



MINDER

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FADE IN:

EXT. URBAN BEACH - MORNING

We open on a line of DOG PAW PRINTS in sand. Those impressions like a psychologist's ink blots. One after the other.

A WAVE spills over them.

DIRTY FOAM sates their indentations.

The sand sinks, flattens around them. An early morning sunlight glistens like magic.

And, like that,

the prints are gone.

MYSTERIOUS MAN (V.O)

It can happen gradually or quickly.
Those benchmarks we take for
granted; the horizon, loved ones.
Those no longer become
distinguishable to the mind.

Pretty eyes squint.

A radiant SUNRISE.

THERA (24) this morning, she's equally radiant. Puzzlement always in those eyes, however. Always trying to arrange her thoughts like holding on to note cards in a speech. Her

CELLPHONE one way to capture a thought.

SNAP! Thera takes a picture with it.

She brings the phone down, shades the screen from the sun to judge the shot.

A BUMP. Something impacts against her leg.

A flash of black, something solid.

She moves aside, startled,

Hell, what was that?

A Labrador DOG trolls past her.

The dog seems to measure its' steps. Its' head bobs up and down as though following a jumping bean. It falters on its' legs for a moment, then regains control.

Something is plainly off about this dog as it sniffs at the seaweed.

Thera steps back, eyes registering some anxiety. Large dogs in general leave her apprehensive. This one without a plan, even more so.

FEMALE DOG OWNER (O.S)
It's Cancer. That confusion that
clings to that mess.

Thera turns.

The voice from a middle-aged FEMALE DOG OWNER.

The woman's eyes, face, obviously swollen from crying. She looks with an aching heart at her dog.

FEMALE DOG OWNER
My husbands' taking her to be put
down when we get home.

Thera turns to the dog.

It's not so very scary now.

But, still, a distance kept. Just to be on the safe side.

The owner approaches the dog, kneels beside her.

She gently strokes a coat of thin hair, brunt veins.

FEMALE DOG OWNER
She's loved the beach, any water
since she was a puppy, haven't you,
sweetheart?

Thera turns away from this intimate moment between woman and dog. She checks her cellphone.

Let them be.

The woman reaches into a beach bag on her shoulder, pulls out a

RUBBER BALL.

FEMALE DOG OWNER
Always playful to a fault.

She rubs the ball under the dog's nose. Pushes at her backside.

Suddenly, the woman brings her arm back.

She tosses the ball out to sea as far as she can and it's far.

The dog jettisons off the sand!

Into the waves she splashes!

You could describe it as jubilant and playful, this dog has awoken!

Thera, surprised, turns to watch this sudden burst of life.

The dog swims. Almost a smile on that face skirting the waves.

Some distance from her, the ball bobs like a distant buoy.

On shore, Thera watches at the novelty of the scene, smiles.

The dog owner, behind her, in stark contrast,
gasps with a wretched sob.

FEMALE DOG OWNER

My husband never liked dogs, but
for some reason, she wouldn't get
in the car with me.

Beyond the breaks, the dog swims up to the ball.

It grasps it in her mouth, turns with it, but a rotation too many.

Confusion gets the best of the poor girl. Signs of fatigue in her dog paddle.

The dog is swimming out to sea!

On shore, Thera looks on with anxiousness.

She's swimming the wrong way!

She looks back at the dog's owner.

You need to do something!

The woman collapses in sobs, shakes her head in denial.

FEMALE DOG OWNER

She's deaf. She wouldn't hear you
even if you called.

Thera turns back to the sea. The dog swims further out.

Time is crucial here.

She turns back to the woman, now crouched, crumpled on the sand.

FEMALE DOG OWNER

A bit of a stubborn streak. But all dogs have one, don't they?

Thera turns to the sea again, no sign of the dog changing course.

She makes up her mind, races right then and there into the waves.

Arms flailing, waist pushing against the water until it is deep enough to swim in, Thera attacks the water as though entering a bar fight.

The woman left behind watches.

Her eyes register some contempt at this life-saving measure.

FEMALE DOG OWNER

When she woke up, I let her enjoy an ice cream and cheeseburger!!

IN THE WATER

Thera swims furiously, her breath ragged.

Flashes of the dog in her vision between waves.

She stops to catch her breath, looks around,

where is it?!

Thera treads water, turns in a circle.

She spits out a raspy, pathetic

WHISTLE.

The call lost in wind and wave.

No sign of the dog. Thera pulls in a deep breath,

it has to be done.

She suddenly dives

UNDERWATER

All murky, eyes wide, her arms are tentacled shadows pushing at water.

Lungs bursting at the seams.

Just a moment more...

If the dog is there, its' form now lost in the churn of Thera's own making.

After seconds. That airless panic requires it.

BURST!

Thera breaks the surface, gasps for breath.

She turns back to shore, it seems so very far away now.

Exhausted, she turns on her back.

Backstroking...

From her POV: THE SKY. It seems painfully indifferent to her plight. And those,

CLOUDS.

They float, tear apart in jagged edges.

MOMENTS LATER

The shore a welcome relief as she stumbles out of the surf and onto the sand.

She collapses on her back. Blouse clinging to tender skin. chest rises and falls with gasps of breath.

She rolls to her side. Dry sand sticking to bare arms.

The dog's owner is GONE now.

Thera raises her head, squints out to sea.

Nothing but wave and brilliant sun.

Her head flops back down. What hair not plastered to her brow flutters in the sea breeze.

Then, a sudden realization.

No!

A sigh, eyes closed, lids drowned.

A hand to a pocket, pulls it out. Thera opens her eyes.

Her CELLPHONE,

a waterlogged ruin.

She tosses the phone to the dry sand with frustration.

A WAVE

the dog's play thing discarded to shore,

with nothing more.

EXT. URBAN BEACH - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

A MYSTERIOUS MAN, (40) He carries himself with some weight, some gravity, bends down.

He retrieves Thera's cellphone from the sand.

He spots her out of shouting distance.

She trudges dejectedly up beach towards home.

MYSTERIOUS MAN (V.O)
There is that chance, however
slight, but there, that she gets
back some way---somehow.

I want to believe that.

TITLE CARD:

MINDER

INT. THERA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Thera pulls at a stubborn old kitchen drawer. It's stuck.

Pull, pull... (voicing strain) there!, relenting with a
CRACK, the drawer opens.

She grabs a STEAK KNIFE from the drawer.

She sticks it in her pocket, handle at the ready.

Thera steps through her modest apartment. We spot a sofa,
easy chair, TV, playful throws and pillows to add a personal
touch.

It's not much, however.

Thera hurries to a dated intercom by the door. Leans into it.

THERA
I'm coming down.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - DAY

Murky light fills high ceilings.

DRAB clings to walls despite all efforts to fight it.

It's an old building with a few vintage touches to draw the romantic who can ignore the obvious blemishes.

RAIN beats against a few windows along the hall making the place seem more dour than it already is.

Thera makes her way down the hall from her apartment to another door,

KNOCKS.

The door opens,

ALEX, (25), opens up, in wife-beater, jeans. Something is always gnawing at him, something always needs fixing.

THERA
The guy's downstairs. You're my back-up, Alex, okay? In case it's just some bogus story of his to rape me.

ALEX
Well, let's see. To find you he had to get your phone to work, right? So, his intention is probably just that, to return your phone to you.

Thera rolls her eyes.

THERA
You can find stuff on anyone these days if you look hard enough. Do you have my back or not?

ALEX
Always the knight in shining armor on the battlefield but never allowed entry into the royal palace.

THERA
 (impatient, but playful)
 Alex, come on. Hurry up.

He backs up and disappears.

ALEX
 That's what microwaves are for.

Thera leans her back against the wall to wait for him.

She spruces herself up in the meantime.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING LOBBY - DAY

Pouring RAIN outside thunders in this dark, cavernous space.

The sound of *tapping*.

We glimpse a stunning mosaic tile floor that illustrates a personified MOTHER NATURE.

From extended cheeks she blows wind over a SHIP in treacherous waters, a seaman's COMPASS.

Against a rain soaked window, the GLOW of a TAXI ROOF LIGHT outside at the curb.

The Mysterious Man waits, slouched in a raincoat.

He taps his umbrella dry in a potted palm.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING ELEVATOR - DAY

Thera and Alex ride in this dingy, dated elevator.

The elevator light above them SPUTTERS.

Alex looks up at it with some concern.

THERA
 That seawater did some number on my hair. I look okay?

Alex shakes his head.

Is that some jealousy in those eyes?

ALEX
 He stumbled upon your phone, Thera, not your personal ad.

Thera pokes a finger at Alex's mound of chest.

THERA

Spaghetti sauce is soaking through
to your pecs, just say'n.

ALEX

Should I go back up and get my
shirt on?

THERA

No, I'm just pumping you up for a
fight. In case, you know. You up
for it?

ALEX

Not everyone in the world is out to
take advantage of you. There are
some nice people out there in the
world.

THERA

They seem to work in the shadows,
don't they?

ALEX

You got a few grains of sand. Here,
on your eye brow.

Alex very gently plucks some sand from one of her eyebrows.
Thera relents to this intimacy.

Their eyes meet.

THERA

I tossed a phone to the ground,
opened my life up to whoever
strolled by and picked it up.

The elevator brakes at the lobby floor with a bounce.

ALEX

Count yourself lucky it wasn't
locked.

Sand removal done, they step back from each other.

The elevator door opens.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING VESTIBULE - DAY

The mysterious man, straightens, turns as the elevator opens.

Thera and Alex exit.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Thera?

She nods, approaches him with some caution. He hands over her cellphone.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

I know a day without mine and I'm seriously lost. I need it to remind me of practically everything.

THERA

Thank you. Really, thank you.

ALEX

What doesn't your phone remind you?

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Ahh--- (thinking)---to listen more?

Alex nods his head, *good answer*.

THERA

I've got my phone back!

She shakes the phone over her head in triumph.

She then spots the taxi waiting outside.

THERA

Oh, god, you had to take a taxi here?

She reaches in a pocket, starts to pull out the knife.

OOPS!, WRONG pocket.

From the other pocket, a twenty-dollar bill.

She holds it out to the man.

THERA

Please, for your trouble.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

No. I can't. Nearby beach condo.
Hair dryer. Nothing long and
arduous. I'm on my way to the
office.

Thera notices his expensive shoes, cut of his pants.

This is no beggar.

The mysterious man notices a ring on Alex's finger.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Is that an amethyst by any chance?
I've been reading up on the power
of gems. They supposedly
concentrate the mind on the task at
hand.

ALEX

Yeah, a promise ring. Never was
much for jewelry, but it's grown on
me.

The mysterious man gets closer.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

A nice piece.

Thera stands off to the side, checking her phone. surprised,

It works!

She notices the vibe between the two men, feeling assured
the mysterious man is no threat to her,

maybe he favors Alex?

But he's cute. Perhaps a bit old for her. Too bad.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Well, I better be off. Nice meeting
the two of you.

He gives special attention to Alex.

THERA

You sure there is nothing I can do
for you?

The man is halfway to the door, when he turns.

Meeting Thera's eyes.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

At the beach, I saw what you did on behalf of that dog. Just tragic, wasn't it? Cruel, how life sometimes turns. And in such a beautiful setting, as well.

Hoping she agrees...

MYSTERIOUS MAN

There *is* something---
(a beat)

---his name is Hammer.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING VESTIBULE - DAY

RAIN again pours outside. LIGHTNING flashes against the mosaic floor.

A LEASH tied to the potted palm.

Sounds of *HEAVY RASPY BREATHING*.

We follow that leash to

HAMMER, an aged dog, part Pitbull, quivering BEEFY MUSCLE, BULBOUS GUMS, MILKY CATARACT SHROUDED EYES.

All monster to the naked eye.

On the floor nearby,

a nondescript CANVAS BAG he comes along with.

MYSTERIOUS MAN(V.O)

I've going to go away for a few days. There's no one to watch him. He's an old man. Practically blind, deaf. Some dementia has set in, there's no stopping its advance. But that sweetness of a pup, it's still there. That hasn't changed.

Thera and Alex appear, stare at the dog.

MYSTERIOUS MAN (V.O)

Sorry, left him like this. The cab wouldn't wait. The driver claimed Hammer passed gas and we had to hit the highway with the windows open as soon as possible to air out the

(MORE)

MYSTERIOUS MAN (V.O) (cont'd)
stink. Honestly, I didn't smell
anything.

Thera's eyes wide at the sight of this beast. She takes
comfort behind Alex as he starts to approach it.

ALEX
I thought you were afraid of large
dogs?

THERA
I am. But, you know. "Helpless."
It's my Kryptonite.

Alex approaches Hammer, extends a fist for the dog to sniff.

ALEX
Hey there, Hammer.

Hammer stares ahead, unresponsive.

ALEX
A shy one.

Alex unties the leash.

THERA
What kind of dog is it?

ALEX
It's a he. Looks like maybe some
Pitbull mix.

THERA
I thought they were illegal to own
here.

ALEX
Suppose it's enough of a mix up to
not fit any category. Kind of like
you.

He gives Thera a smile. She rolls her eyes.

ALEX
(to Hammer)
We're just going to take you
upstairs now, okay?

THERA
What's the rest of him, then?

Alex strokes Hammer's side.

ALEX

Well, you'll just have to find that out yourself, won't you, Miss Minder?

He holds the leash out for her to take.

Thera steps back from it.

Ummm..don't think so.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - DAY

The three walk, THUNDER echoing in the hallway.

Alex walks Hammer on his leash.

Thera stays a comfortable step behind carrying the canvas bag.

THERA

They don't allow dogs in this building, do they?

ALEX

Just cats. A few days stay is fine.

THERA

I hope we don't cross a cat.

ALEX

Some dogs like cats. Besides there are only two in the building. Neither see the light of day. The landlord keeps them locked in the basement to hunt for rats.

THERA

That sounds cruel.

ALEX

I know. I'm trying to talk him out of it. Otherwise, I'll take measures.

Hammer stops, looks towards an open entrance into an outside terrace. Rain pours outside.

THERA

We'll take you out there when the sun finally comes out.

ALEX

We?

Thera throws Alex a beseeching look. Alex shakes his head.

ALEX

No. No.

They continue on down the hall.

Thera keeping a more than safe distance behind "the guys".

INT. THERA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Alex sets a bowl of meatballs down in front of Hammer.

ALEX

No garlic for you, boy. Your breath
stays super sweet for that moment
Thera comes in for the kiss.

He turns to Thera who watches from a safe distance.

She flips Alex THE FINGER.

ALEX

I wouldn't do that. Looks like
you're holding out a bone.

She quickly puts her offending hand down.

THERA

Is it worth it?

She holds up her cellphone.

THERA

My short contacts list? Half of
which have never once called
me. My weather app? Hell. It says
partly cloudy today with a slight
chance of rain. God, the guy even
charged it for me. I feel guilty
about this. But, could you watch
him?

ALEX

I've got to get to work. It'll be
okay.

THERA

I don't know. He's a big dog.

ALEX

I'm talking to Hammer. Come on, look. Most of his teeth are gone even if he did think about biting you.

He surveys the dog's body.

ALEX

See? His dick has shrunk.

THERA

Shut up.

ALEX

I'm sure you two snug bugs will get along like old friends.

THERA

Snug bugs? Yeah, right. More like cell mates.

Hammer shakes off some meatball on his lips. His muscle bounces like bowling balls in jello.

THERA

Can't ever turn my back to him.

ALEX

I'll check on you two, later.

Thera resigns herself to some challenging babysitting.

Alex starts to go for the door.

THERA

How do I know when he needs to use the bathroom?

Alex stops at the door.

ALEX

Good question. Either he scratches at the door, or you put out some newspaper.

THERA

I haven't had a newspaper in my apartment since I can remember.

ALEX

Not something you want to admit freely to the public. I'll go down and buy you one. Tabloid or full size?

THERA

Wait, there's a little stuffed in the canvas bag. But I'll need more. He's a beast, imagine what comes out of that.

ALEX

Full size it is, maybe two.

She nods in agreement.

ALEX

You know, this is the first time you've let me in your apartment. I guess a big, bad dog does the trick, huh?

He smiles, leaves her.

Thera stares at this new guest with obvious unease.

INT. THERA'S APARTMENT -NIGHT

WIND rumbles against a darkened window pane.

Hammer lies on the bare floor, can't tell if he's asleep or awake.

Several sheets of newspaper surround him.

Thera lugs several pillows and a pink blanket across the wood floor.

She lays them out at a distance from Hammer as a comfy bed for him.

Her cellphone on a table RINGS, she answers.

THERA

(on phone)

Hello?

MYSTERIOUS MAN

(over phone)

Just wanted to give you the list of places I told you

about. Where he'd like to be
 taken for a walk. Is that
 okay? It's probably the last
 time... the last good days---
 he has, you know, for jaunts
 such as this. Sorry.
 (his voice breaking)

Thera registers some sympathy.

THERA
 (on phone)
 Hold on. I need a pen.

She fetches a pen and paper.

THERA
 (on phone)
 Okay, go ahead.

She writes a list of things down when she notices Hammer
 gets up from his spot, but instead of moving to the pillows
 and blanket,

the dog disappears into a doorway that leads into a kitchen.

Thera cranes her neck.

THERA
 Hey.

She jots things down that the mysterious man is telling her
 over the phone.

She glances towards the kitchen.

What is that dog up to?

MYSTERIOUS MAN
 (over phone)
Everything I'm sure you'll need
should be in the bag. Again, thank
 you for this. It means a great deal
 to me.

INT. THERA'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN / BALCONY - NIGHT

Thera enters. Puzzled. No sign of Hammer.

THERA
 Dog?

A TABLE-CLOTHED KITCHEN TABLE.

The tablecloth reaches the floor, obscuring any view if Hammer hides underneath.

THERA

Don't start hiding on me, now. I've got things to do. I can't have you popping out of nowhere.

Thera takes steps towards the table, tentative, wary.

Arms folded, then a hand out to grab the table cloth, arms folded again. Unsure.

Damn this dog!

THERA

I put out a nice bed for you to sleep on. The kitchen is off limits, dude.

She slowly lifts the tablecloth to take a peek beneath the table when,

TING TING!

She turns her head quickly, startled.

At a large open windowed door,

a WIND CHIME tings from a gust.

She rushes to the windowed doorway which looks out unto a small balcony.

Under MOONLIGHT, she steps outside,

the balcony is EMPTY.

She notices one of the apartment building's elderly resident's,

MRS. NASH, she's (60) disheveled. She's several stories down in a courtyard counting the stars like a budget-challenged planetarium.

Mrs. Nash spots Thera up there on the balcony.

MRS. NASH

I don't know why any of us live so high up. Too much temptation to take a step and be free of life's puzzles, isn't it?

THERA

How are you, too, Mrs. Nash?

Mrs. Nash pokes her finger at the sky.

MRS. NASH

I'm counting the stars. Reached a dozen before you sidetracked me.

Thera shakes her head, turns, goes back inside.

That woman.

Thera quietly closes the windowed door shut.

Sudden quiet, she turns to the kitchen.

Hammer quickly grabs hold of a kitchen towel on the counter covered with silverware and

pulls it down.

Forks, knives, spoons slide,

crash to the kitchen floor with a raucous

CLANG!!!

INT. THERA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

SOFT ROCK MUSIC on a radio.

The *CLINK* of a teaspoon as it stirs a cup. An air of calm.

Thera holds a tea cup, steps gingerly past Hammer laying on the floor.

He's still ignoring the pile of pillows and blankets she's laid out for him. Thera takes note of this with some bother.

THERA

Don't get too comfortable.

She takes a chair. Sips at her tea, stares at the dog.

Hammer repeatedly scratches at his side.

Thera removes the TEABAG from her cup.

THERA

Just what I need, a fleabag. I'm sending him the fumigation bill.

(MORE)

THERA (cont'd)
He'll pay for the dry cleaners too
while he's at it.

Hammer scratches again at a raw spot on his side.

Thera gets up, moves towards Hammer ever so slowly.

It's like she's crossing a mine field.

She slowly kneels on the floor near him as far away as she can and still extend a hand to reach over to him.

She surveys his body for any sign of fleas.

THERA
I'm afraid of you, you know that?
I've heard stories. Even in my own
family. I know how fast you can
move. How powerful are those jaws.
Once they're in you--- But, Alex
says at your age --- you won't
bite.---Please don't bite.

She very slowly holds out the teabag towards his side,
placing it very gently against the raw skin where he was
scratching.

She leaves it there, quickly withdraws her hand away as
though she touched a flame.

THERA
Green tea bag. In a pinch, it
soothes an itch.

Hammer just stares at her through those milky eyes.

Thera meets his eyes.

THERA
Do you know any tricks?

(A Beat)

The dog's stare becomes unnerving.

Thera moves back quickly on the floor, pushing her back
against a chair.

Avoiding any eye contact...

THERA
I didn't think so.

She looks over at the canvas bag on the floor.

Wondering what awaits her.

Those eyes so questioning...

THERA
We're going out tomorrow.

INT. THERA'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Thera tosses and turns on her bed, it's been a restless night.

Her cellphone alarm *BUZZES*.

She reaches over where it sits on a nightstand, turns it off.

She sighs, stumbles out of bed. Half asleep.

THERA
If I had lost my virginity, would I
have offered to babysit a rabbit?

INT. THERA'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Thera steps into a *SHOWER*. Bare shoulders, glimpse of thighs, shapely.

She turns the water on, but something stops her. She turns it off.

She listens for something. She feels uncomfortable, exposed somehow.

She steps out of the shower, takes a peek out the open bathroom door,

THERA
Dog?

She closes the bathroom door, locks it.

There, better.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY -NIGHT

An OLD MALE RESIDENT shuffles down the hallway, looking confused.

Thera, her head out her door, waits until the man is gone.

She pulls Hammer on the leash out the door, locks it quickly.

She grabs the canvas bag, starts to make her way down the hallway.

A door opens.

Damn! Not fast enough.

Mrs. Nash pokes her nose out a door.

Thera tries to shield the dog from Mrs. Nash's view, to no avail.

MRS. NASH

Thera, gosh, where you headed at five-thirty in the morning? What's that animal?

THERA

Just getting it out.

MRS. NASH

For good, I hope.

THERA

Have a nice day, Mrs. Nash.

MRS. NASH

I'm thinking about it. Or maybe having a crappy day. It's better to get up early to decide these things.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING ELEVATOR -NIGHT

Thera rides along with Hammer, keeping a safe distance from him in as much as she can in this tight space.

The elevator light sputters.

Hammer reacts to it with some anxiety.

He starts to circle about in the elevator, slides once against Thera's side.

Thera pushes her back against the rear of the elevator as tight as she can.

Hammer starts pushing in that direction, Thera switches position against a corner away from him.

Unnerved by his pace, she turns her face to the elevator wall.

She cringes when she feels him knock against her.

The elevator *rattles*.

Damn, this elevator is taking forever!

The elevator light sputtering against her "growing in alarm face".

What a trap.

She looks up.

Ride, please be over!

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING VESTIBULE -NIGHT

Thera and Hammer exit the elevator. Thera still shaken.

She's spooked, when a voice rumbles in the space.

ELDERLY MALE RESIDENT

Excuse me, what day is it?

Thera turns, spots that same elderly male from the hallway seated in a chair. She exhales.

THERA

It's Saturday, Mr. Fanning. Your sister picks you up every Saturday. You're waiting for her.

ELDERLY MALE RESIDENT

Oh, yes. Nice dog you have there.

THERA

She doesn't come till nine, though.

ELDERLY MALE RESIDENT

Should I go back up?

THERA
Yes. It's better.

Thera pulls at Hammer's leash.

The two exit through a door to the outside. The elderly resident stares after them.

ELDERLY MALE RESIDENT
I had a Collie once. Tied him to my wagon. Like my investment broker. Took me for a ride.

EXT. GATED CEMETERY - NIGHT

WIND whips large old trees about.

Burnt orange street lights cast shadows on buckled sidewalks.

Thera and Hammer walk alone at this early hour towards a set of high iron gates.

Worn TOMBSTONES vanquish behind the gates.

MYSTERIOUS MAN(V.O)
At this hour, there won't be anyone about. Dogs in cemeteries tend to make people a bit anxious. Understandably, their tendency to dig out of curiosity might cause alarm.

Thera and Hammer reach the gate. Thera places the canvas bag down, reaches in to it, pulls out a small notebook,

pink, wrapped in a ribbon.

She opens it, reads some numbers. She punches them into the gate's automated lock.

It works, the gate releases, she swings it open.

She grabs the canvas bag, leads Hammer inside.

THERA
So. He takes you for walks in graveyards. What does he feed you? The eyes of a toad?

The two move down a path lined with gravestones.

Trees *rustle* with a wind. Branches *creak* with strain.

MYSTERIOUS MAN(V.O)

Let him go, Thera. He'll find it on his own.

Thera releases Hammer's leash.

The dog saunters off, disappears.

Thera looks somewhat relieved.

Finally, got rid of that dog.

Thera follows after, in no hurry, as she follows along a narrow stone path.

THERA

Take your time. I'll just enjoy all these dead people.

The path meanders, blocking her view of Hammer as he moves forward.

Thera trips on an exposed stone in her path, gains her balance.

THERA

Ouch.

She hears the sound of Hammer whimpering ahead.

She moves towards the sound,

A GRAVE.

Hammer lies prone upon it, pushing his snout into the engraved sentiments on the marble stone.

He lets out a whimper, a faint howl of grief.

MYSTERIOUS MAN(V.O)

We humans can smell a teaspoon of sugar in a cup of tea. Dogs can smell a teaspoon of sugar in an Olympic-sized swimming pool. Smell is something they rely on. If they find themselves lost, a smell may lead them back, back to a place where they know they belong.

Moranne watches the dog, not letting sympathy take hold.

She notes the name on the gravestone, instead.

It reads,

LAURA NESBITT

Thera turns away, the dog has given her enough grief.

She takes a seat on a bench with a yawn. She looks up.

A STATUE of a young girl, her hand outstretched towards the grave looks down at her.

That's pretty, but damn, I'm tired.

Thera leans her head against the trunk of a tree against the path.

Her eyes closed, sleep is still gnawing at her at this early hour.

She succumbs to its' draw.

INT. GATED CEMETERY - MORNING

SUNLIGHT against the statue's gentle face.

Thera awakes with a start. Brilliant morning sun crosses her eyes.

What time is it?!

She looks over at the grave where Hammer was lying down on.

DAPPLED SUNLIGHT dances on the stone, but there's no Hammer.

THERA

Dog?

She steps up on top of the bench for a better vantage point to look around.

No sign of Hammer.

From that vantage point, however, she notices the gates to the cemetery are now OPEN.

A MAINTENANCE WORKER!

He enters with a broom and plastic bag on his clean-up rounds.

Thera steps down from the bench with renewed urgency.

THERA

Dog?

She rushes through the meandering narrow stone path. She hears some

rustling in some foliage.

She gets off the path, pushes aside some low branches.

THERA

Come out or I'm leaving you here. I
can't afford a trespassing
violation.

A group of headstones all bunched together, Thera navigates through them like a maze.

More rustling, she turns her head, follows the sound.

MORANNE

I'm not playing now. You're
especially not supposed to be in
here.

A *creak* behind her, she turns, nothing but a tree.

She turns back, steps into a suspended bouquet of

MYLAR BALLOONS.

Startled, entangled, she pulls them off her, steps away.

She turns back to look at them, a laugh of relief.

Behind her, Hammer stands on a flat monument at Thera's eye level. In his mouth,

A DEAD SQUIRREL.

The Squirrel's EYES DISLODGED GROTESQUELY. A line of DRIED BLOOD from its' mouth along the TATTERED and KNOTTED FUR of its neck.

Thera doesn't see it but we do,

as she steps backward, she's in for a fright, yes, another step, another.

It's coming, get ready for it...

Hammer's find dangling there, a scare imminent.

but... There! What?

Thera vanishes from sight,
 as she FALLS into a newly dug
 GRAVE.

Thera shakes off the sudden spill, moans, grabs an ankle.

Hammer steps to the side of the grave.

Ceremoniously, as an offering, like a cat does with a mouse
 to prove his worth and gain his master's pride, Hammer
 drops the dead squirrel down into the grave over her.

Thera SCREAMS.

At a distance...

MAINTENANCE WORKER (O.S)
 Hey! Who's there?!

With some difficulty, Thera crawls out of the grave,
 grabbing Hammer's leash as leverage.

THERA
 What is wrong with you?

She slides up out of the hole, wipes crumbly dirt off her
 clothes.

THERA
 Lost your mind?

Thera pulls at the leash. Hammer won't budge. Thera pulls
 again.

THERA
 Don't fight me now. We have to go.

It's a futile effort.

THERA
 Stop it, now.

Still at a distance but coming closer...

MAINTENANCE WORKER (O.S)
 Where are you? You're not allowed
 in here until opening time. What
 are you up to in there?!

Thera gathers every ounce of courage in her, loses every
 ounce of sanity at that moment, rushes at Hammer, takes hold
 of his bulky body.

Wincing with the weight of the dog and PAIN of her ankle, she staggers back and forth with Hammer in her arms.

She's petrified of this proximity, but anxious to get away.

THERA

Stay still.

She stumbles her way to the gate. Hammer drools lines over her arm.

The maintenance worker spots her across the cemetery, now making her get-a-way with an accommodating still Hammer in her arms.

MAINTENANCE WORKER

Hey, lady. Where'd you get that?
You digging up dogs in here? Sicko,
put that back in where you found
it!!

INT. THERA'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Thera is soaking her ankle, massages a back out of whack, cellphone to her ear.

Alex sits at her kitchen table with a cup of coffee.

He places the cup down on a pink place mat.

ALEX

My mother forbid pink in the house.
Said it was a weak color. "The mind
thrived on the bold".

Thera puts her phone down, frustrated.

THERA

He's not answering his phone.

ALEX

Maybe there's no service where's he
at.

THERA

Where's that? Some basement
in Hell? Please, Alex, can you
take it? I don't want it in my
apartment any longer.

ALEX

My roommate's allergic to dogs.
He's a model, you want him going to
a photo shoot with blood-shot eyes?
Really?

THERA

Oh, come on. You said you hate your
roommate. Okay, let's take him to
the pound, then.

ALEX

They'll put him down.

THERA

So?

ALEX

So much for Kryptonite.

Thera lifts her ankle out of the soak.

THERA

I didn't mean that.

She stands up, winces from her back pain.

ALEX

I could massage it for you.

She flashes him a "thanks, but no thanks" look.

She looks through the doorway at Hammer in his usual spot on
the floor.

THERA

I didn't even get the guy's name,
where he lives. I know nothing
about him. What if he doesn't come
back for it? Why doesn't he answer
his phone?

ALEX

Jumped in the ocean with it?

Thera shakes her head.

You're no help.

ALEX

Yeah, there's that possibility he's
abandoned Hammer. I've thought
about it.

THERA

Well, thanks for thinking the worse.

Alex rubs his finger thoughtfully along the pink place mat.

ALEX

Some people never come back.

INT. MYSTERIOUS MAN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

A high-end kitchen with polished surfaces.

The mysterious man's WIFE (40) pretty but fatigued, stares at a cellphone on a counter.

The mysterious man enters. He's just finished something requiring some exertion.

He notices his wife there.

There's some tension here. You could cut it with one of their Scandinavian woodblock knives.

WIFE

They keep calling. This woman's name. Should I be worried?

The Mysterious man retrieves a bottle of water from the fridge, slowly twists the cap open like it's a challenge.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

No.

He takes a sip of water. Grabs his phone off the counter, stuffs it in a pocket in haste.

WIFE

Where have you been?

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Took Daisy for a walk. She's been restless. Misses her buddy.

WIFE

I put up some Missing Dog fliers today.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

They'll just fade in this weather.

Cracking at the edges...

WIFE

Well, I'm doing something.

His wife exhales. Unfinished business between them.

The mysterious man watches her wipe a counter down.

She's the last one to hide things from.

INT. THERA'S APARTMENT -NIGHT

Thera scoops up the pillows and blanket from the floor that Hammer has fully ignored.

Like, okay, if you don't like my hospitality. Just stuff it.

She huffs to a bedroom, pulling them along.

INT. THERA'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Thera lies in bed, a tablet in her lap.

She googles the name on the headstone that Hammer was grieving at.

Laura Nesbitt

THERA

I have a nose for digging up stuff,
too,--- hell hound.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Thera and Hammer wait by a bus stop.

A CITY BUS pulls up.

The door to the bus opens, Thera starts to get on, pulling at Hammer on the leash to follow her up,

but he's stubborn, gives her a fight.

THERA

Move.

A grouchy BUS DRIVER shakes his head.

BUS DRIVER

Miss, you can't get on with that.
Step back, please.

THERA

Please.

BUS DRIVER

I'm closing the door.

Thera steps back, defeated, then suddenly thinks of something.

THERA

Wait! I can. Just hold on.

She huffs, fumbles with the canvas bag.

She pulls out a folded orange vest.

Its a SERVICE DOG VEST

Fitting it on Hammer is a challenge and touching him to do so is particularly unnerving.

She tugs here and there at the vest, has it on backwards at first. Switches it around.

Hammer resists the vest. Loud *HUFFS* from his nostrils.

THERA

Please sit still.

Inside the bus, the bus driver shakes his head with impatience.

BUS DRIVER

You're holding me up.

Finally, she gets the vest on with some sense of a proper fit,

pulls Hammer up into the bus.

THERA

Okay.

Flustered, she holds out a BILL. The driver points to the FARE BOX.

She attempts to insert the bill in the WRONG SLOT on the fare box to the chagrin of the bus driver.

BUS DRIVER

What, are you blind?

INT. MOVING BUS - DAY

Thera shares a seat with Hammer who seemingly stares out the window through clouded eyes.

The sights of the city rushing by outside.

Thera gives the Hammer a glance, then a stare, suddenly sympathetic to the dog's blindness.

A REVERIE of woman and dog and passing city.

(For a BEAT, we linger in this reverie)

until

the bus JOLTS

The bus driver evades a car that's cut him off.

BUS DRIVER

Ass wipe!

The reverie sure as done as

PASSENGERS grab the seats in front of them and fall back.

Murmurs of aftermath.

Thera looks over to Hammer, almost disappointed he survived the near crash.

Notices there in his seat, however,

he's PEED buckets.

THERA

No.

She looks around, hoping no one has noticed.

She moves herself and him from that polluted seat to an adjacent one.

Other passengers start to stir as the bus continues on its way.

Maybe the smell?

Thera grabs some Kleenex from her purse, goes over, dabs at the puddle with it but the Keenex dissolves in it. Totally Useless.

IRATE PASSENGER
Damn, girl. Ever hear of
housebreaking?

Thera sits back down with Hammer, embarrassed, throws disgusted looks at him, while some passengers hold their noses.

She notices in the bus' upfront rear view mirror, the driver's eyes bore into her with a sternness.

Suddenly, she pulls the overhead chord to signal a "stop requested".

THERA
Come on, we're going to walk the
rest of the way.

EXT. STREET - DAY

A leafy neighborhood of older homes of old wealth and influence.

Bird song from every tree top.

Thera leads Hammer down a front walk.

The BARKS of several dogs is heard from out back, past trellises and rose bushes gone to seed.

Hammer whimpers.

THERA
Those your friends? Tell me, we've
got the right place.

They make it to the front entrance. This large home could use a fresh coat of paint.

The door left open. It's all a bit odd.

THERA
Hello?

Without an answer, Thera leads Hammer inside.

THERA
Excuse me. Hello?

INT. HOME - DAY

Thera adjusts her eyes to the dim light.

Several large pieces of FURNITURE,
old dressers, cupboards, entertainment centers.

No chairs, tables, nor a TV.

Thera looks about.

How odd this arrangement.

All these heavy furniture pieces are gutted of drawers and shelves. The interiors lined with pillows, blankets, catnip toys.

Here and there she notices them,

CATS.

They sleep or clean themselves.

Thera looks alarmed at Hammer, but he seems nonplussed at the cats.

No drama here.

Thera moves towards a poster on the wall, reading it,

EMBRACE HOPE PET RESCUE.

Donations make a life thrive. Save one and make one today.

Thera starts, as

YAP YAP YAP!

A jaw full of razor teeth beneath the wide spread of sinewy gums. Think a cross between the Alien mother and an angry

CHIHUAHUA.

Thera steps back from this bite-sized sentinel.

A voice from somewhere in the house...

VET

Angel, got a mouth on you. When
will you ever learn?!

Enter a VET, female, (30)

She's missing one arm under her vet smock.

The vet scoops up the Chihuahua with her one remaining arm.

Hard to miss that long nasty SCAR on her cheek.

She nudges her nose against the Chihuahua's.

VET

If you don't keep your teeth to
yourself, a forever home will
always be beyond your reach.

The vet turns to Thera with a smile, spots Hammer behind her.

Sudden welcome turns to seeming spite or is that disappointment?

VET

You giving him up?

THERA

I can't keep him. I know I
promised. He said he'd be back in a
few days, but I just can't.

VET

Who said?

THERA

You know the owner, right? You know
this dog?

VET

I'm sorry?

THERA

Laura Nesbitt. Do you know who that
is?

VET

This was Mrs. Nesbitt's home. She
donated it upon her death. She
started all this.

THERA

I guess I'm looking for her son,
then?

The vet puts Angel down. He scampers over to Hammer.

The two stiff each other out.

Thera looks concerned Hammer might gobble up the smaller dog in one bite.

VET

Mrs. Nesbitt doesn't have a son.

An ELDERLY VET enters the room.

ELDERLY VET

I wanted to show you where I've put the sedatives before I go.

The elderly vet spots Thera and Hammer.

ELDERLY VET

Hello.

She looks on them with almost recognition and some tenderness.

VET

This dog look familiar to you?

The elderly vet kneels beside Hammer, lovingly strokes his head.

ELDERLY VET

Well, yes. ---Hammer, isn't it?

Thera exhales with some relief.

ELDERLY VET

Severe injuries on intake. It was touch and go for a while. He had obviously been in some fight, and the fight he put up to survive was just as brutal.

THERA

I'm looking for his owner.

ELDERLY VET

I lost my patient records in a fire. I remember my babies distinctly but their owners, they are just all one blur, I'm afraid.

She plants a gentle kiss on Hammer's white tinged head.

ELDERLY VET

(Sotto to Hammer)

I know of that blur.

She stands up, meets eyes with Thera.

ELDERLY VET

Sorry.

The elderly vet takes her leave of them.

ELDERLY VET

I'll wait until you're finished.

The one-armed vet goes to a cupboard.

VET

I can have one of the volunteers assist you if you're giving up your dog.

The vet gently pushes a cat away from off a top of papers, grabs one,

holds it out to Thera.

VET

Fill it out. I'll have to be honest, though. Adopting out a dog of that breed and age will be difficult.

THERA

The dog's not mine...

Impatient...

VET

Sometimes we realize our bond can no longer be sustained. This scar on my face? My missing arm? A Rottweiler got the best of me. A life of socialization wiped out in one moment of brain chemistry we can't explain.--- That Rottweiler was my own dear pet.

Thera stares at her.

THERA

I'm sorry. Would you mind seeing if he has a chip?

EXT. STREET - DAY

Thera and Hammer stand at a corner. Thera somewhat despondent.

She looks down the block back at the home.

Something about it brings forth something hurtful inside of her. She can't explain it.

Hammer pulls at his leash, breaking Thera out of her spell.

MOMENTS LATER

TRAFFIC zooms by on the street. Thera's head is down in thought when a PEDESTRIAN touches her arm.

PEDESTRIAN

It's safe now. You need some help,
crossing over?

Thera waves the pedestrian off.

THERA

No, I'm okay. Thank you.

Thera starts to remove the service dog vest off of Hammer.

THERA

You don't even have a chip. What
kind of poor-ass dog doesn't have a
chip?

She notices something on the vest,

a city provided I.D. number on a tag.

A clue!

She puts the vest back in the canvas bag, takes out her cellphone.

THERA

I can't afford it, but I'm calling
us a taxi. Your owner will pay me
back. If you need to take a leak,
you better do it here and now. No
more accidents.

At a distant corner, a high-end late model car sits.

Someone behind the wheel watches Thera through the windshield.

This is LIZZY, (26) some resemblance to Thera.
That cold stare couldn't get any colder.

EXT. FAST FOOD RESTAURANT - DAY

Hammer greedily laps up water from a cup.

Thera at a patio table above him with her tray of fast food.

Her cellphone is to her ear, service dog vest in the other hand.

THERA

(on phone)

Yes, hello. I found a service dog vest that I'd like to return to the owner? Yes. I've got it. The number on it is SD749327. Yes. Okay. I'll wait. Thank you.

She takes a CHICKEN NUGGET off her tray, soaks it in a wide opened carton of MILK.

She offers it to Hammer with some trepidation, drops it as he reaches to snatch it.

VOICE ON CELLPHONE

Miss? We're not able to provide contact information on this vest. This number falls under a particular category that requires a guardian to address all communication with the user.

Hammer nudges Thera's leg for another chicken nugget.

She impatiently complies with another soak of milk, tosses it down at some distance from her.

THERA

Don't get so close.

(on phone)

I'm sorry, what did you say?

VOICE ON CELLPHONE

You give me your phone number and I'll have this guardian contact you.

THERA
 (on phone)
 Sure. Tell him to get back to me as
 soon as possible.

She puts down the phone.

She tosses the rest of her nuggets down to Hammer.

THERA
 Go to town. I'm not hungry.

She watches him eat. Watching an animal eat often softens one view of them. They are like us. Hungry for something.

THERA
 He thought he found some
 soft-hearted person he could dump
 you on. Well, I can't have a dog.
 And you're not exactly the kind of
 dog I see myself with, you know?---
 I could have left you at that
 house, but something about that
 house gives me the creeps---

Hammer finishes the nuggets off, looks up to her with those scary eyes, like,

Mama, I want some more.

THERA
 ---even more than you do.

EXT. FAST FOOD RESTAURANT - DAY

The mournful GLOW of a SETTING SUN.

Hammer licks the container of some DESSERT PIE.

Thera checks her phone. Still no phone call from the "guardian".

THERA
 Where are you?

Another female CUSTOMER. (50), takes a seat at a table nearby.

She takes note with some displeasure of what Hammer is licking at.

She eyes Thera with some animosity, but tries to be polite.

CUSTOMER

A dog doesn't thrive with a diet like that. Dogs need a balanced and healthy diet. Do you mind, may I offer him my fresh chicken salad?

THERA

It's okay, he's eaten.

CUSTOMER

I see. Chocolate Mousse cake.

THERA

That was mine. I'm sorry, I'm stressed.

The customer gets up, takes her chicken salad, lays it down in front of Hammer.

CUSTOMER

Here, baby. You can have mine.

Hammer sniffs at it, ignores it.

THERA

Do you want him? You can have him.

The customer looks stunned.

CUSTOMER

What? you're pawning off your dog to a total stranger? Do you know how dangerous that could be to this poor baby? I could be an animal abuser for all you know.

THERA

You gave him your chicken salad. I don't think so.

The customer shakes her head, walks away.

Frustrated, Thera grabs her leftover trash, dumps it in a trash can.

She grabs Hammer's leash. She forgot a wrapper.

The wind picks it up. She chases after it, struggling with Hammer's leash at the same time.

She dumps the wrapper, starts to leave, remembers she left the canvas bag on the table, goes back for it.

THERA
Come on, dog.

EXT. STREET - DAY

DARKNESS has settled on this part of town as a warning.

PEDESTRIANS more alpha here, more weighed down by their life struggles tighten their coats against taunting gusts.

Streetlamps glow with a burnished orange. Store fronts start to shutter for the night.

They know better.

Thera walks with Hammer, cautious, ready to turn back from this unsettling path.

MYSTERIOUS MAN(V.O)
Dogs see in black and white except
for cruelty. One may kick their dog
and their dog still loves them
back. Cruelty is something they
can't delineate from kindness. It
is that weakness that sometimes
imprisons them. Take Hammer here---

Thera leads Hammer to the entrance of a dirty stucco building.

A sign in the front can hardly be read.

Is that "Motel" in faded lettering?

MYSTERIOUS MAN(V.O)
---know this place is somewhere
he'll always be welcome.

A security BUZZER sounds.

Thera pushes a metal door open, leads Hammer in.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING COURTYARD - NIGHT

Crackling transistor radio music.

Mrs. Nash places an old portable radio on a picnic table. She looks up at the stars.

ALEX(O.S)
Mrs. Nash. It's getting chilly.

She turns around.

Alex is there holding a sweater.

ALEX

You must have dropped it in the
elevator.

He goes over, helps her slip the sweater on. He's gentle and gentlemanly.

Mrs. Nash swells in the attention.

ALEX

Nice music.

MRS. NASH

This station always plays the
oldies.

ALEX

Billy Idol.

MRS. NASH

Dancing with Myself. Surprised you
know him.

ALEX

My mother has his records. A
poster, too. It's rolled up in the
closet next to her skates.

MRS. NASH

Thera hasn't come home. I don't see
a light up there yet.

Alex looks up to her balcony. His eyes register worry.

THERA

Mrs. Nash. Has she ever said
anything to you about me?

MRS. NASH

Not that I can remember.

Alex looks down with some defeat.

ALEX

Don't stay out here too long. Don't
want you getting sick, do we?

He starts to walk away.

MRS. NASH
There is something she said.

Alex stops, looks back, hungry for her words.

MRS. NASH
You remind her of someone.
---Someone from school.

Surprisingly, this cheers him up.

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Yellowish light emanates from a

GLASSED IN RECEPTION BOOTH.

Inside, a DESK CLERK fiddles with the blouse of some street
SKANK.

He turns to his duties as desk clerk as Thera and Hammer
enter the building.

He approaches the dirty glass, leans into an old microphone.

Matter of fact...

DESK CLERK
Rooms go by the hour. You
getting it on with the dog, hon?

Thera turns around with disgust ready to hit the door and
scram from this awful place.

But, a voice from behind her, low and assertive, stops her
cold.

HEWITT (O.S)
Hammer?

Thera turns around.

Meet HEWITT, (55), grizzled, commanding. Been around the
block in the worst of neighborhoods.

HEWITT
I recognize that gait. King of the
hill at one time, old Hammer.

THERA
I'm looking for his owner.

HEWITT

I've got some jerky back in my room
he would savor ravishing.

THERA

Thank you, but if you could just
tell me---

The entrance BUZZER sounds.

The door opens, three LARGE THUG TYPES enter. They approach
the glass booth.

Unease turns to panic. These thugs stand in Thera's path to
get the hell out.

One throws a menacing glance her direction.

HEWITT(O.S)

Boy's lost some of his teeth but
the tongue's still working, you see
that, there?

Thera turns to see Hammer gently licking at Hewitt's hand.

Thera surrenders to a choice.

Between a rock and a hard place.

I'll take the rock.

INT. HEWITT'S ROOM - NIGHT

Hammer nurses a big piece of jerky.

Thera looks uneasily around the room.

Liquor bottles. Newspapers. A MUTT sleeps in an arm chair
before a TV showing a reverse mortgage commercial.

A bedraggled WHORE passed out from drink sprawled on a
sullen bed.

The room speaks grime and misdemeanors including that pile
of CASH on a dresser.

Against her better judgement, Thera stands rooted to one
spot.

Hewitt grabs a bottle of liquor, two dirty glasses. Settles
against the dresser for a story.

HEWITT

I'll tell you where Hammer came from. Me and some boys were hired to do some trapping in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. There were hundreds of strays down there. Not just the ones that were already on the streets before the storm, but all those left behind by families overwhelmed by the levee breaks. We were paid well for each one we brought in dead or alive. And most were dead. But there were some dogs who survived on rooftops. Up in trees, mind you. Anywhere they could grab a hold of. Some we found floating on carcasses of folks, bloated from death and days in that burning sun. Dogs find sinew and bone to survive on where they can.

Thera turns her head with disgust.

HEWITT

The boys and I came upon a bunch of wood planks floating along. There was a small dog on the planks. What do you call them things? Shit-zoos?

THERA

Close enough.

Thera fidgets.

I should just get out of here.

HEWITT

Obviously injured somewhere, couldn't get up to take a crap. We docked up alongside it. Suddenly from beneath this canvas, growling like Katrina herself, bolts old Hammer.

He looks over at Hammer with some fondness.

HEWITT

Just a puppy then. All protecting of his sailing partner twice his age. None of us had the heart to give him a bullet then. We boys understood the camaraderie of spending days and days on those wretched waters.

He pours himself a drink, offers her a glass. She shakes her head.

He throws one back for her.

HEWITT

We had to tie up to those wood planks, tow those two in to dry land. Until I made myself clear I wasn't going to harm the little shit-zoo, I could not approach it. Took Hammer under my wing from that day I could.

A memory comes to Thera. She shakes her head, *why didn't I think of that before?*

THERA

Someone with a condo by the beach has him now.

HEWITT

A condo by the beach? Living the high life, now, are we boy?

He turns to Hammer.

HEWITT

I should have saved that jerky for myself.

Two THUG CHARACTERS appear at the doorway.

The atmosphere suddenly turns tense, threatening.

HEWITT

Just lock her up somewhere until the show is over. And I mean, just.

THERA

What?! No!! What are you doing?, Please, no!

The thugs grab her, pull her cellphone away from her, drag her off.

EXT. PARK SETTING - NIGHT

A quiet two-lane road in the darkness. The intense shrouded flashing of bicycle lights in a thick evening

FOG.

Alex rides a road bike down the road, pulls into a field.

Treeless except for one he props his bike against.

He walks a bit to a rock embankment, edges lost in the fog.

Dozens of feet below him, the dark azure water of a

FLOODED ROCK QUARRY

It's like a big black hole lost to the world, this pit.

Alex stands there in thought, restless.

A car pulls up.

We've seen it before, watching Thera outside the pet rescue.

Headlights choked in the fog.

Inside, Lizzy sits watching him. That same cold stare.

Alex tries to ignore the car. Anger building.

ALEX

This is our place. Not yours.

A horn BEEPS.

Alex turns, heads to his bike, gets on, rides to the car window.

ALEX

Leave me alone.

Lizzy stares straight ahead out the windshield.

LIZZY

That dog is going to get her killed.

ALEX

That's not what you're worried about, is it Lizzy? It's more like a fortune and where it might end up, isn't it?

LIZZY
Please, help me, for her sake.

ALEX
Let it work itself out.

LIZZY
Whatever his plan is, it will never
work. Ask Doctor Frank.

ALEX
The plan's not his. And, yeah,
maybe not.

He looks off to the darkness, sadness in his eyes.

ALEX
Whatever happens, for how ever long
it may last, we move on the best we
can from tragedy. You, of all
people should know that.

She finally turns to look him in the eye.

To her frustration, Alex pedals away without a glance.

SOMETIME LATER...

Alex rides his bike along the road. Bike lights flashing.
The fog has gotten worse.

Lizzy's car appears behind him.

Her car ACCELERATES, SWERVES,

runs Alex off the road!

Alex swivels and spills, falls to a grassy bank.

Lizzy's car stops.

She gets out, walks over to him.

On the ground, badly bruised, but otherwise unhurt, he won't
look at her.

LIZZY
If she comes to the realization of
what I'm been battling. She'll hate
me.

Alex picks himself and his bike off the ground.

ALEX

I think that's way down on her list of emotions to rediscover if that moment should ever come.

He checks a bloodied bruise along his arm.

LIZZY

I'm sorry. The fog, I didn't see you.

Alex finally gives her a look that could kill.

ALEX

Yes. Sure.

He gets on his bike, quickly pedals off as fast as he can get away from her.

Lizzy watches the flashing rear light of his bike fading off into the fog.

LIZZY

I need to see Doctor Frank about this.

EXT. MYSTERIOUS MAN'S HOME - NIGHT

A high-end home, well-kept.

Late model car in the driveway.

The Mysterious man's wife comes racing out the front door as the Mysterious man stands by the door to his car, fiddling with a briefcase and car keys.

WIFE

Where are you going?

MYSTERIOUS MAN

I need to get back to the office.

She's lost in doubt. Stares at him. Accusing.

WIFE

Beth at the pet rescue saw my flyer for Hammer. She called and told me, she understand how frantic I might be, but not to worry. My husband knew where he was.

She exhales with the burden.

WIFE

What else are you keeping from me?

The Mysterious man places his briefcase in the back seat.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Get in the car.

WIFE

What?

MYSTERIOUS MAN

You're going with me. Get in the car.

WIFE

I don't have on my shoes.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

I didn't marry you for your shoes.

She gets in the car. He gets in.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

They sit for a spell in silence.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Remember the canvas bag you saw me bring in one day? I told you I was going to hide it, it had your birthday present in it? It wasn't your birthday present. It's not my bag.

WIFE

I don't understand. Where's Hammer?

EXT. MYSTERIOUS MAN'S HOME - NIGHT

His car quickly pulls out of the driveway.

INT. MOTEL HALLWAY / PATIO - NIGHT

Two low-lifes count out a wad of bills as they pass

Thera, as she's being dragged by the thugs to a hallway entrance.

She can see Hewitt leading Hammer on his leash towards the sound of

PULSING ROCK MUSIC,

then *CHEERS.*

Thera tries to comprehend,

what is going on here?

The hallways open up, meet across from each other. Between them,

A large enclosed PATIO.

An AUDIENCE of rough and tumble.

They cheer from two balcony hallways at some sadistic scene between and below them.

Their ringside seats to

A kidney-shaped,

EMPTY SWIMMING POOL

Blood smears up and down the sides.

Scraps of FUR, illuminated by the recessed

POOL LIGHTS.

The sound of FRANTIC SCRATCHING NAILS.

HIGH-PITCHED WHIMPERS.

SMALL DOGS with numbered vests try racing up the side, some slipping back on the concrete incline.

One makes it over the side to some cheers, some groans, and runs off.

At one end of the empty pool,

a MUSCULAR PITBULL, charged on "hungry" moves against the pull of a

long *RATTLING* chain.

He races after the dogs, jaw open, scrambling for all the tasty morsels at once but he can only catch a few.

Thera turns her head at a high-pitched

SQUEAL.

An audience member gets a spray of BLOOD across his face, steps back, knocking over a flimsy lawn chair.

ACROSS THE PATIO

Hewitt leads Hammer towards a corral of helpless whimpering dogs.

More *SQUEALS* from within the pool.

VOICE ON SPEAKER (V.O)
Middle-weight division's next
folks. Grab a beer, place your bets
now!

Thera is pulled away, closes her eyes to the horror below her.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING / CITY SIDEWALKS - NIGHT

Dressed in subdued but urban style, DR. FRANK, (70) steps out of the building carrying a small knapsack on his shoulder.

Lizzy comes up beside him. He takes notice of her, displeased to say the least.

They walk along together despite Dr. Frank's annoyance at her presence.

LIZZY
Stylish carry, doctor. For a gerontologist, I would have expected an old Samsonite or something to help identify with your patients.

DR. FRANK
Age is all in the mind.

LIZZY
I feel eighty these days. Marginalized to the sidelines while the opposing team plays for a win.

DR. FRANK
I hear the charity circuit doesn't give up too many eligible rich bachelors these days. That is why you go, isn't it?

LIZZY
I expect they'll be after me soon.
Coffee, doctor?

DR. FRANK
I don't think so. I've got an
appointment to keep.

LIZZY
At this hour?

DR. FRANK
Yes. I'm hoping a patient of mine
makes a breakthrough.

LIZZY
Your patients make a breakthrough
when they die.

He stops, turns to her.

DR. FRANK
It's not much to concede, that in
your old age, you'll probably never
see the light.

LIZZY
And what light is that, doctor?

DR. FRANK
That it's not all about you.

He leaves her then, picking up his pace like a young man.

She turns around, somewhat defeated, then she sees it.

Stapled to a telephone pole,

A MISSING DOG POSTER. It flutters in the wind.

It opens up enough for her to see the picture on it.

LIZZY
Hammer.

INT. HIGH RISE OFFICE BUILDING OFFICE - NIGHT

The REFLECTION of the Mysterious man's EYES in a window.

Outside the window, far below the sparkling lights of a
city's promise, the narrow alleyways of its' danger.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

I do as my clients wish, what they pay for. Sometimes, yes, it's a painful choice.

He turns around from the window.

He's behind a desk. A finely appointed law office surrounds him.

His wife, curled up in a chair, shoe less, before the desk.

She meets eyes with his with a tender love.

He approaches her, bends to meet his lips with hers. Their lips part.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

If this ever happens to me, what would you do?

His wife grabs his hand. Takes a breath.

This is a difficult subject to talk about.

WIFE

I'd do the same you would do for me. Hope you'd prepare like she's done, the best you can. Not push you to remember anything, but never let you go.

They stare at each other with love.

A SECRETARY leans her head in the door.

SECRETARY

He's here.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

(to the secretary)

Stick around, we'll need you as a witness.

He smiles at his wife.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

(to his wife)

Take the car. I'll take a cab home.

WIFE

I haven't driven barefoot since the beach house days.

He helps her out of the chair.

MYSTERIOUS MAN
We've had some good years. We'll
have many more.

The wife takes her leave as Dr. Frank enters.

The Mysterious Man greets him warmly.

MYSTERIOUS MAN
It's just a matter of waiting now.

DR. FRANK
(smiling)
I try not to tell my patients that.

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Thera is pushed into a DARK SPACE.

The two thugs, hefty shadows at a door before closing it.

THUG #1
Letting that pretty little thing go
to waste seems a shame.

THUG #2
Yeah, after the show, a skinny dip
in the pool sounds good.

THUG #1
There ain't no water, dude.

THUG #2
A little spit. That's all I need.

THUG #1
Hewitt says, there's a limit on our
hospitality. He's the top dog.

Thera looks petrified, steps back.

THERA
Pack leader.

THUG #2
What?

THERA
That's what they call them. The dog
the other dogs follow.

THUG #2
Why'd you come here?

THERA
The back leader is never set in
stone. Another can take his place.
It's who gets the most respect.

THUG #2
Shut up.

SLAM,

they close the door on her.

She sinks against the wall. Quiet. Then...

She hears it now. In a corner,

WHIMPERS.

A dozen SMALL DOGS cower in fear against a wall.

She turns at the sound of *huffing and puffing*.

A WHITE PITBULL struts back and forth in a low cage across
from them.

Sarah moves back towards the small dogs.

She looks around. No windows. No exit besides the door that
she can see.

She rushes to it, pulls.

It's firmly locked.

She looks up. It's a high space but there seems to be an
opening on one side. She can see a band of light. The edge
of one wall opens up.

How to get up there?

She looks at the small dogs herding themselves together as
comfort against the fear.

THERA
Hey. Easy, now.

She gets down on her knees. The dogs flock to her, seeking
comfort.

Something comes to her mind. The dogs have given her a plan.

THERA
Plans are good. Yes.

She places one dog in her lap. She removes his collar.

THERA
There, now. Not going to hurt you.

She picks up another dog. Another collar removed, then another dog, another collar.

She looks over at the Pitbull in the cage. His head sticks out between two bars.

He watches her as though he knows she's up to something.

Thera turns back to the task at hand. Another dog, another collar removed.

THERA
Good dogs.

She looks back at the Pitbull.

MOMENTS LATER

Sarah has tied all the dog collars together, laid them out on the floor.

She picks up her created "rope", moves towards the wall.

She swings it up to catch it on the edge of a wall where that band of light shines through.

First attempt - a bust.

Second attempt, also a bust.

Frustrated, she looks around.

She needs something heavier to anchor it, something that might catch on that edge.

but there is nothing...wait...

She looks over at the Pitbull pacing in his cage. He's getting hungrier by the minute.

His METALLIC COLLAR gleams with heavy metal design, hooks, barb wired. Someone wanted him to look so cool and menacing.

But, how?

SOMETIME LATER...

A small dog, just a ball of fur, whimpers, the string of collars connected to his own collar.

He's being slowly dragged towards the Pitbull's cage.

The Pitbull growls at this meal headed his way, closer, just get it a little closer. He can taste it now.

TEETH BARED. EYES GLEAMING WITH BLOODLUST.

This is too damn easy.

The poor little fur ball is scared out of its wits, dragging its feet, scrambling, as it is dragged closer and closer to the cage.

The Pitbull extends its head as far out between the bars as it can to nip with sharp lunges at the little dog, when

BOOM!

Thera, from on top of the cage grabs at the Pitbull's collar, unloosens the buckle as fast as she can, snatches it up,

WHEW!

just as the Pitbull turns its' head, SNAPS at her hand with razor teeth.

The tension on the "rope" suddenly gone, the little dog slides back.

It scampers back to safety to the other dogs.

Thera rushes over to it, grabs it up in her arms, wracked with guilt.

THERA

I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry I made
you scared like that.

She places him on the floor, ties the Pitbull's heavy collar to the end of the rest of the collars.

She tosses the "rope" up, it catches hold of the wall edge above in one try.

She sighs with relief.

THERA

Come on.

She ties up her skirt, places the little ball of fur in the fold.

She takes hold of the string of collars. She starts to climb.

THERA

Hold on. This is not going to be easy.

She starts to climb and immediately slips.

She struggles, another try, pushing herself.

Muscle strains against the collar "rope". Hands sting against collar buckles.

Just a few more feet, she's making it,
past a collar with some bells on it that
RING loudly.

She cringes, hoping no one has heard the sound and alerted them to her escape attempt.

She reaches the top, hoists herself over with a groan.

She pulls up the rope of collars, lets it fall to the other side.

She climbs down the collar rope, lands in a storage room. Mops, buckets. Fold-away beds.

She goes to a door, peeks out. The sound of the crowd reaches her.

She takes the ball of fur from her skirt, cradles the little dog.

THERA

Stay quiet now.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - NIGHT

The sounds of TRAFFIC, Pedestrians.

Lizzy stands before a shop display window.

Jewelry, diamonds, gold and fine stones, glitter in the display cases.

This, this should all be mine.

She lifts a cellphone to her ear.

LIZZY

(on phone)

You did some business with my boyfriend. There's this dog. He was rescued once from some dog fighters. I think he may have found himself running in those circles again. The problem is, the girl he's with may be a problem for them. She's real tight with the police. Yeah, I thought you might be interested.

INT. MOTEL PATIO - NIGHT

Crowd cheers.

Below them in the empty pool, the tethered Pitbull races towards a mid-sized dog, grabs his leg.

Up on one balcony, Thug #2 watches. He looks over at a couple. The man's arm swung around his sexy bitch.

The Thug grabs his crotch. Got an itch. Wish I could have some of that.

He steps back to the sounds of awful carnage below.

Screw Hewitt.

I'm going to get me some.

He heads off, moving past patrons screaming like Banshees.

INT. MOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dim light, echos of the crowd from the patio.

Thera sneaks out the storeroom door carrying the little dog. Carefully, she makes her way down a hall.

Suddenly a couple from the crowd is walking in her direction.

No place to hide!

She suddenly places the dog in a garbage container, leans her head inside the can

Thera fakes puking up her guts into the can.

The couple pass her, throwing her a disgusted look, disappear down the hall.

She's safe!

Thera grabs the little dog from out of the trash, continues quickly.

She makes it to the open door of Hewitt's room and enters.

INT. HEWITT'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Hewitt's mutt on the easy chair is awake, rattles with *BARKS* at Thera's entrance.

THERA
Shhhhh.

Thera glances at the passed out whore on the bed.

The whore stirs but doesn't wake.

The mutt keeps barking.

Thera places the little dog next to the mutt on the chair.

THERA
(quietly)
Here, I've got a little buddy for you.

The mutt quiets.

Thera searches about the room.

THERA
(quietly)
Oh, god. Where's my phone? They took it?

She grabs the canvas bag, she picks up the little dog, places it inside.

THERA
(quietly)
We're getting out of here.

Thera turns.

THUG #2

What? Don't like to gamble?

He pushes her back into the bed.

The whore half awakes.

WHORE

I'm not doing threesomes, honey.

The thug falls on top of Thera, tries to pull her skirt down.

Thera struggles.

THERA

No!

He pulls at her blouse. Nasty kisses to her neck.

She reaches for a liquor bottle on the bed.

Please...

She strains, reaches for it. There! grabs hold of it, brings it down on the thug's head.

BAM!

He grasps his head. She pushes him off.

He falls, hits his head on a bed post,

out cold.

Thera collects herself, canvas bag on shoulder, runs out of the room.

INT MOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

The desk clerk behind the glass is occupied with the Skank again in the booth.

Thera makes her way past him to the door,

I'm getting out of here!

when the voice of a different announcer reaches her ears. At his words,

Thera stops dead.

HEWITT (V.0)

He's back for a return engagement after so many years. But fortunes' reversed, he's the hunted, now and not the hunter.

Thera closes her eyes.

Now is the time to get out of here.

Just GO.

HEWITT (V.0)

It's only fitting he get a final go, where he got his start. Whatever the outcome is. He'll give it his all, I promise. Now, give it your all, folks, for one hell of a fighter, Hammer!

Cheering.

Thera closes her eyes.

INT. MOTEL PATIO - NIGHT

To cheers, Hewitt pulls at Hammer's collar, trying to get him to take the steps that lead down to the empty pool.

Hammer's reluctant, strains against Hewitt's pull.

It's like he knows what fate there awaits him.

HEWITT

Come on. Give them a show, boy. There's still some fight in you left, or has that girl turned you into some pussy?

The tethered Pitbull strains at the end of the chain, eyes fierce, jaw open in expectation of this match.

Hewitt pushes Hammer to the bottom of the steps, rushes back up.

Hewitt glows with expectation.

HEWITT

You owe me, boy.

The tethered Pitbull charges at Hammer.

Hammer backs away a few steps, opens his jaws.

He GROWLS.

The Pitbull steps back. A low growl like a distant freight train.

It charges Hammer again.

Hammer fights back with open jaw, clawing at the Pitbull.

A SHRIEK.

The Pitbull got a good bite in.

Hammer retreats.

Hewitt looks around, the crowd is really into it.

This is the kind of spectacle he loves to put on.

He looks back at the match. Eyes intense, proud of his protegee.

HEWITT

Good boy. You could try to get up
the side, but you face your enemy
dead on.

The two dogs charge at each other.

A mad, SHREIKING, GROWLING wrestling match.

With what teeth he has left, Hammer gets a good bite in.

Blood soaks the Pitbull's side.

The two separate.

Hammer becomes still, fuming.

Anger, fight, betrayal, all building within that muscular body, behind those half-blind eyes.

He prepares himself for one last charge against this foe.

Fierceness breaking through those cataracts.

EVERY MUSCLE LEANS FORWARD to make the charge.

THERA (O.S)

Hammer!!!

Hammer freezes.

This is the first time she's called him by his name.

He turns his head to see her standing there, canvas bag on her shoulder,

a look of determination on her eyes.

The Pitbull takes advantage of this distraction,

Thera sensing he's in trouble.

Oh, No!

The Pitbull charges at Hammer full speed.

Suddenly, Hammer turns his head, thumps the Pitbull with his entire weight,

knocking it back like a bowling pin.

Hammer races towards Thera, but not before,

Hewitt tosses a leash around him, pulls him towards him.

HEWITT

Where you going? There's no winner yet.

Thug #1 comes up to Hewitt.

THUG #1

We got a call about her.

He tells something to Hewitt in his ear.

Hewitt stares at Thera with menace at the information.

THERA

I'm taking him out of here.

HEWITT

Now, take a spot and enjoy the show, missy. You can't fight nature. This is what he was bred and born for.

THERA

No, this is all cruel and sick what you're doing here.

She turns to the murmuring crowd.

THERA

What you're all doing here!!

Thug #2 awoken from being out cold suddenly charges from behind.

Thera falls to the ground on her hands and knees.

The canvas bag falls open in front of her.

THERA

No!

The thug grabs at Thera to get her up. She struggles, fighting him off, lunging at his hands with her teeth.

HEWITT

(to the crowd)

Looks like dogs come in all sizes!

Thera struggling against the thug's pull.

She stares into the canvas bag, takes note,

The little fur ball backs up within the bag, shivers with fright.

Thera gets an arm loose from the thug.

She reaches into the bag, pulls it out.

Not the fur ball, no.

Something wrapped in newspaper. At one time, she thought it was to hold Hammer's crap.

She quickly unwraps it,

Turns on her side.

She brandishes a

GUN

Everyone backs off from her.

HEWITT

Wait there, now. Calm down.

Thera struggles to her feet,

waves the gun at the thug, now at Hewitt, breathing heavily.

What do I do now?

She turns the gun at the thug again.

HEWITT (O.S)
Put that down.

Wide eyed, Thera turns.

Hewitt is holding a long, nasty SWITCHBLADE to Hammer's throat.

HEWITT
Put it down, sugar, or Hammer pays
a heavy toll to that rainbow
bridge.

Thera looks back at the thug, gnawing at the leash to get his slimy hands on her.

She looks back at Hewitt,
the blade at Hammer's throat.

Defeated, Thera starts to put the gun down.

When, suddenly!

the little fur ball tears out of the canvas bag, darts between her legs.

Thera is distracted.

Hewitt comes at her with the blade.

A reflex, Thera lifts the gun.

BLAM!!!!

A shot to Hewitt's leg.

He falls back in agony, collapses to the floor of the pool.

Thera swings the gun around. Eyes intense, scared out of her wits.

No one get close!

Everyone backs off.

The air in this space has exploded with smoke.

Thera can't but help breath it in.

That gunpowder smoke against her nose.

MYSTERIOUS MAN(V.O)
 If they find themselves lost, a
 smell may lead them back.

Time seems to go in slow motion now.

Everything blurring and echoing in Thera's mind.

The crowds on the balcony rushing off like a slow motion
 marathon.

The tethered Pitbull barking up a storm in puddles of blood,
 but we can't hear his madness.

Hewitt writhes on the ground. Mouthing obscenities at her.

Thera is stunned. A flashback from her POV in grainy memory
 unfolds...

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. HOME - DAY

A garden outside that same home where the pet rescue is now.

A YOUNGER THERA, cuts a pink flower at the stem. Pleased
 with the petals, the fragrance.

A *GUNSHOT*

Her eyes move in fright to an upstairs window.

INT. HOME - DAY

Thera rushes up some stairs. The living room we saw before
 with the odd furniture arrangements of the pet rescue is now
 a normal space, finely appointed.

She approaches a door.

A YOUNGER LIZZY stands there, her back to the door.

Several LARGE PET DOGS surround her,
 pawing frantically to get beyond that door.

Matter of factly, somewhat cold...

YOUNGER LIZZY
 Mother's finally tired of her
 dementia. Like her own mother,
 she's taken her life, Thera.

Young Thera pulls Young Lizzy away from the door.

FLASHBACK ENDS:

INT. MOTEL PATIO - NIGHT

Thera waves the gun in front of her.

The thug tries to approach her once again.

THERA
Get back, all of you!

She removes a finger from her temple like it's on fire.

Something aches in her head. Something forces itself back.

FLASHBACK RETURNS:

INT. HOME - MOTHER'S BEDROOM - DAY

Young Thera pushes the dogs away from the door, squeezes through it,

closes it.

Her back to it. Gunpowder smoke against her face, frozen in shock.

YOUNG THERA
Mama.

She slowly makes her way to a bed.

Horror, grief, building on her face.

This can't be.

YOUNG THERA
No.

FLASHBACK ENDS:

INT. MOTEL PATIO - NIGHT

Thera backs up, keeping a gun on the thug, following other patrons headed towards the exit.

I've got to get out of here.

She looks around for Hammer.

THERA
Hammer?

No sight of him.

She backs away, gun in hand. The thug follows her.

She makes it to the door and outside, slipping the gun in a pocket.

The thug give chase.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Thera rushes across a busy street.

BEEEEEEP!

A car narrowly misses plowing into her.

Thera stumbles, runs in the direction of a

BEAT COP on the sidewalk.

The thug stops in his tracks, worried she's going say something to the cop.

THUG #2
Hell.

He scurries away like a cockroach back to the motel.

But Thera, she ignores the cop,

she's in some horrid zone now.

Only running makes sense at this moment.

So, she runs.

AN ALLEYWAY

Dark, narrow. Thera runs.

She stumbles into a garbage can. The lid falls off creating a racket.

A guard dog behind chain link fence erupts in

BARKS that give way to other barks, echoing into the recesses.

A BUSY SIDEWALK

Thera pushes past people, to the entrance of a large office building.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING LOBBY - NIGHT

She stumbles up to the reception desk.

Beside it is a billboard of dozens of names of office tenants.

The security guard is taken aback by her rumpled appearance.

Thera wipes her face. Catches her breath.

THERA

Excuse me, is there a doctor Frank here?

An OLDER SECRETARY, matronly, comes through the lobby with other workers, all leaving their offices for the evening after working late.

OLDER SECRETARY

Thera?

Thera turns to her, relieved to hear her name.

THERA

You know me?

She wipes her face again.

THERA

I'm looking for doctor Frank.

OLDER SECRETARY

He's with your lawyer.

THERA

My lawyer? I don't understand. I don't have a lawyer.

OLDER SECRETARY

Yes, Dr. Frank set you up with him before things got, ah,--- murky for you. Dear, is everything all right? Should I call Richard?

Thera steps back from her, confused.

Brain on overload.

Thera suddenly turns, rushes out the door.

OLDER SECRETARY
Honey, they're waiting for you!!

EXT. ROCK QUARRY - NIGHT

That big black hole in the ground. It seems like it would suck you in if you let it.

Thera there at its' edge, lost in its enormity and danger.

She's in a stunned state. Grasping at the benchmarks that make up her life.

She reaches in a pocket, pulls out that gun.

Without a thought, she tosses it to the water far, far, far below.

The faint sound of its' splash.

Thera steps closer to the edge.

A few steps and it's death for sure.

VET (V.O)
A life of socialization wiped out
in one moment of brain chemistry we
can't explain.

Thera takes another step closer...

MRS. NASH(V.O)
I don't know why any of us live so
high up. Too much temptation to
take a step and be free of life's
puzzles, isn't it?

She takes another step, right on the edge,
just one move.

She closes her eyes tight.

THERA
Mama.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. HOME - DAY

Young Thera closes the door to her mother's bedroom in stunned shock.

How could this be?

Her mother's large pet dogs clamor with nails to the door to get in that bedroom to see their master.

Thera ignores them. They only remind her of her mother's fate.

She passes Young Lizzy in the hallway.

Lizzy stares at her with a cold look.

YOUNG LIZZY
Helpless. It was her Kryptonite.

Young Thera walks on, head down. Grieving and fearful.

What does the future hold for me?

FLASHBACK ENDS:

EXT. ROCK QUARRY - NIGHT

Wiping away the anguish. Thera opens her eyes.

(a beat)

She's come this far. She's made a plan.

She's going to see it through.

She steps back from the edge.

Not today.

INT. CITY BUS - NIGHT

The rattle of the bus.

The bus driver, that same one from before behind the wheel.

He looks up in his rearview mirror.

Thera sits alone there, mid bus.

She looks like she's been through the ringer.

BUS DRIVER
Where's the dog? You were on here
before with a dog.

She remembers.

Things are tying together now.

THERA
I was, wasn't I?

She folds into a smile.

INT. HIGH RISE OFFICE BUILDING OFFICE RECEPTION - NIGHT

The mysterious man's secretary hands Thera a brush.

Thera tends to her hair, ties it back.

The secretary takes off her business jacket, hands it to Thera to put on.

The secretary nods her head.

You look presentable, now.

Thera smiles with appreciation,

inhales,

I'm ready.

INT. HIGH RISE OFFICE BUILDING OFFICE - NIGHT

Lizzy is about to sign a document on the mysterious man's desk when the door to the office opens.

LIZZY
You people think you could get away
with this. There's nothing that
could bring her any lucidity. It's
the Nesbitt curse.

DR. FRANK
Thera?

Lizzy turns. She sees her sister enter, followed by the secretary.

Thera steps through the room, acknowledging each.

THERA
Lizzy. Doctor Frank.

Lizzy remains hopeful.

Thera is no match.

Doctor Frank appears reluctant to believe.

Thera approaches the desk, notices the document.

The mysterious man takes the pen from Lizzy's reluctant hand, hands it to Thera.

They meet eyes.

THERA
Richard.

He smiles, as though the weight of the world has left his shoulders.

Their eyes stay on each other.

There is history here. Support. Going the distance.

His delight growing as she speaks.

THERA
My name is Thera Nesbitt. Richard is my attorney, my appointed representative. I was born to Laura and Samuel Nesbitt. My father died in a plane crash in Kenya when I was three. My mother suffering from very early onset dementia took her own life. I have inherited that inclination and prepared for that eventuality the best I could.

She looks over at the family portrait on the desk, noting Hammer there.

THERA
A year ago, I asked Richard to assist me in a plan, with the help of his dog, Hammer. I remember making that plan. A little ambitious, foolish, perhaps.

She looks over at Doctor Frank who stares in surprise.

THERA

But it got me to this point. A point of soundness for however long this lasts. Legally sound with Doctor Frank's evaluation to continue what my mother wished for all her life. To assure that bequest.

She turns to Lizzy who has backed away into a corner.

THERA

You look just like her, Lizzy.

Lizzy lowers her eyes.

THERA

(her voice breaking, but no tears)

Why you fighting me all this time. Our mother?

She collects herself.

THERA

All her fortune, she wanted it to go for them.

She looks to doctor Frank who nods approval to all in the room.

THERA

I'm honoring her wish, releasing the rest of it to her rescue organization. The sum of three million dollars.

The secretary approaches the table. Richard points to the dotted line.

Thera, without hesitation, signs.

She looks up to this no longer mysterious man, beseeching.

THERA

Michael?

MYSTERIOUS MAN

He's kept close to you, Thera. Always within reach. Watching over you.

Thera turns away, stepping quickly out of the room, but one look first to Lizzy,

who turns from her with coldness.

Thera inhales,

forget her.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - MORNING

The sunrise casts a brilliant glow against the windows.

A car pulls up.

Thera quickly exits the passenger side.

She looks back.

Inside the car, the one-armed female vet smiles back at her.

THERA

You're the fastest one-armed driver
I know.

VET

Call me!

Thera runs towards the apartment entrance, anxious to get in, patting her pockets.

All smiles.

THERA

I've lost my phone!

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY -MORNING

Alex stands before Mrs. Nash's doorway.

MRS. NASH

I'm sorry to get you over here so early, but my pipes keep singing Hall & Oates to all hours of the night. I flushed some drano down the sink and it only gets louder.

Alex listens patiently.

ALEX
I'll need to go grab a wrench.

MRS. NASH
Come back soon. I'm afraid it's
going to wake up the nanny.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING ANOTHER HALLWAY -MORNING

Thera knocks repeatedly on a door.

THERA
Open the door!

She pushes the door open.

It's a maintenance man's office.

TOOLS of the trade about.

A MICROWAVE in one corner.

She looks around, no sign of him, she rushes out.

She rushes down the hall as Alex comes in the opposite
direction.

ALEX(O.S)
Guy come back for his dog?

Thera stops dead in her tracks. She closes her eyes, emotion
welling within her.

She keeps her back turned to him as he grips the door to the
maintenance room.

TEARS are finally coming now.

Streaming her cheeks.

Everything spent now...

THERA
You quoted Dr. Seuss on our first
date---

Her voice breaks with emotion...

THERA
"How did it get so late so soon"?

Alex lets go of the door knob. Stunned.

Oh, my god. It worked.

Thera turns around, tearful, smiling.

He runs to her, grabs her in his arms,

kissing her cheeks, her mouth,

catching up on months and months of denial.

They embrace, can't let go.

We leave them now, long kisses, touching, swallowing each other up as we are swallowed into

A DARKNESS

OPEN on

INT. MOTEL PATIO - DAY

SUN SPARKLES on the water of that same swimming pool. But now, things are cleaned up,

pool filled, chlorinated and all.

Deck chairs all in a row.

No sign of the horrid mayhem which infested this place before.

Hewitt lies on a pool lounge chair. His mutt on his stomach.

Bandages on his leg are the only things that seem to mar his idyllic afternoon.

He takes a dog chew from Thera's canvas bag, gives it to the mutt.

He looks up. Maybe not so idyllic.

Along one balcony above him,

Thera, two POLICE OFFICERS and a DETECTIVE look down at him.

Hewitt smiles.

No worry.

HEWITT
May I help you?

Another police officer approaches,

retrieves that nondescript CANVAS BAG at Hewitt's side.

THERA(V.O)
Everything I'm sure I'll need I'll
put in the bag.

INT. MOTEL HALL - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

The Detective carefully disengages something off the exterior of the canvas bag.

It's very small. He lifts it up to examine it.

A tiny SURVEILLANCE CAMERA.

He insert a disk from it into the desk clerk's computer.

Everything on video from the time Thera entered the motel and afterwards when she left it behind.

The clean up of the mess to avoid authorities. It's all there, all the nasty details as they watch.

Evidence enough to implicate him.

Hewitt is walked, handcuffed, by officers out the door.

INT. MOTEL - HALL

Quiet.

Thera walks alone, peering into each motel room, each open doorway.

She stops at the door of one room.

Something catches her eye.

Inside, she sees it.

A table, covered with a tablecloth that reaches the floor.

She enters the room.

Maybe.

INT. MOTEL ROOM

Thera approaches the table, she lifts up one edge of the tablecloth.

She slips in under the table.

In the dim light, there,

We see Hammer.

He sits quietly.

He backs up at the sight of her, unsure. He looks anywhere but at her.

Thera settles, watches him.

THERA

Hammer---Do you remember me?

Hammer lifts a paw, takes a tentative step towards her, stops, then a complete step.

Another. He needs her comfort as much as she needs his.

Thera reaches around him, embraces him ever so tight, an anchor. Hammer leans into her.

We leave the two under the table in that embrace,

as we FADE TO BLACK.