide before him.

BHAIRAVA (CONT'D)

And all the world will suffer for
it.

The view from the bird spirals outward as the catastrophe spreads. The sun has all but set, even the fires of war begin to disappear down the ever growing chasm.

INT. HELL'S BOUDOIR - NIGHT

The Mistress runs her finger across the diamond shaped puncture in the silver embossed cover. The dark residue of blood from a forgotten time can still be seen as evidence of the armor's failure.

MISTRESS

The most lovely of memories are
those that were never meant to be.

With great reverence she kisses the face of the book and replaces the tome on the shelf.

From there, the Mistress is quickly drawn to another glass display globe, this more simple container houses the blindfolded head of Mr. Feign. He is quiet, nearly motionless but obviously not dead.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

"Is there anything better than to
be longing for something, when you
know it is within reach?"

The surrounding room has begun to shutter and devolve as intersecting realities begin to fight for supremacy. The curtains of the great four post bed resemble massive hooded figures that carry the burden of the bed between them.

The foot of the bed, higher than before, consists of steps down to the floor. The bed now resembles something akin to a sacrificial altar. The headless Champion stands immobile at the base of the stair.

A cacophony of birds, beasts, and winds continues to grow but the ring of the music box can be heard over it all as a counterpoint to the madness of the growing rush of sound.

Mr. Feign, still blindfolded, is lifted lovingly from his display and presented to the Champion by the Mistress. Without fanfare, the Champion lifts the head of Mr. Feign and places it upon the stump of his own neck.

The dissonance of sound rises as the flesh of one joins with the flesh of another.

The seam of the connection disappears almost instantly. The room falls silent. The only incongruity is a change of skin tone at the neck.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)

How does it feel, my darling?

The still blindfolded Mr. Feign runs his hands tentatively across his body and up to his neck where he gingerly touches the nearly invisible seam. He inhales deeply, savoring the normal functions that are taken for granted.

MR. FEIGN

(his voice horse)

I...I can feel again, I'm alive?
Is, is this real? Can I see?

Standing at the foot of the great bed, the rest of the world has dropped away into darkness. The Mistress approaches Mr. Feign; their faces are drawn together intimately close. Her hands brush across his face as she reaches to remove the blindfold.

MR. FEIGN (CONT'D)

I...

MISTRESS

(interrupting)

Our wait is over, now see me
through your eyes.

The white silk scarf drops away from Mr. Feign's eyes and after a pause, he opens them.

His reality trembles at the sight, a mixture of pain and ecstasy cross his face.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MISTRESS' ASPECT - NIGHT

A piercing screech punctures the silence.

Mr. Feign's view of the Mistress shutters and unfolds outward from her center before peeling back into herself at the edges.

Darkness erupts outward and it is pulled back to make way for crows and carrion that make way for flesh and sinew that make way for insects and rot that make way for eyes and claws that make way for the leather and thorns that make way for smoke and teeth that make way for the Mistress and Mr. Feign wrapped together in a lover's embrace.

The flash of imagery is painfully fast and strains the eye to keep up with the speed of the visual assault. There is a pause and the imagery reverses at an even faster pace, the images now swallowing themselves at an even more fevered pace.

The final images fold inward until nothing remains but an endless emptiness. The rush of sound is abruptly cut to total silence.

FADE TO:

INT. MR. FEIGN'S APARTMENT BEDROOM- DAY

The apartment window is open to the early morning light, the curtain quietly sway with a light breeze. An antique wire birdcage sits open on the windowsill where an elaborate nest fills the bottom of the cage.

The sounds of the city are conspicuously missing, utter silence pervades the room.

MR. FEIGN (O.S.)

(memory)

This is just so perfect, I wish it would never change.

After a moment a magpie flutters into the cage's open door, makes itself at home, and begins to peck at seeds that have been left in the feeder.

The bird goes about its business and begins to sing sweetly against the backdrop of the silent city.

FADE OUT.