

"M A R I O N E T T E S"

written by

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FADE IN:

INT. NEON BAR - NIGHT

Scarlet neon bleeds across cracked leather booths. A jukebox hums a brittle '70s pop track. Reflections fracture in half-empty glasses.

At the bar: ANNA PETERSON (24), ink-stained fingers, laughs with SARAH (24), warm, loyal. Two friends in their element.

A KINDLY MAN in a GRAY COAT sits two stools down. Face half in shadow. Polite, unassuming.

The BARTENDER sets down two SHOTS.

BARTENDER
Compliments of the gentleman.

The man in the gray coat raises his glass, almost shy. Anna and Sarah clink.

CLOSE ON the rim of Anna's shot: an iridescent haze. The liquid ripples unnaturally red for a heartbeat.

The room tilts slightly sideways. Outside, a neon sign flickers:
DEEP RED DONUTS.

SARAH
Birthday rule: no doom. Promise.

ANNA
I promise-ish.

She downs the shot. The world smears. Colors bloom too bright.
A faint RINGING starts in her ears.

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND BAR - NIGHT

Rain-slick brick. Red neon bleeds across puddles.

Anna staggers out, dazed. Sarah stumbles after.

A hand in BLACK LEATHER GLOVES flicks open a STRAIGHT RAZOR.
SNAP.

CLOSE ON SARAH'S EYES: pupils widen, neon red reflected.

The razor flashes. SLASH. Arterial spray paints the wall.
Sarah collapses.

Anna screams — silent, underwater — then drops beside her,
hands slick with blood.

Blue-red police strobes swallow the alley.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

Sterile green fluorescence. ANNA trembles, tear-streaked.

Across the table: DETECTIVE NATHAN MILLER (42), sharp,
haunted.
His partner, DETECTIVE ELI CHEN (33), methodical and steady.

MILLER

Anna, you were found with Sarah in
the alley.
Your prints are on the knife. Walk
me through
the night.

ANNA

It goes black. I was talking to a
nice man—
he bought a drink — and then...
everything
went red.

CHEN

You know his name? Anything
specific?

ANNA

(helpless)
Nice. That's all. Nice.

Miller studies her. Not her words, her tremors. His eyes are
tired.
He pushes a glass of water toward her. She doesn't touch it.

MILLER

Smell? Sound? Anything right
before?

ANNA

(beat)
Hospital... and ringing.

Miller registers that. A shadow crosses behind his eyes.

INT. HOMICIDE BULLPEN - DAY

The board: red pins for victims, blue for accused. A tight five-block cluster.

Miller's desk is ritual: a CHIPPED "WORLD'S OKAYEST DAD" MUG, a DONUT BOX (powdered, jelly), a half-hidden bottle of J&B WHISKEY.

Chen drops a fresh file.

CHEN

New one. David Reynolds. Art critic. Throat cut at his gallery. We found Mark Jenkins nearby, catatonic. Blood on his hands.

Miller rubs his eyes. Pours a splash of J&B into his coffee. Sips.

MILLER

Not just women then.

He pins the photo. The cluster tightens.

INT. ART GALLERY - NIGHT (CRIME SCENE)

White cube sanctity violated. REYNOLDS sits, propped, throat a gaped grin. Blood sprayed across a pristine canvas - accidental art.

CLOSE RUN: glass stem shards in a palm. A heel print in blood. A smear that could be a fingerprint but isn't.

CHEN

No sedatives on prelim. Whatever's doing this burns fast.

Miller's reflection elongates in a warped panel, a diagonal RED slice across his face. The faint RINGING brushes him; he steadies.

INT. PRISON - VISITING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

JONATHAN REED (late 40s) - intelligent ice - behind glass.
Miller, younger, angrier.

REED
Everyone thinks I like puppets. I
don't.
Strings tangle.
(smiles)
I prefer routine. Keys in a bowl.
Coffee,
same mug. A splash to take the edge
off.

REED (CONT'D)
We train ourselves to be taken,
Detective.

INT. DR. KLINE'S OFFICE - DAY

DR. EVELYN KLINE (50s). Measured quiet. Miller sits rigid.

KLINE
Blackouts?

MILLER
Gaps.

KLINE
Stress. Or something else?

MILLER
Old ghosts.

KLINE
Reed.

KLINE (CONT'D)
Take the leave your captain
offered.

MILLER
You can paint mold pretty. It's
still mold.

INT. MILLER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Crimson desk lamp. DONUT BOX open. Miller chews, absently.
Licks red from his thumb. J&B glows amber.

Chen enters with a folder.

CHEN

Tox finally called. Not sedatives.
Doesn't
match registry. Street chatter
calls it...
Deep Red.

Miller chuckles, red sugar on his lip.

MILLER

That's a title, not a compound.

CHEN

Fits what we're seeing. Short-term
amnesia.
Extreme suggestibility. Fast burn.
Leaves
nothing — except in the
bloodstains.

CLOSE ON Miller's mug as he sets it down: a faint RED RING on
the rim.
He wipes his mouth, unaware. Chen clocks it — says nothing.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - NIGHT

Golden hush. Sprinklers hiss. A back door eases open
silently.

INT. ELIZABETH CHENEY'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Perfect domesticity. ELIZABETH CHENEY (38) enters, sleepy.

Hands in BLACK LEATHER GLOVES lift a STRAIGHT RAZOR into warm
light.

CLOSE ON EYES: the blade reflected.

MILLER (V.O.)

(far away)
He wants us blind.

The razor hovers. Breath slows.

SLASH. A scream. Blood arcs across white cabinets. Pearls
snap
and scatter.

The glove covers her mouth. The blade GLIDES over her eye —

EXTREME CLOSE: Blade in pupil. POP. Red tears streak down.

SECOND EYE — another precise SLASH. Silence. Her head lolls, sockets ruined.

A neighbor's porch light clicks on. The gloves vanish.

INT. CRIME LAB - DAY

Photos slapped under fluorescence: Elizabeth's ravaged face.

CHEN
He went for her eyes.

Miller leans in; for a blink the sockets reflect in his pupils.

He sips coffee. The mug's rim dusted faint red. He doesn't see it.

INT. BULLPEN - MORNING

A white box of donuts lands on Chen's desk.

MILLER
Don't say I never bring you
anything.

CHEN
Thought those were your vice.

MILLER
Sharing is caring.

Chen takes one. Powder on fingers. Red jelly glints. He bites.

CLOSE ON EYES: pupils dilate, then pinch. A faint RING.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Fluorescents hum. Oil rainbows. Miller walks, trance-calm.
Mug
dangling from his fingers. RINGING rising.

POV - MILLER: Colors too vivid, shadows too deep.

A MAN fumbles keys near his sedan.

Black gloves SNAP a straight razor open — ON MILLER'S HANDS.

CLOSE ON Miller's eyes — pinprick pupils, red sheen in the blade.

SLASH. Cheek first — a crimson smile. The man screams, staggers.

Miller moves, puppet-precise, serene. The razor DRAWS the throat.
Blood EXPLODES on the windshield. The horn BLARES under the dying weight.

A single blood drop lands in an oil rainbow — a red flower.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - LATER

Tape flutters. Crime scene ballet. Chen paces, unsettled.

OFFICER
Found this.

A LIGHTER bagged from the hood. Chen clocks it; looks at Miller.

Miller drinks from his mug. A faint Deep Red dust on his lip. Wipes it away. His eyes empty for a beat — a puppet's stare.

INT. DR. KLINE'S OFFICE - DAY

Miller paces, caged.

MILLER
What if it's me?

KLINE
What makes you say it now?

MILLER
I keep... seeing my own eyes in theirs.

KLINE
Then stop drinking from the same well.

INT. MILLER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The J&B bottle. Red desk lamp. A plain ENVELOPE in his drawer —
inside, a mini-cassette.

He drops it into a cheap RECORDER. CLICK.

REED (TAPE) (V.O.)
 You thought you cut my strings. We
 pressed
 pause. Now we press play. Every
 string must
 be dyed before it's pulled. Drink
 deep.
 Deep Red.

Miller freezes. His hand rises — unbidden — to the J&B.
 Pours.
 Drinks.

CLOSE ON his eye. Pupil thins to a needle.

INT. PRECINCT BATHROOM - NIGHT

Chen washes powder from his hands — faintly red. He stares at
 his
 reflection, hears a faint RINGING.

He checks his cuff: a thin RED LINE of dried something. Not
 blood.
 Not jelly. He can't place it.

A stall door CREAKS. He turns. Empty.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT (MONTAGE)

- Black gloves flick the razor open.
- Eyes widen, neon reflected.
- Donut jelly halves, oozing red.
- J&B swirls amber under a red lamp.
- Razor laid neatly beside a coffee mug.
- Reed's tape spinning.

INT. MILLER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Keys in a bowl. Jacket on chair. Mug in sink. Rituals.

He stares in the mirror. For a flash, the reflection wears
 black gloves.
 He blinks — gone.

His phone BUZZES. UNKNOWN NUMBER.

REED (V.O.)
 Routine is consent. You consent
 every day.

Miller goes very calm. He sets the phone down. Eyes empty.

INT. CHEN'S CAR - NIGHT

Chen STARTLES awake. Parked outside his building. A half-eaten powdered donut in the cup holder, red jelly congealed.

Three missed calls. The RINGING persists even as the phone is silent.

He peels back his sleeve: a tiny PUNCTURE on his forearm. He doesn't remember.

INT. CAPTAIN ORTEGA'S OFFICE - DAY

CAPTAIN ORTEGA (50s) listens, wary.

CHEN

He's off. Evidence keeps... pointing
at him,
then at me. I'm losing time.

ORTEGA

(quiet)
Either you close this or I take you
both off it.

Chen nods, haggard.

INT. MILLER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Miller rearranges photos... then rearranges them again. Without knowing, he's mirroring REED'S ORIGINAL CASE PHOTOS pinned opposite. A grotesque symmetry.

He steps back. In the glass, for a heartbeat - REED'S face.

INT. CHEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Chen scrubs his counter. The sponge smears faint RED POWDER into pink streaks. He stops. Lifts the sponge.

CHEN

(whispers)
Deep Red.

A tremor in his hand. Panicked breath.

EXT. SERVICE TUNNEL - NIGHT

Long, narrow. Red bulbs every thirty feet.

Black gloves dip the razor in a bucket. Water runs pink.

A HOMELESS MAN (50s) hums down the tunnel. He turns — kind eyes.

HOMELESS MAN

Spare a—

The razor ARCS. Intimate SLASH across the throat. Blood
STEAMS
in cold air.

CLOSE ON his eye as life leaves it. A red bulb shrinks in the pupil.

INT. SERVICE TUNNEL - LATER

Chen and Miller over the body. Red bulbs throb like a heartbeat.

CHEN

(quiet)

You ever feel like someone's using
your hands?

Miller stares at his own (empty) hands — as if expecting gloves.
He blinks.

INT. DR. KLINE'S OFFICE - DAY

Miller's hands shake.

MILLER

What if I'm dosing him too?

KLINE

Are you?

MILLER

I don't know.

KLINE

Lock your drawers. Change your
routines.
Break your strings.

INT. CHEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Chen tears through drawers and cabinets. Coffee grounds
dusted
with faint red. A pill vial with residue. Even his toothpaste
—
a blush of crimson on the cap.

CHEN
(barely a breath)
Jesus Christ...

He staggers, dizzy with rage and fear.

INT. MILLER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Razor beside the mug. Miller stares at it too long.

A COURIER envelope — inside, another cassette.

REED (TAPE) (V.O.)
You've fed him well. You'll both
dance until
the blade rests. Deep Red binds
you.

Miller's pupils shrink. He grips the razor.

INT. PRECINCT - INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

One harsh fluorescent bulb. Steel table. The RAZOR in the
center.

Miller and Chen sit across from one another.

CHEN
(low, shaking)
It's you. It's been you. You dosed
me, Nathan.

MILLER
(confused, angry)
No. You— evidence points to you.

CHEN
Because you put it there. You don't
even
know you're doing it.

MILLER
I caught Reed. I put him away. I—

CHEN
He never let go.

Silence. The BUZZ of the light.

CLOSE ON EYES: Miller's twitch, red sheen catching. Chen's
dart,
terrified but resolute.

Both men reach for the razor at once—

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Hands slam the table. The razor clatters, spins.

FLASH CUTS: Reed's whisper. Donuts oozing red. J&B pouring.
Eye slashes. Pinprick pupils. Neon strobing.

Miller SLAMS Chen to the mirrored wall. The RAZOR PRESSES up
under Chen's jaw.

CHEN
(hoarse)
Fight it, Nathan. Fight it!

Miller's hand trembles. In the mirror — Reed's face overlays
his
for a heartbeat.

REED (V.O.)
Cut the strings.

SLASH.

Blood fans across the one-way glass. Chen collapses, eyes
wide,
throat opened.

Miller stares down. Breathing steady. Razor dripping.

INT. PRECINCT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Officers rush the door. Through the glass: Miller stands
motionless,
bathed in crimson. Chen sprawled lifeless.

INT. MILLER'S OFFICE - NIGHT (EPILOGUE)

The board looms. The razor beside his chipped mug. Donut box
open —
one left.

Miller eats slowly. Red jelly smears his lips. He sips from the mug.
J&B glows.

REED (TAPE) (V.O.)
Sweet, isn't it? Deep Red forever.

CLOSE ON MILLER'S EYES — empty, puppet-like.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END