pal·imp·sest

/ˈpaləm(p)ˌsest/
noun

1. A manuscript or piece of writing material on which the original writing has been effaced to make room for later writing but of which traces remain.

2. Something having usually diverse layers or aspects apparent beneath the surface.
EXT. OLYMPIC PENINSULA, 1562 A.D. – DAY

Pillars of sea-carved stone stand sentinel at the water’s edge. Whitecaps march relentlessly beneath a cruel gray sky. A somber mist bleeds between the coastal conifers. An anchored CARAVEL sways offshore.

SLIPFOOT, an elderly native Makah, watches a figure ascending from a rowboat down at the shore. IOÁNNIS PHOKÁS wears Spanish sailor garb, with a beard marking his months at sea. He reaches Slipfoot.

    SLIPFOOT
    (in Makah, subtitled)
    What’s this about?

    IOÁNNIS
    (subtitled, language: unknown)
    The village tells me you’re trustworthy.

Leaning over to catch his breath, he presents a SATCHEL to Slipfoot. Slipfoot hesitates then takes it, peering inside.

    IOÁNNIS
    Sugar, tobacco, silver, a good knife...
    (straightens up)
    Payment for your troubles.

    SLIPFOOT
    What do you need of me?

Ioánnis hands him a smaller PARCEL wrapped in cloth. He stops Slipfoot from opening it--

    SLIPFOOT
    What’s inside?

    IOÁNNIS
    Unimaginable peril.

Slipfoot turns it over. Seems awfully small to be dangerous.

    SLIPFOOT
    Do you want me to burn it?

    IOÁNNIS
    No. To destroy it is forbidden. I want you to keep it safe. Tell no one, show no one. And never look at the words inside.
SLIPFOOT
Words? I can’t read or speak White
Men’s words.

IOÁNNIS
And I’m not speaking your tongue.
Yet you understand me.

Slipfoot’s stunned – realizing the man has in fact been
speaking a different language. Ioánnis gestures to the book.

IOÁNNIS
A mere strand of its power – and
its danger. Never look inside, or
madness will follow. (beat)
Can you keep it safe? Will you?

Slipfoot weighs the generous heft of the satchel and nods.

SLIPFOOT
For how long?

Ioánnis heads back towards the shore--

IOÁNNIS
Until someone is sent for it.

SLIPFOOT
When?

Ioánnis tightens his jacket against the crisp air.

IOÁNNIS
If we’re lucky, when the stars burn
out.

The sailor shrinks into the distance. Slipfoot considers his
new possessions, then leaves the clearing.

EXT. WILDERNESS - DAY

Slipfoot comes to a rock incline, he goes up instead of
around. As he climbs his foots SLIPS – and he drops
everything just in time to get a handhold. He climbs down to
retrieve his belongings.

Gathering items back into the satchel, he spots the parcel
tumbled out of its wrapping. It is a BOOK. It is the
PALIMPSEST. It has landed OPEN.
One page is written in unknown symbols. The opposite page has an illustration, almost abstract. But the MULTIPLE EYES AND ARMS are clear enough. Something monstrous.

Slipfoot’s hand trembles as he reaches for it. He SLAPS the Palimpsest closed, rewraps it hastily, and stuffs it into the satchel. He clears the rocks and heads towards the forest.

He slows. He stops. He looks around furtively.

Slipfoot pulls the Palimpsest from the satchel. He opens it, flips a few pages. Thinks a moment. He closes it and keeps walking, disappearing into the shadows of the tree line.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Buds emerging on branches reveal that time has passed. Two teenage MAKAH idly make their way beneath the dark canopy of trees.

FATMOUTH
Why do we have to be the ones to find him?

CREEPS
Because you’re the one who had to open your fat mouth. Maybe I’ll call you ‘Fatmouthe’ from now on.

FATMOUTH
The Elders asked who saw the old man last. What am I supposed to do, lie?

CREEPS
Yes. Or leave my name out of it next time. I’ve got better things to do.

FATMOUTH
Hah! No you don’t.

CREEPS
True. But the old man is losing his mind. It gives me the creeps...

They enter a clearing. Fatmouth points to the far end where SLIPFOOT is hunched over, arranging objects on the ground. They can’t see his face.

CREEPS
Hey old man!
No response.

FATMOUTH
The village is worried about you.

Slipfoot says something, but not in Makah. The teens look at each other and shrug. They notice the clearing is strewn with ROCKS, BRANCHES, and BONES. They slow their approach.

CREEPS
What are you up to out here?

Creeps carelessly steps on a bone and it CRACKS, causing Slipfoot to WHIP AROUND. The teens freeze. He babbles at them, face hidden beneath a tussle of hair.

They back away, disturbing more bones and branches. Slipfoot’s rant grows louder, angrier, LESS HUMAN as he charges - leaping onto Creeps and mauling at him!

Creeps’s arms up in defense, screaming, glimpsing Slipfoot’s multiple OPAQUE EYES set in a GROTESQUE FACE. Fatmouth panics, grabs a ROCK and brings it down on Slipfoot’s skull with a meaty CRACK.

Creeps rolls Slipfoot’s limp body off of him. They examine his face - now human again. Two lifeless eyes staring into oblivion. The teens look to each other.

CUT TO:

Their hands hurriedly scoop dirt into a makeshift shallow grave. Fatmouth finds the Palimpsest, opens it--

CREEPS
(snatches it away)
We didn’t find this. Or him--

Creeps tosses the book beside the body.

CREEPS
We were never here.

Final handfuls of dirt cover all evidence of Slipfoot. The teens leave. Viewed from above, the objects in the clearing are laid in the shape of the creature from the Palimpsest.
TITLES

Extreme close-ups of the Palimpsest being written by different hands during different epochs. With a bone needle dipped in blood, charcoal stick, quill, and ball point pen.

Writing, erasing, rewriting. Obsessive fingers scrawl strange symbols, improbable schematics, and dense formulae.

Episode credits appear as written words in the Palimpsest. The title sequence varies every time, revealing different clues each episode, such as:

- The Palimpsest being DUG UP from the shallow grave.
- A page being TORN OUT, folded, and POCKETED.
- A QUANTUM MECHANICS equation being SOLVED.
- Writing in foreground, a CORPSE lying in the background.
- Held up to LIGHT, both sides of a page create ONE IMAGE.
- A page being written next to a chunk of PITCHBLENDE.
- Tattooed SKIN being PEELED and SEWN into the Palimpsest.
- A sketched DNA SEQUENCE, one segment erased then REDRAWN.
- The book being WRAPPED and gently buried in a bed of CLAY.
INT. GRADY’S APARTMENT – MORNING – PRESENT DAY

Faint shapes visible through fabric. The THRUM of a digital alarm. A bed sheet is pulled away to reveal a CEILING. ELIZABETH GRADY, 30ish, opens her eyes and looks up at it. That kind of white apartment stucco that churns like oatmeal if you stare at it too long.

Grady defuses her alarm clock and sits up. She gets out of bed, does some gentle stretches, and steps into the shower.

Once her hair is washed, she dons glasses and begins reading a hanging water-proofed iPad. She continues washing, swiping through digital text with a soapy finger.

Her apartment is clean and sparse. Dressed in business casuals, she tops off her travel mug with coffee and loads books and a laptop into her shoulder bag.

Hand on the doorknob to leave, she pauses and puts an eye to the security PEEPHOLE. The corridor is empty and the door across the hall is closed. The fish-eyed coast is clear.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY – MORNING

Grady gently closes the door behind her, locking it almost inaudibly. She gets few steps down the hall when her neighbor’s door opens--

MILLS
Morning Ms. Grady!

Grady pauses, wilts slightly.

GRADY
Morning Mr. Mills, how are you?

MILLS is somewhere north of 50, bath-robed, unshaven. Not creepy, just rumpled. He toasts his mug of coffee.

MILLS
Fine, fine. I’m rooting for you. Today is the day!

She raises her mug in acknowledgement. Mills smiles, sips his coffee and observes Grady leaving.

GRADY
Have a good day Mr. Mills, put some pants on.

Mills sheepishly tightens his robe as Grady exits.
**INT. BUS - MORNING**

Grady ignores the jostle of the morning commute, engrossed in her copy of “Proto-Indo-European Phonology.”

**EXT. UNIVERSITY - MORNING**

Grady exits the bus onto a large campus with a mix of modern and classic buildings. She joins the swift current of students making their way to class. She enters the Department of Linguistics.

**INT. AUDITORIUM - AFTERNOON**

Grady lectures to a group of FRESHMAN, a slide of ancient symbols projected on the screen behind her.

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GRADY
Can anyone tell me what benefit we derive from decrypting a writing system that’s been dead over three thousand years?
(calls on student)
Yes?

1ST STUDENT
Better understanding of that culture’s daily life?

2ND STUDENT
Reference points for deciphering related languages of the same era?

GRADY
Both arguably true, but think about a practical application in modern society.
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The class is silent.

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GRADY
Okay we’ll come back to that next week. A hint: it has to do with cognitive frameworks. For now read the chapters on Kober and Ventris, we’ll compare and contrast their approaches to solving Linear B.
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The class files out. She notices a PROFESSOR passing by the doorway, and hurries to pack.
While Grady wrestles with the projector remote, the screen phases into STATIC. She doesn’t see the words--

**DO NOT READ THE BOOK**

--Flicker on screen as she turns the projector off.

**INT. UNIVERSITY HALLWAY - AFTERNOON**

Professor MARCUS BALDWIN is a distinguished-looking egocentric in his 60s. Grady jockeys and slaloms past students to catch up.

**GRADY**
Marcus.

**MARCUS**
Elizabeth. How was my class? Keeping to my curriculum I hope.

**GRADY**
Naturally. Have you had a chance to review my proposal?

**MARCUS**
Yes, I’m not sure I understand it.

**GRADY**
Which part?

**MARCUS**
The whole thing really.

This throws her off guard. She follows him into--

**INT. MARCUS’ OFFICE - AFTERNOON**

Marcus deposits some papers on his desk and rummages through a desk drawer.

**GRADY**
Is my argument unclear?

**MARCUS**
Clarity’s not the issue.

Marcus lays a thick CATALOG on the desk.
MARCUS
Here, I need you to take our microfiche catalog, go to the archives, and transfer it all to digital.

(searches the desk more)
The argument’s not terrible per se, but I don’t think it’s viable. Too cross-discipline, too radical.

GRADY
Isn’t the point of a thesis to prove something new?

(beat)
And why can’t the intern do the scans?

MARCUS
Yes but neuroplasticity, pattern recognition... it’s more neurobiology than linguistics.

(beat)
Former intern. Found a paying job and left without giving notice.

GRADY
Yes but if you consider the--

Marcus finds a copy of her THESIS, holds it up.

MARCUS
If you really want to pursue this, you’ll want to work with someone over in Biology.

(beat)
We’re overdue on the school’s digital mandate, so the scans need to be done post haste.

She looks at the catalog. It is large.

GRADY
That’s going to take me weeks.

MARCUS
It’s important and frankly you’re the only one available who I trust to do it accurately.

GRADY
What about my thesis, Marcus?
MARCUS
In its current form, it’s not something I’m willing to chair. Come back with something more traditional.

(hand back her proposal)
If you have your heart set on it, consider doing it as your post-doc.
In the meantime--

He holds out the catalog. Defeated, she takes it and stuffs it in her bag.

INT. LIBRARY STACKS - AFTERNOON
Grady wanders past corridors of impassive archives. She navigates down a dark row. She pulls out a large box. It’s filled with smaller boxes. Consulting the catalog, she selects an armful.

She seats herself at a MICROFICHE READER. Lays out her materials. Opens a small box, removes a strip of MICROFILM, and loads it into the reader.

A page of MEDIEVAL TEXT is projected on the screen. She presses a button. The page is scanned. She saves it to the computer and marks it off in the catalog. She advances to the next page, scans it, saves it, checks it off in the catalog.

It’s going to be a long day...

INT. GRADY’S APARTMENT - EVENING
Grady enters, discarding her shoulder bag. She drops on the couch, rubbing the bridge of her nose under her glasses. Closes her eyes, ready to fall asleep. Her CELL PHONE rings. She puts it to her ear.

GRADY
Speak.

(listens)
God yes.

INT. BAR - NIGHT
A pair of COCKTAILS on a tray weaves its way to a table. The WAITER sets them down. Grady grabs one drink, FRANCESCA grabs the other. ‘Chess’ for short. Late 20s, petite, vivacious, confident. A bite-sized stick of TNT.
They raise glasses.

CHESS
So dish.

GRADY
Oh-my-God-he’s-torpedoing-my-academic-career.

CHESS
You mean Baldwin?

GRADY
Yes Marcus Baldwin that motherf--

CHESS
Let the medicine do its work.

Chess guides the drink to Grady’s mouth, Grady takes a generous sip.

GRADY
Pompous prick. Thinks my thesis is too ‘out there.’

CHESS
Well that’s the point right? Break new ground?

GRADY
That’s what I said! But he’s not having it. He won’t chair unless I change the whole thing.

CHESS
Rude.

GRADY
Plus we lost our intern so now I’ve got to pick up his slack. I might have to bag the whole semester.

CHESS
When it rains, it shits.

GRADY
I know right? What am I gonna do?

CHESS
Find a buff undergrad to work off your stress?
GRADY
Ugh. You and my neighbor. I think
my mother is the only one not
interested in my love life.
Seriously, Chess. What do I do?

CHESS
I can’t help you with Academia.
Not my circus, not my monkeys.
You’ve got drive, it’ll come to
you. Can’t do anything about it
tonight, though. Am I right?

Chess raises her glass, waiting for a response. They clink, and drink.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - EVENING

Grady makes her way down the hall, as her key hits the lock--

MILLS
Evening Ms. Grady--

GRADY
(jumps & drops her keys)
Jesus Christ!

Mills stands bath-robed in his doorway watching Grady gather her things.

GRADY
A little warning next time!

MILLS
Sorry there. Any luck?

GRADY
Oh. No, today was not the day.

MILLS
Tomorrow then. You’ll see!

GRADY
Good night Mr. Mills.

MONTAGE

Grady wakes. Stucco ceiling. Reading in the shower.
Reading on the bus. Calling on students in lecture hall.
Walking into the library. Grady catches the eye of SCOTT, a handsome student librarian. She enters--
INT. LIBRARY STACKS - NIGHT

Grady continues her routine: Loads microfilm, scans it, saves it to the database, marks it down in the catalog.

Grady grows sleepy as the tedium continues. She’s jarred awake when the overhead lights FLASH off then on. Fifteen minutes to library closing time.

She revives herself with coffee and begins packing her things. She consults the catalog.

GRADY
Might as well finish out the box.

She double-times it, sliding and scanning page after page. Suddenly she stops on one slide.

All is quiet except the HUMMING fluorescents overhead. She clears the sleep from her eyes and cross-checks the catalog.

GRADY
That can’t be right.

On the screen: the page from the PALIMPSEST (the one opposite from the illustration). Grady scrolls the film back a page: Medieval text. Scrolls forward: The inscrutable Palimpsest text. She scrolls forward once more: EMPTY WHITE SCREEN.

Grady pulls the MICROFILM from the reader and holds it up. She does this with the remaining microfilm in the box.

GRADY
Where’s the rest?

She puts the film back in the machine and examines the DETAILS. Written on old paper, with a BLOODSTAIN in the corner. Grady scans the page into the computer.

The lights CLACK as they shut off for the evening, leaving the glow of the Palimpsest symbols projected on her face.

She puzzles. Considers. Decides.

Grady makes note of the signature on the box cover: “LANDON 2/81”. Pulls a FLASH DRIVE from her bag. Copies the file over to it. Then DELETES the file from the library computer.

She packs up and leaves, more lights shutting off behind her, as if she’s leaving a wake of darkness.
INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - NIGHT

The rest of the library is shutting down. Scott notices Grady on her way out.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Grady approaches her apartment. She puts the key in the lock, pauses, and turns with arms folded.

    GRADY
    What is it, Mr. Mills?

Mills - standing there in pajamas and fuzzy slippers - is taken off guard.

    MILLS
    I, um, just...

    GRADY
    This is getting really tiresome.
    Don’t you have anything better to do than worry about me coming and going?

She intercepts him with a gaze when he tries to look away. She waits for an answer - and is taken back when Mills gets teary-eyed.

    MILLS
    It’s just... I had a daughter, once. She would have been about your age now. It gets lonely without anyone to look after, you know? I just want to know that you’re okay. That somebody’s okay...

Mills breaks down, eventually composes himself.

    MILLS
    Sorry.

    GRADY
    (genuinely touched)
    Mr. Mills, that’s sweet.

Mills goes in for a hug--

    GRADY
    Personal space!

    MILLS
    --Understood.
Mills shifts uncomfortably. Grady takes pity.

GRADY
Look I don’t mind if you ask me how I’m doing now and then. Just less creepy-stalky, okay?

MILLS
Okay Ms. Grady.

GRADY
You can call me Elizabeth.

MILLS
Arthur.

GRADY
(smiles)
I like Mr. Mills.

MILLS
(cheering up)
Good night Elizabeth.

GRADY
Good night Mr. Mills.

They retire to their apartments.

INT. GRADY’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Grady sets up her laptop and plugs in the flash drive. She opens the Palimpsest scan, and PRINTS it.

She pours some fresh coffee. Pulls a copy of “Lost Languages” off her crowded bookshelf. She sits at her desk, puts the PRINTOUT under the desk light, cracks open her book, and begins researching.

INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

Scott observes GRADY entering, smiles.

SCOTT
No rest for the wicked!

Grady is oblivious as she makes her way upstairs. Scott cringes at his clumsy flirtation.

Grady stakes out a spot to study, and fetches hefty books like “The History of Proto Writing” off the shelves.
She reads through pages, comparing them to the PRINTOUT and taking copious notes.

Her cell phone vibrates.

UNKNOWN (TEXT)
Drinks?

GRADY (TEXT)
Who’s this?

CHESS (TEXT)
Chess. New number. So?

Grady checks the time.

GRADY (TEXT)
K. Usual spot. 8pm.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

The waiter brings a pair of COCKTAILS over to Chess and Grady at a corner table. The two tap their glasses and sip.

GRADY
So dish.

CHESS
Oh-my-god-she’s-turning-into-a-complete-psycho.

GRADY
Valerie?

CHESS
That’s the old one. This is Tina. Sweetheart on the outside, control freak on the inside. She reorganized all my bookmarks.

GRADY
Okay, that’s a little OCD, but--

CHESS
And deleted all the links she considers gender-insensitive, followed by a lecture which ended in tears – her tears, mind you – about how I don’t respect her choices for making me a better lesbian.
GRADY
(beat)
But you’re bi.

CHESS
In denial of my true sexual identity, according to her.

GRADY
You freak magnet.

CHESS
I know right?

GRADY
When does she get your patented break-up talk?

CHESS
I’ve decided to change my methods. And my locks.

GRADY
(holds up her cell)
And your phone number. You are a cruel, cruel woman.

CHESS
Sexual denial does that to a person. How are things with you?

GRADY
Well I’m less than half-way through the intern’s work, and I haven’t solved my thesis problem yet. In the plus column, my neighbor isn’t a dirty old man, just paternal in a tragic sort of way. Oh, and there’s this--

Grady hands her the Palimpsest PRINTOUT. Chess squints, holds it out at various distances.

CHESS
Can’t read it without my specs, what is it?

GRADY
Found it the other night when I was scanning some medieval texts.

CHESS
(hands it back)
I take it it’s not medieval.
GRADY
I don’t know what it is. It was just sitting there at the end of a microfilm. I haven’t been able to find anything on it in the library, or in my personal collection.

CHESS
Which is Legion.

GRADY
I’m wondering if it was written by some disgruntled student.

CHESS
Like a hoax or a practical joke?

GRADY
Seems likely. I mean, it’s just the one page.

CHESS
(considers)
What if it isn’t a joke?

GRADY
There’s no record of this writing system anywhere, so it would be a unique find.

CHESS
Unique enough to write an award-winning thesis?

GRADY
Oh that’s a stretch. And academic suicide if it turns out to be bogus.

CHESS
So find out.

GRADY
How?

CHESS
It’s on a roll of film, right? Find out who took the picture and ask them.

GRADY
Chess, you’re a genius.
CHESS
A cruel, cruel genius.

They clink glasses in celebration.

INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - MORNING

Grady is waiting at the front door as Scott unlocks it.

SCOTT
The early bird catches the bookworm!
(winces)
Oh God, that was terrible. Way funnier in my head. Apologies. Please, once more.

He gestures for Grady to return outside. Skeptical, she exits. Scott does some mock athletic stretches, and opens the door for her with a flourish.

SCOTT
Good morning!

She rolls her eyes as she passes by.

SCOTT
Much better don’t you think?
Simple, pun-free.

Scott watches her disappear into the recesses of the library.

SCOTT
I will forever be alone.

Grady browses fruitlessly through old university publications. She pushes away from the table, rubs the bridge of her nose under her glasses, then stops.

Idea.

CUT TO:

Scott grabs books off his library cart, returns them to the shelves. Pulls the cart a little further, turns to grab some more books and GRADY IS RIGHT THERE--

SCOTT
(knocks over books)
Jesus Christ!

Someone nearby SHUSHES them.
Yeah, I get that from my neighbor. You are going to help me solve a mystery.

(picking up books)
Sure just give me a minute to finish up my heart attack.

He guides her to a library terminal and pulls up a chair for her.

So what’s your mystery?

More of a missing person actually. Faculty by the last name of Landon from 1981.

Which department?

Archaeology maybe?

Scott types a query with no results.

Try Anthropology.

He tries again but no hits. He types again.

Trying all departments for last name Landon.

(another failed search)
Some departments were still doing everything on paper back then. Any more details you can give me to refine the search?

All I know is in 1981 this guy took a picture of a text that could save my thesis.

Then failure is not on option.

Scott resumes typing with enthusiasm.
SCOTT
You might ask why a computer science major chooses an opening at the library over a job in the computer lab. The thing about a large university is that the left hand doesn’t know what the right hand is doing.

(looks at her, typing)
Like a Computer Science Department with all sorts of firewalls in place to prevent some of its more enthusiastic constituents from misbehaving.

(back to screen, typing)
Meanwhile a library across campus - run by different staff - is behind the curve on certain security measures. From here, an enterprising undergrad can negotiate all sorts of access. Including back doors to neglected databases.

GRADY
Is what you’re doing legal?

SCOTT
Not in the least. And if you look at the history of any institution, the first department to go electronic has always been--

(victorious keystroke)
Accounting.

Grady blinks at the screen.

SCOTT
Mathers, first name Landon. Professor of Photography.

GRADY
That makes sense. He probably took photos for the other departments. Is there any contact info?

SCOTT
Here. Address as of his last paycheck, issued March 1981.

GRADY
(writes it down)
Mid semester? Odd. Does it say if he got fired or quit?
SCOTT
Nope, sorry.

GRADY
It’s a start. Thanks. Nice work, uh...

SCOTT
(extends hand)
Scott.

GRADY
(shakes hand)
Friends call me Grady.

SCOTT
Nice to meet you Grady. In between solving thirty-five year-old mysteries, do you ever go out for drinks?

She grabs a pen and writes her phone number on his palm. She gives him a pat on the cheek.

He blushes, watching her leave. Grady pulls out her phone, texting.

GRADY (TEXT)
Up for an adventure?

CHESS (TEXT)
Desperately. When?

GRADY (TEXT)
Tomorrow. I’ll send you details tonight.

CHESS (TEXT)
Squee!

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Grady reaches her door with keys out, pauses. She knocks on Mills’ door. Moments later Mills opens up.

GRADY
I think today was the day.

MILLS
Really? What’s his name?
GRADY
Scott. He’s cute, bit of a nerd. Awkward, but clever. Maybe even a little subversive.

MILLS
And that’s good?

GRADY
Yes, Mr. Mills that’s very good. He shows great potential.

Mills offers a high-five which Grady accepts.

MILLS
I am very happy for you. Will you let me know how it turns out?

GRADY
Thank you, I most certainly will.

Grady goes into her apartment. Mills stands there, pleased.

GRADY
(through the door)
Pants, Mr. Mills.

He tightens his robe and returns to his apartment.

INT. CAR – DAY

Chess is behind the wheel and Grady gets in.

GRADY
You know how to get there?

CHESS
(starts driving)
Got it mapped on my phone. What are we doing?

GRADY
We’re visiting the house of the guy who photographed that page.

CHESS
You said that was thirty-five years ago. He’s still alive?

GRADY
Hope so, the house is under the same name. Thank you internet.
CHESS
Look at us, chasing down leads like a couple of cops. So who’s the perp?

GRADY
A photography professor named Mathers. Maybe the picture’s just some art piece he did.

CHESS
But you don’t think so.

GRADY
I’ve been studying the pictograms on the page. Or ideograms. I’m not sure which… I think they’re ideograms.

CHESS
You’re losing me already.

GRADY
A pictogram is a representation of a thing, like that guy on that pedestrian sign over there.

GRADY
An ideogram is a concept, like the circle-slash around an arrow - like that ‘no left turn’ sign.

Chess turns the wheel, Grady grips her seat--

GRADY
No left turn!

A car HONKS. Chess swerves, nonplussed.

CHESS
Blame Google maps. You were saying?

GRADY
My point is the symbols aren’t random. They have a… cadence. They feel familiar. Innate. I think it ties into my original thesis.

CHESS
How? In simple terms this time.
The brain is essentially an organic computer. Words are like the programming language. They shape how we think, how we behave. Some computers languages can do things others can’t, the same goes for human languages.

Like when something gets lost in translation?

See? You’re getting it. Now computers have Binary Code; ones and zeros to construct these programming languages. (beat) I think the human brain is similar. Associating symbols with meaning is the root of comprehension.

So this thing is written in a Binary Code for the brain?

It’s not a perfect analogy, but yes. A cognitive framework that might be what every language evolved from. There are a few ancient proto-texts that hint at it. If what Mathers has is real then this is my Rosetta Stone. (deep breath) I’m talking a lifetime career. So we’re going to find out where he found it, and if he still has it.

And if he faked it?

Then we crap on his lawn and go out for drinks.

The perfect plan.

Chess pulls her car into a dirt driveway and they step out.
The Mathers house is tucked under trees by some woods. Rural, rundown, junk overgrown with weeds, on what might have once been a lawn.

GRADY
Lawn-crapping is not going to have the shock value I had hoped for.

The windows are lifeless and dark. The only sounds: the surrounding woods. They reach the front door.

CHESS
No doorbell. Or electricity and running water, I bet. This suddenly feels like a bad idea.

GRADY
C’mon Chess, I need this.

Grady KNOCKS on the door. They wait. Nothing. Before Chess can stop her, Grady knocks again, obnoxiously.

GRADY
Adventure, remember?

They listen as LARGE footsteps approach and stop on the other side of the door. A pregnant pause.

The door opens as much as the DOOR CHAIN will let it. A tall bearded MAN looks at them through the crack.

GRADY
Landon Mathers?

MAN
(beat)
Not here.

GRADY
When will he be back?

The man laughs a little. An inside joke.

MAN
Why do you want to see him?

GRADY
To ask him about a photograph--

The door SHUTS. The sound of the CHAIN unhooking, the GROAN of the door opening. FOOTSTEPS away from the door. An awkward invitation.

The two of them lean in, scanning for danger.
INT. MATHERS HOUSE - DAY

A disheveled home. Barely a household surface visible between the piles of random junk.

MAN (O.S.)
You want tea? I know how to make tea.

Grady and Chess following the voice into the kitchen. The man fills a teapot and puts it on the stove. He rummages to find clean cups.

MAN
He’s dead. Dad died.

He turns to face an EYE CHART on the refrigerator. Puts a hand over one eye. He quietly reads off the letters, but he’s getting them out of order. Every time he does, he starts over again.

GRADY
Sorry?

MAN
Dad died a long time ago.

GRADY
Oh. Sorry. I’m Elizabeth Grady, this is Francesca.

CHESS
Hi.

The man pulls a stained handkerchief from his pocket and blows his nose. Returns the filthy rag to his pocket.

CHESS
(under her breath)
If he’s a serial killer, I’m unfriending you.

Grady and Chess draw closer, noting how unsettled and vacant he seems. The man keeps reading the chart letters in between the conversation.

GRADY
What’s your name?

JOSEPH

GRADY
You live here by yourself?
JOSEPH
Nobody else.

GRADY
I’m a student at the university where your dad worked. Do you remember when he used to work there?

JOSEPH
He loved taking pictures. Loved it until he didn’t.

GRADY
Do you remember him ever taking pictures of old papers or books?

A hesitant shrug.

GRADY
Did he ever come home with old papers or books?

No response. Grady and Chess trade a knowing glance: Joseph is a poor liar. Grady nods to Chess, who nods back.

GRADY
Joseph can I use your bathroom? (mouthing to Chess)
Your phone.

Joseph fidgets and points down the hall. Chess hands off her phone before Grady heads into the hallway. Joseph watches her down the hall.

CHESS
So what do you do for kicks around here, Joe?

He turns to Chess.

JOSEPH
Kicks?

INT. MATHERS HALLWAY - DAY

Grady leans into the bathroom, flips on the bathroom light, closes the door, and continues down the hall. She pokes her head into one messy room after another. She reaches a DOOR at the end of the hall, opens it quietly. Stairs lead into DARKNESS. She finds a light switch and--
INT. MATHERS CELLAR - DAY

Grady takes each STEP gingerly, agonizing over every CREAK. The basement is slowly revealed as she nears the bottom. Like the upstairs, it’s a debris field of unremarkable items. But then she sees it.

INT. MATHERS KITCHEN - DAY

Joseph leans to look down the hall again. The bathroom door is closed and the LIGHT is on inside. Seems in order. The sound of the teapot HEATING UP.

INT. MATHERS CELLAR - DAY

There’s something behind the stairs. As Grady walks around, the magnitude of it registers. Pictures and clippings pinned all over the wall and connected with string, like a police MURDER BOARD.

INT. MATHERS KITCHEN - DAY

CHESS
Do you ever get out, go to the movies?

JOSEPH
No.

CHESS

JOSEPH
Nothing like that.

The water is beginning to BOIL.

INT. MATHERS BASEMENT - DAY

The snippets on the wall seem unrelated, disorganized, almost incoherent. Under it are stacks of books. Encyclopedias, National Geographic, remedial reading books. A mish-mash of items as random as the clippings on the wall.

INT. MATHERS KITCHEN - DAY

Joseph keeps stealing impatient glances at the bathroom. Beginning to sense something’s fishy.
CHESS
You like to read?

JOSEPH
I’m not so good at it.

CHESS
I know the feeling. Do you like to talk at least?

JOSEPH
No one to talk to.

CHESS
Well I’m here, you can talk to me.

JOSEPH
Isn’t that what we’re doing?

He catches Chess looking at the hallway too. Their eyes meet. He doesn’t like this, definitely something fishy. The tea pot WHISTLES painfully. Joseph COVERS his ears, heads for the bathroom--

INT. MATHERS BASEMENT - DAY

Between the piles of books, in the center, is a piece of ancient cloth covering an OBJECT. Grady reaches for it then looks UP, hearing Joseph’s heavy FOOTSTEPS--

INT. MATHERS HALLWAY - DAY

Joseph approaches the bathroom.

Extends his arm.

Puts his hand on the doorknob--

GRADY (O.S.)
I’ll be out in a minute.

INT. MATHERS BATHROOM - DAY

Chess’ PHONE is on the bathroom sink, it’s set to SPEAKER and the caller is GRADY.

GRADY (PHONE)
Sorry I’m taking so long.
INT. MATHERS HALLWAY - DAY

Joseph hesitates.

GRADY (O.S.)
It’s lady stuff.

The tea pot’s still WHISTLING.

GRADY (O.S.)
Sounds like the water’s ready.

Finally, he returns to--

INT. MATHERS KITCHEN - DAY

Joseph takes the pot off the stove. He pours three cups of tea. Eye on the bathroom door, calmer but still uneasy.

CHESS
Got any milk for the tea?

Joseph looks in the fridge.

JOSEPH
No.

CHESS
How about sugar?

He looks in the cupboard.

JOSEPH
No.

The sound of toilet FLUSHING.

CHESS
(relieved)
Plain tea is fine.

Grady enters, sees the tea.

GRADY
Oh thanks.

She grabs a mug, takes a sip, puts it down.

GRADY
I was hoping your dad could help me with something, I didn’t know he passed away. I’m sorry we imposed.
We should get going.

CHESS
Catch ya later, Joe. Try to get out more.

INT. MATHERS HOUSE - DAY

Chess and Grady exit. Grady puts a hand on Chess for her to slow down.

GRADY
Casual. Like nothing happened.

CHESS
Something happened? What happened?

Joseph appears at the front door. Grady waves as they get in the car. He does not respond. He watches them drive off.

INT. CAR - DAY

Chess is driving too fast.

GRADY
Slow down. We’re good.

CHESS
So what happened?!?

GRADY
I got it.

CHESS
You found the page?

GRADY
I found the mother lode.

CHESS
Is it for real?

GRADY
I don’t know.

CHESS
Well let’s see it!

GRADY
(types into phone)
No.
CHESS
After I ran interference with Mr. Freaky Pants? What the hell, Grade?

GRADY
I have to examine this under controlled conditions.

CHESS
So are we going to the school?

GRADY
Hell no. If this is the real McCoy and Baldwin finds out, what do you think will happen?

Chess doesn’t know the answer.

GRADY
He’ll take it and he’ll take credit for the find. Marcus Baldwin is not getting his hands on this.
(reads phone)
I need to buy some things. There’s a hobby shop a mile from my place.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - DAY
Grady reaches her door, shopping bag in hand. MILLS opens his door, Grady gives him the briefest smile as she enters her apartment and locks the door behind her.

INT. GRADY’S APARTMENT - DAY
Grady clears her desk. Unloads the bag: Tweezers, magnifying glass, cotton gloves, X-Acto knife. Small plastic bags.

She lays out the materials, puts on the white gloves. She withdraws a BOOK from her shoulder bag.

The PALIMPSEST.
Weathered by countless ages. She cradles it onto the desk, using tweezers to open the cover. The first pages are LINED PAPER, written in blue ballpoint pen. Grady looks utterly desolated.

GRADY
“Syzygy shall reveal the Word that invokes the arrival of the five vessels.” All that, for this--
Nonsense. Mathers, you asshole.

She flips through the book, then slows... flip, flip, FLIP.

Grady sees only the first pages are contemporary, crudely glued in. Further into the book, the pages are ANCIENT PARCHMENT. Strange symbols, DaVinci-like diagrams, and cryptic equations. Snippets of Latin and other languages, known and unknown. The pages have been WRITTEN AND OVERWRITTEN.

GRADY
What is this?

EXT. UNIVERSITY - AFTERNOON

Grady walks the campus with purpose. She clutches her shoulder bag slightly as she spots MARCUS coming her way, but he’s walking with a STUDENT, occupied in conversation.

She’s relieved when she passes unnoticed--

MARCUS
Elizabeth!

GRADY
(turns, fake smile)
Hi Marcus!

MARCUS
How are the transfers coming?

GRADY
Fine.

MARCUS
And the new thesis?

GRADY
Coming along fine.

MARCUS
Good. Keep me updated.

Grady picks up the pace. Marcus pauses, looks back, sees her enter--
INT. RESEARCH BUILDING – AFTERNOON

Grady steps downstairs into the ISOTOPE LAB. She approaches IRWIN, a researcher working among HUMMING lab equipment. Has the ruffled look of a lifetime staffer who loves his job.

IRWIN
Elizabeth Grady, haven’t seen you since your Bachelor days.

GRADY
Heya Irwin, what’s new?

IRWIN
Oh you know me, it’s not about what’s new. If it ain’t old--

GRADY
It aint interesting.

IRWIN
It aint interesting.

They exchange smiles.

IRWIN
What brings you down to the Pit?

GRADY
Forced to rework my thesis by decree of the great Marcus Baldwin.

IRWIN
I warned you as an undergrad, he’d be a pain your ass.

GRADY
I am reminded of it daily. So I’m scrambling to revise my thesis and I find, well...

(beat)
I think I found a palimpsest.

IRWIN
For real?

GRADY
I don’t know. That’s why I’m here.

IRWIN
Samples?

Grady presents him with the four SAMPLE BAGS, each containing a sliver of PAPER.
IRWIN
That’s my Grady.
(examining bags)
Origin?

GRADY
I’m hoping you can tell me. Think you can squeeze it into the queue?

IRWIN
A palimpsest? Shit, I’d do it now if I didn’t have a backlog. How about end of the week?

GRADY
Works for me. I’ll stop by.

IRWIN
Good seeing you, Elizabeth. Come by more often.

INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - NIGHT

Grady is camped out at a table piled with an absurd number of language books. She writes in her notebook. Cross-referencing volumes. Researching with unwavering purpose.

As she works, the words in her notebook momentarily MORPH. Unrecognizable. Maybe she’s just tired. She’s distracted by a quiet CONVERSATION between STUDENTS at a nearby table.

Their whispers are UNINTELLIGIBLE, like they’re speaking an alien language. She rubs her nose beneath her glasses. Takes her a moment to realize someone is talking to her--

SCOTT
Earth to Grady.

GRADY
Sorry. Long day. I think my brain is full.

SCOTT
Hope you have room for a little more, I have some info for you.

GRADY
On the palimpsest?

SCOTT
Er, I don’t know what that is. No, on your mystery man.
GRADY
You found more on Mathers?

Scott takes a seat.

SCOTT
Divorcée, father of one Joseph Mathers. He did some moonlighting doing yearbook photos for local high schools.
(beat)
You were right about him doing odd jobs for other departments. Especially Archaeology. You know about Ozette village?
(off her nod)
He was part of a contingent the University sent at the tail end of the excavation. He died a few weeks later.

GRADY
How?

SCOTT
Dunno, I’m still digging. Hah, digging. Excavation. Get it?

GRADY
How’d you find out all this?

SCOTT
Better if I don’t say.

GRADY
Thanks.

SCOTT
Maybe drinks this weekend?

GRADY
(absently)
Yeah sure.

SCOTT
Go home. You look like you could use some sleep.

INT. GRADY’S APARTMENT – NIGHT

Grady enters and drops her bag on the couch. She goes directly to her desk. She dons white gloves and with tweezers, opens the Palimpsest and begins reading.
She jots down notes. Her pace accelerates, she must keep going. She reaches the page pictured in the microfilm. And the CREATURE depicted on the opposite page. She pauses on it, absentmindedly TAPPING the desk with her tweezers.

What is this thing? Tap tap tap.

Tap tap tap.

Someone is TAPPING on her door. She heads over.

GRADY
(under her breath)
This is not the time, Mr. Mills.

She puts her eye to the PEEPHOLE, reaching for the knob--

It’s JOSEPH.

She takes her hand away from the knob.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK causes her to flinch.

She watches him silently through the peephole. Joseph’s distorted image looks around expectantly then LEANS IN TO LISTEN. She leans back in response, getting scared now, holding her breath. She looks through the peephole again:

Joseph looks down. Then up. He pulls out his grimy handkerchief and UNSCREWS the hallway LIGHT BULB above him.

The peephole hallway goes DARK. A tiny abyss. SILENCE.

Grady looks down, realizing in horror that the light from her apartment is casting SHADOWS OF HER FEET through the bottom of the door into the hallway--

JOSEPH (O.S.)
I know you’re there.

She stifles a yelp and backs away from the door.

JOSEPH (O.S.)
You shouldn’t have taken it.

Terrified, she silently backs up to the couch, curling up in a ball against it.

JOSEPH (O.S.)
If you don’t give me the book, you’re going to die.

Silent tears, frozen in terror. She waits. Agonizing moments pass.
She grabs her phone from her bag to dial, but then the sound of Joseph’s FOOTSTEPS recede down the hall, a DOOR opening then closing in the distance.

She waits, afraid to exhale. The RING of her cell phone startles a SCREAM out of her. Grady’s hands shake so bad she has trouble answering.

CHESS (PHONE)
Grade?

Grady SOBS uncontrollably.

CHESS (PHONE)
What’s wrong? What happened?

CUT TO:

INT. MATHERSS HOUSE – MORNING

There’s a KNOCK. Joseph reaches the door and opens it. He looks down. The diminutive CHESS is brandishing a lethal expression ten times her size--

She CLOSES IN ON HIM faster than he can back up through all the piles of junk.

CHESS
Joseph you psycho stalking sonofabitch Elizabeth Grady is my best friend in the world and I swear to God if you lay so much as a finger on her I will END you--

Joseph TRIPS backwards, landing on his ass with Chess looming over him.

CHESS
Nod once to demonstrate your clear understanding of the words I’ve just spoken to you.

Joseph produces one. slow. nod.

CHESS
You went to Grady’s apartment last night and threatened her.

JOSEPH
I... I was trying to warn her--

He cringes as she LEANS in.
CHESS
Explain that statement before I start breaking testicles.

Chess makes a fist so tight her knuckles CRACK--

JOSEPH
The book is dangerous! If she reads it, it will kill her. Just like it killed my dad.

Puzzled, Chess’ eyes narrow.

JOSEPH
Do you want some tea? I know how to make tea.

INT. GRADY’S APARTMENT – MORNING

Grady wakes. Stucco ceiling. Dark circles under her eyes. Making coffee in the kitchen. Waiting for the water to boil. She eyes her desk. She goes over and begins reading the Palimpsest without using the gloves.

The water boils unnoticed.

INT. MATHERSS HOUSE – MORNING

Chess sips tea while Joseph rummages through a pile of VHS TAPES. He finds the right one and plays it on the VCR. It is an old local NEWSCAST:

REPORTER (TV)
I’m in Port Orchard, where a man was shot and killed this afternoon. Police say Landon Mathers became violent during an attempted arrest. Fearing for their safety, officers resorted to deadly force. While it will be weeks before all details are known, police spokesmen say that mental illness was likely a factor in the suspect’s behavior. Landon Mathers leaves behind a young teenage son. Back to you, Terry.

Joseph stops the tape.
CHESS
Is that all there is?
   (off his look)
Were you there when it happened?

JOSEPH
I was at school. They say he left
a store with stuff he didn’t pay
for, and the police came, said he
went crazy, and they shot him.

CHESS
What happened after that?

JOSEPH
Dad’s lawyer sued the police and he
got some money and he gives me some
every month so I can keep living
here.

CHESS
Do you know why your father
attacked the police?

JOSEPH
Because of the book.

CHESS
I don’t understand. How did the
book make your dad attack the
police?

JOSEPH
Dad went on a trip. When he came
back he had the book. He started
reading it and he couldn’t stop.
It messed with his head, made him
do stuff. Weird stuff.

CHESS
What kind of stuff?

JOSEPH
He started building something.

CHESS
What kind of something?

JOSEPH
Something weird.
CHESS
Joseph, I will turn this mug sideways and shove it up your ass if you don’t start making sense.

JOSEPH
I don’t know what it was! Wires and circuits. All he could do was read and build.

CHESS
What happened to the thing he built?

JOSEPH
I threw it away. It scared me.

CHESS
Okay, we’ll skip that for now. If the book is so dangerous, why didn’t it mess with your head?

JOSEPH
It did. I have dyslexia. I tried reading the book, but that made it worse. Harder to learn. So bad I can’t keep a job - which is why dad’s lawyer sends me money every month. So I can keep living here. I wanted to throw the book away, every day. But dad made me promise to keep it, not to tell anyone about it.

CHESS
Why?

JOSEPH
He made me promise. It was the last thing he asked me.

CHESS
Well you don’t have to worry about it anymore. It’s out of your hands now.

JOSEPH
Please get rid of the book, bad things will happen.

CHESS
Enough Joseph.

Chess finished her tea.
CHESS
I’m leaving now. You scared Grady half to death. Don’t go near her again. I mean it.

As she reaches the door, he grabs her hand--

JOSEPH
Please, don’t let her read it.

CHESS
Be thankful I don’t have your ass thrown in jail.

Off her stare, he lets go.

CHESS
I’m sorry for what happened to your dad, but books don’t make people mental, Joe. Thanks for the tea.

INT. CAFÉ - AFTERNOON

Grady looks a little fidgety as Chess sits down with a pair of coffees.

CHESS
Jeez you look like crap, you get any sleep?

Grady takes a long pull of Java.

CHESS
Guess not. So I had a chat with our friend Joe, he won’t be bothering you again.

GRADY
Fine, fine.

CHESS
I don’t know why you didn’t call the police like I told you to.

Chess watches Grady down the rest of her coffee.

GRADY
It was a misunderstanding. I should get back.

CHESS
Back? Back to where?
GRADY
To the book. I have to finish my work.

CHESS
Can we talk about what happened last night? This freak shows up at your door, and while it turns out he wasn’t trying to threaten you, he threatened you!

GRADY
I’m over it.

CHESS
Over it?!?

GRADY
It was buried in the Ozette Village mud slide in 1592. In 1970, a tidal storm uncovered the village and it was excavated over the next decade. Mathers was photographing the dig, and found the book. Or stole it.

CHESS
What does this have to do with anything?!?

GRADY
Don’t you see? The Makah didn’t have a written language. The book was brought there. There’s some Latin in it, so it came through Europe, so it could only be Ioánnis Phokás.

CHESS
I don’t know who that is.

GRADY
We know him as Juan de Fuca, the explorer who ‘discovered’ the Olympic Peninsula. For reasons unknown, he gives the book to the Makah, but the village is wiped out, and the book is preserved in clay for five hundred years--

CHESS
You’re losing perspective here, Grade.
GRADY
Perspective? This could be the Find of the Century. I shit you not.

(whispers urgently)
It isn’t just a manuscript, it’s a palimpsest. It’s been written and rewritten, probably over centuries. Three languages I recognize, and two I’ve never seen before.

(beat, normal voice)
I was reading last night and I’m beginning to understand the syntax of one of the writing systems. It starts in simple ideograms, but it then it builds on itself - like a primer.

CHESS
Will you listen to yourself? The book can wait!

GRADY
Only the book matters. If somebody finds out before I finish, they’ll take it under the Antiquities Act, ending my career before it starts. Just when I’m beginning to understand the syntax.

CHESS
Yeah, you said that.

GRADY
(thinking aloud)
The word ‘aeternum’ keeps appearing, Latin for eternally or forever. The equations... the diagrams - maybe it’s a treatise on time. This is bigger than the Archimedes Codex--

Grady continues talking, but in a different language. She stops when it registers that Chess is staring at her. Other people too.

GRADY
What?

Chess stands up and hands Grady her coat.

CHESS
You’ve had a traumatic event, now you’re incoherent.
I am taking you home, you are getting some sleep, and then you’re getting counseling for what happened last night if I have to drag you there myself. C’mon, let’s go.

Chess ushers Grady out of the shop.

INT. GRADY’S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Chess tucks Grady into bed. She takes a long, concerned look at Grady. Brushes the hair out of Grady’s eyes.

CHESS
You look exhausted. Get some sleep.

GRADY
(conceding)
Okay.

CHESS
Okay. Talk to you later.

Chess leaves. Exhausted, Grady closes her eyes.

INT. GRADY’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Grady wakes. Stucco ceiling. The steep shadows from a streetlight outside make it look like the surface of a foreboding planet.

She gets up. Turns on her desk light and sits. Opens the Palimpsest.

Outside in the night sky, a sliver of the MOON looms like an ominous waking eye.

INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - MORNING

Scott sees Grady - still in pajamas - heading for the exit with an armful of books like “Introduction to Microwave Circuits” and “Physiopsiastic Implications of Quantum Biology.”

Scott walks to greet her.

SCOTT
(cheery)
Hey there!
No response as Grady walks right past him and exits.

**INT. HARDWARE STORE - MORNING**

Grady wanders the aisles in her PJs, dropping items into her basket. Soldering iron and wire. A screwdriver and screws. A hacksaw.

**INT. MARCUS’ OFFICE - AFTERNOON**

Irwin appears in Marcus’ doorway. Marcus glances up ever so briefly.

MARCUS
Irwin, what brings you up from the depths?

IRWIN
Seen Elizabeth Grady around? I need to talk to her.

MARCUS
You and me both. She missed teaching one of my lectures.

IRWIN
Well give her a break, she’s probably busting her ass rewriting her thesis for you.

MARCUS
And how did you come to know that?

IRWIN
She stopped my lab with some samples. She did it, she found an honest-to-God palimpsest.

This gets the professor’s attention.

IRWIN
The first page was only thirty-five years old, so I assume it’s a control sample. I put the other pages at the 1560s, the 1330s, and - get this - 1400 BC.

Marcus raises an eyebrow.
IRWIN
On the level. If you see her can you let her know and give her my congrats?

Marcus nods. Irwin leaves while the professor pushes back from his desk, considering this new information.

INT. GRADY’S APARTMENT - DAY

A landscape of BOOKS and loose NOTES lays sprawled across the floor: A trail of obsession leading to Grady’s desk, where she sits, writing incessantly. We do not see her face.

Her cell phone RINGS, displaying the name SCOTT. She ignores it and keeps writing. Later the phone buzzes again.

CHESS (TEXT)
Where are you?

Grady considers, then texts--

GRADY (TEXT)
At my mom’s, resting.

CHESS (TEXT)
Good. Tell her I say hi--

Grady drops the phone and continues writing. Later, a third ring, this time it’s MARCUS.

The phone is thrown across the room.

EXT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - DAY

Mills steps into the hallway with his coffee. He knocks on Grady’s door. All is quiet as he waits.

He hesitates, then knocks again. A pregnant pause.

The door opens a crack, revealing the disheveled apartment beyond. Mills can only see a hint of Grady’s face. She looks gaunt.

MILLS
Hi Elizabeth, I’ve been trying not to bother you. It’s just that it’s been a while. Maybe you’re on a different schedule now?

No response.
MILLS
I just wanted to see how you’re doing. How are things going with Scott, have you two gone out yet?

Silence.

MILLS
Is everything okay? Is there anything you need?

Still nothing. His concern turns to worry.

MILLS
Elizabeth--

GRADY
I have work to do.

He pauses in disappointment.

MILLS
Okay then. I’ll talk to you later.

He returns to his apartment, taking one last look at her door before it SHUTS.

INT. GRADY’S APARTMENT – DAY

We still don’t see Grady’s face as she returns to her desk. She pulls up another book, “Breakthroughs in Supersymmetry and Supergravity.” She turns to a page with an advanced formula.

Turning to a FORMULA in the Palimpsest, she compares the two. They are nearly IDENTICAL. Grady takes a pen and corrects the formula in the NEWER BOOK.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY – NIGHT

Outside in the night sky, the MOON looms larger, wider. Like a sleepy eye opening.

Inside, Marcus Baldwin makes his way down the hall. He knocks on Grady’s door. Nothing.

He thinks. He makes a call with his cell phone, listening to the door. He hears Grady’s phone ring inside. The ring is CUT OFF by the sound of the phone being smashed.

Marcus knocks again.
MARCUS
Elizabeth, I know you’re in there.
We need to talk.

A pregnant pause.

MARCUS
Nobody’s seen you, you’ve missed
several lectures, and the digital
transfers are overdue.

Still silence. He considers a new tack.

MARCUS
Irwin came to see me the other day--

The door opens a crack. Grady’s face is hidden in shadow,
but a copy of “Autopsy Pathology” is visible in her hand.

MARCUS
Burning the midnight oil, no doubt.
Irwin told me about the palimpsest.
I’ll venture to guess you’re working on it here at home.

She says nothing.

MARCUS
And I can only assume the means by which it came into your possession are less than legitimate. But with the right advocate in your corner, I’m sure any indiscretions can be overlooked in the interest of the greater scientific good.

(beat)
So why don’t we talk about how we’ll be bringing our new discovery to light.

A pause. The door opens wider. Marcus walks in and the door closes behind him with a quiet finality.

INT. HALLWAY – DAY

Mills checks his mailbox, noting that Grady’s MAILBOX is overstuffed.
INT. MILLS APARTMENT - DAY

Mills picks up his land line and places a call. His door is open. As he speaks, he watches Grady’s door across the way. It stands silent and unyielding.

MILLS
Hello, Beverly? This Arthur, your tenant in seventeen. You know Elizabeth Grady across the way? Last time I saw her she wasn’t looking good. She hasn’t been answering and now there’s an odd smell coming from next door. I’m worried she’s really ill, or worse. Could you come check on her to make sure she’s okay?

(beat)
Thank you, the sooner the better.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Mills stands in his doorway as BEVERLY arrives. They exchange worried smiles. Beverly knocks.

BEVERLY
Hello Elizabeth? It’s Beverly your landlord. Are you there?

They both listen, answered by silence. Beverly knocks louder.

BEVERLY
You’ve got some people very worried.

Beverly flips through her crowded KEY RING until she finds the correct key.

BEVERLY
I’m coming in to check on you.

She unlocks the door - leaving the key in the lock - and opens it with a labored CREAK. Mills watches her step into the apartment which is dim and disheveled. Beverly is framed by the doorway as she looks around, pausing--

BEVERLY
Oh my dear you look terrible, are you sick? Do you need help?

There’s a GARbled response. A strange language that’s all too familiar with now.
BEVERLY
Oh God, is that a --

An hand thrusts into view with an X-Acto knife - directly into Beverly’s eye! With a SPASM and single SQUIRT OF BLOOD, her head slides off the knife with a nauseating SCHLICK.

HORRIFIED, Mills backs into his apartment, his doorway now framing Grady’s doorway. Beverly’s body is pulled out of sight and Grady’s door quietly closes.

Mills recovers his senses, approaches his door, and quickly shuts and LOCKS it. He backs away to his phone and dials frantically.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Two police officers, MARTIN and PEREZ, enter the hallway. They turn as Mills opens his door and he points silently to Grady’s apartment.

OFFICER MARTIN
Did you call this in?
(off his nod)
Stay in your apartment with the door closed and locked, sir. We’ll let you know when the situation is secure.

They turn to Grady’s door and knock.

OFFICER MARTIN
Ms. Grady, this is Office Martin, we’ve had a report of a severe injury and we are coming in. If you are able, please stand in plain view, unarmed. Do you understand?

No response.

The officers nod to each other. They unholster their pistols, safeties off, and OPEN the door. After a quick visual scan, they STEP IN...

INT. GRADY’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The apartment is a sty. A giant MURDER BOARD on one wall, but unlike Joseph’s, this one is organized, in the shape of the creature from the Palimpsest.
As the officers move further inside, a HORRIBLE TABLEAU is revealed. The BODIES OF MARCUS AND BEVERLY sit with their backs propped against the sides of Grady’s desk.

The tops of their skulls have been REMOVED. Electrodes run from their EXPOSED BRAINS to a carbuncle of kit-bashed electronics, including Grady’s LAPTOP.

The officers FLINCH as the bodies TWITCH. It happens again.

Moving closer, guns ready, Officer Martin sees there is TEXT scrolling on the SCREEN, the bodies twitch with each new line. He gives only a perfunctory glance at the words:

You have called.
I have answered.
I await.

These lines repeat. The officers RAISE THEIR PISTOLS and scan the apartment – oblivious to the laptop screen when it phases into STATIC as new words appear:

SHE HAS READ THE BOOK
SHE IS CONTAGIOUS
USE LETHAL FORCE, OFFICERS

The officers realize Grady’s SILHOUETTE is standing in the archway.

OFFICER MARTIN
On the ground, face down, hands behind your head!

Grady is motionless.

GRADY
Syzygy shall reveal the word that invokes the arrival of the five vessels.

OFFICER MARTIN
Do it now!

GRADY
Syzygy shall reveal the word that invokes the arrival of the five vessels--

She repeats this, her voice becoming deep, gurgled, INHUMAN--
GRADY
--Only nothing can stop Æternum.

Grady LEAPS at them, in that instant the officers glimpse her malformed, spindly hands and multiple opaque eyes--

They both get off a shot and Grady’s body hits the floor, face down.

Officer Martin notes that Grady’s face and arms are completely normal as he handcuffs her behind her back and checks her pulse.

OFFICER PEREZ
Alive?

OFFICER MARTIN
Not for long.

OFFICER PEREZ
Did you see her face?

OFFICER MARTIN
No. And if you want to avoid a psych review, neither did you.
(towards the doorway)
Clear!

The paramedics, JAIME and ALEX, arrive.

OFFICER MARTIN
C’mon. Let’s get our stories straight on this.

Martin guides Perez into the hall to discuss. Jaime and Alex turn Grady over, she’s conscious but fading. She cranes her neck to Jamie, trying to speak.

Jaime leans down to listen while Alex unpacks medical equipment. While Grady says something quietly in Jaime’s ear, he notices the corpses and bolts upright--

ALEX
What did she say?

JAIME
I… I don’t know.

ALEX
C’mon, we’re going to lose her.

They go to work on Grady.
INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Martin and Perez interview a tearful Mills, while he watches Grady’s covered body gurneyed past by the paramedics.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

A REPORTER faces us as the paramedics push the gurney behind the POLICE TAPE in the background.

REPORTER (TV)
I’m in the Central District, where Elizabeth Grady was shot and killed this evening. She became violent during what the police are calling a domestic disturbance. Fearing for their safety, officers responded with lethal force after discovering two bodies in the woman’s apartment. While not all details are known, a police spokesperson says that mental illness was likely a factor in the incident. Back to you, Jerry.

Pull back to reveal:

INT. CHESS’S HOUSE - NIGHT

A TELEVISION is showing the newscast. Chess sits on her couch, eyes puffy and red from crying. She curls up, agonized for not heeding Joseph’s warning.

The television shows Grady’s covered body being loaded into an ambulance. CUT TO BLACK on the ambulance doors CLOSING.
CREDITS OVER:

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

A dingy corridor between city blocks. An AMBULANCE is parked askew at the end, its back doors OPEN. Pushing in closer, MOVEMENT is visible inside. Entering the back of the ambulance reveals a PATIENT, bandaged and writhing against his restraints.

PATIENT
Help... I don’t feel so good...

Over and past the patient to the ambulance cockpit. ALEX is in the driver’s seat, leaning against his seat belt. A SCALPEL is driven half-way through his temple. Looking to the passenger seat, JAIME sits quietly with the PALIMPSEST open in his lap.

He turns another page.