

FADE IN:

**EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - DAY**

The most hopeless corner of the city. Graffiti, broken windows, piled garbage. A sight for which the term "godforsaken" was invented.

ANDRE (V.O.)

It all started with that thing.  
That thing Crackhead wanted to  
trade for a buck or a rock.

Tough-looking young men loiter near an abandoned diner. Bored to death. In the center of the loitering group stands ANDRE MENDES (20). Andre is handsome, with coal-dark eyes that miss nothing. But if eyes are the windows of the soul, Andre keeps the shades tightly drawn.

A gaunt man, 30s, scurries over to them. This is CRACKHEAD. He waves a drill-shaped object in the air.

ERNESTO (18) snatches the object and holds it out of Crackhead's reach. He tosses it to OMAR (19).

ANDRE (V.O.)

He boosted it from a restaurant.  
Or maybe a welder.

Crackhead lunges to retrieve his prize. Two other young men -- JOSE and MARCUS -- block him. Hooting and jeering.

CRACKHEAD

Give it back! It's worth a lot!

OMAR

Take it, tweaker.

CHICK (16) -- slight, bursting with jumpy energy -- leaps up and grabs the "thing" from Omar. He presses a trigger and a JET OF FLAME shoots out.

*Whoa!* The guys cheer and clap.

Chick zaps the flame on and off as he dodges Crackhead.

CHICK

Check it out!

Desperate and sweaty, Crackhead turns to Andre who is clearly leader of the group.

Andre's not taking part in the hi-jinks but he has no patience for Crackhead either.

ANDRE  
(to Crackhead)  
Beat it.

He doesn't need to say it twice.

Cursing to himself, Crackhead heads off down the street.

Chick gallops after him and knees him in the ass.

Crackhead trips, turns, throws them a fierce look, flips them off, stumbles again.

The guys fall over laughing.

Across the street, HOLLAND KING (64) pokes his head out of his store entrance. The "Kings's Corner" convenience store windows are barricaded behind a brace of iron bars. An urban fortress.

Holland struggles to drag a trash bin out the door. Once straight as an oak, the man now leans his full, angry weight on a wooden cane.

He scowls at the young men across the street.

Chick wields the mini blowtorch like an Uzi.

CHICK  
Think fast, slumlord!

He FIRES off another jet of flame.

Red-faced, Holland limps back into his store. Blames them for everything.

Chick shoots the flame again, nearly igniting a stack of newspapers in the dumpster.

Andre grabs the blowtorch from him.

ANDRE  
Quit screwing around. It's not a toy.

The boys settle down. Omar turns to Andre.

OMAR  
You hear about that house party tonight?

Andre nods. *Yeah.*

OMAR  
You goin'?

Andre shrugs. Like he cares.

JOSE  
It's Sopa turf.

OMAR  
Free country, man.

CHICK  
Sopas charge a toll.

Omar snickers.

MARCUS  
They don't fucking scare me.

JOSE  
Nah. You just piss and run.

Marcus shoves Jose, edges for a fight.

One warning look from Andre and they stop cold.

Ernesto clears his throat.

ERNESTO  
You driving, Omar?

OMAR  
Sure.

They all turn toward Andre. A moment, then--

Andre nods his assent. The others nod, too. Agreed.

Across the street CLARA, a tiny woman, ancient and frail as a dry leaf, emerges from her apartment building. She makes her way carefully along the sidewalk.

The young men eye her.

CHICK  
How old you think she is?

MARCUS  
Why, you want a date?

Clara's pale, aged skin is almost translucent. She clutches a frayed handbag.

CHICK  
 Pitiful. Ain't even worth  
 snatching her bag.

JOSE  
 Marcus already did.

MARCUS  
 Ha. Only thing in it was peanuts.

ANDRE  
 Peanuts?

MARCUS  
 And some kinda seeds and shit.

CHICK  
 Where does she go every day?

OMAR  
 Who gives a crap. She's just  
 runnin' the meter out.

Clara gives a friendly wave to the young men as she totters  
 past.

They return impassive stares.

A bus pulls up, belching exhaust. Ernesto squints at the  
 passengers climbing off the bus. He points with his chin.

ERNESTO  
 Yo. Andre.

Walking toward them is MARIA GUZMAN (20) leading by the hand  
 TICO, a little boy of about four. Tico has Andre's eyes and  
 Maria's smoky beauty.

Under her threadbare coat Maria wears a maid's uniform.

MARIA  
 Hello, Andre.

ANDRE  
 Hey.

MARIA  
 (brightly)  
 Tico's birthday is next week.

Andre doesn't react. The little boy stares at Andre with an  
 expression way too serious for a child.

Still Andre doesn't look at him.

MARIA

They went and cut my hours on the night shift.

ANDRE

And your point is?

MARIA

My point is... what I make hardly pays babysitter and rent.

ANDRE

Life stinks, doesn't it?

Maria sucks in a breath. The flicker of something in her eyes... but she sucks in her pride, too.

MARIA

I thought maybe you could help. I mean--

ANDRE

(breaks in)

That's got nothing to do with me.

Maria bites her lip. It's useless. She ruffles her son's hair.

MARIA

Come on, Tico. Let's go.

ANDRE

Maria.

She looks up, a ray of hope--

Andre holds out a five dollar bill.

ANDRE

Buy the kid a toy. For his birthday.

Maria gazes at Andre, eyes full of hurt. She turns away. Doesn't want the money. But then, she reconsiders--

She wheels around and snatches the bill from Andre's hand, stuffs it in her coat pocket. She and Tico head off down the street.

Andre's eyes follow them until they turn the corner and are out of sight. The smirk gone from his face.

The other young men hold a wary SILENCE.

As the silence stretches out, Andre stiffens. He feels what they're thinking.

ANDRE  
Just 'cause she says he's mine  
don't mean he is.

The guys exchange looks. *Yeah, right.*

**INT. MENDES APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

The door opens. Andre enters the modest room, closes the door quietly behind him.

HUBERT MENDES lies on a fold-out couch watching TV. He's ill, oxygen clip in his nose, walker by the couch. Only forty-nine years old but the world has added decades more.

ANDRE  
Yo, Papa.

HUBERT  
Look who's here. *Hola!*

Andre squeezes his father's shoulder.

ANDRE  
What'd you do today?

HUBERT  
Well I started off with fifty push-ups. Then I jumped some rope, ran ten miles. Nothing too strenuous.

ANDRE  
(grins)  
What are you watching?

HUBERT  
The news. It's bad. The world's in worse shape than me, if you can believe that.

Hubert CLICKS OFF the TV. Andre sits down next to him.

HUBERT  
One of those letters came.

Hubert points to an envelope on top a pile of similar envelopes piled on the end table.

ANDRE  
What'd they say?

HUBERT

Wonderful guys. They're gonna pay for the medical, give me a hundred grand, too. For my inconvenience, you know? Pain and suffering.

Andre throws his dad a wry look. He picks up the letter, opens it and reads, grows more furious by the second.

ANDRE

This is total bullshit!

Hubert leans his head back and closes his eyes.

ANDRE

They won't pay because you "used to smoke cigarettes"?

HUBERT

I never smoked cigarettes. Once or twice, a cigar.

(opens his eyes)

The day I married your mother...

Hubert turns his head and gazes lovingly at a FADED PHOTO draped with a black velvet ribbon. Andre's mother.

HUBERT

... And the day you were born.

ANDRE

(waves the letter)

They say they got a witness. He swears he seen you smoke.

HUBERT

Maybe 'cause I'm smokin' hot, no?

ANDRE

You worked like a slave in that dump for twenty years. Breathing in their poison.

HUBERT

Doesn't matter now.

ANDRE

Yeah it does.

Andre springs to his feet.

ANDRE

They got fancy lawyers, you got nothing.

HUBERT  
 Guess I'll have to rob a bank. You  
 can drive my... my getaway...

Hubert starts to wheeze. He can't finish his sentence.  
 Andre swallows his anger. He strokes his father's forehead.  
 Hubert settles. He rests a limp hand over Andre's.

ANDRE  
 You okay?

HUBERT  
 Never better.

**MENDES APARTMENT, KITCHEN**

Andre pours a can of soup into a saucepan. In the living  
 room, the TV turns back ON. A quiz show.

TV ANNOUNCER (O.S.)  
*Who wants to be a millionaire!*

**MENDES APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM**

Hubert eats his soup, propped up on pillows. Andre enters  
 the room pulling on a fresh sweatshirt.

HUBERT  
 Going out?

ANDRE  
 Yeah. Don't wait up.

HUBERT  
 If you're going dancing I want to  
 come, too. Try out my flash moves.

Andre chokes out a laugh. He eyes his father's soup, barely  
 touched. Hubert spies the look of concern.

HUBERT  
 I had enough. It was delicious.  
 Just like homemade.

A car HONKS.

ANDRE  
 I gotta go.

He leans over and presses his lips to the top of his father's head.

**EXT. URBAN STREET - NIGHT**

An old model Buick sedan idles at the curb. Andre jogs over and climbs inside with the other guys.

**INT. CAR - TRAVELING URBAN STREETS - NIGHT**

Omar drives. Andre and Chick sit crammed with him in the front, Jose, Marcus and Ernesto in back.

Andre pinches Chick's cheek.

CHICK

Ow.

ANDRE

No monkey business tonight, Junior.  
If I say it's suck city we're out  
of there pronto. Got it?

Chick giggles. Andre smacks the back of Chick's head.

ANDRE

I said, got it?

CHICK

I got it, I got it. Fuck, man.

Omar points to a house with lit-up windows. The loud *thump-thump* of hip-hop MUSIC flows onto the street.

**INT. PARTY HOUSE - NIGHT**

Andre and his crew snake through the dancing throng.

A heavily TATTOOED GUY catches sight of Andre and does a double take. The guy flips open his phone, turns aside.

Ernesto helps himself to a bottle of beer from an ice bucket. He hands one to Andre.

DISSOLVE TO:

**EXT. PARTY HOUSE - NIGHT (LATER)**

A Pontiac cruises up. Very tough-looking young men -- the "Sopas" -- climb out, led by CLEVELAND (21), tall, African-American, pissed off and itching to settle old scores.

**INT. PARTY HOUSE - NIGHT**

Andre stands by himself and drinks a beer. His eyes scan the party crowd. He watches Chick hit on a cute GIRL WITH HOOP EARRINGS. The girl giggles... then glowers at Chick and stalks off.

Chick sulks over to Andre.

ANDRE  
What did you say to her?

CHICK  
Told her she was hot.

ANDRE  
Hot? And?

CHICK  
Told her she had a great ass.  
That's a compliment, right?

Andre laughs out loud. Jose runs over--

JOSE  
Andre. The Sopas.

Andre sparks to life. Cleveland and his crew -- CESAR, BOBBY and TREY -- shove their way toward Andre. Cleveland swats Chick to one side like a mosquito.

In an instant the party around them goes STILL.

Andre freezes. His eyes narrow. Subtly, his weight shifts to the balls of his feet.

ANDRE  
Excuse me. I think you pushed my friend by mistake.

JOSE  
Andre, let's--

Cleveland, seething with the effrontery of Andre and his friends' presence--

CLEVELAND  
Get the fuck out. Now.

ANDRE  
Soon as I finish my beverage.

Andre locks eyes with Cleveland. He makes a big show of draining the last drop of his beer, licking his lips.

CLEVELAND  
Get. Your ass. OUT!

Jose signals to Omar and Ernesto. They move for the door.  
The SOUND of a bottle breaking. A WOMAN cries out.

WOMAN (O.S.)  
Oh my God. Please. No fighting.  
Please, just go!

Andre puts a protective hand on Chick's shoulder.

ANDRE  
Let's go, Chick. This party  
suddenly got real low class.

BOBBY  
Yeah, when the Nopas came and stunk  
it up.

Chick tackles Bobby.

ANDRE  
Chick!

Andre grabs him around the waist, pulls him off.

**EXT. PARTY HOUSE - NIGHT**

Omar already waits in the car. Jose and Marcus make a run for it, Ernesto pounding right behind.

Andre charges out of the house pushing Chick in front of him.

ANDRE  
Little *puto*, what are you trying to  
do? Get yourself killed?

CHICK  
I was only--

ANDRE  
Get in the car!

Cleveland and crew follow them out, bottles in hand.

Andre turns, raises his hands.

ANDRE

Chill, dog. We're outta here.

Andre pushes Chick into the rear seat, sprints around to the front. Omar revs the engine, starts to pull out, waiting for Andre.

Cleveland and his gang follow them out into the street.

**INT. CAR - NIGHT**

Andre jumps into the front seat next to Jose and SLAMS the door. *Whew!*

In the back seat, Chick can't resist one last *nyah-nyah*. He opens the door and leans out.

**EXT. URBAN STREET - NIGHT**

Chick flashes his bare butt at the Sopas...

CHICK

Full moon, suck-ass!

... Then dives back into the car.

**INT. CAR - TRAVELING URBAN STREETS - A MOMENT LATER**

Chick laughs hysterically. Andre, livid--

ANDRE

What kinda dumb shit--

BANG! A sharp CRACK and a FLASH OF LIGHT.

BANG!

The rear window behind Chick SHATTERS.

ERNESTO

Hey!

JOSE

They're shooting!

Omar HITS the gas. A SQUEAL of burning tires, they hurtle forward.

ANDRE  
You okay? Everyone okay?

                  ERNESTO  
Holy shit, man.

                  ANDRE  
Chick, you okay, man?

Chick doesn't say anything. A puzzled expression on his face. He slumps forward.

**EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT**

The Buick SCREECHES to a halt in front of the neon EMERGENCY sign.

Andre staggers into the hospital carrying Chick in his arms.

**INT. EMERGENCY ROOM, WAITING AREA - NIGHT**

Andre and the guys sit in a garishly lit room. One by one the others leave. Jose, Marcus, Omar... finally Ernesto.

Andre is left sitting alone, motionless, numb, head in his hands. His shirt front is stained with blood.

We watch from a distance as a young RESIDENT in green scrubs comes up to him. Andre rises to his feet.

The Resident talks, lifts his hands and drops them to his side.

**EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - NIGHT**

The last night-owl bus pulls up. One passenger jumps down. Andre.

He trudges across the street and collapses against the wall.

The street is dark except for one LIT WINDOW three flights up in the apartment building opposite. Andre kicks the side of the dumpster. Hard. He lifts a sack of garbage and HURLS it into the street.

He turns, about to toss more garbage... then catches sight of the blowtorch Chick was fooling around with.

Andre snatches it up and flips the switch. A TONGUE OF FLAME shoots out.

Andre scribbles against the wall with the flame.

Then, in a dam-burst of anger and grief, he starts to SLASH the flame across the cracked stucco face of the wall.

Back and forth, back and forth. Wild brush strokes of fire.

Chest heaving... he glances up.

Clara, the old woman, watches him from that bright third story window. Like a patch of light floating in an aureole of dark nothingness.

Andre meets her eyes, frowns.

He SMASHES the blowtorch against the wall and pitches it into the dumpster. *Done.*

#### **EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - EARLY MORNING**

Next door to King's Corner Store sits a food bank and walk-in counseling center. PETERSON (42), formerly a priest, now a lay minister, arrives and clears garbage away from the entrance. He unlocks the door.

Peterson's hands shake. In the pre-dawn light he shivers, but not from the chill air. He rubs his nose. In his hollow eyes is the beaten look of a man who's been a disappointment to everyone, including himself. Barely awake and already he needs a drink.

He glances over his shoulder and catches sight of the WALL opposite.

He stops cold. Stares.

#### **SAME - LATER**

Peterson stands with VILMA MARTINEZ, a middle-aged Guatemalan woman. Crackhead and a few other street people join them.

They all gaze at--

#### **THE WALL**

A large smudged STAIN covers the cracked stucco surface. Instead of the zig-zag burn marks one would expect from Andre's outburst there's a blurry image -- what could be a head, and very broad shoulders... or wings.

The dark image looks like it grew out of the wall.

VILMA  
How did it get there?

PETERSON  
(awed)  
I don't know.

Maria walks up, leading Tico by the hand.

PREM and MIRA PATEL, a young Indian couple, join them. They all regard the wall, curious.

CHARLES JACKSON (31) drives by in his flashy pimp car, two heavily made-up young ASIAN WOMEN in the back seat.

He leans out the window.

CHARLES JACKSON  
Whassup?

Peterson points to the image on the wall.

PETERSON  
It just appeared. No one knows how.

CHARLES JACKSON  
Some kinda art thing?

Peterson shrugs his shoulders.

Charles Jackson gives a non-committal grunt and drives off with his ladies.

**INT. MENDES APARTMENT, ANDRE'S BEDROOM - DAY**

Andre lies in his bed staring at the ceiling. He still wears the bloody sweatshirt from the night before.

From the living room comes the SOUND of his father's labored breathing.

Andre rolls to sitting. On the pillow next to him is a GUN. He slips the gun into his waist band.

**EXT. KING'S CORNER STORE - DAY**

Holland King undoes the massive padlock on his door. He barely glances at the gathering across the street. None of his business.

He clutches his cane and shuffles inside.

**THE WALL**

Peterson returns from the food bank lugging a theology text. He kneels down to look at the squiggly marks at the base of the image.

Prem Patel runs his hand over the smudge.

PREM  
It is not paint.

PETERSON  
(stutters)  
There! You s-s-see. I thought so.  
That could be Hebrew. Ancient  
Hebrew letters. I think it s-s-  
spells out... Gab... Gab Ray El.  
(softly)  
Gabriel?

He stands, turns to the others.

PETERSON  
The Angel Gabriel.

Vilma crosses herself.

VILMA  
An angel!

**IN FRONT OF THE ABANDONED DINER**

Ernesto, Jose and Marcus sit slumped on the ground. Despair hangs over them like a dark cloud. The fact of Chick's death is still sinking in.

Peterson's rising voice carries to them. Ernesto tosses a rock at Peterson.

ERNESTO  
Hey you! Wacko! Shut it!

JOSE  
Yeah, go back to the wacko tank.  
Asshole.

ERNESTO  
Crazy drunk.

Marcus hangs his head, too devastated to speak.

Peterson ignores their taunts. He lurches back and forth, pointing out the "angel" to anyone who walks by.

#### **DOWN THE STREET**

TRACY (25), an out-of-work cocktail waitress, exits a decrepit apartment building with her son BARRY (7). They walk toward the food bank.

#### **URBAN STREET CORNER**

Peterson hurries over to them. He shows Tracy the painting of the angel in the book, points to the wall.

PETERSON  
Look, it's Gabriel. See!

TRACY  
(dubious)  
Oh. Yeah.

PETERSON  
(stutters)  
What if it's a s-s-sign? The f-f-finger of God?

Outside the shuttered diner, the young men groan.

ERNESTO  
(black preacher voice)  
Oooh Lawd, God be giving us da finger.

JOSE  
You got that right, man.

Peterson stands rooted in the middle of the street. He fixes on the wall and suddenly begins to WEEP. We get the impression that the young men might be right -- Peterson is a "wacko."

HONK! A car wants to get by.

The Patels help walk Peterson back to the curb.

#### **IN FRONT OF THE ABANDONED DINER**

At last Andre arrives. Grim and hollow-eyed. He squints at the wall for a second but has bigger things on his mind.

ANDRE

Pay back. Tonight we pay back  
double.

The young men huddle around him.

A quick belch of a SIREN, and then a POLICE SQUAD CAR turns  
the corner.

JOSE

Aw for...

Marcus glares at the squad car, hawks back and SPITS noisily  
on the ground.

OFFICERS FRANK MOODY (56) and LARRY STARK (41) park and climb  
out. They saunter over to the young men.

Moody is paunchy, cynical, nothing he hasn't seen on his  
beat. The hard years have made him mean. His new partner  
Stark is black and disillusioned -- an idealist ground down  
by reality.

OFFICER MOODY

Morning, gentlemen.

The young men give the cops fuck-you looks.

OFFICER MOODY

I'd like to introduce my new  
partner, Officer Stark.

The young men couldn't care less.

OFFICER STARK

Morning, guys.

No response.

OFFICER MOODY

You know why we're here.

Officer Stark takes out a small notebook.

OFFICER MOODY

Apparently one of the Nopas got  
iced last night.

JOSE

Nopas? What's that? Some tasty  
snack? Like tacos?

Moody turns to Stark.

OFFICER MOODY  
North of the Park, Nopas. South of  
the Park, Sopas.

OFFICER STARK  
Park?

OFFICER MOODY  
Well, it used to be a park. Now  
it's just a concrete dump. Like  
the rest of this shit-hole.  
Mendes, you gonna tell me anything?

Andre fixes his insolent gaze on the cop. Icily silent.

Moody's not surprised.

OFFICER MOODY  
He was your buddy, but do you care  
he got shot down like a dog? Nope.  
Soulless little punks.

Andre's jaw tightens. Every word cracks from his mouth like  
a steel whiplash, delivered with fierce precision--

ANDRE  
I didn't. See. Nothing.

OFFICER STARK  
You were with him. You brought him  
to the ER. But you "Didn't see  
nothing"?

ANDRE  
Night, my brotha. It was dark.  
Black.

Andre's eyes burn like lasers. Moody turns to Jose.

OFFICER MOODY  
What about you, taco boy? You see  
anything?

JOSE  
No sir. I got bad eyes. Too much  
chokin' the chicken.

**INT. KING'S CORNER STORE - DAY**

Moody and Stark enter. They nod to Holland who is filling  
the coffee machine with water.

OFFICER MOODY

Morning.

HOLLAND

Morning.

OFFICER MOODY

Teenager got shot last night. One of the kids who hangs out across the street. You see anything?

Holland snorts. He takes his cane and limps back to the counter. He pulls a foil bag of coffee from the shelf.

HOLLAND

Let me ask you something, Moody. Why do you bother?

OFFICER MOODY

Excuse me?

HOLLAND

Why should anyone talk to you clowns, no offense?

Holland gestures at the street.

HOLLAND

Guess who's out there, walking on two good legs, riding around in his pimpmobile full of Korean hookers?

OFFICER MOODY

Holland--

HOLLAND

The guy robbed me, shot up my leg for no good reason. I mean, what for? I gave him the till. So what do you cops do? You let him right back out on the street.

OFFICER MOODY

He served his time.

HOLLAND

Four years. Big deal.

OFFICER MOODY

He got a plea bargain, Holland. It was the lawyers. They wipe each other's asses. Hell, if it was me I'd lock him up for good. Lock 'em all up. Right, Larry?

Officer Stark gives an uncertain nod.

HOLLAND

Do I get a plea bargain for a  
shattered leg? For a wife who's  
too scared to leave the house?

Holland points to the barred windows.

HOLLAND

I'm more behind bars than he is.  
How funny is that?

OFFICER MOODY

(it's hopeless)  
Well. If you hear anything give us  
a call.

HOLLAND

Best thing that could happen is  
they all kill each other off. Have  
a great day.

**EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - DAY**

The two officers exit the store and head down the street.

OFFICER MOODY

(to Stark)  
Welcome to the worst beat in the  
city. Whole cesspool should be  
razed to the ground, and that  
includes News 'n Booze back there.

He gestures behind him at King's Corner Store.

Peterson runs up to the officers with his theology book.

PETERSON

Did you s-s-see the angel? Here.  
In this book. Gabriel. He's God's  
m-m-messenger.

Moody and Stark exchange looks. Stark raises his eyebrows.  
His look asks: *Nuts?*

PETERSON

It's like God talking to Moses  
through the burning b-b-bush.

Behind Peterson's back Moody rolls his eyes and mimes  
drinking.

**IN FRONT OF THE ABANDONED DINER**

The young men slouch against the dumpster.

Ernesto lopes into the street and checks out the wall.

He returns to his pals.

ERNESTO

Looks like dirt to me.

Andre opens his mouth to speak... then decides against it. He lowers his head, swallowed up in his grief and anger.

MARCUS

How long these cops gonna be in our face?

**URBAN STREET CORNER**

Moody turns to Stark.

OFFICER MOODY

Flippin' waste of time. Let's go over to the Sopas' turf.

The officers get into their squad car and drive off.

**IN FRONT OF THE ABANDONED DINER**

Andre draws the others around him.

ANDRE

Tonight, Omar and me drive over to the Sopas. We flush 'em out, get 'em to chase us back here. Ernesto, you and Jose and Marcus keep watch and when they drive by, you take care of business.

Andre hands his gun to Ernesto.

ANDRE

You got the best eye, man.

Ernesto hefts the gun.

ANDRE

Marcus, you cover him?

Marcus nods, pulls a pistol from his back belt.

JOSE  
What if they get you guys first?

ANDRE  
I'll be driving. No way they catch me.

The guys exchange grave looks, nod. They're committed to Andre's plan of revenge.

OMAR  
Chick, man. Little Chick. I can't believe it.

MARCUS  
He was one crazy-ass kid.

Andre doesn't utter a word.

Omar glances at Marcus. The heaviness of Andre's silence weighs on them. Finally--

OMAR  
(to Andre)  
He was like your little brother.

Andre explodes.

ANDRE  
Brother? I got no brother! Get real. You get born, then you die. Some die quicker than others. Chick screwed up. This is war. What we got here is our own little Iraq. We gotta defend our piece of dirt. Or they take it from us.

PETERSON (O.S.)  
(thick with emotion)  
It could b-b-be a miracle!

Ernesto yells back at Peterson.

ERNESTO  
What would be a miracle, bozo, is like you maybe become a priest again. Or did the Church have a ba-ba-belly full of you?

**PETERSON**

Swallows hard, wipes his mouth.

**IN FRONT OF THE ABANDONED DINER**

Ernesto snickers.

ERNESTO

Whack job needs a drink bad.

Clara walks by. Peterson corrals her, points out the image on the wall.

Clara ponders the wall without speaking.

She turns and looks over at Andre.

He meets her eyes. Defiant. So what if she knows he was the one who burned the wall? He's not volunteering any explanations.

**INT. CAR - TRAVELING URBAN STREETS - LATE NIGHT**

Andre drives. Omar rides shotgun in the passenger seat.

**EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - LATE NIGHT**

Total darkness... except for the LIT WINDOW in the third story.

Ernesto hugs the side of the metal dumpster. Marcus crouches behind Ernesto's back.

Jose lurks in the doorway of Clara's building, a cell phone to his ear.

Jose signals to Ernesto, who nods. He grips his weapon, tensing.

A VAROOOM-VAROOOM of engines.

The Buick sedan TEARS down the street.

The Pontiac driven by the Sopas SCREAMS close behind.

Ernesto leaps out from the dumpster and SHOOTS.

A CRACK of gunfire, a FLASH of light. And then...

A BIRD flies up.

The Pontiac's brakes SCREECH. It wheels around, runs up a curb, comes to a hard stop.

But no bullet-shattered glass.

Marcus hisses a whisper--

MARCUS  
What the... did you miss, man?

ERNESTO  
No! I got a dead-aim shot.

The Pontiac GRINDS gears, tries to reverse.

Ernesto runs into the street. He FIRES twice more in succession at the passengers in the Pontiac. BANG! BANG!

Two more BIRDS -- sparrows -- fly to the rooftops.

**UP THE STREET - CONTINUOUS**

Andre and Omar are already several blocks ahead.

OMAR  
He got 'em!

With a SQUEAL of tires Andre cuts a sharp u-turn.

**INT. CAR (TRAVELING URBAN STREETS) - CONTINUOUS**

Andre floors the gas. The Buick ROARS back.

**EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - CONTINUOUS**

With the first crack of gunfire WINDOWS LIGHT UP.

Just as quickly the LIGHTS TURN OFF. Windows SLAM SHUT.

Except CLARA'S WINDOW. Her tiny figure, visible, intent on the scene below.

BANG! BANG!

Ernesto continues to FIRE.

The bullets turn into pigeons, doves, finches...

Cleveland, Cesar and Trey crouch for cover in the Pontiac.

Trey pulls out an automatic pistol and -- BANG BANG BANG!

FLASHES OF GUNFIRE... then an explosion of FLAPPING WINGS.

MARCUS  
What the... where are all those birds coming from?

Total confusion on both sides.

Ernesto ducks into a doorway.

Cleveland bursts out of the Pontiac.

When Cleveland reaches the middle of the street Ernesto jumps in front of him and lifts his automatic.

He SHOOTs at Cleveland's chest point blank from three feet away.

BANG! And again, BANG!

WE ARE THE BULLETS that discharge from Ernesto's gun like blinding orange-red firecrackers only to EXPLODE in a blur of white and grey flapping WINGS...

UP, UP, WHOOSHING UP into the night sky to the rooftops--

#### **STREET LEVEL**

Ernesto and Cleveland both WATCH the bullets turn into mourning doves.

Cleveland stands there. Not moving. Doesn't believe what he sees.

Ernesto stares at his gun. Then he looks at Cleveland.

Their eyes meet for a long moment.

*Did that just happen?*

Ernesto's gun hand lowers. He swallows.

Cleveland's legs go stupid. Eyes still locked with Ernesto's, Cleveland staggers forward, sinks to his knees.

Trey and Cesar leap out of the car and pull Cleveland back into the car.

TREY

You okay, man? You get hit?

Cleveland shakes his head.

CLEVELAND

(barely gets the words  
out)

I'm... good.

The Pontiac REVS THE ENGINE and speeds off.

Ernesto still stands in the middle of the street, gun in hand. Trying to process what the hell he saw.

Marcus ventures out and joins him. Jose, too.

Against the moonlight BIRDS FLUTTER back and forth between the rooftops.

Omar's car ZOOMS up. Andre leaps out.

ANDRE

You get him?

Ernesto shakes his head.

ANDRE

What? How could you miss?

ERNESTO

I didn't. I shot him.

ANDRE

Then how could you not hit him?

JOSE

There's something wrong with your gun.

ANDRE

There's nothing wrong with my gun.

ERNESTO

He shot at me, too.  
(can't believe it)  
Nothing happened.

MARCUS

What the...

Ernesto's eyes lift. He gazes at the rooftops. At the birds.

ANDRE

How could you mess this up!

Andre glances up. He spies Clara watching from her window.

ANDRE

That old bag of bones. Don't she ever sleep?

DISSOLVE TO:

**EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - DAY**

The young men loiter in front of the shuttered diner as always but there's a shift in mood. Dissension. Uneasiness. The whiff of change in the air.

Ernesto steps into the middle of the street and scrutinizes the smudged angel image. Andre calls to him.

ANDRE

Ernesto!

Ernesto reluctantly joins the others.

ANDRE

(re: the angel image)

That's got nothing to do with anything.

Omar and Marcus whisper together. Marcus points at the BIRDS, still cooing and chirping on the rooftops.

ANDRE

We go back tonight. Finish what we started.

ERNESTO

What for?

ANDRE

What? What do you mean, what for?

ERNESTO

I mean...

Ernesto's at a loss for words. He doesn't know the answer--defying Andre is a new experience for him.

More whispering between Marcus and Omar. Jose, too.

Andre turns on them.

ANDRE

What? What is this, kindergarten? What is your problem? Do I got to spell it out, like on a blackboard? They took out one of us. One of US. We need to take out two of THEM. Any of you too chicken-shit to get justice for a brother, tell me now, 'cause I need to know. I need to know that information!

The guys all look down, shamefaced.

### **THE WALL**

Peterson, hands clasped at his waist, eyes lifted, contemplates the "angel" wall.

Tracy and her son Barry pause for another look. Barry walks up to the wall and presses his palms against the stucco surface.

Tracy takes out a pack of cigarettes, leans toward Peterson.

TRACY  
Do you mind if I smoke?

PETERSON  
I... uh...

TRACY  
(taps pack)  
Oh, never mind. I'm all out.

### **IN FRONT OF THE ABANDONED DINER**

Andre surveys his crew, feels like he's losing control.

ERNESTO  
(emotional)  
I didn't screw up. When I shot  
your gun... birds came out.

Andre rubs his mouth. Quiet anger brews behind his eyes.

ANDRE  
Are you making fun of this?

ERNESTO  
I'm telling the truth. I swear it.

ANDRE  
Birds? You got bad aim, man.  
That's all it is. Or maybe you  
just turned chicken, that's a bird.  
Right?

Andre turns to Marcus and Jose.

ANDRE  
What's your excuse?

MARCUS

I saw Ernesto shoot. And... and they shot back at us--

ERNESTO

Birds!

ANDRE

This is crazy. You're all fucking crazy.

ERNESTO

I saw it with my own eyes.

ANDRE

Man, you're really flying your freak flag today. Worse than that wino priest.

Andre faces the guys, agitated.

ANDRE

Bullets. That's what killed Chick. Hard, lead, bullets. Not tweety-birds. I will make sure we do right by him. Even if I have to do it by myself.

He strides across the street, colliding with Clara as she exits her building.

ANDRE

Watch it, old lady.

CLARA

My name is Clara. Pleased to meet you.

She has a faint, Old World accent.

## **THE WALL**

Barry returns to his mother.

BARRY

I couldn't rub it off. It's not chalk.

TRACY

Honey, I got to get some smokes.

BARRY

But I have to go to the bathroom.

TRACY

(hands him a key)

Go back home and wait for me there,  
okay? I'll be right back. Two  
minutes.

FOLLOW Barry as he scampers down the street toward the--

**EXT. DECREPIT APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY**

TRAVEL UP the building's walls, the crumbling bricks, the  
cracked paint, rotted sills...

...THROUGH THE WINDOW TO--

**INT. DECREPIT APARTMENT BUILDING, CRACKHEAD'S ROOM - DAY**

Crackhead hunches over a dirty mattress on the floor. He's  
trying to light a rock in a pipe. His hands tremble.

He drops a match on the floor littered with rags and  
newspapers.

CRACKHEAD

Damn it.

The match catches on the papers. Crackhead slaps the fire  
out with the palm of his hand.

Crackhead tries again. This time the lit match falls out of  
his shaking hand and into an open box of matches on the  
mattress.

KABOOM!

It IGNITES like a phosphorus bomb. The mattress EXPLODES  
into flames.

Crackhead stumbles to his feet.

CRACKHEAD

Shit.

He tries to stomp out the flames, but he's barefoot.

He grabs a soiled towel, swats at the fire, the towel catches  
fire, uh oh...

With a panicky SQUEAL Crackhead drops the burning towel. He  
leaps back and kicks over a bottle of cheap booze.

The alcohol pours out in a stream.

WHOOSH!

The fire leaps to the alcohol, races it to the door.

FLAMES SPRING over the lintel and up to the ceiling.

Seconds later the room is ABLAZE.

Crackhead is stuck in the center of it.

**INT. DECREPIT APARTMENT BUILDING, CORRIDOR - DAY**

Thick SMOKE POURS out of Crackhead's apartment. FLAMES scamper across the walls.

WHOOSH!

In the blink of an eye the building's rattletrap construction goes up like kindling.

A door opens and Prem Patel leans out, coughing.

PREM  
Fire! Help!

He pulls his door shut.

**INT. DECREPIT APARTMENT BUILDING, PREM AND MIRA'S ROOM - DAY**

SMOKE POURS into their apartment from the corridor.

Mira runs to the window and flings it open -- the window has metal bars across it.

Prem tries to push the bars loose. No luck. He yells out the window--

PREM  
Help! Fire!

**INT. DECREPIT APARTMENT BUILDING, VILMA'S ROOM - DAY**

Vilma works at her sewing machine. She sniffs the air, coughs a little.

PREM (O.S.)  
Fire! Get out!

Vilma springs to her feet. Now the smoke spills under her door.

She pulls the door open. A WALL OF FLAME hurls her backwards.

She can't shut the door. She races to her window and the fire escape, the window won't open.

Vilma, too, is trapped.

**EXT. KING'S CORNER STORE - DAY**

Tracy leaves the store and strolls down the street smoking a cigarette. She hears SHOUTING. A TEENAGER races past her.

TRACY  
Hey. What's up?

TEENAGER  
Fire.

Way up ahead Tracy spies black smoke pouring from a building. HER BUILDING. Her knees buckle.

TRACY  
BARRY!

She drops her cigarette and stumbles, crawls, struggles to her feet, somehow runs--

**INT. DECREPIT APARTMENT BUILDING, TRACY'S ROOM - DAY**

Barry sits huddled in a corner, clutching an action-figure toy to his chest. Flames lick the walls around him.

BARRY  
Mommy!

**EXT. DECREPIT APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY**

The building is an INFERNO. Far off in the distance a SIREN wails.

From all the way down the street the Nopas come running. Andre first, followed by Ernesto, Marcus, Omar and Jose.

They gather in the street. Stunned at the sight.

Peterson organizes a group, passing buckets of water and throwing it on the flames. Ernesto jumps in to help him.

Others try to pry the bars off the first floor windows with broom handles.

Andre stands paralyzed. Some unknown memory flashes before his eyes and fills them with despair.

A police squad car, lights flashing, SCREECHES up. Moody and Stark jump out.

Tracy flings herself against Moody's chest.

TRACY

My son is in there. My baby. He's only seven, BARRY! BARREEEEE!

OFFICER MOODY

Now hold on, hold on. Which apartment is he in?

TRACY

Up there. Second floor. I just left him for a minute, oh God please help!

SMOKE GUSHES out the windows of the second floor.

Moody and Stark exchange looks. Stark pulls off his jacket and dashes into the burning building.

**INT. DECREPIT APARTMENT BUILDING, PREM AND MIRA'S ROOM - DAY**

Prem holds a wet towel around Mira's head. She's choking, faint from the smoke.

He batters at the window bars with a chair.

**INT. DECREPIT APARTMENT BUILDING, VILMA'S ROOM - DAY**

Vilma crawls across the floor, coughing.

**INT. DECREPIT APARTMENT BUILDING, CRACKHEAD'S ROOM**

Crackhead bends over double. Chunks of burning roof fall around him.

**INT. DECREPIT APARTMENT BUILDING, FOYER - DAY**

Officer Stark presses his jacket over his mouth. He edges toward the stairs.

A BALL OF FLAME hurtles like an Indiana Jones boulder down the landing toward him.

He's flung back, scrambling, barely finding the exit door.

**EXT. DECREPIT APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY**

Stark stumbles out, heaving, eyes weeping. Moody rushes up to him.

OFFICER MOODY  
Stark! You okay?

TRACY  
Oh my God, this is all my fault. I  
went to buy cigarettes!

SIREN screaming, a FIRE TRUCK pulls up at last.

FIREFIGHTERS jump off.

FIRE FIGHTER #1  
(to Officer Moody)  
Hydrant?

Moody points down the block. The firefighters race over with the hose. Tracy runs after them, sobbing.

TRACY  
Barry... You have to save him.

The firefighters BLAST their water hoses from the hydrant.

They yell to each other--

FIREFIGHTER #1  
Go in?

FIREFIGHTER #2  
(grimaces)  
Roof's gonna cave any second.

Firefighter #3 considers the building, completely ENGULFED. He looks at the other two. *It's hopeless.*

Andre eyes the firefighters. He can see the defeat on their faces.

Andre pulls his leather jacket over his head and runs into the building.

FIREFIGHTER #2  
Hey! You!

FIREFIGHTER #3  
Stop that guy!

**INT. DECREPIT APARTMENT BUILDING, FOYER - DAY**

Andre bursts into hell on earth. Black smoke. Walls rippling. He can't see a thing. Flames CRACKLE around him.

He tries to yell over the ROAR of the fire--

ANDRE

Yo! Little kid!

SNAP! A roof beam falls next to Andre, singeing his jacket sleeve. He tries to call out again and gulps in smoke. His voice strangles in his throat.

HANDS PULL him out of the building.

**EXT. DECREPIT APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY**

Firefighter #1 guides Andre to the sidewalk.

FIREFIGHTER #1

What are you trying to do, get yourself killed?

Andre rubs his stinging eyes with his sleeve. He stumbles past Tracy who is on her knees crying.

Gagging and coughing, he pushes past the other guys.

OMAR

Andre. Where you going?

Andre waves his hand without turning around.

ANDRE

(gasps a whisper)

I don't need to watch people die.

He staggers away.

**INT. DECREPIT APARTMENT BUILDING, CRACKHEAD'S ROOM**

Eyes pressed shut against the smoke, Crackhead sinks to the floor.

And then his EYES OPEN. He looks up, dazed.

Slowly he rises to his feet and steps forward.

Right THROUGH THE FLAMES.

**VILMA'S ROOM**

The Guatemalan woman experiences the same thing as Crackhead.  
Her head lifts from the floor. She takes a breath...

**PREM AND MIRA'S ROOM**

Prem cradles Mira's body. She's fainted. They crouch on the floor together.

But then Prem looks up. He taps Mira's cheek.

Her woozy eyes open in amazement...

**TRACY'S ROOM**

Barry lowers his toy and lifts his tear-streaked face.

He smiles and raises a hand in greeting.

**EXT. DECREPIT APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY**

The awesome power of a raging fire -- the spectators stand mesmerized by the sight.

Clara ventures from her apartment to watch, her face pinched with sorrow.

Charles Jackson arrives with his women. They, too, stand and watch.

Maria hugs her son Tico to her chest tighter than she has ever held him. She can't bear to look at Tracy. Tracy, whose own little boy is trapped inside the inferno.

Tracy clings to Peterson who does his best to console her.

The firefighters train their hoses on the building. Clearly, it's just for show. They know the house and all in it are lost.

And then a single GASP goes up from the crowd.

VOICE

Oh my God! My GOD!

A ripple runs through the onlookers.

More GASPS.

Out of the burning building walks CRACKHEAD, unharmed.

VILMA follows, emerging from the black smoke and roiling flames with a blissful smile on her face.

PREM, carrying MIRA in his arms, appears next.

And last, little BARRY runs out.

BARRY

Mommy!

With a shriek of joy Tracy lunges forward.

TRACY

Barry! Barry! Oh God, I love you.

She scoops the child up in her arms.

Joyous shouts and applause from the onlookers. Overwhelmed, many fall to their knees.

The firefighters lower their hoses, flabbergasted.

The one REPORTER, a gum-chewing third stringer with a single video cam sent to cover the slum fire, stands rooted to the spot.

He realizes he's just filmed the scoop of a lifetime.

**INT. MENDES APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Andre drags himself in, still rubbing his eyes and hacking from smoke. The TV set is going full blast.

HUBERT (O.S.)

Andre? Is that you? Come look at this!

ANDRE

In a minute.

Andre heads into the--

**MENDES APARTMENT, KITCHEN**

He drops his head into the sink and lets water rush over his face, scooping up handfuls and gulping it down.

TV ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

... are calling it a miracle.

Andre's head jerks up.

**LIVING ROOM**

Andre enters slowly, his face dripping water. Hubert lies on the couch bed.

**TELEVISION SET**

CRACKHEAD talks directly into the camera.

CRACKHEAD

I saw him. He stood right in front of me like he stepped off a stained glass window. You know, like in church. Jesus... Jesus himself! He took my hand and he said, "Walk with me."

**LIVING ROOM**

Andre's jaw drops. He gapes at the TV set. Hubert cranes around to grin at him.

HUBERT

Isn't this something?!

**TELEVISION SET**

VILMA, her face glowing, faces the camera.

VILMA

The Virgin of Guadalupe! She's dark like me, a *mestiza*. She said to me, "Vilma, come. I will protect you." She wrapped cool flowers all around me. It smelled sweet, like roses. Oh *madre de dios!*

Vilma bursts into happy tears and crosses herself.

The handheld TV CAMERA SWINGS over to--

PREM AND MIRA, dazed, giddy to be alive.

PREM

How can I describe what is impossible to describe? The Lord Krishna threw his cloak over us--

MIRA  
Yes! His cloak of jewels.

PREM  
He held us to his chest. His skin  
was blue--

MIRA  
Like in the paintings! So  
beautiful.

PREM  
A cool mist fell upon our faces...

The TV CAMERA SWOOPS over to catch--

TRACY, weeping with joy, rocking BARRY in her arms. His legs  
wrap around her waist. Tracy puts up a hand to the camera --  
she's too overcome to speak.

TRACY  
(whispers)  
Thank you thank you thank you.

REPORTER (O.S.)  
Uh. Excuse me.

Peterson steps in front of the camera and guides Tracy and  
Barry safely away.

#### LIVING ROOM

Andre draws closer to the TV set. Not believing this.

HUBERT  
Even that little boy got out okay.

#### TELEVISION SET

The TV CAMERA jerks around, searching for a subject.

OFFICERS STARK AND MOODY -- caught in the frame.

REPORTER (O.S.)  
Officers! Excuse me. Can you tell  
us what you saw?

Stark and Moody exchange looks. How much to say?

OFFICER STARK  
(voice still raspy)  
Uh, I went into the building.  
(MORE)

OFFICER STARK (CONT'D)  
 It was like a furnace. You can't  
 imagine how hot. No one could have  
 survived--

OFFICER MOODY  
 (blurts out)  
 They walked through the fire! I  
 saw them. Each one of them.

The TV CAMERA ZOOMS in close on Moody. His eyes brim.

OFFICER MOODY  
 Like they were taking a Sunday  
 stroll in the park. In the park!

He starts to laugh hysterically. Stark pulls him away.

The TV CAMERA jerks around again, sweeps the crowd and FINDS--  
 MARIA holding TICO on her hip.

REPORTER (O.S.)  
 Miss, excuse me. You witnessed  
 what everyone is calling a miracle.  
 What do you think of it?

Maria hesitates. She's not comfortable being on camera.

MARIA  
 I... it... it gives me hope.

WIDEN TO INCLUDE:

### **LIVING ROOM**

Hubert points to the TV set.

HUBERT  
 That's the girl you used to go out  
 with. Maria, right? Whatever  
 happened to her?

Andre SNAPS the TV set off.

HUBERT  
 Andre! I was watching that.

ANDRE  
 Nothing to see.

Hubert considers his brooding son, shakes his head.

Hubert's eyes travel to the black-ribboned PHOTO of Andre's mother.

HUBERT

If only we'd had a miracle like  
that when your mother--

ANDRE

(breaks in)

Well we didn't. No one threw a  
cool cloak around her. She died in  
that fire. Like all those other  
women, burnt alive with their  
sewing machines. And everyone just  
stood around outside and watched  
them die.

HUBERT

That's not true.

ANDRE

Yeah, it is. That fire was judge,  
jury and executioner for my mother.

Hubert shuts his eyes, pained.

HUBERT

Don't.

Andre bites his lip. Ashamed. He looks over at his father,  
broken, aching. Hubert struggles for each breath.

ANDRE

(gentle)

Miracles don't happen to you and  
me, Papa.

A moment of quiet despair. Hubert fumbles for the remote.

Andre hands it to him. Hubert CLICKS on the TV.

#### **TELEVISION SET**

ERNESTO speaks intensely into the camera.

ERNESTO

It has something to do with the  
angel. The angel on the wall.

Andre turns and stomps out of the room.

**EXT. URBAN STREET - DAY**

The charred remains of the decrepit apartment building have been turned into a shrine heaped with flowers.

The street is now a carnival scene. Representatives from every denomination have shown up. Priests and monks hold prayer sessions and hymn singing.

News vans troll up and down.

The faithful cluster around those who witnessed the event to hear their stories, over and over.

Some drift down the block to see the "Angel" mentioned by Ernesto.

**EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - SAME**

In front of the shuttered diner the Nopas eye the religious TOURISTS who snap photos of the wall.

TOURIST #1

What do you think?

TOURIST #2

I don't know. Kinda looks like mold.

TOURIST #1

Well I see an angel. I do.

**IN FRONT OF THE ABANDONED DINER**

Omar regards the tourists.

OMAR

Can I throw a rock at them?

JOSE

They'll leave soon. It's like politicians. They come around with their cameras, they say they're gonna help us. Then after the cameras go they don't come around no more. Nothing ever changes.

MARCUS

Jose, what are you jabbing about? This is about miracles and shit. Walking through fire--

ANDRE

(he's had enough)

No. It's about hitting the Sopas back for killing Chick. A fact you pussies want to forget. Where's Ernesto at?

JOSE

He went to help that *boraccho* priest.

ANDRE

What?

JOSE

He's printing up fliers for him or something.

Andre rolls his eyes. *Unbelievable.*

A news van RUMBLES up, splashing the guys with gravel. The van parks next to the dumpster.

KIM MACDONALD, a stylish anchorwoman, climbs out of the van. Her CAMERAMAN jumps out and hands her a microphone.

Kim gestures to a small group of worshippers led by Peterson who pray in front of the wall. Tracy and Barry are among them.

Kim hisses to the cameraman--

KIM MACDONALD

There he is. The kid.

The Cameraman opens the van's back doors and pulls out a massive video camera. Kim smooths her skirt and practices her smile.

## **THE WALL**

They walk over to the praying group...

PETERSON

(with group)

*Yea, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I shall fear no--*

KIM MACDONALD

Hello there. Pardon me. Hello, Barry.

She shoves the microphone in the child's face. He shrinks back, clings to his mother's hand.

KIM MACDONALD  
Can I talk to you for a minute?

PETERSON  
Miss, I don't think this is an a-p-propriate...

Kim throws Peterson an evil look, but she beams at Tracy. Not missing a beat--

KIM MACDONALD  
And you must be the mother of this blessed child.

Tracy's dazzled by the slick anchorwoman.

TRACY  
I... I...

PETERSON  
Miss, if you don't mind. This little b-b-boy has been through enough--

KIM MACDONALD  
(cuts him off)  
I'm sure Barry's mom wants to share the joy we all feel for her and her son.

Kim whispers to Tracy like they're close friends.

KIM MACDONALD  
I won't upset him, I promise.

TRACY  
Well... just for a minute. If it's okay with Barry.

#### **IN FRONT OF THE ABANDONED DINER**

Andre and crew observe the anchorwoman in action.

JOSE  
What a skank.

MARCUS  
TV bitch needs to get schooled.

Marcus' eyes shift to the news van parked next to them.

MARCUS  
I don't think they locked that van.

**IN FRONT OF THE WALL**

Kim MacDonald kneels down to Barry's level. She motions her cameraman to kneel down, too.

KIM MACDONALD  
Barry, you don't mind if we talk a little, do you?

A BEAT. All eyes on Barry. He shakes his head no.

KIM MACDONALD  
You know, I watched the video of you walking out of the burning building. You were a very brave boy.

BARRY  
I was scared.

KIM MACDONALD  
But you were so brave. Did... did someone help you get through the fire?

PETERSON  
Miss, I think you're--

CAMERAMAN  
Shhhhhh!

KIM MACDONALD  
Did somebody help you, Barry?

The child nods yes.

The Cameraman EDGES his huge lens closer, right up into Barry's face.

KIM MACDONALD  
(unctuous voice)  
Did you recognize the person who helped you?

Again, Barry solemnly nods yes.

Kim shares a triumphant look with her Cameraman. *Scoop!*

KIM MACDONALD  
Who was it, Barry?

BARRY

Batman!

CUT TO:

**THE NEWS VAN**

Omar lifts a bulging camera case out the back doors and passes it to Marcus.

Jose sneaks around to the passenger door and snatches Kim MacDonald's designer handbag.

The guys scam with their loot just as Kim and the Cameraman return to the van.

KIM MACDONALD

(snide)

Well that was priceless. Hey!

She spies Jose sprinting down the street.

KIM MACDONALD

That's my purse!

She chases after Jose but it's useless. She rolls over on her ankle and a high heel breaks off.

The Cameraman opens the rear doors.

CAMERAMAN

My case! Those punks took my lenses.

He spins around and spots Andre, leaning against the wall, hands in his pockets. He storms over to him.

CAMERAMAN

Where's my bag?

Andre gives an insolent shrug and lifts his empty hands.

ANDRE

Hey man. You should lock your car. This is a bad neighborhood.

Kim MacDonald limps over, fuming.

KIM MACDONALD

Miracles my foot.

(to Cameraman)

Let's get out of this hellhole.

They climb into the news van and pull away, gravel flying.

**IN FRONT OF THE ABANDONED DINER**

Ernesto arrives carrying a stack of colored paper. He walks up to Andre.

ERNESTO

Yo. Andre.

Andre snatches up one of the papers. It's a FLIER for a candle-lit prayer service -- there's a drawing of the angel image on it.

Andre glowers at the flier, then rips it in half.

ERNESTO

Aw, man.

Andre throws the torn paper to the ground, grinds his heel into it.

Ernest levels him with a look.

ERNESTO

What is your problem?

ANDRE

I don't got no problem.

ERNESTO

Yeah you do. Shit.

Ernesto takes a breath. Considers Andre. Wants to understand him.

ERNESTO

(quietly)

What's up with you anyway?

ANDRE

It's bullshit. Like everything else.

ERNESTO

(mulls this)

I don't get it. Why are you so down on what's happening?

Andre looks off. Finally--

ANDRE  
 What you call the "angel"? On the wall? I did it.

ERNESTO  
 What?

ANDRE  
 The night Chick got killed. I took that thing, that blowtorch thing we got off Crackhead. And I blasted the wall with it. ZHOOM! ZHOOM!

Andre flings his arm out to demonstrate.

Ernesto's eyes narrow.

ERNESTO  
 How come you didn't say this before?

ANDRE  
 Because it was stupid. A stupid-ass thing to do.

Ernesto looks back at the wall, considers Andre's words.

ERNESTO  
 It don't look like a burn.

ANDRE  
 What, you think I'm lying?

ERNESTO  
 Where's that blowtorch thing now?

ANDRE  
 (has to think)  
 I threw it away.

ERNESTO  
 Right.

ANDRE  
 Aw, c'mon man. I did it.

Ernesto's not buying.

Andre, infuriated, thinks, then points to Clara's window.

ANDRE  
 The old lady. She saw me do it. She was watching from her window the whole time. Ask her. Go on.

ERNESTO  
 Good try, Andre.

Ernesto walks over to join Peterson's prayer group which is heading back to the food bank.

Andre glares after him in frustration.

**URBAN STREET CORNER**

Clara makes her way gingerly down the street. It has begun to snow. She pulls her collar tighter.

Andre spies her. He gives a shrill whistle.

ANDRE  
 Hey! You. Old lady.

Clara keeps walking.

ANDRE  
 Old lady! I'm talking to you.

Still she doesn't turn around. Andre jogs up to her.

ANDRE  
 You deaf or something? I been calling you.

Clara halts, turns to face him. Sweetly--

CLARA  
 Oh? All I heard you call was "Old lady."

ANDRE  
 Yeah. Whatever. Look, how come you--

CLARA  
 I'm sorry. I don't know your name.

ANDRE  
 (can't believe this)  
 Andre.

CLARA  
 Pleased to meet you, Andre.

Clara resumes walking.

Andre lopes alongside, throwing wary glances in case anyone spots him hanging with the old woman.

ANDRE  
You saw me that night. Why don't  
you tell people?

Clara doesn't answer.

ANDRE  
I put that thing on the wall. You  
saw me from your window. Right?

Clara gives a cryptic nod.

ANDRE  
So it's all a lie. All this angel  
crap. Why don't you just tell  
people?

CLARA  
Why would I do that?

ANDRE  
Because these "miracles"... none of  
this sh... garbage. It ain't real.

CLARA  
It seems real enough.

ANDRE  
But it's not. You know it's not.

Clara reaches out her hand to catch a snowflake.

CLARA  
Isn't the first snow beautiful? So  
fluffy and white. Everything looks  
new. Full of hope. Don't you  
think?

Exasperated, Andre turns and walks off muttering.

ANDRE  
Crazy old bitch.

**INT. KING'S CORNER STORE - DAY**

The two police officers drink coffee and peek through the  
barred windows at snow flurries outside. Officer Stark sets  
down his cup and rubs his hands together.

OFFICER STARK  
Snow's gonna drive all those  
television folks away.

HOLLAND

Too bad. I've been selling lots of coffee and doughnuts.

Officer Moody turns around, pensive--

OFFICER MOODY

Never thought I'd see such a thing. What do you say, Holland?

HOLLAND

About what?

OFFICER MOODY

What else?

Holland scoffs.

HOLLAND

People walk out of a burning building and you call that a miracle.

He gestures to the barred windows with his wooden cane.

HOLLAND

Every day I walk through a hellfire war zone to open my store. What's the difference?

OFFICER STARK

You still playing that "Oh my poor sorry ass" tune? You need to change the channel, my good man.

HOLLAND

Only one channel in this place.

OFFICER MOODY

They walked right through the flames, Holland. I was there. I saw it.

OFFICER STARK

The Lord was with them, that's for sure.

HOLLAND

So where's the Lord been up to now? Kinda late to the party.

Officer Moody, troubled, shakes his head. Still trying to wrap his mind around the experience.

OFFICER MOODY

All my life I've been a cop. I live in the real world. Crime. And dirt. And blood. I don't know jack strap about miracles and... angels. I only know what I see with my own two eyes. And what I saw, I just can't... I just...

His voice trails off.

Holland lifts his wooden cane above his head.

HOLLAND

You know what I see? This cane. Every morning when I drag myself out of bed, and every night when I drag myself back into it. Here's a miracle for you.

Holland SMACKS the tip of the cane against the floor. Loudly.

HOLLAND

When this wooden stick sprouts leaves, then I'll believe there's good in the world.

OFFICER MOODY

But that fire--

HOLLAND

(waves his cane)  
Leaves, Moody. 'Til then this place is the same dead-end dump it's always been.

**INT. MENDES APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Andre carries a bowl of soup to his father.

On the TV, Anchorwoman Kim MacDonald interviews experts seated at a table.

Hubert watches, transfixed.

**TELEVISION SET**

SUPER: DR. SIMON NOYCE, PSYCHOLOGIST

Dr. Noyce strokes his salt and pepper beard--

DR. NOYCE

... Shared self-delusion. It's a form of group hysteria. What we have to ask is, are the specific visions based on actual empirical, sensory experience or on the subconscious recall of imagery imprinted through cultural conditioning? In my professional opinion, I say it's imprinting--

DR. MORIKE (O.S.)

No no no!

The camera cuts over to DR. MORIKE, who leans forward, his voice urgent.

SUPER: DR. AL MORIKE, PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY

DR. MORIKE

It's far more plausible that the survivors were driven into a mentally suggestive state, thanks to the extreme terror of their situation. Like the Indian fakirs who pierce their skins with knives or walk on hot coals. Each person visualized something that allowed him to achieve a trancelike state and pass through the flames unharmed...

WIDEN TO INCLUDE--

**MENDES APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM**

Andre and Hubert both now sit riveted on the TV Set. Hubert yells at the talking heads--

HUBERT

Then why weren't their clothes burned up? Were their clothes in a trance? Answer that one, smart guy.

KIM MACDONALD (V.O.)

Mr. Shipley? Would you like to comment?

**TELEVISION SET**

The camera shifts over to F.M. SHIPLEY, heavy set, ruddy face.

SUPER: *F.M. SHIPLEY, ARCHITECTURAL ENGINEER*

Shipley gives a patronizing chuckle--

F.M. SHIPLEY

Actually, the explanation is quite simple. A lot simpler than some cockamamie Daniel-in-the-lions-den story. You see, it was a fluke. There was an anomaly in the building's construction. It created a pocket of cool air like a tunnel. That's how the residents were able to escape. I've seen cases like this before. Though not quite so dramatic, heh.

**MENDES APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM**

Hubert turns to Andre.

HUBERT

They don't know nothing.

ANDRE

Eat your soup.

HUBERT

Why can't they just say it?  
(shouts at the TV)  
It's a miracle. A God-loving miracle, for God's sake.

ANDRE

No such thing.

HUBERT

What about when God parted the Red Sea?

ANDRE

Low tide.

HUBERT

You always see the cup half empty.

ANDRE

I'd like to see that bowl empty,  
with you finishing all your soup.

Hubert coughs. Andre pulls on his jacket.

ANDRE

I'll be home early.

HUBERT

Bring me back a million dollars.

ANDRE

Now wouldn't that be a miracle.

**EXT. FOOD BANK/COUNSELING CENTER - DAY**

Fliers plaster the storefront. Maria peers in the window, unsure. A moment passes.

She decides, pulls open the door and goes in.

**INT. FOOD BANK/COUNSELING CENTER - DAY**

Peterson sits at a rickety table sorting packages of ramen. He glances up, smiles at Maria.

PETERSON

Hi. What can I do for you?

MARIA

(embarrassed)

It's my son's birthday. He's four.

PETERSON

Ah. Nice.

MARIA

I want to make him a special  
dinner. I thought you might have  
something...

Her voice trails off as she scans the sparse shelves. Cans of cheap tuna. Dried soup packets. Day-old bread.

PETERSON

(off her disappointment)

Yeah. Hmmm. Let's see.

He stands, starts rooting around in boxes.

PETERSON

With all the publicity about the fire... I hoped we might get more donations. But times are tough.

Maria's face falls. She moves toward the door.

MARIA

It's okay.

Peterson lurches around. Becoming agitated.

PETERSON

Wait. Now wait. Let me see. I did have a b-b-box here... oh look!

He holds up two cans of artichoke hearts.

PETERSON

These are special. Aren't they? The cans are a little dented...

Maria doesn't look like she wants the artichoke hearts but she can tell how desperate Peterson is to help.

PETERSON

Although maybe not s-s-so special to a four-year old.

She takes the cans.

MARIA

He'll love them. Thank you.

Peterson runs to hold the door open for her.

PETERSON

Here, take a flier. We're going to go caroling at the holidays. And there's a tree-trimming. Your s-s-son will like that.

MARIA

I have to go now, pick him up at the baby-sitter. Thank you.

Maria leaves.

Peterson lets the door swing shut. He drops his head into his hands.

**EXT. URBAN STREET - LATE DAY**

Maria exits carrying the two cans and comes face to face with Andre. They lock eyes for a long moment.

For both: a mixture of sadness, loss, feelings still there.

Maria studies Andre's face. As if remembering it close to hers. Andre shares her yearning. For a moment, the tough-guy facade slips and we glimpse the real man beneath.

They each want to speak but cannot. Too much hurt stands in the way.

Andre takes a deep breath. Tries--

                          ANDRE  
Hello, Maria.

                          MARIA  
Andre.

                          ANDRE  
How's...

Across the street, Marcus and Omar wave.

                          MARCUS  
Yo, Andre!

Andre stops, turns to them, raises his fist in greeting.

The moment with Maria breaks.

She gives a curt nod and hurries past Andre.

Too late, Andre realizes that Maria had just come out of the food bank. He whips around, about to follow her--

                          OMAR  
                          (bellows)  
Andre!

--then hesitates. Torn.

He decides, crosses the street to join his pals, making a point of skirting the angel wall.

**IN FRONT OF THE ABANDONED DINER**

Marcus holds out a can of Bud.

Andre takes a gulp. He looks around.

ANDRE  
Where's Ernesto?

OMAR  
Haven't seen him. Maybe he's with Jose, scoring some weed.

ANDRE  
Forget him. Forget both of them. We cruise the Sopas tonight. We catch Cleveland when he comes out of the projects.

Omar looks away.

OMAR  
Uh. I promised my girlfriend I'd paint her kitchen.

ANDRE  
What the f--

OMAR  
She's been ragging me about it, man. I got to do it.

ANDRE  
How long does it take? We'll go after.

Omar avoids Andre's eyes. Clearly he doesn't want to go.

Andre turns to Marcus. Marcus, too, looks away.

MARCUS  
Shit. Gettin' cold out here.

ANDRE  
(dawns on him)  
You're just gonna roll over. Like a couple of little girls.

MARCUS  
Hey, man!

ANDRE  
That's all you got to say to me? "I got to paint a kitchen." And "Ooooh. I'm fuckin' cold."  
(intense)  
They shot Chick dead.

OMAR  
Andre, nothing we do is gonna bring  
him back.

ANDRE  
So we just forget it?

OMAR  
I didn't say--

ANDRE  
Fine. So be it. Chick's lying in  
the ground not even cold yet and  
it's just another "Whassup!" day.  
Have a Bud.

Andre hurls the can of beer against the dumpster where it  
hits with a loud SMASH.

He's more furious with his pals than he has a right to be.  
He knows it. Omar and Marcus know it, they shift their  
weight, uncomfortable.

#### **THE WALL**

A few people approach the wall to marvel at the image. A  
HUCKSTER sells postcard photos.

HUCKSTER  
Photo of the angel? Only two  
dollars.

The two cops leave King's Corner Store and stroll toward the  
wall.

The Huckster quickly pockets his wares and takes off before  
the cops can spot him.

#### **IN FRONT OF THE ABANDONED DINER**

Andre fixes on Omar and Marcus, sizing them up.

ANDRE  
You guys think birds flew out of  
guns. You think it has something  
to do with... that.

He gestures to the wall. His voice rises, louder--

ANDRE

Guess what. I burned that thing into the wall. It's no "Finger of God." It was my damned finger.

The cops throw a curious glance back in Andre's direction but continue walking.

Marcus picks up the smashed can of Bud and slam dunks it into the dumpster.

Andre shouts at the people clustered by the wall.

ANDRE

I did that! With a blowtorch. You're praying to a joke, you stupid fools. A stupid joke.

The people give Andre fearful looks -- he must be crazy.

At King's Corner Store, Holland struggles to get his trash bin out the door while leaning on his cane.

Marcus and Omar observe Holland's struggle like it's a spectator sport. Marcus belches.

Andre smolders, ready to erupt.

ANDRE

Screw this.

He takes off down the street. Anywhere to get away from the wall.

**EXT. DECREPIT APARTMENT - DAY**

The shrine has wilted with the first snow but the devoted still arrive with flowers.

Charles Jackson drives up in his flashy car. He parks and gets out. He stares at the charred ruins, rubs a hand over his chin. He's deeply affected and he doesn't understand why.

Andre strides up. Charles Jackson nods at Andre.

Both contemplate the burned building. In the silence, an unspoken connection grows between them.

CHARLES JACKSON

Too much, huh?

Andre doesn't respond.

Charles Jackson gets back into his car and drives off.

Andre stays facing the burnt wreckage. *Too much?* Andre doesn't understand it either. And he doesn't know what to think.

**EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - DAY**

Andre trudges back to the abandoned diner. Marcus and Omar are gone.

Peterson leaves the food bank and weaves his way unsteadily toward THE WALL.

Peterson is clearly in distress.

Andre stands unseen in the shadows next to the dumpster and watches him.

PETERSON  
 (addresses the "angel")  
 I am not a perfect man.  
 (snorts)  
 What an understatement. I... have  
 a problem. I cry. A lot. And  
 then there's...

Peterson lifts his elbow, mimes drinking.

PETERSON  
 No one to blame but m-m-me. Me,  
 myself and I. My holy trinity of b-  
 b-blame. But, I have a good heart.  
 That's my excuse.

Andre leans closer to listen.

PETERSON  
 The road to failure is paved with  
 good hearts.

Peterson rubs his mouth.

PETERSON  
 You wanna know the truth? The  
 secret, the dirty little secret? I  
 didn't destroy my "potential" with  
 drinking. No. I was a loser to  
 begin with. But now people can  
 say, "He could have done something  
 with his life, something g-g-good.  
 If only he wasn't a drunk."

Peterson forces out a brittle laugh.

PETERSON

"If only." Huh. I run a food bank that has no f-f-food. A counseling center even though I'm in no shape to give counsel. I can b-b-barely get the words out. What good am I? What p-p-possible good am I on this earth?

Peterson staggers backwards and nearly falls.

The angel image looms over Peterson.

Peterson slowly lifts his sunken face. Voice steady, no stuttering--

PETERSON

(emotional)

Just the fact that you're here. That you came. It means so much. It makes me... want to do better. That's all. That's all.

He reels around and stumbles back toward the food bank.

From the shadows, Andre watches him go.

#### **INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY**

Maria and Tico unload their cart at the checkout. Maria winks at Tico as she gently lifts out a pink cardboard box with clear plastic top. Inside is a single jumbo CUPCAKE with icing and sprinkles.

MARIA

We're going to have a fun birthday party, you and me.

The CLERK rings up Maria's items.

Maria SEES the total. She frowns. She roots inside her change purse.

Other people in the checkout line wait for her to pay. The Clerk eyes her coldly.

Maria considers her order. What to put back? Not the milk. Not the bread or the peanut butter.

CLERK

Is that it?

Maria's anxious fingers brush over the cupcake... then travel to a large can of baked beans... then back to the cupcake.

Tico watches her with serious eyes.

No! Her son must have his birthday treat. Maria slides the can of baked beans off to the side.

Tico reaches up and puts the beans back on the belt. He takes the cupcake and pushes it off to the side.

Tears flood Maria's eyes. She wipes at them, angry. She pays the clerk and gathers up the grocery bag.

**EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - DAY**

A bus pulls up and stops. Maria and Tico get off, Maria carrying the paper grocery bag.

They pause to look at the image of the angel. Maria, wistful, squeezes Tico's hand.

**INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN - DAY**

Maria sets the grocery bag on the table in their tiny kitchen and begins to unload it. Bread, potatoes, peanut butter...

The bag tips over. Two oranges fall out of the bag. Maria picks them up.

MARIA

Tico! Did you put these in there?

The little boy shakes his head. Maria sighs.

MARIA

That checker. He must have put them in by mistake. I'll take them back tomorrow.

But then two more oranges fall out. And another.

MARIA

What the...

She looks inside the bag. Stunned, she pulls out a bag of shiny apples.

And then a wedge of Swiss cheese.

Tico's eyes grow wide.

Maria's hand goes to her mouth, she shrinks back toward the wall. Terrified. Awed. *What is happening?*

Tico crawls onto a chair and reaches his little arm inside the bag.

With a cry of joy he pulls out a pineapple.

Maria GASPS.

MARIA

It's not... it's not possible.

TICO

Look, Mama. There's more.

Maria edges toward the bag.

MARIA

Dear God.

Maria reaches into the bag and pulls out a whole roast chicken, steaming hot in its plastic bubble dish.

Tico claps his hands.

TICO

Chicken!

Maria sets the chicken down. In a state of shock. Her lips tremble. She can't speak.

She picks up the empty paper bag. She shakes it, hears something rattle, turns it over.

A tiny box falls out. Maria bends to pick it up... birthday candles.

The bag sits upright on the table. Maria leans forward and peeks inside.

Carefully she reaches in and lifts out a large round birthday cake, laden with butter cream roses. She sets the cake on the table.

Laughing, crying, overcome, she hugs Tico. She can barely whisper--

MARIA

Happy... birthday.

**INT. KING'S CORNER STORE - DAY**

The BELL over the door jingles. Holland looks up to see Andre enter. Holland's suspicious glare follows Andre as he walks over to the refrigerator cases along the back wall.

Andre pauses in front of the cold beer.

Holland clears his throat. Loudly. He points to a sign over the register:

"MUST BE 21 TO BUY ALCOHOL."

Andre shrugs. He moves down the refrigerator cases and pulls out a can of Red Bull. He saunters up to the register.

As Holland rings up the charge, Andre notices cheap plastic TOYS hanging from a rack next to the beef jerky and cigarettes.

ANDRE

Wait up.

He pulls down a fire truck in a laminated plastic bubble.

ANDRE

This too.

**EXT. KING'S CORNER STORE - LATE DAY**

Stuffing the toy in his jacket, Andre exits the store.

DISSOLVE TO:

**THE ITEMS FROM MARIA'S GROCERY BAG**

Chicken, birthday cake, fruit -- all clustered in the center of the table.

WIDEN TO SHOW--

The table now groans with homemade casseroles. Chips and soda, pies and cookies, surround the items from the bag.

WIDEN MORE--

**INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN - EVENING**

Friends and neighbors gather around the kitchen table. Peterson is there, along with the survivors of the fire -- Vilma, Crackhead, Prem and Mira, Tracy and Barry.

Ernesto is there, too. But not the other Nopas.

They have all brought THEIR OWN FOOD to add to the bounty of the bag. It's a feast. Their generous gifts dwarf the few items pulled from the bag.

Vilma makes room for her tray of empanadas. Mira peels the foil wrap off another dish.

MIRA

Samosas. I made them in the Red Cross kitchen. Everyone helped.

MARIA

Thank you. Thank you, my friends. You've brought so much.

Ernesto opens bottles of soda, hands them out.

Maria's eyes travel over the people in the room and rest on her beaming son.

MARIA

I am a rich woman.

PETERSON

You are indeed. Let's give thanks.

They all bow their heads.

BARRY

(loud whisper)

Aren't we gonna have cake?

TRACY

Barry. Shhhh.

Maria smiles. She puts four candles on the cake.

MARIA

Does anyone have a...

Crackhead starts to offer matches, then--

CRACKHEAD

Whoa, I better not. I'm not so good with these things.

Everyone laughs.

Ernesto steps forward with a lighter. As they start to sing Happy Birthday, ANDRE WALKS IN, the toy fire truck in his hand.

He stands apart, in the doorway. Taking in the scene.

Maria stops singing. Their eyes meet.

Andre's face is a road map of emotions. *Will he join the others?* He swallows, takes a step further into the room...

Tico blows out his candles. The group breaks into applause.

Tico looks up with shining eyes.

Andre sets the toy on the table, turns and walks out.

DISSOLVE TO:

#### **SHADOWY IMAGE OF THE ANGEL ON THE WALL**

Barely discernible in darkness.

Night turns to dawn. The rising sun spreads a rose-colored haze over the wall, bringing the angel image into relief.

The figure shimmers like shook fabric, then undulates like rippling water.

The cold light of day returns. The wall's surface hardens.

The angel resumes its dusty, flat outlines.

Andre enters and leaves the frame. From one side to the other--

#### **EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - DAY**

Back and forth, Andre paces, impatient. He keeps watch on the entrance of Clara's building.

At last the door opens and the elderly woman steps out.

Andre strides over to her.

ANDRE

You need to tell people. That I made the angel. Stop this stupid shit.

CLARA  
Good morning, Andre.

ANDRE  
Are you deaf? Did you hear me? It ain't right that you let them think it got there by some kinda crazy supernatural--

CLARA  
Why don't you tell them?

ANDRE  
I did. I do. No one believes me.

CLARA  
That's too bad.

ANDRE  
Look at this place.

Andre flings his arm out in disgust at the fan club in front of the wall. The Huckster is back selling postcards.

ANDRE  
It's like a circus. It's pathetic. You go over there and tell them. Now!

Andre towers over Clara, intimidating.

CLARA  
Quite the angry young man, aren't you?

She tries to move past him. He blocks her path.

ANDRE  
What, am I keeping you from your busy day? Like you got a life or something?

Clara tries again to move past Andre.

He raises his fist.

ANDRE  
See this? BAM. I could crush you like a cockroach. Useless old... you should be dead by now anyway.

Clara blinks up at Andre, unafraid.

CLARA

You think you're the toughest thing  
I ever faced? Not even close,  
Mister Tattoos.

It's a high-noon standoff.

Andre's jaw tightens. He sucks in a deep breath.

At last, he drops his fist and steps aside.

Clara proceeds down the street.

Andre follows a few feet behind, fuming.

He draws up alongside her.

Clara throws him a sideways glance.

CLARA

So many tattoos. What do they  
mean?

ANDRE

They don't mean nothing.

CLARA

How is that possible? A tattoo is  
permanent. A mark on your body.  
You wear that mark for life.  
Whatever it means, it's always with  
you.

ANDRE

My tats are none of your business,  
old lady.

CLARA

My name is Clara. I told you that.  
(exaggerated sympathy)  
Are you hard of hearing? Or do you  
have a problem remembering things?

ANDRE

You are a pain, you know that?

**EXT. PARK - DAY**

Clara and Andre arrive at a cyclone-fenced patch of concrete  
and grass. A few straggly trees, crumbling stone benches.

Andre stops short. He looks around warily.

Clara notes his hesitation.

CLARA  
What is it? Afraid to cross the  
"border"?

Andre gives Clara a sharp look. Maybe she's not as crazy as he thought.

CLARA  
Man with big fist who can squash an  
old woman like a cockroach?

Andre purses his lips. Defiant, he follows Clara into the park.

CLARA  
Strange. How you fight over  
something you don't even own. Or  
care about.

ANDRE  
(wants to change the  
subject)  
Where do you come from? You talk  
funny.

CLARA  
I think you talk funny, too.

Clara opens her handbag and takes out a handful of peanuts. She sets them on the bench.

Immediately two SCRUB JAYS fly over and snap up the peanuts.

CLARA  
Hello Buster. Hello, Fat Boy.

More birds arrive. Clara takes a handful of birdseed from her bag and sprinkles it over the ground.

ANDRE  
This is what you do all day? Feed  
birds?

CLARA  
Not as thrilling as standing on  
street corners drinking beer, I  
suppose.

*Touché.* Andre scowls.

ANDRE

Look. Clara. Here's the deal.  
This angel thing is messing up my  
life. I got something important to  
do.

CLARA

What?

Andre looks off, troubled. Why is he talking to this old  
woman? Finally--

ANDRE

One of my friends got... hurt.

CLARA

You mean killed.

ANDRE

Yeah.

(serious)

I got to even the score. No one  
else will. It's about... justice.

CLARA

An eye for an eye, a tooth for a  
tooth.

ANDRE

You don't agree with that?

CLARA

I think already there's too many  
people walking around with no eyes  
and no teeth.

ANDRE

Well. That's what the Bible says  
to do.

CLARA

A book more waved like a fist than  
read, I'm afraid.

ANDRE

You don't know nothing about it.

CLARA

I'm just an observer.

ANDRE

What does that mean?

She hands Andre a handful of birdseed.

CLARA

Here.

He flings the seeds at the birds. They flutter off, spooked.

CLARA

You're supposed to feed them, not attack them.

ANDRE

Sorry.

CLARA

So impatient, the young. In such a great hurry to die.

(beat)

Is this the world you want to give your son?

ANDRE

What?!!

CLARA

Like I said, I am an observer. That pretty woman with the little boy, the one who stops to talk to you. That child is your son, isn't he?

ANDRE

No. Who said that?

CLARA

He looks just like you.

ANDRE

No he doesn't. He ain't my kid.

CLARA

I may be old but I am not stupid.

ANDRE

I never asked her to have a kid.

CLARA

That's not how it happens.

Clara stops feeding the birds, looks pointedly at Andre.

CLARA

You turn away from him. Why?

ANDRE

Jeez, you're like a dog with a sock.

Clara chuckles. Andre, against his will, blurts out a laugh.

They laugh together for a moment. Clara's laugh fades to a wistful sigh.

CLARA

My husband used to say that to me.  
Like a terrier with a slipper.

ANDRE

Where's he at, your husband?

CLARA

Oh. He's gone. Passed away.  
Many, many years ago.

ANDRE

Hunh. Too bad.  
(beat)  
Any kids?

A spasm of grief passes through Clara's frail body. A long BEAT.

She shakes her head, barely whispers--

CLARA

No... no.

A sudden breeze blows dead leaves across the dirty snow.

In the SILENCE an unspoken word hangs in the air between Andre and Clara: *Loneliness*.

Clara smiles sadly. She goes back to feeding the birds.

Andre stares at her, at a loss for words. Struggling to control his emotions. Finally, his armor cracks, exposing the open wounds beneath, his fears--

ANDRE

How can I be a father to a kid? I  
wouldn't know what to do. I'd  
screw it up. I can't provide for  
him.

CLARA

Why not? You could get a job.

ANDRE

Yeah, right. I got nothing to give him. Nothing. He wouldn't want to be like me.

Clara empties more birdseed out of her bag.

CLARA

Why don't you try talking to him?

ANDRE

I can't. I don't have the right words.

CLARA

Words don't matter. There's an old saying. "What comes from the heart goes to the heart."

A BEAT. Andre turns this over in his mind.

ANDRE

So you believe that miracle stuff, hunh?

Before Clara can respond, Andre catches sight of ERNESTO at the other edge of the park.

ANDRE

Hey!

Ernesto talks to CLEVELAND, leader of the Sopas. The one whose bullets turned to birds in the shoot-out with Ernesto.

Andre takes off like a rocket toward them.

Cleveland spies Andre. He says something to Ernesto and leaves quickly.

Ernesto turns to confront Andre's wrath.

ANDRE

Was that Cleveland?

Ernesto lifts his hands.

ERNESTO

Hold up--

ANDRE

What the fuck. You talkin' to Cleveland. Head of the Sopas.

ERNESTO

Andre, he came up to me--

ANDRE

I don't believe this, man. He's the one who shot Chick.

ERNESTO

He didn't. They didn't mean to shoot him. They shot at the car--

Andre can't hear Ernesto's words. Too consumed with rage.

ANDRE

Shot him dead.

He shoves Ernesto backwards--

ERNESTO

Hey!

ANDRE

Chick was a kid. A *kid!*

Ernesto holds up his hands in a defensive pose.

Andre drives forward, relentless.

ANDRE

He was nothing. He was dirt under your shoe. Oh, they meant to hit the car, so it's cool--

Ernesto tries to walk away. Andre grabs his shoulder--

ANDRE

You joining the Sopas now? You're running tail and snitch.

ERNESTO

I'm not joining anything. Or anyone. Could you shut up and listen? Cleveland came to me. He doesn't want to fight no more.

ANDRE

I don't want to hear this shit--

ERNESTO

You got to hear it, Andre. You got to. Stop being a dick and just listen to me.

(MORE)

ERNESTO (CONT'D)

He told me about this program, this training thing for guys like us who want to learn stuff, like auto mechanics.

Andre shakes his head. He points at Ernesto with both hands.

ANDRE

You are done, man. We are done.

Andre walks backward. Continues to yell at Ernesto even as his voice breaks--

ANDRE

"Job" training? Like someone would hire a gangbanger like you? Newsflash.

(holds up his tattooed forearms)

Punks like us can't get real jobs. Won't happen. Ever. No way. We deal 'n steal.

At the other end of the park Clara continues to feed the birds.

ANDRE

Jobs? Ha. What's the point? Companies, they just screw you over. Work you 'til you drop dead on your face. They don't care about you... or your family... your kids. What do your kids get when you drop dead? Shit on a stick's all they get. The rich get richer and we get evicted...

**EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - DAY**

Andre strides up to the wall. The Huckster displays his wares on a card table.

With one stroke Andre KNOCKS the table over.

HUCKSTER

Whoa.

ANDRE

It's just burn marks on a wall, you jackass. That's all it is. Go home.

The Huckster scoops up his cards and takes off in fright.

Andre turns and glares at the angel image.

He snatches up a postcard photo the Huckster dropped in his haste and starts to crumple it. He stops, shoves the photo in his pocket instead.

**INT. MENDES APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Andre enters and closes the door softly.

Something is wrong. There's no sound of the TV, just harsh BREATHING.

ANDRE

Papa?

Andre rushes over to the bed and sees Hubert leaning on one elbow, gasping for breath.

ANDRE

Papa.

Andre grabs the oxygen tank.

ANDRE

Isn't this working?

Hubert can't talk. His chest heaves. He collapses.

ANDRE

Papa!

Andre tries to lift him up. Hubert's a dead weight.

He grabs the phone and dials nine-one-one.

VOICE (V.O.)

(filtered)

Nine One One Emergency.

ANDRE

Hey! My father is--

VOICE (V.O.)

(filtered)

... Your call is very important to us. Please hold and the next available operator will...

Andre throws down the phone. He runs over to the window, flings it open, frantic, leans out--

ANDRE  
 Help! Help me. Anyone got a car?

**ANDRE'S P.O.V. -- OUT THE WINDOW**

Two floors down on the street below people hurry past, not wanting to respond to the yelling man.

Charles Jackson rests against the door of his flashy car, smoking a cigarette and waiting for one of his girls.

Jackson looks up, squints at Andre.

**ANDRE**

Hanging half out the window--

ANDRE  
 Help me! Somebody, please!

**CHARLES JACKSON**

peers up at Andre. Weighs this.

CUT TO:

**EXT. ANDRE'S BUILDING - DAY**

Andre and Charles Jackson exit the building. Andre carries his father in his arms, Charles Jackson carries the oxygen tank.

They hurry to Jackson's car across the street.

**EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY**

At the Emergency Entrance Charles Jackson and Andre help a NURSE lift Hubert onto the gurney and rush him into the hospital.

**INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY**

Andre runs alongside the gurney holding his father's hand as nurses and doctors roll him into a treatment room.

NURSE  
 (to Andre)  
 Please stay in the waiting room.

The DOORS CLOSE. Andre stares at the closed doors.  
He turns. In a daze he drifts down the corridor.

**INT. EMERGENCY ROOM, WAITING AREA - DAY**

Andre looks around. The same fluorescent-lit room where he spent the night waiting for Chick.

He slumps into a seat. Charles Jackson comes over and sits down next to him.

Andre looks at him, startled to see that he's still there.

CHARLES JACKSON  
Your dad gonna be all right?

ANDRE  
I don't know.  
(takes a moment)  
Thanks. Thanks for the help. I  
don't know what I would've done...  
ambulance takes forever... I...

CHARLES JACKSON  
No problem. I got the car.

They both sit in silence.

CHARLES JACKSON  
He'll be okay. I'm sure of it.

ANDRE  
Why do you say that?

CHARLES JACKSON  
The angel, man. All these good  
things happening.

Andre groans. He drops his head into his hands.

He lifts his face. A mixture of despair and frustration. In a soft whisper--

ANDRE  
I put that thing on the wall,  
Charles. After Chick got gunned  
down. I was out of my head, and I  
took a blowtorch and blasted it at  
the wall.

Charles Jackson frowns. Then he nods, *yeah*.

CHARLES JACKSON  
I figured it could've been  
something like that.

But then he brightens--

CHARLES JACKSON  
But what about the fire? Crackhead  
and them other folks... I saw them.  
That was real man, it was a real  
miracle.

ANDRE  
It was a pocket of air. A guy  
explained it all on TV.

CHARLES JACKSON  
Then there was that lady, your baby  
mama, right?  
(Andre bristles)  
She got that bag with the cake--

ANDRE  
You believe that? How much you  
wanna bet that wino priest gave her  
the food. I saw her go into his  
food bank that same day. Anyway,  
most of that food was stuff brung  
by the neighbors. Look, man. It's  
a bunch of fairy tales. Like  
stories about guns shooting  
bullets that turn into birds.

Charles Jackson chuckles.

CHARLES JACKSON  
Heard that one, too.

Two volunteers enter the waiting room and start putting up  
holiday decorations. Santas, holly wreaths, bells, angels.

The two men fall silent.

Charles Jackson watches the decorations going up. He tilts  
his head.

CHARLES JACKSON  
I always believed that the strong  
survive. What we go through shapes  
us.

He turns to Andre.

CHARLES JACKSON

But I have seen people walk through fire. And they were all kinds of people. A junkie, a little boy. And they all said the same thing. Something got them through the fire. Call it what you want. God? I don't know. Whatever shape God was to them. Something gave them hope. That's how they got through the fire.

Charles Jackson turns and faces straight ahead.

CHARLES JACKSON

(emotional)

I have hope, Andre. I have dreams. I believe in the future.

Andre, stirred, watches Jackson's profile.

CHARLES JACKSON

What's on that wall, what ain't on that wall. It don't matter. What I believe now is that a man can change for the better. He can turn his life around one hundred percent.

ANDRE

What's that, pimp wisdom?

Charles Jackson's jaw clenches.

ANDRE

(instantly sorry)

I shouldn't have said that, I... aw, man.

CHARLES JACKSON

It's cool.

He stands.

CHARLES JACKSON

I got to get back.

Andre struggles. He feels terrible, wants to make it right with Jackson.

ANDRE

Thanks. Thanks so much--

CHARLES JACKSON

No need to keep thanking me.  
That's why we got put here on this  
earth. To help each other.

ANDRE

Funny. I'm the one who started all  
this, with the angel... and I'm the  
only one whose life isn't any  
better for it.

CHARLES JACKSON

Whose fault is that?

ANDRE

Hunh?

Charles clasps Andre's hand.

CHARLES JACKSON

You take care now.

Jackson leaves.

Andre pulls the PHOTO of the angel out of his pocket and  
stares at it.

DISSOLVE TO:

**SAME - LATER**

Andre dozes in a chair. A RED-HAIRED NURSE approaches.

RED-HAIRED NURSE

Excuse me. Mr. Mendes?

Andre wakes with a start.

RED-HAIRED NURSE

We have your father in a room. You  
can go in and see him.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY**

Andre sits on a chair pulled close to Hubert's bed. A fabric  
screen separates him from another patient.

Hubert is groggy but conscious, hooked up through his nose to  
an oxygen apparatus. Andre grips his hand.

HUBERT  
 (tiny voice)  
 Is it snowing?

Andre gets up and peeks out the grimy window.

**ANDRE'S P.O.V. - HOSPITAL PARKING LOT**

Snow flutters down. Two men wrangle a Christmas tree from the top of a car. They carry it into the hospital.

**BACK TO SCENE**

Andre gazes out the window.

ANDRE  
 Yeah. It just started again.

HUBERT  
 Good. I want it to be a white  
 Christmas.

There's a tone of resignation in Hubert's voice. Andre winces to hear it. He returns quickly to his father's bedside.

ANDRE  
 This ain't your last Christmas,  
 Papa.

Hubert heaves a deep sigh. He looks up at his son, tries to smile.

HUBERT  
 Do other people know what a great  
 kid you are?

ANDRE  
 Ha. You're the only one who thinks  
 that. Everyone else thinks I'm a  
 lowlife.

HUBERT  
 But you're not. I know you're not.

ANDRE  
 You say that 'cause you're my  
 father.

HUBERT  
 No, I say that because I know you.  
 In here. Inside. Where it counts.

Hubert taps his hand over his heart. Andre forces a smile.  
 Hubert continues to gaze at his son, eyes full of love.  
 Andre can hardly bear it.

ANDRE  
 What did the doctor say?

HUBERT  
 Same old thing. I need that  
 treatment. Those drugs that cost  
 more than a house. Two houses!  
 Maybe Congress will pass a  
 corporate bail-out for patients.

Andre tries to laugh. Hubert closes his eyes.

HUBERT  
 I'm tired, Andre. Tired of  
 fighting.  
 (beat)  
 I can't fight no more.

ANDRE  
 I'll fight for you, Papa. Don't  
 give up, don't--

A HEAVY-SET NURSE blusters in, bursting with phony cheer.

HEAVY-SET NURSE  
 Well, how are we doing, Mr.  
 Mendoza?

ANDRE  
 It's Mendes.

HEAVY-SET NURSE  
 Oops, sorry. Are you all excited  
 about the holidays?

She checks the IV monitor.

Andre looks at her like she's a mental case.

HUBERT  
 (rallies his spirits)  
 You bet. We're flying off to  
 Hawaii. I'm gonna compete in the  
 Christmas hula contest.

HEAVY-SET NURSE  
 Isn't that wonderful. I'll be back  
 to take your pressure. Sit tight.

HUBERT

Ach. I was gonna run out for a slice of pizza and a beer.

Andre chokes back a laugh.

The Heavy-set Nurse leaves. Hubert winks at Andre.

HUBERT

That big woman? She wants me.

Andre cracks up. *His dad.*

The laughter fades. Andre eyes his father. Hubert looks weaker than ever.

**INT. HOSPITAL, NURSING STATION - DAY**

The Red-Haired Nurse sits at a desk writing up medication orders. Andre approaches.

ANDRE

Hey. My father needs that treatment. We can't pay for it but the company that did this--

RED-HAIRED NURSE

Your father is receiving standard-of-care. It's maintenance--

ANDRE

(explodes)

He doesn't need maintenance! He needs treatment. He needs to get better.

The phone RINGS. The Red-Haired Nurse picks up.

RED-HAIRED NURSE

(to Andre)

Excuse me.

(into phone)

Sixth floor. Yes, I got the scrip...

A doctor approaches, drops off more orders, tries to talk to the nurse while she's on the phone.

Andre steps away, then comes back, more determined.

ANDRE

They poisoned him.

RED-HAIRED NURSE  
 (to Andre)  
 I'm sorry, I'm on the phone.

ANDRE  
 And now they won't pay.

The nurse is writing busily, holds up her hand in a "Stop" signal to Andre.

RED-HAIRED NURSE  
 (into phone)  
 Could you hold a second.

She looks up at Andre, exasperated.

RED-HAIRED NURSE  
 Would you like to speak to a social worker?

ANDRE  
 I have talked to social workers. I have talked to people on the phone. I have called and gone downtown to talk to people there. We just get shoved aside like garbage.

RED-HAIRED NURSE  
 Mister Mendes, I understand your frustration, but I am going to have to ask you to lower your voice. This is a hospital.

**EXT. URBAN STREET - DAY - ESTABLISHING**

A car pulls up outside of the food bank. Ernesto gets out and starts unloading boxes. Dozens of them.

Peterson opens the door of the food bank.

Ernesto waves to him and starts carrying the boxes inside as Peterson holds the door.

**INT. MENDES APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Andre barrels in and strides over to the table by the couch.

He scoops up all the LETTERS -- the entire stack of them -- and shoves them into his jacket.

He storms back out of the apartment and slams the door.

**INT. KING'S CORNER STORE - DAY**

The bell over the door JINGLES. Holland King looks up to see Charles Jackson.

HOLLAND

You! What are you doing here!

Charles Jackson raises both his hands.

CHARLES JACKSON

Take it easy, man.

HOLLAND

How dare you! Get out. Get out or I call the cops, put you back in jail where you belong.

Holland lifts his wooden cane, threatening.

CHARLES JACKSON

I'll go. I'll go in a minute. But there's something I got to say to you first. I'm sorry for what I did. I think about it every day and I ask God for forgiveness. For some reason I guess God wanted it to go down this way. But it was me who pulled that trigger. No one else to blame. God had nothing to do with that. And I live every day, knowing I did this bad thing to you.

Holland stares at him, eyes full of hate and distrust.

CHARLES JACKSON

I don't expect you to forgive me.

HOLLAND

I don't. I hope you rot in hell.

CHARLES JACKSON

You're entitled. But I just want you to know I'm sorry. I am truly sorry.

Charles Jackson backs out the door. The bell JINGLES as he exits.

Holland, sputtering with rage, grabs his cane and limps around the counter. He hobbles to the front door and throws the bolt, glowers out the window.

He turns and starts to hobble back to the register.  
He stops. Something feels weird.  
He looks down at his hand which holds the wooden cane.  
He lifts his fingers to see--  
LEAVES, sprouting from the cane.

**INT. HOSPITAL, NURSING STATION - DAY**

Andre strides up to the Red-Haired Nurse. She's on the phone again. She glances up at him.  
Andre opens his jacket and dumps the entire pile of LETTERS onto her desk.  
He stomps out.

**INT. FOOD BANK/COUNSELING CENTER - DAY**

Ernesto helps Peterson unload the boxes of groceries. The shelves now overflow with donated items.  
The door opens and Maria and Tico walk in.

PETERSON  
Hello. Look who's here.

Maria beams. Tico clutches the large can of baked beans, the one they bought at the grocery store.

MARIA  
Tico wanted to donate something.  
For people who are having a hard  
time.

Peterson bends down and takes the can from the child.

PETERSON  
(voice clear and strong)  
Thank you very much, Tico. I hope  
you'll come help us decorate the  
tree.

Tico nods happily.

Maria takes Tico's hand, they wave goodbye.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

Hubert sleeps. Andre sits by his bed. He holds the postcard photo of the angel.

The Heavy-Set Nurse enters, points to her watch.

HEAVY-SET NURSE  
Visiting hours are over.

Andre stands and pockets the photo.

ANDRE  
I was just leaving.

**EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - NIGHT**

A bus pulls up. Andre gets off, crosses the street.

He stops in front of the wall. Someone has strung holiday lights across the roof.

Andre's eye travels to the dumpster. It overflows with pieces of sheetrock and concrete debris.

Curious, Andre steps over to--

**IN FRONT OF THE ABANDONED DINER**

The graffiti-covered boards are off the windows. New panes of glass, still taped, reflect the blinking holiday lights.

Andre leans forward and squints inside--

**INSIDE THE DINER**

A freshly tiled counter. Sparkling new light fixtures.

**IN FRONT OF THE ABANDONED DINER**

Officers Moody and Stark saunter past.

ANDRE  
Uh... Hey! What's up with the old diner?

OFFICER MOODY  
(hostile)  
Ah, Mendes.

OFFICER STARK  
 Didn't you hear? Charles Jackson  
 bought it.

ANDRE  
 What?

OFFICER STARK  
 Yeah, closed the deal, got his  
 permit just a few days ago. He's  
 going to open a noodle place. One  
 of his girls is a terrific cook, he  
 says.

Officer Moody snorts.

OFFICER MOODY  
 Isn't that one for the books? From  
 hooking to cooking.

OFFICER STARK  
 It'll be nice to be able to get a  
 hot meal on this street.

Andre peeks again in the windows.

ANDRE  
 When's it gonna open?

OFFICER STARK  
 He says he plans to open Christmas  
 Eve.

OFFICER MOODY  
 We'll see. It'll take a lot of  
 work to get that old dump in shape.

OFFICER STARK  
 The man is determined. I'll give  
 him that.

ANDRE  
 He didn't tell me anything about  
 it.

OFFICER MOODY  
 You're not the only one. His  
 parole officer was pretty shocked.

Stark rubs his hands together.

OFFICER STARK  
 Wouldn't mind a hot bowl of noodles  
 right now. With some spicy pork.

The two officers move along. Moody calls over his shoulder, his voice gruff--

OFFICER MOODY  
Keep your nose clean, Mendes.

And then, in a sudden burst of good will that surprises even himself, Moody turns again--

OFFICER MOODY  
Merry Christmas.

Andre doesn't hear him. He stares in the diner windows, lost in thought.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY**

Hubert sleeps, his breath raspy and uncertain.

Andre dozes in a chair by Hubert's bed. Snow beats hard against the window.

A HAND taps the side of the fabric screen.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)  
Mister Mendes? May I come in?

Andre jerks awake.

ANDRE  
Uh. Yeah.

HELENA WAXMAN, short, middle-aged, matronly, thick glasses, waddles around the partition.

She extends a chubby hand to Andre.

HELENA  
I'm Helena Waxman. The unit nurse gave me these.

Helena reaches into her shoulder bag and pulls out a bundle of letters -- Hubert's letters.

Andre's eyes narrow.

ANDRE  
You a social worker?

HELENA  
Well, I'm that, too. But I'm first and foremost a patient advocate. This must be your father, Hubert.

Andre nods.

Hubert's labored breaths suggest a restless sleep.

HELENA  
 Why don't we step outside so we  
 don't wake him?

**INT. PATIENT LOUNGE - DAY**

Helena leads Andre into a small, drab room with a few tables and vending machines.

They sit. Helena sets the letters on the table in a neat stack. She's business-like, her voice matter-of-fact.

HELENA  
 I've read all these.

ANDRE  
 (skeptical)  
All of them?

HELENA  
 Every. Last. One.

Helena pulls out a notepad.

HELENA  
 That company your father worked  
 for... what a bunch of creeps.

ANDRE  
 (can't believe his ears)  
 That's what I said.

HELENA  
 But the law is on your side. And  
 I can get the company to make good.

ANDRE  
 You mean, pay for his treatment?

Helena nods.

ANDRE  
 Treatment, not just maintenance?

HELENA  
All his care. Even custodial,  
 should he need it. I'll make sure  
 your father gets everything he  
 needs.

Andre gapes at her in disbelief.

ANDRE

But you can't. The company refused--

Helena peers at Andre through her thick glasses.

HELENA

I know how to deal with these fat-cat crooks, Mr. Mendes. It's what I do.

Andre shakes his head. *Impossible.*

ANDRE

You know how long my father and I have been fighting them?

Helena holds up the letters, nods.

HELENA

I'll get them to pay. I may look like a Hobbit, but I'm really a wizard.

Andre gapes at her.

A BEAT. He grows agitated, to the point of being combative--

ANDRE

Right. Like I believe that. Why would you do this? Why would you help us?

HELENA

It's my job.

Andre's not buying. His voice seethes with suspicion.

ANDRE

What's your angle? You think helping a poor spic will buy you a ticket to heaven or something?

Helena fixes Andre with a hard look.

HELENA

I'm Jewish. I don't give a crap about heaven. For your information I don't believe the afterlife is about sitting on a cloud, flapping my wings and playing a harp. It's about the value we add here, on Earth.

(MORE)

HELENA (CONT'D)

That's what lives on after us.  
Now. Can we talk about your  
father?

**EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - DAY**

A frenzy of activity in Charles Jackson's diner. SOUNDS of hammering and drilling, laughter and chattering, flow into the street.

Charles Jackson has traded in his fur coats and bling for spackle-flecked overalls and a knit cap. He lugs a crate of tile scraps to the dumpster.

**ACROSS THE STREET**

Holland King limps out of his store supported by his leafy cane.

**CHARLES JACKSON**

Sees Holland and freezes. He watches as--

**HOLLAND**

Hangs a holly wreath on his front door. Holland takes a can of spray paint and paints--

"PEACE ON EARTH"

Over his windows, bars and all.

Holland turns and sees Charles Jackson watching from across the street.

They lock eyes. Neither moves.

And then Holland gives a quick NOD.

**CHARLES JACKSON**

Slowly raises his hand in acknowledgement.

**HOLLAND**

Turns and hobbles back into his store.

**EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - DAY**

A bus pulls up. Andre jumps off.

He looks around him. The street is transformed. Holiday decorations are everywhere.

A man walks toward Andre. It takes Andre a moment to register that the man is Crackhead -- still gaunt, but he's cleaned up nicely: hair trimmed, clothes neat.

ANDRE

Hey. Cra...

Andre clams up. He doesn't know Crackhead's real name.

Crackhead smiles and extends his hand. It no longer shakes.

CRACKHEAD

My name is Joseph.

Andre grasps Joseph's hand.

ANDRE

Joseph. You're looking good, man.

CRACKHEAD/JOSEPH

I'm in rehab.

ANDRE

That's good. Good.

CRACKHEAD/JOSEPH

I figured if I could make it through the fire, I can make it through rehab. All the best to you.

ANDRE

You too, yeah.

A pickup truck pulls in front of the food bank, a large Christmas tree in the back.

Ernesto jumps out of the truck. Peterson runs out of the food bank. He and Ernesto try to lift the heavy tree from the back of the truck. They're struggling.

Andre hesitates, then steps over--

ANDRE

Need help?

Ernesto turns, eyes Andre warily. Andre means it. Ernesto gives him a slow grin.

ERNESTO

Thanks.

PETERSON

Thank you. Careful. There. We got it now.

Peterson and Ernesto carry the tree into the food bank.

PETERSON

(calls over his shoulder to Andre)

Come help us decorate the tree.

Andre shakes his head no. He continues down the street.

Two young ASIAN WOMEN approach him, giggling. They wear elf hats and carry trays of small paper cups.

ASIAN WOMAN #1

Free sample?

ANDRE

What?

ASIAN WOMAN #2

Free sample. Noodle.

ANDRE

Ah, from the new place. Sure.

Andre takes one of the cups and a plastic fork. The Asian Women watch him eat.

ANDRE

Wow.

ASIAN WOMAN #1

I make it. You like?

ANDRE

Yeah. It's good.

ASIAN WOMAN #1

Please. Take more. Free.

ANDRE

No, I should--

ASIAN WOMAN #2

Please take.

Beaming with pride, she pushes another cup into his hand.

ASIAN WOMAN #2

We open soon. Big party! You  
come.

**MONTAGE -- MUSIC OVER**

- Andre moves down the street, eating the noodles.
- At KING'S CORNER STORE Holland King, balancing on his cane, struggles to drag his trash bin out the door. Marcus and Omar spy his efforts. They run over to help. Marcus holds the door while Omar drags the bin out to the curb. Holland smiles a surprised thank you.
- Outside the DINER Charles Jackson and helpers hoist a banner sign that reads: "ANGEL NOODLES SUPREME! GRAND OPENING DECEMBER 24."
- Inside the FOOD BANK, Tracy and Barry, Maria and Tico, hang decorations on the tree. Peterson hoists Tico up so that Tico can fix a star to the top of the tree.
- Down the STREET Jose helps Ernesto paint over graffiti on the side of buildings.
- Helena Waxman enters Hubert's HOSPITAL ROOM. She meets his eyes, then thrusts a triumphant fist in the air. He grins up at her.

**INT. MENDES APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Andre opens the door and quietly slips inside. He's greeted by stony silence.

He views his father's empty couch bed facing the dark TV.

Andre tiptoes over to the couch bed and sits down on it. He sinks back, stares at the ceiling.

Loneliness presses around him.

Andre turns his head. SEES his father's soup bowl, spoon still in it, sitting on the table.

He turns his head the other way and SEES the photo of his mother, draped with black ribbon.

Andre sits up abruptly. An idea has taken hold.

He rolls to his feet and bolts out the door.

**EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - DAY**

Andre strides up to Charles Jackson's diner and goes inside.

**INT. DINER - DAY**

Cartons of food and dishes are stacked along one wall. Charles Jackson stands with a roller, painting the other wall. He turns when Andre enters.

CHARLES JACKSON  
Mendes. How you doin'? How's your dad?

ANDRE  
He's doing better.

SOUNDS of pots and pans, running water and voices, filter from the kitchen.

ANDRE  
(intense)  
I want a job.

CHARLES JACKSON  
What?

ANDRE  
I want to work here. I'll do anything. Sweep floors. Wash dishes. Anything.

CHARLES JACKSON  
Ah man.

Charles Jackson looks pained.

ANDRE  
I know you need help. The cop said so.

CHARLES JACKSON  
Working here... it ain't possible.

ANDRE  
I'll take whatever you can pay me. I don't care what.

CHARLES JACKSON  
(looks off)  
I can't hire you.

ANDRE

Why not?

CHARLES JACKSON

I just can't.

ANDRE

I swear I'll work harder than anyone. You said that a man can change for the better. That's what you told me at the hospital.

Now Charles looks really uncomfortable.

ANDRE

I'll do the work of two people, three! I'll...

From the kitchen in back, CLEVELAND steps into the room.

He's wearing an apron. His sleeves are rolled up, soaked from washing pots. He holds a dishrag.

Andre goes still.

Charles Jackson notes Andre's hate-filled glare.

CHARLES JACKSON

See? See what you doing? That's what I can't have in here. Can't have no gangbangin' and hatin'. Yeah, we all done it. I done it. But this place is about leaving that behind. It's got to start with one man. One man got to stand up, raise his hand and say "enough." Enough!

Andre looks from Cleveland to Charles Jackson, then back to Cleveland. We can see that he's torn up inside.

He can't do it.

He holds up his hands in surrender and backs out of the diner.

**EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - DAY**

Andre tramps past the dumpster. With each step, his pent-up ANGER RISES inside him like a kettle about to boil over.

He thrusts his hand into his back belt to pull out his gun.

But there's no gun there.

Andre SLAMS his fist into his hand.

ANDRE  
Son of a bitch. Ernesto... my gun.

**INT. FOOD BANK/COUNSELING CENTER - DAY**

Andre barges wild-eyed through the door. He finds Peterson and Vilma assembling holiday gift bags of food.

ANDRE  
Where's Ernesto at?

PETERSON  
Welcome. Ah, Ernesto. He left to pick up a donation. Would you like to--

Andre doesn't wait to hear the rest. He's gone.

**EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - DAY**

Andre scrambles over the dumpster ledge, roots through the construction debris. A broken wooden two-by-four... that'll work.

Andre leaps down from the dumpster, clutching the two-by-four like a club.

He hefts the weapon, whips it side to side. Eyes full of murderous rage.

And then HE LOOKS UP--

Directly in front of him is the angel image.

Andre stops, backs up slowly, fixes on it.

His jaw tightens. Tighter, until his entire body SHUDDERS. His chest heaves.

His body CONTORTS. He raises his wooden club to strike, but his arms flail uselessly.

The angel lifts off the wall and looms over Andre.

A tense struggle as Andre WRESTLES with his angel.

At last, Andre lets go. His hand opens and the two-by-four falls at his feet.

Andre stands there. Limp, wrung out.

A BEAT. He turns and walks--

**INT. DINER - DAY**

Cleveland is helping Charles Jackson with the painting when Andre returns.

Andre walks up to Cleveland and extends his hand.

Cleveland shoots a look at Charles Jackson. *Can Andre be trusted?*

Charles Jackson gives Cleveland a shrug. *Up to you, man.*

A long pause. Cleveland steps forward and grasps Andre's extended hand.

They SHAKE.

Andre turns to Charles Jackson.

ANDRE

We can work together. You got my word on that.

CHARLES JACKSON

(mulls this; then)

You got yourself a job, brother.

Andre steps over and grabs Charles Jackson's paint-smeared hand.

CHARLES JACKSON

Whoa, man. Watch the paint. Go home and get a good night's sleep. Be here tomorrow morning at seven. Prepare to work your ass off.

ANDRE

All right. All right!

He grins at Charles Jackson and Cleveland. He walks out of the diner, calls from the door--

ANDRE

Tomorrow morning.

**EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER - DAY**

Andre, giddy, laughing in disbelief, saunters down the street. A spring in his step, as if a thousand pounds of weight has been removed from his shoulders.

He throws a look at the wall to check in with the angel again.

THE ANGEL IS GONE.

Andre stops in his tracks. He stares.

The wall is blank. Just the same old cracked stucco as before, with a few faint burn-mark slashes.

Dead leaves blow across its bare surface.

But on the street, NO ONE NOTICES.

They are all going about their business:

A group wearing Santa hats led by Joseph (formerly Crackhead) sings carols at Holland King's store.

Vilma and the Patels hang festive decorations from street signs.

The Asian Women give out more noodle samples.

Andre turns and takes in the blank wall, stricken.

He looks up at Clara's window and SEES her watching him.

A tenant exits her building. Andre sprints across the street and grabs the door before it can lock shut.

**INT. CLARA'S BUILDING, FOYER - DAY**

Andre ignores the rickety elevator and bounds up the stairs.

**INT. CLARA'S BUILDING, THIRD FLOOR CORRIDOR - DAY**

Andre jogs down the corridor, tries to figure out which door would be Clara's.

One door stands slightly AJAR.

Andre nears it. He knocks gently on the door jamb. Clara opens the door wide.

CLARA  
Andre. How kind of you to visit.  
Come in.

**INT. CLARA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Clara leads Andre into a cozy, overstuffed room. The window overlooks the street... and the wall.

Close by the window sits an armchair. Clara points to a small dining table with chairs.

CLARA  
Please sit. I was just fixing a  
pot of tea.

Andre, stunned, bereft, gazes out the window at the blank wall.

Clara shuffles over with an ancient porcelain tea pot. She places cups and saucers on the table, pours tea for herself and Andre.

CLARA  
Sit!

Still dazed, Andre sits down. Clara sits across from him.

CLARA  
Milk and sugar?

ANDRE  
Uh...

CLARA  
Young men don't drink tea. Try it.

ANDRE  
(blurts out)  
It's gone. The angel.

CLARA  
Just because you can't see him  
doesn't mean he's not there.

Andre gives a derisive snort.

ANDRE  
Like God, hunh?

CLARA  
Are you being sarcastic?

Andre shrugs. Doesn't respond.

CLARA  
Drink your tea.

They both sip tea.

Andre, troubled, lowers his cup. He's clearly disturbed.

ANDRE  
Everyone said it was what caused  
the miracles. All the good things  
that have happened.

CLARA  
The "angel"?

Andre nods.

CLARA  
What do you think?

ANDRE  
(anguished)  
Me? I never saw any miracles.  
Everyone else saw them, believed in  
them. They were winning the lotto  
in miracles. But not me. No  
miracle ever happened to me.

CLARA  
Not all miracles can be seen. Some  
are very small. So small you can  
easily miss them. For example,  
here you are, sitting at my table,  
having tea with me. Isn't that a  
miracle?

Andre leans back and laughs.

ANDRE  
You're right. I never expected  
that.  
(beat)  
I guess... we're kinda friends now,  
you and me.

CLARA  
I believe we are.

Clara looks out the window. Softly--

CLARA  
 You know, sometimes, even just  
 surviving is a miracle.

Andre tips his cup and drinks the rest of his tea.

He stands.

ANDRE  
 Well. Thank you for the tea, Clara.  
 I've got to go, I've got a job.

CLARA  
 I am happy to hear that.

ANDRE  
 Talk about stuff I never expected.

Clara rises to her feet and sees Andre to the door.

CLARA  
 I wish you a very happy holiday,  
 Andre.

ANDRE  
 You too, Clara.

Clara reaches out her hand.

Andre clasps it with both of his. Glancing down, Andre SEES  
 on Clara's thin, pale forearm--

The faded image of a BLUE TATTOOED NUMBER.

Andre leaves.

**INT. CLARA'S BUILDING, FOYER - DAY**

Andre bounds down the steps, whistling *Jingle Bells*.

**EXT. CLARA'S BUILDING - DAY**

Andre exits Clara's building and starts down the street. He  
 glances up at the wall.

Over the blank surface someone has printed in small, block  
 letters:

"HOPE LIVES!"

Andre gazes at it. A half block up ahead he spots MARIA AND  
 TICO walking away.

He tries to call out--

                                  ANDRE  
                  Maria! Tic...

But his voice chokes off in his throat. They don't hear him,  
don't turn around.

They move farther away.

Andre hesitates, then he takes off, RUNNING...

RUNNING...

RUNNING...

AS FAST AS HE CAN...

And when he has almost reached them he raises his hand...

They stop and turn around to him as we...

FADE OUT.