

PUTREFACTION: A MENTAL RELAXATION

Written by

Bernard Mersier

TITLE CARD: NEW AMENDMENT

FADE IN:

INT. THE STUDY - NIGHT

A man is sitting at an ancient desk with a hood over his head, hiding his face in the darkness of the fabric, while he uses his quill pen to write on the parchment in front of him. The sound of the pen is identical with a whisper in the wind.

Dust motes are swirling around the amber of the solitary candle resting on the desk, traveling through the musk of forgotten wisdom. The study is a suffocating tomb filled with centuries of knowledge. The books are cascading from the shelves, precariously, with their spines catching slim threads of light from the candle.

MAN (V.O.)

With the right title and the right voice... People will swallow anything you feed them.

He pauses, letting the tip of the pen hover above the paper.

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

These masses will cling to crowds like drowning victims, fighting to catch a breath, desperately needing something to believe in. Right and wrong have become their costumes, discarding one of them when convenience demands it.

(Low chuckle)

Laws. Religion. The grand illusions of order. Yet chaos dances in the open, performed by those who believe they're above the very rules they proclaim are sacred. Who decided these laws were correct in the first place?

The question lingers in the air, while he stares at the parchment, seeing each letter as a small rebellion against certainty.

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

The laws change like seasons, twisted with self desires from one person who believes their opinion is right.

(MORE)

MAN (CONT'D)

Crimes are causes, and punishment is persecution, all depending on which wind is blowing through the corridors of power. The irony is exquisite.

When he begins writing again, his pen is moving with a renewed purpose, crafting something that will either damn or deliver—and he could care less either way. When he's finished, in his mind, the parchment has been blessed with the truth.

INSERT PARCHMENT

People will no longer be charged with hate crimes because it's a human emotion that needs to be expressed.

The words are innocent as a prayer, and dangerous as a loaded weapon, gleaming with their own objective that's darker than his.

He picks up a small American flag pendant that's resting to the side, and lets it dangle above his work.

When the flame catches the metal, it fractures into a thousand tiny stars before he releases it. The impact is barely a whisper—a small sound with grand intentions.

His gaze drifts across the room to a severed head, which was once his most faithful advisor. The glassy eyes that once held authority are reflecting the final moments of terror before their life was ended.

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

You're either a follower, a leader, or you stand alone behind what you believe in. You have a brain for a reason.

Rising from his desk with the pen, he approaches the head with measured steps. The pen feels warm with a conquering purpose as he raises it, and then drives it deep into one of the staring eyes. The sound it makes—wet, final, profound—seemingly approving his work.

Moving back to the desk, extinguishing the flame with his fingers, in the sudden darkness, his words float in the void...

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

A selfish mind is dangerous when it speaks to a fragile mind.

BLACK SCREEN:

TITLE CARD: SNEAKY LINKZ

"When a person discovers they've been cheated on, the pain has nothing to do with love. They're disgusted because their mate performed the same sexual acts with someone else, and now they realize they were told lies about their performance in bed. They realize materialistic things and money meant nothing. But above all... For some reason, a person can know their mate will never love them as much as they love them, but because of their mindset, they believe they can change it."

~Bernard Mersier~

DISTORTED VOICE (V.O.)

You had to know this was gonna happen. You probably didn't think it would go this far, but you had to know it would.

The sound of spit hitting the floor follows.

DISTORTED VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

People show their true colors when you least expect it. But that's not the problem. The problem is I heard it from your mouth, and saw it in your eyes. So right now, I need you to impress me, and show me you can't die.

Three gunshots crack the silence, echoing into the void.

EIGHT HOURS EARLIER

INT. MODEST APARTMENT - DUSK

Eight hours earlier in a modest apartment located by the Detroit skyline, a marvelous shade of dark blue can be seen through the windows, with a soft stream of orange.

A woman's hand—light-skinned with French tips—moves across a smartphone screen.

INSERT SCREEN

Baby, what are you doing?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. TYRELL'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

A recording studio that looks like it's seen better days can be seen in the background through the tinted windows.

TYRELL (22, dreadlocks, tattoos, plain T-shirt, torn black skinny jeans) is slouched in the driver's seat of his truck. Bass from a rap track rattles the windows. His phone buzzes on his lap. He picks it up with a smirk, reading the message, and texting back.

INSERT SCREEN

Smoking on one with this cup of yak, waiting to go in the booth and drop this fire.

HER REPLY

You need to be here between these thighs, sipping on this water.

Tyrell chuckles, with his dreadlocks swaying, leaning back. His phone rings-**DEBT** on the screen. He turns the music down, and answers, placing it on speaker.

TYRELL
Yo, what's good?

KEYSHA (V.O.)
Whatchu doing?

TYRELL
Sitting in the car, vibing to my
music. What's on the floor?

INSERT SCREEN

As long as your throat is ready to carry, I'm with it.

KEYSHA (V.O.)
Nothing right now. Just seeing
what's up with you before I make
plans.

INSERT SCREEN - HER REPLY

This is a 24-hour abortion clinic, baby. You know what it is.

TYRELL
Fam just texted me, asking if I'm
coming to the studio.

INSERT SCREEN

That's why you're my bad bitch.

KEYSHA (V.O.)
Okay, go handle your business. When
you're done, we can figure
something out.

TYRELL
Bet.

INSERT SCREEN

Give me about an hour, and I'll be there.

KEYSHA (V.O.)
Take your time. I'm off and ready
to kick back.

INSERT SCREEN - HER REPLY

Okay, Daddy. It'll be smooth and wet, just how you like it.

TYRELL
That's what's up. I'm about to try
and get this shit done now, so I
can hurry up and get to you.

INSERT SCREEN

That's what's up.

KEYSHA (V.O.)
Okay.

INSERT SCREEN - HER REPLY

N.I.M.tonight. I'm trying to see something.

He releases a sigh of frustration, but when he looks at the
message, he releases a humorous laugh, replying.

INSERT SCREEN

LMMFAO!!!

CUT TO:

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - LATER

Tyrell's all-black Escalade rumbles through the suburban
neighborhood as a rap beat bangs from inside. The truck
comes to a stop in front of a ranch style house.

Turning the truck off, Tyrell steps out, carrying the swagger of someone who has outran death too many times as his sneakers crunch the gravel, and he lights a blunt. His phone buzzes, and he pulls it out seeing a text.

INSERT SCREEN

Come get this pussy, Daddy.

A cocky grin spreads as he exhales smoke, striding toward the house, walking inside.

E/I. INSIDE THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Inside, candlelights bathe the living room, along with a trail of rose petals leading to the hallway, giving it a romantic theme. Tyrell's eyes land on a glass of cognac on the coffee table, which he walks over to and picks up, swirling the liquid before taking a sip.

He slightly smiles, and then follows the trail to the bedroom door, where a note is pinned.

INSERT NOTE

You're the only one for me.

His smile deepens as anticipation coils in his veins. Reaching for the doorknob, slowly opening the door and walking in, a sledgehammer of pain explodes at the back of his skull, when a bat connects, dissolving his world.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - LATER

Tyrell awakes in a nightmare—a decrepit motel room reeking of feces and death. His head is throbbing with blood crusting his bruised face, standing on a stack of crates atop of a chair, as a noose bites into his neck, with his arms bound and hooked to the wall.

Inches from his face, there's a ceiling fan spinning lazily, glinting with razor edges.

At first, fear is clawing at his chest, but it quickly ignites into rage.

TYRELL
(Angry tone)
What the fuck is this?

MIKE (O.S.)
How the fuck should I know?

Tyrell looks around and spots Mike, mid-thirties, handsome but haggard, lying shirtless, tied to a soiled mattress, with his body straining against the ropes.

There's also two women wearing black sweaters, sitting chained to chairs with black bags over their heads as muffled panic screams come from one of them.

TYRELL

Somebody needs to start explaining this shit. Why do they have bags over their heads?

Mike continues struggling against his restraints.

MIKE

If I knew, I'd tell you.

TYRELL

They can fuckin' talk. I know y'all hear me. Say something.

The women don't respond.

Tyrell's anger surges.

TYRELL (CONT'D)

Great. I'm in a room that smells like fresh shit with a dude tied to a bed and two motherfuckers with bags on their heads.

MIKE

(Calm tone)

Calm down.

TYRELL

Calm down?

Tyrell snaps as the noose tightens, and the crates shake as he shifts.

TYRELL (CONT'D)

I'm inches from death, and you're telling me to calm down?

MIKE

Bitching won't help.

TYRELL

(Bitter laugh)

Maybe you're calm 'cause you're into this freaky shit, but this ain't me.

MIKE

No, I'm not. But your bitching
isn't helping the situation.

TYRELL

What do you suggest we do? Wait
until I cut my throat, or listen to
you trying to make this situation
seem normal? I'm all ears, fam.

MIKE

There's no need to be a dick.
What's your name?

TYRELL

My name? At a time like this, you
wanna know my name?

MIKE

It might help us figure out why
we're here.

TYRELL

...You know what? I'll entertain
this. My name is—

The door creaks open, and a tall person enters, cloaked in
baggy black clothes, leather gloves and a red-and-black
skull mask.

An eerie silence follows as the person closes the door, and
then walks to one of the women, placing a hand on her
shoulder.

Tyrell's defiance wavers, but he pushes through.

TYRELL (CONT'D)

I knew it. Some freaky-ass bondage
shit, tryna make a snuff film.
Look, this ain't got shit to do
with me. Come cut me down, and I'll
let y'all have at it.

The person stays silent, pointing to a camera positioned on
the ceiling, off in the right corner.

A woman's voice crackles through a speaker, cold as ice.

RACHEL (O.S.)

There's only one somewhat innocent
person here tonight. But just know,
all of you will die tonight.

(MORE)

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Now, to make it fair, the one person who knows everything could've prevented this, but they never spoke the truth.

Tyrell's ego begins to diminish, with his eyes locked on the person. Mike's mind is racing, searching for connections, while the chained women remain silent.

TYRELL

What kinda lame shit is this? Get me the fuck down, and stop bullshitting.

The person walks over to Tyrell and strikes him in the gut. Pain erupts as he lurches forward, nicking his forehead on the spinning blades.

Blood trickles down his face as he groans, struggling to stand back up straight.

MIKE

(Dry tone)

We see your approach didn't work.

TYRELL

Fuck you.

(Wheezes)

I don't see you trying to do shit.

MIKE

I'm trying to figure out what we have in common, and possibly get us out of this.

The person turns to Mike, nodding slowly, before moving to one of the women.

TYRELL

We don't have shit in common. I don't know what this is about, but if you're gonna kill us, just do it.

The person snatches off the bag, revealing Dawn, late-thirties. Her light brown skin is slick with sweat as tears stream down the duct tape on her mouth, while her eyes dart around the room, filled with terror.

Mike and Tyrell's eyes widen as the person leaves the room.

MIKE
(Worried tone)
Baby.

TYRELL
Baby? Hold up. You mean to tell me
that's your woman?

MIKE
Yeah, that's my woman. What about
it?

TYRELL
(Mocking laugh)
You're trying to be tough. I get
it. We need something to lighten
the mood.

MIKE
It's not an act. What's funny about
the woman I've been with for three
years being held hostage here with
us?

TYRELL
Three years? Three-this shit is
crazy. Do you think she's faithful?

MIKE
Say what the fuck you gotta say.

TYRELL
Look, I'm not the type to beef over
pussy. Especially if you don't know
better. Shit, even if you do know
better, my beef is with her, not
you.

MIKE
What?!

TYRELL
We've been fuckin' for years.
Granted, I didn't know about you
because that's not my business. But
I've been rearranging her guts,
bro.

MIKE
(Laughs)
You've been fucking my woman.
That's funny.

TYRELL
What's funny about it?

MIKE
Look at you and look at me.

Tyrell looks at him confused.

MIKE (CONT'D)
That wasn't a good point. But, I'm a successful businessman who can buy her whatever she wants. Take her wherever she wants to go. And I don't need to brag about my performance in bed.

TYRELL
(Sharp laugh)
Bro. Do you think all of that shit you just said stops bitches from fuckin' other niggas? Are you that dumb?

MIKE
I know you're talking out the side of your ass right now.

TYRELL
Okay, let's say that. Can you explain how I know who she is?

MIKE
She probably took one of your CDs off the street. You look like one of those mumble mouths, 'I'm a rapper' type of nigga.

TYRELL
(Laughs)
Listen to this nigga jokes. Don't try to downplay what I do because you just found out your bitch is eating my dick. See, I can call her a bitch because that shit turns her on. That's a fun fact.

MIKE
If I wasn't tied down to this bed, you wouldn't be talking shit.

TYRELL
Bro, I told you I'm not about to beef with you over some pussy.
(MORE)

TYRELL (CONT'D)

Even if we were free to throw the fair one, I'd feel bad for beating your ass over some pussy we're sharing. That pussy must be 'Godlike' to you.

MIKE

You'll never know.

Slowly shaking his head, Tyrell releases a soft laugh.

TYRELL

This guy refuses to believe me. Bro, if we didn't get caught up in this weird shit, we'd be fuckin' tonight.

MIKE

I get it. You wish you could sleep with my woman. I understand. But that shit ain't in your future, junior.

TYRELL

Junior? Man... I wish the bitch mouth wasn't taped up so you could ask her.

MIKE

You're gonna stop calling my woman a bitch, I know that.

TYRELL

Or what? What the fuck are you gonna do?

MIKE

I don't have time for you.

(To Dawn)

Dawn. Dawn, baby, what is he talking about?

Dawn closes her eyes, letting the tears of shame spill, etching her face as her muffled sobs break through the tape.

By looking at her, he knows what Tyrell said is true, but he doesn't want to believe it.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Seriously? Are you serious right now?

As the tears continue flowing, she mumbles words of what would appear to be sorrow.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Just shut the fuck up. How could
you do this to me?

TYRELL
I tried to tell you, stupid ass
nigga.

Mike turns to look at Tyrell with fury in his eyes.

MIKE
You shut the fuck up! Mind your
goddamn business while I'm speaking
with my woman.

TYRELL
Our woman.

MIKE
You heard what the fuck I said.
(To Dawn)
Back to you, bitch. I do every
goddamn thing for you, and you're
out here fuckin' a nobody? If we
were free and you could talk, I'd
knock the bullshit down your throat
you would try to tell me. I can't
believe—

The masked person reenters, carrying a closed paint bucket, walking over to Mike, stepping onto the mattress, hooking the bucket to a pulley above Mike's head.

Mike tries to grab their ankle, and the person stomps him hard in the chest, forcing a gasp.

TYRELL
(Chuckles)
You didn't have to do him like
that, bro. He's just mad after what
he heard.

The person ignores him, while removing the lid on the bucket before coming down from the bed.

TYRELL (CONT'D)
We know what we have in common. I'm
fuckin the woman he's in love with,
and she's still fuckin him, making
him think she's faithful. There,
you can let us go.

The person walks over to Dawn and pauses, placing a hand on her shoulder, causing her to cringe.

TYRELL (CONT'D)
Yeah, that bitch. We're sharing her.

MIKE
Sadly, I agree.

The person pulls out a stainless steel butterfly knife and opens it.

Dawn's eyes widen, feeling the cold steel pressing against her throat.

The person holds the knife in place on her throat while staring at Tyrell.

TYRELL
What? That's what we have in common.

MIKE
You can kill the nasty bitch as long as it gets me outta here.

The person slowly shakes their head disagreeing, while pointing to the other woman.

TYRELL
I'm sure whoever that is has nothing to do with me. If that's a bitch she's fucking, then that's on them. You can let me go.

The person lowers the blade and then walks over to the other woman.

Tyrell is still talking trash, while Mike breathes heavily, shaking his head disgusted about the news he just found out.

Dawn continues crying with her head lowered in shame, unable to look at Mike.

The person reaches the other woman and pauses, placing a hand on the bag.

Tyrell stops talking trash, and focuses on who the person could be under the bag.

The person removes the bag and reveals Keysha. She's a beautiful brown skinned woman in her mid twenties with duct tape on her mouth, and her eyes wide open with confusion.

Tyrell instantly gets upset.

TYRELL (CONT'D)
Motherfucker, you let her go!

Dawn gets an attitude, staring at Tyrell ready to kill him.

Mike looks over at Keysha with a straight face.

TYRELL (CONT'D)
Baby.

Tyrell says with a sense of worry in his tone.

Keysha is staring at Tyrell with the same expression.

The person moves back over to Dawn, and places the knife on her throat. Slowly gliding the knife up to her chin, the person places the tip of the blade under the duct tape, and with a smooth, swift motion, cuts the duct tape and then snatches it off.

Dawn releases a moan of pain, followed by swishing her mouth around. Once she's settled, she focuses back on Tyrell.

DAWN
You lame-ass nigga. You were
talking all that shit about me, and
you have a whole woman!

TYRELL
Fuck you right now. I need to know
what's wrong with my baby.

MIKE
Amazing. As soon as she can talk,
she starts talking shit to you but
says fuck me, and I'm her man.

DAWN
Oh, get the fuck over it. Put your
big boy boxers on and suck it up. I
needed more than what you were
giving me.

MIKE
I shouldn't have given you that
much, you dirty bitch.

TYRELL
Fuck what both of y'all are talking
about. I need whoever that is to
tell me what's wrong with my baby.

Keysha remains with the same blank stare, while the three begin arguing over each other. The person puts the knife away, and then walks back to the center of the room.

The three continue arguing for a few seconds before focusing on the person.

RACHEL (O.S.)

Now everybody sees everybody and knows what you have in common. The only thing left to do is kill all of you.

The person leaves the room.

While the three look at each other, trying to figure out what will happen next, Keysha remains with the same expression, looking at Tyrell.

TYRELL

My baby is the innocent one in this situation, so I need to convince whoever that is to let her go.

DAWN

(Scoffs)

What makes her so innocent?

TYRELL

Because all she does is go to work, come home, cook and wait for me.

MIKE

(Snickers)

And eat dick.

Tyrell's head snaps toward him.

TYRELL

What?

Mike turns his head to look at him.

MIKE

Don't tell me you took offense?

TYRELL

I wanna know what the fuck you said.

MIKE

I said... And... Eat... Dick. That's what you said my woman does with you, right?

DAWN

Hold on. You just said whoever the fuck that person is can kill me, but you were fucking another woman?

Mike's eyes are cold when they land on her.

MIKE

Cut the dramatics. I already knew about your pathetic sneaky link over there. I just didn't wanna believe you'd sleep with someone like that.

TYRELL

If you were laying the pipe down right, she wouldn't have crept off on your moist ass.

MIKE

(Scoffs)

She was a whore from the hood. I'm sure you met her at the same spot I did. Anyway, once I confirmed you two were sleeping together, I found out you had a girlfriend, so I looked at it as a fair trade.

DAWN

(Attitude tone)

A whore from the hood?

MIKE

Exactly. Any woman who lets you fuck on the first date after two drinks, your appearance and your car, yes, she's a fuckin' whore.

DAWN

But you stayed with this whore for three years and was ready to propose. So what does that make you?

MIKE

At first, I was pussy-whipped, I can't even lie. But the more I found out about you, I started falling in love. A dumbass mistake on my part.

DAWN

It wasn't a mistake. You knew you found—

TYRELL

Scratch all that. You're telling me you already knew about me and her? So that little show you put up was a front?

MIKE

That's right.

TYRELL

And since you knew about us, you decided to fuck my woman?

MIKE

What did you tell me? 'I'm not about to beef over some pussy'.

TYRELL

That's not a piece of pussy! That's the woman I love!

MIKE

I just said the same thing about Dawn, so now you see how I feel.

Keysha remains with the same expression as Dawn's eyes begin watering a little after hearing Mike say he loves her.

Tyrell spits to the side.

TYRELL

No, we don't feel the same. The way I feel—

RACHEL (O.S.)

What made you decide to sleep with Mike?

KEYSHA (O.S.)

Even though I saw the videos of Tyrell with another woman, he lied to me every night with a straight face, claiming I was the only one for him.

RACHEL (O.S.)

But you knew he was lying?

KEYSHA (O.S.)

...I knew. I just... I just thought I could change him. He made me feel like I was the only thing that mattered, and I thought I made him feel the same.

RACHEL (O.S.)
Girl, you know the only thing dogs
change is the owner if they get to
roam free.

KEYSHA (O.S.)
(Sighs, sniffles)
I know.

RACHEL (O.S.)
That's the reason why you're part
of what's going to happen. I wish
it didn't have to be this way
because you're truly the innocent
one, but... You allowed yourself to
get involved in some bullshit.

KEYSHA (O.S.)
Wait. I'll leave him alone. I'll
move on. Please, don't do this.

RACHEL (O.S.)
It has to be done.

KEYSHA (O.S.)
Please, no!

As Keysha's screams echo over the speaker, Tyrell blends his
with hers.

He closes his eyes, and begins sobbing as tears roll down
his cheeks.

RACHEL (O.S.)
That was recorded earlier. And in
case you were wondering why she
hasn't responded, it's because her
eardrums are busted. The duct tape
is just decoration because her
tongue has been removed as well.
The icing on the cake... Gluing her
eyelids open so she wouldn't miss a
thing.

Tyrell is filled with anger, slanting his eyes, gritting his
teeth

TYRELL
Who the fuck are you?!

The door opens, and the person enters carrying a clear
bottle of tequila, closing the door.

Placing the bottle on the table, the person moves to the center of the room and pulls the cord on the ceiling fan until it reaches max speed.

Tyrell's tears continue to fall, but anger is evident on his face as he stares at the person. The person steps up in front of Tyrell and pauses.

Tyrell coughs up a loogie and spits it on the person's mask.

TYRELL (CONT'D)
Fuck you, coward. You could at least show me your fuckin' face.

The person pats him on the side and then walks behind him. Knowing he's about to die, Tyrell looks at Keysha with deep sorrow in his eyes.

TYRELL (CONT'D)
I know I wasn't shit, and I'm sorry. But believe me now when I tell you—

He doesn't get to finish his sentence because the person pushes the chair forward, and the blades begin cutting through his throat.

Dawn and Mike shriek in fear, watching the blood spray around the room. The person moves back to the table, grabs the bottle of tequila, and then walks over to Keysha.

RACHEL (O.S.)
I'm sure Mike won't mind, but certain things can't be allowed.

The person caresses the side of her face before opening the bottle.

MIKE
(Scared tone)
What are you talking about?

RACHEL (O.S.)
'N.I.M.' That's what I'm talking about.

MIKE
'N.I.M.'? I don't know what that means.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Neither did I. I had to ask around to find out what it meant, and when I did...

(MORE)

RACHEL (CONT'D)
(Low whistle)
It blew my mind.

MIKE
What does it mean?!

RACHEL (O.S.)
That baby you wanted with your girl
for three years... Well, she wanted
it with Tyrell. 'N.I.M.' means 'Nut
in me'. But what makes it bad is
that she was gonna let you believe
it was yours."

Dawn lowers her head.

Mike's heart drops as he looks over at Dawn with glossy
eyes.

MIKE
You were gonna do me like that? How
fucking heartless are you? What did
I do to you?

RACHEL (O.S.)
Ah, don't worry about it, man.
Keysha was willing to have the baby
for you. But like I said, certain
things just can't be allowed.

MIKE
(Begging frantic)
No, no, no! What are you about to
do?!

The person cuts the duct tape from Keysha's mouth and
snatches it off. She opens her mouth trying to scream,
revealing the piece of tongue left.

The character grabs her by the jaw, and holds her mouth
open.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Please, please don't hurt my baby!
Kill me! Anything, just don't kill
my baby!

RACHEL (O.S.)
What was that you said, Mike? 'Two
drinks will have a bitch ready to
fuck'. Well, let's see what a fifth
does.

Mike screams as the person begins pouring the liquid down her throat. As the liquid continues to flow, smoke starts rising from her insides burning away because of the acid.

Releasing her jaw, the person steps back and watches as the blood and her insides spill out before she slumps.

Mike yells of sorrow are lingering in the room, while Dawn appears as if she's ready to vomit from the horror, doing her best to hold it back.

The person moves over to Mike and stares at him.

RACHEL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Don't be sad, Mike. I told you
everybody was gonna die tonight, so
why are you crying?

MIKE
(Sobbing)
You didn't have to kill the baby,
you bitch. You didn't have to kill
the baby.

RACHEL (O.S.)
You're sad you lost a baby you were
going to have with a side bitch,
and you have a whole woman you
claim to love?

DAWN
(Scoffs)
That's the same thing I was
thinking.

MIKE
Fuck you and her! The baby didn't
have to die behind this bullshit!

RACHEL (O.S.)
I agree. But the woman carrying the
baby involved the baby in this
bullshit, so she's still at fault.
And no, you would never fuck me.
And after this, you'll never fuck
her again.

MIKE
(Sobbing)
Who are you? Why are you involved
in the lives of people who don't
concern you? How do you know so
much about this situation?

DAWN

It doesn't matter if she tells us or not. The only thing we can do is accept the penalty coming towards us and let God figure out our punishment in the next life.

RACHEL (O.S.)

'God?'" The woman laughs. "In a situation all of you created, I can't believe you referenced 'God' with this. That's pathetic on a different level. But to answer your question, I'm the person none of you should've fucked with.

MIKE

That doesn't answer—

The person places a foot on Mike's throat, causing him to gasp and open his mouth. Placing a hand on the bucket, the person prepares to empty the contents.

RACHEL (O.S.)

People love playing the victim, knowing they're the attacker. That's one of the problems in the world today. There are no consequences for people's actions these days. But that stops tonight.

The person proceeds to tilt the can forward, and diarrhea feces spill out, falling into Mike's mouth. As he gags and chokes, the person continues pouring until the can is empty.

With his face covered with feces, Mike lies gagging, trying to spit out what's in his mouth, while the person quickly pulls the butterfly knife out and removes their foot before cutting Mike's throat.

As Mike lies dying a slow, disgusting death, the person focuses on Dawn.

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

Men. No matter the race or status of their character, they're all full of shit.

(Sighs)

That leaves me and you.

DAWN

You saved the best for last, huh?

RACHEL (O.S.)
I wouldn't say the best, but it was
designed to end this way.

DAWN
Really? And why is that?

RACHEL
I would love to answer that, but
it's not my place.

DAWN
Whose place would it be?

Silence cloaks the room.

DAWN (CONT'D)
I'm listening.

The person removes the mask, and Dawn's eyes get wide.

REGGIE
Because this is a matter for you to
discuss with your real husband.

DAWN
Oh... My... God.

Reggie is a handsome brown skinned man in his early fifties,
with a distinguished charm about him.

Reggie's voice is steady with pain burning in his eyes.

REGGIE
If you believed in God and our
vows, none of this would've
happened tonight.

DAWN
(Trembling tone)
Reggie... I-

REGGIE
You know... You should've suggested a
divorce. But no, we had to go
through this bullshit, and for
what?

Her sniffing becomes louder, almost choking with each
breath she takes.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

All of this crying doesn't mean a goddamn thing. Do you want me to tell you what I think you believe?

She slowly closes her eyes, sobbing, nodding her head in shame.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

See, bitches love keeping up with other bitches. It's a stupid competition, ignoring the fact that they're identical in every way with the person they're judging. Then there's some women who are nothing like them, but they put up an image as if they are. Another stupid fun fact. Those are the women who swear they want a good man but view men as whores. That's strange.

He goes into his pocket and pulls out a cigarette, placing it behind his ear.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

And then you have good women who desire a good man. They mainly keep to themselves, waiting for the ideal man. The problem with that is they don't know the difference between a good man and a man portraying to be a good man. From the male perspective, ninety percent of men want complete dominance over every woman who crosses his path. That's the ultimate goal. Eight percent of men attempt to complete that goal, but they don't have the heart or mind frame to complete it, and end up becoming pushovers for every woman they encounter.

He spits to the side.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

The last two percent... The two percent of real men who accept their woman's past and present. They get fucked over the worst. For some reason, being a stand-up man is viewed as soft because women love the dudes who fucked them over.

(MORE)

REGGIE (CONT'D)

So the men in that two percent bracket tries their best to get her back on the path to happiness, no matter if he keeps getting fucked over. Now, let me ask. Which woman do you think you are, and what percentage do I fit in?

DAWN

You're a good man, Reggie.

REGGIE

(Sarcastic laugh)

That's another reason why we're all here in this bullshit. You don't know how to communicate. I asked you what percentage, and you said, 'I'm a good man'. Does that answer the question?

DAWN

No.

REGGIE

I didn't think so. Would you like to try again?

DAWN

You belong in the two percent, Reggie.

REGGIE

That's where you're wrong, my loving wife. I converted to the two percent when I met you, but I bet you don't even know why.

DAWN

Just tell me.

REGGIE

You truly didn't give a fuck. Goddamn. Amid death and deceit, you still stand by the fact that you never loved me.

DAWN

I never said I didn't love you.

REGGIE

You said that shit every time you said you loved me. But you can't tell me why I changed for you?

DAWN

Because you saw the potential in me, and you loved what you saw.

REGGIE

Not what I saw. The woman I was getting to know that I thought was the real you. I was never a big fan of that saying, 'You can't turn a hoe into a housewife' because technically, everything walking this earth has been through a hoe phase, or they're still going through it. The catch is if you can make the hoe remain faithful. That's what I was thinking while I was getting to know you.

DAWN

Don't place all of this on me, and you have a fair share as well.

He steps back and places a hand over his heart, staring at her, stunned.

REGGIE

What's my fair share?

DAWN

You didn't have to commit after we fucked on the first night. You didn't have to spend random amounts of money on me, thinking that would keep me happy instead of spending time with each other. You didn't have to give me dry answers to certain things because you thought I was being sarcastic. Yes, baby. You have your fair share.

REGGIE

You stand by that?

DAWN

Just as sure as either you'll kill me or let me go.

REGGIE

Hm. Well, we know the answer to that.

DAWN

Then do it and get it over with.

REGGIE

No. No, I'd like to share this moment with my 'piece-of-shit wife'.

DAWN

She probably was a piece of shit when you met her, but you kept piling shit on her making it worse. Like I said, accept your share.

REGGIE

I never knew you were so witty.

DAWN

You'd know if you paid me some attention.

REGGIE

Maybe.

DAWN

MmmHmm.

REGGIE

Still. All of that shit you just said made you sleep with that guy over there and made this guy believe you two were in a serious relationship? That shit you just said made you bounce from dick to dick, knowing you have a home? Maybe it wasn't a perfect home, but we could've fixed it if you knew how to communicate.

DAWN

The only communication you respond to is me being your slut. And if I'm not performing the freaky shit you want done, you go on a spending spree or drown me with degrading words. Don't talk to me about communicating. Pay attention to what you said and see how it fits this relationship, marriage, or whatever.

REGGIE

Damn. You do pay attention.

DAWN

Don't start going soft. Keep that raw ass energy going.

(MORE)

DAWN (CONT'D)

That's one thing you forgot about
that little two percent you're
bragging about.

REGGIE

What's that?

DAWN

A woman can worship the ground you
walk on, do everything you ask her
to do, and that still wouldn't be
enough. A man has to feel superior
as if he's God, and when a woman
treats him the way he treats her,
he's ready to move on to the next
bitch. The essence of a bitch
dwells in men, too. It's all about
which side he decides to let
dictate his life.

Speechless, he slyly covers his mouth, while closing his
eyes, nodding in agreement.

DAWN (CONT'D)

Aww. Is the angry, jealous man who
can't accept his part in this
fucked up marriage silent?" She
laughs. "I thought I was supposed
to be the only one with a pussy
that loves to get fucked.

REGGIE

Speaking of pussy.

DAWN

(Annoyed sigh)

The shit was trash. You had better.
Something along those lines, right?

He opens his eyes and looks at her, confused.

REGGIE

Huh?

DAWN

I'm just saying what you're about
to say.

REGGIE

That's nowhere near what I was
gonna say. Unlike you, I enjoyed
our sex life.

DAWN

The occasional days when it occurred.

REGGIE

Right. Anyway, that's not what I was gonna say. I was gonna ask you if you at least told them.

DAWN

What? Did I tell them about my trichomoniasis? No, why would I?

REGGIE

That's some foul shit.

DAWN

Considering I don't know who I got it from, it's not. Nobody said they had to run in me raw. Again, people need to take accountability for their actions.

REGGIE

You heartless bitch. You gave that shit to me, knowing I was only fuckin' you.

DAWN

Oh, fuckin' well. I'm sure you cleared it up, and they're dead, so it doesn't matter. That's the only way a woman can truthfully get attention from her man. Give him a disease. Tell him it's his baby, knowing it ain't or fuck his friends. Other than that, guys look at us as an easier way to get a nut without using his hand.

REGGIE

You are fucked up in the head, bitch. I thought you loved me.

DAWN

Maybe if you thought like a man instead of a bitch, you would've been comfortable with us just being fuck buddies and none of this would've happened.

REGGIE

(Soft chuckle, clapping)
Thinking like a bitch. I got you.

Removing the cigarette from his ear, he places it in his mouth, while going into his pocket to retrieve a lighter.

DAWN

Oh my. Do you need to calm your nerves? The high and mighty man has fallen from his tower, and now he's mad because a bitch got down on him and she doesn't care.

Lighting the cigarette, he takes a calm pull and smiles. He slowly makes his way in front of her and stops.

She looks at him with passion in her eyes, cracking a smile.

DAWN (CONT'D)

What is it, baby? You wanna spit on me? Slap the bitch outta me. Make me grovel and beg for you to forgive me. You wanna start over from scratch and make it work?

He blows smoke in her face, and she inhales it, looking at him with a smile.

REGGIE

None of that, baby.

DAWN

Well, what—

With a quick motion, he hits her hard in the stomach, followed by taking a pull.

REGGIE

Right now, I just need you to shut the fuck up and listen.

She's gasping, trying to catch a breath as saliva falls from her mouth.

He turns his back, takes a few steps forward and stops, reaching under his shirt, pulling out a .38, turning around to face her.

You would think the tears building in his eyes and the anger outlining his face is coming from the situation, but it's because he's still in love with her.

Taking a pull from his cigarette, he cocks the gun and aims at her head.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

You had to know this was gonna happen. You probably didn't think it would go this far, but you had to know.

Dawn spits, ragged.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

People show their true colors when you least expect it. But that ain't the problem. The problem is I heard it from your mouth, and saw it in your eyes. So right now, I need you to impress me, and show me you can't die.

He fires three shots and then lowers the gun, taking one last pull before throwing the cigarette to the side, sobbing.

She's wide-eyed, thankful he didn't shoot her, but confusion plagues her mind.

DAWN

Why didn't you—

He remains with his head lowered.

REGGIE

Why didn't I kill you?

Slowly lifting his head, he looks at her with his watery eyes.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

It's easy to kill people who've done you wrong. You can sleep like a baby after that. Killing a person you love, knowing they did you wrong... That'll haunt you. People can say love is easy to shake off, and those are the same people who no longer recognize their reflection.

DAWN

Reggie... Reggie, I'm sorry.

REGGIE

You're not sorry. You don't have to keep lying.

DAWN

No, I'm truly sorry for everything. You're right. All we had to do was communicate with each other.

REGGIE

When your life is on the line, you'll realize all the fucked up shit you did was pointless. When you find out it's not your time, you'll say you're thankful, but you'll continue doing fucked up shit.

(Scoffs)

I'll give you this much. You were right about one thing.

DAWN

...What's that?

REGGIE

Men are just like bitches, if not worse. We say women are emotional when it's us. We do believe we should be treated as Gods, knowing we're only doing the bare minimum to deserve the devotion a woman is showing us. So on that part, you're right.

DAWN

Baby, you know I don't look at you as a bitch.

REGGIE

Dawn, it's okay. You made me realize I am accountable for what happened tonight.

DAWN

...Reggie.

REGGIE

It's cool.

He places the gun away, and then goes into his pocket, retrieving a key to the lock on her chains.

She stares at him as he approaches.

DAWN

What now?

He steps behind her and places the key in the lock, unlocking it. With the lock removed, he takes the chains off.

She moves her arms around, trying to regain the feeling in them.

REGGIE

There's one thing I need, and the rest is up to you.

Standing to her feet, she turns around and looks into his eyes. With a warm, loving smile, he places a hand on her cheek and holds it there.

Throughout everything that transpired, the same loving feeling resides on her face as she holds his hand against her cheek.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

The next man you encounter who truly loves you. Please don't do him like you did me. Make it work.

Tears start building in her eyes.

DAWN

Bae, we can make it work.

REGGIE

(Soft laugh)

I wish that was true. But killing you would be selfish. I would be preventing you from meeting the man you'll actually love. That's what love is about. Maintaining it, but letting it go if things get critical. I'll always love you.

With passion lacing his lips, he moves in for a kiss, and she embraces him. When he pulls back, a tear falls from her eye that he gently uses his thumb to wipe away.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

A lucky man will give my angel her wings and halo so she can fly above the bullshit. Until then... Bye, baby.

She prepares to speak, and he places a finger on her lips, shaking his head no. He kisses her on the forehead and then he turns around, walking away.

DAWN

Reggie.

He stops but doesn't turn around.

REGGIE

Yeah?

DAWN

Think about giving us another chance.

He pulls the gun out and extends it to the side, placing it down on the table.

REGGIE

I told you whatever happens next is on you. Bye, baby.

He opens the door and walks out.

Looking around the room at the horror, the once sensitive emotions she displayed quickly vanish, forming a sinister smirk as she walks over to the table.

She picks up the gun and scoffs, opening the door, walking out.

INTERCUT WITH:

I/E. MOTEL - CONTINUOUS

The abandoned motel is deep in the slums, barely visible because of the flickering lights. As Reggie walks toward the stairs, that's when Dawn cocks the gun, and aims at his head.

DAWN

You don't pay attention to the shit you say. Who leaves a gun with someone who has no problems fuckin' them over?

He stops but doesn't turn around.

REGGIE

I pay attention to everything. Like I said, whatever happens now is on you. I see you've made your choice.

DAWN

Damn fool. You were dumb to think you could change me. You were dumb to think I loved you.

(MORE)

DAWN (CONT'D)
And now you're about to die like
the dumb bitch you are.

REGGIE
True. But there's one thing about
bitches I admire, but guys do it
way better.

She squeezes the trigger and the gun clicks. Confused, she
squeezes the trigger again, getting the same result, and
then **BANG!!!**

Her body drops hard, face first, with a hole in her head.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
When a man makes you believe he's
hurt...

He turns around with a sinister smile.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
It's so you'll have no idea he has
a good woman on the side.

The sound of high heels are heard as he places a cigarette
in his mouth. Rachel, the woman over the speaker, is a dark
skinned vision of beauty in her late-thirties. She walks to
him and stands to the side, using her lighter to light his
cigarette.

Blowing the smoke to the side, he turns to look at her with
a smile before they embrace in a passionate kiss. She stares
at him with a sexy glare, gently running her finger under
his chin before walking away.

He turns around and gives her a light pop on the ass.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
Good game.

She releases a bashful laugh as she walks off. He catches up
with her, and the two make their way down the stairs.

FADE TO BLACK:

BLACK SCREEN:

"A vain person uses "Love" effortlessly as long as people
are giving them what they want."

~Bernard Mersier~

BLACK SCREEN:

TITLE CARD: OUR 13TH BIRTHDAY**FADE IN:****INT. THE LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON**

The living room has been transformed into a perfect birthday tableau. Paper plates and silverware are arranged on the table, alongside a lighter and a box of birthday candles.

Machi's friends are sitting around the table like courtiers awaiting a royal decree. Becky, slender with long blonde hair framing her glasses-magnifies her blue eyes as she fidgets with her napkin. Lucas, short and brown-skinned with his carefully sculpted low fade, drums his fingers on the table. Jasmine, light-skinned and lithe, has her long black hair pulled back into a ponytail that matches her expression.

They're sitting on the cusp of something unknown, though none of them realize just how unknown it will be.

Their mothers are off to the side having a conversation about adult concerns and social pleasantries.

INTERCUT WITH:**INT. THE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

In the kitchen, Tiffany is leaning against the counter with her smile stretching thin as a fishing line. At twenty-five, she's petite and brown-skinned, but something about her posture suggests a woman carrying weights far heavier than her small frame should bear. Her eyes are fixed on her daughter with the intensity of a guard watching a powder keg.

Machi is beaming beside the table with her gaze locked on two pink boxes—one large, one small—both tied with shimmering ribbons. She's short and slender like her mother, brown-skinned and has long, curly black hair that seems to absorb light rather than reflect it. At thirteen, there's something unsettling about the way she smiles as if she knows secrets the adults forgot they taught her.

TIFFANY

I can't wait to see what your cake
looks like.

Machi doesn't look at her mother when she replies.

MACHI

It's just a cake, Mom. What's important is that my friends showed up for our birthday.

Tiffany's frown deepens, carving lines of confusion across her face.

TIFFANY

I've been meaning to ask. Why do you call it 'our' birthday?

Machi turns to look at her, and that radiating smile doesn't waver.

MACHI

Because they make me feel special. Without their love, I would've never found out who I truly am.

TIFFANY

Sweetie, I don't understand. Your father and I show you love, so how did they help you understand who you are?

MACHI

The love from you and Dad is expected, and it helped in more ways than you know. The love from my friends out there... They showed me—

The back door explodes open with a violent force, and Que stumbles in like a flesh made storm. He reeks of beer and simmering rage. In his late-twenties, he's short and out of shape, with his brown skin radiating the kind of menace that makes small animals hide and children learn to read moods like weather patterns.

Tiffany's face crumples with practiced concern, but Machi's smile remains fixed—a terrifying mask of serenity.

QUE

(Slurring)

This shit ain't over yet?

TIFFANY

Bae, please, don't—

MACHI

We were waiting for you, Dad. My party wouldn't be complete without you.

Que scoffs and pulls out a dented flask, preparing to take a swig.

MACHI (CONT'D)

(Soft tone)

Dad, can you wait? I had Mom buy
you something special.

Lowering the flask, he looks at Machi, annoyed.

QUE

That shit in the refrigerator? I
started to drink it.

MACHI

I'm glad you didn't. Can you wait
until I cut the cake and we sing
happy birthday before you drink?
Please.

QUE

(Scoffs)

Will that help speed this shit up?

MACHI

Yes, Daddy.

QUE

Then let's get the show on the
road.

He shuffles out of the kitchen, leaving a wake of sour
resentment.

Tiffany sighs, looking at her daughter with a mixture of
pity and fear, speaking about the years of walking on
eggshells in her own home.

TIFFANY

Sweetie, don't pay attention to
your father. You know—

MACHI

Mom, nothing can ruin this day.

Machi places the small box on top of the larger one with
care.

MACHI (CONT'D)

Can you make Dad's drink and pour
some wine for you and the other
ladies? I'm about to take the cakes
out.

Tiffany searches her daughter's face for cracks in that perfect composure.

TIFFANY

Are you sure you're okay?

MACHI

I have my parents and friends. All of you have made me so happy.

Machi picks up the boxes and walks out of the room, leaving her mother standing in confusion.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

In the living room, Que has positioned himself against the wall, with his annoyance radiating outward in waves. The mothers continue their careful conversation, while the children maintain their joyful moment.

Becky is the first to notice Machi's entrance.

BECKY

Here comes the birthday girl.

Jasmine looks toward Machi with a predatory interest.

JASMINE

You mean the slow girl who'll end up with a drunk like her father, who'll beat on her every day like her father beats on her mother because she's too stupid to leave?

The three friends erupt in laughter.

Lucas makes a halfhearted attempt at restraint.

LUCAS

Chill out.

Machi approaches the table and places the boxes down with ceremonial precision. The three friends struggle to contain their mirth, exchanging glances that speak of shared cruelty and assumed superiority.

The mothers turn their attention to Machi as Tiffany enters carrying a tray laden with wine glasses and a single cognac glass. She serves Que first—a ritual of appeasement—and then she distributes the wine to the other women like communion offerings.

MACHI

I would like to thank my best friends for coming to my party. You don't know how much this means to me.

BECKY

No problem, M.

JASMINE

Yeah, you know we'll always be here for you.

LUCAS

Fa sho.

MACHI

And that's why I love you guys. Because of that, I had a cake made special for us.

She removes the ribbon with the reverence of a priest performing sacrament. She opens the box, revealing her masterpiece.

INSERT CAKE

The cake is a perfect circle, decorated with an emoji face—hearts for eyes, and a big smile stretching across its surface. Becky, Lucas, Jasmine, and Machi names are written in delicate script around its circumference.

Everyone except for Que finds the cake adorable, with genuine admiration.

QUE

Can we speed this up so I can get to my drink?

The mothers' expressions speak volumes about what they want to say.

Machi looks at her father with that same unwavering smile.

MACHI

Right. Sorry, Daddy. Unlike traditional birthday parties, I have something different planned.

She lines up six plates before cutting six perfect slices, placing them on the plates. Before distributing them, she places a candle in each slice and a fork on the side before lighting the candles with the solemnity of someone lighting funeral pyres.

She serves Becky, Lucas, and Jasmine first, and then places three plates on the tray for the mothers. Each woman sits down her wine glass and accepts her portion with polite gratitude.

TIFFANY
Sweetie, where's my piece?

MACHI
Mom, I have this under control.
Just go along with me.

TIFFANY
(Nervous laugh)
Okay.

MACHI
Thank you. Now, I want everyone to close their eyes and make a wish. When you open your eyes, blow out your candle, and then taste the cake and tell me what you think. After that, we can sing happy birthday. Mom, Dad. You two take a sip while everyone tries the cake.

Jasmine shifts uncomfortably.

JASMINE
This... This is something different.

MACHI
It'll all make sense. Okay.
Everybody, make a wish.

Despite their confusion, everyone complies. They open their eyes, blow out their candles, and take their first—and last—bites of Machi's special cake.

Que and Tiffany sip their drinks as instructed.

JASMINE
Honestly, this cake is...

Jasmine begins, but her words dissolve into choking gasps.

The change is swift and terrible. Breathing becomes labored, and then impossible. Bodies hit the floor like falling dominoes with seizures wracking their forms as foam bubbles from their mouths. The living room transforms into a theater of death.

Machi watches with scientific detachment before speaking into the chaos.

MACHI

It's the worst fucking cake you ever tasted. That's probably what you would've said if your mother wasn't here. Cake infused with a heavy dose of cyanide should taste horrible. They say the death can be quick or it can be slow and painful, lasting up to an hour. In the case of you three bitches, I hope it's quick because you don't deserve to live for what you put me through.

She walks to Que, who is writhed on the floor. His cruelty has finally met its match.

MACHI (CONT'D)

You don't deserve the hell you're going to. God shouldn't have allowed you to exist.

Then, she walks over to Tiffany, who lies gasping, with her eyes wide with the horrible understanding of her daughter's methodical revenge.

MACHI (CONT'D)

In your case, I know you'll die slowly. I didn't spike your wine with a heavy dosage. I want your death to be slow and agonizing because you didn't stop your filthy husband from what he was doing to me and had me do. Just because you enjoy him treating you like shit, you thought it was okay for him to treat me the same? I got something special for you before you die.

She turns to Jasmine, taking her final breaths.

MACHI (CONT'D)

The bitch who thinks she's better than everybody. Look at you and your bitch-ass followers. Yeah, my mother is a dumb bitch and my father is a rapist.

(MORE)

MACHI (CONT'D)

But you're about to die not knowing who your father is because your mother doesn't know, since she's the biggest hoe in the city. And your followers...

(Laughs)

They're products of their mothers. Spineless ass-kissers, following an image thinking there would be no consequences because they believe the leader can't be touched.

She spits on Jasmine's still form.

MACHI (CONT'D)

I would like to thank you and your mutts for bullying me, causing me to wake up so I wouldn't become like the bitch over there I call my mother.

Moving to the table, she pushes the cake aside and opens the smaller box.

INSERT BOX

Inside is a cupcake, decorated with an emoji face—but this one has demonic eyes and a sinister smile. She places a candle in it and lights it with a steady hand.

Closing her eyes, she begins to sing in a voice bright and clear.

MACHI (CONT'D)

Happy birthday to us. Happy birthday to us. Happy birthday to us! Thank God, all of you bitches are dead.

She opens her eyes and blows out the candle. The room seems to darken, as if the light itself is recoiling from what it witnessed.

Standing alone amid the bodies, surrounded by the ruins of her childhood, Machi is no longer a victim. She has become something worse—something forged in cruelty and tempered by betrayal. The silence is broken by her soft whisper, a final benediction over the carnage.

MACHI (CONT'D)

You all taught me that weakness is punished, and kindness is mistaken for stupidity.

(MORE)

MACHI (CONT'D)

So the only way to survive in this world is to be stronger and more ruthless than everyone else. You taught me that there's no point in being good when the good gets destroyed and the cruel gets rewarded.

She laughs before picking up the cupcake, taking a bite with a smile.

BLACK SCREEN:

TITLE CARD: GUMMY WORM

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The cheap plastic Halloween decorations are clinging desperately to the grimy walls of the cluttered living room. They're a pathetic attempt to lend the squalid space some semblance of grim festivity. Overturned beer cans and greasy fast-food wrappers litter the stained, threadbare carpet and the chipped veneer of the coffee table. Alcohol, old cigarette smoke, and simmering neglect festers in the air.

A horror movie flickers faintly on an old floor model television. In a shadowed corner, a skinny black cat rests on a yellowed stained pillow, watching everything with quiet, feline judgment.

Marion sits hunched on the worn-out sofa, with her slight frame lost in a shapeless Halloween outfit. She's sketching absently in a sketchbook with the cover fading, but it still bores the faint, curling script.

INSERT COVER

Mildred's Art.

A familiar hollowness shadows her eighteen-year-old baby blue eyes—the weight of unspoken sorrows. She sighs, a deep, shuddering breath, with her fingers absently tracing the raised puckered burn, peeking from the edge of her sleeve.

From the kitchen comes the crash of something heavy hitting the floor, punctuated by her father's guttural curses. It's a soundtrack eerily similar to the one playing three months ago, the night everything fractured.

The doorbell's shrill, unwelcomed sound cuts through the domestic cacophony.

JOEL (O.S.)
You hear the goddamn doorbell?!

Joel's voice booms from the kitchen, thick with his Kentucky accent.

MARION
(Sighs)
I heard it.

The doorbell shrills again, followed by heavy, impatient footsteps pounding down the hallway.

JOEL (O.S.)
Useless goddamn brat! I don't believe in this Halloween shit, but you do. You decorated my whole goddamn house, but you can't even answer the door?!

MARION
(Flat tone)
You'll be fine.

The front door creaks open with a groan of protest.

CHILDREN (O.S.)
Trick or treat!

A moment of children's laughter, quickly stifled, and then the door slams shut with a violent thud.

Joel scoffs as he enters the living room.

JOEL
(Scoffs)
Freeloaders!

He's a man in his late thirties who looks older, with his face obscured by a rugged, matted mountain beard and a greasy bald spot shining in the middle of his thinning hair. He's wearing filthy overalls and mud-caked boots, clutching a half-empty whiskey bottle.

He takes a long, gurgling sip, fixing his eyes on Marion with disgust.

JOEL (CONT'D)
Every damn one of 'em, preparing for their futures as useless layabouts.
(MORE)

JOEL (CONT'D)

Some homeless bastard probably dreamt up this idea for hard-working people to give away free candy, and a bunch of morons decided to make it a holiday.

(Spits)

'Halloween.' Hell, every day is Halloween when you step outside. Weirdos everywhere lookin' for handouts, and poor saps like you fall for it every damn time. Why is that? Why do you people feel sorry for these goddamn peasants?

Marion places her sketchbook and pencil carefully on the stained cushion beside her.

She lifts her head slowly, meeting his gaze, feeling the disappointment of a familiar ache in her chest for the man she's forced to call father.

MARION

You're complaining, but you took the time to dress up? Oh, wait. You look like this every day.

JOEL

What was that?

Marion covers her mouth, chuckling.

MARION

I'm sorry. It's just funny. You complain about people, and you're just like them. Hell, some days you look worse, and your begging is far more pathetic.

JOEL

You think you're funny?

His knuckles whiten around the whiskey bottle.

MARION

Do you think you matter?

Joel takes a deep, ragged breath, as the air whistles through his teeth moving towards her, and each step is heavy with menace.

JOEL

Why didn't you leave with your mother?

(MORE)

JOEL (CONT'D)

All you do is bitch, eat up my food
and draw in that stupid little
book.

MARION

Unfortunately... She didn't tell me
she was leaving. Otherwise, I would
have gladly gone with her.

Joel cracks his neck and it's a sharp, ugly sound as he
spits on the filthy carpet.

JOEL

There's the door. Get your little
shit and go. You'll fit perfectly
with the other freaks out there.

Marion closes her eyes for a fleeting second, and a silent
sigh escapes her.

MARION

What did my mother ever see in you?

JOEL

A provider. A protector. A real
man—

MARION

A freeloader. An alcoholic she
foolishly thought she could change.

He jabs a thick finger at her as his face contorts with
rage, taking another swig from the bottle.

JOEL

One more. Let one more goddamn
smartass remark come outta your
mouth, and I swear to God, I'll
knock those pretty lips clean off
your face.

The black cat, silent until now, rises from its pillow and
stretches languidly before moving over to Marion, hopping
onto her lap. A soft, rumbling purr vibrates against her as
she strokes its sleek fur.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Make sure you take that freak with
you.

Marion's mouth curves into a slight, knowing smirk as she
continues petting the cat.

MARION

The only freak in this hellhole is you, Daddy. And you should watch what you say. Cats are a lot like humans. They never forget what you said or did.

JOEL

(Harsh, sarcastic laugh)

I don't give a flying fuck about a feline's memory. Do you want your lips knocked off?

Marion gently places the purring cat to the side before standing up, walking towards Joel, stopping inches from him—close enough to smell the sour whiskey on his breath.

MARION

That wouldn't be anything new for you, would it? In fact...

(Chilling laugh)

Studies show most men like you can't get it up unless they beat on a woman to feel superior. You're always trying to find some shred of masculinity in that pitiful shell, knowing there's only a frightened little boy inside. Isn't that right, gummy worm?

Without hesitation, his hand cracks across her face. The force of the blow snaps her head to the side, and her cheek instantly turns flaming red.

JOEL

You little trash mouth tramp! You get that bullshit directly from your mother. It's a good thing she's not here because—

The doorbell shrills again, an insistent, metallic shriek. Joel turns with his eyes narrowing with hate, darting toward the doorway. Looking back at Marion, he jabs his finger at her.

JOEL (CONT'D)

You wait. Before I kick you the fuck out, you're gonna show me some respect.

Rubbing her stinging cheek, Marion releases a low, eerie laugh that seems to crawl under his skin.

MARION

Oh, somebody is gonna show some respect tonight.

He raises his hand to strike her again, but the doorbell rings once more, longer this time. Frustrated by the incessant trick-or-treaters and the poisonous exchange with his daughter, he growls and takes another deep swig of whiskey before slamming the bottle down hard on the coffee table.

He storms off to the front door.

JOEL

Goddamn freeloaders! I'll be glad when this goddamn day is over because—

He wrenches the door open, and his face shows fury, stumbling back a step. On his decrepit, rotting porch lies a paper bag with flames licking eagerly at its edges, pulsating with an orange glow. Vile, acrid smoke is coming from it, carrying the stench of feces and putrid meat.

He dashes to the kitchen—a space just as filthy and neglected as the living room, where flies buzz lazily around a pile of leftover food festering on the table, with roaches scattering like guilty secrets from the sink overflowing with greasy, scum-coated dishes.

He grabs a grimy plastic pitcher from the sink, and doesn't even bother to empty the murky water already in it.

Storming back to the front door, spewing a fresh torrent of curses like a drunken sailor, he prepares to douse the flames. But approaching the threshold, a look of utter confusion comes over his face—the burning bag is gone.

Lost in a disbelieving fog, he slowly closes the door and heads back to the living room, intent on resuming his venomous tirade against Marion. When he lurches back into the room Marion and the cat are gone.

JOEL (CONT'D)

I hope you're getting your things so you can get the hell out!

A cold, eerie ripple of female laughter drapes the room, seeming to emanate from the very walls, causing him to spin around, with his eyes wide and confused.

MILDRED (V.O.)

Did the smell remind you of something, Joel?

The voice is unmistakably his dead wife Mildred—a silken whisper laced with frost.

JOEL
What the fuck?

MILDRED (V.O.)
The big, tough man isn't scared, is he?

Mildred's voice mocks, closer now.

With a shaky, cocky laugh, he places the pitcher down on the stained carpet and cracks his knuckles.

JOEL
Okay. Okay, you think you're funny, Marion? You wanna play games?

He storms toward Marion's bedroom and bursts in, only to be met with an empty room. A cold dread begins to seep into his bones.

JOEL (CONT'D)
What in the hell is going on?

MILDRED (V.O.)
Who are you looking for, my love?

Her voice is directly behind him, followed by that same, creepy, knowing laugh.

Joel nods slowly, tapping a trembling finger against the side of his head.

JOEL
I know. I... I know what's going on. It's just the booze...

MILDRED (V.O.)
Run to it, then. That's all you were ever good for, wasn't it?

Evil intertwines with her spectral laughter, coiling around him.

MILDRED (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Some men can't face their demons without a boost of liquid courage.

Joel scrambles back to the living room and snatches up the whiskey bottle, tilting it back, taking a desperate, burning swig. Letting the fiery liquid sear his throat, he slowly starts to smile—a grimace of defiance.

MILDRED (V.O.) (CONT'D)
That's the same smile you had when
you took care of your so-called
problems.

Joel begins slapping his hand against his forehead, again
and again.

JOEL
Shut up. Shut up, shut up, shut up!

MILDRED (V.O.)
Are you feeling a little bad now,
gummy worm?

With a guttural roar, Joel hurls the bottle across the room
where it shatters against the wall. He covers his face with
his hands, releasing a raw, animalistic scream tearing from
his throat.

Slowly, he lowers his hands. A shaky, almost triumphant
smile begins to form on his lips, until he opens his eyes.

Pure, unadulterated terror wipes the expression clean off
his pale, ghastly white face. He gasps—a choked, strangled
sound.

He's standing in the burned-out, smoke-blackened shell of a
living room from his old house. On the floor, amidst the
charred debris, lies the dead, horribly mutilated and burnt
body of his wife, Mildred, with her stomach grotesquely
swollen—evidence of the three-month pregnancy.

Not too far from her dead body lies Marion's burned up body.
Over in the corner, a small, blackened, and twisted form is
unmistakably the burnt, mutilated cat Marion was petting.

Joel stumbles back, with his hand flying to his mouth to
stifle a retch.

JOEL
No. No, this... This didn't happen
like this.

MILDRED (V.O.)
(Eerie whisper)
Oh, but it did, gummy worm. You
took the life of two talented
artists and possibly snuffed out
another one in the making. And for
what? Because you couldn't satisfy
your wife? Because you couldn't
compromise, always resorting to
your fists, your rage?

JOEL

God, no. No, I didn't—

A partially burned, skeletal hand with blackened flesh peeling slams down hard on his shoulder. He yelps, spinning around and screaming, falling heavily to the scorched floor.

The grotesque, reanimated corpses of Mildred and Marion are towering over him. Mildred has a large, gaping gash torn in her stomach, where small, perfectly formed baby hands claw.

Perched on Marion's charred shoulder is a horrifying caricature of the cat, with its fur singed away and eyes glowing with an unnatural, malevolent white light.

Joel pants in sheer terror, with his eyes wide and unblinking, fixed on the abominations before him. Mildred slowly reaches into the gash, and with a wet, tearing sound, pulls out a bloody butcher knife.

MILDRED

Let's take care of the real
problem, gummy worm.

Her bones crack and pop with unnatural articulation as she lowers herself to the floor, crawling onto his chest, with her dead weight pressing the air from his lungs. She wraps one cold, unyielding hand around his throat.

Marion uses her hands, along with the hands coming from Mildred's stomach to snatch his overalls off. As his eyes bulge and he gasps, Mildred looks down between his legs with a horrifyingly serene smile on her burnt lips.

With an eerie, almost seductive laugh, she moves the knife slowly, deliberately, down between his legs.

Joel's world explodes in white-hot agony as he screams, feeling the razor-sharp edge slice through his manhood.

And then, he's back in the cluttered, dimly lit living room. The doorbell is ringing—a mundane, repetitive sound. After a few more rings, it stops, leaving an echoing silence.

Joel is sprawled on the sofa, clad in a dingy, sweat-stained T-shirt and blood-soaked boxer shorts. Gummy worms, sticky and bright, spill obscenely from the gaping, bloody hole where his genitals were once attached. A mask of unimaginable pain and abject fear is frozen on his face.

On the floor beside him lies a bloody butcher knife, next to an overturned whiskey bottle and his severed penis.

On the coffee table, Mildred's sketchbook lies open, displaying a meticulously drawn picture—a tender image of a mother lovingly holding her child, while in the background, her older daughter and a serene black cat watches over them.

BLACK SCREEN:

TITLE CARD: DECOMPOSITION

FADE IN:

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Cameron's house should be in a quarantine zone because of the decay, and scattered empty liquor bottles reflecting light from the cracked television, along with piles of crusted plates and discarded clothes forming a jagged landscape.

The walls, once a hopeful ivory, are now marbled with dark, viscous stains—a silent record of dried blood and ancient vomit. Heavy, grime-caked curtains seal the room off from the outside world as if the house has given up on facing the light.

Cameron, a shadow of a man in his early twenties, sits shirtless on the sofa. His brown skin is leaking sweat and delusion, and his jogging pants are hanging loosely because the elastic waistband is frayed and tired.

In one hand, he clutches a half-empty bottle of whiskey, and in the other, a .357 revolver. He takes a sip, placing the gun carefully on the sagging cushion beside him. The television hums a broken melody, with the static on its spiderwebbed screen distorting into something that feels almost alive.

CAMERON (V.O.)

People throw the word love around
like it's candy. But love... Love
is a parasite. It burrows into your
soul and feeds until you're nothing
but an empty husk.

His hollow eyes are staring into nothingness.

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

My story isn't about love. It's
about obsession. The kind that
plunges your soul into damnation.
That sounds like a contradiction,
doesn't it?

(MORE)

CAMERON (CONT'D)

(Takes a swig.)

I was like you once. I believed the dictionary definition of love. I shared my flesh with every woman who crossed my path, chasing euphoria, mistaking it for a different meaning. Soulmates, they call it. But it's just masturbation, isn't it? A hollow exchange.

Rising from the sofa, Cameron picks up the .357 and tucks it into the waistband of his pants. The living room feels like it's closing in on him as he moves toward the hallway. The hallway itself is a suffocating tunnel, choked with overflowing trash bags and a chorus of buzzing flies.

All of the tattered photographs hanging on the walls are of a woman named Lila, with her body torn away, leaving only her smiling face. Her dark eyes are frozen in a mocking expression of joy.

Cameron stops at a photo, and uses his thumb to brush her face with a tenderness that feels obscene.

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

Your body... It made something rise in me. But I only craved your flesh. I kept your face... For relapse purposes.

He takes another swig of whiskey, swatting half-heartedly at the flies.

He moves down the hallway to a closed door. His fingers tighten on the doorknob, turning it with a deliberate slowness. The door opens, revealing the bathroom, a slaughterhouse disguised as a room.

Blood paints the walls and floor in thick, congealed, grotesque patterns. Bits of flesh and glistening organs litter the tiles in a macabre mosaic. Limbs—arms and legs—floating obscenely in the bathtub, while hands and feet clutter the sink.

Cameron steps inside, and his bare feet slip slightly on the slick floor. He approaches the blood-smeared mirror and wipes a clean patch. His reflection stares back at him—eyes empty, face exhausted. He raises the bottle to his lips once more.

CAMERON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
This room... This is my greatest
work. A symbol. Someone who truly
understands life would see the
beauty here.

His lips twitch in a grotesque attempt at a smile.

CAMERON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
To some, this is art. Others would
call me insane. But death comes
when you consume flesh for no
reason, when you think you're in
love. These women... They were no
different from her.

Backing out of the bathroom, he moves toward his bedroom
door that's slightly cracked. He pushes it open with a
hesitation that feels almost reverent.

Inside, the room is a shrine to his madness. A twin-sized
bed sits in the center with its sheets soaked in blood.
Shackled to the frame is Lila, or what remains of her. Her
body has been sawed in half, with her torso ending in jagged
lines of raw flesh. Her face is frozen in a scream, a silent
witness to the agony of her final moments.

Her organs are piled beside the bed in a disturbingly neat
arrangement.

Cameron approaches and sits on the edge of the bed.

CAMERON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
This... This is where it all
happened. Countless nights of
consumption. Women... They only
love a man's flesh, not his soul.
They take what they want and move
on, draining whatever's left. But
you, Lila. You were different. You
were my poison.

His fingers trail through her hair, down to her lips, with a
chillingly intimate gesture. His breathing grows ragged, and
a twisted arousal flickers in his eyes as his hand moves
across her breasts and then down to the mutilated flesh of
her torso.

CAMERON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I removed the source of your
corruption. Now there's only one
thing left.

He climbs onto the bed, settling beside her with his back against the headboard. He kisses her forehead, a gesture so tender it's a stark contrast to the horror surrounding them. Then, calmly, he raises the .357 to his mouth.

The shot is terrifying as the back of his head explodes, painting the wall. His body slumps, and the gun falls from his hand.

CAMERON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
We'll make it work in the
afterlife. One vessel of death,
reawakened with new flesh. This...
This is love.

BLACK SCREEN:

TITLE CARD: OFF LIMITS

FADE IN:

INT. THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

The vanity mirror reflects back a stranger. Sydney barely recognizes the woman staring back at her—dark circles have taken permanent residence beneath her green eyes, like bruises that refuse to heal. Her once-vibrant smile has been replaced by a practiced mask of composure, one she's perfected over three months of pretending the world didn't shift off its axis. Each stroke of the comb through her long brown hair becomes a meditation against the chaos in her mind. The woman in her early-thirties is no longer the woman she once was.

SYDNEY (V.O.)
Why can't I find someone who truly
sees me?

She rises from the vanity with her slim figure moving with subtle grace as she crosses to the queen-size bed. The exhaustion of another day weighs on her shoulders as she curls under the blanket, turning onto her side.

On the nightstand, a silver frame catches the dim light from the streetlamp outside.

INSERT PICTURE FRAME

William is smiling back at her from the photograph—captured in a moment of pure joy during their weekend at the beach last summer, with his arms spread wide, embracing the sun.

SYDNEY
(Soft whisper)
You would know what to say. You
always knew how to make me feel
like I was enough. Like I was more
than enough.

Rolling onto her back, she stares at the ceiling.

SYDNEY (V.O.)
Maybe I'm broken.

INT. THE OFFICE - MORNING

The next morning at her office cubicle, Sydney sits staring at her latest drawing—a woman crying by a lake. She debates on adding more detail but pauses to check the news on her laptop. The headline makes her blood run cold.

INSERT SCREEN

Serial Rapist Claims 19th Victim.

Her gaze hardens.

SYDNEY (V.O.)
This is why casual dating is
dangerous. You never know what's
behind a person's mask. No wonder
I've only been with William
because—

A soft knock on her cubicle wall interrupts her spiraling thoughts. She looks up to find Russell standing there, holding a carry-out bag from a Thai restaurant.

He's tall and lean, with gentle features that suggest he's been a thoughtful child who grew into a thoughtful adult. His blonde hair is slightly tousled in an artfully accidental way.

RUSSELL
(Soft tone)
Sorry to disturb you," he says
softly.

SYDNEY
No, you're fine.

RUSSELL
I, uh... brought you some food.

He holds up the bag as evidence of his good intentions.

RUSSELL (CONT'D)
It's from the new Thai place down
the street. I noticed you usually
skip lunch, and I thought... Well,
I hope you like it.

SYDNEY
You didn't have to do that.

RUSSELL
I know, but I wanted to.

He places the bag carefully on her desk as if it contains
something precious.

RUSSELL (CONT'D)
I hope you like pad Thai. The
reviews said it's their specialty.

SYDNEY
I love Thai food. Thank you,
Russell. This is really sweet.

His smile transforms his entire face from pleasant to
radiant.

RUSSELL
You're welcome. I just... Well,
enjoy your lunch.

He starts to leave but then returns, with his eyes shining
with something that looks dangerously like hope.

RUSSELL (CONT'D)
Sydney.

SYDNEY
Yes?

RUSSELL
Would you like to go out tonight?

SYDNEY
Oh, Russell, I—

RUSSELL
Did I come on too strong? I'm
sorry, I—

SYDNEY
No, it's just... I'm surprised.

RUSSELL
Why?

SYDNEY

I'm used to men approaching me sexually, and here you are being the ideal gentleman. Your approach caught me off guard.

RUSSELL

I'd love to take you out and get to know you better. If you say no, I'll understand completely.

SYDNEY

Russell-

RUSSELL

I get it. Thanks for your time. Enjoy your food.

He turns away with dejection evident in the slope of his shoulders.

SYDNEY

What time are you picking me up?

He blinks, turning around, caught off guard.

RUSSELL

Are you serious?

SYDNEY

(Blushes, shy laugh)

Does someone have a change of heart?

RUSSELL

No-no. How about eight?

SYDNEY

That works. I'll give you my number at the end of the day.

RUSSELL

Great. Eight it is. You won't regret it, I promise.

As he walks away smiling, Sydney finds herself smiling too as she opens the food.

SYDNEY (V.O.)

I know he's not my first love. But maybe he can be my new beginning.

CUT TO:

INT. THAI RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The Thai restaurant is perfect—dim with the gentle murmur of other diners creating a comfortable backdrop. Sydney smooths her dress nervously as they're seated at a corner table, though she remains hyperaware of her surroundings. The exits, the other patrons, the way Russell's hands move when he speaks.

SYDNEY

This is perfect. Thank you for suggesting it.

RUSSELL

I've been wanting to try it but... Well, eating alone at a nice restaurant always feels a little depressing.

SYDNEY

I know what you mean.

RUSSELL

So, I have to ask—and feel free to tell me it's none of my business—but why are you single? I mean, you're intelligent, beautiful, successful... I can't imagine you're short on options.

SYDNEY

I guess I'm just selective. I can't be with someone I don't love. I haven't felt that kind of connection since...

She pauses, gathering her courage.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Since I lost my partner.

Russell's expression shifts, becoming more serious.

RUSSELL

Lost how, if you don't mind me asking?

SYDNEY

He was murdered three months ago.

Russell's face goes pale with genuine shock and sympathy warring across his features.

RUSSELL
Jesus, Sydney. I'm so sorry. I had no idea.

SYDNEY
It's okay. I'm slowly learning to live with it. The memories help.

RUSSELL
That's... I can't imagine. You're incredibly strong.

Sydney shrugs, uncomfortable with the praise. Strength felt like something she was pretending rather than possessing.

SYDNEY
I don't feel strong. Most days I feel like I'm just going through the motions.

RUSSELL
But you're here. You're trying. That takes courage.

SYDNEY
What about you? Why did you ask me out?

Russell's cheeks flush pink.

RUSSELL
Honestly? I've been watching you since I started working there six months ago. Not in a creepy way. But... There's something about you. The way you handle yourself. Your kindness with the support staff. The way you really listen when people talk to you. I've been trying to work up the courage to approach you for months.

SYDNEY
Really?

RUSSELL
I noticed you seemed to be going through something difficult, and I didn't want to add to your stress. But today, when I saw you looking so sad at your desk, I thought maybe... Maybe you could use a friend.

SYDNEY

I appreciate that more than you know. Most men in the office have made it clear what they're interested in, and it's not friendship.

RUSSELL

Their loss. Though I have to admit, I hope maybe friendship can grow into something more. Eventually. When you're ready.

SYDNEY

There's something about you that reminds me of William. The way you approach people, the thoughtfulness. It's... it's nice to remember that men like you exist.

Russell's smile is soft and understanding.

RUSSELL

I'm honored by the comparison. He must have been a special person.

SYDNEY

...He was.

And for the first time in months, talking about William didn't feel like tearing open a wound.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

He would have liked you, I think.

They spend the rest of their dinner talking about books, traveling and their families, while carefully avoiding topics that feel too heavy or too intimate.

Russell is funny in a self deprecating way. Intelligent without being condescending, and genuinely interested in her thoughts and opinions. When he suggests they should probably head home, Sydney feels a genuine pang of disappointment.

RUSSELL

A gentleman never keeps a lady out too late on a first date. Especially when he's hoping for a second one.

SYDNEY

I think that could be arranged.

INT. RUSSELL'S TRUCK - LATER

Later, in Russell's truck with black-tinted windows parked in her driveway, Sydney feels genuinely content for the first time since William's death. They're sharing drinks and easy laughter, flowing like water finding its natural course.

SYDNEY

Thank you for a lovely evening.

RUSSELL

Thank you for letting me show you a good time. You always seem so... melancholy at work.

SYDNEY

You're sweet, Russell.

RUSSELL

You're the sweet one.

Something in his tone shifts—becoming hungry, more sexual. He leans in for a kiss with sudden, startling intensity.

She pulls back instinctively as every alarm in her head begins screaming.

SYDNEY

What are you doing?

RUSSELL

I wanted a taste of the sweetness.

His tone is completely different now—lower, rougher, with an edge that makes her skin crawl.

SYDNEY

I don't do that on first dates.

Russell's eyes fill with something dark and ugly—lust mixed with something far more dangerous. Sydney's heart begins racing as adrenaline floods her system.

RUSSELL

Well, how do you get down then?

His words drip with a crude implication.

SYDNEY

Maybe you should leave.

Her voice is steady, but her hand moves slowly toward her purse.

He quickly locks the doors with a decisive click that sounds like a prison gate slamming shut.

Sydney shivers, praying that he doesn't hurt her—at least not in the way she suspects he wants.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
Russell... Whatever you're
thinking, please don't do it.

RUSSELL
How do you get down?

His voice takes on a sing-song quality that's somehow more terrifying than shouting.

SYDNEY
Russell, listen to me—

RUSSELL
Do you love playing the victim?
Locking yourself in all that pity?

Before she can respond, he grabs her by the back of the head with bruising force, pulling out a knife. She trembles as he presses the blade to her throat, feeling the cold metal against her skin like a promise of violence.

RUSSELL (CONT'D)
Give me what I want, or I'll treat
you like the others. Your choice,
sweetheart.

As he rubs the knife gently across her skin in a mockery of tenderness, Sydney slips her hand into her purse with practiced stealth, letting her fingers close around the taser she's been carrying religiously.

She closes her eyes and nods, playing the part he expects.

RUSSELL (CONT'D)
So, you'll give me what I want?

She nods again, and he presses the knife harder, drawing a thin line of blood that runs warm down her neck. Sydney tenses, letting a low, frightened shriek escape—the sound every predator wants to hear from their prey.

RUSSELL (CONT'D)
Say the words. Hearing it makes it
so much better.

SYDNEY
(Whispering)
Take me, Russell. I was wrong for
leading you on.

RUSSELL
That's a good bitch.

He leans in to lick the blood from her neck with nauseating intimacy.

RUSSELL (CONT'D)
Just lay back, and I'll handle the
rest.

Just before his lips can reach hers, he screams—a high, agonized sound. The taser sends electricity coursing through his body, and he falls back into the driver's seat, reflexively slashing her throat in his convulsions—but not deep enough to kill.

She presses the taser between his legs and holds it there, watching with cold satisfaction as he convulses helplessly. While he's down, she grabs the bottle from the floor and raises it high.

SYDNEY
You bastard!

She snarls, bringing it down against his head with all the fury she's been carrying for three months.

EXT. THE PIER - LATER

Russell's truck is parked by the pier, where waves lap peacefully against the shore. The moon hangs full and bright overhead, illuminating the scene like a spotlight.

The hatch of the truck is open, revealing Russell lying bound in the back, bleeding, gagged and groaning as consciousness slowly returns.

Sydney is standing in front of him with a combat knife in hand—the same type that killed William, though Russell doesn't know that yet. The blade catches the moonlight, with its deep ridges designed for maximum damage.

SYDNEY
You couldn't leave well enough
alone, could you?

He mutters something incomprehensible through his gag, struggling against bonds that won't give way.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

At first, I thought you had potential. You were a gentleman, and sex seemed like the last thing on your mind. But you showed me you're no different from all the others who took my first love from me.

She presses the knife's tip to his face, just below his left eye, applying enough pressure to dimple the skin without breaking it... Yet.

He turns his head frantically, mumbling pleas through his gag that she ignores. She grabs his head with her free hand, and holds it still with surprising strength.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Now, you said you'd treat me like the others. I don't know exactly what that means, but I have some ideas.

With one swift motion, she cleanly slices his ear off. His muffled screams fill the air, echoing off the water like the cries of dying gulls. She laughs—a sound devoid of warmth or sanity.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

We're about to have some fun before I kill you.

She steps back to admire her handiwork as blood streams down his neck.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

By the time I'm done with you, you'll scream louder than that. You see... One thing I've noticed about men like you is the dick complex you all seem to have.

Sydney steps back and raises her dress, lowering her panties, revealing what Russell—like so many others—never saw coming. Despite his pain, the sight makes him vomit violently, though the gag muffles the sound as he stares in shock and disgust.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

I didn't need surgery because my man loved every part of me. That's what got him killed, you know.

(MORE)

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

People like you couldn't understand
how a man of his caliber could love
a transgender woman. But enough
talk about the past.

Pulling her panties back up, she climbs into the back of the truck, and sits on his legs, cutting through his belt with the knife. His muffled screams grow more desperate as understanding dawns.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

You're about to be famous. Because
congratulations—you're number
twenty."

She presses the button to close the hatch, and as it closes with a final click, sealing them in darkness together, his screams fade into the soundproof confines of the truck.

The moon continues to shine down on the peaceful pier, illuminating nothing but shadows and the gentle lapping of waves against the shore.

BLACK SCREEN:

TITLE CARD: I AM GOD

"Parents are God in the eyes of a child."

~Bernard Mersier~

FADE IN:

INT. CONFESSIONAL BOOTH - NIGHT

Inside of the confessional booth, fifty-year-old Father Taylor shifts in his seat, and the faint creak echoes like a whisper from the grave. His baby blue eyes catch the sparse light, gleaming against the backdrop of his salt-and-pepper hair. He blesses himself with a deliberate motion as his fingers trace the cross over his chest, exhaling deeply as if drawing strength from the shadows.

FATHER TAYLOR

"My son. Although our Father
created us in his image, he knew we
would never be perfect. Sinning is
wrong, but sometimes we can't help
ourselves. So I ask you, my son...
Do you believe God will forgive you
for your sins?

The silence that follows is a void that's terrifying in its depth. Father Taylor leans forward as confusion etches lines across his brow. He needs an answer, craving the ritual of absolution.

FATHER TAYLOR

Did you hear me, my son? Do you
believe—

A shotgun's blast explodes through the lattice screen, reducing Father Taylor's head to a spray of blood and brains, painting the booth in a grotesque mural. Fragments of skull and thoughts cling to the wood like accusations.

From the shadows, an unseen person emerges, cloaked in darkness, and black leather gloves gripping the weapon. With casual disdain, the person tosses a newspaper onto the priest's headless corpse. The headline screams in bold, unforgiving print.

INSERT PAPER

Father Taylor was found not guilty after being accused of molesting a ten-year-old boy.

INT. THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Brendan is sitting on the edge of a queen-size bed, wearing all-black, with his long hair falling like a curtain over his emotionless green eyes, taking a drag from his cigarette. It's uncertain about the emotions running through the man in his late-twenties.

BRENDAN (V.O.)

They say life is continuous energy.
Who knows if that's true, but the
energy inside me—good or bad—it's
beautiful.

His gaze shifts to the side. The torso of a woman with fair skin and short black hair hangs off the bed, and her head is barely attached by a thin strip of flesh, dangling like a broken promise.

Brendan reaches over, pulling her head back with care. He extinguishes his cigarette on the stump of her neck, grinding it into the raw, weeping flesh, and then, he lowers the head gently, patting her as if soothing a loyal dog. Rising, he leaves the room without a backward glance.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The room is swarming with police officers as flashes from cameras capture the horror. They shake their heads, murmuring curses under their breath while searching for clues that might explain the inexplicable.

BRENDAN (V.O.)

The law is a farce. A parade of colorful puppets pretending to serve and protect. They make you think you're safe, but they can't explain their incompetence.

One officer pulls back the blanket, revealing the woman's dismembered body in all its mutilated glory. The others cover their mouths, fighting the urge to vomit.

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

A death well deserved, since she helped that pedophile priest abduct children. Now, some would say I'm wrong because I'm not 'God'. Well, if God stood by his convictions, the world wouldn't need me.

CUT TO:

INT. BRENDAN'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - LATER

Brendan is walking naked down a dark hallway in his home, and his footsteps are silent on the cold floor. A faint glow emanates from the bathroom door, drawing him like a moth to a flame.

He steps inside, and the chill of the tiles bite at his skin. The mirror on the medicine cabinet is defaced with a painted image of Jesus—eyes closed, weeping tears of crimson.

BRENDAN (V.O.)

Followers of 'God's word' judge you, but they're the ones defiling it. Irony. Jesus weeps for the mindless who praise him without understanding why. I don't believe in his words, so I have no use for his tears.

He opens the cabinet and scans the array of mental medications lined up like soldiers in a futile war.

BRENDAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
If this God everyone believes in is
real, then why am I still alive? Is
it because good can't exist without
evil? If so, what does that say
about God?

Selecting a bottle, he twists off the cap and swallows four
pills dry. The bitterness is a familiar companion.

BRENDAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
People should believe and know one
thing. Death is inevitable.

He takes a seat on the toilet, and covers his face as the
pills begin their slow dissolve into his bloodstream.
Memories begin clawing their way to the surface, dragging
him back to his childhood in the 1980s.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - MORNING

Young and innocent, ten year old Brendan is sitting between
his parents, Sophia and Darwin in the packed Catholic
church. Their smiles mask the rot within, similar to the
pristine stained-glass windows. Hymns swell around them,
while the congregation is lost in praise.

BRENDAN (V.O.)
We were the perfect ideal,
American, God-fearing family in the
eyes of the congregation and the
community. But if they were to look
behind the closed door, they would
see the truth.

As the music fades, their hands slide onto his thighs—too
intimate, too wrong. Brendan's uneasy expression goes
unnoticed amid the worshippers' fervor.

CUT TO:

INT. SOPHIA AND DARWIN BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Sophia and Darwin's bedroom drips with religious décor:
crucifixes on walls, statues of saints watching with hollow
eyes. Young Brendan, only in his boxers, is shackled to a
metal bed frame, with his struggles remaining futile against
the chains.

Sophia and Darwin enter in white robes, with their faces
serene yet menacing. Sophia is holding a goblet, and Darwin
is holding a pair of scissors.

She sets the goblet on the side table and then places a soothing hand on Brendan's face, halting his movements. She caresses him as if he were her lover, not her son.

SOPHIA

Just relax, Brendan. This is what God wants. You love our God, right?

He nods slowly as fear knots in his gut.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

That's my big boy. Now, remember. No matter how aggressive this can get, this is for God, so we'll be welcomed into his kingdom.

Darwin approaches, opening the scissors, placing them at the hem of Brendan's boxers, ready to cut. Brendan tenses up, but Sophia gently cuffs his face, relaxing him once more.

She reaches for the goblet, caressing it in an orgasmic manner as Darwin snips away at the fabric, exposing him.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

When the time comes, we'll collect the juices God has blessed us with inside the goblet that we'll drink from. Are you ready?

Brendan closes his eyes, nodding uncertainly.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

You'll be reborn in his name, and then you can truly say you're a man of God.

She leans down, kissing his forehead. They shed their robes, revealing naked bodies of delusion.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

Enjoy yourself, Brendan. And keep one thing in mind. You can use your teeth on your mother. Pain and love mix perfectly.

Moans fill the room—Sophia's ecstasy, Brendan's uneasy grunts.

BRENDAN (V.O.)

This went on for years. Countless threesomes. One-on-one sessions. All in the name of God.

(MORE)

BRENDAN (CONT'D)
But when I began reading and
understood the words, I showed my
parents the error of their ways.

INT. THE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Rain hammers against the windows as Sophia stands at the sink in lingerie, washing dishes. Teenage Brendan enters with wet hair clinging to his face, and his eyes burning with hate. He approaches the table, and pulls the butcher knife from the carved turkey, slipping it into his back pocket. Slowly, he closes the distance.

TEENAGE BRENDAN
Are we having our usual group
session, or will it be me and you?

She turns, smiling, stepping into him, touching his face seductively.

SOPHIA
You're old enough to make that
decision on your own.

TEENAGE BRENDAN
(He moistens his lips)
Well, I'd like to try something new
with you.

Turned on, she leans in for a kiss, but he turns his head.

SOPHIA
What's wrong?

TEENAGE BRENDAN
(He kisses her cheek)
Nothing. Just let me do this.

SOPHIA
(Smiles)
I'll be submissive, master.

TEENAGE BRENDAN
Thank you. Stand up against the
sink.

She winks, complying, placing her hands on the counter, slowly parting her legs. He presses against her, eliciting a moan as she feels his hardness. His left hand wraps around her throat.

TEENAGE BRENDAN (CONT'D)

There's no love deeper than what
'God' has for you, but, right now,
you'll experience a love that 'God'
himself won't be able to fathom.
Are you ready?"

She moans as if she's being penetrated.

SOPHIA

Yes. Yes. Give it to me. Give it to
me, hard and deep. Make mama-

Her words dissolve into a shriek as he plunges the knife
between her legs. He covers her mouth, while he continues to
stab her repeatedly. Blood spills from her thighs as the
blade tears her flesh.

TEENAGE BRENDAN

I don't know if this is
pleasurable, but this is how I felt
when my father raped me as a child.
You two speak about 'God,' like
what happened is something he would
condone. Your 'God' is a fucking
coward.

Her eyes roll back, and her whimpers fade to silence. He
snatches out the knife, and slings her body aside. Staring
at the blood pooling, a slight smirk crosses his lips before
he looks up.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. SOPHIA AND DARWIN BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

In the bedroom, Darwin is sitting naked and sweaty, watching
a homemade video of their depravities on the floor model
television, while masturbating. The door creaks open, and
Brendan is standing there with the bloody knife in hand and
ice in his veins.

Darwin, lost in pleasure, doesn't notice him until Brendan
grabs his head, and places the knife on his throat.

TEENAGE BRENDAN

You'll never get another orgasm at
my expense.

Darwin's eyes get wide.

DARWIN

Bren-

The slash is deep, aggressive. Blood pours as Darwin gasps his last. Brendan lets the body slump, and then spits on him before tossing the knife. Tears form as he watches the screen showing the horror he went through.

DARWIN (ON TELEVISION)
That's right, son. Punish her for
disobeying God's Word.

A single tear falls as Brendan kicks through the television screen.

TEENAGE BRENDAN
You two made me realize I am God,
and you defiled me.

END FLASHBACK:

INT. BRENDAN'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Back in the present, Brendan is still sitting in the bathroom, removing his hands from his face, revealing reddened skin. After a few sniffles, a low laugh bubbles up.

BRENDAN
I called the police on myself.
You're probably wondering, why did
they release me? Well, when you
have a good lawyer with videos
showing what you went through,
freedom is the only option. But I
did spend a few months in an
asylum.

INT. BRENDAN'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Heavy metal blares under flickering light, with blood-stained S&M tools adorning the walls like trophies. Brendan is sitting naked at a desk, showing off his back tattoos.

INSERT BACK

I live to kill. in bold calligraphy, surrounded by demonic images.

BRENDAN (V.O.)
If people took responsibility for
their actions or thought about the
consequences, I wouldn't have to
judge people. People can't deny, 'I
am God.' I can take and create life
whenever I please.

He stretches, cracking the knuckles on his massive hands, and then stands and crosses the room.

INSERT DESK

On the desk lies an open book bound in human flesh, and on the pages are carved sadistic thoughts and pictures. Beside it, lies a bloody switchblade with skin clinging to it.

In the corner, a beautiful woman in her early twenties is trapped in a homemade pillory with her hands shackled to the floor. Whimpers escape her ball-gagged mouth as blood and saliva drips, and tears stream from her big blue eyes.

Brendan steps before her.

BRENDAN

Are you enjoying this as much as I
am?

She shakes her head no, as her whimpers intensify. He laughs sadistically.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

Isn't this your fantasy?

He picks up a jar filled with her teeth.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

This was in case you thought about
biting me.

Setting it down, he caresses her face.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

Do you wanna go home?

She nods yes, pleading through tears.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

I'll let you go home after you do
one thing.

He steps off for a hot second, and when he returns, he's holding a black nine-millimeter, engraved with demonic inscriptions. Her whimpers become muffled screams.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

Calm down. Calm down, or I'll put a
fucking bullet in your head! Shut
up!

She goes silent.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)
That's a good girl. I said I'd let
you go home, and I will. All you
have to do is eat your meal.

He presses the barrel to her head, removing the gag. Before
she can speak, he forces himself into her mouth.
Unsatisfied, he cocks the hammer.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)
Bitch, you better get to work. Eat
your meal!

Her cries mixed with the sounds of her giving him a blowjob
makes his moans grow louder.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)
That's right. Go faster. Go faster,
baby. Come on. I know you can do
it.

Gripping her head, he thrusts deeper.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)
Yes! Yes, you're almost free! I'm
almost there! I'm almost—

He climaxes, pulling the trigger. Her brains splatter. He
releases her, catching his breath, staring at the blood.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)
I told you I'd let you go home.
Hell has a special place for
whores.

He walks away with an evil laugh echoing.

BRENDAN (V.O.)
The only form of heaven you'll
experience is the death I'll give
you. Your hell is being allowed to
live for your unpunished sins. Your
'God' is nothing if he'll always
forgive you with blessings.

BLACK SCREEN:

TITLE CARD: EVERLASTING IMAGE

FADE IN:

INT. JEANQUÁL'S HOUSE - THE BATHROOM - NIGHT

Candles are illuminating the bathroom, casting a warm glow on Jeanquál as he reclines in an old-fashioned cast iron tub filled with milk. In his early-thirties, with slicked-back auburn hair, arched dark eyebrows, and piercing blue eyes, he muses about beginnings and endings.

JEANQUÁL (V.O.)

(French accent)

Everyone has a beginning. When you enter the middle, you really don't care about the beginning. That's the case for most people. I need to know the beginning, so I'll know how to treat the woman who deserves my love. The taste of a woman's breath coating your mouth is indescribable. When her eyes taste every inch of your body, it's breath-taking as the texture of her lips speak about her life. Jealousy can consume you, but you enjoy drinking the glory, knowing you're her last. That's why I have to know the beginning of a woman's story.

He rises from the tub with the milk dripping from his hairless torso, moving to the sink. As he meets his reflection, he rubs the milk into his skin with a provocative smirk, thinking about the women he's been with.

JEANQUÁL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I've had my share of women, bathing in the joys of their happiness. But leaving my everlasting image seared into their souls is what matters.

Leaving the bathroom, he glides down a dimly lit hallway lined with paintings, which he considers fleeting obsessions. He enters his all-white bedroom, where a large mirror has replaced the ceiling. He gets on his king-size bed, and places his hands behind his head as he continues his thoughts.

JEANQUÁL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Finding the perfect piece is hard. Just when you think you did, you'll see one that's better. I feel the same way about women. They say there's no perfect woman, but that's not true.

(MORE)

JEANQUÁL (CONT'D)

The key is to find the one who believes she's perfect for you and then make her prove why.

INT. JEANQUÁL'S OFFICE - MORNING

Jeanquál is wearing a vibrant lavender suit that contrasts with the muted art he's standing in front of.

JEANQUÁL (V.O.)

The only thing a woman truly wants is love. You see, women are like art. Some are vibrant. Some are only worth a glance. And certain women have a natural beauty that only a non-shallow person will notice. It makes me wonder why certain men become enraged when a woman turns them down. Just accept you weren't what she was looking for and carry on with life. In the same breath, I don't care why women turn other men down. I just know if I see a woman I want, I can accommodate her to get what I need.

He goes behind his desk, and takes a seat.

His secretary, Maggie, mid-twenties, enters with a stiff long brown ponytail and her eyes 'alight with lust.'

He looks at her with a slight smile.

JEANQUÁL

Yes?

MAGGIE

Your client said he's changing his appointment from 1:00 to 3:00.

JEANQUÁL

Thanks for the reminder, but he already called me with the information.

MAGGIE

Oh. Oh, okay, well... I was reminding you.

JEANQUÁL

Thank you.

Maggie continues staring at him, while he looks at her confused.

JEANQUÁL (CONT'D)
Is there anything else?

MAGGIE
Can I ask you something?

JEANQUÁL
Shoot.

MAGGIE
Do you find me attractive?

JEANQUÁL
(Soft laugh)
'If you have to ask, you shouldn't be in the establishment?' Have you ever heard of that saying?

MAGGIE
What does that have to do with what I asked?

JEANQUÁL
Well, it's the same thing. If you're asking a man if he finds you attractive, more than likely, you know you're not his taste. Honestly, yes, you're my type. Yes, you're very attractive. You're just missing what I look for in a woman.

MAGGIE
And what would that be?

JEANQUÁL
What would you gain from going on a date with me?

MAGGIE
I am certainly not trying to sleep with you. That's the furthest thing on my mind. I'm just—

JEANQUÁL
You're lying. Sleeping with me is your goal. That's why you asked the question. Maggie, there's a man out there who would love to be with you, but I'm not him. Don't take offense. Just reevaluate your approach.

With no further words, Maggie makes her way out of the room.

JEANQUÁL (V.O.)

Do you see what I mean? Maggie is what I would call a vibrant painting. If she could handle the change I'll bring into her life, I would give her the attention she deserves. Maggie easily traps men because of her looks. They think they got over on her, not seeing that she has already got over them and moved on after getting what she wanted. Ah, searching for companionship using sex will always result in failure. But when you gain trust, that ties everything together for a complete relationship.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MALL - AFTERNOON

Jeanquál is sitting alone in the mall at a table, eating Chinese food with a beverage beside his container. While eating, he scans the women walking around.

JEANQUÁL (V.O.)

Look at the lovely flowers that their men didn't nourish right. You can tell by a woman's walk and how she talks if she's been nourished right. I wish I could have them all is what every man dreams about, although the majority of them are lying. If you've been paying attention, you would know I just lied. I can't just submit my love to every woman if she's not willing to accept the change I'll bring.

He gathers his trash, stands up, and then walks over to a trash can, throwing it away. When he turns around, a voluptuous Caucasian woman in her mid-twenties with red box braids, wearing a crop top and skimpy shorts is standing in front of him, blushing.

WOMAN

How are you doing today?

JEANQUÁL

I can't complain. And yourself?

WOMAN

I feel the same way. I just noticed you from afar, and I had to speak.

JEANQUÁL

Really? Why is that?

WOMAN

A handsome man. Well dressed. Eating alone. You look like you need a good woman in your life.

JEANQUÁL

How do you know I don't already have a wife?

She looks at his hand for a wedding ring.

WOMAN

Where's your ring?

JEANQUÁL

Would it make a difference if I was wearing it?

WOMAN

Of course.

JEANQUÁL

It wouldn't. Considering I highly doubt you were looking to see if I was wearing a ring from afar.

(Laughs)

I do give you credit for trying.

He laughs, walking off, shaking his head, continuing through the mall, observing the women with a smirk. He comes to a designer suit store, shrugging his shoulders as he walks inside.

Jennie, the cashier, is in her late-twenties, slim with long blond hair and a porcelain face of perfection. She catches a glimpse of Jeanquál, and likes what she sees.

She adjusts her clothes, and comes from behind the counter, making her way towards him.

While Jeanquál scans through the suits, Jennie comes up behind him.

JENNIE

That would look perfect on you.

Jeanquál keeps his eyes on the suits.

JEANQUÁL

What makes you say that?

JENNIE

Broad shoulders. Thick arms. Why wouldn't it?

JEANQUÁL

(Snickers)

Do you think so? You haven't fully registered my face, but you think this is perfect for me? Are you trying to sucker me in with your sales pitch, or can you truly stand by the words you spoke?

JENNIE

Apparently, I noticed your face first. Does that answer your question?

Jeanquál turns around, looking at her with a slight smirk.

JEANQUÁL

Well, to be perfectly honest, it wouldn't look good on me because it's cheap.

JENNIE

Cheap? This is an \$8,000 suit.

JEANQUÁL

And the one I'm wearing now is Twenty-thousand.

JENNIE

So, why are you—

JEANQUÁL

I like to compare. On a better note. 9875 Brink Road. My name is Jeanquál.

JENNIE

Jeanquál. Is that French?

JEANQUÁL

Yes.

JENNIE

Very nice. But why are you giving me your address?

JEANQUÁL

I'm cutting straight to the point.
You said you weren't giving me a
sales pitch, so it's obvious you
want me to make you dinner.

JENNIE

I love the cocky attitude.

JEANQUÁL

Cocky and confidence are two
completely different things. If I
thought you were easy, I would've
suggested meeting at a cheap motel.

(He caresses her face)

Dinner will be ready by eight.
Don't come later than 8:20. I
wouldn't want the food to start
getting cold.

JENNIE

So, you have that much trust to
give a random woman your address?

JEANQUÁL

I look forward to seeing you later.
You can tell me more about yourself
when you arrive.

Jeanquál walks off, leaving Jennie blushing.

CUT TO:

INT. JEANQUÁL'S HOUSE - THE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The warmth from the fire in the fireplace and the candles on
the table gives the room a romantic glow.

A champagne bottle, champagne glasses, a bowl of sliced
strawberries and their meal, which is lamb chops, squash,
and asparagus are beautifully arranged on the table.
Footsteps are heard.

JENNIE (O.S.)

This is a lovely home. What do you
do?

JEANQUÁL (O.S.)

Homes don't have genuine beauty.
They change the moment a flaw is
seen. But, I'm an art consultant."

The two enter the room. Jeanquál is wearing a plum button-up shirt with matching slacks, and Jennie is wearing a fitted black dress with costume jewels embroidered on it.

JENNIE

That explains why you have all of the paintings.

JEANQUÁL

They change at the end of every month. As I said, you always need something new, until you find the perfect fit.

The two walk to the table, and Jeanquál pulls Jennie's chair out, allowing her to sit.

JENNIE

Is that why you invited me to your house? So you can have something new to try and get in bed.

Jeanquál picks up the champagne bottle, and pours her a glass.

JEANQUÁL

Would you like a strawberry?

JENNIE

Clever way of avoiding my question. Yes, I'll have one.

JEANQUÁL

I never avoid anything. Manners always come before satisfaction.

JENNIE

Oh really?

Jeanquál uses the tongs to remove a strawberry from the bowl, placing it in her champagne.

JEANQUÁL

Yes.

He extends the glass, and Jennie takes it, taking a sip.

JENNIE

Hm.

Jeanquál takes the champagne bottle with him to his seat, and pours himself a glass before taking his seat, locking his eyes on Jennie.

JEANQUÁL

Who made you believe men only want sex from women?

JENNIE

Why can't I naturally feel that way?

JEANQUÁL

No woman naturally feels all men are the same. She either has father issues or was taught to think that way. Or... Even if she's been with one man or had her fair share. One of them created the thought. Now...

He cuts a piece of his lamb chop.

JEANQUÁL (CONT'D)

Which is it?

JENNIE

Well... He wasn't my first love, but he was my first.

JEANQUÁL

Not only did he uproot your delicate flower, he took your rational view about men.

JENNIE

That's a polite way of putting it.

JEANQUÁL

Agreed. I know how you feel. My first love tarnished me, but I didn't allow it to consume me with negative thoughts about women.

JENNIE

What did it create inside of you?

JEANQUÁL

It heightened my desire to help women who are seeking love. It also helped me learn how to approach every woman I encounter.

JENNIE

Is that right?

JEANQUÁL

Let's exchange stories while we eat. As I said in the store, you don't want your food to get cold.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JEANQUÁL'S HOUSE - THE DINING ROOM - LATER

An hour goes by and the only things that remain on the table are the champagne bottle and bowl of strawberries.

JENNIE

I must say, you're an interesting man, Jeanquál.

JEANQUÁL

Not as interesting as you, Jennie. I'm glad we had our talk. My first thought about you wasn't far off from what I was thinking.

JENNIE

What were you thinking?

JEANQUÁL

You're a woman who is seeking true pleasure. But now I know you want true love, and sexual satisfaction.

JENNIE

I like where this is going. What makes you think I've never been satisfied sexually?

JEANQUÁL

You were probably close, but unfortunately, it fell to the wayside right when you were about to reach it.

JENNIE

What makes you say that?

JEANQUÁL

After listening to your stories, it's clear that you tried to reach this experience with the wrong men.

JENNIE

Let me guess. You're the right man, huh?

JEANQUÁL

I'm just Jeanquál. A man showing you a lovely evening. I can pose a question, and that will give you the answer you're seeking.

JENNIE

What's the question?

JEANQUÁL

(Takes a sip)

Do you know what ignites a man's loins to sleep with a woman?

JENNIE

(Seductive laugh)

A man's loins? I didn't expect to hear that one.

JEANQUÁL

You won't expect the actual answer once you respond.

JENNIE

Aside from seeing a beautiful body and five minutes of his own enjoyment, no. No, I can't say I know the answer.

JEANQUÁL

The everlasting image of his orgasm seared into her eyes.

JENNIE

(Takes a sip, wide eyed)

I'm sorry, what did you say?

JEANQUÁL

The everlasting image a man sears on the back of a woman's eyes. That's what he desires.

JENNIE

That's hard to swallow. Men love more than one position, so how will he leave his image if the position isn't missionary?

JEANQUÁL

Your response can prevent you from finding out. I say this because...

(Takes a sip)

There's a question you should have asked first."

The two keep their eyes locked on each other.

JENNIE

...What question is that?

JEANQUÁL

How does a man know he'll make a woman have an orgasm at the exact moment he reaches his?

JENNIE

How does he know?

He stands up from his chair, with his eyes still locked on her, moving towards her with his fingertips barely touching the linen on the table. When he reaches her, he places a comforting hand on her shoulder, and with the other hand, he gently places it under her chin, making her look up at him.

A tear prepares to fall from her eye, and he quickly places a finger under her eye, halting it.

JEANQUÁL

The moisture in her eyes. That's why I couldn't allow the teardrop to fall. Every drop coming from a woman's body should be conjoined with the man she's sleeping with. As far as positions, well..."

He helps her to her feet, and then steps behind her, holding her by the waist, nestling his face against her neck as she closes her eyes.

JEANQUÁL (CONT'D)

You can give a woman thrusts, listening to what you believe are genuine moans.

His grip tightens, but remains passionate, slowly moving his hands up her sides, stopping underneath her breasts.

JEANQUÁL (CONT'D)

A woman can straddle a man and look down at him as if she's conquering him with her warmth, prepared to sear her image into his eyes, but his eyes are closed, enjoying the sensation."

He moves his hands up to her breasts, and cuffs them just enough to make her moan before continuing up to her shoulders.

He massages them for a moment, and then glides his hands down her arms to her hands, clutching them while softly kissing her neck.

He releases one of her hands, turning her around, grabbing hold of her waist while keeping the other hand clutched.

JEANQUÁL (CONT'D)

The two positions can be flipped to reflect the desires of the people engaging in sexual desires. A woman can ride a man sideways, backwards, and truthfully, if you're standing up, she's still riding him. A man can have a woman on her knees, on the side, or lying flat on her stomach, and it's still doggy-style. But when it comes to missionary..."

He applies a soft kiss on her neck.

She tries to kiss him, but he moves back.

JENNIE

What's wrong?

JEANQUÁL

I can't kiss you now. Kissing you now will ruin the connection.

JENNIE

But you said the wetness of a woman shouldn't go to waste. What are you going to do about the dampness in my panties?

JEANQUÁL

A delicatessen I'll enjoy before we engage. Considering I don't see a pantyline or signs of a thong, I hope none of my pleasures stained the chair. Now, shall I continue, or are we ending this night with a mere kiss and good conversation?

JENNIE

Do you promise to fulfill all of what you're saying?

JEANQUÁL

Only if you climax with me.

JENNIE

I can do that if you deliver.

JEANQUÁL

It's already delivered. My entrance inside of you will open the package you yearn for.

JENNIE

Why can't we do it right here?
Let's see if you can validate your words.

JEANQUÁL

The dining room is for meals only.
Consuming a woman should only be performed in the bedroom, so her essence can fill you up as her body constricts around you without restraints.

(Delicate kiss)

That's how a man can watch as the image sears before she rests.

He grips her left thigh, lifting it up so it's properly resting on his waist. Jennie moans softly, enjoying the moment.

JENNIE

What do you want to do to me?

JEANQUÁL

I can only do what you allow me to do.

JENNIE

We should be heading to your room.

JEANQUÁL

As we should.

He releases her thigh, and walks towards the spiral staircase heading upstairs, with her following behind him. As they walk up the stairs, she admires the various paintings on the wall.

JENNIE

These are some nice pieces.

JEANQUÁL

They're decent. It's the value that makes them stand out, not the creation.

JENNIE

So if you don't like the work, why did you buy them?

JEANQUÁL

They inspire me with the piece I'm creating.

JENNIE

I would love to see it.

They reach the top of the stairs, and he pauses at the first door that's already open.

JEANQUÁL

In due time.

(Extends his hand)

Shall we?

He leads her into an all-black room lit by Roman candles, with more artwork on the walls and a king-size bed covered by black satin sheets.

Jeanquál takes his shirt off as he follows behind her, approaching the bed. She prepares to sit, and he quickly grabs her hand, turning her around.

JEANQUÁL (CONT'D)

It's not proper for a woman to just lie on the bed. She should be properly stimulated, and then the man should place her on the bed.

JENNIE

Well, let the stimulation commence.

They engage in a passionate kiss. She digs her nails into his back while he places his hands under her dress, caressing her thighs.

The deeper they get into it, he lifts one of her legs up on his waist. She kisses him deeper, hopping up, wrapping her legs around him.

While holding her up, he begins kissing her neck, increasing her moans and the grip on his back.

JEANQUÁL

(Seductive tone)

Are you ready for me to lay you down?

JENNIE
 (Moaning)
 Yes. Yes.

He places her down, and then gets down on his knees, placing one of her legs on his shoulder, causing her to grab hold of his head.

Just when she thinks she's about to receive some oral pleasure, he places the other leg on his shoulder, and lifts her up just enough to slam her forward on the bed.

Her scream fills the room after being impaled by the minispears placed under the sheets. As she slowly dies, Jeanquál looks on with a smile, slowly leaning down into her face.

She coughs up blood, and it lands on his face. He delightfully licks it off before giving her an intimate kiss, pulling back, smiling.

JEANQUÁL
 Your pitiful search for love ends
 now, my dove. My love will be the
 last thing you remember before your
 soul moves on with a piece of me
 with you. But don't worry...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JEANQUÁL'S HOUSE - THE BASEMENT - NIGHT

In his grim basement, Jeanquál is sitting naked in front of an easel, looking at a picture of a woman he's creating using the irises of the women he killed.

JEANQUÁL (V.O.)
 My beautiful women joined together,
 creating my masterpiece.

Surrounding him are various women cemented into the walls, with their eyes missing.

JEANQUÁL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I love you all.

BLACK SCREEN:

TITLE CARD: STRYCHNINE

FADE IN:

INT. THE APARTMENT - NIGHT

The apartment reeks of fear and Pine-Sol, a combination familiar as breathing since the outbreak began four months ago. Marco is on the sofa, with his twenty-three-year old frame coiled with tension, gnawing at the skin around his thumbnail—a nervous habit evolved from occasional fidgeting to obsessive self-mutilation since the first reports of 'S&M' began flooding the airwaves.

On the television, a reporter stands behind a hospital's reinforced glass partition, with her face obscured by layers of protective gear making her look more like a hazmat technician than a journalist. The digital feed crackles with interference, making her voice sound distant and otherworldly, as if she's broadcasting from another dimension entirely.

REPORTER (ON THE TELEVISION)

The deadly pathogen known as 'S&M' continues to claim lives at what experts are now calling an extinction-level event. The acronym, coined by witnesses who described victims enduring slow, agonizing, miserable deaths, has become synonymous with humanity's greatest nightmare.

Marco's hand trembles as he raises a glass of Remy to his lips. It does nothing to calm the ice-cold dread that's taken permanent residence in his chest, which is a living thing feeding on every news report, every statistic, every horrifying detail emerging from the medical community. Four months. Four months since patient zero collapsed in a Detroit emergency room, bleeding from every orifice, and the world's brightest minds are no closer to understanding the virus than they were when it first announced its presence to humanity.

REPORTER (ON THE TELEVISION) (CONT'D)

Medical professionals worldwide remain baffled by the pathogen's origins and presentation. Unlike previous pandemics, 'S&M' presents no identifiable symptoms until its terminal phase. The virus activates randomly within infected hosts, and once it does, death follows within minutes. The CDC strongly advises anyone in the vicinity of an active case to evacuate immediately and seek decontamination.

The apartment door opens, and like routine, Trudy enters without a care in the world about what's going on. At twenty-one, she possesses the kind of magnetic confidence that seems to deflect the world's chaos through sheer force of will. Her perfectly styled hair catches the light as she moves with her form fitting crop top and leggings showcasing a body she sculpted through countless hours at the gym.

TRUDY

What's going on, baby?

MARCO

(Holds up a hand)

Hold up.

REPORTER (ON THE TELEVISION)

The airborne nature of 'S&M' makes it highly contagious through respiratory droplets. However, recent studies indicate the highest probability of transmission occurs through intimate physical contact, particularly sexual intercourse. Standard protective measures have proven completely ineffective against the pathogen's unique molecular structure.

Trudy rolls her eyes with theatrical exaggeration, kicking off her designer sneakers.

TRUDY

Why are you watching this garbage?

Marco fumbles for the remote like it's a lifeline as his fingers slick with sweat stabs the mute button, plunging the room into a silence that feels more oppressive than the reporter's dire warnings. The reporter's mouth continues to move soundlessly, and her gestures become more animated as she delivers news civilization isn't ready to hear.

MARCO

What do you mean, why?

Marco turns to face her, with his brown eyes wide with the kind of disbelief reserved for moments when reality becomes too surreal to process.

MARCO (CONT'D)

They still haven't found any symptoms for that virus, and people are randomly dropping dead.

Trudy's scoff is so dismissive, further implying she doesn't care about the situation.

TRUDY

You don't believe this bullshit, do you?

MARCO

Thousands of people have died unexpected, random, gruesome deaths. Bodies are literally dissolving from the inside out. Fuck yeah, I believe it.

Trudy clicks her tongue against the roof of her mouth, rolling her eyes in a gesture that's become her signature response to anything she deems unworthy of her precious attention.

TRUDY

Come on, baby. It's just like they did with COVID. A lot of people died, and that's sad, but look at what happened after the initial scare. They came up with a vaccine, and everything went back to normal.

MARCO

This isn't COVID. With COVID, they had patients to run tests on, symptoms to track with a progression to study. They have no idea what the early symptoms could be for S&M because once it activates, you're dead within minutes. There's no time to study it, no time to understand it. No time to even scream.

TRUDY

I still think it's a bunch of bullshit.

Trudy moves toward the kitchen with the casual indifference of someone discussing the weather forecast.

MARCO

Why?

TRUDY

If this virus is as serious as
they're making it out to be,
wouldn't you think every hospital
and clinic in the country would be
completely overrun?

She opens the refrigerator and pulls out a bottle of water,
twisting off the cap with movements that seem choreographed.

TRUDY (CONT'D)

I mean, where are all the sick
people?

MARCO

Did you not hear what I just said?
There are no early symptoms. People
don't know they're infected until
they're literally dying.

TRUDY

Okay, but if people are so
terrified, every hospital and
clinic should still be packed with
worried people getting tested.

She comes back to him taking a long drink that seems
deliberately provocative.

MARCO

Tested for what? There is no test!
You can't detect something that
doesn't show symptoms. And even if
you could, what would be the point?
There's no treatment, no cure, no
hope. You just wait to die, or
possibly catch it from someone who
doesn't even know they have it.

Trudy considers this for a moment, but her expression makes
Marco's skin crawl.

TRUDY

As cruel as this sounds, yes.
People should be lining up anyway.
So it's airborne?

MARCO

It's COVID multiplied by a hundred.
If it's in your system, it seeps
through your pores, your breath,
your sweat.

(MORE)

MARCO (CONT'D)

If you have it and touch something, and then someone else touches that same surface, they're as good as fucked. It's like the virus turns your entire body into a biological weapon.

TRUDY

Hm. Well, people should learn to only fuck with one person or go completely celibate.

MARCO

It seems like you don't care.

TRUDY

I know I'm only fuckin one person, so I'm not worried about it. If I have to wrap myself in plastic to prevent catching it, fine. But I'm not about to panic over what's obviously population control.

MARCO

That's an insane way of thinking.

TRUDY

It's a realistic way of thinking. You're all worked up like you're out there fuckin anything that moves.

MARCO

You know that's cap.

TRUDY

Make sure it's cap.

She leans in kissing him, and her lips move against his with an intensity that catches him completely off guard. When she pulls back, Marco swishes his mouth around, with a puzzled expression.

MARCO

You're a little heavy with the saliva tonight.

Trudy's smile matches the lust in her eyes.

TRUDY

I've been thinking all day about what I'm gonna do to that dick when I get out of the shower. So yeah, my mouth is extra wet.

MARCO

Is that right?

TRUDY

Damn right. Be ready when I get out.

She pecks him again, followed by a playful bite on his lower lip that's just hard enough to sting and leave the metallic taste of blood on his tongue. She walks off toward the bathroom, with her hips swaying.

Marco flops back onto the sofa and flicks the television to a music station, unmuting it to fill the oppressive silence and thoughts racing through his mind. He reaches for his glass, but before he can take a sip, his phone begins ringing.

The sound cuts through the apartment like an air raid siren, causing him to fumble frantically in his pocket for the device. In his haste, a strip of condoms tumbles out, landing on the carpet with a soft thud.

His heart is beating fast, quickly scooping them up, shoving them back into his pocket.

Back to being comfortable, he pulls out his phone and answers.

MARCO

Hello.

DAMON (V.O.)

What's good?

MARCO

Shit, just chilling, waiting for her to get out of the shower.

DAMON (V.O.)

You heard about ole girl you were fuckin with dying from that shit?

The words hit Marco like a sledgehammer to the chest. That girl. He knows immediately who Damon is talking about—Keisha, a twenty-two-year-old with curves that defied physics and an appetite for danger, matching his own. She was everything Trudy wasn't.

Spontaneous, passionate, uninhibited. The kind of woman who made him feel alive in ways his relationship never achieved.

MARCO

Yeah, that's fucked up. But I'm good.

DAMON (V.O.)

How do you know?

MARCO

It's been three days since I fucked her.

DAMON (V.O.)

You know that shit activates at any moment, right?

MARCO

It hasn't kicked in yet, so I'm not worried. I'm blessed.

DAMON (V.O.)

Yeah, okay. But that's not why I called you.

MARCO

What's up?

DAMON (V.O.)

She didn't see me, but I saw your girl coming out of some nigga house earlier, all hugged up and shit.

MARCO

Get the fuck out of here.

DAMON (V.O.)

Bro, with that shit out there killing people, why would I lie about something like that?

Marco picks up his glass, but his hand is shaking so violently, when he tries to take a sip, the liquor spills down his shirt, soaking through the thin fabric and onto his skin.

MARCO

(Whisper)

That bitch.

DAMON (V.O.)

What—

Marco hurls the phone across the room. His body coils with a rage so pure and primal it frightens him. He's never been a violent man, but at this moment, he understands how people can commit acts of passion that destroy lives and make headlines.

He stands up, intending to storm toward the bathroom and confront Trudy, to demand answers, to scream until his throat bleeds, but as he takes his first step, his body betrays him.

A violent cough tears through his chest with the force of a seismic event, so powerful it doubles him over, sending him stumbling toward the coffee table. The cough doesn't feel like anything he's experienced before—it's deeper, more violent, like his lungs are trying to turn themselves inside out.

Blood erupts from his mouth, splattering across the carpet. Each droplet pulses with malevolent life as it soaks into the cheap fibers.

Barely standing, another step toward the bathroom brings another cough, more blood, more evidence that his body is breaking down at a high cellular level. His legs feel like they're made of lead, and his vision blurs as if someone is slowly dimming the lights of reality.

The hallway stretches before him like a tunnel, with each step requiring monumental effort.

When he finally reaches the bathroom door, gasping, leaving a trail of blood droplets like breadcrumbs, he's about to kick it open when he sees it—a note taped to the door, written in lipstick in Trudy's familiar handwriting

INSERT NOTE

FAIR TRADE!!!

The words hit him like a revelation and a death sentence combined. He snatches the note down with trembling fingers, and then kicks the door open with the last of his strength, immediately slipping on the blood spreading across the tile floor like a macabre welcome mat.

He crashes to the ground, with his knees hitting the tile with a sickening crack. The bathroom, once a sanctuary of cleanliness and routine, has transformed into a crime scene that would make seasoned detectives vomit.

Trudy lies sprawled across the floor as her body contorts in a position that would be impossible for any living creature.

Her perfect form—the body she spent hours sculpting, the curves that once drove him wild with desire—now slowly dissolving into a grotesque puddle of blood and liquefied tissue. Her organs are spilling out like sap from a tree, creating abstract patterns on the white tile that looks like modern art painted in human suffering.

But despite the agony. Despite the fact her body is literally coming apart at the seams... a smile stretches across what remains of her face. Her phone is propped against the bathtub, showing a grainy sex video that Marco recognizes of him and Keisha, lost in passion just three days ago, recorded from a perfect angle.

The betrayal is complete and devastating. Not just the cheating, but the cruelty of it all. She knew about Keisha. She knew about the risk, about the virus, about everything. And she still made her choice with the cold logic of a chess grandmaster.

TRUDY

(Low whisper)

You stupid motherfucker. Did you really think I didn't know?

Marco's body begins to convulse, forcing him to lie flat on the blood-soaked tiles. The same horrific process consuming Trudy begins working its way through his system. His organs are shutting down one by one as the virus completes its deadly design.

The distant hum of the television still plays music to an audience that no longer exists.

BLACK SCREEN:

TITLE CARD: SELF PRESERVATION

"Stupidity is showing a person you're mad because they hurt you. Just return the favor a hundred times worse."

~Bernard Mersier~

BEGIN DAYDREAM:

FADE IN:

INT. DAY'RYE'S HOUSE - THE KITCHEN - NIGHT

The kitchen floor is cracked linoleum with chipped countertops. The refrigerators hum and the clink of dishes stacked haphazardly in the sink fills the room.

At the small wooden table, two chairs sit opposite from each other, with worn cushions bearing the weight of countless late-night conversations.

Da'rye and Audrin enter the room, taking a seat at the table.

Da'rye is light brown with long cornrows hanging loosely, framing a handsome but hardened face, with a thin goatee complimenting the sharp lines of his jaw, wearing a white wife-beater and faded jeans.

Audrin is dark skin, glistening faintly with sweat, with his husky build filling out a clean-cut T-shirt and jeans.

The two men are both in their early thirties, and have known each other since their teenage years, forging a tight bond. But tonight, the bond feels brittle, and ready to snap.

AUDRIN

So, what's going on, D? Why did you need me to rush over?

DA'RYE

(Sighs)

I had a crazy-ass dream last night.

Da'rye exhales heavily, with his sigh carrying something unspoken, reaching into his pocket, pulling out a crinkled blunt that's slightly getting damp from his grip.

He lights it with a flick of his lighter, and takes a deep drag.

AUDRIN

About what?

Da'rye has a blank stare, as if he's still trapped in the grip of his dream.

DA'RYE

I was in the middle of nowhere at night. Pitch black. And I was... Burying myself.

Audrin leans back, and his chair creaks under his weight, letting out a dry chuckle, trying to mask his unease.

AUDRIN

Wait, what? You were burying yourself? That's some wild shit.

Da'rye takes another pull, and his expression darkens.

DA'RYE

That's the same shit I was thinking, until I realized what it meant.

AUDRIN

What does it mean? Are you trying to be on some philosophical shit now?

Da'rye cocks his head, with his eyes narrowing, exhaling a plume of smoke.

DA'RYE

Are you trying to be funny when I'm deadass serious?

Audrin raises his hands, trying to defuse the moment.

AUDRIN

Chill, nigga. It just sounds weird, that's all.

His gaze flicks to the blunt, with a silent question lingering.

AUDRIN (CONT'D)

Are you gonna pass that shit or what?

DA'RYE

(Smirks)

This shit is low-grade. I'm only hitting it 'cause I'm out of squares. But I got something special for you."

He stands with the blunt dangling from his lips, crossing the small kitchen to the refrigerator. He opens it, and his hand disappears inside for a second before emerging with a bottle of tequila.

He shuts the door with a thud, turning to face Audrin, holding the bottle like a prize.

Audrin, still seated, pulls out a pack of cigarettes and a lighter, setting them on the table.

AUDRIN

Why didn't you just ask me for a square?

Da'rye returns to the table, placing the bottle in front of Audrin.

DA'RYE
It slipped my mind. I was more
focused on telling you what my
dream means.

Audrin picks up the bottle, and as his eyes scan the label.

INSERT LABEL

Desleal Chucho

AUDRIN
What the fuck is this?

Da'rye's laugh is a low, bitter sound, plucking a cigarette
from Audrin's pack and lighting it, tossing the blunt in the
sink.

DA'RYE
My homeboy at work said it'll get
me together. It's strong as fuck,
supposedly.

AUDRIN
You don't even know what this shit
means, do you?

DA'RYE
Who gives a fuck? Open it up and
neck it.

Audrin hesitates, as his fingers tighten around the bottle.

AUDRIN
Neck it? Nigga, you wild.

DA'RYE
Ain't no pussies in this room,
right?

Audrin scoffs, twisting off the cap. The sharp scent hits
him, raising the bottle to his lips, taking a deep swig.

His face frowns, shaking his head, exhaling sharply.

AUDRIN
That's some strong shit.

Da'rye nods, passing the cigarette.

DA'RYE
I figured it would be.

Audrin takes the cigarette with trembling fingers from the kick.

Da'rye grabs the bottle, and his grip is tight, almost possessive.

AUDRIN
We can't finish this shit.

DA'RYE
You're right. I don't plan on
drinking my piss.

Before Audrin can process the words, Da'rye swings the bottle with brutal force, smashing it against Audrin's head.

The glass shatters, and urine sprays across the table as Audrin folds, collapsing from the chair to the floor, and his body goes limp before Da'rye begins stomping him for a few seconds to make sure he's unconscious.

Da'rye stands over him with his eyes burning with hatred so raw it consumes the room before he spits on him.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)
It means 'Disloyal mutt'.

CUT TO:

INT. ABANDONED MEAT FACTORY - LATER

The area is shrouded in darkness, until a switch flips and flickering fluorescent lights come on. Old blood is the miasma hugging the walls.

A long black sheet hangs from wall to wall, suspended by rusted hooks, concealing the horrors beyond, with the faint sound of a woman's whimpers echoing through the room.

Audrin awakes to pain, with his head throbbing, and his limbs heavy and unresponsive. Gaining focus, he realizes he's chained to a chair, stripped down to his boxers.

Although his vision is still a little distorted, as his eyes adjust, he sees Da'rye standing before him, and the man he's known for years is unrecognizable.

Da'rye's face is painted to resemble a skull, giving him a demonic appearance. Blood smears his cheeks, and he's wearing a butcher's apron, stained crimson, with leather gloves gleaming with moisture.

DA'RYE
Wake up, nigga.

Da'rye delivers a sharp slap to Audrin's face.

The sting fully awakes him.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)
There he is.

AUDRIN
Wha-what the fuck is this?

Da'rye steps up, leaning closer so his breath can warm Audrin's face.

DA'RYE
This is what happens when a friend
fucks over a friend.

AUDRIN
Fucked you over? What the fuck are
you talkin' about?

DA'RYE
Nothin', A. Maybe it's the molly.
Maybe it's the liquor or the dust
that has me thinking you're a
bitch-ass friend. But I'll give you
a chance to fix it.

The woman's whimpers grow louder with a desperate sound that makes Audrin's stomach twist.

Da'rye turns and strides back toward the black sheet.

AUDRIN
I don't know what the fuck is going
on in your head, but you got me
fucked up!

Da'rye pauses at the sheet, with his hand gripping the edge.

DA'RYE
I'll let you go when you fix it.

He yanks the sheet down.

The sight steals Audrin's breath. To the left, there's a body bag lying on a slab, with the occupant chained inside and tubes snaking from it to an inject-o-meter pump. Beside it, there's an oil drum chained shut, with a hole cut into the lid, and a gallon of gasoline resting nearby.

In the center of the room, two body bags hang from hooks like grotesque ornaments.

One has intestines spilling from a gash, and the other has holes cut out, revealing the terrified eyes of a woman. To the right, a table is covered by a black sheet.

Da'rye moves to the body bag with the spilling intestines, using his hand to trail through the gore with a sickening nonchalance, glancing back at Audrin with a twisted smile.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)

Since you loved diggin' in my
bitch—my wife—I decided to dig her
guts out... Literally.

(Chuckles)

And guess what? I did something I
never would've thought about doing.
I fucked her after I killed her,
and let me tell you, it was way
better than when she was alive.

Audrin's stomach churns, as bile rises in his throat.

AUDRIN

I didn't do shit with your wife!
You're a sick fuck. Those drugs got
you fucked up.

Da'rye's eyes flash with rage as he steps to the other body bag, swinging hard, and when his fist connects, a choked moan of pain comes forth.

DA'RYE

Shut the fuck up, bitch!" I'm
talking to my bitch-ass friend!

AUDRIN

Leave her the fuck alone!

Da'rye's smile returns, colder than ever.

DA'RYE

Don't worry, I'm saving your wife
for last. Maybe you should've left
my wife alone. Goddamn, if you
wanted to fuck her, why didn't you
just ask me if we could run her
Right now, all you gotta do is fix
the situation.

AUDRIN

I didn't fuck your wife. I've never
betrayed you. Those drugs are
making you delusional, D.

Da'rye's laughter is low, and mocking as he moves to the covered slab, fumbling beneath the sheet.

DA'RYE

Did you enjoy the head? I did. It could've been more pornographic like those bitches who gag and hurl, but it was cool. What do you think?

AUDRIN

I never fucked your wife or got head from her! When will that shit sink into your skull?

Da'rye turns, holding a bloody mutilated female skull with pieces of flesh barely clinging to it, and the scalp peeled back, exposing the brain, with liquor and blood oozing from it.

Da'rye makes his way over to Audrin and extends the skull, while Audrin tries his best to hold back from hurling, but ultimately, he turns his head and hurls.

Da'rye looks at him laughing.

DA'RYE

Oh, now you don't like the head, even after I amplified it. Look, after she gives you some head, I'll get some and then you can still fix the problem.

Audrin is coughing, trying not to hurl again, keeping his head to the side. Da'rye tries to force the skull into Audrin's face, but Audrin does his best to avoid the contact.

Pulling back, Da'rye takes a sip from the skull, looking at Audrin with a straight face, and after another sip, Da'rye takes a bite from the brain, chewing with delight, staring at Audrin.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)

I guess you were right to turn the head down. Incest is something most people don't condone.

Slowly turning his head with vomit falling from his mouth, Audrin breathes heavily.

AUDRIN

What?

DA'RYE

This is your daughter's head. I figured a pussy-hound wouldn't turn some head down, no matter what condition it's in.

(Low chuckle)

You proved me wrong, huh?

AUDRIN

You're on some bullshit. That's not my firstborn.

DA'RYE

...You're right. I just wanted to see how you would react. Are we about to fix this problem? I can't fall out with my only friend over some pussy.

AUDRIN

You decided we should fall out.

DA'RYE

...Cool beans.

Da'rye takes another sip from the skull, followed by a bite of brains before tossing it on Audrin's lap.

Audrin is disgusted, wiggling around to get the skull off his lap.

Da'rye returns to the slab, pulling off the sheet, revealing a dismembered teenage girl, laid out like a grotesque puzzle. A meat cleaver, chainsaw, jar of acid, cigarettes, lighter, and rusty garden shears sit beside her, alongside something covered by a black cloth.

Da'rye picks up an arm, and then turns around, showing Audrin a tattoo in elegant script.

INSERT FOREARM

My Daddy Is My King.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)

This is your daughter, right?

AUDRIN

(Sobbing)

Fuck you!

DA'RYE

What's so funny is that people don't think about penalties for their actions, but they get tight when the shit hits home.

AUDRIN

Fuck you, D. I can't do shit now, but if I wasn't chained up—

DA'RYE

You would bitch up. But you didn't bitch up when you put your dick in my wife. Still, I can't place all of the blame on you. She knew right from wrong when she was giving up that pussy.

(Sinister laugh)

Ah, well. You can end all of this if you admit what you did.

Audrin spits to the side before looking into Da'rye eyes.

AUDRIN

I keep telling you... I didn't fuck your wife. You don't believe me, well—

DA'RYE

I wish you would've kept this loyalty in our friendship. So...

Still holding the arm, Da'rye walks over to the inject-o-meter pump, looking back at Audrin with a sinister smile, turning the machine on.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)

This is all your fault.

AUDRIN

Who the fuck is that?! I know that's not my goddamn son! Tell me that's not my goddamn son!

DA'RYE

You'll find out after the acid connects.

AUDRIN

I didn't fuck you over!!!

DA'RYE

If you would've come to me as a man, this wouldn't be happening.

Audrin's screams echo watching the acid flow through the tubes into the body bag.

Da'rye is looking at Audrin with a straight face, sucking on one of the fingers of the dismembered arm.

The bag begins dissolving and muffled screams of agony fill the room revealing Audrin's teenage son's body disintegrating before his eyes.

Audrin drops his head, with his sobs wracking his body.

AUDRIN

He didn't deserve it, you son of a bitch.

DA'RYE

I didn't deserve to get fucked over, but hey, shit happens.

Da'rye tosses the arm and then walks back to the dismembered body.

Audrin continues mumbling what he just said, as Da'rye pulls out a cigarette and picks up the lighter, placing the cigarette in his mouth, lighting it, taking a calm pull, looking at Audrin.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)

You know...

(Takes a pull)

I don't need you to fix the problem. In all honesty, you're not the problem.

He takes a pull from the cigarette while calmly making his way to the oil drum.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)

Last chance. Do you think you're the problem, or is something else the problem?

Audrin slowly raises his head with tears falling from his eyes as his lips tremble.

AUDRIN

I... Am not... Your fuckin'... Problem!

DA'RYE

Okay.

Keeping the cigarette in his mouth, he picks up the gasoline and pours it into the oil drum, letting the liquid glug ominously.

Placing the container down, Da'rye looks at Audrin with a straight face.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)

Then I was right about you not
being the source.

He drops his cigarette inside the drum, and it erupts in flames.

A woman's screams pierces the air, while Audrin's confusion morphs into horror, looking at Da'rye as his smile grows.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)

I blame that bitch for giving you
life. Yes, your mother was the real
source of the problem. Now, maybe
we can fix the friendship. What do
you think?

Audrin screams, straining against the chains.

AUDRIN

I swear to God, if I get free, I'm
fuckin killin you!

Da'rye's laugh is devoid of sound.

DA'RYE

You wanna kill me 'cause you fucked
up and won't take accountability?

AUDRIN

I don't give a fuck about none of
that! Set me free so I can fuck you
up, bitch!

DA'RYE

Are you admitting you fucked up?

AUDRIN

Fuck you! Set me free, bitch ass
nigga!

Da'rye's laughter grows louder as he returns to the slab, letting his fingers brush against the rusty garden shears in an eerie manner.

DA'RYE

A man's word resides in his balls,
'cause those are the only three
things he's got. So when a man
breaks his word, he shouldn't be
allowed to keep 'em.

Audrin's curses continue as Da'rye lifts a jar from under the black cloth, revealing a pair of testicles preserved in liquid.

He opens the jar and walks back over to Audrin.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)

Your bitch-ass son tried to cover
for you, so he didn't need his.

Da'rye takes the testicles from the jar and tosses the glass. In a sadistic manner, he slowly moves the testicles towards Audrin's mouth.

Audrin thrashes, as his screams get muffled by Da'rye forcing the grotesque offering into his mouth.

Audrin spits them out, gagging and coughing, as his rage boils over.

AUDRIN

Fuck you!

Da'rye steps back, unfazed.

DA'RYE

Self-preservation till the end. I
love it.

While coughing and spitting in disgust, Audrin is filled with anger.

AUDRIN

Fuck you!

DA'RYE

Damn. You fucked my bitch, and you
wanna fuck me too? I'll pass. But,
I'll tell you this.

AUDRIN

You're a weak bitch. You're a
fuckin' raw pussy.

DA'RYE

All of this is because of pussy.
But since you brought it up.

He walks back over to the dismembered body.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)

Of course, I fucked her while she was alive. But I kept the pussy for myself to fuck her again later.

Audrin's voice is a broken snarl.

AUDRIN

I hope you burn in hell, bitch.

DA'RYE

Yeah, yeah. Since you don't wanna fix the friendship, I guess I'll fix it for us.

In an eerie manner, Da'rye glides his fingers across the rusty garden shears again before picking them up.

Turning to face Audrin, he slowly makes his way towards him. Da'rye leans down in Audrin's face with a stone-cold glare in his eyes.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)

Why didn't you just ask me to run the bitch? She wanted to fuck you, so why not be a real nigga and ask?

Audrin spits in his face because defiance is his only weapon.

AUDRIN

You're not even a real nigga, so fuck you.

Da'rye licks the spit from his lips with a sadistic smile before opening the shears, jamming them between Audrin's thighs, snapping them shut.

Audrin's screams fill the room as blood pools beneath him.

DA'RYE

You'll never fuck another man's bitch again.

He says with a calm tone, tossing the shears aside.

He moves to the body bag with the whimpering woman, and caresses it with a perverse intimacy before unzipping it.

Camille, Da'rye's wife, emerges, gagged and bloody, with her brown skin marred with bruises and her eyes wide with terror.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)
You filthy bitch.

Da'rye goes to retrieve the chainsaw and starts it up. Its roar fills the room, as he walks back over to Audrin.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)
Time to end this fake-ass
friendship.

Audrin, still screaming in pain, watches in horror as Da'rye raises the saw and brings it down on his head, splitting skin and bone with agonizing slowness.

Blood sprays, coating Da'rye's apron as Camille's muffled screams join the cacophony. Da'rye stops at Audrin's chest, and then he tosses the chainsaw aside.

Picking up Audrin's severed penis, he approaches Camille, and yanks out her gag.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)
Since you couldn't keep one dick in
your mouth, here's the other one
you loved getting face-fucked with.

He forces it into her mouth.

She spits it out and begins screaming.

Da'rye walks back over to the table and grabs the meat cleaver and acid. While she continues screaming, Da'rye steps in front of her, placing the meat cleaver down, opening the acid, looking into her eyes.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)
The problem with bad bitches is
they can't stay with one man. I
knew that, but I figured I could be
one of the exceptions and change
the rules.

Camille stares at him with trembling lips, wide-eyed with fear.

CAMILLE
Da'rye, listen. I—

Her words are replaced with screams when the acid hits her face.

The liquid hisses as it eats away at her skin.

DA'RYE

The only way to humble a bad bitch
is to show her how ugly she truly
is.

He picks up the cleaver and begins hacking at her body, and her screams fade as she comes in half and her intestines spill out.

Reaching into the carnage, he pulls out her heart, and stares at it with a twisted reverence.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)

Heartless, bitch.

He takes a bite.

END DAYDREAM:

INT. DAY'RYE'S HOUSE - THE KITCHEN - NIGHT

The kitchen is quiet and heavy with the weight of what just played out in Da'rye's mind. He's sitting at the table with a blank expression, and his hands resting on the worn wood.

Camille is standing beside him with her hand on his shoulder.

CAMILLE

Baby, are you okay?

Da'rye blinks, emerging from the trance of his violent daydream, but his eyes remain distant.

DA'RYE

I'm good.

CAMILLE

Are you sure?

DA'RYE

Yup. Can you get me something to
drink?

She leans in to kiss him, but he turns his head, avoiding her touch.

CAMILLE

What's the problem?

DA'RYE

No problem. Can you get my drink?
We can do the kissing shit after.

Camille scoffs, turning toward the refrigerator.

CAMILLE

I guess.

The moment her back is turned, Da'rye's hand moves with practiced speed, pulling a nine-millimeter from his waistband. He stands and closes the distance in two strides, bringing the butt of the gun down on the back of her head.

She drops to the floor, unconscious.

Da'rye places the gun on the table, but his eyes never leave her, pulling out his phone, calling Audrin.

DA'RYE

I need you to slide through real quick.

AUDRIN (V.O.)

What's on the floor?

DA'RYE

Man, this shit is crazy. I can't tell you over the phone, so just slide over.

AUDRIN

I'm on the way.

DA'RYE

Bet.

Da'rye hangs up, slipping the phone into his pocket.

He sucks his teeth, cracking his knuckles as he continues staring down at Camille's motionless form.

DA'RYE (CONT'D)

You stupid motherfuckers should've cleaned up your text messages and emails.

He grabs her ankles and drags her out of the kitchen. The darkness swallows them both as he leaves the kitchen.

BLACK SCREEN:

TITLE CARD: THE ETIQUETTE OF A NECROPHILIAC: THE SEQUEL

"Why question what people think is wrong knowing you're right?"

~Bernard Mersier~

FADE IN:

INT. THE BATHROOM - NIGHT

The bathroom is a mausoleum of carnage. Its once-gleaming tiles are now a grotesque tapestry of blood-streaked, splattered, congealing into dark, viscous pools. A single faucet weeps, its relentless plink, plink, plink echoing like a metronome in a dying world. The air reeks of copper and rot, so thick it coats the throat. In the corner, Dennis is sitting naked, with his muscular frame smeared with crimson, and his knees hugged tight to his chest. His breath comes in shallow, jagged gasps, as if he's trying to suck in the essence of the slaughter into his lungs.

Dennis, mid-thirties, is a study in contradiction—arms chiseled from years of discipline, now slacking under the weight of his fractured mind. His blonde hair, matted with blood and sweat, clings to his scalp in frizzy clumps, framing a face that might have once been charming but now it's a mask of mania. His blue eyes, wide and unblinking, burn with a feverish gleam, darting across the room as if chasing specters only he can see.

DENNIS

Wha-what do you mean I'm the bad guy?

He rocks slightly, with blood-slicked fingers digging into his thighs, leaving crescent-moon marks in his flesh.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

You ... You should be grateful I got you out of that mess.
 Seriously? You think I stopped you from something good?
 (Bitter scoff)
 What the hell is a good thing?"

His gaze sweeps the room with the fervor of a prophet. The bathroom is a slaughterhouse, and its walls were a silent witness to unspeakable violence. Blood seeps into the grout, pooling in the cracks like ink on vellum. The sink is a basin of gore, its porcelain stained sickly red. And the bathtub—God, the bathtub—it's a shrine to his depravity, a crimson altar where his madness formed.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

There's no fuckin way ...
 (Cynical laugh)
 I'll be goddamn, you might be onto something there.

His laughter swells, a serrated sound that fills the claustrophobic space. His eyes flick to the shadows, as if expecting an answer from the void. He cups his ear, as his expression hardens, daring the silence to defy him.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

I do feel this way because you were trying to fuck. Maybe... Maybe if I wasn't home... Well, I was home and here we are. What was that?

He cups his ear, and his expression turns serious as if what he's about to hear better be to his liking.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

What do you... What do you mean something aside from this could've been done? What do you think aside from this could've been done?

He raises an eyebrow with twitching lips, and a perverse curiosity. The silence mocks him, and he snaps his fingers, wagging one in the air as if struck by divine insight.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

A threesome? How would that even work?

He pauses with his mind churning, and then he shakes his head, with a low chuckle escaping.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

That would be common courtesy. See, that's all I ask for. A little etiquette. Wait a minute. ...Can either of us talk about sharing her body without asking her how she feels about it?

Dennis slaps his forehead with a wet smack, and the sound reverberates in the stillness. A gut-wrenching laugh tears from his throat, raw and unhinged.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Yeah, you're right. She didn't ask us if it was okay to fuck us behind our backs. Hell, who knows who else she was fuckin'?

He scrubs his blood-smeared jaw, letting his fingers leave fresh streaks across his face.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

That still doesn't...

He trails off, with his gaze drifting to the bathtub, where the silence presses harder, broken only by the faucet relentless drip.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

No, that doesn't let you off the hook. But you've got a point. That threesome shit might've kept her from sneaking around. But wait-

He slaps his forehead again, harder.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

She didn't play by the rules, did she?

With a sinister smile, Dennis stands up and stretches. As he moves toward the sink, he picks up a man's severed head with a deep gash in the skull and one eye missing.

He holds the head, smiling, giving it a nod of approval before moving to the bathtub. The tub is filled with bloody water, and inside lies a woman in her mid-twenties, fair-skinned, with her long black hair drenched in blood. Her arm hangs over the tub's edge, with a slight, chilling smile on her face-clearly staged.

He holds the man's head up, bringing it eye-to-eye with his own.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Well... There she is. What's that?

He presses the head to his ear for a moment, then pulls it back, laughing as he looks at it.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

We'll do just fine. Although this is something new for me, but I'm confident I'll perform the same as I would if I was fuckin' solo.

(Laughs)

I guess I only fucked her solo figuratively because who knows who else aside from us was fuckin' her, right?

He places the head inside the tub at the opposite end. Moving to her body, he picks her torso up from the water, revealing she's been cut in half with her insides hanging down.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

No. No, this... This is what will
make us all happy. No, don't try to
tell me differently and you were
fuckin' him.

He opens her mouth and sticks his tongue inside, tongue
kissing the head with passion. When he's finished, he places
the torso back into the tub before climbing in himself. Once
he's comfortable, he grabs the man's head and pulls her body
closer.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

This should be fun. When we're
finished here, we can go to the
bedroom and eat her out at the same
time to see whose tongue she loves
the most.

He lowers her head under the blood, and then begins making
out with the man's head.

FADE TO BLACK:

END CREDITS: