

CITY OF SHADOWS

"The Red Red Eyes"

Pilot

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EXT. LOS ANGELES - TWILIGHT

1949.

The sun's last rays sink over our establishing shot: a teeming mass of humanity and chugging automobiles constituting the "City of Angels" sprawl post WWII.

A wry, dry female voice comes in over the city's buzz.

NORA (V.O.)

Some nights you know trouble when he walks through your door.

EXT. MAR VISTA - NIGHT

Santa Monica's less attractive little sister neighborhood is still largely "up and coming."

Dockhands trade off- the day shift ready to rend the night and the night shift resigned to labor til day.

NORA (V.O.)

Sometimes he creeps in on little cat feet. Sometimes with a slug to the mug.

Good folks return to their families, leaving the shadows grown long in their wake. Stranger, darker things start to stir...

NORA (V.O.)

But he's at his worst when he arrives with a smile.

EXT. LAKE INVESTIGATIONS - NIGHT

A squat, dimly lit brick building, with a bronze plaque by the weather-beaten door:

LAKE INVESTIGATIONS.

We push in through the window...

INT. LAKE INVESTIGATIONS - NIGHT

A simple office setup: a tiny receptionist's desk in the front waiting room, a bigger messy OFFICE in the back.

INT. LAKE INVESTIGATIONS - OFFICE - NIGHT

The only light comes from a dusky desk lamp. Bing Crosby croons quietly from a beat-up record player in the corner.

A pair of FEET rest on the grand oak desk that cramps up nearly half the office. They belong to:

NORA LAKE (mid-30s, white), sharp eyes and a permanent smirk in the corner of her mouth, all set above a tall, lanky frame in tailored trousers.

NORA (V.O.)

When trouble arrives like a salesman,
suitcase full of your deepest, darkest
wishes... well, there aren't many who can
recognize him then.

Nora READS court documents carefully, making notes.

Bzzzzzzt. The buzzer goes off at the front door. Nora doesn't move or react. Moments pass.

Bzzzzzzt.

And finally, the door pushes open, somewhat timidly. We can't see the intruder, but we hear a deep, rich voice from the other room.

DAMIEN (O.S.)

Hello?

Nora raises her eyebrows, but it's only when he darkens her doorway that she bothers to look up.

DAMIEN SOW (late 20s) would cut a tall and elegant figure were it not for the distress of his face and clothes. Dark brown skin and rolling accent of French and African influence reveal a foreign upbringing.

DAMIEN (CONT'D)

Is this Lake Investigations?

NORA

It was until 5PM, and it will be again
tomorrow at 9AM.

DAMIEN

You are closed, I see. Apologies. Were I
not so desperate...

Nora doesn't bite.

NORA

9AM tomorrow. I'd recommend 9:15, unless you'd prefer to speak to me before I've had my coffee.

DAMIEN

(surprised)

You are Detective Lake?

NORA

I am Nora Lake, yes.

DAMIEN

I did not think a woman could be a detective.

NORA

Then you've clearly never tried lying to one.

DAMIEN

No, I just meant... you run this business on your own?

Nora raises her left ring finger, almost like she's flicking him off. But a plain gold band sits there, inconspicuous but present.

NORA

My husband and I own it together. But he is out of the country, so you're stuck with me.

DAMIEN

Please, you are my last hope. I have been to every detective agency in Los Angeles, and they all refuse to speak with me.

Nora finally puts down her papers, realizing this guy isn't going anywhere without a good push.

NORA

Look, Mr...?

DAMIEN

Sow. Damien Sow. I am looking for—

NORA

I don't care. I imagine the color of your skin is all the other dicks cared about, and that's why they turned you away.

Damien looks at her steadily.

NORA (CONT'D)

So I want to be clear. I don't give a damn if you're brown, blonde, or mauve. Lake Investigations has only one rule.

She nods to the corner of her desk, where a stack of small white BUSINESS CARDS perch precariously.

Damien picks one up and reads aloud.

DAMIEN

Lake Investigations...
(he looks up at her)
Female clients only.

NORA

Precisely. Off you go. Best of luck, now get lost.

Shhhhhp. Shhhhhp. The record is over. Nora resets the needle and Bing's voice floats out once again...

She looks up. Damien hasn't moved.

Nora casually opens her top desk drawer, revealing a REVOLVER inside. Damien swallows. Hard.

DAMIEN

What if I am not the client?

NORA

You sure got that "client" look about you. Barging in, asking for help...

DAMIEN

The client is Lucette Sow.

NORA

Another Sow, huh? Alright, pal. Soon as she walks in that door, she can take a crack at hiring me too.

DAMIEN

She's missing.

NORA

You don't say.

Damien struggles to control his temper as Nora watches with only polite interest.

DAMIEN

I have money. Whatever your rate, I will double it.

NORA

I told you—

DAMIEN

Triple it.

Nora stands, resting her hand on the revolver.

NORA

If you've misplaced your wife, perhaps
you might look to your dearth of
listening skills.

DAMIEN

Lucette is my sister. She is only just
seventeen.

Nora frowns. Not liking the twinge in her stomach a
missing seventeen year-old girl gives her.

NORA

And she's hiring me to find herself, is
that it?

Damien raises his hands in a gesture of peace:

DAMIEN

Her brother is a mere purveyor of
information... and funds.

He pulls out a wad of bills and puts it on the desk
between them with a hopeful smile. It's easy to see how
under better circumstances he might be quite charming.

Nora takes her seat behind the desk again, hands behind
her head, feet on her desk. Ignoring the money— for now.

NORA

Sixty seconds to speak for your sister.

Damien presses eagerly into the chair facing her desk.

DAMIEN

We came to this country a year ago, after
the death of our parents in Dakar. We
were to stay with my uncle— my mother's
brother— but it proved... an unsafe
environment for Lucette.

He looks to Nora, to see if he needs to expound. A curt
nod tells him he doesn't.

DAMIEN (CONT'D)

I found a job at a club off the Sunset Strip. I couldn't bear to tell my sister I worked in such a place, of vice and sin, and so imagine my shock when one night, I saw her there.

NORA

And which den of iniquity was this?

DAMIEN

The Matchstick Club.

Nora's face betrays nothing.

DAMIEN (CONT'D)

You have heard of it?

NORA

Oh yes.

DAMIEN

My sister... she is very young. Naive. Los Angeles has filled her with dreams and I... I could not bear to take them from her, even though I knew they would only bring her pain.

He squeezes his hands into fists. Nora clocks his RIGHT WRIST: a white, almost star-shaped SCAR.

DAMIEN (CONT'D)

That night in the club was the last time I saw my sister, three days ago. When I attempted to ask questions, I was fired and barred from returning. When I returned anyway, the police were called. I ran.

He cocks his head, trying to gauge Nora's reaction.

DAMIEN (CONT'D)

Will you help me find her?

A beat.

NORA

Lake Investigations only services female clients.

DAMIEN

But Lucette is female! She's just a girl—

NORA

And I have only your word on any of this.
Your word that you have a sister, that
she is missing, that she disappeared at
the Matchstick Club... not a place one
goes poking around in lightly.

DAMIEN

But Madam—!

NORA

Do you know why we only service women
here? Because men have no qualms wasting
our time and energy on that which, as
men, they can solve for themselves.

A beat as Damien gapes at her like a fish out of water.

NORA (CONT'D)

You can see yourself out.

She picks up the revolver, spins the cylinder to check if
it's loaded. Wouldn't you know, it is.

But Damien is done being polite, gun or no.

DAMIEN

(desperate)

NO! You have to listen. Our uncle tried
to sell her to a terrible man, a movie
producer— the same man I saw her with at
the club! But I cannot get near him
either. He gave his security on the
picture lot my name, my face. I am no use
to Lucette if I am in jail!

He finishes, breathing hard. Eyes boring into hers with
uncommon passion. Nora considers.

NORA

A movie producer?

DAMIEN

Yes. A fat man with greasy black hair. I
do not know his name.

NORA

Does he wear a bolo tie?

Damien looks at her, surprised.

DAMIEN

Yes. With silver— what do you call them?—
aglets.

This clearly means something to Nora, though her face remains unreadable.

Finally, she flips the cylinder into the revolver and tucks it back in the drawer before counting out and pocketing the money on her desk.

NORA

Alright, Mr. Sow. I'll take the case—
Lucette's case. Now will you kindly get
the fuck out of my office?

The look of gratitude on Damien's handsome face just serves to annoy Nora as she shoos him out.

EXT. LAKE INVESTIGATIONS — NIGHT

Damien is only a tall, bent silhouette disappearing down the street into the night as the pale light in Lake Investigations' brick-lined windows dims to nothing.

NORA (V.O.)

Trouble. When he gets his hooks into you,
he does it with a smile...

The sound of crickets rises from chirp to SCREECH, the sound as oppressive as the darkness of the night.

NORA (V.O.)

Until it's too late to change your path.

FADE OUT.

EXT. MESA VERDE SANITORIUM — DAY

A grim facility of steel and concrete and barred windows.

INT. MESA VERDE SANITORIUM — MARGARET'S ROOM — DAY

A blank-faced NURSE lets Nora into an actual padded cell.

NURSE

Fifteen minutes.

She says it like she's said it a thousand times before—
she has. Nora waits until the nurse leaves and then
steels herself before turning to—

NORA

Good morning.

In a STEEL CHAIR bolted to the floor sits MARGARET (50s), the white of her too-pale face bleeding into the white of her STRAIGHT-JACKET. Dark hair in a tangled cloud over her head.

She neither speaks to nor looks at Nora.

Nora sighs and picks up a hairbrush, trying to tame Margaret's hair as gently as possible.

NORA (CONT'D)

I don't know how it gets this way.

Margaret's eyes are dry and dead, staring at nothing. Even when Nora's brushing hits a SNARL, jerking her mother's head back, Margaret doesn't blink.

INT. MESA VERDE SANITORIUM — CORRIDOR — DAY

Nora steps through the door the Nurse holds open for her.

NURSE

(mechanical)

Was it a nice visit?

Nora doesn't even bother looking back as she departs.

NORA

Same visit we've had for the last twenty-six years.

CUT TO:

INT. LAKE INVESTIGATIONS — OFFICE — DAY

Nora sits at her desk across from RACHEL BROWN 40s, perfectly groomed in a predatory sort of way. Rachel gleefully eyes:

An array of lurid PHOTOS featuring a NAKED MIDDLE-AGED MAN crushing a BOTTLE BLONDE under his soft white belly.

RACHEL

Yes, these will do nicely.

NORA

I thought they might. But Mrs. Brown—
(off Rachel's wince)

Rachel— I have to let you know I've been hearing... rumors.

Rachel looks up at Nora sharply.

RACHEL

Rumors.

Nora takes a deep, professional breath.

NORA

That your husband is employing similar methods against you.

RACHEL

(bristles)

What are you implying?

NORA

Complete discretion. And that I can take care of this complication for an additional three hundred.

Rachel sighs, deflating.

RACHEL

God, will I ever be free of him?

Nora leans forward, confident.

NORA

He'll be out of your hair before you know it. Leave it to me.

Rachel stands, somewhere between annoyed and impressed.

RACHEL

Here's hoping you're as good as you think, Miss Lake.

Nora stands too, stretches a hand to shake.

NORA

It's Mrs., actually.

RACHEL

Funny. I wouldn't have pegged you for the married type.

It's hard to tell how she means it. Nora flashes a smile.

NORA

Partners in life as well as business. My husband is off tracking a particularly elusive bail jumper through the Everglades at the moment.

(beat)

But he'd be the first to admit you should never send a man to do a woman's job.

That gets a smile out of Rachel before she leaves.

Left alone, Nora puts on a hat for the express purpose of pulling it down over her face.

NORA (V.O.)

My bread and butter: women who're done
with being done wrong.

She slouches down in her chair, trying to catch a few winks or just gather her thoughts.

NORA (V.O.)

It's what I should stick with. Lord knows
Bob Seed is a bad road to take. That's a
lesson already learned.

She sighs.

NORA (V.O.)

But a seventeen year old girl, caught in
his flabby grasping hands? This feels too
much like a second chance.

She sits up, dropping the hat onto the desk. Picks up the PHONE decisively.

NORA

(over phone)

Monumental Pictures, please. Office of
Bob Seed. Thanks.

When she speaks again, her voice is different; breathy, innocent.

NORA (CONT'D)

(over phone)

Hello? My name's Daisy, I met Mr. Seed at
a party. He told me to give him a call...

(she giggles)

If I was interested in any, uh, modeling-
type work?

She rolls her eyes at herself.

EXT. MONUMENTAL PICTURES STUDIO LOT - DAY

A bustling studio lot; the drive lined with palm trees as a row of long, boat-like cars wait to enter the premises.

It takes a moment to recognize Nora standing in front of the entrance in a prim skirt suit, sunglasses, and a wig of kinky red curls under a half hat.

She stares up at a BILLBOARD for Monumental's upcoming release: a thriller titled BLOODY MAGGIE. "Starring newlyweds VICTORIA WOODLAWN and BUCK DAVIS!"

On the poster, Buck, painted square-jawed and blandly handsome looks nervously at his co-star—

Victoria, utterly captivating even in acrylics: platinum blonde and glamorous, her mad eyes stare straight into the viewer (in this case Nora)'s soul.

Nora shakes off those eyes and squares her shoulders to enter the lot.

EXT. INDIAN JUNGLE — NIGHT

The lush foliage of a JUNGLE rustles as SOMETHING BIG moves through, stalking:

A procession of "native" Indian GUIDES protectively march a knockout REDHEAD (20s) in a sarong, their torches the only source of light.

REDHEAD
(fearful)
Did you hear that?

The FRONT GUIDE throws up a hand. The company HALTS—

FRONT GUIDE
(heavy Indian accent)
It is Gogaji!

Suddenly, out of the jungle in front of them explodes a MONSTER— a man-snake hybrid, nearly seven feet tall with scaly skin, slitted nose and glowing yellow eyes.

As the redhead SCREAMS theatrically, the monster THROWS her over his shoulder and RUNS—

DIRECTOR (O.S.)
CUT!

INT. STAGE FOUR — DAY

Reveal that we are, of course, on a movie set... an immense warehouse space currently hosting the "jungle" as men scramble, on set and off, to prepare for the next shot. Cameras and microphones are fastened into place.

The "monster" puts the red-haired actress down, but not before sliding his hand up her sarong. She flinches but finds herself almost immediately under the arm of:

BOB SEED, 50, with protuberant eyes and protruding belly. He carries himself with smug confidence, wearing a distinguishing BOLO (string) TIE with silver aglets (metal caps at the ends). It's... a look.

SEED

Beautiful, sweetheart. I love to hear you scream.

The front guide— an actor— approaches Seed nervously. He speaks without a trace of the pronounced Indian accent—

FRONT GUIDE

Mr. Seed, I was wondering if we could pull back on the accent? It feels a bit—

Seed looks through the actor to the harried DIRECTOR—

SEED

Give the line to one of the others.

FRONT GUIDE

(hurriedly)

No, wait, I can do it—

Seed doesn't acknowledge him, just turns— the actress still clenched under his arm— and finds himself face to face with NORA in her disguise.

NORA

Mr. Seed? We have an appointment.

She keeps her voice light, girlish, but there's something underneath. Something ugly, festering. Seed's oily smile fades as he takes her in.

SEED

You'll have to forgive me; I don't recall us meeting. Certainly not at the kind of parties I attend.

The actress trills out a mean laugh.

NORA

I confess I fibbed. I only need a moment of your time— to stave off police involvement, if you catch my drift.

Seed stares, trying to suss this strange woman out. She responds with only the blandest of smiles. Finally Seed sends the actress off with a slap to the bottom.

SEED
(to Nora)
You have five minutes.

NORA
Perfectly fine. I'm a social worker, you see. I'm looking for a missing girl.

Seed loses what little interest he had in her conversation.

SEED
In this town? Good luck.

NORA
Her name is Lucette Sow.

No reaction. Nora holds out a PHOTOGRAPH.

NORA (CONT'D)
Perhaps this jogs your memory?

She watches his face closely as he looks down his nose at Lucette's smiling face and notes the small FLINCH before:

SEED
I don't go around with underage girls.

NORA
I'm not the police, Mr. Seed. I'm sure you would never gad about with an underage girl... intentionally. But girls get ideas, think they're grown women...

He sneers in agreement. But—

SEED
Still haven't seen her.

NORA
Mr. Seed, are you a member of the Matchstick Club?

No chance of hiding his flinch this time.

SEED
(angry)
What's a social worker know about the Matchstick Club, huh?

NORA

I know that's where Lucette Sow was last seen.

She drops the girlish flutter to her voice.

NORA (CONT'D)

(hard)

With you.

SEED

This interview is over.

He starts to walk away, but Nora's voice, harsh and flat, stops him in his tracks.

NORA

Do you know what's wrong with your movies, Mr. Seed?

Seed turns to glare at her. He's not used to being spoken this way. Especially by a woman.

SEED

Listen here, you insolent—

Nora just steamrolls over him.

NORA

Men in scary masks don't frighten anyone.

Nora's gaze is hard, and we know for sure now: she hates this man. More than hates. Wishes him dead.

NORA (CONT'D)

It's the monsters with human masks— the ones who think pretty girls are theirs by right, to do with as they will— they're the ones who deserve to be torn apart limb from fucking limb.

The whole CREW is staring at this interaction. Seed SNAPS his fingers and two on-set SECURITY GUARDS step up to grab Nora by both arms. They aren't gentle.

Seed gets close to Nora, sensing her revulsion and reveling in it.

SEED

What bothers you more, sweetheart? That I can have whatever woman I want? Or—

She jerks back, but his greasy hand lifts her chin so they're only inches apart.

SEED (CONT'D)
-that I don't want you?

Nora, usually so dauntless, is frozen. Just as he intended. Seed laughs and turns to the guards:

SEED (CONT'D)
See this... woman... off the lot- and
make sure she doesn't return.

Nora doesn't struggle, but there's murder in her eyes as they lead her away. Seed's satisfaction only lasts a moment before it gives way to concern.

EXT. THE SUNSET STRIP - TWILIGHT

The infamous Sunset Strip is just starting to come alive in the early evening; taxis dropping off couples and groups of young men and women dressed to the nines.

Nora pulls up in a sea-green Dodge Wayfarer, a stout little convertible roadster. A woman in pants, alone, in her own car draws some eyes, but she pulls down her hat and gets on with it.

EXT. THE MATCHSTICK CLUB - TWILIGHT

The Matchstick Club looms at the end of an alleyway, painted black with darkened windows, only a single streetlight illuminating the red front door.

Nora, missed at first glance, lurks in the shadows, leaning against the wall.

She watches as bright-faced girls in dazzling dresses are escorted inside by men in sharp suits with sharper eyes.

Nora takes in the details; the BARS on the windows, the waves of jazz creeping out the door as it opens and closes, the large pair of BOUNCERS outside the red door.

Then, the moment she's been waiting for- SEED strolls up, alone, brimming with self-importance. The bouncers raise the velvet rope with obsequious respect.

Nora watches Seed disappear inside, then melts away into the night.

She doesn't seem to notice as a tall dark figure peels away after her.

EXT. SUNSET STRIP - NIGHT

Nora approaches her car, where a dour METER MAID is writing a ticket.

NORA
(charming)
Must we? I was just dropping off my husband.

METER MAID
Your husband works here?

It's difficult what she disbelieves more; that this woman would have a husband, or that he'd work on the Strip. Nora's smile is disarming, though.

NORA
He's a musician. I play second fiddle to an actual fiddle.

That pulls a small grin. The meter maid rips the ticket.

NORA (CONT'D)
God bless ya. It's been a rough day.

Suddenly, the meter maid's face darkens.

METER MAID
That your husband?

Nora turns to see Damien Sow standing in front of her car, his arms crossed.

NORA
Well, he's not the postman.

The meter maid glares at them both as she leaves.

NORA (CONT'D)
(to Damien)
I'm starting to think nobody likes you.

DAMIEN
You didn't talk to anyone! You didn't even go inside the club.

NORA
Look who's a detective now, too.

She hops in her car.

DAMIEN
You promised to find Lucette.

NORA

I keep a careful record of my promises
and that was not one of them. Don't make
me regret taking her case.

She starts the car under Damien's glare. But as she
notices a Matchstick Club bouncer striding towards him—

NORA (CONT'D)

(resigned)

You'd better get in.

Pre-lap the BLARE of a hot jazz trumpet—

INT. THE MATCHSTICK CLUB — NIGHT

The den of iniquity in action. A whirl of madness: the
scintillating glint of beaded dresses contrast against
shadowy dark corners; bright-faced CIGARETTE GIRLS and
crisply clad WAITERS tend to every need as the Los
Angeles ELITE mix with the young, beautiful and eager.

The band is hot, the martinis are cold, and there's never
an off night here. At least not for the customers.

We find Seed right at home on a love seat; the red-haired
ACTRESS from set on one side and a very young ASIAN GIRL
(18 only when asked) on the other. He whispers into the
younger girl's ear while the actress clenches out a
patient smile.

Then a CIGARETTE GIRL leans down to touch Seed's arm,
directing his gaze towards:

HOWARD BRONSON (30s), a small man in square glasses,
conferring with a CUSTOMER by the bar.

Though Bronson listens politely, the balance of power
here is clear— the customer is deferential. Even nervous.

Seed looks at Bronson with something different, however—
annoyance. Jealousy.

INT. BRONSON'S OFFICE — NIGHT

Bronson enters the large, richly furnished office like he
owns the place, and as we clock the fancy nameplate—
Howard Bronson— on his desk, we realize: he does.

Without looking—

BRONSON

Seed. What do you want?

Bob Seed awaits him, helping himself to Bronson's Scotch.

SEED

A warmer welcome, for starters. Come now,
aren't we all in this together?

Bronson could start a club with Nora on hating this guy.

BRONSON

Here I thought I was doing the hard work
while you enjoyed my fucking hospitality.

SEED

Touchy touchy.

He loves that he's gotten under Bronson's skin.

SEED (CONT'D)

To the point. Some broad came to see me
today asking about the Senegalese girl.
Claimed she was a social worker.

BRONSON

A woman?

SEED

Yeah, a woman. Red hair. Nosy. Nasty.

Bronson frowns.

BRONSON

You promised no one would come looking
for the girl.

SEED

You're the one who cut her brother loose.
Now who's this nosy bitch making up
stories? Stories about *me*?

He stands, looming over Bronson.

SEED (CONT'D)

It was never supposed to be my name on
the line, Bronson. I want to tell him—

Bronson's temper, already on a short fuse, BLOWS.

BRONSON

You do not speak to him, Seed. A wiser
man wouldn't even speak of him.

There's something in the way they say "him"— whoever he is— to send a shiver down the spine.

Seed backs down, albeit petulantly. He downs his drink, setting the dirty glass down on Bronson's desk.

SEED

I will be there when the time comes,
Bronson. That's all that matters.

(beat)

The warning about the woman is my
courtesy to you.

BRONSON

Thank you. Now kindly buzz off.

With a final smirk, Seed leaves. Bronson frowns, unsure what to make of Seed's story, but prone to worry.

He sees the cigarette girl who directed Seed to him hovering at the open door.

CIGARETTE GIRL

Sorry about the indiscretion, boss. He
told me you wouldn't mind...

BRONSON

(easily)

It won't happen again.

(beat)

Take a chef's special down to the cellar,
wouldja?

Her face goes from eager-to-please to terrified in seconds. She opens her mouth to argue, or plead— but Bronson's cold eyes end the conversation.

EXT. LAKE INVESTIGATIONS – NIGHT

The Wayfarer pulls up in front of the office. Nora turns to Damien, sullen in the passenger seat.

NORA

Don't go back to the Matchstick Club. If
you get yourself killed, not only will
your sister remain as she is— alone and
probably in trouble— but I will have to
answer questions from authority figures.
And I hate authority figures.

Damien turns an unblinking stare on her.

DAMIEN

Where is your husband?

NORA

(taken aback)

What?

DAMIEN

Your husband. You told me he was out of the country. You told the meter maid he was a musician on the Strip. I contacted another of your clients—

NORA

You did *what?!*

DAMIEN

She claimed your husband is recovering his faculties with family in Vermont after a stint as a Japanese P.O.W.

A long pause as Nora sizes Damien up. Clearly she's underestimated him.

DAMIEN (CONT'D)

We're the same, you and I. We get by in a world that gives us nothing and condemns us for taking anything for ourselves. We change what we can and accept what we cannot.

There's iron in his voice.

DAMIEN (CONT'D)

I cannot accept my sister's disappearance. You're right; dead I cannot help her. But I do not trust you.

NORA

That's the smartest thing you've said since we met.

Having said his piece, Damien opens the car door. Nora puts her hand on his. He looks up at her, surprised.

NORA (CONT'D)

I don't care what your life is. One more lie, one more overstep— we're kaput, little sister or no. Got it?

He tips his hat to her— somewhat sarcastically— and slides out of the car. Nora watches him disappear into the night, frowning.

Wondering what she's gotten herself into this time.

INT. KITCHEN — NIGHT

The strange, blurry unreality of a dream.

A perfectly pristine old-fashioned kitchen with a high counter. A LITTLE GIRL enters in a white nightgown.

LITTLE GIRL

Mama?

We hear heavy breathing: a man's and a woman's.

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)

Papa?

The little girl steps around the counter. From her POV:

A NAKED MAN on the floor, shuddering, gasping for breath, a NAKED WOMAN on top of him, thrusting...

The little girl doesn't comprehend.

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)

(upset)

Mama?

We realize the woman is thrusting with a KNIFE, tearing uncontrollably into the man's naked flesh.

She turns towards the little girl and we see her FACE at last— bared teeth, blood-spattered cheeks... and GLOWING RED EYES.

It's MARGARET.

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)

(screams)

MAMA!!!!

SMASH TO:

INT. NORA'S BEDROOM — DAWN

Nora STARTS AWAKE from her nightmare and presses her hands over her eyes as if she could push away the fear.

She pulls out a flask from her nightstand and takes a long draw of something strong. Clearly not the first time this has happened.

She rises and we take in the small, windowless chamber of her bedroom. It's a pigsty; clothes and papers strewn everywhere. She walks down a spiral staircase, into:

INT. LAKE INVESTIGATIONS – NIGHT

Nora sits at her desk, feet up, staring out into space and drinking Scotch straight from the bottle.

She reaches for her desk drawer. Hesitates. Then opens it. She removes the drawer's FALSE BOTTOM to retrieve:

A folded, worn PHOTOGRAPH of a Latina woman on the beach; raven-haired and dark-eyed, with a sweet smile and smooth caramel skin. This is VALERIA SUAREZ, preserved at 22.

Nora unfolds it– the other half of the photo is HER, several years younger and lighter. She leans against Valeria, laughing.

Nora flips it over and takes a strong pull of Scotch.

In beautiful flowing writing– not Nora's:

Glad to be hers and she glad to be mine. Valeria

Nora stares at the picture for a long time, resting her head on her arms until her eyes close with exhaustion.

INT. MESA VERDE SANITORIUM – MARGARET'S ROOM – DAY

The nurse lets a very tired-looking Nora in, not even bothering with her usual chipper remarks.

NORA

Hello, Mother.

Margaret awaits– tangled black hair vivid against her white face and straightjacket.

Nora loses herself a moment staring into her mother's vacant face, so unlike what haunts her nightmares. Eyes no longer red and savage but unfocused. Deserted.

She snaps herself out of it and takes the hairbrush. Begins the daily ritual.

For a minute, it's almost peaceful. The sun bright through the window. Except for a thin tendril of SHADOW across Margaret's face, like that of a tree branch.

Nora glances at the window.

There's no tree outside.

She looks back at her mother's face, and there's definitely a shadow there.

Curious, Nora moves to the window to investigate. It's a nice view: the Hollywood hills in the distance, the rush of the city below. But not even a hint of shade.

When she looks back at Margaret, the shadow is GONE. Off Nora, unsettled—

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE OF VINCENT MARINO, PI — DAY

A larger space than Nora's office, but with the same general idea: receptionist desk out front, a door behind her leading to the P.I.'s larger OFFICE in back.

Unlike Nora's receptionist desk, this one has a RECEPTIONIST behind it, so when her boss, VINNIE MARINO (50s, sleazy, hungover) enters, she jumps up.

RECEPTIONIST

Mr. Marino—

VINNIE

Whoa, calm down there, sweetheart. It's too early to be jumping up and down. Where's my coffee?

RECEPTIONIST

There's someone in your office— she was here when I arrived so I couldn't—

Vinnie's beady eyes widen—

INT. VINNIE'S OFFICE — DAY

Vinnie slams into his office to find Nora in his chair, feet up on his desk in her preferred position.

NORA

I like this chair. Desk is a little off though. Maybe too modern for my taste?

Vinnie's not amused.

VINNIE

Who the hell are you?

NORA

A P.I., just like you. Well, not just like. But you get my drift.

VINNIE

(scoffs)

A lady dick? Pull the other one.

Nora just leans back with a smile.

NORA

I have a business proposition for you, Mr. Marino. How'd you like to make some easy money?

Vinnie can't help himself— his ears prick up at the mention of his favorite kind of money.

VINNIE

(suspicious)

What do I have to do?

NORA

Nothing you haven't done before. Just sell out a client.

VINNIE

I would never.

(beat)

How much?

CUT TO:

EXT. BEVERLY HILLS — DAY

Nora's Wayfarer sits in front of a beautiful Beverly Hills home.

INT. DINING ROOM — DAY

An array of PHOTOS feature Nora's client, Rachel Brown, riding a Clark Gable lookalike buck naked.

We pan up to see Nora, politely expressionless, presenting the shots to Rachel, who is unembarrassed. Maybe even a little titillated.

NORA

Negatives included.

Rachel grins, pleased.

RACHEL
You're good, Lake. You're very good.

NORA
I would recommend destroying them, of course.

RACHEL
(deadpan)
Of course.

Rachel pulls out her checkbook and quickly fills out a check before handing it to Nora.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
For the extra trouble.
(beat)
You're quite a find, Detective. Perhaps we'll see each other again before too long.

Nora glances at the check. The amount clearly pleases her— she tips her hat to Rachel as she goes.

EXT. THE SUNSET STRIP — DAY

The Strip looks different— cleaner, respectable— by day.

Nora strides past restaurants (open) and jazz clubs (closed) til she reaches a BRICK WALL covered in ivy.

At the end of the wall, easy to miss, is a GATE.

EXT. SCHEHEREZADE'S BORDELLO — DAY

Nora closes the gate behind her and turns: a lavish fantasy world is laid out, themed to Arabian Nights.

Beautiful WOMEN of all types are dolled up "harem" style in gauzy translucent silks. Some are with CLIENTS, others frolic in the crisp aqua pool.

A beautiful LATINA girl sways up to Nora—

LATINA
Are we expecting you?

NORA
(all business)
Tell Amita Nora Lake is here to see her.

The girl performs a perfectly practiced pout of disappointment, but leads the way—

INT. SCHEHEREZADE'S BORDELLO — DAY

Inside, the theme continues. Nora sits, sipping at tea (clearly wishing it was something stronger) as the whorehouse operates smoothly around her.

Then AMITA (50s, Iranian) approaches to shake Nora's hand with surprising warmth.

AMITA

Nora. Lovely to see you.

A SCAR trails from under Amita's ear to fishhook halfway across her throat. The clear mark of a survivor.

NORA

Do people really buy into this bullshit?

She gestures at over-the-top theme— gauze everywhere, cheap gold "Arabian" trinkets, the veils—

AMITA

(laughs)

Of course they do. Never enlighten ignorance when it leads to cash. An actual visit to Tehran would terrify our clientele, but fantasy is what they pay for. Fantasy is all they receive.

Her sharp eyes briefly echo Nora's disgust.

AMITA (CONT'D)

Not you though. I haven't forgotten the part you played to keep me here.

Nora gives her half a smile.

NORA

I'd hoped you hadn't.

The beautiful Latina girl refills Nora's tea. Nora politely nods her thanks, but the girl doesn't miss the way Nora's eyes are drawn to her for just a moment too long. Neither does Amita.

NORA (CONT'D)

(gets to the point)

Have any of your girls ever crossed paths with the Matchstick Club?

Amita's smile slips.

EXT. GAZEBO - DAY

JANE (20, not her real name) sits, petite and stunning, inside a beautiful gazebo, drawing on a sketchpad.

Amita, with Nora trailing, approaches her cautiously. Like Jane is fragile... or dangerous.

AMITA

Jane, this is Detective Lake. She'd like to ask you some questions.

If Jane hears or understands, she gives no sign. Nora nods at Amita- "I've got it from here"- and Amita leaves.

NORA

Amita tells me you worked at the Matchstick Club.

Jane's pencil SKIDS, ruining her drawing. Still she says nothing. Just flips to a new page.

NORA (CONT'D)

I'm looking for someone. Last time anyone saw her, that's where she was.

Jane just draws. It's impossible to tell what- the lines seem to be appearing out of order.

NORA (CONT'D)

I'd like to keep what happened to you from happening to her. Or worse.

Finally Jane looks up. Her eyes like hollowed out caves.

But even without looking, she keeps drawing.

NORA (CONT'D)

Can you tell me anything that might help me find her?

Jane removes an EARRING. Before Nora can stop her, she STABS the post into her index finger-

NORA (CONT'D)

Wait, don't-

BLOOD wells up. Eyes on Nora, Jane presses her finger once, twice, onto her drawing- then hands it to her.

Nora looks, startled, at the picture. It's of a MAN we've never seen, every feature unremarkable except one:

Jane's blood marks his eyes RED.

The drawing hits Nora like a punch in the gut. She looks up into Jane's empty eyes—

NORA (CONT'D)

Is this... the man who hurt you?

And then Jane's mouth opens wide and Nora sees only a JAGGED STUMP where Jane's tongue used to be.

Nora jerks back but Jane just LAUGHS, hysterically and soundlessly.

CUT TO:

INT. LAKE INVESTIGATIONS — OFFICE — DAY

Nora drops Jane's drawing onto her desk. Stares at it a long time. Wondering.

Suddenly, the FRONT DOOR OPENS.

NORA

Damien?

A MAN appears in her office doorway— white, middle-aged, doughy. Definitely not Damien— nor expected.

NORA (CONT'D)

Apologies.

(she studies him a moment)

Mr. Brown.

This is Nora's client Rachel's husband, EDGAR BROWN— last seen photographed in a very compromising position.

He smiles. It doesn't reach his eyes.

BROWN

My wife was right. You are a clever girl.

Nora's forced smile mirrors his own, but she's clearly on her guard.

NORA

And how is Mrs. Brown?

BROWN

I think you know damn well how she is.
Sitting on top of a pile of money in *my*
house while I'm forced to take lodging in
an extremely unsatisfactory motel.

NORA

(too sweetly)

Not alone, one hopes.

BROWN

I don't know how you scammed my man out
of those snaps, but I'll make it worth
your while to give 'em back.

Brown sits, uninvited, and smirks as he looks Nora up and
down.

BROWN (CONT'D)

A woman detective. Doesn't quite make
sense, does it? Like a dog scientist or a
giraffe whore.

NORA

Or a male client.

BROWN

Huh?

She tosses one of her cards at him. Mouths along-

BROWN (CONT'D)

(reads)

Lake Investigations. Female Clients Only.

Nora's voice remains calm and even throughout, even as
disgust shows in her eyes.

NORA

Even were that not the case, Mr. Brown, a
strict legal- and ethical- code prevents
me from servicing you after working for
your wife. You should look for the same
quality in your own PI next time.

Brown reacts poorly, red-faced:

BROWN

You're a goddamn piece of work.

Nora casually lays her REVOLVER on the desk. Her polite
tone now carries an edge.

NORA

So I've heard.

Brown just shakes his head. Not intimidated.

BROWN

You think I'm gonna just walk out of here empty-handed? I'm a *judge*. With powerful friends in powerful places.

NORA

Yes. I know. As I am a detective.

BROWN

How do you think the DA's office would feel about a woman wielding a PI license?

Nora doesn't like where this is going.

NORA

(steel)

The license is my husband's, and I operate under it legally. Now, I have a case to get back to so—

(fuck off)

Good day, Mr. Brown.

But Brown just leans aggressively across the desk.

BROWN

I can ask nosy questions too, *Mrs. Lake*. Where *is* your husband? Where is Don Lake?

Nora's face pales. Brown knows he's got her.

BROWN (CONT'D)

Because boy howdy, if "Don Lake" doesn't exist then that would mean you've engaged in, let's see...

(taps his chin mockingly)

Forgery, identity theft, fraud, misrepresentation to law enforcement...

Nora's glare has just a touch of fear to it.

BROWN (CONT'D)

You have until tomorrow morning to get me my photos. Think of it as a "case." "The Case of the Vengeful Judge."

(beat)

Pro bono, of course, now that you've tried my patience.

Nora stands, revolver in hand.

NORA

There are really only two things I don't do, Mr. Brown. The first is sell out my clients. The second is work pro bono.

(beat)

Now get the hell out of my office.

Brown finally stands, but slowly. Disrespectfully.

BROWN

Tomorrow. Morning. Photos.

He LEAVES. Nora shakily drops the gun back onto the desk and slumps back into her chair.

She takes out a bottle of scotch from the cabinet behind her and pours herself a full glass. She downs it—

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. THE BLUE MANTIS — EARLY EVENING

Nora slams a different empty glass onto the bar.

She's in a seedy dive bar, and at home there. This is no Matchstick Club; there are no dishy dames or snazzy suits. Everyone here has seen better days, and no one gives a fuck what your line is as long as it doesn't get in the way of their drinking.

The GRIZZLED BARTENDER slides another glass down the bar to Nora, who nurses it.

DAMIEN slides onto the bar stool next to her.

DAMIEN

I was surprised you called.

NORA

I was surprised too.

The bartender moseys over.

BARTENDER

What'll it be.

DAMIEN

Nothing for me. Thank you.

Wrong answer. The bartender's eyes flick to Nora.

NORA

Get the man a whiskey on my tab, Jim.

DAMIEN

That is not necessary. I do not drink.

The bartender slides the whiskey down. Nora shrugs, takes it for herself.

NORA

Never trust a man who doesn't drink.

DAMIEN

And a woman who drinks too much?

NORA

Assume she has good reason and stop asking her irritating questions.

Nora pulls out Jane's drawing of the red-eyed man.

NORA (CONT'D)

Do you recognize him?

Damien examines the drawing, shakes his head.

DAMIEN

What does he have to do with Lucette?

NORA

Honestly, maybe not a goddamn thing. But there's one more person I want to ask.

DAMIEN

Who?

NORA

Bob Seed.

DAMIEN

Didn't you already—

Nora's eyes flash.

NORA

I've got a plan to earn us some quality *private* time this go-round.

(beat)

First, I need you to do something for me.

Damien balks, unable to hide his disdain.

DAMIEN

Why would I do anything for you? I'm paying you to find my sister, which you have not yet done.

NORA

There's somewhere I need to go, and it
would be... unwise... for me to go alone.

(suggests)

I would hate to have to delay your
sister's case.

Damien sees right through her ploy. With no choice:

NORA (CONT'D)

(hard to say)

Please.

Their eyes meet. Finally, Damien nods.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTER HARBOR, BERTH 46 — NIGHT

South of the city is a huge SHIPPING YARD. A maze of
DOCKS with rough-and-tumbles loading crates onto tankers.

The kind of place where cargo manifests go missing, if
you know where I mean.

One man STANDS OUT in a pin-striped violet suit and
spotless spats untouched by the salty grime around him.

This is RAFAEL, 26, young but unabashedly in charge. He
CONFERS with a SHIP CAPTAIN, a trace of a Cuban accent in
his voice even after many years in Los Angeles.

CAPTAIN

New customs agent was receptive to your
offer. We'll be underway tonight.

Rafael gives the captain a crafty grin.

RAFAEL

Buen viaje, my friend.

The captain is on his way and Rafael scribbles CODE into
a small black NOTEBOOK—

NORA (O.S.)

Don't you ever worry you'll lose it?

Rafael looks up. No grin for Nora, strolling up with a
casualness that feels forced, hands jammed in her
pockets. But a reserved respect between them.

RAFAEL

Mrs. Lake. This is unexpected.

Rafael spots Damien, tall and not unintimidating, waiting by the ship with a watchful eye. Too far to overhear, close enough to act quickly.

RAFAEL (CONT'D)

Who's the *prieto*?

NORA

A new friend with a vested interest in seeing me back out of here safely.

RAFAEL

Mrs. Lake, you wound me. No one here means you harm.

NORA

Not everyone down here has your impeccable manners, Rafael.

At that he does grin. Shrugs impishly— what can you do?

NORA (CONT'D)

I'm here to deliver a message.

RAFAEL

And what is this message?

She struggles. Even having come down here, she's hesitant to pull the trigger—

NORA

(finally)

His "Honour" Edgar Brown.

Rafael's eyes narrow. Then he nods. Message received. Nora nods in return, turns to leave.

RAFAEL

I have a message for you, too.

Nora looks back, confused.

NORA

What?

RAFAEL

Do you know why it's called the Matchstick Club?

Nora's whole body tenses.

RAFAEL (CONT'D)

Because the girls there strike hard, burn bright, and die quick.

NORA

Why are you telling me this?

RAFAEL

Because powerful men would think nothing of killing a woman— even a woman as uncommon as yourself— to protect the Matchstick Club's secrets. And our mutual friend would prefer you remain...
unburnt.

A long beat as Nora considers his words. Then flashes him a bright smile— not friendly. Like flame.

NORA

Noted.

RAFAEL

And you know, of course, that there will be a price for Edgar Brown.

His tone is firm. Nora's eyes go flat. This is exactly what she was afraid of.

NORA

You know I'm good for it.

Nora departs, Damien at her side. He looks back once to find Rafael's keen eyes still following them.

DAMIEN

And now Bob Seed?

With only the barest hesitation:

NORA

(hard)

Bob Seed.

OVERLAP: the BULBSMASH of a paparazzi CAMERA—

FLASH TO:

EXT. THE EGYPTIAN THEATER — NIGHT

The FLASH resolves into a dazzling PREMIERE in front of the wrought PILLARS of the Egyptian Theater in Hollywood.

It's the premiere of "Bloody Maggie," and everybody who's anybody is here tonight.

Front and center is VICTORIA WOODLAWN, 31, yet more beautiful in life than on her billboard.

Her movie star smile is lit fiercely by the diamonds dripping from her ears and wrapped choker-style around her neck.

Glued to her side is her new husband, BUCK DAVIS: strong-jawed and wavy-haired, filling out his tux and exuding the same silver screen magic as his bride.

The PAPARAZZI calls their names as the FANS scream for their attention so hard a woman FAINTS.

Watching over it all is Bob Seed, red-haired actress on his arm and a Chesire cat smile on his face.

A harried-looking ASSISTANT scurries up to Seed.

ASSISTANT

Sir, you have a call.

SEED

Kid, it better be Jack Warner himself for you to hassle me right now-

ASSISTANT

Yes, but sir, they said to tell you it was the Matchstick Club-?

And Seed's face drains of color.

ACTRESS

Bob? Is everything-

He's already gone.

INT. EGYPTIAN THEATER - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Bob strides down the hallway, waving off the assistant who follows in his wake.

At the end of the hall is an OFFICE-

INT. EGYPTIAN THEATER - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

And as soon as Seed steps inside, the trap CLOSES-

The door SLAMS behind him, with Damien looming between Seed and the exit. Seed recognizes him immediately-

SEED

You! I'll have you arrested-

Then the desk chair turns to reveal Nora, of course. She steeples her hands together and peers at Bob like a specimen in a lab.

NORA

Well hi there, Bob.

SEED

Who the hell are you? What the hell is this?

NORA

It's a shakedown. He—
(points at Damien)
—and I are going to ask you some questions. You're going to answer.

Bob Seed shakes his head. Unintimidated by this pair.

SEED

Look, I'm having a good night, so I'm gonna give you an out. No security, no flatfoots. Just fuck off.

He turns around and stares at Damien with the air of a man used to being obeyed. Damien doesn't move.

SEED (CONT'D)

Get out of my way you goddamn ni—

He's interrupted by the COCK of a revolver. Whirls to find Nora pointing said revolver at his chest. She moves in front of the desk. The gun doesn't waver.

SEED (CONT'D)

(aggravated)
Lady, you're killing me.

NORA

It's Detective, actually.

And she KICKS Seed in the balls. He lets out a high-pitched MOAN as he sinks towards the floor.

Damien can't help a wince.

Nora pulls Seed up by the chin.

NORA (CONT'D)

Where is Lucette Sow?

Now Seed RECOGNIZES her—

SEED

It's you. The anti-social social worker.
Fuck you, I'm not afraid of—

Nora SHOOTs straight down into one of his shiny black spats. Blood SPRAYS and Seed SCREAMS.

NORA

No one can hear you. All those folks
squealing over your starlets. Tell me
where she is.

Seed pushes out a wheezing laugh through the pain.

SEED

I have no idea. Trust me, I'd tell you if
I did.

NORA

And why's that?

SEED

You have no chance. Whatever I tell you,
you'll take to your graves. Quickly.

Nora and Damien exchange glances.

NORA

(to Bob)

Won't that be nice. So you don't know
where she is. Why don't you tell us, in
great detail—

(she gestures with the gun)

—what part, *exactly*, you played in her
disappearance?

Seed sneers at her, his ugly face uglier as he recounts:

SEED

I see a hundred girls every day, coming
up to me at parties, begging to suck my
cock and play Florist #2 in my next
picture. The prettiest, the ones with a
spark, I bring to the Club.

(beat)

Most are just membership perks. They'll
last a month or two before whoever's eye
they caught tires of them.

NORA

So you procure the girls. Then what?

SEED

I don't know.

Nora SHOOTs him in the other foot. He SCREAMS, sweat dripping down his fat forehead.

SEED (CONT'D)

I *don't*. Sometimes they come back to me, after, but I have to cut them loose. What happens after that? What happens to any cookie caught on the streets after dark?

Nora looks at him with pure disgust.

DAMIEN

(harsh)

But some girls don't come back at all, do they Mr. Seed? Some are... special.

Nora turns, surprised at the change that's come over Damien. His charming, friendly demeanor is gone, replaced by barely contained rage.

In this moment, she might recognize the mask he wears to get by in this world and what it costs him to wear it.

SEED

(nods tightly)

The Negro girl was a special case, yes. Bronson told me to keep an eye out for a mark, like a star—

Nora's eyes fly to Damien's wrist.

DAMIEN

My sister has the same mark.

NORA

Who's Bronson?

Seed hesitates. Nora grinds her boot into his bullet-torn foot til he answers—

SEED

(gasping for breath)

Runs the place.

NORA

Is this him?

She unfolds Jane's drawing of the man with red eyes from her pocket. Seed LOSES HIS MIND at the sight of it.

SEED

No! NO! That's— that's—

(begs)

Put it away, put it away, he can't know—

Nora SLAPS him back to attention.

NORA

What do they want with her?

Seed shakes his head. Terrified now, and not of her. Nora slides off the desk down to Seed's eye-level and moves the gun from his face to his CROTCH.

NORA (CONT'D)

(growls)

One chance.

SEED

(desperate)

I don't know, I don't *know*! But she's gone. There will be nothing to find; no body, no trace. He never leaves anything behind when he's done with them.

Nora looks to Damien as his world stops. He takes one step back. Then another. Heartbreak writ across his face.

Nora, however, isn't finished with Seed.

NORA

Who? Who is he?

Seed again shakes his head, trembling head to toe.

SEED

You have to understand... He promised me glory, riches— he promised me *everything*—

NORA

(frustrated)

Who? Who promised you?

Seed just BLUBBERS like a child. Nora looks down to see Seed has WET HIMSELF. She's broken him.

But Nora doesn't move the gun. She's looking at Seed without restraint, with rage and disgust and violence.

DAMIEN

Detective.

His voice comes from behind her, sad but steady. Her hand TIGHTENS around the revolver.

DAMIEN (CONT'D)

Detective, please.

She looks up at him, like a sleepwalker wakened. Damien's face is streaked with tears, but his eyes are clear.

DAMIEN (CONT'D)

He is worth nothing. Do not let him make you a monster. Besides...

Damien's voice turns ice cold.

DAMIEN (CONT'D)

There are better ways to make him pay.

The spell breaks. She nods jerkily.

NORA

Go get the car.

Damien nods, sprints out the door. Seed moans:

SEED

Oh God, they'll kill me for this. Please, leave it be. We'll both live if you leave it be.

Nora looks back down at Seed.

NORA

If only you'd shown the same concern for Lucette, or any of the hundreds of women unlucky enough to find themselves caught in your depraved paws.

BANG. Nora FIRES the revolver, blowing off half Seed's penis and a good chunk of testicle.

His SCREAM is inhuman. Beyond pain. Nora pulls out a HANDKERCHIEF and shoves it in his mouth to stop the noise— so he can hear when she tells him:

NORA (CONT'D)

That was for Valeria Suarez, whose soul you stole and devoured, you piece of shit.

She steps over Seed as he curls into the fetal position, and closes the office door firmly behind her.

INT. EGYPTIAN THEATER — LOBBY — NIGHT

Nora slips unnoticed through the glittering crowd gathering for the premiere.

Suddenly she's PULLED to the side—

INT. TICKET SELLER BOOTH – CONTINUOUS

The ticket seller booth is dark and shuttered, not in use this evening. But there's enough light to make out the sparkling dress, elegant neck graced by diamonds, platinum hair made silver by the shadows—

It's VICTORIA WOODLAWN.

VICTORIA

(whispers)

What are you *doing* here?

For the first time, we see Nora at a loss for words.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

Nora...

NORA

(husky)

I'm not here for you.

Victoria, too, seems unsettled by their closeness. Like maybe she didn't quite think this through. Her fingers brush Nora's cheek—

VICTORIA

Then where's Bob?

Nora ignores the question. Grabs Victoria's fingers in her own.

NORA

Valeria...

Victoria pulls away.

VICTORIA

Not Valeria. Victoria.

NORA

(bitter)

You're right. Valeria Suarez would never have made this particular movie. She was a good woman. Before Bob Seed.

A flicker of shame in Victoria's eyes. But:

VICTORIA

I made my choices, Nora. I'm not a princess in a tower, not some little girl lost. I don't need you to rescue me.

NORA

(sad)

I know.

(beat)

I have to go.

(beat)

But I am sorry.

VICTORIA

(wistful)

Sorry for what?

Nora pulls the door of the ticket seller booth open.

NORA

For ruining your premiere.

With the door open, they can hear quite a COMMOTION—
looks like Bob Seed's been found—

Victoria's eyes widen, but Nora's already GONE.

FADE IN:

EXT. PORCH — NIGHT

Another bleary, surreal DREAM.

CLOSEUP: the LITTLE GIRL stands on a rickety porch. Pan
out to reveal the activity of a CRIME SCENE BEHIND HER.

A POLICE OFFICER kneels next to her, but the little girl
just stares out into space, seeing nothing.

Then a GURNEY emerges from the house, a body covered
under a tarp.

The little girl watches it pass right in front of her.

Suddenly, the tarp TEARS and a HAND reaches out to GRAB
the little girl by the throat—

She can't even scream—

She's pulled towards the body, and her FATHER'S HEAD POPS
OUT with a too-wide, maniacal grin,

and JAGGED HOLES where his eyes used to be.

SMASH TO:

INT. NORA'S BEDROOM — DAWN

Nora wakes with a gasp in her bed. Again. She reaches for the flask in her nightstand, only to find it EMPTY.

INT. LAKE INVESTIGATIONS — NIGHT

Nora comes down the stairs into her office. She flicks on the LIGHT—

And bites back a SCREAM. Damien is sitting in her chair.

NORA

What the fuck are you doing here?

He looks a hundred years old. Her face softens. Slightly.

DAMIEN

I don't know where else to go.

A long beat as Nora considers. Then she reaches around him to pull two things out of her desk drawer: her bottle of scotch and her car keys.

NORA

I'll drink. You drive.

EXT. DEAD MAN OVERLOOK — NIGHT

Right off Mulholland Drive. Nora's Wayfarer sits alone and undisturbed overlooking the city lights.

Inside the convertible, Nora looks a little out of place sitting shotgun with Damien in the driver's seat.

She offers the bottle of Scotch, half-gone, to Damien.

DAMIEN

(evenly)

I do not drink.

NORA

What do you do?

He doesn't answer, just stares out at the view. Perhaps wondering where, in the city below, his sister ended up.

NORA (CONT'D)

You really love her, don't you?

DAMIEN

Lucette is all I have. All I have to offer into this world.

(beat)

Had.

Nora shakes her head, bitter.

NORA

That kind of love means you end up here. Suffering for another person who was always going to leave you, one way or another.

DAMIEN

Then why bother helping me?

NORA

(shrugs)

You paid me well.

Off his pained look—

NORA (CONT'D)

You'll be better off not believing in people, chief. Live longer.

Damien shakes his head. Not buying her act this time.

DAMIEN

There must have been someone you cared for, once. A lover?

Another drink is Nora's only reply, but Damien doesn't give up.

DAMIEN (CONT'D)

What about family? Siblings? Parents?

She lets out a low chuckle.

NORA

Family. Now there's an innocuous word.

(beat)

Do you know the story of Bloody Maggie? The real story?

DAMIEN

Bloody Maggie... the movie? At the premiere?

(off her nod)

No, I've never heard it.

Nora breathes deep, eyes on the city below.

NORA

Twenty-six years ago, a woman in Alhambra named Margaret O'Riley woke up in the middle of the night and found her husband in the kitchen pouring himself a glass of milk. For some reason, she took such exception to this, she found it necessary to stab him twenty-six times. Nine in the chest, six in the stomach, three in the groin, and eight times in the face. Gouged his eyes right out of his head—police never even found 'em.

Damien's eyes are wide.

DAMIEN

But... why? Was he unfaithful? Did he hurt her?

Nora shakes her head.

NORA

He wasn't much, but he wasn't a cheater or a beater. Just a postman.

Another drink. Damien has no idea what to say.

NORA (CONT'D)

Bloody Maggie was queen of the tabloids for months after that. But eventually the story faded, she faded, since no one ever knew *why*.

(beat)

Because she never spoke another word after that. Not even to her own daughter.

She looks at Damien, who's finally starting to get it.

NORA (CONT'D)

(matter of fact)

It's better not to believe in people. Sometimes they end up devouring your father's eyeballs.

Damien looks sick, but Nora seems to have settled something in her own mind by telling him this.

NORA (CONT'D)

I'm not done looking for your sister.

Damien snaps his head up to look at her.

DAMIEN

You heard what Seed said... it's hopeless.

NORA

And you're better off not to hope, because I doubt we'll find her alive. Or if alive, not... whole. But I'm tired of this city swallowing up girls like her. Tired of just... letting it go.

She holds out the photograph of Lucette with a kamikaze smile. Damien hesitates, then, honestly:

DAMIEN

But I am out of funds. I have nothing left to pay you to find Lucette.

Nora shakes her head, bemused.

NORA

I wondered if that was all your lettuce. You're a terrible negotiator- I would've worked for less.

DAMIEN

Then can I have-

NORA

No refunds. But there are other ways to make good. Despite your sobriety, you got a certain- something.

(beat)

I could find use for a guy like you.

A beat as Damien and Nora truly consider each other. Another before he nods, finally accepting the photo.

We pan out slowly, allowing the two to become merely silhouettes against the city's skyline, even as we cut away to other moments...

NORA (V.O.)

I thought I knew trouble.

INT. LAKE INVESTIGATIONS - OFFICE - NIGHT

Nora's office sits empty, waiting.

Moonlight illuminates the PICTURE on Nora's desk, fluttering just slightly in an untraceable wind: Jane's drawing of the man with RED EYES.

NORA (V.O.)
I thought I knew what world I lived in.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A beautifully decorated bedchamber. Victoria sits at her VANITY in a silk robe, brushing out her hair while her husband, Buck, sleeps naked on the bed behind her.

In repose, she looks like just a woman— an unhappy one.

As she stands and turns, her robe slips to reveal a purpling BRUISE under her shoulder blade.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Bob Seed, feet and groin heavily bandaged, lies in a hospital bed.

NORA (V.O.)
I've lived my life trying not to look back.

A NURSE leans over him sympathetically, offering drugs, but Seed SHAKES his head emphatically. As she leaves, the fear in his eyes is apparent.

Still, he's been through a great deal of physical trauma... his eyes droop...

Then FLY OPEN at the sense of a PRESENCE.

SEED
(croaks)
Hello?

But there's no one there. The hospital curtain rustles gently, as if someone had just passed by...

And Seed sees on his tray table— a small MATCHBOOK.

Hands trembling, he picks up the book and opens it.

Inside, one WHITE MATCH stands out among the rest, which are burnt and BLACKENED.

Seed DROPS the matchbook to the floor, shaking now in earnest.

INT. CHEAP MOTEL ROOM — NIGHT

EDGAR BROWN lies snoozing in bed, his nude belly drooping over his tighty-whities, his arm over a naked WOMAN.

NORA (V.O.)
I've been racking up bills I never
intended to pay.

The door BANGS open, waking them both with SCREAMS.

THREE TOUGH GUYS enter, two with BASEBALL BATS. One with BRASS KNUCKLES.

The woman trembles with fear as Brown blusters at them—

Then behind the tough guys, RAFAEL ENTERS.

He ignores Brown, removes his coat and settles it on the woman's shoulders, covering her. He speaks to her quietly. She leaves the room without looking back.

Brown realizes exactly what's about to happen as the brass knuckles FLY towards his face—

The tough guys go to town on Brown, BEATING him til he lies in a boneless heap, bleeding on the floor.

Then, like clockwork, they file out. Only Rafael remains. He bends down and puts a hand on Brown's shoulder even as Brown flinches away—

RAFAEL
Mr. Don Lake politely requests you stay
out of his wife's affairs.

Brown nods frantically as blood drips down his chin. As Rafael leaves as elegantly as he entered—

NORA (V.O.)
Now I'm terrified of what's come due.

CUT TO:

INT. NORA'S BEDROOM — NIGHT

Nora stumbles, more than half drunk, into her bedroom.

She looks blearily at her bed, knowing the dreams that await her there. She stalls, continuing into—

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Nora looks at herself in the bathroom mirror— she looks tired. Older.

NORA (V.O.)
I've been wary all these years of
trouble's smile. But it's his eyes
that'll getcha in the end.

Nora sighs, turns on the sink to splash her face with water.

NORA (V.O.)
His red, red eyes.

She dries her face with a towel and starts to leave—
Then stops in her tracks, looking back at her reflection:
A thin tendril of SHADOW crosses her face.

Just like the shadow she saw on Margaret's face in the sanatorium.

Nora holds up her hand right where the shadow hits— but her hand is unshaded.

She drops her arm to her side— the inexplicable shadow is still on her face...

Until it SLITHERS OFF.

Off Nora, frozen, wondering if she's losing her mind— or if this is something far worse...

FADE TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK.

Pre-lap a JAZZ SINGER'S warm voice as she SCATS a solo—

INT. THE MATCHSTICK CLUB - NIGHT

The club is in full swing, the occupants dancing, sweaty and wild-eyed to careening Dixieland jazz.

There's a savage, off-kilter energy to the place as we swing through the crowd to push into—

INT. BACK HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

A nondescript corridor, disturbingly bare.

A DOOR opens at the far end and BRONSON, looking pale and unsettled, comes through. We press past him—

INT. STAIRWAY - CONTINUOUS

The jarringly bright music fades as we soar down flight after flight of rusting metal stairs to emerge into:

INT. CELLAR DUNGEON - NIGHT

Over almost complete darkness, we hear the SOFT SOBS of a YOUNG WOMAN.

A door CREAKS OPEN, but we barely see a sliver of her face in the dim light it reveals.

A match STRIKES, a CANDLE is lit. A MAN'S VOICE, high but lyrical, creeps through the darkness. The girl shivers.

MAN

(recites)

"Through the ghoul-guarded gateways of
slumber, past the wan-mooned abysses of
night..."

As man and candle approach, we hint at the vastness of the room, large dark shapes covered in cloth.

MAN (CONT'D)

"I have lived o'er my lives without
number, I have sounded all things with my
sight."

The tiny flame FLICKERS, casting shadows that dance across the floor with a life of their own.

MAN (CONT'D)

"And I struggle and shriek ere the
daybreak..."

As the man draws close, the candle flame illuminates the girl's face— dark skin, dark eyes huge with fear, quivering lips. She can't be more than 17.

MAN (CONT'D)

(savoring the last words)

"Being driven to madness with fright."

CHAINED to the wall, yellow-orange light reflects off a white, almost star-shaped BIRTHMARK on her left wrist.

LUCETTE.

The man kneels in front of her. His face— despite being as close to the flame as her own— is a DARK VOID, as if the candlelight dies before touching his skin.

LUCETTE

Please... please help me...

The man presses a finger to her lips and Lucette freezes. He seems to be listening...

WHISPERS rise from the darkness; overlapping, insistent:

WHISPERS

More.../please.../more.../we hunger...

The man pulls out a SMALL BOOK, worn with age, and holds it up for the girl, whose manacled hands cannot grasp it.

MAN

Read.

Lucette gulps down her fear. Her voice trembles, but it's there, lilting with the same gentle French-African accent as Damien.

GIRL

(reads)

"I have whirled with the earth at the dawning, when the sky was a vaporous flame..."

The whispers rise, their words unintelligible... no longer English but something older, something darker.

GIRL (CONT'D)

"I have seen the dark universe yawning, where the black planets roll without aim..."

As she reads, she doesn't notice as the man's eyes begin to GLOW; the RED of coal awakened by flame.

GIRL (CONT'D)

"Where they roll in their horror unheeded, without knowledge or lustre or..."

She pauses, afraid. She looks up to see the red eyes, the whispers drowning her in their dreadful cacophony.

GIRL (CONT'D)

"...or name."

The man BLOWS OUT the candle.

END OF PILOT