

The Shadow of Azrael

written by

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WGA REGISTRATION # 2256905

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FADE IN:

TITLE appears on the dark screen:

Therefore in your midst parents will eat their children, and children will eat their parents.

EZEKIEL 5:10

The TITLE fades off.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - AFTERNOON.

SUPER: FIFTEEN YEARS AGO.

JAKE (15), a shy-looking kid, walks out of the school doors, his head down, and hurries across the school yard. He glances back over his shoulder before quickly turning around the corner of the building, almost vanishing.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - CONTINUOUS.

Jake is on his way home, walking along a deserted rural road. The road is empty, a narrow ribbon cutting through seemingly endless fields of dry, yellow grass. The sky above is a uniform gray, and the landscape appears bleak, stripped of color.

Jake hears something behind him—a rhythmic whirring. He turns his head and sees three KIDS riding their bikes rapidly towards him. Jake quickens his pace, almost breaking into a run. Then, abruptly, he stops and shoves his left hand deep into his pocket. His face grows numb, a blank, fearful expression.

The kids catch up to Jake, surrounding him and blocking his way. One of them, a red-haired boy named PETER (16), is clearly the leader. He puts his bike on a kickstand and walks deliberately towards Jake, a cruel smile spreading across his face. The two other kids do the same, dismounting their bikes and circling around Jake, their smiles wolfish and predatory.

PETER

Master Jake! I tried to catch up with you back at school, but you were in such a great hurry.

FIRST KID

You sure were!

PETER
 Shut up, Matt.
 (to Jake, his voice
 dropping)
 We have unfinished business.

JAKE
 I have no business with you, Peter.

PETER
 Oh, yes, you do. Didn't I tell you
 to wait for me after school?

JAKE
 I just want to go home.

PETER
 This is a free country. Go, then!

Jake takes a tentative step, but the two other kids instantly seize him, pulling him back roughly. They throw him to the ground, a puff of dust rising. Peter steps forward and plants his foot firmly on Jake's face, grinding it into the dirt, while his two friends hold Jake still, preventing any struggle.

PETER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 Not so fast.
 (to his friends)
 Let him go.

The two boys step back, releasing their grip. Peter takes his foot off Jake's face and squats down, bringing himself eye-level with Jake. He looks at Jake with a vicious smile, enjoying his torment.

PETER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 You know why we do this to you,
 Jake? Because you are a toad. Weak,
 slimy, little toad. You think it's
 your town, because your parents
 were born here? Get this, toad... I
 am an American citizen just as
 well, regardless the fact my
 parents were born in Russia.
 Norristown...
 (pause, his voice growing
 menacing)
 ...belongs to Russians. Because we
 are not toads. We have guts to do
 what needs to be done. So one day...
 (pause, a chilling threat)
 ...I will fucking kill you, Jake.
 Because I can.
 (MORE)

PETER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
The world is divided between those
who can... and the cunts that can't.

Peter grabs Jake by the neck, his fingers digging in, and pulls him up sharply, so that their faces are almost touching, nose to nose. Jake's face is deathly pale, his jaw clenched. His eyes, however, are full of simmering hatred.

PETER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Whatcha gonna do, Jake? Call your
junkie Daddy for help? Well, I got
news for you, buddy. Your Dad is
fucking dead! It makes me wonder...
Who the hell knocked up your slutty
mom? Ah... Maybe you did? Maybe...

At this very moment, Jake's left hand flashes out of his pocket, and we see that he holds a knife. Without hesitation, he stabs Peter, pushing the blade deep into Peter's stomach.

PETER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Ah...

FIRST KID
God dammit, Jake! What the fuck did
you do, man?

Jake shoves Peter back, forcing him to stumble, and stands up, the bloody knife still clutched in his hand. Peter writhes convulsively on the ground beneath his feet, clutching his wound.

JAKE
Want some, Matt?

FIRST KID
Fuck you, man!

Both kids instinctively take a few steps back, their bravado gone, replaced by fear. Jake pays no mind to them. He looks down at Peter, then deliberately puts his foot on Peter's face, pressing down.

PETER
(coughing and crying, his
voice weak, holding his
hands desperately on the
gushing wound)
Please, man... We were just kidding!

JAKE
Your comedy stand-up is a fail.

Jake calmly tilts the blade, letting the blood from it drip onto Peter's face. Peter closes his eyes in agony, tears mixing with the blood.

Jake smiles, a chilling, distant expression.

JAKE (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
One day, Peter, I will get tired of
it... I will kill you then... Oh, I
forgot. I already have!

CREDITS.

MAN'S VOICE(V.O)
When I was fifteen years old, my
father passed on. I spent days with
him, watching the first flowers of
decay blossom on his skin. On the
dawn of the third day, my father
spoke to me for the first time
after his heart stopped. He shared
his secrets with me, and I listened
to his every word as his body
turned yellow, as if he were
nothing but an autumn oak leaf. I
learned the one and only truth
about death. Nothing is eternal.
Everything rots... I learned the one
and only truth about life... Life
feeds on life. Then I tasted my
father's fading flesh. And when I
felt his bitter meat inside me, I
learned to speak with all those
whose bodies melted and gave birth
to a new life. I learned the
language of the deceased. As even
the dead sometimes are too stubborn
to die. I know... I can hear them. I
can see them. I make them.
(pause)
It all started.. with death, of
course.

EXT. THE STREET - AFTERNOON.

It's a bright, summer afternoon, and we follow ANGELA (51)—a well-dressed woman—as she comes out of the grocery store. She walks down the street, holding a paper bag full of groceries, seemingly quite content with life.

Angela enters the territory of a posh condominium and sees kids playing on the playground.

She smiles and waves to them, and they wave back cheerfully. The sun shines almost hysterically, and the world seems perfectly peachy.

INT. THE BUILDING - CONTINUOUS.

Angela enters the opulent building and walks up the stairs to the second floor. The staircase is immaculately kept and lavishly decorated with expensive materials, gleaming under the light.

INT. ANGELA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Angela opens the door of her apartment. It's a clearly posh place, meticulously decorated. There are various pictures on the walls—among them, a hand-stitched picture of the Red Square in Moscow.

Angela puts the bag with groceries on a low bench by the door and walks towards the kitchen, passing the closed door to the dining-room. She then spots her cat and squats down, her voice soft and affectionate.

ANGELA

Here, Johnny. Here, Johnny-boy!

The cat meows in response and walks towards her. It's a fat, sleek black British Shorthair, and it immediately starts purring loudly as Angela pets him, rubbing her hand along his back.

ANGELA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Who's momma's cat? Who's my little
bublik, huh? Momma brought you
something taaasty.

Angela hears a faint sound from the dining room. She turns around and sees that the door to the dining room is now ajar.

She walks slowly towards the dining room, her brow furrowing, and stops as she hears another faint meow.

Another cat walks out of the dining room—this has a collar with a name printed on it:

Shazam.

ANGELA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

What?..

Angela is stunned, frozen in place. While she is trying to catch her breath and comprehend what's happening, another cat walks out of the dining room—this one is also gaunt and looks sick. It is followed by another, and another, and another.

Now Angela is truly scared, her eyes wide with a growing sense of dread. She carefully approaches the dining room and enters it, only to find it teeming with stray cats, their eyes gleaming in the dim light. She makes a hesitant step forward, her heart pounding, and then a strong hand grabs her by the neck from behind. Angela blacks out instantly.

INT. ANGELA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Angela wakes up. She is lying on her bed. Her hands and legs are tightly bound, but her mouth is free. When she tries to scream, however, she cannot make a sound—there is a bandage on her neck, and her neck is visibly covered with iodine. All she can manage is a guttural hiss.

Angela looks around, her eyes darting. Cats are everywhere—on the floor, on the furniture, even on the bed. Her own cat, Johnny, is among them. The cats are actively eating something from the floor, their heads bent over. A couple of them sit on the bed, also chewing on something unseen. One of the cats sits directly on her chest, its weight heavy, but she cannot see its head, obscured by her vantage point.

Angela looks around again, straining, and sees an IV line connected to her arm, a thin tube running from a bag. She concentrates, summoning what little strength she has, and manages to raise her head slightly.

What she sees fills her with unspeakable horror—her body is CUT OPEN, a gaping wound, and one of the cats is actively eating her intestines, its head buried deep inside her belly. Another cat joins the gruesome feast, tearing at her flesh, and then her own cat, Johnny, comes closer and closer and closer...

Angela hisses, a raw, desperate sound of pure terror, and her cat hisses back, its eyes cold and unfeeling.

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - MORNING.

SUPER: Now.

The apartment is dark, shadows clinging to every corner. We pass through the corridor—there is a calendar with a kitschy picture of cats playfully biting mice on the wall.

We stop by the bathroom—the door is half-open, revealing only darkness within.

We move on and enter the dining-room. Bookcases line the walls, filled with various volumes. On one shelf sits a statuette of a bulldog wearing a cop's uniform. A small, peculiar picture of a piranha hangs on the wall.

JAKE (25) sits in the dark dining-room, hunched in front of two notebooks. There is a sticker on one of the notebooks—a half-chewed clover leaf and a stoned butterfly smoking a pipe with a dumb smile on its face. Both of the laptop screens are full of intricate figures, phone numbers, and cryptocurrency wallet addresses.

Jake receives a chat message, a ping echoing in the quiet room. He pushes almost absent-mindedly some buttons on his keyboard, and one of the phone numbers on the screen turns green—a moment later, the amount on one of the crypto-wallets increases significantly.

The phone rings, startling the silence. Jake picks it up.

JAKE

Hey, baby!

(pause)

Just working...

(pause)

I'll be there in time! Cross my heart!

(pause)

I love you, cat!

Jake hangs up, a boyish smile spreading across his face. He stands up, stretches, a yawn escaping him, then looks at his watch and hurriedly leaves the room.

INT. YURY'S APARTMENT - MORNING.

We are in the cozy, well-furnished dining-room of Yury's apartment. Two youngsters sit comfortably in armchairs, sipping whiskey. One of them is ANDREY (22). He is well-dressed Russian young man, exuding the polished look of a yuppie.

The other is MARINA (26)—a beautiful Russian girl with a somewhat spoiled face, hinting at a life filled with forbidden pleasures. She is dressed in a style more appropriate for a teenager, which is somewhat incongruous given her age.

Both seem to be waiting for something.

There is a dog in the living room, a friendly golden retriever, who pads around. Andrey absently pets the dog as it passes.

There is a Russian Orthodox icon prominently displayed on the wall.

Marina looks at the icon, a slight frown on her face.

MARINA
Why is he always pissed?

ANDREY
Who?

MARINA
(points at the icon)
God.

The phone rings. Andrey picks it up.

ANDREY
What's up, dog?
(pause)
Attaboy.

He hangs up the phone and looks at Marina, a knowing glint in his eyes.

MARINA
What?

ANDREY
(pause)
Talking about God...

MARINA
Fuck God.

ANDREY
See... That's why he is pissed.
(pause)
David's on the way. He's got the goods.

MARINA
I was kind of worried about him...

Andrey looks at Marina with a contemptuous smile, his lips curling. He stands up and walks to the table, opening a drawer. He takes a huge Desert Eagle gun out of it, its dark metal gleaming.

MARINA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Where the fuck did you get it from?

Andrey, still smiling, slowly approaches Marina. He stands directly in front of her and deliberately raises the gun so that its muzzle is in line with her mouth, a silent, menacing gesture.

MARINA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Stop that!

ANDREY
It's one of my father's...
(pause, his smile fading)
They say, guns are like dicks...
Wanna suck it?

MARINA
Put it away!

ANDREY
You know, Chekhov once said.. If there is a gun in the first act of the play, it must go off in the third act...
(pause, his face devoid of humor)
You are not fucking David, are you?

MARINA
Shut up!

ANDREY
Are you?

MARINA
No.
(pause, her voice small and scared)
I am not fucking him. Happy?

ANDREY
Good girl...

MARINA
(obviously scared, her eyes wide)
Would you put it away now?

Andrey looks at the gun as if he's never seen it before, his expression briefly confused. He walks back to the table and calmly puts the gun back in the drawer, closing it with a soft click.

ANDREY
It's not even loaded...

Marina turns away from him, a shiver running through her.

INT. THE MALL - MORNING.

Jake is in the mall, standing nervously, scanning the crowd as he waits for someone. Finally, his eyes light up as he spots a young, beautiful girl approaching. It's ANYA (21). She is obviously deeply in love with Jake, her affection clear in her beaming smile. She is wearing casual jeans and a peculiar T-shirt featuring a friendly puppy playfully biting a man on his leg.

Anya sees Jake and runs to him, her steps light. They meet, and share a tender kiss.

JAKE
I missed you so much... Your kisses...

ANYA
(laughs softly, a sweet sound)
You only kissed me yesterday. Stop it...
(she kisses him tenderly again, a lingering touch)
I missed you too, baby...

JAKE
Wanna go to the movies? Or, I don't know...

ANYA
Doesn't matter. All I want is to spend a day with you... A perfect day...

JAKE
Just like in that song...

ANYA
You make me forget myself...

JAKE
I thought I was someone else...
(pause, his voice wistful)
...someone good...

ANYA
I got a present for you!

JAKE

Well, give it to me now!

ANYA

Nope!

(pause, teasing)

I know, I know! We can go to that new aquarium. I heard they got all kinds of carnivore fish, like piranha! I've never seen piranha in my life!

JAKE

Sounds like a plan. Just... give me the present first, will you?

ANYA

NO WAY.

JAKE

(sighs, a playful
resignation)

Okay, let's go watch the piranha. Maybe, I'll feed you to them!

ANYA

I thought... you wanted to spend your life with me. Raising children and all...

JAKE

(seriously, his gaze
intent)

Yes. I still want it. More than anything else.

They kiss again.

INT. YURY'S APARTMENT - MORNING.

Marina and Andrey are still in the dining-room. They are no longer alone—DAVID (23) is also in the room. He is wearing torn jeans and a T-shirt with a "Slipknot" emblem on it. He is the only American in their little gang.

David has a Mohawk haircut and both his ears are pierced with multiple rings. He is meticulously "cooking" a joint, rolling it with practiced ease.

ANDREY

How did it go?

DAVID

(shrugs, exhaling smoke)
I went in... I paid for the muffins...
I went out. That's that. Hey... where
did you learn about this shop?

ANDREY

Darknet. They say it's the best in
town.

DAVID

I was expecting to see a ghoul with
a tattooed face. 'Twas a pleasant
surprise.

ANDREY

Stay by me, dude. I will make a
good Russian out of you one day.
Right, babe?

Marina nods absentmindedly, her focus on her snack. She is
enjoying a chocolate muffin, taking slow, deliberate bites.
There is a box full of muffins on the table. The logo on the
box is a happy caterpillar chewing on a clover leaf.

DAVID

My dad always said—there will be a
day, David, when Russians nuke
America. But you guys... You guys
invaded us without a single shot.
This little town is full of
Russians! I mean, aren't you
supposed to work for us, like good
migrants do? Instead..

(a look around the well-
appointed apartment, a
hint of envy)

Boy, wish I had a place like that!

ANDREY

Spare my ears.

DAVID

The new county judge is Russian,
ain't she? I guess our next
president will be Boris.. or
something...

(pause, then lights his
joint)

Alright. Dinner is served.

They blow the joint, the smoke clouding the air.

INT. THE RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON.

Jake and Anya are seated in a restaurant. At a neighboring table, a STRANGER(48) with a tanned, utterly non-remarkable face reads a newspaper, seemingly oblivious.

JAKE

I told you that piranha is nothing to look at.

ANYA

I liked them.

Jake raises his half-empty bottle of coke, a slight smile playing on his lips.

JAKE

Here's to piranha. Are you sure you're okay? You look pale. Would you like some wine or something?

ANYA

Thanks, but... no thanks. Baby...
(she touches Jake's hand)
Don't worry about me.

She takes a large, eager bite of pizza. Then another one, quickly.

JAKE

Hold your horses, babe! No one's gonna steal your food.

ANYA

(smiles, a little shyly)
It's just... I'm used to eating fast.
Food is...
(awkward smile)
...life.

JAKE

Is that what they taught you in the orphanage? Sounds like a verse from a Satanic Bible.

ANYA

(pause)
No... I must have heard it from my mom.

JAKE

Didn't she die when you were only four?

ANYA

(a bit disoriented, her
brow furrowing slightly)
Yeah... It must have been someone
else, then... Hey, better tell me...
Have you given it a thought?

JAKE

What do you mean? Oh, that thing.
Yeah, I will.

ANYA

You have to say it properly, babe.
If you want that present, of
course.

JAKE

I will quit my job. And find a new
one. A barber, or something.

ANYA

You will make a hell of a barber,
Jake Sanders. You deserve a
present. I will give it to you now
because I love you. But you can
only open it at home.

JAKE

Blackmail, huh... It's a felony, you
know?

ANYA

Look who's talking. Well... Do you
accept my conditions?

JAKE

Or what?

ANYA

Or else!

JAKE

Alright!

Anya takes the present out of her purse and places it on the
table—a small, blue box adorned with a plump, cherubic angel.
The Stranger at the neighboring table subtly raises his eyes
from his newspaper for a brief moment, a flicker of
attention.

JAKE (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Is it a wish box?

ANYA

So to say. It grants one wish only,
though. If you are ready to accept
it. I hope we both are, Jake...

JAKE

Let me...

ANYA

(laughs softly, pulling
the box away)
Not just yet...

They share a laugh.

JAKE

I got an idea. Let's go to the
park!

ANYA

Romance spotted.

JAKE

Maybe I just want to get a quickie
in the bushes.

ANYA

No way. The shop is closed. For
now, that is. Nevertheless, kind
sir, your offer is accepted.

JAKE

(playing along)
I love you dearly.

ANYA

(seriously)
I know, Mr. Sanders. You bet, I do.

EXT. THE HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS.

Andrey and the gang are in the car, speeding down the
highway. They are all clearly high. Loud dub-step music
blares from the speakers, and Andrey drives recklessly,
weaving through traffic, a wild grin on his face.

Marina is by his side, sitting on the passenger seat, and she
starts kissing him passionately, her hand drifting down to
pet his crotch.

David is in the back seat. He clearly sees what Marina is
doing, and his face goes grim.

EXT. THE HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS.

Jake and Anya stand amidst a crowd of pedestrians, awaiting the green light to cross the street. We see PEOPLE around them, a blur of faces, and we again see the same Stranger with a non-remarkable face standing not far from Jake and Anya, seemingly part of the crowd.

Anya suddenly stops, her gaze drawn in the direction of the Stranger, but he is already walking away, disappearing into the flow of people. Her face subtly changes, a fleeting expression, and Jake notices it immediately.

JAKE

What is it?

ANYA

I thought I saw... Nevermind.

Jake and Anya cross the street, their hands clasped tightly, a moment of unease passing.

EXT. THE HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS.

Andrey and the gang are speeding, the car a blur. The music is even louder now, a deafening roar. They barely manage to stop the car at a red light, the tires screeching violently. David slams his head on the front seat.

DAVID

Fuck, man! Better be careful before you kill someone.

ANDREY

Look at him, Marina. Our American friend is such a whiny-boy.

DAVID

Goddamn Rusky.

Andrey laughs, a wild, unhinged sound.

EXT. THE PARK - CONTINUOUS.

Jake and Anya have crossed the street and are about to enter a park. All of a sudden, Jake stops dead in his tracks, his face puzzled, a look of realization dawning.

JAKE

Shit! I left your present back in the mall.

ANYA

Babe!

JAKE

Stupid me! Let's go back!

ANYA

It's okay. Don't worry, it's okay.
You will get your present, no
matter what. I promise.

JAKE

No, it's not.

Jake takes a step, then stops again and looks at Anya, his expression contrite.

JAKE (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

I am really sorry, baby. I am..

ANYA

Hush...

Anya takes Jake's face gently in her hands, her thumbs tracing his cheeks.

ANYA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

It's okay... I am here. I love you. I
am yours...

JAKE

All mine...

ANYA

All yours...

They kiss, a deep, comforting kiss.

EXT. THE HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS.

Andrey stomps on the gas the moment the light turns green, the car lurching forward with violent acceleration.

EXT. THE PARK - CONTINUOUS.

Jake and Anya are still kissing passionately in front of the entrance to the park, very close to the road.

EXT. THE PARK - CONTINUOUS.

Marina, sitting next to Andrey, suddenly screams, a shrill sound of terror.

MARINA

Watch out!

There is a cat darting across the road. Andrey turns the wheel wildly, frantically spinning it, and slams on the brakes. The car instantly goes out of control, swerving violently.

EXT. THE PARK - CONTINUOUS.

Jake hears the terrifying sound of an approaching car, a screeching of tires, and turns his head just as he sees the vehicle. But it's too late—the car smashes into him and Anya, a sickening crash, and then violently turns over, flipping onto its roof.

EXT. THE PARK - CONTINUOUS.

Jake is on the ground. We see the world from his perspective. Everything is out of focus, hazy, and sounds are dim, muted.

He sees people, looking like spectral ghosts, running frantically towards him, their blurred faces full of panic. He hears the faint wail of sirens in the distance, but through all these chaotic sounds, he hears one more distinct, constant sound—the repetitive *drip, drip, drip* of droplets falling.

He turns his head slowly and sees he is still holding Anya's hand, her fingers interlocked with his.

Jake tries to say something, a choked sound escaping him, and he tries to stand up, but his limbs refuse to respond. Then Anya's hand comes sickeningly out of focus, and he sees the mutilated, lifeless body of his girlfriend, twisted and broken.

The hood of the crashed car is covered with blood, a glistening, dark mass. The blood is steadily dripping from the hood, and the sound of these droplets falling becomes a deafening, thundering rhythm in his ears. Everything starts fading away, blurring into oblivion.

Before Jake finally passes out, his vision swimming, he sees one more face—it is the face of the Stranger who stood in the crowd, observing.

Then, darkness.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - AFTERNOON.

SUPER: Few months later.

We are in front of the courthouse. The day is sunny, a stark contrast to the grim events. The street is full of shiny, happy people, going about their day. Several cars are parked in front of the courthouse.

Among them, a black sedan sits silently. A middle-aged man with a severe army haircut sits in the sedan, smoking a cigarette. It's YURY (46), Andrey's father, who is revealed to be an influential police officer.

David emerges from the courthouse, a relieved smile on his face. He looks around, then Marina comes out, following closely.

DAVID
Congrats, sis!

Marina laughs, a brittle sound, and kisses him briefly on the lips. At this very moment, Andrey (wearing a sharp suit but a frivolous T-shirt) comes out of the courthouse. Marina instantly takes a step back from David.

ANDREY
Did I spoil all the fun?

MARINA
Honey, please!

ANDREY
(mockingly, a sneer on his face)
"Honey, please!" I am watching you, babe. I am watching both of you. In the car, gang! Let's celebrate!

The gang is about to enter their car, a new and obviously expensive model, gleaming in the sun. At this moment, Yury steps out of his own car, his expression unreadable.

ANDREY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Dad! Haven't seen you inside.

YURY
I had no business inside. Would you spare a minute, son?

ANDREY
Yeah... What is it?

Yury glances pointedly at David and Marina, and both immediately step away, sensing the tension.

ANDREY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
You should have seen Mike, Dad! He nailed the case. And the judge...

Yury remains silent, his gaze fixed on his son.

ANDREY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
It's good to be your son... I mean, for a moment, I thought...

YURY
Shut the fuck up.

Andrey steps back abruptly as if physically slapped, his casual demeanor cracking.

YURY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
You fuckwits, killed a girl. Crippled her boyfriend. She...

ANDREY
It was an accident!

YURY
The hell it was.

ANDREY
Dad, please. Even the judge...

YURY
Even the judge? The judge did what I told her to do. Same with the attorney. I was very convincing, you know. Because in this town, we take care of our own. You were high as hell, all of ya. You...

ANDREY
If you want me to say, how sorry I am...

YURY
I want you to tell me where you got the drugs from.

ANDREY
(innocently, feigning
ignorance)
What drugs?

Suddenly, Yury steps forward and slaps Andrey hard across the face. Andrey almost falls, stumbling back, and Yury grabs him by the neck, his grip firm.

YURY
Don't fuck with me. The only reason
you are still standing on this
fucking pavement is because I
fucking broke all the laws of men
and God to keep you standing. If I
ever catch you smoking this shit
again... If...

ANDREY
Mom would have never hit me.

YURY
Well, she is dead. Now listen to me
carefully, boy. This is my last
favor to you. Do you get it?

ANDREY
(pause)
I didn't ask for any favor from
your side...

He steps back, pulling free from Yury's grip.

ANDREY (CONT'D)
It was all your choice, Daddy.

He turns around and walks towards his car, gets in, and drives away, leaving a stunned Yury behind. Yury stands near his car—he is very pale, his face etched with a complex mix of anger and regret.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - EVENING.

Beep... Silence... Beep... Silence...

Jake slowly opens his eyes. He is in a hospital bed, the sterile environment confirming his location. An IV line is connected to his arm, and a clear liquid slowly drips into the catheter, drop by drop.

It's evening, and the room is dimly lit. Yury sits on a chair in front of him, looking very ashamed, his usual sternness replaced by a weary expression. Yury is wearing a sweater and a jacket, suggesting that it is no longer summer.

YURY

Do you know who I am? Just... nod.
I'll do the talking.

Jake nods slowly, his gaze unfocused.

YURY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Good. It won't take long. I am sorry. I really don't know what else can be said. Andrey is a scumbag, but he is my son. I will make sure he will never hurt anybody else. I will... You don't have to worry about anything. Your bills will be paid. If you need anything, anything at all, just give me a call. I am... Let's say, I am forever in your debt and I give you my word...

JAKE

How is she?

Yury looks at him, his face tightening, and says nothing.

Jake's face instantly freezes, a terrible realization dawning. Yury reaches inside his jacket and takes out a plump envelope, placing it quietly on the table.

YURY

Just in case, Jake... Just in case.
It's not much... But if you need more... Call me.

He stands up, preparing to leave the room.

JAKE

Who will take care of Shazam?

YURY

Pardon me?

JAKE

Anya's cat. He is all alone... While she is... away. Who will take care of him?

YURY

I am... sure, he is okay.

JAKE

And she is okay as well? She is
okay, isn't she?

YURY

(pause, his voice strained
with sorrow)

No. She is not okay.

He turns around and leaves the room, his footsteps heavy. Jake follows him with his eyes, a single tear tracing a path down his cheek. He starts crying silently, then lets out a piercing scream, and again and again, a raw wail of grief. A NURSE rushes in, and we exit the ward as she sedates Jake, his cries fading.

INT. HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS.

When Jake wakes up, the envelope with cash still lies on the table, exactly where Yuri left it. By the envelope, a folder lies open.

Jake opens the folder, his hands trembling slightly, and sees pictures of six people along with some concise information about each of them. One of the men is Yuri. Above his face, the word "PIG" is starkly written.

Another picture shows a stout man with a kind, almost benevolent face. Above his face, the word "MOUTHPIECE" is written.

The next picture is of the woman, Angela—above her picture, the word "BEAK" is written.

The three others are David, Marina, and, of course, Andrey. Each of them has a descriptor written above their face—David is PUNK, Marina is WHORE, and Andrey is BUTCHER.

JAKE

Nurse! Nurse! Fuck, where is
everybody?

A nurse enters, startled by his shouting.

JAKE (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Who was here?

NURSE

Well, no one...

JAKE

What the fuck are you talking
about? What...

Pause, then a wave of despair washes over him.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Nevermind. Go. Just fucking leave
me alone!

The nurse, flustered, quickly runs out of the ward. Jake looks at the folder, his face a mask of profound grief and burning hatred.

EXT. THE STREET - AFTERNOON.

It's late autumn. Jake walks out of the hospital, his movements stiff. He limps noticeably. The street is gray, the sky overcast. It's raining lightly, a chilling drizzle, and everything seems to be muted, almost black and white.

Jake carries the folder under his arm. He looks around, his eyes scanning, then hurries towards a cab station, driven by a new purpose.

INT. PRECINCT - AFTERNOON.

Yury is in the precinct, sitting alone in his office. There is a folder with Jake's name on the table in front of him. An ashtray, overflowing with cigarette butts, sits nearby—one of them is still smoking, a thin wisp of smoke curling upwards.

VICTOR (48), a bulky Afro-American man with a severe army haircut, enters the office. He has a small envelope in his hands.

VICTOR
There's a package for you.

YURY
A package? Since when have you
become my secretary?

VICTOR
Since you started to smoke again.
Look at you, man...

He hands the package to Yury, his expression concerned.

YURY
Who brought it?

VICTOR
I don't know... It has your name on
it.

(MORE)

VICTOR (CONT'D)
(a slight smile, trying to
lighten the mood)
Doesn't look like a bomb to me.

YURY
I think I know what's inside.

Yury takes the package and places it on the table, his gaze fixed on it.

VICTOR
Don'tcha want to open it?

Yury takes a cigarette out of the pack and lights it, taking a long, deliberate drag. Victor glances at the folder with Jake's name on it, then back at Yury.

VICTOR (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
You have to let it go, man...

Yury looks at Victor, then his gaze drifts to the folder. He taps on it with his index finger.

YURY
Did you know that when Mr. Sanders was fifteen years old, he almost killed another kid? Some kind of a school bully. Stabbed him in the gut.

VICTOR
Yeah? So what?

YURY
He was a minor... Besides, the other guy's family refused to press any charges.

VICTOR
He is nothing but a cripple now.
Case closed, my friend.

YURY
Is it, my friend?

VICTOR
I gotta go. We'll talk later.

Victor leaves the office. Yury takes another drag from his cigarette, then slowly opens the package. Inside, there is a plump envelope. He opens the envelope and sees that it's full of money. Yury closes the envelope, a heavy sigh escaping him.

EXT. CEMETERY - AFTERNOON.

Jake stands above Anya's grave, the fresh earth a stark mound. It's still raining, a continuous, mournful drizzle.

JAKE

You know what my mom said when she learned about...

(points at the grave)

She said, you are my angel now.

(pause, a bitter laugh)

I thought about it. Think, she has a problem with tenses. Cause... you were my Angel. If not for you, I would have been dead. That fucking car hit you first... But then I thought again...

(pause)

I thought... If not for me, you would have been alive. See, it works both ways. Funny... So, now you are sitting on a cloud with all those diamonds laughing at me and I stand here... talking to your...

(pause, a frustrated sigh)

...fucking grave. Who am I shitting? We both know, there ain't no clouds... No angels. No diamonds. No ghosts watching over us. You can't hear me. You are gone and I... Shit... I am nothing... I am fucking nothing without you.

Jake turns around, his shoulders slumped, and slowly walks away, disappearing into the gray, rainy afternoon.

INT. PRECINCT - EVENING.

Yury is all alone in his office. The envelope with money lies conspicuously on the table in front of him. Jake's file, opened to the page describing Jake stabbing another kid when he was fifteen, lies directly in front of Yury, almost accusatory.

FLASHSHOTS showing excerpts from the report appear, quick, jarring images:

SEVERE WOUNDS

EXTREME ATROCITY

PSYCHOTIC BEHAVIOR

Yury frowns, his jaw tightening, and grabs a cigarette pack from the table, but it's empty. Yury crushes the pack in his hand and throws it back on the table with a frustrated *thud*. He turns the page of the report and sees Jake's picture: Jake standing in front of a small pastry shop. The emblem on the front door clearly shows a happy caterpillar sitting on a clover leaf.

YURY
(under his breath, a faint
realization)
A pastry-maker...

Finally, Yury closes the file, the click of the cover echoing in the quiet room. He sits motionless in the armchair, deep in his thoughts, his face a complex mixture of exhaustion and contemplation.

EXT. THE ROAD - EVENING.

Jake drives out of the city, leaving the urban landscape behind, heading into the unknown.

EXT. JAKE MOM'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING.

Jake arrives at his mom's (STACI, 45) house in the woods. She lives there with his little stepsister, JULIA (10). Staci stands on the porch as he parks the car. Jake gets out of the car and walks to his mom, and she embraces him tightly.

STACI
Welcome home, baby.

INT. JAKE MOM'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON.

Jake is in his room. He sits at the table, his laptop open in front of him. Jake looks at a slideshow on the screen—all the pictures show him and Anya, vibrant and alive.

They laugh happily, standing in front of the lion's cage at a zoo.

They mock each other playfully on the beach, splashing in the waves.

They pose, side by side, in front of a pastry shop, under the emblem of a happy caterpillar sitting on a clover leaf.

The sign above the door clearly reads, "Jake's Pastry."

Julia enters the room, her small figure appearing in the doorway. She sees the picture on the laptop before Jake turns the laptop off, his movements quick.

JULIA
I'd have a muffin.

JAKE
(smiles sadly)
You are a muffin.

JULIA
You mean, I'm fat? I am not. Who is running the shop while you are here?

JAKE
Natasha. The one with tattoos, remember?

JULIA
The scary chick.

JAKE
She is nice. You know what, little muffin?

JULIA
What?

JAKE
I'm gonna make her the CEO.

JULIA
CEwhat?

JAKE
The owner.

JULIA
You quit the shop? The pastry shop???

JAKE
I am thinking about it.

JULIA
To do what?

JAKE
I don't know...
(pause)
To become...
...someone else. An assassin, maybe?

He smiles a strange, unsettling smile, a hint of something dark beneath the surface.

INT. JAKE MOM'S HOUSE - EVENING.

Jake sits in a rolling chair on the porch, watching the sun go down, painting the sky in fiery hues. He holds a bottle of beer in his hand. The ashtray in front of him is overflowing with cigarette butts.

Staci comes out of the house and sits opposite Jake, her expression weary.

STACI

Cancer is not the most pleasant way
to die...

Jake looks at her, pain etched deeply in his eyes.

JAKE

What is the pleasant way to die,
mom? Being crushed by a car, maybe?

STACI

Oh, Jake... I am sorry. I didn't... I
keep on forgetting...

JAKE

It's easy to forget. You two hardly
liked each other.

STACI

We didn't know each other.
(pause)
How bad is it?

JAKE

One to ten? It feels pretty much
like a solid ten, mom.

STACI

Give it time...

JAKE

To heal? These guys... Shit, have I
told you that one of them sent his
father to bribe me? It's like,
sorry, mate, we killed your
girlfriend, we crippled you, but
here is some money to ease the
pain, so to say. Give it time,
dude. Give it time... They were
sentenced to nothing.

(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)

They just walked out of the court.
It's like Anya never existed, mom.
Like she was erased... I know who did
it. I know who was at the wheel. I
know who was in the car... I know all
of them. I... What should I do, mom?

STACI

Pray... God will show you the right
way.

JAKE

God? He is fucking dead, mom. God
is fucking dead. Shit, I shouldn't
have come here.

STACI

Stay with me. As long as it takes.
We shall live through this
together.

Jake looks at his mother and smiles sadly, a profound
loneliness in his eyes.

JAKE

No, mama... I am all by myself.

As Jake and his mother sit on the porch, we move back from
them, receding into the deepening shadow of the trees. There,
at the edge of the forest, a man stands—his face completely
covered in deep shadows, observing them silently.

EXT. JAKE MOM'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING.

The house stands silent, wrapped in a thick, ethereal fog.
Everything looks dreamy, almost surreal in the muted light.

The front door opens slowly, and Jake comes out, his face
pale, showing the effects of a restless night. He looks at
the chair on the porch—empty beer bottles are scattered under
it, and a half-empty bottle of bourbon sits forlornly.

Jake winces. Then he looks down and sees an envelope tucked
neatly under the doormat. He picks up the envelope. There is
only one sentence, stark and clear, written on its crisp
white surface: "Truth kills."

Jake opens the envelope and takes out a small flash-drive.

INT. MOM'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

Jake studies the contents of the flash-drive, his brow furrowed in concentration. It contains two folders. One of them is ominously called—"The butcher boys." The other one is called—"Sticks and Stones."

Jake opens the first folder and sees copies of D&A tests taken after the accident. We see a series of quick FLASHSHOTS confirming that all three youngsters in the car were indeed under the influence of drugs:

SYNTHETIC CANNABINOID POSITIVE.

Jake looks at their faces in the pictures for a long time, his expression hardening, then he opens the second folder.

There is only one document in it—it's a post-mortem autopsy report describing the horrific wounds Anya received in the accident. Jake sees Anya's post-mortem picture, a stark, lifeless image.

Jake reads through the text, which is NOT shown to us, his eyes scanning the gruesome details. He closes his eyes tightly, then pushes the laptop away so hard it slides across the table, almost falling off.

Jake screams in agony, a raw, guttural cry, and throws the glass half-full of whiskey across the room. The glass shatters against the wall, and a large, dark spot spills and drips down—it almost looks like blood. Jake sits motionless, his eyes wide open and brimming with tears, his body trembling.

Finally, he stands up and gently takes the laptop in his hands as if holding a newborn child, his movements reverent. He looks at Anya's post-mortem picture once again. Her dead eyes are half-open, staring blankly.

JAKE

I'm gonna kill them all, baby.
Don'tcha worry... Don'tcha worry...

Jake closes his eyes, pressing them shut, and sits motionless, his resolve hardening.

INT. JAKE'S ROOM - MORNING.

Jake is about to leave. His rucksack lies on the floor, packed and ready, by the door. He sits on the couch, fully dressed, quietly looking at Anya's picture on his phone.

Staci enters and sits by his side, her presence a silent comfort.

STACI
She is so pretty...

JAKE
Was.

STACI
I guess... you won't stay...

JAKE
I need to take care of things, mom.

STACI
(pause, her voice
resigned)
Nothing will return her, Jake.

JAKE
They fucking killed her, mom. Don't
you understand that? They killed
her and walked out of clean. That's
that.

STACI
Let it go.

JAKE
How can you say something like
that?

STACI
Have I told you about your father?

JAKE
It's not the time.

STACI
But it is. He was... He was so
handsome... So... masculine. And he
always behaved like a man... He had
that mantra he kept on repeating—a
man should walk like a man, talk
like a man, and do what a man has
to do.

JAKE
Please...

STACI

At first I... I liked it. I guess I was too young and too stupid to understand... I guess I loved him too much. So I learned to cope with him and with his... demons. It was like he had that fire inside him, and that fire needed to be fed all the time. Once, we were in the bar...

(pause)

You got a cigarette?

JAKE

I thought you quit.

STACI

So I did. Give me the cigarette, will you?

Jake takes a pack out of his pocket and hands it to Staci. Staci lights the cigarette and takes a deep drag, exhaling slowly.

STACI (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

It was a real shithole. Mark liked shitholes. All those stinking punk clubs and shabby road houses... There was one guy there. A big fellow. Prison tattoos, all that stuff, you know. He... He saw us when we were entering the place and... winked. Nothing much...

(pause)

And nothing happened. Mark didn't say a word, and I thought that for a change he would at least pretend he didn't notice. So we sat there, drinking, and then, all out of a sudden, Mark said something like, "Honey, give me a sec, will you?" In a very casual tone. Then he stands up and walks to the table where that bulky fellow sits and says something to him, and then he grabs the beer mug—one of those big ones, two pints or something—and just throws that mug into the guy's face.

JAKE

Mom!

STACI

I still remember that sound... A dull, stupid sound, and then the guy fell down on the floor, and his head... The blood mixed with beer and became... almost indecent, like piss. As if your father pissed on him. And Mark just looks at me and smiles. Happily!

JAKE

I don't want to...

STACI

You will, Jake. That was the time when I understood that one day your father would kill somebody. Fortunately, he died before that. First, I learned he was pushing drugs for the local Italian gang. And then, no surprise, I learned he was treating himself to his own shit. And then... You know what happened then, don't you... You were what... fourteen years old when he died? I told you it was a heart attack. I still remember the way you looked at me. You knew. Everybody knew. He died of an overdose. He was so high, he didn't even understand he was dying. HE MISSED HIS OWN DEATH!

(pause)

That was a blessing. Because in any other case, he would have killed someone, oh he would. And maybe, just maybe, it could have been me, or you...

JAKE

He never touched me.

STACI

But he wanted to, Jake. He had that fire, burning in his heart. And you know what?

JAKE

What?

STACI

You have it too. I prayed, oh, I prayed to God to deliver you from this curse. And then...

JAKE

You know the story, mom. It was self-defense.

STACI

Was it? You almost killed that kid, Jake. You were smiling when the cops arrived. Happily!

JAKE

I have to go.

STACI

Your father passed something to you. Something rotten. He was a drug dealer, and he was a killer, even if he never killed anyone.

(pause)

I wish I could chain you to this couch, but I can't... I can't... So promise me.

JAKE

What?

STACI

Promise me, you will never follow the path of your father.

JAKE

I don't believe in words, mother...

STACI

Nothing will bring that girl back. Nothing!

Jake's face freezes, the words striking him with cruel finality.

JAKE

She once had a name, mom...

STACI

Promise!

Jake gently takes a cigarette from Staci's fingers, takes a deep drag, and carefully places the butt in the ash-tray.

EXT. ON THE ROAD - AFTERNOON.

Jake drives back to the city, the landscape blurring past him. He passes a familiar sign: "Welcome to Norristown. We cherish life."

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - EVENING.

Jake is back in his apartment, the familiar walls offering little comfort. He sits at the table, gazing at Anya's pictures, his face etched with sorrow. He cries a little, small, desperate sobs escaping him. The folder with pictures and information about Andrey and the gang lies open on the table in front of him.

Finally, Jake makes a decision. He calls somebody on the darknet chat, his fingers moving quickly.

JAKE

It's me.

(pause)

I'm out. I say, I'm out. The shop is yours. Want a piece of advice?

(pause)

Burn it.

Jake hangs up.

INT. PASTRY SHOP - EVENING.

First, we see the screen of a laptop. The logo in the left corner of the screen is identical to what we saw in the opening sequence—a stoned butterfly smoking a joint with a dumb smile on its face; a torn-up clover leaf lies under its feet. The darknet chat is open beneath the emblem.

Then the chat closes, and another emblem appears—a happy caterpillar sitting on a clover leaf. We are now on the front page of Jake's Pastry site.

We see NATASHA (24), a muscular, boyishly-looking girl, sitting in front of the laptop behind the counter of a well-lit, cozy-looking pastry shop.

Pastry boxes are everywhere, stacked neatly—each one adorned with the happy caterpillar emblem. Natasha closes the laptop and smiles absent-mindedly at one of the clients—it is the same Stranger we have already seen at least twice. The Stranger Jake saw immediately after the accident.

STRANGER

Bad news?

NATASHA

Oh... No, I guess...

She looks at the Stranger, a slight blush on her cheeks, and smiles, a nervous, almost embarrassed expression.

NATASHA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

I don't know...

EXT. MICHAEL'S HOUSE - EVENING.

We follow MICHAEL (45), the attorney (whose picture we have already seen among the files Jake studied), as he parks his car in front of his charming cottage. He leaves the car and stands for a moment, smoking, then takes his briefcase from the back seat.

He walks slowly towards his nice and cozy home. Michael looks like a typical, successful middle-class American attorney, his demeanor composed. Michael stands on the porch, then enters the house.

INT. MICHAEL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

Michael's wife, LENA (45), stands in the corridor—she is an archetypal housewife.

LENA

How was it?

MICHAEL

SSDD, honey.

LENA

We'll fix you, don't worry. Grab yourself a drink. Dinner is about to be ready in... say, five minutes?

MICHAEL

No prob. Five minutes is more than enough to get rat-assed. When you're my age, that is.

Michael walks into the dining-room and stands in front of a huge aquarium filled with piranha fish. He looks at the fish, their tiny eyes gleaming, then slowly submerges his index finger in the water.

The piranhas instantly react, darting towards his finger and trying to attack it. Michael laughs happily, a dark amusement in his eyes, and takes a step back.

EXT. MICHAEL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

We move back, our perspective shifting, and seemingly fly through the door and out of the house, soaring across the street.

There, in the deep shadows, a car is parked, its engine off. Jake sits at the wheel, his face pale and sickly. The picture of Michael lies on the passenger seat of his car, discarded. A switchblade knife rests on the folder, its blade glinting ominously.

INT. MICHAEL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

Michael sits in an armchair, absorbed in some papers, the soft light of a lamp illuminating his work. He looks at his expensive wrist watch and seems surprised by how much time has passed. He approaches the bar and pours himself some whiskey.

MICHAEL
(loudly, his voice echoing
in the quiet house)
Honey? What about that dinner?

No one answers.

MICHAEL (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Lena? Baby? Are you alright back
there?

Michael puts the glass on the bar table and walks out of the dining-room, entering the kitchen, and then STOPS, frozen in place.

MICHAEL (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
What... have you done? What have you
done to my wife???

EXT. MICHAEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT.

Jake sits in his car, parked in the darkness outside. The folder with Michael's picture is on his lap. The knife lies on the passenger seat, its blade now covered with blood, a gruesome stain. Jake's right hand is also bloody, smeared with fresh red.

Jake looks at Michael's picture for a long moment, his gaze fixed, then emotionally closes the folder and throws it onto the back seat, a gesture of disgust. He beats the steering wheel with his fists, a frustrated, angry tattoo, then starts his car and drives away madly, tires squealing.

We follow his car with our eyes, watching it disappear, and then slowly fly towards Michael's cottage, drawn back to the scene.

INT. MICHAEL'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS.

We enter the cottage through the front door, gliding silently through the corridor, hearing the chilling sound of droplets. We enter the kitchen and stumble upon Michael's wife—she lies on the floor on her stomach, utterly still, and appears to be dead, lying in a spreading puddle of blood.

We fly out of the kitchen and enter the living room—it is almost dark, the only source of light emanating from the eerie glow of the aquarium. We approach the aquarium and see Michael—his head is IN the aquarium, submerged in the water, and fish are actively DINING on his face, a horrific sight. He is dead, and his face is almost entirely eaten by the piranha. The table is wet with water spilled from the aquarium, and water slowly drips onto the floor, mimicking the sounds from the accident.

For a long time, all we hear is silence, broken only by the constant *drip, drip, drip* of water. Then, the front door opens somewhere behind us, and we hear a loud, cheerful teenage girl's voice.

ASHLEY

Mom! Dad! I'm home!

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT.

Jake is back at his apartment, trembling uncontrollably. He sits at the table, the knife and his phone placed before him. His right hand is covered with dry, crusty blood.

The folder also lies on the table, open. Jake looks at Michael's picture, then he slams his fist down on it.

JAKE

I am not a monster!

At this very moment, he receives a message on Whatsapp. Jake looks at his phone and reads through the message, sitting perfectly still for a moment, his mind racing. Then, he opens the table drawer...

...and takes out a small blue box with a plump angel drawn on it. It's the same box he left in the mall moments before the car accident.

Jake looks at the box, first perplexed, then shocked by its appearance. Finally, he opens the box, his hands shaking slightly.

EXT. MICHAEL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

The front yard of Michael's cottage is full of COPS, their flashing lights painting the scene in stark blues and reds. Two ER ASSISTANTS carry Michael's body in a black body bag to the waiting Ambulance, their movements somber.

Yury stands near the Ambulance, smoking, his face grave

Yury throws the cigarette butt onto the ground and steps on it, crushing it, then walks into the house.

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Jake looks at something that lies inside the box for a long time, his face utterly numb, devoid of expression. He then starts crying helplessly, tears streaming down his face.

Jake carefully closes the box and places it back in the table drawer, as if trying to hide it. Then he hears the chilling sound of droplets coming from the bathroom. He gets up and takes a step towards the bathroom, then stops and grabs his knife from the table, a strange sense of resolve in his movements.

He walks out of the room and stops in front of the mirror in the corridor. He looks at his reflection for a long moment, a distorted image staring back.

JAKE

I am not like my father...
(pause, his voice barely a
whisper)
I am nobody.

There is a wall calendar by the mirror. Jake looks at the calendar and pushes the current date square, leaving a bloody thumbprint on the paper.

Jake turns away and walks into the bathroom, but instead of turning the running faucet off, he turns it on even more, letting the water gush, and starts filling the bathtub with hot water.

INT. MICHAEL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

Yury stands near the aquarium, which is now empty, its glass shimmering eerily. One dead piranha lies on the bottom of the aquarium, a grotesque relic.

Victor enters the room. For a long time, they stand motionless, as if enchanted by the empty aquarium and the single dead fish.

YURY

How are they?

VICTOR

Lena is sedated. She... doesn't remember much. She was drugged before it all... happened. Injected with something potent... I guess the guy was hiding in the kitchen. She goes in. Pours herself a glass of red wine... The guy sticks a needle in her neck from behind. Clean and mean. She didn't see anything.

(pause, a somber shake of his head)

When the cops arrived and saw her lying in that puddle, they thought she was a goner.

(pause)

I wonder, why did he spare her?

YURY

What about Mike's daughter?

VICTOR

Ashley came home when... the show was over. Whoever did this was gone. So, she ain't gonna be of much assistance.

Yury points at the empty aquarium, his gaze hard.

YURY

That's a horrible way to die.

VICTOR

(frowns, his expression grim)

Mike was a former quarterback. There's no way he would have let anybody make a meal out of him in this piranha brunch without a struggle. I think he was drugged, just like his wife.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

If he was lucky, he didn't feel
shit. He was dead before the fish
started to have fun with his
eyeballs.

YURY

Let's wait for the autopsy.

VICTOR

The autopsy... Did you see his face?
What's left of it. Fucking mess.

(pause, a tired sigh)

Mike had a lot of enemies...

YURY

We all do...

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Jake lies in the bathtub, which is now full of water. He
submerges himself completely in the bathtub, lying very still
with his eyes closed, the water covering his face.

Suddenly, he opens his eyes wide and rises from the bathtub,
gasping, taking a deep, ragged breath.

INT. NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT.

Andrey and the gang are in the Green Room of a punk
nightclub. New Metal blares loudly in the background,
vibrating through the walls.

David, his Mohawk painted a vibrant green, snorts some
cocaine from a small pile on a table. Marina, dressed in a
full emo outfit, watches him without much interest, her gaze
distant.

DAVID

Want some?

MARINA

You should stop that. It's gonna
kill you one day.

DAVID

We all are gonna die one day, baby...

Andrey, still dressed like a yuppie and clearly not belonging
to the place, winces almost imperceptibly at the word "baby"
and glances at David, a flicker of irritation in his eyes.
David seems not to notice the look.

DAVID (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Gonna be a hell of a gig today.

MARINA
I thought you call them.. concerts..

DAVID
Con-certs... Andy, my man, what is
eating Gilbert Grape?

ANDREY
Mike Bellamy was killed a few days
ago.

DAVID
And who in carnation is that?

Marina frowns, a knowing look crossing her face.

ANDREY
The attorney who saved your ass.

DAVID
Oh, good old Mike! I forgot about
him completely.
(pause, a casual shrug)
As a matter of fact, I believe he
saved YOUR ass.

ANDREY
Say again.

DAVID
You were the wheel-man that day.

ANDREY
(slowly, a dangerous edge
to his voice)
What the fuck is that supposed to
mean?

DAVID
Nothing. Nothing, dude. Why are
you, Russians, so gloomy all the
time? The world is peachy! One dead
counselor ain't gonna spoil
nothing. Relax, man! Snort some
sugar.

ANDREY
Why don't you go and fuck yourself.

DAVID
Andy, boy, you have a dirty mouth.

David snorts some more coke, oblivious to Andrey's growing tension.

ANDREY

Your nose...

DAVID

What's with my nose?

ANDREY

It will fall off one day...
(pause, a cold smile)
If you live that long.

DAVID

You are such a fuckface...

MARINA

David, stop! We are all in this together!

David turns and looks at Marina with sudden, intense hatred in his eyes, his earlier nonchalance gone.

DAVID

We were. It's all over now. It's been six months since... Wanna know what I feel? Nothing! No remorse. No pain. No-thing. I don't give a rat's ass about that dead bitch. I don't give a shit about her crippled boyfriend and I couldn't care less about that dead shyster.

David turns back to Andrey, his voice dripping with contempt.

DAVID (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Fuck you very much for being such a dick.

Andrey is about to answer, a retort on his tongue, but at this very moment, a YOUNG PUNK bursts into the room.

YOUNG PUNK

Come on, motherfucker. Everybody's waiting.

DAVID

(smiles, his bravado returning)
See! I am a star! Wanna watch the gig from behind the stage?

MARINA

I guess...

She gets up. Andrey sits motionless. David looks at him for a long time, a lingering challenge in his gaze.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Suit yourself, Stalin.

David and Marina exit the Green Room, leaving Andrey alone, deep in his thoughts, the loud music still pounding through the walls.

INT. NIGHT CLUB - CONTINUOUS.

David walks towards the stage, the heavy bass thrumming through the floor. Right behind the stage, a CROWD of people, mostly friends of the band, watch the performance, swaying to the music. David bumps into a GUY, wearing a cap that casts a deep shadow over his face.

THE GUY

My bad.

He walks away quickly, merging into the crowd. David shrugs, dismissive, and steps onto the stage. He walks directly toward the microphone stand, his eyes scanning the eager faces in the crowd, and stands in front of them as the band immediately launches into their first song, playing loudly.

INT. NIGHT CLUB - CONTINUOUS.

Andrey is still in the Green Room, the raw, distorted music now truly annoying him.

ANDREY

(under his breath)

Why don't you just shut the fuck
up!

To his surprise, the music suddenly becomes chaotic, a cacophony of screeching feedback and disjointed notes, and then abruptly stops. Andrey raises his head, listening intently to the disturbed murmur the distracted crowd makes as fright begins to ripple through them.

INT. NIGHT CLUB - CONTINUOUS.

David stands on the stage, basking in the spotlight. He feels that something is wrong, a cold prickle of unease.

The smile slowly leaves his face as the music behind his back dies, and he hears whispers and then sharp screams erupting from the crowd.

VOICES IN THE CROWD

What the fuck, man!
Look at all this blood!
Hey, dude, you pissed your pants
red!

David turns his head slowly, fear seizing him. The BASS-GUITARIST says something, his mouth moving, but David seems not to understand a word as all of a sudden everything blurs, his vision tunneling.

David looks at the crowd again and sees that people are pointing at him, their faces contorted in horror and disgust.

David looks down, still clutching the mic, and sees that there is a steadily growing puddle of blood under his feet. He slowly falls to his knees, still grabbing the mic-stand for support, then touches the puddle with his right hand.

He lets the mic go and falls onto his back, the mic falling down onto the stage with a loud BANG.

The puddle of blood rapidly becomes bigger, spreading across the stage every second as a pulsating flow of blood streams out of a cut on David's thigh. David looks up at the ceiling, his eyes wide. The ceiling becomes bright white and enormous, then darkens rapidly, and then everything turns black.

INT. THE MORGUE - CONTINUOUS.

...And then the light is back, harsh and glaring. David is still looking at the ceiling, and it is bright white and low, lit by the fluorescent lamp. Then Yury's face appears above him, a grim, concerned expression.

And then the perspective changes, and we look at David from Yury's point of view.

David lies on the coroner's table in the morgue, utterly still. His eyes are open, staring blankly upwards. He is dead. Yury and Victor stand above him, examining the body.

VICTOR

He literally bled dry. Look here,
see?

Victor raises the sheet, revealing David's thigh, and points at a precise spot.

VICTOR (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
The killer cut right through the
femoral artery. He used something
really sharp...

YURY
I don't understand. He was seen
walking on the stage.

VICTOR
The blood test shows he was stoned.
He...
(a humorless chuckle)
Sort of missed his own death.
Sounds almost Shakespearean.

YURY
Sounds like shit. I know this guy.
He is... Andrey's friend.

VICTOR
Oh...

YURY
He was in the car with Andrey when
they... On that day.

Victor looks at Yuri but says nothing, understanding the
unspoken implication.

YURY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Can you do me a favor? Would you...
check on that kid, they nearly
killed in the car accident? Jake
something... I know you did, but...

VICTOR
Listen to me. This was done by a
pro, okay?

YURY
This was done by a guy with a sharp
knife. Once there was a knife in
Jake's past... Once...
(pause)
Check on him. Use your darknet
dwarfs. Let 'em dig deep.
(pause)
I am asking you as a friend, Vic.

Victor nods slowly.

YURY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Thank you. Oh, and check his
girlfriend too.

VICTOR
His... dead girlfriend?

YURY
Yes.

VICTOR
What's on your mind?

YURY
I don't know... Frankly speaking, I
don't even want to know, but...
Something sinister is about to
happen.
(pause)
Something wicked.

EXT. DARK STREET - NIGHT.

Something is very wrong with Jake. He walks down a dark and narrow street, his movements unsteady. He seems to be drunk, or perhaps disoriented in another way.

Everything around him looks weird, distorted—the buildings are shabby, leaning precariously; the windows are broken or covered with rotten wood-piles; the pavement under his feet looks ancient, made of uneven stones, with grass growing in between them.

Jake sees rats scuttling in the dark corners of the abandoned buildings, their eyes glinting.

He sees an ugly, emaciated cat, carrying a dead fish in its mouth, its fur matted.

He sees a BEGGAR sitting on the wooden porch of an abandoned grocery store—a stray dog sits patiently by his side, and the beggar feeds the dog with something that looks suspiciously like raw meat. The Beggar follows Jake with his eyes, a strange, knowing look, and smiles a toothless smile.

The street becomes narrower, the buildings on both sides crooked and leaning inward, as if their architecture is grotesquely distorted.

Finally, Jake makes it to an opening between the buildings and emerges onto a wide street that looks absolutely normal, but it is also abandoned—the road is free of cars, there are no people, and the stores, bars, and buildings are all dark, devoid of life.

Jake walks down the street and sees a single source of light—it comes from the French window of one of the restaurants, a welcoming glow in the oppressive darkness.

The light is so bright, so overwhelming, that Jake barely sees anything but this light, and he walks instinctively towards it. He turns his head and looks back at the narrow, warped street he has just left—he sees somebody watching him from the deep shadow of the dark passage. Jake quickly turns away and walks faster towards the light.

The closer he gets to the restaurant, the more details he sees. There is a COMPANY OF HAPPY PEOPLE behind the window, celebrating something joyous.

There is a YOUNG COUPLE standing in the center of the room—the WOMAN holds a NEWBORN BABY in her arms.

Jake walks towards the French window and looks at the Woman, and she sees him, her eyes meeting his, and she smiles, a gentle, understanding smile. He takes another step towards the front door of the restaurant—a distinctive red door—and at this very moment, he hears footsteps behind his back. He turns around sharply.

...The street is well lit now, as if a switch has been flipped; cars are passing by, their headlights cutting through the night, and people are walking past, paying no attention to him.

There is a STRANGER standing not far from Jake and looking at him with an odd curiosity. We have met the Stranger before—he witnessed the car accident in the very beginning of the story. He has also visited the pastry shop.

Jake is disoriented. He looks around, puzzled by all the bright lights and all the people passing by, seemingly oblivious to his presence. Finally, he looks at the Stranger.

THE STRANGER
(speaking with a subtle
Russian accent)
Are you okay, my friend?

JAKE
Yeah, I guess.

STRANGER

You don't look okay. Do you know where you are?

JAKE

What? I said, I'm fine!

Jake looks back over his shoulder, and instead of a French window, he sees a solid, unyielding WALL.

Jake almost falls down, his legs giving out. The Stranger quickly grabs him by the elbow, steadying him.

STRANGER

Wow! Hold your horses. You are not drunk or... you know...

JAKE

Sorry... No, I am not drunk. I am... Listen, I kind of lost my way, I guess.

STRANGER

Let me call the ambulance.

JAKE

I need no ambulance!

STRANGER

Let me walk you home then. I can't leave you here in the middle of the night. Do you remember where you live or... where your spaceship is parked?

Jake looks at the Stranger and manages a weak smile, a flicker of dark humor.

EXT. THE STREET - CONTINUOUS.

Jake and the Stranger are on their way to Jake's apartment, walking side by side down the street. Jake still feels a bit dizzy, the earlier disorientation lingering.

THE STRANGER

You look better now.

JAKE

Thanks... It was... weird. I sort of blacked out.

STRANGER

Don't tell me. The way you stared
at that wall...

JAKE

You don't need to... I mean, I live
around the corner.

STRANGER

I'll walk you around that corner
then. I don't have much else to do...
I like to walk a lot since... my
daughter passed on.

JAKE

Sorry to hear that.

STRANGER

Well, we all die. Problem is, God
forgot to teach us how to cope with
death. Especially when it's out of
the blue. My shrink says time will
take care of things. What do you
think?

JAKE

Me? I hope... Time cures.

STRANGER

No, it doesn't. The pain is always
there. Right behind your heart.

Jake stops and looks at the Stranger, his expression suddenly
intense, recognizing a shared burden.

JAKE

My girlfriend died half a year ago.

STRANGER

My God. How did it happen?

JAKE

She... was killed.

STRANGER

I am so sorry.

JAKE

It hurts more and more every day.

STRANGER

It's a confused world. Some would
say... She is in a better place now.

JAKE

Yeah... Some would. Problem is... I don't believe in the afterlife.

STRANGER

(a probing gaze)
Don't you?

JAKE

We are made of flesh and blood. Nothing remains. Anya was an... orphan. Her mother was raped and decided to keep the baby. I guess, Anya learned that the world is full of shit even before she was born. A fucking paradox. Her mom committed suicide when she was four. What a role model. All her life, Anya had nightmares about her childhood. About that guy, who raped her mother. About her own dad. I couldn't protect her from her past. All I wanted was to protect her from the future.

(pause, his voice filled with despair)

We had plans, man. She wanted me to... to quit my job, and I promised her, and...

STRANGER

What kind of a job?

JAKE

I had a... small pastry shop.

STRANGER

Bet it was good.

JAKE

(with a bitter smile)
Best in town. It doesn't matter now. I failed. Everything is in the past... I am in the past.

The Stranger stops and looks at Jake, a knowing look in his eyes.

STRANGER

Not yet.

JAKE

Oh... My... my place is over there.

STRANGER

It was a pleasure meeting you...

JAKE

Thanks for walking me home. I feel
a lot better now.

STRANGER

No need to thank me.

JAKE

Your accent... Where are you from,
man?

STRANGER

From the old country that doesn't
exist anymore.

JAKE

Oh...

STRANGER

Take care...

The Stranger starts walking away, then turns back to Jake, a
mysterious glint in his eye.

STRANGER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

The pain is always behind your
heart. Want a piece of advice? Find
someone to take care of. A cat,
maybe, who knows?

(pause, his accent
suddenly gone, his voice
clear and resonant)

Things will change, JAKE. They are
already changing.

The Stranger turns quickly behind the corner and is gone
before Jake fully realizes he called him by name.

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Jake reaches his apartment and opens the door, stumbling
forward as he almost falls over a cat in the corridor. It's
Anya's cat, Shazam. His name is printed on his collar.

He is very fat and very dirty; his head is covered with old,
rotten blood.

JAKE

How the fuck did you get here?

Shazam purrs. Jake looks at the cat, then he turns the light on and sees there are pictures of David, Marina, and Andrey glued to the mirror.

David's face is crossed out with a harsh red mark. "Dried Punk" is scrawled across his picture. "Snuff the Whore!" is written across Marina's picture. "Save the Butcher for desert!" is written across Andrey's picture.

There is a calendar on the wall, marked with bloody thumbprints.

Shazam purrs, rubbing his head against Jake's leg. Jake winces—the cat reeks of decay.

JAKE (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
You need a bath.

Jake looks at the bathroom—the door is half-open, and it's very dark inside, an ominous void.

Suddenly, Jake feels a wave of nausea, and moves back, stumbling upon the cat again, almost falling. Shazam hisses.

Jake pushes the cat away with disgust. Shazam meows and walks away—he walks unsteadily, as if he doesn't quite understand how to use his own body.

Jake looks at Marina's picture for a long time.

JAKE (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
No... No fucking way. That's not...
Any, please... Tell me what to do?
Tell me...
(pause)
You would have never... Never... I am
not a killer!

At this very moment, Jake's phone rings, startling him. Jake takes the phone out of his pocket and looks at it, bewildered, his eyes wide.

It's a call from ANYA.

Jake pushes the virtual button on the screen and brings the phone to his ear, his heart pounding.

ANYA
(distant, distorted by
strange noises, weird
music, odd sounds)
Jake...

JAKE
What is it... Who are you?

ANYA
Jake... My love... Why didn't you enter
the door, Jake?

JAKE
It's not happening...

Anya's voice sounds very distant now, fading in and out.

ANYA
The red door, Jake. You should have
passed through the door!

JAKE
I don't... Anya, please... Is it you?
Is it really you?

ANYA
(very distant, barely a
whisper)
Don't...

JAKE
Anya! Oh, my God, what should I do?

ANYA
(whispering, barely
audible through the
distortion)
Help... her...

Anya is gone. The line goes dead.

Jake looks at the phone. The screen is black. He pushes the button, and Anya's picture appears on the screen, her smiling face a cruel contrast to the moment. Above her picture, there is a calendar, showing the current time and date. It says, "29.10.23."

Jake looks at Marina's picture on the mirror, his eyes narrowing, a sudden realization dawning on him.

Then he runs out of the apartment, driven by an urgent, frantic energy.

Shazam follows him with a contemptuous stare, then slowly walks into the bathroom, the faint sound of dripping water echoing from within.

We look at the mirror again, then at the wall where the calendar with a cat playing with mice hangs.

The date square on the calendar, the one Jake marked with his bloody thumb, is IDENTICAL to the one we have just seen on his phone: "29.10.23."

INT. MARINA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

We are now at Marina's place. She lives in a shabby, poorly furnished apartment.

Marina sits at the table in the unlit, tiny kitchen, right in front of the window. It's dark outside, and all we see is a black, skeletal tree lit eerily by the moon—its bare branches scratch the glass every now and then. The table is dirty, cluttered with unwashed dishes. Right behind Marina, an open door leads to a dark, uninviting corridor.

Marina talks to Andrey via a Whatsapp video conference. Her face is illuminated only by the laptop monitor, making her look pale, almost ghostly.

Marina is crying. Andrey, on the other hand, seems to be enjoying himself.

MARINA

I see his face every time I close
my eyes... So cold...

ANDREY

(jokingly)

It's mid-November, after all.

MARINA

He bled to death... Honey, what is
this? Who could have done such a
thing to him?

ANDREY

I think... It's gonna snow tomorrow...

MARINA

Andrey, it was David for Christ's
sake! Say fucking something!

ANDREY

It's been two weeks. Listen... My Dad
is on the case... He says...

MARINA

What is wrong with you?

ANDREY

My dad says that they will find
this guy.

(MORE)

ANDREY (CONT'D)

They will nail him, no problem. In the meantime, you better be careful. The guy who did it is still out there...

MARINA

David was your friend too...

ANDREY

(calmly)

Friends don't fuck their friends' girlfriends.

(pause)

Don't say anything. Not a fucking word. I am not stupid. I knew all along. I just... don't give a shit. I was sure it would be over one way or another. Well, there we go. It's over.

MARINA

I didn't...

ANDREY

Oh, you fucking did. Don't be sorry. No need.

MARINA

(whispering)

Can you come? I am... I am so scared.

ANDREY

Sorry, hun. My dad thinks it would be better for me to stay at home. For my own good. Want a piece of advice? Lock yourself up. It's gonna be over...

(chuckles)

...one way or another.

Andrey hangs up.

Marina cries, alone in the dark, dirty kitchen, lit only by the pale moonlight. The shadows are deep and menacing, and the door to the corridor is ajar, revealing nothing but impenetrable darkness behind it.

Marina starts looking for something in her pockets, her fingers fumbling, and finds some cocaine. As she is about to snort it, she hears a child's voice coming from the dark corridor, a faint, unsettling sound.

CHILD'S VOICE (O.S.)

Hello? Hello?

EXT. THE STREET - CONTINUOUS.

Jake is on his way to Marina's apartment. He runs frantically down the street, his breath coming in ragged gasps.

He stops abruptly by a shabby apartment building. There is a small, dilapidated playground in front of it, and an old seesaw creaks mournfully, swaying in the wind.

Nearby, a small, one-story house stands on the playground, oddly reminiscent of a gingerbread house. The house is lit by a single lantern above a bright RED front door.

Jake stops as if hypnotized, gazing at the red door for a long moment. He seems hesitant, but then he makes a decision. He runs towards the apartment house instead, leaving the gingerbread house behind him.

The lantern above the Red door goes dark, plunging the small house into shadow.

INT. PRECINCT - CONTINUOUS.

Victor is in his office, alone, sitting in front of a computer, its screen casting a blue glow on his face. Some documents are scattered on the table beside him.

We see the Jake's Pastry Shop emblem displayed on the screen. We see Jake's file, open and highlighted. We see another emblem—the one that was used in the darknet chats, the stoned butterfly.

But Victor seems to be most interested in the files and reports displayed on the screen of his old, flickering computer.

We see Anya's old picture.

We see various reports on the screen, dense with text and data.

VICTOR

What the...

Victor opens a video file. We don't see what he watches, but his face changes dramatically, a mixture of shock and disbelief.

VICTOR (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

(under his breath, a
horrified whisper)

Jesus...

At this moment, Victor's phone rings, a jarring sound in the quiet office.

Victor picks up the phone, his hand trembling slightly.

VICTOR (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Yeah.

(pause)

You found whom?

(pause, his eyes widening)

I know where she lives. I am on my way.

Victor hangs up and looks at his phone, his expression grim.

VICTOR (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Jesus fucking Christ...

Victor dials Yury's number, his fingers moving with frantic urgency.

INT. ANDREY'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Andrey is in his apartment, engrossed in a game on his PS5, mindlessly drinking whiskey from a glass. Yury walks in.

YURY

You don't look like a mourner to me.

ANDREY

(not even looking at him,
his eyes glued to the
screen)

I am desperate.

YURY

You might want to know that your friend was so high, he didn't even feel the blade that ended his life.

ANDREY

Good for him.

(pause)

Listen, it happened almost two weeks ago... So if you don't mind...

(points at the screen)

I am in the middle of something...

Yury looks at him for a long time, a mixture of disappointment and anger in his eyes, then steps directly in front of the TV, blocking Andrey's view. Andrey raises the remote and clicks repeatedly, but Yury doesn't move.

Andrey sighs in annoyance and puts the remote aside, finally acknowledging his father.

YURY

Sometimes I think you are not my kin. Way too stupid. Don't you understand?

ANDREY

Yeah, yeah, sure. I should stay off drugs... From now on.

YURY

Someone is hunting you guys down.

ANDREY

Us?

YURY

Your friends.
(pause, his gaze piercing)
You.

ANDREY

The way I see it, we are in the same boat. That counselor... You know, that fat pig... What was his name?

YURY

What did you call him?

ANDREY

I was just...

YURY

What the fuck is wrong with you, son? Your friend is dead. He was fucking slaughtered!

ANDREY

Another dead punk. Who cares? He was not even Russian. Americans are... disposable. Besides, he was fucking my girl. Everybody knows that. Why should I care if any of them gets wasted?

Yury looks at his son with utter disgust and wants to say something cutting, but at this moment his phone rings, pulling him away from the argument. He looks at the screen.

YURY

This is not over.

Yury walks out of the room.

Andrey is puzzled, not yet scared, but a flicker of unease crosses his face.

He tries to call Marina but she doesn't pick up.

INT. MARINA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Marina stands rigidly in the dark living-room, looking at someone hidden in the shadows. She is absolutely terrified, her body trembling.

A MAN sits calmly in an armchair, holding her young son, TEDDY (5), on his lap. We do not see his face, only his ominous silhouette against the faint light. When the Man talks, he WHISPERS.

MARINA

Please...

THE MAN

You have to be careful when
pleading with Death...

(to Teddy, his voice
deceptively soft)

You know what they call you when
you don't hear them?

TEDDY

Teddy-bear.

THE MAN

They call you retard. They say, you
are slow... Now... What do they call
you when you can hear them?

TEDDY

Special...

THE MAN

Oh, yes, you are special... I believe
you are the one...

(to Marina, his voice
turning colder)

What do you want from Death?

MARINA

Just... let him go... He is innocent...

THE MAN

No one is innocent.

(pause)
Nevertheless, your wish may be granted. But what's your offer? You have to offer something as a toll.

MARINA
I don't have any money.

THE MAN
You have your life...

MARINA
Then take it!

THE MAN
And who will take care of the little one?

MARINA
My mother! She... She hates me, but she adores Teddy. I can call her right now! Tell her to come!

THE MAN
Then do so.

The man gently lets Teddy go, setting him down from his lap.

THE MAN (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
(to Teddy)
Grandma will be coming soon. Wait for her in the corridor.

Teddy, innocent and trusting, walks out of the room, disappearing into the darkness of the corridor.

THE MAN (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
You will have to be very quiet while I work on you. If you scream... He will die. Then, I will kill your mother. And then I will kill you. But first I will make you taste your own son's flesh.

MARINA
Oh, God, please, no... I promise! I will be quiet! Just don't hurt Teddy!

THE MAN
Your offer is accepted.

The Man stands up, his silhouette growing larger, more menacing. Marina instinctively covers her mouth with her hand, stifling a scream. She is absolutely terrified.

INT. MARINA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Jake stands rigidly in the doorway of Marina's bedroom, his presence unnoticed by Teddy. He turns around and sees Teddy, who is now sitting calmly on the floor in the corridor, his back against the wall. Teddy looks past Jake, his gaze unfocused, then softly sits down.

TEDDY

Mom is asleep... I tried to wake her
up... But she won't.
She must be very tired.
(not looking at Jake)
Hey, Mister... What is a retard?

Jake doesn't answer. He slowly enters the room and sees Marina lying on the bed. Her eyes are wide open, staring blankly, and so is her mouth—as if she is still screaming silently. She is dead. Her left hand is brutally broken in a couple of places, twisted at unnatural angles.

JAKE

Oh, God...

Jake is utterly shocked, a wave of nausea washing over him. He backs away quickly, stumbling. When he is in the corridor, the faint sound of an elevator reaching their floor registers. He turns and runs out of the apartment.

INT. THE APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS.

The moment Jake leaves the apartment, the elevator stops, its doors hissing open. A woman steps out of the elevator and hurries toward Marina's door, not even looking at Jake as he rushes past her. It's Marina's mother, SVETLANA (50), her face etched with concern. Jake runs frantically down the stairs, his footsteps echoing, and leaves the apartment building, fleeing the horror he just witnessed.

INT. ANDREY'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Andrey is back to playing PS5, his focus broken. He wants to smoke but finds no cigarettes, patting his pockets in frustration.

ANDREY

Man, what the fuck, man...

Andrey starts getting dressed, a growing unease settling over him.

Suddenly, Yury storms into the room, his face pale, his movements agitated. He is extremely nervous, almost hysterical.

YURY

Where do you think you are going?

ANDREY

I am out of cigarettes.

YURY

You are NOT going anywhere!

ANDREY

Oh, yes, I am!

Andrey tries to get past his father, but Yury grabs him with surprising force and throws him onto the couch.

ANDREY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

What the hell are you doing, dad?

YURY

The guy you almost killed half a year ago. Remember him?

ANDREY

That pastry maker? You think he is after me? What's his plan, Dad? To stuff me with his muffins till I die of diabetes?

YURY

Pastry maker...

(pause, a bitter chuckle
escaping him)

Victor just called. There's been another murder...

ANDREY

I don't give a shit about your fucking job!

YURY

But you will... Your pastry maker is behind the biggest online drug store in this town. We've been looking for him for the last three years.

ANDREY
This is bullshit!

YURY
Congratulations, son. Of all the people, you have managed to kill the girlfriend of a local drug-lord. No wonder, he is pissed.

ANDREY
How did you...

YURY
Find him? I didn't. I would have never found him. If not but you.

ANDREY
Listen, this is ridiculous. Arrest him!

YURY
Oh, so now you want me to arrest him? Is that an order?

ANDREY
I am not ordering you, dad. I guess, I should call Marina and warn her about...

YURY
So now, you care about her?
(pause, his voice cold)
No, you don't. You are just scared. Well, at least you are listening. You will stay here.
(pause)
The keys.

ANDREY
What?

YURY
Give me your keys, now!

Andrey throws the keys at him and Yury catches them with a swift movement.

ANDREY
Where are you going?

YURY
To do my fucking job. Don't worry. You are safe. For now, that is.
(MORE)

YURY (CONT'D)
(pause)
Stay!

Yury exits the room, leaving Andrey stunned.

Andrey sits on the couch, frozen. The dog walks in, sensing his distress, and Andrey pets him automatically. We hear the engine start outside, a car driving away, the sound fading into the night.

Andrey sits on the couch, petting the dog, his mind racing. Then he gets up and starts pacing around the room, restless. He takes the phone out of his pocket and dials Marina, but she doesn't answer.

ANDREY
(under his breath)
Stupid whore!

He puts the phone back in his pocket. Then he picks up the empty pack of cigarettes from the table and opens it, realizing it's useless. Andrey throws the pack on the floor in disgust.

ANDREY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Ah, the fuck with it!

He opens a drawer and takes out the gun he earlier threatened Marina with, its cold metal gleaming, and puts it under his belt.

He opens the balcony door and walks out onto the balcony, stepping directly onto the fire ladder, and clambers down.

The moment he steps onto the pavement, a needle is injected into his neck from behind. He collapses onto the pavement, his body going limp, and blacks out, the world fading to nothing.

INT. ANGELA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Yury and Victor are in Angela's apartment, the scene now a hive of activity. The apartment is full of COPS and EXPERTS, their movements efficient and grim.

There are cats everywhere, dozens of them, all fat and all covered with Angela's dried blood. The apartment stinks of cat's piss and decay, an unbearable stench.

Angela's body lies on a stretcher, covered with a white sheet. Two experts are about to roll it out.

Yury raises the sheet, his face grim, and looks at something hidden from us for a long moment, then puts the sheet back and nods to the experts, a silent instruction. He turns to Victor, his face tight with disgust.

YURY
Someone should have called the
police long ago... The screams...

VICTOR
No screams. Whoever did that, took
care of things. Her vocal chords
have been removed. That IV-line...

Victor points at the IV-line by the couch, a grim piece of evidence.

VICTOR (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
The killer wanted her to live long
enough so that the cats would get
hungry and... She felt every bite.

YURY
Fuck...

VICTOR
Neighbors have been complaining
about the smell not once. Local
cops just... paid no mind.

YURY
Sure...

VICTOR
She was on leave. That's why no one
in the court was bothered with her
absence. They were expecting her to
come back on Monday...
(pause, a heavy sigh)
I doubt they have courts in heaven...

YURY
If she ever makes it there in one
piece...

Yury turns away, his gaze falling on the couch, covered with dry, dark blood. He sees a series of FLASHSHOTS, vivid and horrifying:

Angela's body lying on the bed; an IV-line is connected to her arm; her belly is wide open; half-eaten intestines hanging out.

Angela's half-eaten, rotting face. Her mouth is wide open in a silent scream.

Angela's cat-his face is covered with blood. The cat hisses, its eyes wild.

END OF FLASHSHOT.

Yury feels something cold brush against his leg and looks down, seeing a purring cat, its fur stained with blood, rubbing against him. Yury pushes the cat away with disgust, a shiver running through him.

VICTOR
She was a cat-lady...

YURY
She only had one...

Yury points at Angela's cat.

YURY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
The rest must have been brought here by... whoever killed her.

VICTOR
Technically, he didn't kill her.
The cats did.
(pause, his voice grim)
She was a friend of yours, wasn't she?

YURY
No.

VICTOR (PAUSE)
You know what I mean.
(pause)
Let's step outside. It stinks here.

EXT. ANGELA'S BALCONY - CONTINUOUS.

Yury follows Victor to the balcony and closes the door behind himself, shutting out the putrid smell.

Yury looks at Victor for a long moment, a silent question passing between them.

VICTOR
She took care of things for you?

YURY
Just that one time...

VICTOR

Listen... I don't blame you for anything. We've been friends for the last twenty years... regardless of the fact, you are Rusky and I am American and we are...

(pause, a small, wry
chuckle)

Destined to hate each other... I know you. You are one of the bravest men that I have ever met.

YURY

Spare my ears.

VICTOR

We both know that your son was supposed to spend the next five to ten years in prison. We both know that you have paid Angela to save his ass.

YURY

Mike got some as well.

VICTOR

I don't care.

YURY

You don't care? Aren't you supposed to arrest me?

VICTOR

Fuck you. I would have done the same to save my son. But now... listen to me carefully. Problem is not what we know. Problem is that HE knows as well.

Yury looks at Victor for a long moment, struggling to comprehend.

YURY

He is just a kid..

VICTOR

That kid is a drug-lord. He is our local Heisenberg. Damn careful... We would have never learned about him if not but you. You asked me to hack his computer... And so I did. He's been selling bath salts here for the last four years at least.

(MORE)

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Bliss, Cloud Nine, you name it.
That kid... That kid wants revenge.

YURY
The way I see it, we need a
warrant...
(a grim smile)
Guess, Angela won't be signing any
from now on.

VICTOR
There is more...
(pause)
Maybe he is not alone.

YURY
What do you mean?

VICTOR
The guy who did it to Angela... must
have had medical background.

YURY
Is there anything else, Vic?
Anything else you want to tell me?

VICTOR
Yes. There is something else. You
asked me to look into the girl. The
dead girlfriend.
(pause)
She was pregnant, you know?

Yury nods, a wave of sickness washing over him.

YURY
Is that all?

VICTOR
Not even close.

Victor takes his phone out of his pocket, pulling up a file.

VICTOR (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
I want you to watch a little movie.

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT.

Andrey wakes up in the dark apartment, disoriented. He is tied to a chair, his wrists and ankles bound, and he sits at a round table. A notebook lies on the table, its sticker showing a stoned butterfly smoking a pipe with a dumb smile on its face—the familiar darknet emblem.

Pictures are spread across the table: Angela—her face half-eaten by cats, a grotesque image; Michael with his head in an aquarium, still and lifeless; Marina—her face a silent scream, contorted in terror; David on his way to the stage, unaware of his impending doom; Andrey's father, Yury, walking his dog out, a seemingly innocuous snapshot.

There also is a post-mortem autopsy report for Anya.

We see FLASHSHOTS showing the sentences describing her injuries, each word a brutal impact:

A ruptured femoral artery.

Broken spinal cord.

Broken arm.

Ruptured lung...

Asphyxia...

Agony...

Death.

The last flash-shot shows the statement that Anya was in the early stages of pregnancy.

Andrey tries to free himself, straining against the bonds, and at this very moment, he hears the chilling voice of a Stranger behind him, close and insidious.

STRANGER (O.S.)

Don't...

ANDREY

Dude... Listen... Whatever you have in mind... Shit... What did you knock me out with... Whatever you have in mind... I can pay for all your trouble... My father...

STRANGER (O.S.)

Silence.

ANDREY

Man, hold your horses. I am sorry...
I don't know who the fuck you are,
but I swear to God Almighty, I am
fucking sorry, man!

At this moment, the Stranger injects Andrey with something, a sharp, sudden prick.

ANDREY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 Fuck! Why, man? What did you do
 that for?

STRANGER (O.S.)
 To keep you calm. You may lose
 control over your body...

ANDREY
 (already drugged, his
 words slurring)
 Lose control? What... What do you
 mean?

STRANGER (O.S.)
 Don't worry. Everything will be
 over soon.

ANDREY
 (blacking out)
 Who are you?

STRANGER (O.S.)
 I am a doctor.

Andrey closes his eyes and blacks out again, his head lolling
 to the side.

STRANGER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 And you are the disease.

INT. ANYA'S MOM APARTMENT - 2007.

What we see is police footage, shaky and grainy, shot inside
 the apartment. The COP carrying the camera moves slowly along
 a dark, narrow corridor. We see his reflection in the mirror,
 a shadowy figure.

COP
 It's 03:15 PM Eastern Standard
 time. 24, Strawberry Lane,
 Norristown. I am Officer Dave
 McNeal, NYPD, badge number 58663.
 My partner...

The camera pans to show another cop following the first one.
 He carries a gun, held ready.

COP (CONT'D)
 ...is Officer John Peterson, Badge
 number 65713... We are here in
 response to a possible 10-54 call.
 God, it smells like shit here...

The cop slowly walks down the corridor, his boots echoing faintly.

COP (CONT'D)
The house belongs to Stephen Taylor
and is rented by Juliya Dmitriyeva...
apparently living with her four-
years-old daughter, Anya
Dmitriyeva.

The cop stops near a locked door, adorned with childish drawings, innocent scribbles. He knocks on the door, a loud, hollow sound.

COP (CONT'D)
Anybody there?

There is a faint noise coming from behind the door, a rustle.

COP (CONT'D)
Open up! It's the police! Ms.
Dmitriyeva, are you alright back
there? Ms. Dmitriyeva?

He knocks one more time, louder this time. When no one answers, he tries the doorknob. The door clicks and opens. The camera points at the second Cop, and he nods, a silent agreement. The First Cop slowly pushes the door open, revealing a dark interior.

COP (CONT'D)
Ms. Dmitriyeva. Are you... Oh, my
fucking God!

The room is dark, the blinds all the way down, blocking out any sunlight.

A GIRL (4) sits calmly in the center of the room, surrounded by shadows. She holds a scalpel in her small hand, its blade glinting. Her face is covered with dry, dark blood around her mouth. She slowly chews something.

A DEAD WOMAN lies grotesquely on the floor, her body still. Her face is badly cut, and large chunks of meat are missing, exposing bone. We can see her teeth through a gaping hole in her cheek.

The Girl smiles, a chilling, innocent smile, and a chunk of rotten meat falls out from her mouth, landing with a soft thud.

GIRL
You must be here to see my uncle.
He is gone.
(MORE)

GIRL (CONT'D)
(pause, her gaze distant)
He is a doctor!

END OF THE RECORD.

INT. ANGELA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Yury holds the phone in his trembling hands, his face pale, deeply disturbed by what he just witnessed.

YURY
What the fuck was that?

VICTOR
Anya. When she was four years old.

YURY
That... thing was Jake's girlfriend?

VICTOR
Yes. She was born in Danilov. A small town not far from Yaroslavl. Aren't you from Yaroslavl?

YURY
You gotta be shitting me.

VICTOR
Her mother worked as a nurse in the local ER room. She was raped. The suspect was a doctor... Her boss. I believe he was a surgeon. They had to let him go... Not enough evidence. He quit the job soon after. The lady... She got pregnant and decided to keep the child. She couldn't stay in Danilov though, because... of the rumors, you know.

VICTOR (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
People called her names behind her back. So, she moved to the States. Sort of illegally. Tried her best to start from scratch. But...

(pause)
She failed. When Anya was four years old, her mom... committed suicide. Slit her wrists. Right in front of her daughter.

YURY
What kind of a sick horror story is it?

VICTOR

The lady was found two weeks after she... took care of herself. Anya stayed with her all that time. Locked in the apartment with the corpse. With plenty of water to drink and an empty fridge. She must have grown very hungry... by the time she was found.

YURY

Shit.

VICTOR

Yeah... You got it. She was but a child. No critical thinking. No morals. Children do horrible things every now and then.

YURY

You mean, she... Where did she get the scalpel from? And who is this uncle she was mumbling about?

VICTOR

The guy who gave her the scalpel, I suppose.

YURY

A doctor... You are not saying that...

VICTOR

I am not saying anything. Imagine what kind of a freak would not only rape a woman but follow her across the ocean... Kill her and teach her daughter... Teach her daughter to...

YURY

Why didn't he just kill her?

VICTOR

I don't know. It's like he wanted her to... learn.

YURY

We have two suspects now, I guess...

VICTOR

And one of them is a ghost.

(pause, his voice serious)

My friend... You have to be careful.

YURY

Me?

VICTOR

Mike is dead.

Angela is...

(a sad, grim smile)

...devoured... You are the only one left...

(pause)

Where is Andrey? Is he safe?

YURY

He was at home when I...

Yury takes out his phone and tries to call Andrey, but Andrey doesn't respond, the call going straight to voicemail.

YURY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Get the warrant. Now. I have to go.

Yury runs out of the balcony. Victor follows him with his eyes, a somber look on his face. Then he looks up at the dark sky.

VICTOR

(under his breath)

Please, God... Wherever you are now,
it's time to come back...

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

The effect of the injection wears off. Andrey stirs, groaning, and slowly opens his eyes. He is still tied to the chair, and all he can see is the table itself, the grotesque pictures, and his own hands, bound before him.

His hands are free of the ropes, but he can hardly move them, his limbs heavy and numb as he is still dizzy from the drugs.

The Stranger, still invisible to us, stands directly behind him.

STRANGER (O.S.)

Once I had a daughter. I thought...

ANDREY

Please... I can't move... I can't move
my legs...

STRANGER (O.S.)

I thought the day would come and
she would follow my steps.

(MORE)

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

When she was four years old, I
showed her the way of all flesh. I
have taught her to cherish life.

ANDREY

Why don't I feel my legs?...

STRANGER (O.S.)

...to take whatever the dead may
offer... To feed... She learned that
lesson, and I firmly believe... She
could have learned the rest, when
the time would have come, if not
but you and your stupid little
friends. Now, I don't have a
daughter. I will have to start all
over again. And I am not that
young. I might not even see if the
tree that I plant will ever
blossom.

ANDREY

What's wrong with my legs, man?...

STRANGER (O.S.)

I want to tell you how she died.

ANDREY

I don't wanna know!

STRANGER (O.S.)

Human body is so soft... So weak...
Your car broke her like a doll... Her
femoral artery was cut with a tiny
piece of metal... The one you'd
hardly pay any attention to if you
see it lying on the ground right
under your feet...

FLASHSHOT

INT. THE CLUB.

David is on his way to the stage, navigating the surging crowd. The Stranger, wearing a baseball cap pulled low, follows him, a shadowy figure. He bumps into David, a seemingly accidental collision, and in one swift, professional movement, a glint of metal, he cuts David's leg. He walks away, excusing himself in a low voice, before David, deeply stoned, even registers what happened.

END OF FLASHSHOT.

STRANGER (O.S.)
...And so my daughter bled like a
slaughtered pig.
(pause)
Her precious hand... The hand that
once held the scalpel, was broken
like a toy...

FLASHSHOT

INT. MARINA'S APARTMENT.

Marina lies on her bed, helpless, her body still. The Stranger holds her right arm, and with a sickening crunch, he breaks it once, then again, and again. Marina opens her mouth in a silent scream, no sound escaping, her eyes wide with terror.

END OF FLASHSHOT.

ANDREY
I never broke no arms, man.
Please... please, let me go, please...

STRANGER (O.S.)
I have to thank you, though... You
have also broken her spinal cord.
At least, she felt nothing from the
waist down. I believe I owe you a
favor. So, I have given you
something... to take care of the
pain...

Andrey's eyes widen in dawning horror. He starts to realize what the Stranger did to him, the insidious effects of the drug becoming terrifyingly clear. He tries to move his legs again, straining, but without any success. He is absolutely horrified now, his body trembling.

ANDREY
Man, what did you do to me...

STRANGER (O.S.)
The bleeding could have killed her
in five minutes... But she died of
her own body.
See, her scattered ribs punched
right through her left lung. It was
flooded... and my girl, my little
angel drowned in her own blood. She
drowned in her own blood.

(MORE)

STRANGER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(pause, his voice a
chilling lullaby)
Do you know that drowning people
hear bells ringing sometimes?

ANDREY
What? Listen... Just let me go and
I... I swear to God...

STRANGER (O.S.)
No, no-no-no. It is common to
believe that these are
hallucinations. As for me, I think
that these are the bells of hell.
We all deserve hell, and hell is
what we get when the time comes.
Problem is... Now, pay attention...
Sometimes, whoever is in charge up
there makes a mistake, and the dead
get a chance to follow the light.
In such cases, it is absolutely
necessary to distract them, to make
them lose direction, so to say.
It's not that hard—most of the
recently deceased don't even
understand they are dead.

ANDREY
Whatever, man... I am so sorry... I AM
SORRY!

STRANGER (O.S.)
Apologies accepted. You must be
dying to see... Here, have a look!

The Stranger pulls Andrey's head away from the table, forcing him to look down. Andrey's eyes register what he sees, and he immediately starts screaming, a raw, animal sound of pure agony.

ANDREY
Take it out of me!!! Take it out!!!

No one answers. His screams echo in the empty apartment.

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Jake bursts through the door to his apartment, frantic. The first thing he sees is Shazam. The fat cat is dining on a piece of rotten meat, tearing at it with relish, obviously enjoying its macabre meal.

Jake looks at the cat with revulsion,. Then he hears the unmistakable sound of water running in the bathroom. He pushes open the bathroom door and sees that the tub is almost full. More to say, his switchblade knife lies on the bathtub shelf, its blade unmistakably bloody.

Jake reaches out and turns the water off, but a few drops fall down, splashing onto the porcelain. He tightens the faucet. He still hears drops falling, and he suddenly understands that the noise is not coming from the bathroom, but from the dining-room. He slowly pushes open the dining-room door...

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Andrey looks up, a choked moan escaping him, his eyes wide and pleading. Jake takes a step back, his face contorting in recognition as he sees Andrey, and then his gaze falls on the gruesome pictures spread across the table.

ANDREY

Please...

(choking on blood)

Help me... I can't breathe.

Jake takes a step forward, his eyes fixed on Andrey. He sees that the muzzle of Andrey's Desert Eagle gun is stuck deep in the upper part of his abdomen, buried in his flesh. Jake looks at Andrey, a strange, conflicted expression on his face.

Jake makes another step forward and looks at the pictures, his gaze falling on the autopsy report and the pregnancy report. His face freezes, the last vestiges of emotion draining from it. There is only one sentence written below the pregnancy test result, stark and damning:

"Make your choice."

Jake looks at Andrey, his face now completely blank, devoid of any discernible feeling.

ANDREY (CONT'D)

(choking, desperate)

I didn't want to hurt her... It was an... a fucking accident. It was David... all along... He bought the stuff... The drugs, man! It was David...

All out of a sudden, Andrey stops, blood dripping from his mouth.

He takes another look at the laptop, its screen displaying the emblem of a smoking butterfly, then looks back at Jake. His eyes widen in sudden, terrified recognition, as if all this time he hadn't truly seen Jake, and just realized the identity of the man standing in front of him.

ANDREY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 Oh, God... it's you... it was you all
 the time... You, fucker... You, fucker...
 (pause)
 You fucking killed her, not me! NOT
 ME!

Andrey starts laughing, a raw, hysterical sound, then coughs, trying to catch his breath, blood bubbling on his lips. Jake looks at him—his eyes are serene, dead, utterly empty.

ANDREY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 Don't you understand? Are you
 blind?

Jake says nothing, his silence absolute.

ANDREY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 Where do you think we got the bliss
 from? Fuck, man...
 (pause)
 We are both in this... Both of us.
 Help me, you goddamn...

JAKE
 (calmly)
 Anya was pregnant.

ANDREY
 Well, she is... not... any... more... Fuck,
 you stink, man... Your place stinks...

Andrey looks down at the gun, still stuck deep in his body, a gruesome sight.

ANDREY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 Call the ambulance... Please...

JAKE
 No.

ANDREY
 Fuck you! Fuck you, you goddamn...
 pusher...

Andrey starts coughing, a violent, rattling sound, and coughs and coughs, then his head drops onto his hands, and he lays still.

All we hear now is the sickening sound of blood dripping onto the floor as it pours out of the wound in his gut and his mouth. Andrey's wheezing breath is the only sound as he fights for his life.

And while Jake stands frozen in front of Andrey's dying body, the Stranger himself emerges from the darkest corner of the living-room, stepping into the dim light. It's the same middle-aged man with a dark and unremarkable face Jake has already met on the street, his presence now infinitely more sinister.

JAKE

You?

STRANGER

My job here is almost done...

JAKE

Who are you?

STRANGER

There is one more thing left to be taken care of...

JAKE

You killed him...

STRANGER

I killed them all. Isn't it what you wanted to do yourself?

JAKE

Yes... But that would have never returned her. She is dead... My girl is dead...

(pause, his voice
breaking)

Why are you doing this?

STRANGER

She was my daughter.

JAKE

My God...

STRANGER

I followed her across the ocean... I taught her that life must feed on life. She learned the truth when she was four years old. She could have passed everything she had learned from me to her child... I was desperate to become a grandfather.

(MORE)

STRANGER (CONT'D)
(growls, a guttural sound
of pure rage)
But you destroyed everything!

JAKE
You are insane!

STRANGER
Am I? We are children of men. My
father taught me the ways of flesh.
The only truth that binds us all.

JAKE
What are you talking about?

STRANGER
Everything dies! The sooner you
realize that there is no eternity
for the body, the sooner you become
free. Of all the moral obligations
and bounds. Of all the lies.
(pause)
It's time for you to learn the
truth.

JAKE
Get out of my house.

The Stranger laughs cordially, a deep, unsettling sound.

STRANGER
Oh, it's not your house! Not
anymore.

JAKE
What are you talking about?

STRANGER
I have judged your foes. But who
will judge you?

JAKE
Me?

STRANGER
(looks at Andrey, still
struggling for breath, a
slow, dying wheeze)
This skunk tried to tell you, but
you didn't listen. Here, let me
help you!

The Stranger opens Jake's laptop and pushes some buttons, his fingers moving with practiced ease, and enters the Darknet program.

JAKE

How did you... Where did you get my password?

STRANGER

The Dead have no secrets. Not from me.

JAKE

I don't...

STRANGER

Good things come to those who wait...

The Stranger pushes a button on the computer, and Andrey's phone, still in his pocket, begins to ring. The Stranger reaches into Andrey's pocket and takes out the phone. Andrey wheezes, a dying sound.

STRANGER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

... but only the things left by those who hustle.

(pause, his gaze fixed on Jake)

Oh, your pastry shop was the best in town. You have delivered drugs to whoever paid you. There are no names, or faces when you are in the Darknet. Everybody is anonymous. You were invincible.

JAKE

No... Oh, no...

STRANGER

But sin is like acid. It eats through the fabric of life... Sin, just like us, feeds on life. Sooner or later, your sins come back to you and knock on your door...

JAKE

Stop!

STRANGER

It was you, Jake. You killed Anya. You've made a deal with Andrey, and Andrey sent David to your little cozy pastry shop... Best in town.

(MORE)

STRANGER (CONT'D)

David collected the bliss from
Natasha, and then... Voila... You may
say that Andrey was but a bullet in
the gun, but you were the finger
that pulled the trigger. You knew
that, didn't you? You knew that all
along. This truth haunted you every
day, every hour until you couldn't
bear it. What did you do then,
Jake?

JAKE

Nothing!

STRANGER

What did you do to yourself?

JAKE

I didn't do shit!

STRANGER

Poor Jake...

At this very moment, Andrey's phone, lying on the table,
begins to ring loudly.

INT. YURY'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Yury runs up the stairs to his apartment, his breath coming
in ragged gasps, and bursts through the door. He sees the
apartment is empty but for the dog, who sits patiently. He
takes out his phone and calls Andrey, the phone ringing in
his ear, and...

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Jake and the Stranger are standing opposite each other.
Andrey is dying, his head on the table, his breath coming in
ragged, wet wheezes.

Andrey's phone is ringing, its insistent buzz filling the
otherwise silent room.

STRANGER

The pig is calling for his
offspring...

The Stranger points at Andrey, a grim satisfaction in his
eyes.

STRANGER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
I broke his backbone just like he
broke Anya's. I drugged him and
fucked him with his gun... Just like
he fucked my daughter with her own
rib. Oh, I stuck it deep...
(pause, his voice growing
cold and hard)
Why don't you help him, Jake? Take
it out. Forgive him...

JAKE
Fuck you!

STRANGER
No? Then pull the trigger! Avenge
Anya! Do something!

Jake makes a decision, a desperate resolve hardening his
face. He reaches for the gun stuck in Andrey's gut, his hand
outstretched, and...

...His hand goes right through it. He tries again, desperately,
but his hand goes right through the gun again.

JAKE
What did you do to me???

STRANGER
I didn't do anything...

The Stranger points towards the bathroom.

STRANGER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
The water is cold, Jake. It's cold
and red. Go and see...

JAKE
Please...

STRANGER
Go and see, Jake!

Jake, compelled by an unseen force, walks towards the
bathroom. The Stranger follows him.

Jake stops at the threshold of the bathroom, fear contorting
his face, and looks back at the Stranger.

JAKE
I don't want to...

STRANGER
 (with a cruel, paternal
 pity)
 You have to...

Jake steps into the bathroom, his legs heavy.

INT. YURY'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Yury stands rigidly, the phone still clutched in his hands. His face is etched with despair. He looks at the dog, a silent plea in his eyes.

And the dog looks back at him, its eyes strangely knowing, and then slowly licks its lips.

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Jake and the Stranger are in the bathroom, standing above the bathtub. We do not see what's in the bathtub. Jake looks at the bathtub—he is ABSOLUTELY TERRIFIED, his face a mask of pure horror.

STRANGER
 For you have eyes but you cannot
 see...
 (pause, a sigh)
 I am truly sorry, Jake.

JAKE
 You drugged me... This is not
 reality! What... What is this?

STRANGER
 (points at the bathtube)
 The meaning of life.

Jake looks at the Stranger and then slowly lowers his gaze and looks into the bathtub.

It's full of blood, a deep, crimson red, and HIS ROTTEN BODY lies in it, bloated and grotesque. Not all of it... A large chunk of meat is cut from his thigh, a fresh wound in the decaying flesh. His switchblade knife, with some blood still on the blade, lies on the bathtub shelf.

STRANGER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 Sometimes the dead are too stubborn
 to believe in their own death...

As Jake stares at his own dead body, his mind spirals into a series of FLASHBACKS, the terrible truth unraveling.

EXT. MICHAEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT.

Jake sits rigidly in his car. It's dark outside, the street silent. A folder with Michael's picture is on his lap. A knife gleams in his hand.

Jake looks at Michael's picture for a long moment, his face a mask of conflicted emotions, then throws the folder onto the passenger seat. He opens the door, then smashes it shut with a violent force, a guttural growl escaping him.

He cuts his own hand viciously with the knife and beats the steering wheel repeatedly. He starts his car and drives away madly, leaving the quiet street behind.

JAKE (V.O.)
I am not like my father! I am not
like my father!

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT.

Jake sits at the table, slumped and defeated. The knife, its blade still smeared with blood, and his phone are in front of him. Jake's hand is covered with his own blood.

The folder also lies on the table, its contents visible. Jake looks at Michael's picture, then slams his bloody fist onto it, a cry of anguish tearing from his throat. At this very moment, he receives a message on Whatsapp.

Jake looks at his phone and reads through the message. It says, "look in the drawer."

Jake opens the table drawer and takes a small, blue box out of the drawer. A plump angel is drawn on the box. He looks at it for a long time, his eyes wide, then slowly opens the box and looks inside. A choked sob escapes him, and he starts crying, tears streaming down his face.

He is looking at the pregnancy test—the present Anya was planning to give him right before she was killed.

It's positive, of course.

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Jake hears the sound of droplets coming from the bathroom, a rhythmic, haunting drip. He gets up, still crying, and takes a step towards the bathroom. He then stops, grabs his knife from the table, its handle cold in his bloody hand, and walks into the bathroom.

But instead of turning the faucet off, he turns it on, full blast, and starts filling the bathtub with hot water, a desperate, deliberate act.

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

Jake is in the bathtub, fully submerged in the water. The knife is still in his right hand. He closes his eyes and FALLS EVEN DEEPER IN REMINISCENCES, the images flashing through his mind.

Jake sees Anya, laughing happily as they sit in the restaurant, her face bright with joy.

Jake sees him and Anya walking down the street, holding hands and laughing, their steps light and carefree.

Jake sees the park, full of green trees and blossoming flowers, a vibrant, living memory.

Jake sees Anya's eyes, full of love, when they kiss.

Jake sees the car hitting them, a sudden, violent blur.

Jake sees Anya's mutilated body

Jake sees blood dripping from the hood of the car, a chilling crimson.

Jake sees the pregnancy test report, the final, devastating piece of the puzzle.

Jake opens his eyes.

And slits his veins.

And watches the water turning red, swirling with his lifeblood. Then he smiles, a serene, terrible smile, and closes his eyes again.

END OF FLASHBACK.

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT.

Jake opens his eyes. He lies in the bathtub, the waters around him a sickening red, and the Stranger stands above him. Jake is no longer terrified. He has accepted the truth, a profound calm settling over him.

JAKE
What am I?

STRANGER

Lost spirit... A sleepless ghost.
Your story is told...
(pause)
Now, you will sleep.

JAKE

Don't hurt my family...

STRANGER

(a slight tilt of his
head)
I have no intention to hurt your
family, Jake.

The Stranger looks at Jake and smiles, a cold, predatory expression.

STRANGER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Oh! I understand. You thought I
would take your sister and... educate
her... I am afraid she is too old.
Too absorbed by society. I need
someone pure. Someone untouched by
the chains of morality. I need
someone... uncivilized.
(pause, his eyes gleaming
with a chilling
satisfaction)
I think I have already found my new
disciple.

JAKE

Who are you?

STRANGER

A shadow on the wall... A tale,
whispered in the dark. I am...
nobody. Life ends, Jake. Now, close
your eyes.

Jake looks at the Stranger, then his gaze drifts away, and he sees that the bathroom door is now impossibly, terrifyingly, red.

Jake closes his eyes. When he opens them again, he stands by the door, no longer in the bathtub. The Stranger looks at him and nods. Jake opens the door and enters the darkness... disappearing into nothingness.

The Stranger turns away and meditatively looks at Jake's rotting corpse in the bathtub.

All we hear now is the faint, wheezing noise of Andrey's labored breath coming from the living-room, a grim reminder of the unfinished business.

The bathroom is barely lit, and deep shadows cling to the corners. There is some blood on the rim of the bathtub.

A small drop of blood falls on the floor. It is followed by another one, and by one more, each echoing in the silence. Then, as the darkness gathers, all we hear is these persistent drops of blood falling down, a slow, macabre rhythm.

STRANGER (V.O.)

Everything dies... But even the dead sometimes are too stubborn to die. I know... I can hear them. I can see them.

(pause)

I make them.

The Stranger looks at Jake's body one last time, a final, lingering gaze, and then stands up, slowly leaving the bathroom. He returns to the living-room and walks directly up to Andrey.

Andrey slowly raises his head, his eyes wide as the Stranger's fingers close around the handle of the gun still buried in his gut.

ANDREY

Don't leave me like that...

STRANGER

Of course. Look at me.

Andrey looks at the Stranger.

And the Stranger pulls the trigger.

Twice.

Andrey dies.

The Stranger leaves the gun in his body and walks out of the room. He pauses to pet the cat, still feasting on Jake's meat, then leaves the apartment, closing the door softly behind him.

VOICEOVER (STRANGER)

It all ended with death, of course. It always does.

EXT. THE CEMETERY - AFTERNOON.

The funeral of Andrey and Marina. A small crowd stands silent under the gray sky. We see Yury, his face etched with grief. We see Victor, standing by his side. We see Svetlana, Marina's mother, her face tear-streaked, holding Teddy by his hand. Svetlana is crying softly.

Teddy, a small, somber figure, looks around with a blank, uncomprehending expression on his face. We see a man wearing a mourning suit, obviously a funeral director, discreetly managing the proceedings.

The Russian Orthodox PRIEST reads from the bible, his voice echoing solemnly.

THE PRIEST
...and he will not give to one of
them any of the flesh of his
children that he is...

Yury stands by Andrey's coffin, his gaze fixed on the polished wood. Victor stands silently by his side.

VICTOR
I am truly sorry...

Yury looks at Victor, his eyes distant, almost vacant.

YURY
(absentmindedly)
Sorry? Oh, this... Thank you...

VICTOR
No father should stand over his
son's grave....

YURY
Yeah... Yeah... You know what I am
sorry about?

Victor looks at his friend.

YURY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
I am so sorry the fucker who killed
him committed a suicide. So I can't
reap his fucking heart out of his
body.

VICTOR
We have to talk about this.

YURY
There's nothing to talk about. Case closed.

VICTOR
Yury...

YURY
Let me BURY MY SON!

Victor steps back, respecting the raw grief.

PRIEST
...the afterbirth from her womb and the children she bears. For in her dire need she intends to...

Yury walks stiffly towards Svetlana, his expression unreadable.

YURY
My condolences.

SVETLANA
(smiles weakly, tears still flowing)
Thank you.

Yury squats in front of Teddy, his voice softening slightly.

YURY
How are you, little brother?

TEDDY
I am not your brother.

YURY
(stands up)
Right...

The funeral director slowly walks towards Yury and Svetlana, his voice hushed and respectful.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR
(in a low voice, speaking both to Yury and Svetlana)
Once again, please accept my sincere condolences.

Yury looks at the Priest, ignoring the Funeral Director completely.

PRIEST

...Then he asked her, "What's the matter?" She answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give up your son so...

FUNERAL DIRECTOR

It's time...

YURY

What?

FUNERAL DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

It's time to... lower the coffins...
With your permission, of course...

YURY

(points at the Priest)
What the fuck is HE talking about?

SVETLANA

Yury, please...

YURY

No, I wanna know, what kind of pagan mumbo-jumbo he is quoting?

FUNERAL DIRECTOR

Sir...

YURY

Huh? Ah, yes... Throw the stiff in the ground. No problem. Do whatever you gotta do.

(to Svetlana, pointing at the Priest)

This fuck... This goddamn fuck...

(pause)

I can't... I am sorry...

One tear rolls down Yury's cheek and he turns away, walking away from the graves as the coffins are slowly lowered into the earth.

EXT. PARKING-LOT - AFTERNOON.

The funeral is over. Yury sits in his car, slumped over the steering wheel, crying openly, the dam finally broken.

Victor knocks gently on the passenger window. Yury looks up at Victor, quickly wipes his tears with the back of his hand, and pushes the button, unblocking the car doors. Victor enters the car and closes the door carefully. He places a briefcase on his knees.

VICTOR
Are you okay?

YURY
I always wondered... What's so
terribly wrong with you Americans,
if you keep on asking that idiotic
question, no matter what... No, I am
not okay. And it's not a good time
for... whatever you have in mind.

Victor opens the briefcase and takes out a folder, handing it
to Yury.

YURY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
What is this?

VICTOR
Coroner's report on Angela.

YURY
What the fuck it has to do with the
death of my son?

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Nothing...
(pause)
Everything...

YURY
What do you want, Vic?

VICTOR
Jake didn't kill Angela, Yury.
Angela was dead for weeks while he
was still in the hospital.

Yury opens the folder and looks at the papers, his face
devoid of expression, a numb acceptance.

YURY
So what?

VICTOR
Jake... didn't kill your son either.
I've just received a call from the
coroner's office. He was already
dead by the time... Andrey was...

YURY
...Murdered. Gutfucked by my own gun.

Yury looks at Victor, his eyes hardened.

YURY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
I will ask you one last time, Vic.
What do you want?

VICTOR
You have to be careful, my friend.
Whoever did this... He is still out
there. And he is looking for you.

YURY
(pause)
Funny... I can't find my dog... Since
yesterday. Stupid old fart got
loose in the park. Chased a
squirrel or... I don't know...

VICTOR
Fuck the dog! Don't you hear me?
You are the only one left! He will
not stop! He will find you and...

YURY
Get out of my car.

VICTOR
What?

YURY
I have just buried my son! My only
son! Let me...
(pause, his voice
breaking, pleading)
Let me mourn my child, Victor...
Please...

Yury nods, his hand shaking, and exits the car, closing the door quietly behind him. Victor looks at Yury, a deep sadness in his eyes, then looks down at the folder and throws it onto the passenger seat in frustration. He starts the car and slowly drives out of the cemetery parking lot, disappearing around the corner.

Soon after his car disappears, another car starts, its engine a low hum, and follows. As the car passes by, the driver's window glass goes down, and The Stranger looks at us.

And winks.

FADE OUT