

CARNIVORE

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Dream-like tides of shadow swirl around the wet phosphorescent streetlights that glow dimly in a desolate urban intersection. It is Fall; the misty breath of winter rises up through the sewer grates.

Huddled in a small doorway is a figure swaddled in darkness.

We hear footsteps, expensive shoes clicking against the pavement in a brisk city gait.

The figure stirs.

A well dressed man passes the doorway as the figure raises its head. It is Kuru. Kuru is dressed in rags, his jet black skin, including his face and bald head, is covered with blue tattoos.

KURU

Mister?

His hand reaches for the shadows.

KURU

Mister? You got a dollar, mister?

The man ignores him as Kuru rises behind him.

KURU

Mister-- mister, please. I'm hungry.

Walking even faster, the man continues past Kuru as he strides into the street against the blinking "Don't Walk" sign.

KURU

Mister? Mister? Hey-- Mister!

A horn explodes as a car booms past, almost hitting the man. He shrieks.

Kuru's laughter echoes from the dark.

The man looks back but Kuru is gone. He scurries across the street toward the layered concrete parking garage.

Dead red neon causes the vertical sign to read: RAGE.

INT. GARAGE STAIRWAY - NIGHT

The man climbs quickly, the metal stairs ringing, "thoom, thoom, thoom."

As he reaches his level, a whisper floats up from the garage's concrete bowels.

KURU

... mister.

The man looks over the railing but sees only shadow. He then turns and pushes through the door.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

The grey garage is damp and cold, every sound echoing as though it were inside a whale.

Nervous, the man hurries toward the only car on the level, his red SAAB. He digs out his keys and hits the remote alarm disarm.

Far away, we hear a rattling metal sound.

The man reaches the car groping for the door handle as the rattling draws closer.

He jumps into the car, locking the door and jams the key into the ignition.

Suddenly, a baseball bat arcs down so that the twisting of the key seems to shatter the windshield. The explosion of glass becomes--

INT. DINER - NIGHT

The crash and tinkle of dirty plates being thrown into a bin by a busboy clearing them from the table of an old diner.

Once the table is cleared by the quick automatic hands, the busboy wipes it down with a grey rag.

He then places a setting. A napkin. A fork and a spoon. A knife. The utensils are heavy duty stainless steel. The knife is flat like a butter knife but the end is serrated and sharp enough to cut meat.

We hold on the empty setting as if we were sitting at the table waiting to be served.

John Bunyan throws his backpack into the booth and sits down at the empty setting.

JOHN

Man, I'm starving.

John is a friendly looking fellow whose simple expression of awe and behind-the-times wardrobe immediately places him as new to the city.

The waitress steps over to the table. John smiles.

JOHN

Hi there.

She stands, pencil to pad, waiting for his order.

JOHN

How are you tonight?

She sighs.

WAITRESS

My feet hurt, my back is killing me
and I smell like a hamburger. Now what
can I get you?

JOHN

Let me see here.

He runs his finger down the menu, not the items, but the prices.

JOHN

I'll have the hamburger special.

WAITRESS

To drink?

JOHN

Water is fine.

WAITRESS

Let me give you some advice, country.
When in Rome, do like the Romans, okay?

She leaves.

John takes out twenty dollars from a small compartment in his backpack, then zips it back up.

In the background, there is a commotion that swallows the normal diner noise. John turns and we follow his gaze to a far booth where a man and a woman are having an argument.

Ophelia is a young, attractive woman who is uncomfortably overdressed, expecting to be in a more formal restaurant.

Her date, Roman Links, has the face of a weasel. His hair is slicked back into a ponytail and he is also overdressed but quite comfortable.

He holds up his hamburger to her mouth, trying to get her to taste it.

OPHELIA

No! You know I don't eat red meat!

LINKS

It ain't fucking red! Look at it! It's brown. Just try it!

OPHELIA

No!

Links slaps the burger down.

LINKS

Shit. Why go out if you never try nothing?

OPHELIA

You call this going out?

LINKS

Oh, I'm sorry, this place ain't good enough for your highness.

She tries to lower the argument.

OPHELIA

I didn't mean that.

LINKS

What the fuck difference does it make where you eat? All you ever want is a fucking salad. I take you to the fucking Ritz, you'd order a fucking salad.

OPHELIA

You have no idea what I want.

She snatches up her purse and coat.

LINKS

You ain't going anywhere until you
clean that plate.

He snatches her by the wrist. She struggles, then grabs her
fork with her free hand.

OPHELIA

Fuck you. Fuck your salad.

She stabs him with the fork just hard enough to make him let
go. Before she can get out of the booth, he catches hold of her
hair, yanking her head down.

LINKS

You foul-mouthed bitch.

He forces her face in the plate of salad and cottage cheese.

LINKS

Now eat it. Eat it!

She screams, squirming free. Her face covered with food, eyes
burning and tearing, she runs for the nearest door, the women's
bathroom.

Links calmly pushes the last over-sized bite of burger into his
mouth. He chews, glancing around.

The diner is uncomfortably quiet.

He sips the last of his coffee then politely dabs at his mouth
with his napkin before getting up.

Links walks to the women's bathroom and lightly knocks on the
door.

LINKS

Fifi? Open the door. It's Roman.

OPHELIA (V.O.)

Leave me the fuck alone.

He smashes open the door, goes inside and slams it shut.

John looks around the room at the frozen employees and patrons in the diner. Muffled behind the bathroom door, a sharp slap is heard and Ophelia cries out.

There is another loud slap.

The diner is silent, listening.

John stands and slowly walks toward the bathroom as the waitress runs for the payphone. At the door, John can hear Links talking and Ophelia crying. He knocks.

Links becomes quiet and John knocks again.

The door swings open. Links has a huge black eye.

LINKS

What the fuck?

JOHN

I heard the woman crying.

LINKS

Are you from another planet or something?

JOHN

Why don't you leave her alone?

Links' bony finger pokes John in the chest.

LINKS

Why don't you do what you're supposed to do and mind your own fucking business.

John shrugs, staring hard.

JOHN

Too late now.

LINKS

You got that right.

Links throws the first punch but John blocks it, ramming a fist into Links' gut.

Links doubles over as John grabs him, spinning him out of the bathroom, cocking another punch. He swings, mashing Links' thin pointy nose, sending him sailing onto his back.

Links scrambles to his feet, a wild man, hair splayed across his bleeding face, and grabs a knife from the nearest table.

Screaming, he rushes at John like an animal.

John jumps back but the knife slashes open his forearm. His hot blood speckles the bright white ceramic floor.

John howls and lunges at Links, seizing hold of the knife hand, knocking both of them to the ground. They thrash wildly like dogs, Links even biting John, fighting for the knife until--

Ophelia stomps on Links' arm with her high heel and snatches up the knife.

OPHELIA

Stop it. Stop it, Roman!

Both men recoil, standing. Links, his ears red hot, throws back his hair.

LINKS

This ain't over! This ain't over!

He points at his bloody nose, staring at John.

LINKS

I never forget. This dog's got a long memory! And you--

He stabs a finger at Ophelia who is still holding the knife over him.

LINKS

Pay for your own fucking salads!

They watch as he whirls, storming out of the diner. John, suddenly conscious of his bleeding arm, groans.

OPHELIA

Oh my god. You're really hurt.

JOHN

It's okay, I think.

His knees buckle a bit at the sight of so much of his own blood and he sits at one of the chrome tables.

JOHN

Maybe not.

Ophelia digs out a handful of paper napkins from a dispenser and presses them to his wound.

OPHELIA

I can't believe this, I mean Roman is a little crazy but what you did, it was really... thank you.

John looks up into her smiling face.

JOHN

You're welcome.

OPHELIA

You're not from around here, are you?

JOHN

Just off the bus, actually. I didn't know it was that obvious.

Ophelia looks up, suddenly uncomfortable that the eyes of the diner have been on them the entire time.

OPHELIA

Listen--

JOHN

John. John Bunyan.

He shakes her hand, using his left.

OPHELIA

I'm Ophelia. We really need to get you to a doctor.

JOHN

I don't really have the money. But I'll be alright.

OPHELIA

Do you have someplace to stay? Relatives?

He shakes his head.

Ophelia looks at the clump of napkins, white soaking red.

OPHELIA

Well, that arm is going to get infected if we don't take care of it.

She thinks.

OPHELIA
Come on.

EXT. THE MISSION - NIGHT

A cab pulls up outside the Mission.

The Mission is an old stone building that had once been a proud, magnificent landmark. It is now a squatting corpse; with its boarded windows and crumbling brick work, it wears an edifice of dark, urban decay.

John follows Ophelia from the cab into the alley that runs behind the Mission.

EXT. THE ALLEY - NIGHT

Ophelia pounds on the heavy steel side door.

JOHN
What is this place?

OPHELIA
It used to be something like a YMCA but it was condemned. A man named Rex Mundi somehow convinced the city to let him run a soup kitchen out of it.

She pounds on the door again.

OPHELIA
Granny? Granny?

JOHN
Your grandmother's house?

OPHELIA
No, her name is Gretchen but she told me to call her Granny. She's the cook.

From inside, we hear a faint, old voice.

GRANNY
We're closed. Come back tomorrow.

OPHELIA

Granny, wait. It's Ophelia. I have a friend here who's hurt, bleeding. I was hoping you could...

After a long pause, a series of locks and bolts click and slide before the door finally opens.

Granny is a woman who looks impossibly old, thin, and wrinkled as a willow tree but has the boundless energy of a child. Her smile is a checkerboard of lost teeth gladly given for the chocolate she constantly consumes.

OPHELIA

Granny, this is John.

Her gaze fixes immediately on the cut in his arm and her eyes bulge.

GRANNY

Oh, blood. Come in. Come in quick.

She pulls them inside and the door slams shut. We hear the locks and bolts snapping back into place.

INT. MISSION DINING HALL - NIGHT

The dining hall is a cavernous room that seems to have no walls or a ceiling, only endless rows of cheap fold out tables and chairs.

Beneath nasal-humming fluorescent light, Granny sits hunched over John's arm. Ophelia, leaning in, dabs at the wound with a wet, bloody towel.

Close on a large button hook as Granny pushes another stitch through the flaps of skin. She then pulls, drawing the skin together.

John winces.

GRANNY

Almost done. There. Just like sewing up a turkey--

She wraps it with some gauze as Ophelia hands her strips of tape.

JOHN

Feels better already.

GRANNY

Just bad enough for a nice scar and a good story.

She winks at him.

JOHN

I don't know how to thank you.

GRANNY

Oh no, no-- Well--

An idea slips into her mind and a smile creeps across her face.

GRANNY

Okay, how about a kiss?

Ophelia laughs.

OPHELIA

Granny!

GRANNY

Oh, it's not like that. Just a sweet little thank you, that's all.

JOHN

Uh, sure.

Granny leans forward, her eyes closed, lips puckered.

John puts a hand on her shoulder, leaning in, deciding to close his own eyes. The moment is painfully slow to arrive as they inch closer and closer until finally their lips touch.

Granny pops back cackling with laughter. John laughs awkwardly as she licks her lips, tasting the kiss.

GRANNY

Yes, yes, very nice. Ophelia, you ought to give them a try.

Ophelia looks up at John. There is a hint of something beyond the smile on her lips.

GRANNY

Now, can I get you kids something to eat, some chocolate, maybe? Sugar for the blood?

OPHELIA

Actually, Granny, there was something else. I brought John here because he's new to the city and has nowhere to go.

Granny is suddenly very uncomfortable.

GRANNY

Oh, you'd really have to ask the boss about that.

OPHELIA

Is Rex here tonight?

MUNDI

At last, the fair Ophelia calls.

They turn as Rex Mundi emerges from the black edges of the room.

Mundi is a dark featured man, tall and sinewy who forever seems to be cast in shadow. His clothes have an antique quality to them which includes a battered stove-pipe hat.

He smiles, gliding across the room, his eyes riveted on Ophelia.

GRANNY

Rex, I thought you'd gone out.

MUNDI

You know me, Gretchen. Always about.

Mundi takes Ophelia's hand, holding it almost to his lips. His face hovers over her, nostrils flaring, inhaling the scent of her soft skin. Then, ever so delicately, he kisses it.

MUNDI

To what do we owe this savory surprise?
Tell me, how is Ms. Shelley?

OPHELIA

She's good. I'll tell her you say hello.

Mundi nods.

OPHELIA

The reason I'm here, Rex, is for my friend, John Bunyan. He's looking for a job, a place to stay, anything.

Ophelia gestures to John but Mundi does not look away from her.

GRANNY

You did promise me a dishwasher, Rex.

Mundi considers this, turning, appraising John. He notices the bright, white gauze bandage and the small spot of blood seeping through.

MUNDI

Are we running an animal shelter now, Gretchen? Taking in every wounded stray?

OPHELIA

I brought him here, Rex. It's my fault. He was hurt because he helped me. This is all I could think of.

Mundi watches John.

MUNDI

The city is full of cheap hotels.

OPHELIA

He doesn't have much money.

MUNDI

Then why not bring him home?

Ophelia doesn't know how to answer, leaving an awkward silence.

JOHN

Listen, it's okay. I don't need any charity.

MUNDI

I am not offering charity. Charity has no place here.

JOHN

I thought this was a soup kitchen.

MUNDI

Oh it is. But it is not run out of charity. There is a bargain, a contract if you will. I offer a bowl of stew in exchange for an appetite.

John is confused.

MUNDI

This is my mission, you see. To teach those that will listen that no one need ever be hungry.

He has a voice that seems to weave the words around his audience.

MUNDI

Two percent of the world's population controls ninety percent of the world's wealth. It sounds obscene, doesn't it? Yet if you were to meet one of the two percenters you would find them quite at ease with it. How do they do it?

His black eyes flash like the spinning watch of a hypnotist.

MUNDI

What is it that they whisper to themselves when they open a closet full of fur coats, or a garage full of sports cars? How do they justify the consumption of so much while so many have so little? It is painfully simple. They may equivocate, they may obfuscate, but deep down the rich know exactly what I know. They know that this world is cruel, it is unfair and uncaring and its single guiding principle is dog eat dog.

OPHELIA

Gee, you're as cheery as ever, Rex.

MUNDI

Perhaps I should apologize for my candor.

JOHN

Not necessary.

MUNDI

In that case, would it be a fair question to ask you what brought you to our vanity fair?

JOHN

Your what?

MUNDI

To the big city?

JOHN

Oh. Just looking for a job.

MUNDI

Is that all? You seek nothing but a paycheck? You have no dreams? No aspiration?

JOHN

Well... no. I like to cook. I hope one day to open a restaurant.

MUNDI

Ahh, ambition. That is something I can understand. Understand the dreams and you understand the man. Would you agree with that?

JOHN

Yeah, I think so.

MUNDI

Let me tell you, Mr. Bunyan, that I am many things to many people but I am first and always a pragmatist. My mission is growing and Gretchen reminds me that I am in need of hands. I can offer you the bedroom above the kitchen and all of Gretchen's stew you can eat in exchange for... your hand.

John is surprised by the offer, Mundi extending his hand.

MUNDI

We have a deal?

JOHN

We have a deal.

They shake left hands.

Behind them, the door to dining room opens and clangs shut. For a moment, silhouetted against the kitchen's light we see a very large man.

MUNDI

Ah, Kuru. Come, someone for you to meet.

Kuru moves into the room and when he reaches the light, we see that it is the man with blue tattoos.

MUNDI

Kuru, this is John, our new hand.

Kuru ignores John, whispering something in Mundi's ear.

MUNDI

I must be off. Business. Granny will show you the room, John. Ophelia--

He tips his hat.

MUNDI

It is always a pleasure.

Together, Kuru and Mundi leave.

GRANNY

I'll go find you some bedding, John.
Bye now, Ophelia. Don't be such a stranger.

Ophelia and John are alone again.

OPHELIA

I should be going too.

JOHN

Listen, do you think-- I mean, would you mind--

OPHELIA

Would you like my phone number?

JOHN

Yes. Very much, yes.

She hands him a business card she already had in her hand. It reads: Slimage Surgicenter.

OPHELIA

It's where I work. I wrote my home number on the back. Call me.

JOHN

I will.

He watches her leave then regards his increasingly throbbing arm, the spot of blood growing wider.

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

John stands in the door frame of the small, dark room.

It is bare of furniture except for a twin-sized metal framed bed and a broken chair. A layer of dust covers the floor like moss. A naked bulb hangs above John's head.

He tugs on the pull chain but the bulb is burned out.

INT. JOHN'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

John throws a wall switch and a buzzing strip-light flickers on. Cancerous spots of mildew grow everywhere on the dirty tub, shower curtain and tile.

John urinates and flushes the toilet. Then, leaving the light on, he edges back into his bedroom.

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

John sits on the bed, the metal springs shrieking beneath his weight. He takes off his shoes and lays back, pulling the single blanket over him.

After a long beat, we begin to become aware of faint noises from deep within the building; pipes groaning, the distant hiss of a radiator. It is though the building were trying to digest something.

John twists, turning away from the sounds.

INT. APARTMENT STAIRWAY - NIGHT

Crouched in the shadows behind the banister, Roman Links squats, hiding, watching Ophelia's door from the landing above. His breathing is labored, open-mouthed as both nostrils are stuffed with wads of bloody congealing cotton. Below, the lobby door opens and closes.

Links presses against the spindles to watch as Ophelia climbs the stairs and crosses to her apartment.

Silently, he descends the stairs, creeping towards her as she pulls out her keys and unlocks the door.

A stair creaks.

Ophelia looks back over her shoulder and sees Links. She screams as he lunges, grabbing at her coat but she rips free of him, squeezing through her apartment door and locking it behind her.

LINKS

Fi! Let me in!

He pounds on the door.

OPHELIA

What do you want? What are you doing here?

LINKS

I didn't mean to scare you, Fifi. I'm really sorry about what happened.

He leans against the door, mock pouting.

LINKS

I went a little crazy, that's all. Please, Fi, open the door. I need you.

OPHELIA

What happened to, "buy your own fucking salads?"

LINKS

You know I love it when you use that word.

OPHELIA

Yeah? Then fuck off!

Ophelia feels the steel dinner knife still in her pocket.

LINKS

Bitch.

She rips out the knife, holding it up as if to stab him.

OPHELIA

Don't call me that!

LINKS

Fifi in heat.

OPHELIA

You little prick.

LINKS
Fifi-- Come!

OPHELIA
Goddamn you!

LINKS
Good poodle.

OPHELIA
Stop it!

LINKS
Pretty poodle.

She screams, jamming the knife into the door. An inch of the blade splinters through, just missing Links' neck.

Links steps back, laughing.

OPHELIA
I'm calling the police.

LINKS
I saw you leave with that guy. I saw
you take him to that flophouse.

OPHELIA
What? You were following me?

He pulls out a small plastic folder that is labeled "Master series 1001-2001." Inside are five skeleton keys of which Links draws the first.

LINKS
It's killing me, Fi. Just thinking
about you and somebody else. It's
eating me up.

She hears the first key go into the lock. The lock jiggles as he twists it back and forth but it does not open.

He rips the key out, pulls another and jams it in. Ophelia backs away as he works it against the lock.

Another key is pushed in, its teeth fighting tumblers. Ophelia yanks the knife out of the door.

OPHELIA
Roman!

LINKS
I need you, Fifi.

He slides out the last key.

LINKS
You're mine. My Fifi.

He shoves it in, the teeth sawing into the keyhole.

OPHELIA
Roman!

The lock clicks and the door floats open, stopping lightly against the chain lock. Ophelia holds her breath.

After a beat, she hears his footsteps fade down the stairs. Ophelia leans against the door, still clutching the knife.

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

John sits up in his bed, hair heavy with sweat stuck to the side of his head. Dehydration carries him to the plip, plip, plipping bathroom sink.

As he rises, we see that his sheets are soaked with blood.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

John squints at his bleary eyed reflection, turns on the water, and reaches for a glass.

The glass is knocked from the sink top and shatters on the floor.

JOHN
Oh great--

John looks down and immediately sees why he broke the glass. Where his hand had been is now a bloody, bandaged stump.

JOHN
Oh god! My-- My hand! Where's my hand?!

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM

His body heaving in panic, John searches frantically around the room, under the bed, behind the radiator.

JOHN
Where is it? Oh god, not my hand. I
need that!

He turns for the hall.

INT. KITCHEN

John finds Rex Mundi in the gleaming steel and tile kitchen making himself a sandwich.

JOHN
Rex!

Mundi smiles warmly from behind a mountain of strange condiments, meats, and produce.

MUNDI
Hello, John. Care to join me in a
midnight snack?

Mundi drags a serrated knife across a loaf of French bread.

JOHN
No, Rex. My hand-- Look! My hand!

MUNDI
Oh my, I see.

JOHN
Someone-- Someone stole my hand. I woke
up and it was gone!

Mundi butters the two long slices of bread with clumpy wads of mayonnaise, licking his fingers, chuckling slightly.

MUNDI
Relax, John, relax. Can't you see
you're only dreaming?

John stares, confused.

JOHN
What? Then-- then this isn't real?

Mundi begins to pile things onto his sandwich.

MUNDI

Real? Oh no, John. I didn't say that. Dreams are more real, more true than life itself.

He looks up.

MUNDI

They are the sum of us, John. Secrets whispered while we slumber, revealing who we are. And are sometimes all that we are.

Mundi returns to fixing his snack.

MUNDI

You say you are missing something. Your innocence? Lost childhood, perhaps? Any sexual shortcomings of late?

He smiles at John.

MUNDI

Have you, maybe John, run off and sold your soul to the devil?

John begins to feel a sickness in his stomach.

MUNDI

Perhaps, though, the answer is a more literal one.

Mundi closes the top of his sandwich.

MUNDI

A hand which is a sandwich turns a man into a meal.

He lifts the sandwich and John sees his hand between the two pieces of bread.

MUNDI

Care for a bite?

He takes a huge bite.

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM

John's eyes crack open. He rubs his hand, then his face.

JOHN
What happened to counting sheep?

He rolls over.

INT. MISSION KITCHEN - DAY

Close as a pile of raw liver drops into a deep metal pot sizzling with onions and yellow fat.

Granny stirs the reddish brown meat into the mixture, then ladles in another cup of melted fat. As the steam blossoms up, she inhales deeply.

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM - DAY

John, still asleep, begins to smell Granny's cooking wafting up through the floorboards. The smell is suffocating, as if his mouth were suddenly stuffed with liver and onions.

His eyes pop open.

INT. MISSION KITCHEN - DAY

Granny pours a mound of salt into her hand and begins to sprinkle it into the pot when John, stiff and disheveled, stumbles into the kitchen.

GRANNY
Morning. Stomach got you up, did it?

Granny scoops up a big spoonful.

GRANNY
Liver and onions. Base for any good stew. It's real revitalizing.

She offers the steaming meat to him, blowing on it between her teeth.

John swallows hard, trying to keep his stomach from turning on him.

JOHN
No thanks. Not just yet.

She dumps it back into the pot.

GRANNY
Suit yourself.

They both turn as the basement door slams open and Otto enters carrying a large sack of flour over his shoulder.

Otto is the Mission's dwarf-like butcher. He is a terribly wide man with enormous hands that he is constantly wiping on his bloodstained apron.

GRANNY
Oh John, this is Otto. He handles the goods and deliveries and does all of our butcher work.

Otto wipes his hand before they shake.

He lets the bag of flour drop to the ground and crosses back to the basement door, giving John a friendly wink.

JOHN
You butcher your own meat here?

GRANNY
It's a lot cheaper that way.

John watches as Otto shuts the basement door behind him. After a beat, we hear the click of a lock snapping into place.

EXT. THE MISSION - DAY

John is wandering outside the building, exploring his new surroundings. It does not look quite as ominous in the sunlight.

John turns, following a strange noise around back.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

A large stray dog is chewing open some plastic garbage bags piled near a dumpster.

JOHN
Hey boy. Find anything good?

As John edges closer, the dog looks up, revealing his large canines.

John freezes as the growl grows to a bark. The dog coils ready to attack when the back door slaps open.

OTTO

Hey!

Otto rushes right at the dog.

OTTO

Get out of here! Go on, get!

The dog whines, bolting down the alley as Otto turns to John.

OTTO

You alright? Didn't bite you, did he?

JOHN

No.

OTTO

Yeah, mostly they're alright, even friendly considering. But when they're hungry, you got to be careful.

INT. MISSION KITCHEN - NIGHT

Wearing heavy, yellow latex gloves, John scrubs the enormous silver pot Granny had been cooking in earlier. There are stacks of soup bowls beside him, perhaps three hundred of them, already cleaned. John rinses the pot and racks it. It has been a long night.

He opens the door and sees the bowl of stew Granny left for him. It is still hot.

John smells it. It smells good. He dips a finger into it and samples it. Surprised, it tastes very good.

He grabs one of the newly washed spoons.

INT. MISSION DINING HALL - NIGHT

The only lit strip of fluorescent light hangs above the far table where Granny sits, smoking a cigarette.

John sits down with his bowl across from her.

GRANNY

All done then?

JOHN
It wasn't too bad. Those bowls were pretty clean.

She smiles, nodding.

GRANNY
They love every last drop.

JOHN
Who are they?

GRANNY
The poor. Homeless. Rex calls them the invisible people.

JOHN
The same people every night?

GRANNY
When we started, we had thirty to forty. Now we get two hundred.

John spoons up his first taste of the stew. Granny watches as he blows on it and slips it into his mouth.

GRANNY
How do you like it?

He chews a juicy piece of the meat, hot in his mouth.

JOHN
It's good. It's really good.

She seems as if she's about to start laughing.

JOHN
What kind of meat is this? Veal?

GRANNY
Whatever's donated. Veal, chicken, beef, lamb, rabbit even.

John samples it again, trying to identify the different ingredients.

JOHN
Garlic, rosemary, basil. Lots of pepper but--

He swishes the masticated stew over and around his tongue.

JOHN

There's something I can't put my finger on.

She smiles again.

JOHN

What else is in it?

GRANNY

Oh, a little bit of everything.

JOHN

Come on, Granny. A secret recipe?

GRANNY

Everyone's got a secret.

JOHN

I don't have any secrets.

GRANNY

You do. You just can't keep them to yourself.

Granny stares off into the dark edges of the room, exhaling a cottony cloud of smoke. John's chewing fills the silence.

He looks up.

GRANNY

I remember when I came to the city. I was young and poor with little ones.

JOHN

You had kids?

GRANNY

A long time ago, Rex helped me. Like he helped you.

She smiles her checkerboard smile.

John fills his spoon with a big chunk of the stringy stew meat, but stops remembering something.

JOHN
Oh, Granny, do you think you could loan
me a quarter? I'm good for it.

INT. OPHELIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ophelia, in bed, awakes and reaches to answer the ringing
phone.

OPHELIA
Hello?

JOHN
Ophelia? Hi, it's John.

John leans against the wall, talking on an old rotary pay
phone.

OPHELIA
John?

JOHN
Um, yeah. We kind of met the other
night...

Ophelia sits up, rubbing her eyes.

JOHN
Over dinner.

She smiles.

OPHELIA
Oh, hi. How are you? How's your arm?

JOHN
It's okay. Uh, did I wake you? I can
call another time.

OPHELIA
No, no, it's okay. You saved me again,
actually.

JOHN
Huh?

OPHELIA
I was-- I was having the weirdest
dream.

JOHN

You too, huh? I think I'm punishing myself for not getting a chance to thank you properly.

OPHELIA

Oh really? I think I should be thanking you.

He smiles.

JOHN

Okay. Then thank me by letting me cook you dinner.

She laughs.

OPHELIA

Sounds easy enough.

JOHN

Tomorrow? Nine o'clock?

OPHELIA

Do you mind if it's vegetarian?

JOHN

How could I forget that?

OPHELIA

Tomorrow then.

He lingers, savoring her goodbye.

JOHN

Bye.

He hangs up, a grin spreading wide on his mouth.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

We race with a pounding roar of drums, down an empty street, around a corner and into a parking lot.

Faster and faster we glide across the cracked concrete which is awash in the bright overhead kliegs toward the only car in the lot, a red Mercedes.

30

We circle around the car, the drums at their most fevered pitch and we see the driver's door open, the window smashed.

It hangs open, the only sound is the whining electric warning that the keys have been left in the ignition. On the car seat, we see a splintered broken gold inlay cane.

EXT. PARK STREET - NIGHT

The whine becomes the metal squeak of a broken shopping cart.

A small figure pushes the cart which is piled high with green garbage bags down a deserted sidewalk, a cigarette hanging between her wrinkled fingers.

Close on the broken wheel as blood trickles from the dark load down the chrome frame.

INT. JOHN'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

A steady rhythm of droplets drip from the leaking faucet against the soft echoing digestive sounds from the building's pipes.

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM

John, unable to sleep, rolls up from his bed in frustration.

INT. MISSION KITCHEN - NIGHT

The refrigerator door opens, frigid light spilling into the dark kitchen.

Inside, there is a massive bowl of raw meat. John groans. He turns, reaching for a cupboard but pauses when he notices the basement door is ajar.

With one hand, he gently pushes and it creaks open. Down the uneven steps, he can make out a light at the bottom.

JOHN

Otto?

He steps down.

JOHN

Otto, are you down here?

He looks around, then starts down the stairs.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

It is the old men's locker room. Except for a sparse few hooded electrician's lamps hung from the web of pipes overhead, it is dark.

John slowly moves into the labyrinth of rusting metal lockers. The red paint, cracked and peeling, covers the locker doors like frozen flame.

He creeps down the aisles past a bank of old salvaged refrigerators and freezers most of which are wrapped and padlocked with heavy iron chains.

INT. WORKSHOP - NIGHT

On the pegboard, behind a six foot chopping block, John sees various butchering tools; hacksaws, curved bone saws, and rows of glinting, metal cleavers and paring knives.

An old white radio with a bent hanger for an antenna sits on a workbench beneath the peg board, its knobs crusty with smears left by bloody fiddling fingers.

A layer of sawdust covers the floor, much of it clumped together with dried blood.

On a coat hook, John sees Otto's apron.

JOHN

Otto?

At the end of the room, a dirty, clear plastic curtain hangs in front of what appears to be the showers.

He edges toward it and slides back the curtain. The room is pitch black.

INT. THE SHOWERS

After a moment, John finds the pull chain for the naked bulb.

In the center of the room, hanging from the ceiling are several blood encrusted meathooks. Web-like cracks have formed in the large tiles and green furry mold grows in the grout lines. Near the door, John sees a pair of black, heavy rubber boots

The room reeks of rot. John catches the odor from an old metal pail and mop in the corner of the room.

Grabbing hold of the wooden handle, he lifts the mop from the pail, covering his nose.

There is a nasty wet, sucking noise as the tangled mop strings separate from the scum at the bottom. In the light, he sees the mop is caked with thick, red-brown gore.

Sickened, he drops it back into the bucket, then turns suddenly, hearing something from the kitchen.

John rushes for the stairs.

INT. MISSION KITCHEN - NIGHT

John slips up from the basement.

Mundi stands in the open back door, looking out, a silhouette against the alley flood lights. From outside, we hear low, animal-like growling.

Mundi reaches to the counter where there is a small pile of meat in unwrapped butcher brown paper. He takes a piece of the red meat and tosses it outside.

We hear something scarf it up as John silently backs out through the stairwell door.

Mundi smiles almost imperceptibly as he tosses another chunk of meat out.

MUNDI

Good boy. Good boy.

In the alley, we can make out the unmistakable forms of several naked men and women, hunched protectively over the meat. As they devour it, their bare skin glows sickly under the yellow alley light.

INT. SLIMAGE SURGICENTER - DAY

Close on a white Persian cat, purring as it is stroked and scratched by a woman with long, red nails.

Ms. Sedier is an extremely wealthy, older woman sitting alone in the clinic's waiting room. Nestled in a chair with her mink coat over her shoulders, she seems very much like her over-fed cat who sits in her lap.

The clinic is stylishly furnished; a cross between a modeling agency and a nautilus health club.

Ophelia enters from her receptionist's office, smiling brightly, carrying a clipboard.

OPHELIA

We're almost ready, Ms. Sedier. I just need you to sign a few more things.

She sits in the chair next to Ms. Sedier, pointing out the lines that require a signature.

OPHELIA

That's a beautiful cat.

MS. SEDIER

Felicity.

OPHELIA

Here and here.

Ms. Sedier continues to sign.

MS. SEDIER

They say that animals love unconditionally. No matter what I did or what I looked like, Felicity will always love me. Do you have a pet, Ophelia?

OPHELIA

No, Ms. Sedier.

MS. SEDIER

Everyone should. Do you know Mrs. Kovit? She has a Pekinese. She feeds it caviar. Can you imagine?

She hands the clipboard back to Ophelia.

MS. SEDIER

Don't you find it funny that some pets live better than some people?

Ophelia doesn't know how to answer.

In the background we hear a noise coming through the walls from another room in the clinic. It is a high-pitched whine like that of a vacuum cleaner.

OPHELIA

Well, I think we're ready. Would you follow me, please?

She leads the older woman through a series of doors to--

INT. SHELLEY M. PERDUE'S OFFICE - DAY

Ophelia opens the door allowing Ms. Sedier to enter. Through the opening we see Shelley M. Perdue rising from her desk, moving to greet Ms. Sedier.

Shelley M. Perdue is a mature looking woman, unnaturally, cosmetically perfect. Everything about her is slick with glamour magazine gloss.

SHELLEY M. PERDUE

Evelyn, it's so good to see you again.

They embrace as Ophelia is about to close the door.

MS. SEDIER

Did you ask her?

SHELLEY M. PERDUE

Oh, Ophelia, of course you know Ms. Sedier is here for a treatment, but she's a bit nervous after the last one and she asked if it would be possible to have Felicity nearby.

She is moving closer to Ophelia.

SHELLEY M. PERDUE

I spoke with Dr. Manno and he said that it would not be a problem so would you be a dear and hold the kitty-cat? You know I would myself if it wasn't for my allergy.

Ophelia does not want to do it. Shelley M. Perdue takes hold of her arm.

SHELLEY M. PERDUE

It won't take long and I'll mind the front desk. I really do appreciate this and so does Ms. Sedier.

She smiles, her teeth sharp and pearly white.

Ophelia looks at Ms. Sedier and her cat.

MS. SEDIER
We hate to be apart.

INT. CLINIC OPERATING ROOM - DAY

Ms. Sedier is laying on the table, surrounded by several nurses and the cosmetic surgeon, all dressed in white and wearing masks.

Everything in the room looks sterile and crowded with high-tech machines attached to stainless-steel cables and hoses.

Chrome-plated scalpels and other operating instruments are spread neatly like a dinner setting.

Ms. Sedier is wearing a small hospital gown that leaves her lower buttocks and legs exposed. Her flesh is moon-white except for her face which is still covered with make-up.

Ophelia, cradling the cat, watches from nearby as the operation begins.

We hear again the whirring of the vacuum cleaner but now it is very loud.

Ophelia sees the large clear container of the liposuction machine as it begins to fill with white, viscous wads of cellulite.

INT. MISSION KITCHEN - NIGHT

A large hunk of butter is thrown into a heavy skillet and begins to melt. John flashes a large knife over an onion, doing his best Benny Hana imitation.

He carries his cutting board over to the large skillet and scrapes the various vegetables into the hot, melted butter. As he turns up the burner, he looks at the clock. It reads 7:30.

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

John steps from the shower, drying himself in the swirling steam and moves toward the sink to shave.

He wipes a circle in the fogged mirror and we see his face lathered with shaving cream. Dragging a cheap disposable razor across his cheek, he nicks himself.

Close on the blood as it trickles down the white shaving foam.

He touches the blood. There is something about it. The redness. Something he has never noticed before.

Slowly, John brings his fingers up to his nose. Then to the tip of his tongue.

He looks up at his reflection as though his name were just called. The steam has refogged the mirror somewhat, his image blurred.

INT. MISSION KITCHEN - NIGHT

Steam wisps up from a rich burbling spaghetti sauce.

There is a soft knock on the back door. John throws it open.

OPHELIA

I'm so sorry I'm late.

JOHN

What? Oh no, no. You're... perfect.

She smiles from the bottom step.

OPHELIA

I'm starving.

JOHN

Good. Everything tastes better when you're hungry.

He takes her hand, leading her in and closes the door.

INT. MISSION DINING HALL - NIGHT

John and Ophelia walk towards the far dining table.

It is romantically set, including candlelight. The candles, propped up in tin cans, lean at strange angles.

OPHELIA

John, this is so nice.

He helps her into a chair and lifts a large jug of wine to fill their glasses.

JOHN

Only the freshest wine for the lady.

She looks at the cans and laughs, finding them terribly cute.

JOHN

It's the best I could do on my budget.

OPHELIA

Oh no, no. They're perfect. Everything is.

Close on a candlestick as it suddenly begins to collapse, as though superheated, time-lapsing into a melted, multitiered globular pool of slag wax.

Dinner is almost over. They are still nibbling at the tangle of saucy red noodles on their plates. The wine bottle is nearly empty and they both are feeling quite warm.

OPHELIA

When I was little, I wanted to be a dancer. My mother sent me to a special school one summer. It was horrible. The instructor would weigh us every Monday in front of the entire class. Whoever weighed the most won the piggy prize and had to wear a little piggy nose for the rest of the week.

JOHN

Yikes. That's pretty horrible.

OPHELIA

Yeah, but in a way, I was grateful because I learned real quickly what dancing was all about. It wasn't tutus and ballerina shoes. It's a brutally competitive world where you learn to torture your body to survive.

JOHN

And how long did that take to learn?

OPHELIA

Eight weeks. One summer. Tutu buried in the closet. Never saw daylight again.

JOHN

Wise woman.

OPHELIA

Not wise enough. I went from wanting to be a dancer to wanting to be a model. Not a big difference. Took me much longer to figure that out. After high school, I came here to the city. I went to all the agencies. They liked me but everyone told me I needed "work." My nose, my chin, my breasts, my hips. They all needed work.

JOHN

You mean surgery?

OPHELIA

Yeah. That's how I met Shelley. I was about to get a nose job and I just broke down. I couldn't do it. She talked to me for a long time. I guess she liked me 'cause she offered me a job.

JOHN

Do you like working there?

OPHELIA

Sometimes it does feel like we're helping people. Other times... I don't know.

She drains her glass and he refills it.

OPHELIA

What about you? Have you always wanted to open a restaurant?

JOHN

I don't think so. But I've always loved cooking.

OPHELIA

Well, you are an incredible cook. Dinner was delicious.

JOHN

Thank you.

OPHELIA

Oh god, speaking of dinner. look what I found in my pocket the other day.

She pulls out the knife from the diner.

OPHELIA

I don't know why I kept it.

JOHN

Uh oh. I think my arm is having a flashback.

OPHELIA

God, if what happened to you happened to me, I'd have been on the next bus back home.

JOHN

No. I can't go home.

OPHELIA

Why?

JOHN

I'm from this small town. Total Hicksville. Unless you've been there you can't imagine it. Every day is the same. The people are the same. Nothing ever happens. Living there is like being dead. It's Night of the Living Dead, but it's night and day and night and day of the living dead.

OPHELIA

What about your parents?

JOHN

Living dead.

OPHELIA

They can't be that bad.

JOHN

My parents and I never really got along. We had a falling out when I was young.

OPHELIA

How young?

JOHN

Seven.

Ophelia laughs, almost choking on a sip of wine.

JOHN

I found this duckling with a broken wing so I decided to bring him home and take care of him.

OPHELIA

Aw.

JOHN

He was really my first pet. I took him everywhere which was funny because I'd always see my Dad come back from hunting and he'd have all these ducks hanging upside down from his belt. I figured that was the way you carried ducks. So I'd loop some string around his feet and hang him from my belt.

OPHELIA

Didn't he bite you?

JOHN

No, he would just fall back and his wings would spread loose and he'd dangle there until I let him down.

OPHELIA

The poor thing.

JOHN

It gets worse. We had a rule on our farm that no animal could have a name, for obvious reasons. But that duck was my best friend. So in secret I gave him a name. I called him Jesus.

OPHELIA

Jesus?

JOHN

I was just a kid. Anyway, after about a year, Jesus got nice and fat and one day when I came home from school and I smelled something cooking--

OPHELIA

Oh no.

JOHN

Oh yes. From then on I never liked school and I never trusted my parents.

OPHELIA
That is so sad.

JOHN
You know what the worst, the weirdest
part of it is? I ate dinner that night.

OPHELIA
You ate poor Jesus?

JOHN
I had to. They made me. Even stood over
me while I cleaned my plate. But Jesus
sure did taste good.

She studies him with the kind of intensity that is only
possible after consuming large quantities of alcohol.

JOHN
What?

OPHELIA
I'm trying to figure out why I'm so
attracted to you since you don't have a
hairy back.

JOHN
You like hairy backs?

OPHELIA
No, I hate hairy backs but I always
seem to end up with men that have hairy
backs.

JOHN
What about hairy palms?

She laughs.

JOHN
I'm glad my back isn't hairy.

OPHELIA
So am I.

The urge to touch, to feel, to kiss is over-powering,
magnetically so, pulling them up from the table to each other,
their lips snapping tightly as they embrace.

She tears open his buttoned shirt and reaches for his jeans.

Every action seems to drive them farther, each desire leading to another. He lifts her, sitting her on the table, right where he had been eating. He pushes her dress up past her thighs as she leans back on her hands, dizzy with alcohol.

We watch her reaction, lit by the flickering candles, as he pulls off her underwear. A smile creeps across her face, then a short giggle.

OPHELIA

He feeds me, then eats me.

We see them from the dark edges of the room. Her thighs are wrapped around his head when she suddenly feels a chill.

OPHELIA

John, wait...

He looks up over her leg. Looks around, then up at her. They laugh guiltily as he lifts her up.

We hold on the table listening to their laughter fade as they run for the door.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALL - NIGHT

Moving down the hall towards John's door, we hear the sound of violent love making. It sounds almost bestial.

The door opens, as the sounds rise to their most desperate and wild and we see the lovers sound asleep, the sheet wound about their naked intertwined bodies.

But the wild animal sounds continue, as we move over the bed to the open window. The sounds are coming from outside, rising up from the alley.

They grow more and more vicious, until--

A scream.

John lurches up.

Ophelia stirs slightly, as he eases from her side and goes to the window.

Outside in the alley, he sees two stray dogs savagely fighting over a large bone. White, against the dark fur of the dogs, its strange shape catches John's eye. It is a bone he has never seen before.

After a moment, he closes the window, shutting out the noise.

EXT. THE CITY SCAPE - DAWN

The sun has begun to rise.

INT. OPHELIA'S APARTMENT - DAWN

Ophelia enters, closing the door behind her. She is very disheveled, her dress not zipped all the way up, still very tipsy and smiling. Obviously, she had a good time.

Then she hears something. Something inside her apartment. It is still and dark inside, the orange of dawn hardly visible behind the drawn blinds.

OPHELIA
Who's in here?

Her heart pounds as she reaches for the nearest light.

OPHELIA
I have a gun.

The light clicks on, a metal desk lamp, and she shines it into the darkness. She lets out a scream when the improvised spot finds--

Roman Links, hunched strangely, standing on her futon bed. He looks over his shoulder, his broken nose is taped up, his eyes wide like an animal frozen in the headlights of a car.

OPHELIA
Shit, Roman! What--

LINKS
Bitch!

He charges at her and she sees that he is naked under his long black leather coat.

LINKS
Bitch! Filthy, fucking bitch!

She rips the lamp from its cord, the light flashing blue as it dies.

As he lunges at her, she swings the lamp violently, catching him on the side of the head, knocking him over a chair.

Links scurries wildly to his feet and races for the door, still screaming.

She slams the door behind him and slides the heavy iron deadbolt. She nearly crumbles with relief, but realizes something is wrong with her apartment.

There is a terrible smell.

INT. MISSION KITCHEN - DAY

Granny stirs up a mixture of liver and onions as John enters, a smile stretched from ear to ear. His hair is pointing in various gravity defying positions.

JOHN

That smells good.

GRANNY

And a good morning to you, John.

John smiles.

GRANNY

I saw your company leaving this morning.

JOHN

You did? Was she all right?

GRANNY

Oh yes. Wearing an equally ridiculous smile.

John smiles even harder, almost blushing.

JOHN

Man, I'm starving.

GRANNY

Worked up an appetite, did we? Maybe you'd like a taste?

She scoops up a spoonful.

JOHN

Right now, I could eat anything.

She offers him the steaming helping of meat and wet onions and he opens wide.

It's hot and he chews carefully. He is again surprised by the richness and flavor. Rolling it in his mouth, the liver seems to melt away, his face contorting orgasmically.

Granny smiles, holding her spoon like some bizarre advertisement.

INT. OPHELIA'S APARTMENT - DAY

In the background, we can hear a vigorous scrubbing sound. The phone begins to ring but the scrubbing does not stop.

The answering machine clicks on.

JOHN (V.O.)
When I woke up I was thinking maybe it
was all a dream, but then I found, well
not exactly a glass slipper...

INT. MISSION STAIRWELL - DAY

John, on the pay phone, is holding her bright pink panties. Smiling, he smells them, as if they were a country morning.

JOHN (V.O.)
But this is not your typical fairy
tale.

INT. OPHELIA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Ophelia, on her hands and knees, is wearing rubber gloves, scrubbing the carpet with a heavy brush and sudsy water.

JOHN (V.O.)
Perhaps I should scour the countryside,
trying every butt, searching for the
perfect fit.

She drops the brush into the bucket and grabs the phone.

OPHELIA
Hello, John, I'm home.

JOHN (V.O.)

Hey! I called work but they said you weren't coming in. Not hungover, I hope?

OPHELIA

Not exactly.

JOHN (V.O.)

Are you okay?

OPHELIA

I don't know if I want to talk about it.

JOHN (V.O.)

Oh no. Was it Roman?

There is a long beat.

OPHELIA

Yes.

JOHN (V.O.)

Shit. What happened?

Her voice is very faint.

OPHELIA

He just scared me. When I came in he...

JOHN (V.O.)

What? He did what?

OPHELIA

He pissed all over my apartment.

JOHN (V.O.)

Ophelia, just tell me where he lives--

OPHELIA

No, John. I called the police. They're looking for him. I had the landlord change the locks. I don't want it to get any worse.

JOHN (V.O.)

Okay, I understand. But if you need anything. Anything.

OPHELIA

Thanks. John, I had a really beautiful time last night.

JOHN (V.O.)

So did I.

OPHELIA

Call me tomorrow.

JOHN (V.O.)

I will.

INT. SLIMAGE SURGICENTER - DAY

Ms. Sedier is again in the waiting room. She sits awkwardly as her thighs, buttocks, and abdomen are encased by heavy medical binders used to patch the liposuction punctures.

There is a tension to her body as though she were afraid that motion might cause some seepage, some meaty human juice to leak out of the sieve-like holes.

OPHELIA

Are you all right, Ms. Sedier?

MS. SEDIER

You're smiling today.

OPHELIA

Am I? I guess I am.

MS. SEDIER

Is it a boy?

Her smile brightens.

OPHELIA

Yes.

MS. SEDIER

Of course. I remember that smile. It feels wonderful while it lasts but that's the trouble with smiles, they never do.

The smile fades.

OPHELIA

And how do you wish to pay for this visit?

MS. SEDIER

By check as usual.

OPHELIA

There was a problem with your last check.

MS. SEDIER

I've already spoken to Shelley about that.

OPHELIA

Fine.

MS. SEDIER

Can I ask you something, dear? How much do you weigh?

OPHELIA

One hundred eighteen.

MS. SEDIER

A size seven?

OPHELIA

Six.

MS. SEDIER

I once weighed one hundred four pounds, wore a size four and had an eighteen inch waist just like Scarlett O'Hara.

She leans back and smiles.

INT. CLINIC OPERATING ROOM - DAY

Doctor Manno positions Ms. Sedier's lower legs in the stirrups of the adjustable operating table.

Ms. Sedier stares up past the bright lights at the mirrored ceiling as the anesthetic is fed into the air mask.

DR. MANNO

Okay, Ms. Sedier. From one hundred.

MS. SEDIER
100, 99, 98, 97...

She sucks at the gas, her thoughts drifting up to the mirror.

MS. SEDIER
95... 90... Mirror, mirror on the
wall...

Outside the observation window, Ophelia pets the fat white cat.
The sudden vacuum whir makes the cat cry out.

OPHELIA
Shhh, it's okay.

The cat continues to cry and as Dr. Manno goes to work,
Felicity squirms and jumps free.

OPHELIA
Felicity!

She follows the darting cat who runs straight to Shelly's
office.

INT. SHELLEY'S OFFICE - DAY

The cat stops, circling a pair of high heels, its white tail
curving up the perfect calf of Shelley Perdue.

SHELLEY
Ophelia.

OPHELIA
I'm sorry, Ms. Perdue, the cat got
spooked.

SHELLEY
I'm fine. Come here. Look.

She is standing at the wall adjacent to the reception area. The
two-way mirror behind Ophelia's desk allows Shelley to look
into the waiting area while maintaining the privacy of her
office.

SHELLEY
Is that him? The one you brought to the
mission?

Ophelia looks out the glass and sees John talking to Mimi, one
of Shelley's stunning beauty technicians.

OPHELIA
Yes, John.

SHELLEY
He's adorable.

Ophelia smiles again.

OPHELIA
He is.

She starts to turn for the door.

SHELLEY
Wait. Watch. I want you to see
something. Look at his eyes.

Mimi smiles at John, batting her luscious false eyelashes. John jokes with her, smiling boyishly.

Finishing a report, she stands to return a file to an open cabinet.

The drawer is very low. She bends. He watches.

SHELLEY
Yes. There they are. Eyes like that
never lie.

Ophelia's smile again fades away.

SHELLEY
Don't feel hurt, Ophelia. Or jealous.
He is only looking at her as one might
look upon a Monet. Or a Michelangelo.
Beauty demands our admiration. His eyes
speak for him but you mustn't fault
their honesty.

She scoops up the purring cat.

SHELLEY
But if I were you, I would certainly
ask myself, does he look at me like
that?

INT. RECEPTION - DAY

John turns as Ophelia enters the waiting area.

JOHN
Ophelia!

OPHELIA
John, what are you doing here?

JOHN
I came to take you to lunch. I made reservations.

OPHELIA
Reservations?

JOHN
Yeah. They do let you eat lunch, don't they?

OPHELIA
Yes.

She grabs her coat and purse while Mimi smiles at them.

MIMI
Have a nice time.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

It is a trendy little bistro. A charred, pepper-crusted filet mignon is set before John.

JOHN
This is exactly the kind of place I'd like to open one day. Oh, that smells good, doesn't it?

She nods as a walnut and avocado salad is placed in front of her. There is the clatter of wielded knives and stabbing forks as John begins sawing open his meat.

JOHN
It can't be too big. That's the trick. The bigger it is, the more prep there is, the less fresh it is and the more assembly line it becomes. You might as well open a McDonald's. God, I'm starving.

Red, ruddy juice oozes from a glistening cube of steak that he pitchforks into his mouth.

OPHELIA

It's lovely, John. I've always wanted to come here but it's so expensive.

He nods, his jaw grinding hard while she watches him, her fork furtively advancing on her salad.

OPHELIA

Where did you get the money?

Suddenly he grimaces, choking down the lump of meat.

OPHELIA

Is something wrong?

JOHN

Had a funny taste... like charcoal. Maybe it's overcooked.

He pokes at the bloody steak.

OPHELIA

Are you kidding? It's almost raw.

JOHN

It's supposed to be.

He continues to eat but tries to cut away the charred crust, slicing out the reddest part of the steak.

OPHELIA

So, you didn't answer my question.

JOHN

Granny gave me some money, she said she knew I'd pay her back some day.

OPHELIA

She's so sweet.

JOHN

Yep, she is. And she's a helluva cook. Her stew is amazing. I'm trying to get the recipe. It's unbelievably rich. How's your salad?

OPHELIA

It's good.

JOHN

Yeah, but I know what you really want.

He stabs a tiny bit of steak onto a single fork tine.

JOHN

Come on, just a little taste.

OPHELIA

John, you know I don't eat meat.

JOHN

Why not? Is it a taste thing or an ethical thing?

OPHELIA

Ethical... mostly.

JOHN

You don't believe those vegetables died for you?

OPHELIA

They don't have eyes.

JOHN

What do eyes have to do with life? A blind man isn't alive? That's not ethics. It's just discrimination.

OPHELIA

I don't have to have a reason. I make personal choice.

JOHN

I know but it's not like it's the forbidden fruit here. You won't get in hell for it. And one tiny teeny teeny taste won't turn you into some kind of strung out meat addict. So come on, just try it.

OPHELIA

Why? Why do you want me to?

JOHN

Haven't you ever watched two people in a restaurant feeding each other, sharing their food? I know why they do it. It's because they're in love. They want their lover to taste what they're tasting to feel what they're feeling. That's all it is.

Ophelia smiles nervously.

OPHELIA

Okay--

She watches as he lifts the tiny, uneven cut of meat to her mouth like a bizarre communion. She closes her eyes, her lips slowly parting as he slips the fork inside.

John smiles as she chews.

JOHN

Little party going on in there I think.

Ophelia shivers, the heavy taste blooming through her.

OPHELIA

I can't believe I just did that. I must really like you.

JOHN

In that case, why don't we pick up some pig's feet and have a real lunch.

OPHELIA

Oh, I get it. You're Satan.

JOHN

You hate me now?

OPHELIA

I'm not sure. Maybe I just need a taste, a tiny teeny weeny taste.

She leans toward him and they kiss.

EXT. RESTAURANT - DAY

From far away, someone watches as they exit the restaurant. We hear the mused whistle of his breathing and a sound that repeats rhythmically; swick, chick... swick, chick.

OPHELIA

That was wonderful. Thank you.

JOHN

Can I see you tonight?

OPHELIA

I'd like that.

Roman Links peers around the corner of the alley, fondling a switch blade that he continues to open and close; swick, chick.

EXT. THE MISSION - NIGHT

A crescent moon cuts scythe-like through the clouds.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

John is washing bowls. The stack appears to have doubled in size. He is about to drown another beneath the sudsy water when he notices a small puddle of stew gravy at the bottom of the bowl.

He slips off his yellow latex glove and runs his finger along the curved belly of the bowl.

Sticking the coated finger into his mouth, he sucks. After a moment, we hear a small crunch as he absently bites down.

JOHN

Ow-- shit.

A tiny drop of blood swells around his knuckle and he sucks on his finger again.

Outside, one of the alley dogs begins to bay.

INT. SLIMAGE SURGICENTER - DAY

There are several women in the waiting area, all of whom are reading glamour magazines. Ophelia, at her reception desk, is also reading a glamour magazine.

The only sound in the clinic is the rattle of magazine pages being turned.

Beneath her desk, Ophelia rubs her thighs together. She has a terrible itch on the inner part of each thigh.

Glancing up, she surreptitiously slides her hand under her dress. As she scratches, her nail catches on something that hurts to touch.

Concerned, she goes to the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Alone in a stall, she pulls her dress up and examines her thighs. There are several red sores swollen with irritation. At the center of each sore is a white protuberance, like a sty but harder.

INT. DR. MANNO'S OFFICE - DAY

Shelley is talking to Dr. Manno when Ophelia enters, obviously upset.

OPHELIA

I'm sorry to interrupt, Ms. Perdue, but there's something... something wrong with me.

SHELLEY

What is it, dear?

OPHELIA

I don't know, I thought it was just a rash but it's gotten worse.

SHELLEY

It's all right. Come. Sit here and let's let Dr. Manno have a look.

She gestures to the examination table and Ophelia sits, fitting her feet into the steel stirrups. Swinging a light between her legs, Dr. Manno examines the sores.

SHELLEY

Oh no.

OPHELIA

What? What is it?

DR. MANNO

Does this hurt?

OPHELIA

Ow-- yes!

SHELLEY

How bad is it?

DR. MANNO

Difficult to say.

OPHELIA

Tell me, please. What is it?

DR. MANNO

Calcified cellulite. In certain cases, particularly with vegetarians, cellulite spreads beneath the derma like a spore, typically in dark, moist places like between toes or the inner thigh. The danger is that it is impossible to know how large the tubors have gotten.

He probes her flesh, feeling a large lump. With a pair of gleaming stainless steel forceps, he clamps hold of one of the white nubs.

He pulls and the nub is revealed to be a thick white stalk like a root growing from the eye of a potato.

Ophelia winces and writhes in the chair as Manno continues pulling the stalk.

DR. MANNO

It's coming. Hold on.

The side of her thigh bulges, the root obviously connected to something much larger.

Ophelia screams as the fist-like potato of calcified fat is torn from her thigh.

INT. OPHELIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ophelia continues to scream, bolting up from her bed.

JOHN

Ophelia?!

Ophelia breathes, looking at John, realizing she is in her apartment.

OPHELIA

It was a dream. Just a bad dream.

She opens her leg and examines the inner thigh.

JOHN

What? Is something wrong with your leg?

OPHELIA

Do you know what that is?

There are several small dimple-like marks on her thigh.

JOHN

No, but it looks good to me.

He starts to bite her but she pushes him away.

OPHELIA

It's not funny. It's cellulite. It means that I have a diffused pattern of irregular and disconnective tissue. It's a genetic predisposition. That's what's so horrible. There are olympic athletes with cellulite. It doesn't make any sense, why would nature design something like this, or acne, or warts. What's the purpose?

JOHN

So people like Shelley Perdue could make a lot of money.

OPHELIA

That's not an answer.

JOHN

I don't know, Ophelia. Maybe nature is evil.

OPHELIA

Do you know the only way to get rid of cellulite is to go U.T.K.?

JOHN

U.T.K.?

OPHELIA

Under the knife. It's done with lasers now but we still call it U.T.K.

She leans back down, switching off the light.

OPHELIA

I think you're right, John. Nature is evil.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

A big stray is viciously digging at the garbage behind the mission. Sensing someone, his head jerks up.

Roman Links stops. He looks terrible, still wearing the same clothes; one brown crusty wad still plugging his nose.

The dog growls. Links growls back. The dog coils onto its haunches, baring its teeth. Links slides the knife out of his pocket; swick.

The dog attacks and Links slashes a bright red cut across its flank. Howling, the dog scampers away. Links smiles, wiping the bloody blade on his pant leg.

Prowling along the back of the Mission, Links searches for a way inside. He finds a rotting piece of plywood covering a basement window and pries it open.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Worming through the small window, Links drops down among the stalls of the men's room, the toilets are black with an unctuous grime. He slips on a patch of congealed grease as he moves through the showers into the locker room.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Creeping through the maze of lockers, he finds the work bench. Several pounds of meat and miscellaneous organs have been fed through the grinder. Huge piles of hamburger sit proportioned onto butcher paper.

Sniffing, eyes wide as he reacts to every noise, Links creeps toward the refrigerators.

One of the chains hangs loosely around the bulbous waist of an old Frigidaire. The padlock is open.

Quietly, Links pops the door. In the white light and swirling frost, his expression turns to horror.

The door slams shut, revealing Kuru.

Links yelps, coiling back, his knife flashing from his pocket. Kuru sees the tiny blade and smiles.

From the back of his belt, he unsheathes his massive gurki-like blade.

EXT. MISSION - NIGHT

Several smaller dogs now digging through the garbage react to a terrible animal-like scream.

INT. SLIMAGE SURGICENTER - DAY

Ophelia is sitting anxiously at her desk, staring into the appointment book. There are no names scheduled after three thirty.

Ophelia begins to circle the open space, her pen orbiting the only blank hole in the book. After a moment, the circle becomes a spiral, the pen trail whirlpooling until the entire space is blackened into an inky tangle.

She looks over at a clock. It is three twenty. She is now very nervous.

Glancing at the mirror that separates her from Shelley, she gets up and goes to the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Ophelia talks to the reflection.

OPHELIA

This is not a big deal. People change themselves every day. It is as natural as getting a haircut. It's more natural than having your ears pierced. If you had a cavity, would you ignore it? No. You see, it's no big deal. But if it isn't then why am I freaking out? I don't know! You need help--

The door opens and Shelley smiles.

SHELLEY

There you are. Ready?

Ophelia takes a breath and looks back into the mirror. The reflection answers.

OPHELIA

Yes.

INT. OPERATING ROOM - DAY

Hydraulically, the chair rises into position. Ophelia stares at the mirrored ceiling, breathing in the gas, as Dr. Manno moves between her spread legs.

Ophelia sees Shelley standing over her; angel-blue eyes staring down, a smile half-hidden beneath the surgical mask.

SHELLEY

Don't worry, Ophelia. Everything will be fine. It's just like magic. You go to sleep and when you wake up, you'll feel wonderful. Your legs will be smooth and beautiful. It's what you want, isn't it? To be beautiful.

Ophelia's body becomes light, transubstantiating with the gas and she feels herself floating up towards her reflection.

Through the slurred syrup of her senses, she hears the whir of the machine.

The first tiny white bits of Ophelia's inner thigh slap against the glass wall of the catch as the splattering sound becomes--

INT. OPHELIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The coughing hiss of whipped cream spitting out the nozzle into a cloud-like mound.

Ophelia puts a spoon into the chocolate sundae and carries it to the living room.

John is on the futon. He looks like a piece of overcooked meat; his eyes are dark and hollow, his face grey and gaunt.

OPHELIA

Are you sure you're okay? You don't look very good, John.

JOHN

I'm fine. I'm just tired. Tired and hungry.

She hands him the sundae.

OPHELIA

I hope this helps.

JOHN

You're not having one?

OPHELIA
No, I can't.

JOHN
Why?

OPHELIA
My surprise.

John scoops up a spoonful of ice cream into his mouth.

JOHN
Ahh yes. The surprise. When do I see
the surprise?

Her smile says something naughty.

OPHELIA
I did it.

JOHN
Did what?

Slowly, she slides her loose fitting dress up over her thighs,
revealing the heavy white binders.

JOHN
Oh god. What happened?

OPHELIA
I got some lipo.

JOHN
Why?

OPHELIA
I told you. The cellulite.

JOHN
Ophelia, you're crazy. Your body is
perfect.

OPHELIA
As perfect as Mimi's?

JOHN
Who's Mimi?

OPHELIA

The one you were drooling over when you came to take me to lunch.

JOHN

I wasn't drooling.

OPHELIA

You certainly were.

JOHN

Maybe a little. But I wasn't really interested.

OPHELIA

Oh no?

JOHN

No. There was nothing to her. I could tell. She's like an appetizer, pretty, but never very satisfying.

OPHELIA

Is everything about food with you?

JOHN

Food is life, you know.

He grabs hold of her, lifting her into his arms.

OPHELIA

What are you doing?

JOHN

I'm taking you to your bedroom.

OPHELIA

I thought you wanted dessert?

JOHN

I do.

INT. OPHELIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

It is later. They are both asleep, fit tight to each other like spoons. Again, John is having a tortured night.

His face is wet with sweat when his body seems to jerk him awake.

There is a smell in the air that swirls about him like a perfume. He turns and sees the bandages on Ophelia's thighs.

His gut squeezes hard and demanding as a fist. Sick and afraid, he pushes himself off the bed, away from her.

OPHELIA

... John? What are you doing?

Hurriedly, he gets dressed.

JOHN

I have to go. I'm not feeling very good.

OPHELIA

I knew it. Something is wrong.

JOHN

I just need some rest.

OPHELIA

Promise me you'll go see a doctor. I'll give you the money. Just promise me.

JOHN

Okay. I will. I promise. Now, go back to sleep.

OPHELIA

Kiss me.

He does, but as her eyes close and he pulls away, he notices something he never had before--

The taste of her lips.

Quickly, he leaves.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

John crosses the street towards "Babe the Blue Ox's BBQ," a late night take-out joint.

There is a group of rowdies in leather, sitting outside despite the cold, guzzling beer and gobbling barbecued chicken.

Smoke is billowing from the stack and John catches the scent of char-broiling ribs. He grimaces.

A woman in the group, nibbling at a chicken wing begins to laugh, a high drunken cackle.

Something is wrong. John looks at her and sees that she is now holding a large, fleshy piece of raw meat.

The human like skin flaps with her laughter and a piece of gelatin falls to the table.

LEATHER MAN

Hey, what are you looking at?

John turns, glimpsing that the woman is again holding a chicken wing.

LEATHER MAN

Dickhead.

John hurries away, clutching his stomach. Very faintly, an ambulance siren can be heard.

Something catches his eye and he stops beneath a sign that reads: "CASMIR'S BUTCHER SHOPPE." The siren is getting louder.

His head cocked, staring into the window listening to a sound that is growing in his head; a sound like the buzzing of flies.

The ambulance booms past, splashing red light across John and the store front window. In that moment John sees hanging in the window, massive slabs of rancid meat covered with maggots and flies. Dotted with black ink spots of rot, they swing ever so slightly, dripping oil and gelatin to the ground.

John spins away, doubling over as he vomits. We see the window now filled with a beautiful assortment of meats and sausages.

EXT. MISSION - NIGHT

John stumbles toward the open alley door when he catches a scent that immediately bolsters his strength.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mundi is at the stove, stirring the burbling stew which is in an unusually large pot.

MUNDI

Welcome home, John.

JOHN
Where's Granny?

MUNDI
Off to bed. She's left me to tend the
stew.

JOHN
God, it smells good.

MUNDI
You're hungry. I can smell it on your
breath.

JOHN
I haven't been feeling very well. My
stomach... is upset.

MUNDI
Perhaps just a taste then?

JOHN
Yeah, maybe. Just a little.

Mundi steps away and John edges closer to the stove. The rising
vapors envelop him with medicinal magic.

Mundi smiles as John slurps the thick broth from the spoon.

JOHN
Mmm, that's good.

He dips the spoon in for another when a hand shoots up out of
the stew and grabs his wrist.

Screaming, he wrestles to get free as the stew-demon rises up
out of the brown magma until we see his face and realize--

It is John.

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

He wakes, terrified. Gradually, the panic subsides and, as it
does, thoughts begin to fill his mind with the chill of ice
water.

Determined, he rises from his bed and heads for where he knows
he must go.

INT. MISSION KITCHEN - NIGHT

A long bladed knife is pushed through the wall and John methodically jimmies back the bolt from the jamb. The door swings open without a sound.

The stairs curl like a beckoning finger into the darkness below.

John descends, sweating almost immediately, clutching his knife. From below, we begin to hear music, barely audible, crackling through the old, cheap radio.

INT. THE LOCKERS - NIGHT

The music is a catchy little Muzak number like "The Girl from Ipanema."

Through a slit, John sees Otto in the workshop. The butcher's hands are bloody to the elbows as he carries something that looks like a bleeding basketball.

John moves with him, catching glimpses as Otto waddles to the nearest refrigerator, a bulbous 1950's model which he opens.

Standing in the wash of white refrigerator light and a swirling mist of cold steam, Otto checks the object and then sets it inside. He then closes the door and goes back to work.

Silently, John makes his way towards the refrigerator.

In the background, over the continuing Muzak we hear Otto as he returns to work. The sounds are grisly, leading the imagination towards the most gruesome speculations; the back and forth grate of a saw, followed by a series of shredding sounds like corn being husked and then a snapping like the cracking of crab legs.

John inches towards the door handle as suddenly the cracking stops.

After a beat, there is a chilling sucking sound.

John, his heart pounding from his temples to his toes, opens the refrigerator.

Inside he sees the eyeless, tongueless, sawed-open head of Roman Links. The white tape still covers his broken nose.

A scream catches like a barb in John's throat.

The knife slips from his hand, clattering to the floor. His hand covers his mouth as he stumbles back, slamming into the lockers.

Otto, still sucking the marrow from the femur bone whirls at the crash and sees John. He lets out a shrill animal yelp as--

John runs.

Otto grabs the nearest cleaver and flails after him.

John slams through the rows of lockers, around a corner towards the stairs now in sight but, Otto whips around the corner gaining--

Raising the cleaver as John stumbles on the first steps, then lunges up the curving stairs just as Otto swings--

The cleaver just misses, embedding into the wooden tread. Jerking it free, Otto scales the stairs into--

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

But John is already gone, the back door thrown open. Otto is about to follow when a hand reaches out and stops him. Otto hunches back like a heeled dog as Rex steps toward the door. He closes it and, in his black eyes, we see the hint of a smile.

INT. OPHELIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The apartment door signal is buzzing. And buzzing.

The light goes on and Ophelia enters, obviously annoyed, hitting the intercom.

OPHELIA

If this is you, Roman-- you fucking asshole--the police are on the way--

She switches to "listen".

JOHN

No. No. Ophelia--it's John.

OPHELIA

John, it's three-thirty--

JOHN

Please, Ophelia, something happened--
something bad--

She presses the "enter" button. As soon as she unlocks the door, John bursts in. He is shaking and out of breath. His hair, despite the cold, is slick with sweat.

OPHELIA

John--what happened?

Immediately, he is pacing around the small apartment.

OPHELIA

Is it Roman?

A little squeak jumps out of John's mouth.

OPHELIA

Did you see Roman?

John nods, hands wringing, fingers knotting.

OPHELIA

In the mission?

JOHN

In the refrigerator.

OPHELIA

What? You saw Roman in the
refrigerator?

John nods again, unable to speak.

OPHELIA

Oh, I see. It was another bad dream.

JOHN

No. No, it's real. They told me what
they were doing. They told me the first
day.

OPHELIA

Told you what?

JOHN

They butcher their own meat. It's
cheaper that way.

OPHELIA

John, you're not making any sense.

JOHN

But I didn't know! I swear to you I didn't know!

OPHELIA

All right. I'm calling the police.

JOHN

No! You can't!

OPHELIA

Why not?

JOHN

Because they won't... believe me.

OPHELIA

Believe what?

JOHN

That I didn't know because I was there, like everyone else. Every night. Two bowls. They'll know it's still inside me, they'll smell it. I can smell it!

OPHELIA

Smell what?

JOHN

The meat!

OPHELIA

John, something is wrong with you--

JOHN

I know, I know. It's the meat. I can feel it. I ate it every night, Ophelia, and it's making me sick because...

His stomach convulses.

JOHN

Because...

OPHELIA

What? Say it.

JOHN
It tasted so...

Horror and revulsion rise with human bile as he clamps his hand over his mouth and runs to the bathroom.

Forcing herself to remain calm, Ophelia follows.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

John is kneeling on the floor, half-dead, his head still hanging over the toilet.

She kneels beside him, taking hold of him.

OPHELIA
It'll be okay. Maybe its some kind of
food poisoning. Making you half crazy.

Shivering and weak, he wraps his arms around her.

OPHELIA
You need to rest. You need sleep.

As she holds him, his breathing begins to ease. She softly kisses his head resting on her shoulder.

He turns his head, kissing her neck when something happens to him. She feels his body go rigid with fear.

There in the soft curve of her neck, he smells something, something just beneath her skin, something that tastes... good.

OPHELIA
John?

He screams, scrambling away from her.

OPHELIA
What! What!!

He's too terrified to speak.

OPHELIA
Goddamnit, John, you're scaring me.

JOHN
Something's happening to me.

OPHELIA

What?

JOHN

I don't know!

She jumps to her feet.

OPHELIA

Enough of this shit!

She throws open the medicine cabinet and grabs a large bottle of sleeping pills. She fills a glass of water.

OPHELIA

You need to calm down. You need to sleep. When you wake up, we'll talk.

She shoves the glass into his hand.

OPHELIA

Open!

He opens his mouth and she drops in several capsules. He drinks and swallows.

FADE OUT

INT. OPHELIA'S APARTMENT - DAY

The room is still dark, the venetian blinds holding back the morning.

John, his face as gray as ash, is asleep on the futon, wrapped tightly in a mess of sheets. It was a torturous night.

A smell fills his nostrils, a terrible gagging smell and he coughs, waking up.

Rex Mundi, fully dressed, is sitting in the room, deep in shadow. A single slice of light cuts across his mouth.

MUNDI

Good morning, citizen.

John scrambles back into the corner.

JOHN
How did you? Where's--

MUNDI
The fair Ophelia stepped out to find
you something to eat.

He grins.

MUNDI
But it won't be enough, will it, John?

JOHN
I know what you are doing.

MUNDI
Of course you do. You've known all
along, from that very first bowl, that
first mouthful--

JOHN
That's a lie!

MUNDI
Your body knew at once what it had
inside of it. It was what it had
always wanted.

John can feel his stomach, a great gaping hole, as empty as it
has ever been.

MUNDI
It is what everyone wants.

John grimaces. His stomach feels like the skin of a sausage
grilling, about to rupture.

JOHN
What's wrong with me?

MUNDI
Your body has been set free.

Mundi watches John in obvious anguish.

MUNDI
There is only one true desire, John.
Everything else is a lie, a lie that
begins for most when they are pulled
from their mother's teat and given a
bottle of cow's milk.

John tries to stand, to move away. He does not want to hear this.

MUNDI

The mind learns to accept what it cannot have, but deep inside the body never forgets.

JOHN

No.

MUNDI

You can eat until you are sick without ever feeling sated or satisfied--why? You will gorge yourself on the flesh of every animal except one--why John? Because you are afraid. Afraid of what you really are. Afraid that what you are is all that you are.

JOHN

No!

MUNDI

I reminded you. I woke the truth inside you. Now, the appetite is alive.

John, dripping with sweat, sinks to the floor, clutching his stomach in agony.

JOHN

God!

MUNDI

There is no god that can help you. The appetite is a part of you now, gnawing away. You can feel your stomach trying to digest itself.

Mundi pulls a heavy package, wrapped in butcher-brown paper from his pocket. John stares at it and we can almost see him begin to drool.

Mundi throws it on the floor between them.

MUNDI

You can make it stop. Give it what it wants. Feed it.

John hesitates, his glance shifting from Mundi to the package.

MUNDI

Feed me.

On hands and knees, John lunges for the package, tearing it open. Bloody cubes of raw meat spill out. John stuffs them in his mouth, gobbling them down.

Mundi smiles.

MUNDI

Good boy. Good boy.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

It is a bitter cold night, outside a dull, gray, office building.

After a long beat, we hear a woman giggling.

As the giggling grows louder, we see a man and woman pushing out through the revolving door of the building. He is pushing with both hands on her ass.

They stagger out, obviously drunk, laughing as she stumbles in her high-heels. Their laughter is swallowed by the emptiness of the city.

The woman is disheveled; her blouse not fully buttoned, her hair tousled, her lipstick smeared. Her appearance suggests they just had sex, yet he looks exactly as he probably looked early this morning when he entered the building. Even his tie is fixed tight to his collar.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out his wedding ring and slides it on.

The woman's laugh dies ugly.

WOMAN

Oh, yes. There it is.

He looks at her indifferently.

WOMAN

You could wait five more fucking minutes.

MAN

It doesn't bother you when you see me take it off.

WOMAN

God, you're a pig. I don't know why I
fuck you.

He smiles.

MAN

You want to keep your job.

Stunned and sickened by him, she rips a ruby earring from each
ear.

WOMAN

You make me sick! I don't want any part
of you anymore!

She throws the earrings at him, spins on her heel and walks
away.

MAN

See you tomorrow.

He smiles, picks up the earrings and slips them into his
pocket.

Whistling, he heads towards the entrance of an underground
parking garage. Its staircase darkens into a black shadow that
swallows the man as he descends.

INT. STAIRCASE - NIGHT

The man appears, rounding the corner of the first level.
Abruptly, he stops, noticing a figure huddled in the corner of
the landing below.

It is John dressed in garbage-picked clothes. The man looks
away and continues down the stairs toward John.

JOHN

Mister? Mister?

The man does not acknowledge him.

JOHN

Mister, can you help me?

John reaches out with his hand as the man passes.

JOHN
I'm hungry--

John grabs hold of the man's pant leg. The man is repulsed and jerks his leg free. His footsteps quickly fade down the stairs.

JOHN
Hungry...

John crawls to the edge of the landing, listening as the door to the level below opens and closes.

INT. UNDERGROUND GARAGE - NIGHT

The vast garage is ominously empty and silent, save for the man's hurried footsteps. From behind, the door again opens and booms shut.

The man stops and looks back at the circle of light around the door. It is empty.

There is a faint rattling in the distance.

To his left, he hears the sound of someone running and he turns, catching a glimpse of a shadow that disappears behind a steel column.

MAN
Is someone there?

Another series of running steps; a flash somewhere else.

The metal rattling grows louder, closer. The man's eyes are darting. He seems frozen, like a deer.

He bolts.

In the dark edges of the garage, behind the rows of columns, he can see them; shadows, running with him.

It is a wild chase weaving through the iron and concrete columns that seem like the trees of a man-made jungle.

The man can see his red Jaguar; the silver cat is poised on the hood as the man races towards it. Behind him the predators gain.

He tears out his keys and jams the key into the lock when--

There is an animal shriek.

John bounds up, springing over the car, landing on top of the terrified, screaming man.

They tumble to the ground, John rolling away.

The man, free for a moment, tries to get back to the car, scampering on hands and knees.

He reaches for the handle, for the keys, but the keys are gone.

He hears the jingling keys behind him. He begins to cry, turning to see--

The predators surrounding him; John, Otto, and Kuru, dangling the keys.

The jingle of the keys blends into the metal rattle as Granny moves into the half circle, pushing her grocery shopping cart.

MAN

What do you want?

He throws his wallet at them.

MAN

Here--take it! Take it! Please don't hurt me.

They close in on him, Kuru and Otto taking hold of his arms as the man, feeble, unable to resist, continues to sob.

GRANNY

Sssh, now. This'll just take a minute.

She pets his head, trying to calm him.

GRANNY

It's okay, nothing to worry about.

She runs her fingers across his forehead, coating them with his sweat. She licks them, tasting, smacking her lips and tongue. Not bad.

Inspecting closer, she reaches under his arm, pinching his fat. He is now crying uncontrollably.

GRANNY
Congratulations, John.

From her shopping cart, Granny pulls a baseball bat.

GRANNY
He's a keeper.

She gives John the bat and pushes him up to the plate.

The man on his knees, his arms still held behind him, looks up at John pitifully.

John stands motionless.

The man begins repeating the word "god" over and over.

John raises the bat. The man drops his head as fills his pants with urine. John's grip loosens.

JOHN
I can't...

Granny stands behind him, whispering in his ear.

GRANNY
You can and you will. Because deep down you want to.

John shakes his head.

MAN
Please..

GRANNY
Look at him, John. See him for what he really is. Meat. That's all. Fresh marbled meat that you can smell. Meat you can almost taste.

John's mouth begins to salivate.

GRANNY
There is only one truth in this world, one law to obey, one rule to survive. Eat, John. Eat or be eaten.

His face contorts viciously as he raises the bat.

The scream fills the entire garage.

The bat falls.

There is a loud pop as the bat strikes the back of the man's skull.

The scream fades, but never seems to die; just a dim echoing roar in our ears. Granny pats John.

GRANNY

You're one of us now.

Kuru and Otto lift the body of the man and load it into the shopping cart.

INT. SLIMAGE SURGICENTER - DAY

Ophelia walks down the hall towards the glass door of the clinic. She digs the keys from her purse and stoops to unlock the doors when she notices a manila envelope with her name on it.

Inside the envelope is a note from John: "I'm sorry that I haven't been myself lately. I hope these will help you forgive me."

She tilts the envelope and a pair of ruby earrings spill into her palm. They are the same earrings the woman threw back at the man.

Ophelia smiles and unlocks the door.

INT. SLIMAGE SURGICENTER - DAY

Ophelia is admiring her new earrings in the mirror behind her desk when Shelley enters.

SHELLEY

Good morning, Ophelia.

OPHELIA

Morning, Ms. Perdue.

SHELLEY

How are your thighs?

OPHELIA

Much better today.

SHELLEY

I am so proud of you, Ophelia. It was a big step, wasn't it?

Ophelia nods.

SHELLEY

Believe me, the first step is always the hardest but now a whole new world of possibilities has opened up for you, you can feel it, can't you?

OPHELIA

Yes, I suppose I can.

SHELLEY

And you're still so young and pretty.

OPHELIA

Thank you.

SHELLEY

Now maybe we'll finally get to fix that little nose of yours.

She winks teasingly and passes Ophelia but stops at the door to her office.

SHELLEY

Oh yes, cancel Ms. Sedier's appointment today.

OPHELIA

All right. Was there another problem?

SHELLEY

Yes, but I've taken care of it. I don't think she'll be back.

Smiling, she shuts the door behind her.

INT. MISSION BASEMENT - NIGHT

Stretched limply over a hanger, suspended in the dark space above us, is a beautiful dark fur.

In the background we can hear John and Otto, though their voices are muffled.

OTTO

There is one basic rule of thumb. The richer they are, the more they eat, the better they taste.

JOHN

Is that why Rex wanted this one?

OTTO

I don't know. I think this one was a favor.

We pass under the dark emptiness of the fur.

OTTO

See here, on the flank and all along the butt and thighs. Lipotracts. All the tasty bits, sucked dry. But she ain't bad.

Ahead, we see the voices are coming from the shower room, which is hidden by the heavy plastic shower curtain. There is a gap at the bottom, where we can see into the room.

OTTO

Now grab one of them bottles.

We can see John's shoes and the heavy rubber boots that Otto wears. On the floor beside them is a funnel and several green wine jugs. The jugs are empty.

John bends down and lifts one of them.

OTTO

Hold it like this. Here.

We hear the quick zink, zink, of a knife being sharpened.

We see the three figures in the room, more defined through the foggy plastic.

The two darker figures are Otto and John, which can be determined by their feet.

The other figure appears to be suspended in the air and through the translucent haze of the curtain, it looks like a great side of beef; white and pink, the colors of suet and meat.

OTTO

You just pull back on the hair and cut.

Blood suddenly sprinkles onto the floor around their feet.

OTTO
The bottle! The bottle!

The blood stops, as we hear it filling the bottle. Otto slaps the naked flesh.

OTTO
This one here'll probably fill three and a half or so. After they're drained, I'll show you what's next. It's easier than you think.

Zink, zink, the knife sharpens again.

OTTO
Here at the tailbone, about an inch deep, right down the spine.

There is a strange zipping sound.

John steps back as though he suddenly lost his balance. Blood is missing the bottle and splattering around his feet.

OTTO
Then, here...and here.

We are almost to the curtain and the blood is everywhere, puddling on the floor.

OTTO
Then you just cut a finger hole... and tear.

An awful tearing noise begins as--

The bottle that John had been filling, slips out of his hand, shattering on the tile floor, in a deafening explosion of green glass and blood.

John turns towards the curtain, lunging out, gulping air.

The heavy rubber boots step through the pool of blood, glass crunching underfoot, past the swinging shadow of the hanging body.

Otto throws open the curtain and finds John sitting on the bench between the lockers, breathing deep and looking very sick.

Otto shakes his head, disappointed.

OTTO
Granny's probably got some work for you
upstairs.

John looks up.

JOHN
I'm sorry...

OTTO
You can throw all that stuff in the
furnace. But not the coat. It's a good
coat.

Otto snaps the curtain shut and again we hear the knife
sharpening.

INT. MISSION KITCHEN - NIGHT

A bowl is being washed. John passes it under the running water,
rinses it, then sets it in the rack.

John stares blankly as he lifts another dirty bowl from the
cart.

The crusty, brown remnants of the stew, thin scrape lines left
from the spoon.

John begins to hear the scraping of the spoon against the bowl.
He is unable to move, listening.

We hear the man eating, slurping the stew, smacking on the
thick pieces of meat.

John looks at the enormous stack of dirty bowls piled on the
cart. The number has grown to almost comic proportions. We
begin to hear more eating noises.

The munching, scraping, clattering spoons multiply, growing
louder, swelling, until it seems the entire dining hall was
stuffed into the tiny kitchen.

Suddenly, there is a knock on the back door, cutting the noise
short.

John shuts the water off goes to the door. He throws the bolt
and opens the door to find Ophelia.

She pulls back her hair, revealing the ruby earrings.

OPHELIA
I love them.

She embraces and kisses John who reacts awkwardly.

OPHELIA
I... thought you were feeling better?

JOHN
I am. I just, I mean, I wish...

He glances at the open basement door.

JOHN
You shouldn't come here anymore,
Ophelia.

OPHELIA
Why not?

He doesn't want to answer the question.

JOHN
Come on. Let's go upstairs.

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

John shuts the door.

OPHELIA
John, what's going on? You have to tell
me. I want to know why you were acting
so strange the other night and why you
disappeared that morning.

JOHN
God...

OPHELIA
What?

He can't stop himself from smiling at her.

JOHN
You are so beautiful.

She blushes.

JOHN
How are your legs?

OPHELIA
They're fine.

JOHN
Can I see?

He sits on the bed beside her and tries to push her skirt up.

OPHELIA
No. I can't remove the bandages yet.

JOHN
Just a peek.

OPHELIA
No, John. Stop. Come on, talk to me.

JOHN
Talk about what?

OPHELIA
What happened the other night?

JOHN
I don't know, I'm not sure I can explain it. And even if I could, I don't think you could understand it. Not yet, anyway.

OPHELIA
What does that mean?

JOHN
I've just had this feeling lately that there's this connection between us, like we're headed in the same direction and that, right now, you're learning the same things that I'm learning.

OPHELIA
Learning what things?

JOHN
Things like who and what you are. And more importantly, what you want.

He leans into her and kisses her neck.

JOHN

You liked the earrings?

OPHELIA

Yes. Very much. But I have to know where you got the money for them. And don't tell me Granny gave it to you.

JOHN

They were donated to the Mission.

OPHELIA

By who?

JOHN

An older woman, or, I mean, her estate. She died and gave everything to Rex. He said I could pick out what I wanted. I took the earrings and...

He crosses to the closet.

JOHN

I was going to save it and give it to you later, for your birthday maybe or Christmas but I think you should have it now.

From the closet, he pulls the long, lush fur coat. Ophelia clamps her hand over her mouth.

OPHELIA

Oh my god.

John offers it to her though she seems almost scared to touch it.

JOHN

Do you like it?

OPHELIA

It's beautiful.

Her fingers disappear beneath the thick, soft fur.

JOHN

Try it on.

She smiles guiltily, but turns and lets him slip it on.

OPHELIA

Oh, god, John. I can't believe this.
There's a woman who comes to the clinic
who has a coat like this. I've always
wondered what it would feel like to
wear one.

She models herself in the mirror, wrapped in its luxuriousness.

John, behind her, is excited by the animal skins. He buries
his head in her hair which tumbles loose in the fur. He feels
the fur against his naked arms wrapped around her.

OPHELIA

Oh, no.

He kisses her neck and ear.

JOHN

What?

OPHELIA

It feels wonderful.

JOHN

Good.

OPHELIA

No, it's bad.

JOHN

Why?

OPHELIA

It's fur. It's not right.

JOHN

You said it felt good.

She smiles, almost intoxicated by the feel.

OPHELIA

It feels incredible.

JOHN

Listen to what your body wants.

She laughs.

OPHELIA
That sounds like Rex.

He unbuttons her blouse, exposing her naked body beneath the black coat. His hand strokes across the fur finding her breast.

OPHELIA
John, please, we need to talk.

JOHN
No, no one needs to talk.

She moans, closing her eyes.

She moans again. And he answers in a low, almost bestial growl. He begins to bite at her hair, her shoulder and up along her neck. The more he touches her, her warm flesh under the animal skin, the more excited they become.

He presses her against the wall, his hands moving through the fur, down her waist, where he begins to pull the coat and her skirt up along the back of her thighs.

Against the wall, in the shadows of the room, lost in the coat, she looks very much like an animal standing on its hind legs.

He begins to nibble at her ear lobe. Licking it, pulling at it with his lips and as he sucks it we hear her earring tinkling against his teeth.

Suddenly, her expression changes. Blood begins to seep from his tightly pursed lips.

OPHELIA
John--Ow!

He holds her tighter.

OPHELIA
John, that hurts!

She screams and as she tears free, we hear his teeth biting through the cartilage.

John stumbles back, his mouth and chin covered with blood. She covers her bleeding ear.

OPHELIA
Jesus!

Ophelia throws off the coat.

OPHELIA

What is wrong with you?!

John, stunned, still has something in his mouth.

JOHN

I love you.

Shaking her head, she rushes out the door.

John is unable to say anything, unable to understand what he has become.

After a moment, he tastes the piece of her earlobe and earring in his mouth. He spits it into his hand, blood and saliva running between his fingers. He closes his hand into a fist, holding it tightly.

John turns to the window and watches Ophelia burst into the alley, running from the building.

He is seen pressed against the panes of the window, like an animal pressed against the bars of its cage.

Granny opens the door to John's room.

GRANNY

John.

John cannot move. Ophelia is gone.

Granny gently turns John from the window. She begins to clean the blood from his face with a dish towel.

GRANNY

Tsk. Had a little mess, here, didn't we?

He stands numbly, his fist still clenched.

GRANNY

It's hard at first. It'll get better.

John, suddenly, looks straight at Granny.

JOHN

I bit her.

GRANNY

I know, honey. I know. It's okay.
It's natural.

She continues to clean him, dabbing the towel to her tongue and then wiping his face.

GRANNY

Do you know that cats eat their young?
Rex kept telling me that, over and
over.

She pauses for a moment, remembering.

GRANNY

I felt so bad about it, for a long
time, but Rex just kept saying, "It's
natural, Gretchen. It's natural."
That's when I wondered. Something has
to die for something else to keep on
living.

She puts the towel to his nose.

GRANNY

Here, blow.

John blows his nose into the towel.

GRANNY

Now, you just need to get some sleep.

She leads him to the bed.

GRANNY

Sleep makes everything feel better.

He lays down. She sees the blood leaking from his fist and
tries to open it. He jerks it away from her.

GRANNY

Okay. I know. One day you'll
understand. You'll see.

He clutches his fist to his chest and rolls away from her.

DISSOLVE TO

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

It is much later that night.

John is having a nightmare, tossing in his sleep, his face beaded with sweat.

INT. THE PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Everything moves very slowly as John rises up to see himself standing with the baseball bat. He sees everything from the perspective of the man he killed.

The bat smashes down.

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

John's head whips sideways as if he had been bashed by the bat.

INT. SHOWERS - NIGHT

John is hanging upside down, staring at the tile floor and the feet of Otto and John, as Otto slits his throat.

We watch as John holds the bottle, catching the stream of blood. The bottle slips and we see it slowly fall and smash--

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

John bolts upright, his mouth gaping, as though he were trying to scream, but couldn't.

He grabs his throat to make sure it isn't slit.

He calms down, his breathing begins to slow.

He looks at his hand, which is still knotted into a tight fist. Slowly, the hand opens, but to his horror, it is empty. The earring is gone.

He jumps out of bed and runs to--

INT. JOHN'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Clicking on the white light, John goes to the sink and turns on the cold water..

He gulps at the stream for a long time before coming up for air.

He lifts his head and catches his reflection in the mirror. He sees he has begun to sweat tiny beads of blood. He tries to wipe it off but he cannot.

He begins to cough. He doubles over, his face turning bright red, unable to breathe, unable to dislodge the object caught in his throat.

He gags, a spray of blood dotting the sink, and hacks something out onto the porcelain.

It is an entire ear with the earring.

He starts to scream.

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

John, again, covered in sweat, bolts upright from his dream. There is blood on his lips.

He looks at his fist and opens it. The earring is gone.

He starts to cry, collapsing into himself, curling up in the bed.

JOHN

Oh god. What's happened to me?

INT. SLIMAGE SURGICENTER - DAY

It is late, near the end of the day. The phone rings and Ophelia answers it.

OPHELIA

Slimage Surgicenter, how can I help you?

DETECTIVE DARROW (V.O.)

This is Detective Darrow with the Chicago P.D. I need to speak with one Shelly M. Perdue.

OPHELIA

Yes, of course. One moment.

She puts the detective on hold.

OPHELIA

Ms. Perdue, there is a police detective that would like to speak to you.

SHELLEY (V.O.)

Really? How strange. Put him through.

OPHELIA

Go ahead, detective.

Ophelia is about to disconnect but stops herself and stays on the line.

DETECTIVE DARROW (V.O.)

Ms. Perdue, I'm sorry to bother you but I'm investigating a missing persons and I need to ask you a few questions.

SHELLEY (V.O.)

Of course, detective.

DETECTIVE DARROW (V.O.)

Can you verify that Ms. Evelyn Sedier was a patient of yours?

SHELLEY (V.O.)

Yes, she was. For several years, we've been seeing Evelyn for a variety of procedures.

DETECTIVE DARROW (V.O.)

Did Ms. Sedier have an appointment scheduled on the afternoon of the 12th?

SHELLEY (V.O.)

Yes, she did. But the appointment was canceled.

DETECTIVE DARROW (V.O.)

Can you tell me why?

Ophelia fiddles nervously with her bandaged ear.

SHELLEY (V.O.)

There had been a problem with Evelyn's payments for the past several appointments.

DETECTIVE DARROW (V.O.)

She owed the clinic money?

SHELLEY (V.O.)
Forty six thousand dollars, I believe
was the figure.

DETECTIVE DARROW (V.O.)
I see, one last question, Ms. Perdue.
Do you have any idea what might have
happened to Ms. Sedier?

SHELLEY (V.O.)
I'm sure I don't know, detective, but
why don't you ask my secretary?

Ophelia looks back at the mirror, feeling the presence of
Shelley behind the silvered glass.

SHELLEY (V.O.)
She has been listening to our
conversation. I suspect she can tell
you what happened to poor Evelyn.

OPHELIA
No, I don't know anything.

The phone line goes dead. Ophelia twists back to find Rex
Mundi, his hand still over the phone.

OPHELIA
Rex? What are you doing here?

MUNDI
You know the answer to that question,
Ophelia.

OPHELIA
I don't. I swear I don't.

Mundi moves around the desk as Ophelia backs away.

MUNDI
Of course you do. You tried the coat
on, didn't you? You knew the truth the
moment you tried it on.

OPHELIA
No, that's a lie!

He steps closer and Ophelia pulls the dinner knife from her
pocket.

OPHELIA

Get away from me!

MUNDI

Oh yes. I love a little vinegar in my greens.

He grabs for her and she swipes wildly, ducking past him and bolting into the hall while--

Shelley appears behind her and grabs her by the throat.

SHELLEY

Remember, Rex, she's mine. You got the boy. I get the girl.

Ophelia screams, fighting for the knife which she twists free and--

Slashes across Shelley's breast, causing clear saline to arc from the lacerated implant.

From behind, Mundi grabs Ophelia, lifting her into the air.

SHELLEY

You little bitch! You're going to pay for that!

INT. OPERATING ROOM

Mundi slams Ophelia down onto the operating table.

OPHELIA

No! No! Please!

He holds her down as Shelley holds her in place with a heavy roll of white medical tape.

OPHELIA

Why are you doing this?

MUNDI

If you look deep enough, you know the answer, Ophelia. Isn't this all your fault? Didn't you bring John to the Mission in the first place?

OPHELIA

Who are you?!

Mundi laughs.

MUNDI

Would you like me to tell you that I am
a demon, an incubi as old as hunger
itself or that Shelley was born beneath
the face of the first mirror?

SHELLEY

Rex, never reveal a woman's age.

MUNDI

Perhaps you would prefer a more secular
answer. That we are manifestations of
human nature created by your
subconscious to anthropomorphize your
darkest fears, your guilt and desire.

He moves in closer, savoring her helplessness.

MUNDI

The conclusion is really the same,
isn't it, my dear?

He is close enough to whisper.

MUNDI

Nature is evil.

He smiles, showing her the long hollow needle-tube of the
liposuction machine. Ophelia begins to scream when Shelley
stuffs her mouth with gauze and secures it with more tape.

SHELLEY

Suck it all out, Rex dear. Suck her
dry. I want every last lovely drop.

The machine whirs to life, and Mundi begins inspecting the
meaty part of each thigh.

SHELLEY

Don't worry, pretty girl. It'll be over
soon. It's just another bad dream.

She smiles.

SHELLEY

Isn't it?

Ophelia screams into her gag as Mundi inserts the needle and
begins to suck the life out of her until--

INT. OPHELIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

She wakes, shaking with fear.

OPHELIA
Oh god... John...

The words seem to conjure a resolve and she suddenly knows what to do.

INT. MISSION - NIGHT

Ophelia creeps down the back alley, looking for a way into the mission. She finds the basement window that Links broke open.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ophelia crawls down into the putrid lavatory. The smell of the basement assaults her. Quietly, she moves through the greasy rot of the showers and enters the locker labyrinth.

She hears someone descending the stairs. Trying to keep herself calm, she hides inside one of the lockers.

Kuru turns the corner just as she closes the door. Carrying several empty wine jugs, he walks past the locker where she is hiding.

Through the metal slits she sees him. Suddenly, like a dog catching a scent, he stops. His nostrils flare.

Blood pounds against her temples as her body sets, rigid with fear. He seems about to look straight at her when he turns and continues on his way.

With painstaking care, she opens the locker, then hurries as silently as she can to the stairwell.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Coldly quiet, the kitchen appears to be empty. Ophelia rushes to the back staircase.

INT. JOHN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Again wrestling with his dreams, John lays in a tangle of sheets. Ophelia sits softly beside him, touching him gently.

OPHELIA

John.

He jerks awake as though electrified by her touch.

JOHN

Ophelia?

He looks around, expecting another dream.

OPHELIA

Yes. It's me. I'm here.

She touches his face and the warmth of her hand fills him with emotion. He wraps his arms around her, drawing her in tight.

JOHN

Ophelia... I'm so sorry...

OPHELIA

No, it's not your fault. I brought you here.

She takes hold of him.

OPHELIA

John, look at me. The police were at the clinic today, asking me all sorts of questions about Shelley and Ms. Sedier. Then they started asking about Rex and the mission.

He pulls away from her.

JOHN

You shouldn't have come here.

OPHELIA

Why? What's happening here?

JOHN

Please, don't ask me that.

OPHELIA

I want to help you.

JOHN

You can't. It's too late for me.

OPHELIA

No. I don't believe that. Come on,
we're getting out of here.

She grabs his clothes from the floor and begins dressing him.

JOHN

Please, Ophelia, leave this place and
just forget about me.

OPHELIA

I can't. I won't. Don't you get it? I
love you.

He feels those words, trying to heal some part of him.

JOHN

... I love you too.

OPHELIA

Then come with me.

He nods, when suddenly he sees something over her shoulder that
frightens her.

OPHELIA

What is it?

She turns and finds Mundi standing behind her.

MUNDI

Ophelia, you are, as always, a feast
for the eyes.

Kuru stands at the door, a bloody baseball bat cradled in his
arms.

OPHELIA

Rex? Good. I was hoping to see you. I
wanted to thank you and to say goodbye.

MUNDI

Yes. I believe you will be saying
goodbye but you won't be leaving here.
Will she John?

John can almost feel Mundi squeezing his intestines.

MUNDI

I spoke with Shelley, Ophelia. She told
me you were talking to the police.

OPHELIA

I didn't tell them anything! I don't know anything.

MUNDI

Poor Ophelia, still living in denial. Like so many others, unable to face what a part of them has always known to be true. There is only one truth that is universal, that is eternal and everlasting.

His eyes gleam with the wet-black of coal.

MUNDI

Hunger.

Ophelia feels the knife in her pocket.

MUNDI

It is hunger that drives us, hunger for power, for love, for money, for beauty. It is hunger that shapes us, that gives our lives purpose, and in the end, it is hunger that separates the world into the only two distinctions that matter: that of predator and that of prey.

He steps towards her with malice in his grin and she rips the knife from her pocket.

OPHELIA

Stay away from me!

MUNDI

Oh yes. I do enjoy a little vinegar with my greens.

Ophelia feels a strange dyslexic blur of dreams and reality.

MUNDI

What is it, Ophelia? You look as if you've seen a ghost.

He grabs the knife hand, twisting it behind her.

OPHELIA

No! John, help me!

MUNDI

Yes, John. Help her.

Kuru hands John the bat. He turns to Ophelia, his eyes cold and dead.

OPHELIA
John? John!

JOHN
Ophelia, you shouldn't have come here.

His grip tightens on the bat.

OPHELIA
John, fight him. It's not too late. you
have to believe me. John? Please. I
love you.

MUNDI
Of course. The magic elixir of love.
But what is love, really? Sadly, it is
little more than something we simply
acquire a taste for, like sex, or
power, or chocolate. I myself must
confess to a certain weakness for
vegetarians.

He holds her face as if he might kiss her, staring at her
mouth.

MUNDI
Such beautiful canines wasted...

Ophelia rips free of his grip and bites down, sinking her teeth
into his hand. Mundi howls with rage as--

John's face contorts as a bestial cry rises out of him and he
raises the bat--

Smashing it down, cracking it against Mundi's head.

Ophelia tears free and Mundi falls while John attacks Kuru,
forcing him back into the bathroom until--

He grabs Ophelia and they bolt from the room.

Kuru helps Mundi, blood oozing down his temple as he quickly
regains consciousness.

MUNDI
Kill them!

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Otto rises up the stairs, a cleaver in each hand as Ophelia and John turn, scrambling back up the stairs.

At the end of the hall, Kuru now rushes towards them as they flee, running wildly through the first open door--

Slamming it and bolting it just as Kuru batters against it.

OPHELIA

What are we going to do?

Caged windows glow with moonlight. It seems that they are trapped. John examines them even as Kuru and Otto continue to bludgeon on the door.

There is a small padlock and latch which is screwed into the window jam.

JOHN

I need...

He takes the dinner knife from her. The screws turn, painfully slow, as the door shrieks with every shouldered blow.

Finally the cage opens. They are over two stories above the alley. To the left, several windows away is an open window.

JOHN

It's the only way.

The bolt begins to splinter.

JOHN

You first.

Ophelia summons her courage and crawls out onto the stone ledge.

JOHN

I'm right behind you.

Forcing herself to stare at the open window, she edges toward it. John looks back once, the door suddenly quiet, then climbs out onto the ledge.

Together they slide, inch by inch, along the thin stone edge.

JOHN
Careful.

Ophelia slowly reaches for the sash, bending down, she crawls into the dark opening. There is a muffled bump, as if she fell to the floor.

JOHN
Ophelia?

He edges closer, unable to see inside the black hole.

JOHN
Ophelia?

He is about to climb in when Otto jumps out at him. John shouts, twisting away but loses his balance--

His arms flail wildly, trying to find some kind of hold as he begins to fall--

He dives forward, grabbing hold of the window ledge. Legs kicking helplessly, he dangles over the alley, holding onto the ledge with one hand.

Mundi steps out of the shadows, looking down at John.

JOHN
Ophelia!

MUNDI
She's here. Don't worry. She'll be joining you soon enough.

Mundi smiles.

MUNDI
You came here with only one thing to offer me. Your hands. That's why I couldn't let you leave, John. We had a deal.

He nods to Otto and John suddenly sees the horror of what is about to happen.

JOHN
Nooo!

There is the flash of a sharpened wedge of steel as the cleaver--

Buries itself into the wood sill, just behind the bone of the wrist and--

John screams, plummeting to the alley below where he slams into a pile of over-ripe bags of garbage.

FADE TO BLACK

INT. SHOWERS - NIGHT

We are unsure of where we are. Dirty white lines of moldy grout stretch out like lines of longitude of a dark, unreal world.

We begin to move, dragged roughly, our blurry single eye sliding along the greasy green ceramic tile.

Our vision fades in and out as the world begins to tilt with a racheting chain ringing in our ears until the hard green squares slowly fall away and spin lightly beneath us.

We are dangling there when we see the bloody stump at the end of one arm as we realize that we are John, naked, hanging upside down in the shower room.

Again, we black out.

INT. MEAT FREEZER - NIGHT

Ophelia jerks awake. She is inside a dark, cold space that feels like a coffin. Screaming, she beats against the door which gives enough to let a sliver of light in.

Ice-cold, her skin is pale moon-white, her lips already blue. Her breath steams around her as she realizes she is locked in one of the refrigerators packed with slabs of bright red and white marbled meat.

INT. SHOWERS - NIGHT

Kuru leans over the inverted John.

KURU

You're stew now, John-boy.

OTTO

What are you doing down here? You see the time? Granny's gonna need help serving.

KURU

In a minute. I just want a little sip
of him while it's still nice and warm.

INT. REFRIGERATOR - NIGHT

Ophelia kicks viciously at the door but a padlocked chain is
wrapped around and through the handle.

She cracks open the plastic shelve-form, exposing the inside of
the door. Tearing out the old foam insulation, she finds the
nuts to the back of the handle.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Otto grabs his knives and the sharpener. As he passes one of
the refrigerators, we see a handle screw turn and fall, making
a tiny plink against the floor.

INT. SHOWERS - NIGHT

Half conscious, John begins to hear a familiar sound; zink,
zink. He tries to reach up to free his feet but he has no hand.

JOHN

Ophelia...

KURU

She's on ice, John-boy. After dinner's
served tonight, Rex promised us a
little treat, sashimi.

Otto grabs his hair, pulling him back, exposing his throat.

OTTO

Grab one of them bottles.

Kuru holds the bottle with the bloody funnel under John's head.

The knife gleams unnaturally bright and long, like death's
scythe, arcing towards his neck.

Suddenly, all the basement lights go out.

OTTO

Fucking fuses.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Behind the bank of refrigerators is the main fuse box. Otto slips in behind the largest freezer and finds the circuit main has been tripped.

OTTO

What?

INT. SHOWERS - NIGHT

John sees his pile of clothes nearby. They seem to be out of reach but he begins to swing toward them, each time drawing closer and closer.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Kuru finds the chain curled around the base of the refrigerator and the inverted, limp handle.

KURU

Otto! Otto!

Otto turns just as Ophelia plunges a long boning knife into Otto's hump.

OTTO

You bitch!

He grabs for her but she knees him in the groin, shoving him back against the wall where the knife hits the open fuse box--

Electrifying Otto, cooking him instantly.

INT. SHOWERS - NIGHT

With the faintest of holds, John catches the sleeve of his coat.

INT. LOCKERS - NIGHT

Kuru sees Otto's twitching body fall to the floor. Ophelia runs into the dark metal labyrinth of the lockers as Kuru lunges after her.

INT. SHOWERS - NIGHT

Straining to stay conscious, John searches the pockets until he finds what he needs; the dinner knife.

INT. LOCKERS - NIGHT

Ophelia creeps silently through the maze, trying to not even breathe.

Kuru follows her scent; a true predator stalking its prey.

She turns a corner, moving through the black space by touch, her fingers using the lockers as the blind use braille.

There is a sharp metal bang behind her. She freezes, afraid. Crouching, she listens, almost feeling the darkness come alive around her as--

We move up to the top of the locker where Kuru stands barefoot, perched above her like a jungle cat.

His knife hisses against the leather of his belt. Ophelia hears it and bolts--

Rushing blindly, searching for the showers until--

She runs straight into Kuru. He slams her back, pinning her against the lockers.

The long knife traces down her body like a finger.

KURU
Oh... I just been dying for a piece of
this ass.

Hearing something, he turns to see John heave the enormous wine jug--

Smashing down onto Kuru who crumbles under the explosion, falling with a shower of blood and green glass.

Ophelia and John collapse into each other's arms.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Granny stands at the edge of the basement stairs, calling into the stygian dark.

GRANNY

Otto! Kuru! Quit your monkey business
and get up here! Can't you hear them?

Behind her, through the double doors, the clatter of spoons can be heard.

Fretting, she wipes her hands on her apron and goes to the stove.

GRANNY

Rex? Rex! Dammit, where are you? I need help.

She tries to lift the enormous pot of stew but it is obviously too heavy. The stew sloshes about precariously and as some spills over the edge, splattering against the floor, the clattering spoons seem to react.

John, dressed now, with a towel wrapped around his hand, leads Ophelia up from the stairs. Granny whirls around.

GRANNY

Oh?... John, Ophelia...

Her smile is dark and toothless.

JOHN

We're getting out and if you try to stop us, I will kill you.

They cross to the metal backdoor but each and every lock has been thrown.

JOHN

Where are the keys?

Granny smiles innocently.

GRANNY

I might know--

JOHN

Where are they!

GRANNY

Please, John, I need help. Can't you hear them? It's late. So late. They're hungry. They have to eat. Everyone must eat--

He rushes at her, pinning her throat against the metal refrigerator with his forearm as he searches the pockets of her apron.

GRANNY

You can't leave, John! No one leaves
Rex! No one!

John finds the keys but when he turns to Ophelia, Granny attacks.

OPHELIA

Look out!

She jumps on his back, knocking him into the counter where he slams against the enormous oven.

Falling, he grabs hold of the oven door which yawns open as they tumble to the floor.

Granny sinks her few remaining teeth into his shoulder, blood bubbling out around her leathery lips as--

John, howling mad, gets hold of her and flips her over onto the oven door which he quickly kicks shut--

Rolling her into the hot metal box, locking it shut as she yowls in pain. The oven jerks and bangs, smoke billowing out until her screams die.

John stumbles over to the steel door. The room seems to grow quiet.

There is a dream-like quantity to the number of keys and locks and a dream-like quality to the struggle to find each match.

With only one hand, John fumbles the key ring. Smoke swirls around him, sweat stings his eyes as a single sound begins to rise, like blood pounding in his temples, a sound that blots out even the metal clatter of keys; the soft burble of stew.

OPHELIA

John, let me help you.

He almost can't hear her as she takes the ring of keys. The stew continues to call, siren-like, luring him towards the stove.

He stands over the pot, finger-like wisps of fragrant stew-steam curling around him, running through his hair.

Turning away, he looks at the smoke-blurred image of Ophelia, trying to open the door.

JOHN

Hurry... Please...

He sees himself reflected in the metal door of the refrigerator. A fat bubble of stew pops as the distant rhythm of beating bowls grows more and more insistent.

His mouth begins to water, his stomach growls and, when he glimpses the reflection again, he does not see himself, he sees Mundi.

The final lock snaps open and Ophelia throws open the door. Outside, the alley seems empty.

OPHELIA

John! Come on!

When she turns back to the open door, Rex Mundi is there.

MUNDI

Leaving before a meal is bad luck.

OPHELIA

No! John!

He grabs her by the neck, backing her into the kitchen, gagging her with his other hand.

MUNDI

It's all right, John. Go ahead. One ... last taste, one little finger-dip, and then you can go.

John feels Mundi taking hold of him.

MUNDI

I give you my word, John. One last taste and I will release the lovely Ophelia and you and she may do as you wish.

Ophelia tries to scream, "No" as John stands at the edge of the stove.

JOHN

No. No more deals.

John grabs the entire pot and lifts it.

MUNDI

What are you doing?

He pitches the pot forward, throwing half the stew onto the floor.

The steaming brown liquid rushes over Mundi and Ophelia's feet, running across the tile, spilling under the double doors.

MUNDI

What have you done?

There is a huge commotion of scraping chairs and tables as hundreds of people scramble to the doors.

The first few slam against them, followed quickly by a dozen more.

John holds the pot which is half filled with stew.

MUNDI

Give that to me.

John shakes his head as outside becomes a feeding frenzy, tongues and fingers lapping at the bottom of the doors.

MUNDI

If you want to live you will give that to me!

JOHN

Let her go!

The frenzy becomes more and more violent, marked by bestial cries as bodies begin pounding against the door.

MUNDI

You're making your final mistake, John!

JOHN

Let her go!

MUNDI

Remember this, John. Wherever you go, I'll be there with you. Remember that. You are what you eat.

He shoves Ophelia towards him.

MUNDI
Now give it to me.

JOHN
Take it!

He throws the remaining stew at Mundi, covering him from head to toe in thick, brown gravy.

MUNDI
Oh no.

The double doors burst open with a savage force as--

John and Ophelia jump into the alley, slamming the door shut, bracing against it as the tidal wave of humanity slams Mundi against the metal.

Blood pours out of the bottom of the door, an unnatural amount of blood, an waterfall of red, rushing down the concrete step and washing over their feet.

The pounding against the door becomes--

INT. DINER - NIGHT

The pounding of a single palm against a bottle of ketchup. The bottle coughs and the thick red sauce gushes onto a hamburger.

HUNGRY MAN
Mom, I'm starving.

As the man sinks his teeth into his hamburger, we see John and Ophelia enter the diner.

It has been several days. Both are bandaged, John's hand thoroughly wrapped, and are carrying their suitcases.

The fat cook watches as Ophelia reaches into her pocket. She slaps the dinner knife onto the counter. It is bent and flecked with blood.

Arm in arm, they turn and leave.

FADE OUT.