

SANDMAN

Screenplay by

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SECOND DRAFT
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FADE IN:

EXT. CHURCHYARD - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: a word carved in stone: 'DREAMS'.

BEGIN CREDITS

PULL BACK to reveal the full inscription:

'FOR IN THAT SLEEP OF DEATH WHAT DREAMS MUST COME.'

It's carved on a large obelisk grave marker. Beneath the inscription is a name: THIBAULT, and dates: 1861-1917.

PULL FURTHER BACK: Perched on the marker is a stone effigy of the angel of death, wings spread wide, half-smile on her face.

AND FURTHER BACK: Ropes are wrapped around the marker. The ropes tighten, and the marker is suddenly PULLED OVER, the CAMERA taking off with it--

The marker is dragged along, through deep grass... then with a bump it's on a dirt road, then over a bridge. It's dragged by a team of horses. Rain starts to fall. The marker pulls away, continuing on toward--

Burgess Manor, a dark outline against the gray marble sky--

END CREDITS

INT. BURGESS MANOR - GARAGE - CIRCA 1930'S - NIGHT

The garage was once the carriage house. Several luxury cars, circa 1930s, fill the bays. The marker lies in an empty one. Two men stand nearby.

One is RODERICK BURGESS. A commanding presence, radiating a charisma both disturbing and mesmerizing. He is in his early twenties, but his soul is much older--and darker.

The other is SMITH. Middle-aged, face drawn, he peers out of the garage furtively. He's worried, preoccupied. A white

clerical collar is almost hidden beneath his coat and scarf.

SMITH
 (hopefully)
 The rain will wash out the tracks...

Burgess moves slowly to the marker.

BURGESS
 I've found it. Crowley couldn't. Mathers
 couldn't. Only I could.

SMITH
 I didn't see anybody on the
 road...

Burgess isn't listening to him; he's preoccupied with the
 marker. He examines it gleefully, reverently.

BURGESS
 Thibault had it stolen from the Vatican
 Library--that's common knowledge. But
 then it disappeared. He told Yeats he'd
 destroyed it. But he didn't. He couldn't.
 And now--I've found it.

SMITH
 I don't think anyone saw me.

Burgess finally looks at the man. Cocks his head, amused.

BURGESS
 Don't worry, Vicar. No one saw you. No
 one knows what you've done--except you
 and me. And God.
 (insinuating)
 Just like your other little...
 peccadilloes.

The Vicar shuts his eyes in pain.

SMITH
 Please...
 (looks at Burgess)
 What they say is true. You are the most
 wicked man alive.

BURGESS

(chuckles)

I've always liked that title.

He grabs up a sledge hammer, startling the other man--as he intended. He smiles, and SMASHES the hammer down on the marker. Another blow. Another--

The marker is hollow. Hidden inside is a large oilskin bundle. Burgess drops the sledge. Lifts out the bundle.

Burgess unwraps it carefully. Inside is a thick book.

BURGESS

The Magdalene Grimoire. Finally.

The book is heavy, leather bound, brittle with age. Burgess pages through it greedily. It is filled with tiny, cramped writing, arcane diagrams, drawings.

SMITH

That's it then? You can do it now? You can... capture the angel of death?

BURGESS

Death isn't an angel. She's one of the Endless... who existed long before angels... and will exist long after the final cherubim has sung its last hosanna.

SMITH

Heresy.

BURGESS

For your sake, hope it's not. The Magdalene Grimoire is all the Order of Ancient Mysteries needed. With it, we will summon and imprison Death.

(beat)

And I will command who shall live... and who shall die.

SMITH

Then... you'll keep our bargain?

(no answer)

Please--you'll keep your promise?

BURGESS

Of course, Vicar. You have my word. You won't die. And you will never have to stand in the judgment of your God.

(clasps him on the shoulder; cheery)

Good night.

He exits the garage, for the main house. Smith looks down at the marker, at the shattered effigy of death.

SMITH

Thank God--

He catches himself, realizing he shouldn't be praying. His eyes fill with tears; he slumps.

SMITH

What have I done?

INT. BURGESS MANOR - CELLAR - NIGHT

Candles burn in the darkness. Robed figures inscribe a large circle on the floor--chalk white against the black stone. Runic characters decorate it.

ACOLYTE

It is midnight, Lord Magus.

BURGESS

It is time. Elspeth, love..?

A beautiful YOUNG WOMAN nods adoringly. She crouches on all fours at Burgess' feet.

Items are placed on her back: a ceremonial bowl, inside which floats a human heart. A long twisted knife. A feather. Coins. The Magdalene Grimoire. She is a human altar.

Burgess opens the book. He begins to intone, displaying the items as he names them:

BURGESS

I give you coin I made from a stone. I
(MORE)

BURGESS (CONT'D)

give you a song I stole from the dirt. I
give you a knife from under the hills.
And a stick I stuck through a dead man's
eye. I give you a claw I ripped from a
rat. I give you a name, and the name is
lost.

He jabs his forearm with the knife. Blood drips onto the
feather.

BURGESS (CONT'D)

I give you blood from out of my vein, and
a feather I pulled from an angel's wing.

He throws the feather into the circle.

BURGESS (CONT'D)

I summon with poison, and summon with
pain. I open the way and open the gates.
Come.

The acolytes echo the word 'Come.'

BURGESS (CONT'D)

I summon you in the names of the old
lords. Namtar. Allatu. Morax. Naberius.
Klesh. Vepar. Maymon. We summon.

The acolytes chant 'Come.'

BURGESS (CONT'D)

From the dark they call you... into the
dark they call you. Coin and song, knife
and stick...

In the center of the circle, the air SHIMMERS--

BURGESS (CONT'D)

Claw and name, blood and feather... Here
in the darkness...

The air SOLIDIFIES, taking shape--
The acolytes echo 'Here in the darkness.'

BURGESS (CONT'D)

Here in the darkness, we summon you
together. COME!

There is FLASH--

--and a black-cloaked FIGURE materializes in mid-air.

His head and face are covered by a HELM that looks like the
skull of some dead ancient god (which it is).

A large, vibrant heart-shaped RUBY adorns his neck.

A small leather POUCH hangs from one hand.

--and then the figure collapses. He lies splayed on the
floor, in the center of the circle.

The acolytes are hushed, amazed.

ACOLYTE

We did it. I don't believe it. We did it--

BURGESS

No. We failed. This isn't Death. Damn it
to hell.

Silence from the others as Burgess considers the figure.

BURGESS

Even so... strip him.

The Acolyte nods, reaches across the circle--

--and SCREAMS as his arm TWISTS violently, torqued by some
unseen force. Burgess shoves him away from the circle.

BURGESS

Fool! If you'd broken the circle, he
could have escaped!

He grabs Elspeth by the hair, slashes with the knife--

Elspeth's head lolls to one side. Burgess catches her before
she collapses.

ACOLYTE

My god--

Burgess lets Elspeth fall to the ground. He holds his hands up like a surgeon. They are stained with Elspeth's blood.

Careful not to break the circle, Burgess steps close to the captured FIGURE. With bloody hands he strips off the cloak.

He takes the ruby.

He takes the pouch.

And then he removes the helm--

The face revealed is bone white, framed by jet black hair. An aquiline nose and high cheekbones, a face carved from finest marble--save the eyes. These are obsidian, deep as the universe--and staring directly at Burgess.

He is the personification of dream.

He is SANDMAN.

Burgess draws back, unsettled.

BURGESS

(shaken)

...I think, at day's end, this will have been a very profitable evening's work.

With a gesture, he orders the acolytes out. Burgess continues to stare at Sandman as he backs out of the room.

The door to the room pivots on an axis; the other side is brick. It is clearly a secret room. The door swings shut.

Sandman lies on the floor, unmoving. And then--

--a single, small tear slips down his cheek--

From somewhere in the empty room comes the SOUND of water DRIPPING, slowly. In the corner, a drop of water slips from a pipe, courses down the wall to the floor.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE WORLD - VARIOUS

A scratchy recording of 'Dream a Little Dream of Me' fades in and out. We see images, drifting, dreamlike, drawn from news reels, photographs, drawings: A bread line. Gandhi. Astaire and Rogers, dancing. Flagpole sitting and dance marathons. Hitler at a rally...

INT. BURGESS MANOR - CELLAR - CIRCA LATE 1940S - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: Sandman's eyes. He's sitting up now, hugging his knees to his chest. But still unmoving.

Burgess, nearly twenty years older, sits in a chair opposite him, studying him.

BURGESS

I know you can grant me boons. Power.
Immortality. A promise you won't seek
revenge.

(beat)

Well? I know you can understand me. Say
something!

Sandman does not respond. Does not move. Just stares.

BURGESS (CONT'D)

Damn you.

The door pivots, and ALEX BURGESS pushes in. He's seven, and he wants nothing more than to please his father. He carries a large folio, dusty and falling apart.

ALEX

Sir! I found it!

BURGESS

Yes, Alex?

ALEX

See? Here. In the Paginarum Fulvarum.

He leafs through the folio. It is filled with old drawings and paintings. We catch quick glimpses of figures titled Destiny, Death, Desire, figures we will learn more of later.

ALEX

You said he had to be one of the Endless.
But it wasn't Death. And it's not Desire,
or Despair--or Destiny. That'd been
brilliant if you'd caught him--um ...

Burgess has fixed him with a stern look, humbling him.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Uh, anyway... Here.

He finds the drawing he's looking for, displays it:

A Heirmonyous Bosch-like portrait of Sandman in his helm and
cloak. Terrifying. The drawing is inscribed 'Here is said
thee Kinge of Dremes.'

ALEX (CONT'D)

See? He's Dream.

(reading)

Morpheus, Lord Shaper. the Prince of
Stories... the Sandman.

Burgess takes the folio, examines it, nodding.

BURGESS

Yes. I was hoping you'd work it out on
your own one day. And you have. Well
done, Alex.

ALEX

Thank you, father--

BURGESS

Father?

ALEX

(chastised)

Thank you, Lord Magus.

(gathers his courage)

Sir... Since you know his true name,
can't you make him do what you want?

BURGESS

Cretin. That kind of magick is too trifling for him and his ilk. The Endless are not mortal

ALEX

But if they're gods--

BURGESS

They are not gods. Gods come and go. Gods fade away.

ALEX

But... are we safe? What if his brothers and sisters come after us?

Burgess broods on this... glances at a shelf. On it lie Sandman's helm, pouch and ruby. He fingers the helm.

BURGESS

Protection can be had. Deals can be struck...

(to Alex)

You've never seen a summoning, have you, son? Tonight, you will. We'll conjure a demon of hell. And trade this--

(lifts the helm)

--for our safety.

(turns to leave)

Inform the acolytes.

ALEX

Yes, Lord Magus. But what about... what about him?

BURGESS

He will not get out unless the circle is broken. And the circle will not be broken unless I order it.

He leaves, Alex trailing. Sandman watches them go...

In the corner, a DROP of water slips from a pipe, courses down the wall to the floor. Twenty years has worn a channel in the stone; the drop flows along it. And then another...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE WORLD - VARIOUS

More time goes by, more images, dreamlike: McCarthy in the Senate. Lenin reviewing a May Day parade. Walt Disney opening Disneyland. Hula hoops, 3-D movies, Elvis. The KKK marching on Washington. All accompanied by the Everly Brothers' version of 'All I Ever Do is Dream.'

INT. BURGESS MANOR - CELLAR - CIRCA 1960S - NIGHT

The door pushes open. Burgess enters, slightly drunk. At sixty, he's still handsome and vital. With him is--

RACHEL. Beautiful in the extreme, radiating sexual heat. Dressed in the counterculture style of the day. She is giggling--then draws up short at the sight of Sandman.

RACHEL

My God... it's true.

She circles Sandman slowly.

Alex, now in his twenties, has followed them into the room; he watches Rachel's every step.

RACHEL

He's magnificent. And you caught him, Lord Magus?

Burgess smiles--but it fades when Alex speaks.

ALEX

Actually, it was a mistake. He was trying to--

BURGESS

Shut up, Alex.

RACHEL

Is he a demon?

BURGESS
(shakes his head)
He's more dangerous than any demon I've
known.

He scoops up the pouch from the shelf.

BURGESS (CONT'D)
Here. This is what I told you about.
(opens the pouch)
The stuff that dreams are made of...

ALEX
(to himself)
'Made on.' Quote it right, you old idiot...

He goes unheard as Burgess sprinkles some of the sand into
his own hand. It sparkles. He holds it out to Rachel.

BURGESS
No matter how much you take out, there's
always some left... Try it.

RACHEL
How do I...? Sniff it?

BURGESS
Sniff it, swallow it, rub it on your skin
...pour it in your eyes... it doesn't
matter.

Rachel considers. Puts one finger in her mouth, moistening
it, rolls it in the sand. With a wicked grin, eyes never
leaving Burgess', she trails her hand down toward her jeans--

Burgess stares, panting slightly--

Her fingers slips beneath the waistband. Between her legs--

BURGESS
Oh, Rachel... You are a wild one...

She smiles, shows her teeth--her eyes go wide. She is
seeing something beautiful, rapturous. She is seeing life as
a dream.

RACHEL

Oh... oh, my...

Roderick sets the pouch down, moves to Rachel. Begins to nuzzle her neck, undress her. She responds to him--

--but her eyes never leave the pouch.

Alex's gaze lingers on Rachel as he backs away. Then he steps discreetly out of the room.

And Sandman continues to watch... and wait...

INT. BURGESS MANOR - CELLAR - NIGHT

The door opens. Alex slips in, followed by Rachel.

RACHEL

Is he really what old Roddy says he is?

ALEX

I don't know... Stupid old Roddy should've died by now and left me in charge... he really can work some sort of magic...

RACHEL

That sand... that was magic...

Alex grabs the pouch. Considers, then takes the ruby as well. He heads for the door. Rachel catches him.

RACHEL

Please... just a little.

Alex considers. Opens the pouch. Rachel pinches out some sand, sniffs it. It takes effect immediately, transporting her. Alex grabs her hand.

ALEX

Come on...

She pulls against him, grabs for the pouch. He lets her take it. She clutches it. One last look at Sandman; then she allows herself to be led from the room.

Sandman gazes after them.

In the corner, a DROP of water slips from the pipe, courses down the wall to the floor. Flows along the channel, which now leads to a small pool.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE WORLD - VARIOUS

More time goes by. Nixon, victorious over McGovern. An EST meeting, slam dancing punks, a 'Star Wars' line. The Ayatollah exhorting a mob. The song is 'Dreamweaver.' It skips.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

A man--call him DAVID--sleeps fitfully in the one-room efficiency apartment. He wears the pants and shirt of a postal uniform; the rest is scattered on the floor.

The TV is on, volume low, showing Bicentennial celebration news footage. Traffic NOISE comes from outside, mixed with the sound of a DOG BARKING.

All the sounds FADE OUT, save the BARKING. It becomes rhythmic, constant.

David's eyes flutter open.

CORINTHIAN

Hello, David.

The CORINTHIAN is a young man with silver hair, whipsaw build clothed in white silk pants and T-shirt.

He wears small, round dark glasses and an amused smile.

DAVID

Hello. How did you get in here?

CORINTHIAN

I wanted to talk to you, David. To tell
(MORE)

CORINTHIAN (CONT'D)

you that you are not fulfilling your potential.

DAVID

I'm not? Who are you?

CORINTHIAN

I'm your friend. You can call me the Corinthian. I want to show you something.

He gestures to the TV. The dog continues to BARK.

ON SCREEN: what looks like the opening credits of a mid-seventies cop show: studio backlot heroics and car chases. It lingers on a POV shot: approaching a parked red Torino. Two figures inside, one blond, one brunette--both women. Their hair is almost ridiculously long and straight.

David leans forward at the sight of the women. His fists clench. The Corinthian smiles.

CORINTHIAN

I've shown other people things like this, David. All through history. But none as special as you.

ON SCREEN: the POV shot continues. A .44 appears in frame, and FIRES. The windshield shatters, and the brunette's head snaps back--a bloodless, TV killing. The blond looks up and smiles.

The gun FIRES again.

David's eyes fill with tears of joy. The rhythmic BARKING continues.

CORINTHIAN

You see, David? If you can dream it-- you can be it.

David saddens.

DAVID

That's all this is? This isn't really happening? This is a dream?

CORINTHIAN

Sadly, yes. That's the only way I've ever talked to special people. But ...

(David brightens)

Something has happened, David. And now you can help me. You can free me. As I can free you.

DAVID

How?

The Corinthian smiles, spreads his hands.

CORINTHIAN

Wake up, David. Just wake up.

CLOSE ON: David, sleeping fitfully. His eyes flutter open. He looks at the TV. The bicentennial footage continues. NORMAL SOUND has returned.

DAVID

Just a dream...

A hand drops on his shoulder. The Corinthian's hand.

CORINTHIAN

Not anymore.

He places something on the bed in front of David--a .44 REVOLVER. David picks it up reverently. Heavy and real.

CORINTHIAN

Good-bye, David. Thank you.

He rises, heads for the door.

DAVID

Wait! Will I ever see you again? Will you ...talk with me some more?

The Corinthian pauses.

CORINTHIAN

I'll always be here, David. I'll always talk to you. Just listen.

Once again, the SOUND fades away, isolating the BARKING DOG.

David listens, nods. The Corinthian nods back, then opens the door and leaves. The door shuts quietly--and NORMAL SOUND returns.

David lifts the revolver. Spins the cylinder. POINTS it at the CAMERA--

CUT TO:

INT. BURGESS MANOR - CELLAR - CIRCA 1980S - NIGHT

Burgess leans heavily on a cane. He is now a withered, fragile old man. He stares at Sandman, who stares back. Suddenly, Burgess is wracked by a violent coughing attack. He gets himself under control.

BURGESS

It's your fault! Damn you!

(resigned)

You aren't Death, but you live forever.
You haven't aged a day since I caught
you. You could have given me power beyond
my wildest dreams.

(chokes back tears)

I... I didn't have to get so old. I
shouldn't have had to get old.

He has another violent coughing attack. Slips to one knee.

DEATH

That's it, let it out.

Another person is in the cellar. She looks about nineteen. Long black hair, pale skin. A kinda groovy, perky neo-punk girl-next-door, dressed in black jeans and camisole. An ahnk, the Egyptian symbol for life, hangs from her neck. She looks genuinely concerned for Burgess.

And we recognize her face: it was the face of the angel of death on the grave marker.

BURGESS

Who are you?

She gestures. He looks down. Sees--

His own body. Lying on the ground near his feet. Dead.

BURGESS

Are you... you aren't Death... are you?

DEATH smiles, half-shrugs. She knows she's not what he expected.

DEATH

Hi.

BURGESS

I tried to catch you once. Got him instead.

DEATH

I know.

BURGESS

Am I... are you going to punish me? Am I bound for hell?

DEATH

I'm just here to take you from this world to the next... Destinations are up to you.

BURGESS

Oh... I am. I'm going to hell. I'm Roderick Burgess. I'm the most wicked man alive.

DEATH

(a bright smile)

Not anymore.

She takes Burgess' hand. Looks up at Sandman.

DEATH

(genuine sadness)

I'm sorry, little brother... there's nothing I can do. I... I miss you.

She and Burgess fade into the shadows. We hear a SOFT FLUTTERING SOUND, like WINGS.

She's gone. Just Burgess' body on the floor... And Sandman, watching. The water still DRIPS; the pool in the corner of the room is quite deep now.

EXT. THE WORLD - VARIOUS

Images leading to the present day. A student stands defiantly in front of a tank. An evangelist breaks down in tears. A white Bronco moves slowly down the freeway. Demonstrators join hands in a field of brightly colored quilts.

INT. BURGESS MANOR - CELLAR - PRESENT - NIGHT

In the corner, a DROP of water slips from a pipe, courses down the wall to the floor. Flows along the carved channel in the stone, into the pool--

The pool OVERFLOWS. A line of water trickles its way across the floor, across the faded chalk runes of the circle. It wipes the line of chalk away--

The circle is broken.

With a cry of pain, Sandman falls forward, collapses outside the circle.

He rolls over. Weak. In pain. His lips part. His voice is filled with dark mystery, a voice that can inspire dreams and command nightmares:

SANDMAN

At... last.

He gathers himself, rises. Stands, a bit unsteady.

He looks down at the remains of Roderick Burgess, decayed and brittle with age. He picks up the skull. Regards it.

Sandman squeezes. The skull SHATTERS. There is no joy in his eyes as pieces sift out from between his fingers.

Sandman looks at the shelf that once held his belongings. Empty. He looks away. Moves toward the door--

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Sodium lamps cast a sickly yellow light on the nearly-empty lot. A WOMAN hurriedly click-clacks toward her car, keys already out. She unlocks the door, opens it--

Someone slams it shut: the CORINTHIAN. He has seemingly appeared from nowhere. He smiles at her.

CORINTHIAN

Beautiful night to be alive, don't you think?

WOMAN

Stay away from me.

She crouches slightly, flexes her fingers. Her red-painted fingernails glint. She knows self-defense. The Corinthian draws a knife lazily, steps forward.

The Woman kicks at his shin--he avoids it. But she brings her foot down on his--hard. She grabs either side of his head, her thumbs clawing for his eyes behind his sunglasses--

She SCREAMS, yanks her hands back. She crouches, staring down at her hands, which drip with blood.

WOMAN

What did you do?

The Corinthian straightens his sunglasses. The woman crawls under the car. The Corinthian grabs her ankle--she SCREAMS, clutches at the pavement, grabs for the tire, as she is inexorably dragged out from under the car.

CORINTHIAN (O.S.)

Don't worry. I won't kill you. That would draw all sorts of the wrong kind of attention. I just want to look into your eyes--

Suddenly, she is no longer being dragged. She twists, peers

out from under the car--

The Corinthian stands still, looking up toward the night sky.

CORINTHIAN

He's back. He's BACK. No! It's not fair!
I won't allow it. I won't go back!

He looks down at the woman.

CORINTHIAN (CONT'D)

Don't worry. I can stop him. I'm not
going back.

She cowers in terror. Opens her eyes--the Corinthian is gone. She blinks--it's as if he was never there--

--except for her hands. The Woman drags herself out from under the car. Raises her hands--

Her THUMBS BLEED, as though bitten through by tiny sharp teeth. She starts to cry.

EXT. BURGESS MANOR - NIGHT

Boarded up, windows broken, overgrown. Sandman stands under the night sky. Reaches out his arms. Shadows move, and darkness stretches towards him.

Sandman wraps the shadows around him--

--and he is gone.

EXT. DREAM REALM - DUSK

A SANDSTORM rages; there is the WHITE NOISE of the howling wind. Shadows flow inside of it, and Sandman's dark outline emerges, one arm raised, a shield against the wind. He peers ahead. In front of him is:

EXT. DREAM REALM - THE GATES OF HORN AND IVORY - DUSK

Ornately carved. Flanked by gargoyles. Sandman is relieved at

the sight.

SANDMAN

The Gates of Horn and Ivory. Once
through, I will see my castle... I will
see--

The gates part before him. Sandman steps through--

EXT. DREAM REALM - SANDMAN'S PALACE - DUSK

SANDMAN

--my home.

Sandman stares in horror--

Ahead of him are the remains of Sandman's Dream Palace.
Beautiful, once, but now overgrown and broken--its glass
walls CRACKED, its delicate spires BROKEN. The majestic
columns have fallen into RUBBLE.

Sandman slumps before it as if struck down. From nearby comes
the sound of gentle weeping--and a voice:

LUCIEN (O.S.)

Breaks your heart, my Lord, doesn't it?

Sandman turns.

SANDMAN

Lucien?

In the shadow of the gates sits LUCIEN, Sandman's librarian.
He rises to his feet. Pointed ears and round spectacles,
dressed as a clown might dress for a formal dinner.

He stares at Sandman, smiling, tears in his eyes. We realize
he's weeping at Sandman's return.

LUCIEN

One and the same, my Lord.

(he bows)

At your service, as always.

(his voice cracks)

Welcome home.

SANDMAN

What happened here?

Lucien takes a breath. Wipes the tears from his eyes.

LUCIEN

What happened? You are the incarnation of this dreamtime, Lord. With you gone, the place... it started to crumble ...

He takes off his spectacles, cleans them.

LUCIEN (CONT'D)

I was aware of it in my Library. Slowly, the words began to fade. Sometime after you vanished, my books became volumes of blank paper. The next day the whole library was gone.

(puts on his glasses)

I never found it again.

SANDMAN

I'm sorry, Lucien.

LUCIEN

I... I tried, sir. I did my best. We all did.

SANDMAN

Let's see how it is, then.

INT. DREAM REALM - SANDMAN'S PALACE - HALLWAY - DUSK

Sandman moves through the ruined palace, around fallen columns and past broken statues.

LUCIEN

(a sad fact)

Most of the palace servants turned back into the dream stuff you made them with--

MATTHEW (O.S.)

He's back? He's really back?

A WILD FLAPPING SOUND and a sleek black raven--MATTHEW streaks down, hovers in front of Sandman.

MATTHEW

Where have you BEEN? Are you all right?
What happened?

SANDMAN

I was detained.

MATTHEW

Ha. Detained. You haven't changed, that's
good news.

SANDMAN

Nor have you, Matthew.

Sandman surveys the devastation.

MATTHEW

It's a pisser, ain't it?

LUCIEN

It hurts me, too, lord.

SANDMAN

Hurts, yes... Some power returns to me,
simply by being here. But I placed too
much of myself in my tools. And they are
gone.

He sits down on a broken marble stair.

SANDMAN (CONT'D)

I wonder... I wonder if it is all even
worth rebuilding.

Matthew speaks an aside to Lucien, not all that quietly:

MATTHEW

Hell, I wonder if he can.

Lucien shoots Matthew a scolding look.

LUCIEN

My Lord--some things you should know,
items that need attention right away.
Many of the nightkind are missing. Lesser
dreams. And...

(he swallows)

One of the major nightmares.

Sandman cocks an eyebrow, waiting. Lucien doesn't like being
the messenger.

LUCIEN (CONT'D)

The Corinthian. Escaped into the waking
world, I'm afraid.

Sandman turns away. Before him is his reflection in a cracked
mirror, hanging askew on a wall. He looks up into his own
eyes a moment, then away--and in the mirror, we get a
glimpse of a fat, gray face--DESPAIR.

SANDMAN

How long?

LUCIEN

Twenty years.

SANDMAN

There is no telling the harm he may have
caused in that time.

(beat)

I blame myself. Had I been here,
fulfilling my function ...

MATTHEW

Aww... it wasn't your fault, boss.

SANDMAN

No? Then whose?

(beat)

And, in my absence, how much further
havoc has been visited upon the waking
world?

INT. STANFORD RESEARCH CLINIC - NIGHT

FACES of SLEEPING PEOPLE, as seen on a row of black-and-white video monitors. Cheap public-sector equipment--out of date, out of focus, one of the screens flipping endlessly. Below each monitor EKGs slowly churn out reams of graph paper.

A DOCTOR moves down the line, checking the readouts with professional indifference.

ON SCREEN: A man sleeps peacefully--his name is PAUL - and then his legs twitch spasmodically, stop. A piece of masking tape is hand-labeled 'PLMS/nocturnal myoclonus.' NEXT SCREEN: An ELDERLY MAN begins thrashing in bed, SCREAMING, pulling out electrodes. His eyes are open but he sees nothing.

DOCTOR

(checks his watch)

Patient seventeen, night terror episode
at eleven-oh-five.

The Doctor expects a response, doesn't get it. He turns, glances down the line--where an ASSISTANT studies the length of an EKG read-out, engrossed.

DOCTOR

Did you get that?

ASSISTANT

(re: the read-out)

It's gotta be some kind of record. Three day observation program, and she's never made it past a level 2 sleep pattern. Even then just for a few minutes.

The Doctor looks interested for the first time, comes over, leaving patient seventeen behind, still SCREAMING.

DOCTOR

Three days without REM sleep? She should see things crawling the walls by now.

ASSISTANT

No sign of hallucinations.
She's part of the benzodiazepine study...

DOCTOR

What's her name?

ON SCREEN: is a WOMAN, lovely, her face relaxed in the peaceful beauty of sleep--but her eyes are wide open, staring enigmatically INTO CAMERA, unblinking.

ASSISTANT (O.S.)

Rose Walker.

INT. STANFORD RESEARCH CLINIC - ROOM - DAY

ROSE WALKER, dressed, quickly packs a few items into an overnight bag. The Doctor appears in the doorway. He turns an envelope in his hands.

DOCTOR

We do appreciate your participation, Miss Walker. Um, if we could persuade you, we'd like to have you back for an individual--

ROSE

(cuts him off)

Yeah, yeah, I know. Lemme guess. I'm special. You've never seen anything like me. You want to run blood tests and do a night-time polysomnogram. Maybe you'll do a daytime multiple sleep latency test. You'll find that my condition is non-respiratory, and not stress induced. You'll find my eye muscles lack tone because my REM sleep is so rare, but you won't know why.

(beat)

Is that the check?

DOCTOR

Yes--

Rose plucks it from his hands. She slings her overnight bag over her shoulder.

ROSE

Look, no offense, but... I've been monitored and studied and hooked up to wires since I was ten. If I thought there was any chance that you guys could get me a good night's sleep, I'd take you up on it. But--

She shrugs. A wave of the envelope, and she's gone.

EXT. STANFORD RESEARCH CLINIC - DAY

The envelope is torn open; Rose examines the check.

PAUL (O.S.)

How'd you do?

PAUL--who we met briefly, a patient in the sleep center--has been waiting. He wears a clean denim shirt, and one of those wispy goatees favored by sensitive-artist types.

ROSE

It'll get me through another semester. You?

PAUL

Same. Walk you home?

ROSE

...sure.

Paul notes the reluctance in her voice.

PAUL

Listen, Rose... I'm sorry I... Sorry that...

Rose glances at him from under raised eyebrows, a smile playing across her lips.

ROSE

Yes, Paul..?

PAUL

That I couldn't talk to you... after the other night.

ROSE

Paul... don't worry about it. We just had some kind of emotional meltdown and we ended up in bed. It's been known to happen.

EXT. BART STATION - DAY

Commuters exit the BART station. Rose and Paul pause, pull skateboards from their bags. They ride expertly downhill, winding in and out of the pedestrians.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO HILLS - DAY

Skateboards in hand, Rose and Paul trudge up a steep hill.

PAUL

I really wasn't looking for, uh, you know. I was just... I've been blocked for so long, and you listen so easy.

(beat)

I was afraid that I'd, I don't know, seduced you--

Rose laughs. Paul looks hurt.

ROSE

I'm a grown woman, Paul... and the whole tormented artist thing is not nearly as attractive as tormented artists think it is.

(trying to ease his conscience)

Look, this was just one of those things. One of those bells that occasionally rings ...

They reach the top of the hill.

PAUL

A trip to the moon on gossamer wings?

ROSE

Just one of those things.

She sets her board down, pushes off--

EXT. ROSE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Brownstones converted into low-cost apartments. The tenants are young, struggling: students, artists, coffee-house employees--sometimes all three at once.

Rose arrives at her entrance, Paul close behind. He looks uncomfortable. Rose packs her skateboard.

PAUL

Hey... let's go have lunch.

ROSE

I'm sorry--I've got too much to deal within my life right now. Okay?

Paul looks even more uncomfortable.

PAUL

I was thinking... just, maybe we should talk some more?

ROSE

Paul, no.

PAUL

Rose--

Rose shoots him a look--she's had enough. Paul sees it.

PAUL

Okay. The truth of the matter is, I know all we're going to be is great friends--
(can't help smiling)
But right now, everybody in your whole building is up with your roommate putting together a surprise birthday party for you, and it's up to me to keep you away from there for the next two hours.

Rose is completely shocked. She glances toward her apartment.

ROSE

Really?

PAUL

Uh-huh. Act surprised, okay?

ROSE

Okay...

(back at Paul)

So, um... pals, then?

Paul regards her... they smile. An understanding reached.

PAUL

Pals. For now.

(off her look)

And probably forever. But I just don't like saying 'never.'

ROSE

Okay. Deal. After all, no one knows their own destiny, right?

CLOSE ON: The parchment PAGE of massive book. In beautiful illuminated script it reads:

"After all, no one knows their own destiny, right?"
Rose said.

In Destiny's Garden, Destiny closed his book and went to his gallery.

The huge tome is SHUT. It is chained to the wrist of--

DESTINY. Oldest of the Endless. Tall, wearing a hooded cassock. We are--

EXT. DESTINY'S GARDEN - TWILIGHT

Destiny moves through his Garden at a measured pace, assuredly as a blind man in his own familiar home. Perhaps he is blind, as we do not see his eyes, hidden in shadow.

The garden is all Greek columns, statues and sweeping archways. Paths that diverge and branch, fork and divide. Tall hedge mazes immaculately cut--

But Destiny knows his way, walking amid the sounds of silence. He leaves no footprints. And casts no shadow.

INT. DESTINY'S GARDEN - CITADEL - TWILIGHT

Destiny moves slowly, dwarfed by the high-ceilinged hallway. Beyond, chambers lead into many rooms and further chambers. He turns a corner, disappears into SHADOW--

INT. DESTINY'S GARDEN - CITADEL - GALLERY - TWILIGHT

Six portraits hang on the wall, all painted in romantic style, all the subjects garbed in eighteenth-century fashion.

Destiny stops in front of the first painting--an ornately-framed oil portrait of Death, she in an elegant pose. Destiny speaks, his voice dry as dust:

DESTINY

Sister. I stand in my Gallery, and I
summon the family to me. It is I, Destiny
of the Endless, who calls you.

(beat)

Come.

Death EMERGES from out of her portrait, into the hallway. She is her usual sunny self, casually dressed.

DEATH

Hiya, big brother. What's up?

DESTINY

I am calling a conclave of the Endless,
Sister. Do you not feel you should be
more appropriately attired?

Death pouts... then spins, and is suddenly wearing a turn-of-the-century satin dress, black leather boots, black silk gloves. The effect is at once wild and elegant.

DEATH

Satisfied?

Destiny moves to the next portrait. He does not look at her.

DESTINY

Yes. I am satisfied.

(to the portrait)

Sibling, I stand in my Gallery, and I
call you...

DESIRE steps out from the portrait. Perfectly symmetrical, perfectly androgynous features. Her (or his) skin is pale as smoke, his (or her) eyes tawny and sharp as yellow wine. Desire smiles in brief flashes, like moonlight glinting from a knife-edge.

She (or he) is formally dressed: black corset, panties, garters and stockings. Desire looks around, taking the place in.

DESIRE

(to Dream)

I see he hasn't redecorated in the last
three hundred years. So what's the
occasion?

DESPAIR

Destiny will tell us that in his own
time, Desire. He won't be rushed...

DESPAIR emerges from her portrait, a heavy woman, naked, rolls of fat weighting her down. Grey eyes that narrow to tiny points.

DESIRE

I see you dressed for the occasion,
Despair.

DEATH

Shush. Be nice. It's been years since the
family was together.

Destiny passes a conspicuous gap where another painting may have hung. The next portrait is of a young girl, smiling,

holding flowers in a summer field.

DESTINY

Sister Delirium. Youngest of the Endless.
I stand in my Gallery, and I call you--

DELIRIUM steps into the Gallery--looking not all like her portrait. Orange hair, her fishnet stockings tattered. One eye is vivid emerald green, spattered with silver flecks that move; her other eye is vein blue. Who knows what Delirium sees through her mismatched eyes?

DEATH

Hi, sis. How are you doing?

DELIRIUM

uh. YesterDAY i did Some really BAD stuff. I meaN REal bad. YOU know.

(beat)

but TOdAY i DiD some GOOD things. I don't know--

DESTINY

Hush, little sister. There is one more to be summoned.

At the end of the gallery is the portrait of Sandman, dressed in the finery of the 17th century. Destiny pauses in front of it--

INT. DESTINY'S GARDEN - CITADEL - MAIN HALL - TWILIGHT

Sandman, dressed as he was painted, sits at a seven-sided table. The Endless gathered around. Destiny stands behind his chair. There is one extra chair, standing empty.

DESTINY

You know why I have called this family meeting.

DESPAIR

Brother Dream is back.

(glances at the empty chair)

I thought you had gone for good.

DESIRE

Abandoned his realm, abandoned his responsibilities...

SANDMAN

I had no choice in the matter.

DELIRIUM

DestiNY couLD hAVe Told yOu WHAT was ComING. BUT he wouLdn't 'cAUse he's meAN.

DESTINY

I could not turn that page until it was time for the turning. But I can tell you what has occurred in your absence.

DESIRE

Oh, do. This could be fun.

Sandman gestures for Destiny to continue.

DESTINY

The dreams of men became chaotic. One man's dream could infect thousands. Dreams of freedom, of subjugation, dreams of equality, dreams of death. Dark or light made no matter, if the dreamer strong enough.

Delirium pays no attention. Bright butterflies emanate from her fingertips.

DELIRIUM

i juST made butter-flies. LOOK, everyBody! LOOK at what I just DiD...

DESTINY

Brother Dream. You must decide. Will you repair your kingdom, and return to your throne?

SANDMAN

I am not sure that I am needed. Or that I wish to resume my mantle.

Desire leans forward.

DESIRE

I could make you wish to.

Sandman frowns.

DESIRE

I am Desire, am I not? Where I touch,
things want and need and love, drawn like
butterflies to a candle-flame.

DESPAIR

You mean moths.

Desire's smile widens.

DESIRE

Butterflies.

One of Delirium's butterflies lands on a candle flame. It
BURNS quickly, writhing, leaving only colored smoke. The
image is at once repellent and beautiful.

DELIRIUM

thoSe Were MINE. you didn't HaVe to do
thAT!

DESPAIR

We should not argue. We should not fight.

Sandman looks across the table at Death.

SANDMAN

You have been quiet, sister. What say
you?

DEATH

What say I? Well, I'll tell you. And I'm
only going to say it once, so you'd
better pay attention.

She rises and comes around the table to him. He waits.

DEATH (CONT'D)

You are utterly the stupidest, most self-centered, appallingest excuse for an anthropomorphic personification on this or any other plane.

She sits on the table beside him.

DEATH (CONT'D)

What we do aren't just responsibilities. These aren't just jobs. We didn't answer ads in the classifieds because we wanted the health care. Destiny, Desire, Death-- this is what we are. And you--are Dream.

Her stern attitude fades, and she takes his hand.

DEATH (CONT'D)

I'm glad you're back. I was worried about you.

She kisses his cheek, then moves back to her chair.

Sandman rubs his forehead... decides.

SANDMAN

I will repair my kingdom. To do so I must recover my tools of power: Pouch, Helm, and Ruby.

DESTINY

(nods)

The path is chosen, then.

SANDMAN

But I don't know where they are. Brother, could you ..?

Destiny does not respond, but pulls his book closer.

SANDMAN (CONT'D)

No. Of course not. Sisters, can you be of any assistance?

He's addressing Desire, Delirium and Despair, who are grouped

together--a tableau of Mother, Maiden and Crone.

SANDMAN

My pouch of sand, which controls dreams.
Do any of you have knowledge of it?

DELIRIUM

i kNow! I KNOW! TheRe's a WOman namED
Rachel--she haS IT! BuT I don'T KNOW
where SHE is. NeiTHEr doeS ShE.

Delirium shuts her mismatched eyes, furrows her brow. When she opens her eyes again, they are both BLUE.

DELIRIUM

Rachel remembers another: Rose Walker.
Perhaps she can lead you to your pouch.
(rubs her temples)
It hurts me to be this way.

SANDMAN

Then stop.

Delirium's eyes shift back to one green, one blue.

DELIRIUM

DestINY? I'm SORry. I didn't MEAN to call
you meAn. I mean, i meant to, bUt I
dIdn't MEAN it whEN I meant To.

DESTINY

I know.

Delirium smiles.

SANDMAN

My Dreamstone, my Ruby Moonstone, which
can alter the fabric of reality. Where is
it?

Desire seems to enjoy answering.

DESIRE

A very desirable item, hm? Stolen from a
king by a mage, stolen from a mage by a
(MORE)

DESIRE (CONT'D)

thief. And that's the last I know of it.

(a knife's-edge smile)

Sorry.

Sandman scowls. Then turns to Despair.

SANDMAN

And my helm of office, which protects me
between realms?

DESPAIR

It was traded to a demon long ago. It now
abides in Hell. I am too familiar with
that place.

Sandman does not like this news.

SANDMAN

Thank you.

He rises, leaves the table.

EXT. DESTINY'S CITADEL - TWILIGHT

Sandman stands on a balcony looking out over Destiny's
garden. Death joins him.

SANDMAN

My ruby is missing. And I am not strong
enough to face a single demon, let alone
the hordes of hell.

DEATH

So... the pouch?

SANDMAN

Yes. My sister, I pray you tell our
siblings that I was needed elsewhere, and
I could not stay.

He kisses her hand, and starts to fade away.

SANDMAN

Adieu.

He's gone. Death bites her lip.

DEATH

Great. Now I get to worry about him some more...

EXT. ALEXANDER'S YACHT - EVENING

A 150-foot white yacht, sleek, huge engines, built for speed and show, a testament to ego rather than seaworthiness. Anchored far away from shore. Silent and dark, save for lights in the galley and a forward cabin.

INT. ALEXANDER'S YACHT - GALLEY - EVENING

Plush and elegant. Long center table, huge refrigerator. Quiet, cavernous and empty. A door opens--

It's ALEXANDER BURGESS. No longer the 'young' Burgess, he's in his fifties, now--and looks older. Silk robe pajamas, unkempt hair, shuffling along, he is a shocking contrast to the opulence of his ship.

CLOSE ON: a tray, as Alexander carefully places five celery sticks in line. Each celery stick is exactly the same length.

INT. ALEXANDER' YACHT - CAPTAIN'S CABIN - EVENING

Alexander pushes into the cabin, carrying the tray. A huge bed, marble and wood appointments--this is a yacht Donald Trump might have owned.

On the bed is the body of a muscular young man. Dead.

ALEXANDER

Carlos... ?

CORINTHIAN

Alexander Burgess, I presume.

The Corinthian is standing to one side of the door. Alexander drops the tray, reaches into his robe, draws a gun from a

holster at his side--

The Corinthian moves swiftly, a single blow--

Alexander crumples to the deck, and SCREEN FADES TO BLACK.

INT. ALEXANDER'S YACHT - CAPTAIN'S CABIN - EVENING

FADE UP: CLOSE ON ALEXANDER, lying where he fell. His eyes open--slightly. He shifts his eyes only, glancing around.

POV ALEXANDER--he sees the Corinthian, moving about the cabin, searching. Photos on the walls show scenes from huge and decadent parties--liquor, drugs, beautiful women, powerful men. The Corinthian looks at them, shakes his head.

CORINTHIAN

(to himself)

Oh my, such decadence.

He moves past, examines an empty wall. Lingers there.

CORINTHIAN

Dear Alexander... you spent a lot of time
time here, didn't you? It stinks of worry...

He glances at a trail we can't see.

CORINTHIAN

You've worn a path. And stood here for
long periods of time...

He reaches up--a hidden switch behind a bookcase slides
back a section of marble, revealing a safe. Without looking:

CORINTHIAN

(to Alexander)

Get up! You've been awake for the past
two minutes. Your breathing betrays you.

Alexander opens his eyes, struggles to sitting. He begins to weep--not in terror, but in resignation. He wipes his eyes with both hands.

ALEXANDER

I knew... it had to happen.

CORINTHIAN

Yes, well... you shouldn't have written the book. Led me right to you.

He flings a book off the shelf down in front of Alexander. 'LORD MAGUS: The Truths of Roderick Burgess' by Alexander Burgess. Alexander looks at it.

ALEXANDER

Stupid. But I had to... to ...

CORINTHIAN

Pay penance? Set the record straight? Make a fortune off the movie sale?

Alexander laughs mirthlessly.

ALEXANDER

Hardly. You're probably the only one whose ever read the damn thing.

(beat)

Want me to sign it?

CORINTHIAN

No.

ALEXANDER

The Ruby.

CORINTHIAN

Yes.

Alexander stands, moves to the safe.

ALEXANDER

Is Carlos dead?

CORINTHIAN

Yes. Your lover?

Alexander works the dial.

ALEXANDER

(shakes his head)

Pilot and body guard. I haven't had much interest in lovers--male or female--in a long time. Although I had my share of both, once ...

He pulls the safe open. It is empty, save for SANDMAN'S RUBY, set on a velvet pad. He takes it out.

ALEXANDER

This gave them to me. It gave me everything I ever desired ...

CORINTHIAN

(mock tragic)

Except the one thing you ever really wanted. Your father's love.

Alexander makes a fist around the Ruby. Hurls it at the Corinthian--who makes an effortless one-handed catch. He holds it up to the light, then pockets it. Draws his knife.

ALEXANDER

You're going to kill me now?

CORINTHIAN

I believe so.

ALEXANDER

With a knife. How prosaic.

(a bitter laugh)

I bought the yacht for safety. Open water, supposed to guard against magic attack.

CORINTHIAN

Your father was right, Alexander. You are an idiot.

Alexander winces. The Corinthian moves to Carlos' body, turns the corpse's head. He works his knife as he speaks.

CORINTHIAN (CONT'D)

You had the Ruby Moonstone of the King of Dreams. Reality itself in your sway. And all you could do was feed your callow little hungers.

He holds up his prize: AN EYEBALL. He lifts it to his face-- we think he may eat it. With his free hand, he reaches up to remove his sunglasses--

CORINTHIAN (CONT'D)

Not that I take issue with indulging pleasures...

Alexander gasps at what is revealed behind the Corinthian's sunglasses.

CLOSE ON: THE CORINTHIAN'S MOUTH. He brings the eyeball closer--

--and past, up, out of frame. EVEN AS HE SPEAKS (CLEARLY), WE HEAR THE SOUNDS OF CHEWING--

CORINTHIAN (CONT'D)

But you never understood how to truly use the Stone. You had the power to change the whole world. And you wasted it.

Alexander is stricken. His knees buckle. He slumps to the floor. And then we see what he has seen:

The Corinthian's eye sockets DO NOT HAVE EYES--instead, they are both MOUTHS, filled with SHARP TEETH. When he speaks, all three of his mouths speak--three voices, overdubbed.

CORINTHIAN

But that's pretty much true of all you mortals, isn't it?

He brings his bloody knife up, and advances.

ALEXANDER

Who are you?

CORINTHIAN

(melodramatic)

I'm your worst nightmare. I'm--

(shrugs, smiles)

That's it. Your worst nightmare.

He LAUGHS--

CUT TO:

EXT. OCEAN - EVENING

The Corinthian, sunglasses back on, pilots the yacht's launch across the bay.

He takes the Ruby from his pocket, holds it up, looking through it at the city.

POV - THROUGH THE RUBY. Everything is tinted red. And as the Corinthian turns the Ruby, its facets distort the city, distort reality...

CLOSE ON - A DOZEN smiling PARTY-GOERS as they yell--

PARTY-GOERS

SURPRISE!

Rose's eyes widen, and she looks appropriately surprised; we are--

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A banner reads 'Happy Birthday, Rose.' The party-goers, mostly tenants, crowd forward. A cake with one big candle on it is proffered; Rose blows it out, pushes through, Paul behind her.

Among the guests are: KELLY, a chubby young woman with a good heart; SAMANTHA, who smokes too many French cigarettes.

KELLY

Were you surprised?

ROSE
 (a la Roz Russell)
 I'm a cynical old woman now. Nothin'
 surprises me.

Samantha holds up a little white KITTEN.

ROSE
 (a mercurial change)
 Oh--oh, look at it! Is it mine?

SAMANTHA
 Happy birthday, Rose.

Rose takes the Kitten, pets it, coos to it.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)
 I thought you needed something in your
 life cute and warm and fuzzy and
 demanding, and I didn't know any men, so...

KELLY
 I wasn't sure you'd like it--

ROSE
 No, no... it's perfect. Purr-fect. I
 love it.

KELLY
 She needs a name.

ROSE
 It's a she? That's easy. Her name's
 'Dinah.'

She moves away, kitten clinging to her shoulder.

KELLY
 Dinah?

SAMANTHA
 Oh--like in Alice in Wonderland. You
 know Rose...

Other partygoers wish Rose happy birthday, pet the kitty.
 Rose smiles to everyone, thanking them, moving through the

crowd--

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Tired, Rose collapses into a chair. The kitten burrows behind her neck. Someone offers a glass of wine--

Paul. Rose takes it from him. Smiles.

ROSE

So... can I at least imagine I inspired you and you were able to get back to work?

PAUL

I wish. No, still blocked. I haven't painted in... months, is it months? Shit. And you know about the sleep trouble. I've been having this weird dream ...

Kelly, questing for snacks, overhears this last.

KELLY

A weird dream? You gotta tell Sam... she's a nut for this stuff. Sam, come here!

(Sam joins them)

He's going to tell us a dream.

SAMANTHA

Ragin'. So tell.

Paul hesitates--it really wasn't for everybody to hear, but now he's on the spot.

PAUL

I dreamt I was climbing a rock face, this sheer, like, spire--and I hate to climb. I hate high places in general. I'm an artist, and I don't even open my windows to look at the view--

KELLY

The dream ..?

PAUL

Right. So I'm climbing, and I've reached the top.

EXT. DREAM REALM - ROCKY SPIRE - DAY

It's Paul's dream: A finger of stone pushes its way into a pale blue sky. At the pinnacle, Paul maintains a perilous hold, his face white with terror.

PAUL (CONT'D) (V.O.)

I can't go higher. I can't climb all the way back down. And I can't let go. I can't fall.

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Remembering, Paul speaks nervously--he's genuinely troubled.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I just can't. Because if you fall in a dream, and you hit the ground--you die. Right?

KELLY

I think that's just an old wives' tale.

SAMANTHA

I tend to trust old wives.

PAUL

So... ah... I figure it's about being blocked. Right?

SAMANTHA

It sounds like an anxiety dream.

KELLY

It always sounds like an anxiety dream to you. Unless it's a sex dream.

ROSE

What if you dream about being anxious
about sex?

KELLY

Is that what you dream about?

Rose is suddenly uncomfortable.

ROSE

I don't dream. Never have.

SAMANTHA

You mean you don't remember.

Rose takes a drink, looks away, and spots--

SANDMAN. Wearing a plain leather jacket, giving the party a
detached once-over. The guests flow around him, seemingly
unaware of his presence.

SAMANTHA (O.S.)

(to Paul)

So this spire... basically long, and
phallic? And you're clinging to it, huh?

Curious, Rose moves toward Sandman--almost drawn to him.

PAUL (O.S.)

Whoa, wait a second--

Rose gazes speculatively at Sandman. She scoops up a Chinese
fortune cookie from a snack bowl. Steps forward, startling
him.

ROSE

Hi. So are you being lonely or just
aloof?

Sandman glances around for the person she is addressing--
then realizes it must be him.

SANDMAN

You noticed me?

ROSE

Yeah... it wasn't hard. I looked behind the philodendron, and there you were.

SANDMAN

I am not usually noticed unless I wish to be.

Rose quickly realizes he's a weirdo, decides to bail.

ROSE

(turning away)

Ah... okay, Ninja-boy. Well, have fun lurking.

Sandman catches her arm.

SANDMAN

Wait. I require your assistance.

ROSE

My assistance ..?

SANDMAN

I am searching for a possession of mine. A leather pouch, full of sand.

Rose looks afraid. She knows what he's talking about, but wishes she didn't.

ROSE

A pouch ..?

SANDMAN

A woman named Rachel stole it. I want it back.

ROSE

Then go get it. And leave me the hell alone.

She pulls away from him. She crosses to a window, and climbs out, onto the fire escape.

EXT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - FIRE ESCAPE - NIGHT

Rose nuzzles the kitten. A beat, and then Sandman moves to beside her--although he did not seem to come out the window.

SANDMAN

My sister did not know the woman's location, nor am I able to sense the pouch. Do you know where she is?

Rose's words spill out, the venom unmistakable:

ROSE

Rachel... is my mother. My mother the junkie.
She was stoned when I was conceived, she was stoned when I was born, she was stoned... she is always stoned. The state finally took me away. I hear from her once in a while--when she remembers she maybe had a kid somewhere.
(a bitter laugh)
Happy birthday.

SANDMAN

Then you do know where she is.

ROSE

I know where she was a year ago.

SANDMAN

Take me to her. I will grant you a boon.

Rose stares at him--this is absurd.

ROSE

A boon?

SANDMAN

Yes.

ROSE

Like a gift? Like in a fairy tale? That kind of boon?

SANDMAN

Yes. I am Dream, of the Endless. I am the Master of Dreams. If it is within my power, you shall have it.

Rose's expression is one of surprise--but not quite disbelief.

SANDMAN

And... I need your help.

Rose is skeptical--but she is considering it.

SANDMAN (CONT'D)

(a single, desperate syllable)

Please.

Rose softens--he is in genuine need.

ROSE

This is too weird. My mother...

She looks down at the fortune cookie in her hand. Looks up at Sandman, into his eyes. They gaze at each other a moment, and something passes between them. Understanding. Trust.

Rose's mouth curls in a sly smile. Cracks the fortune cookie, extracts the fortune. Reads it. Shakes her head.

ROSE

(reading the fortune)

'Be open to new experiences.'

She looks again at Sandman. Sighs.

ROSE

All right. We really don't get to choose these things, do we? I'll take you there.

Sandman nods gratefully.

ROSE

But that doesn't mean I believe you. What a line. The Master of Dreams. Yeah, right.

EXT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A very bad neighborhood. A taxi screeches away from the curb. Sandman stands on the sidewalk, Rose beside him.

The house is one step above condemned. Tall brown weeds and broken windows, flaking paint and decaying siding.

SANDMAN

The pouch is here.

ROSE

How do you know?

SANDMAN

I know.

Rose steps up to the house, rings the bell. Checks the front door. Locked.

ROSE

We can go around back and break a window or something--

SANDMAN

No. We go in by the front door.

Sandman gestures. A CLICK is heard, and the door opens slightly. Rose looks at Sandman in astonishment.

ROSE

Don't tell me you did that. That was chance, right? Because if you did that...

Sandman gestures for her to enter. She pushes the door--

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - FOYER - NIGHT

The door moves open slowly, pushing a large pile of mail before it--magazines, letters, bills. Rose enters, frowns.

ROSE

Six months' worth of mail...
(MORE)

ROSE (CONT'D)
 (calling, panicked)
 Ohmigod. Rachel? MOTHER?

She moves toward a stairway. Sandman stops her.

SANDMAN
 Rose. This place is not safe for you.
 Things are free in this house that should
 not be loose on earth.

She stares at him blankly, not really hearing him. She pulls
 away--

ROSE
 Don't give me any more of that crap. She
 might be in trouble.

--and is off, up the stairs.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - - TOP OF STAIRS - NIGHT

Rose slows her ascent. Before her, white CLOUDS obscure the
 second floor, tendrils of MIST curling down the stairway.

Resolved, she steps into the mist. Looks down--

VERTIGO hits us as the clouds part. Below Rose is open sky,
 the city thousands of feet below. Rose FALLS--

EXT. SKY - NIGHT

The WHITE NOISE sound of WIND as Rose free-falls, plummeting
 toward earth. Arms and legs spread, she watches, wide-eyed as
 the ground approaches. She SCREAMS--

EXT. DELIRIUM'S REALM - INDETERMINATE

THE SCREEN CRACKS LIKE A MIRROR. Pieces of it fall away. Rose
 stands on a misty plane. Color, sound, creatures and words
 whirl around her violently.

This is DELIRIUM'S REALM. Delirium looks up at Rose.

DELIRIUM

Have yOu COme to viSIT my ReaLM?
 GoodGoodGoodie. I Like compAnY...
 i Like to be ALONE, too. but NOT bY MYseLf.

Sandman's hand touches Rose's shoulder. He stands beside her.

SANDMAN

Sister... she is not yours.

DELIRIUM

BRother! nOW we cAn aLL bE aLONE ThreE at
 A time!

SANDMAN

No, little one. Not now.

Delirium makes a face. Blows a lock of hair out of her face.

DELIRIUM

Um. OkaY.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - TOP OF STAIRS - NIGHT

The clouds, mist, and realm are gone. Sandman stands behind Rose, close to her, holding her.

SANDMAN

Rose. You're here.

Rose, shaking, hangs onto Sandman. Takes in her surroundings.

ROSE

Uh... .so real. I thought I saw... You
 were there. A dream--like Paul's. It
 was only a dream.

SANDMAN

It is never 'only a dream,' Rose. Here
 less than some other places.

He pushes open a door. The hallway beyond is black.

SANDMAN

Follow, if you must.

(offhand)

Be careful. Stay away from the mouths.

ROSE

What do you mean stay away from the--?

But he has already entered the hallway. She follows--

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

The scrape-whoosh of a cigarette lighter. Rose holds the flame aloft, gasps--

The flame lights a hellish scene: The walls are not smooth. DOZENS of grotesque, blood red FACES bulge from the walls and ceiling. Thin tentacle arms reach out, hands gripping hands from the other side, blocking their path. The faces SNEER, several speaking at once:

FACES

Leave her.

Do not disturb.

She is ours.

We from hungry.

Do not disturb us.

Rose shrinks back, looks around wildly.

ROSE

Where is she? Mother!

The faces gnash teeth, lick drooling lips. They flow along the wall, some fading back, others pushing forward.

FACES

Foolish foolish.

Hear it posture?

Hear it threaten?

Foolish meat things.

SANDMAN

Let us through.

Sandman's voice has instant effect. Some faces look surprised; others glance around warily.

FACES

Who said?
Who spoke?
Not him.
He's gone.
All gone long gone.

SANDMAN

This has gone far enough. You have exceeded your bounds.

The faces are already pulling back into the walls. Eyes lowered, contrite. A few are even scared.

FACES

Master?
Do not chastise.
Sorry sorry.
We thought you long gone.
Yes yes Master.

Sandman moves down the hall, the arms untangling before him. A disgusting meaty wet PLOP sound as the arms pull back into the walls.

Rose stares as the hallway becomes smooth, normal.

ROSE

Dreams, right? Those were dreams. And you really are their Master.

SANDMAN

Yes.

ROSE

Did you send them? Are you responsible for this?

SANDMAN

No.

Sandman pushes open the door at the end of the hall.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - RACHEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dimly lit. The SOUND of buzzing FLIES. Rachel's naked body lies sprawled, partially covered by a sheet, her appearance a shock: her skin is shriveled and decayed, several months beyond death. Her eyes are open, unseeing.

Rose moves forward, recoils at the sight of her mother. She drops to one knee, sobbing at the foot of the bed.

CLOSE ON: Rachel, as her eyes flutter.

RACHEL

(a whisper)

Hello?

Rose's eyes widen.

ROSE

Oh no she's alive.

RACHEL

Who's there? Oh!

(a ghastly smile)

I dreamt I had a daughter, once. Such a wonderful dream...

Rachel sits up. The sheet falls away from her shoulders. We wish it hadn't.

RACHEL

Dream dream dreeeeeam... Whenever I want to... all I have to do is dreeeeeam...

The Pouch of sand lies on a night stand. Sandman picks it up. Squeezes it tight in his fist. He has reclaimed his first tool.

RACHEL

No that's mine. Mine. Gimme...

Rachel lurches for the pouch--Sandman simply takes a step back. She collapses face-first on the bed.

SANDMAN

(to Rose)

I have the pouch. We can go now.

Rose stares at him in disbelief.

ROSE

No. You can't just take what you wanted
and go. You can't leave her like this.

Sandman regards Rachel, who writhes in the bed, humming, a
dry, croaking sound.

SANDMAN

Why not? The sand was the only thing
keeping her alive. She will die soon.

(an afterthought)

Painfully, I would imagine.

He moves to the bedroom door. Rose stands.

ROSE

I request my boon.

Sandman pauses.

ROSE

For helping you. The boon you promised.

Sandman turns, eyes her--an almost menacing look.

SANDMAN

Yes?

ROSE

Give her a... merciful release from
this. Please. You can do that, can't you?

Sandman is surprised. His look softens. He reassesses her.

SANDMAN

You could choose anything in the world.
And you choose to help her. Her, of all
people.

(beat)

I am... impressed, Rose.

She meets his gaze. Again, that connection between them. He nods.

SANDMAN

I will grant your desire, Rose. You must leave the room.

Rose closes her eyes. Opens them, looks on her mother one last time. Turns, moves past Sandman, directly out the bedroom door.

CLOSE ON: Sandman's hand, as he sprinkles dream sand from his fingers. It falls--

--turning into PETALS that land on Rachel's forehead. She is somehow young and healthy, now, lying back on green grass. More petals land. Rachel opens her eyes, smiles. We are:

EXT. DREAM REALM - GREEN HILLSIDE - DAY

The sun is shining. A young girl--it must be Rose, as a child--GIGGLES as she drops petals onto her sleeping mother. Rachel stands, alive and healthy. She laughs, starts to spin, arms flung outward. Rose spins with her, twirling--

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rachel lies on the sheets, dead. Sandman pulls the covers up over her eyes. Pauses.

Suddenly Death leans into frame. She smiles sympathetically, whispers into Sandman's ear:

DEATH

That was a lovely final dream you gave her, little brother.

She leans out. There is the soft fluttering SOUND of WINGS. Then silence. Sandman is alone.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Rose waits. The bedroom door opens, and Sandman is there.

SANDMAN

She died peacefully. She died happy.

ROSE

(flat)

Yeah. Great. Thanks.

Sandman backs away from her. Rose sighs, looks up at him--
The hallway is empty. Sandman is gone.

EXT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Police cars and an ambulance crowd the street in front of
Rachel's house. The ambulance (presumably with Rachel's body)
pulls away.

Bystanders stand behind police tape. Rose sits in the back of
a taxi. She gazes up at the house, lost in thought.

ROSE

(to herself)

...Mister Sandman, bring me a dream...
make him the cutest... that I've ever
seen...

The taxi pulls forward, moves down the street.

INT. JEWELRY SHOP - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Several piles of GLITTERING cut DIAMONDS are strewn on a
workbench. They sparkle in the glow of the overhead light.

A hulking FAT MAN lays out jeweler's tools on a blue velvet
cloth. Babyish face, his hands seem dainty and too-small for
his huge arms, his features tiny, lost in the mounds of fat.
He calls himself FUNLAND.

There is a RAP on the metal side door. Funland moves quickly,
expectantly. Pulls the door open. The Corinthian stands in
the doorway. Extends his hand.

CORINTHIAN

Funland, isn't it? Hi. The Corinthian. We met online.

FUNLAND

(shakes his hand)

Right... wow, I can't believe it's actually you... wow. I thought you'd be older--

CORINTHIAN

My compliments to you on your BBS. Well done.

(looks beyond him)

So we're all set, then? The tools?

FUNLAND

Yeah. I, uh, got your e-mail--

INT. JEWELRY SHOP - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

The Corinthian sits at the workbench. Sandman's RUBY is in a small vice; the Corinthian peers at it through a magnifying light, measuring the stone.

Funland eats a whole Twinkie, washes it down with a swig of Jolt Cola. He looks over the Corinthian's shoulder. Trying to act nonchalant.

FUNLAND

(a little proud)

You know, I've got my own little thing going.

CORINTHIAN

(amused)

Oh?

FUNLAND

I've found my own special place. There's, like, thousands of people. And there are always beautiful little children wandering off, getting lost. Always pleased to see somebody friendly.

The Corinthian murmurs as he makes an adjustment at the bench. He pulls out a page torn from a book, consults it.

FUNLAND (CONT'D)

And quiet places to take them to, even in the middle of the crowds. And what's great is, the people who run the place always hush it up. They don't want anyone to know that I'm there either. They want everybody to be happy. Just like me.

The Corinthian CUTS, fashioning the gem into a NEW SHAPE.

FUNLAND (CONT'D)

(dreamy)

It's a wonderful place, my secret, special place. And the other thing I love, if you can't find any beautiful children to play with, you can always go on one of the rides.

CORINTHIAN

(without looking up)

How very pleasant.

FUNLAND

Yeah. I can't tell anyone else where it is, because, y'know, they'd all want to go there.

The Corinthian lifts the Ruby, examines it. Puts it back.

CORINTHIAN

I'd like to make use of your mailing list, Funland. There's going to be a gathering of collectors.

FUNLAND

--really? Uh, sure.

Funland moves to an old Mac Plus computer on the bench, hunches in front of it.

CORINTHIAN

Nimrod is organizing it. Send him the addresses you have. And I have some names to add: Family Man. Carrion. Moon River. Dog Soup. Candy Man.

Bright SHARDS of ruby chip off as the Corinthian works, hit the table, the floor--and flatten into drops of BLOOD.

FUNLAND

(amazed)

Dog Soup and Candy Man? Oh, man. Oh, wow ...this'll be great...

Funland's fingers dance over the keyboard. A bloody shard flies out from the Ruby, hits Funland on the cheek. He touches it. Looks at his finger.

FUNLAND

Hey, that's... that's...

CORINTHIAN

(helpful)

Blood. Yes.

Funland stares at his finger, the blood drops coming from the ruby. Quickly turns away, back to the keyboard. The Corinthian laughs, keeps working...

INT. DREAM REALM - LUCIEN'S LIBRARY - DUSK

Lucien sifts through piles of fallen books, carefully placing them in order back onto the shelves. A PUMPKINHEAD MAN silently assists him.

Matthew flutters in, perches on a stack of books.

MATTHEW

So, the library's open again.

LUCIEN

Yes. Lord Dream was good enough to restore it before... before he continued with his tasks.

MATTHEW

So he's gone to hell, huh? To get his

helm?

LUCIEN

Yes.

Matthew shudders. He glances around.

MATTHEW

I never got into the whole book thing.

LUCIEN

Oh, but it's a very unusual library,
Matthew.

(with pride)

Somewhere in here is every story that has
ever been dreamed.

MATTHEW

Yeah? Say, watch this.

(sticks his beak into Lucien's face)

NEVERMORE! Good, huh?

LUCIEN

Hmn. The complete Poe is in the southern
annex. Including stories he never wrote,
or never finished, except in dreams--

MATTHEW

C'mon! I was doing Peter Lorre in that
Roger Corman movie--

(he cocks his head)

Hey, Lucien. Is that big black thing
supposed to be there?

LUCIEN

What?

He looks where Matthew is looking--

In one wall is a large hole. Nothing beyond but blackness.
Even as they watch, the hole enlarges, shelves and books
DISSOLVING as the widening edge touches them.

LUCIEN

Oh, dear!

Matthew flutters backwards, away from the black hole. Lucien reaches forward, pulls volumes off the shelf nearest the hole, saving them from obliteration.

MATTHEW

Does this mean... the boss isn't doing so well in Hell?

LUCIEN

No--it's a Dream Vortex.

MATTHEW

Uh, oh. That's bad. That's very bad.

(beat)

What's a Dream Vortex?

Lucien's arms are stacked with books by now. He adds more as others fall, backing away from the hole.

LUCIEN

Something that can destroy the entire Dreaming... the Waking World... even Lord Dream himself.

MATTHEW

Sheesh... when it rains, it pours.

Lucien and Matthew retreat across the room, through a door--

INT. DREAM REALM - LIBRARY - HALLWAY

A SLAM! as the door shuts. Lucien's books fall to the floor as he leans with his back to the door, as if trying to keep the Vortex locked inside.

LUCIEN

The Master must be informed as soon as he returns.

MATTHEW

If he returns.

LUCIEN

Matthew... sometimes you can be very infuriating.

(beat; quietly)

If he returns...

EXT. DREAM REALM - GATES OF HORN AND IVORY - NIGHT

Sandman stands outside the gates. A gesture, and an ancient wooden pier grows from nowhere. It rests on rough-hewn pylons, floating in a sea of stars.

Sandman now stands at the edge of the pier, looking down. He steps off the edge, drops--

EXT. GATES OF HELL - DAY

Sandman falls, lands on a barren landscape.

Before him is Hell.

The Walls of Hell are constructed of human bodies, piled up to the sky. Dead bodies, we presume, until here an eye opens, there a chest heaves in sigh.

The Gates of Hell are wrought-iron-style ornate, intricate, glorious--but fashioned of living bodies, horribly distended.

Near the Gates a severed HEAD has been impaled on a spike. The head twists toward Sandman, grins.

HEAD ON SPIKE

Ah! There is one at the door!

(rhyming)

There's one at the door, at the gates of Damnation. Is it thief, thug or whore?

SANDMAN

Greetings. I wish to talk to your master. Immediately.

HEAD ON SPIKE

There's one at the door, and there's room
for one more, 'till the end of creation!

SANDMAN

I am the King of Dreams, of the Nightmare
Realms. I seek Lord Lucifer, the Lord of
Hell.

HEAD ON SPIKE

(taunting)

Oh, yes, my clown. So where's your crown?
Where's your ruby?

Sandman unexpectedly lashes out with his fist, slugging the
head. It spins on its spike--a comic image if it weren't so
grotesque.

SANDMAN

I will take no insults from you, little
demon.

The Head grins through bloody lips.

HEAD ON SPIKE

Squatterbloat!

A minor demon--SQUATTERBLOAT--pushes open the Gates of
Hell. The demon is hunched over, with no mouth; one of its
arms ends in the shape of a sharp battle-ax.

HEAD ON SPIKE

Take the Dreamclown. Guard him and guide
him, he's new in town.

Squatterbloat nods. Steps back, lifts the battle-ax arm,
indicating the way. Sandman moves through the gates--

EXT. HELL - WOOD OF SUICIDES - DAY

Sandman follows behind Squatterbloat, takes in Hell as it
flows past. They move through a forest of thin, sickly-
looking trees.

SANDMAN

The wood of suicides has changed since my last visit. I remember it as a tiny grove. Now it is a forest.

Squatterbloat remains silent, continues on...

EXT. HELL - CLIFFS OF TARTARUS - DAY

Sandman is led past a row of barred caves. He brushes past hands that clutch at him. Anguished voices cry out. Sandman tilts his head, hearing something. He raises a hand.

SANDMAN

Wait.

The demon Squatterbloat pauses. Sandman peers through the bars into one of the caves--

Inside, Roderick Burgess is chained to a wall, his own arms wrapped several times around his body, forming a flesh straight jacket. He confides to a fellow prisoner, similarly constrained.

BURGESS

(boasting)

I put my curse on a man and he was dead.
I captured Dream! Oh, I was the most wicked man to ever live--

SANDMAN

Roderick Burgess.

Burgess looks out, recognizes Sandman. He is stricken.

BURGESS

You!

SANDMAN

You call yourself wicked, without knowing what that means. You dream you are the equal of the demons around you.

Burgess's mouth drops open, but he has no words.

SANDMAN (cont'd)

Burgess, for your deeds against me, this is my judgment on you.

(beat)

You shall know who you truly are. I take away your dream.

Burgess frowns.

BURGESS

Special? Of course! I'm Roderick Burgess!
I'm the...

(falters)

That is, I'm the... uh... I'm... just...

(beat)

uh, me.

His eyes widen. He takes in his surroundings, as if noting his situation for the first time.

BURGESS

Oh, no.

Outside, Sandman gestures to move on. Squatterbloat leads the way. From behind them come Burgess's screams--

BURGESS (O.S.)

Oh God no. Help, somebody help me--

EXT. HELL - STAIRS OF BLOOD - DAY

Squatterbloat stops at the foot of a stairway. Blood flows down the steps. Sandman glances up, climbs--

EXT. HELL - LUCIFER'S THRONE - DAY

At the summit, the steps end at a high parapet, at Lucifer's throne. Made of flesh, the throne bleeds, source of the flowing blood.

Lucifer leans casually against a railing. He is blond, lean, youthful, a handsome rock star lounging in the shadow of his own enormous black wings.

SANDMAN

Greetings to you, Lucifer Morningstar.

Lucifer looks Sandman up and down.

LUCIFER

Hello, Dream. We heard you were caught by mortals, like a newly-fledged demon. We expected better of you.

Sandman does not comment. Lucifer hops up on the balcony, leans forward expectantly, chin on the back of his hand.

LUCIFER

Have you come to ally your realm to ours? To acknowledge the sovereignty of Hell?

SANDMAN

You know my views on that, Lightbringer.

LUCIFER

Yes, we do. Still this is no social call. What do you want?

SANDMAN

My helm was stolen from me. I believe one of your demons has it. I would like it back.

(beat)

Now.

Lucifer is amused. He arranges his dark wings about him.

LUCIFER

Which demon? There are more than a million demons, after all.

SANDMAN

I do not know the demon's name.

CLOSE ON: Lucifer, as his eyes narrow. His tone changes-- this is serious business.

LUCIFER

Then let us summon all of them to tell,

and meet them on the Vasty plains of Hell!

PULL BACK: from Lucifer's eyes. He and Sandman have not moved, but everything around them has changed. The parapet is crowded with demons, claws scraping, eyes glinting--

CONTINUE PULLING BACK: the stairway is covered with demons of all types and sizes. Some are insects. Others look like reptiles. Some wear their guts outside their skins--

CONTINUE PULLING BACK: More and more demons, crawling over each other, biting, fighting--

All of the demons of Hell.

Lucifer and Sandman are tiny dots, standing on a distant mesa.

LUCIFER

There. Now, Dream King. Tell us... which demon has your helm?

Sandman scans the multitude. He reaches into his Pouch, pulls out a handful of sand. Releases it--

A LINE of DREAM SAND streaks into the demons. It shoots this way and that, searching, creatures flying past in a blur--

Finally the sand SWIRLS, settles on: CHORONZON, a blood-red demon, fashionably dressed. He looks surprised.

LUCIFER

Choronzon, a Duke of Hell.

(to the demon)

Well? Does Dream speak truly? Do you indeed have his mask of office?

Choronzon has two mouths on his face, one above the other. As one speaks, the other smirks.

CHORONZON

Yes, Lord.

SANDMAN

Return it to me. Now.

Both of Choronzon's mouths smile, a double dose of insolent grin.

CHORONZON

Ssss. I traded for it from a mortal. A fair trade.

(bold)

I broke none of the laws of Hell.
If you want your precious back then you must fight me for it. Ssss.

Demons HOWL and JEER at the challenge. Lucifer is amused. Dream regards the utterly confident Choronzon.

SANDMAN

Very well. I challenge you, Choronzon. We shall play the most ancient game.

CHORONZON

Sss. Sso. As the challenged, I choose the battlefield.

(beat)

I assert... Reality.

INT. THE HELLFIRE CLUB - NIGHT

A dingy nightclub. Demons sit at small tables placed too close together, near a dingy stage. Lucifer watches from a seat in the shadows, not touching the drink in front of him.

The lighting is hellish, of course. Choronzon is our host. He wears a tuxedo and dark glasses, speaks glibly into the mic:

CHORONZON

Sss. Welcome, ladies 'n' gennelmen, to another thrill packed evening of funfunfun here at the Hellfire Club.

APPLAUSE from the assembled demons. A female demon--a voluptuous body and the head of a horse--snorts and stomps her hooves.

CHORONZON

I am your host, Choronzon, High Duke of the Eighth Circle. Tonight, for your entertainment, a formal challenge. Let's have a big hand for Mister Sandman!

A BLINDING SPOTLIGHT hits Sandman, standing center stage. Scattered APPLAUSE from the demons, amid mostly BOOS.

Choronzon moves opposite to Sandman.

CHORONZON

(deadly serious)

You know the rules, Dreamlord? Win, and you get your helm. Lose, and you serve as a ssslave of Hell, for eternity.

Sandman stares into Choronzon's eyes.

SANDMAN

I understand.

CHORONZON

I have the first move.

(loudly)

I am a dire wolf, prey stalking, lethal prowler.

In a quick FLASH we see Choronzon's wolf, a hulking creature, stalking through a forest. Sandman is quick to reply:

SANDMAN

I am a hunter, horse-mounted, wolf-stabbing.

We catch a GLIMPSE of Sandman's hunter, on horseback, as the hunter kills the wolf.

CHORONZON

(confident)

I am a horsefly, horse-stinging, hunter-throwing.

Choronzon's slain wolf becomes a stinging fly, and Sandman's hunter is thrown.

Demons cheer. At one table, a TOOTHY DEMON picks the flesh off another's face, eats it--washes it down with beer.

SANDMAN

I am a spider, fly-consuming, eight-legged.

Sandman's hunter TRANSFORMS into a spider. Choronzon's fly is caught in a web.

CHORONZON

(hisses)

I am a snake, spider-devouring, poison-toothed.

Choronzon's fly becomes a snake; it eats Sandman's spider.

SANDMAN

I am an ox, snake-crushing, heavy footed.

The snake is crushed beneath the hoof of an ox.

CHORONZON

I am an anthrax, butcher bacterium, warm-life destroying.

The demons like that. The Toothy Demon has nearly finished his snack--the other demon's skull is nearly picked clean.

Sandman's ox lies on its side, dead and decaying. Sandman pauses a moment, considering. Then:

SANDMAN

I am a world, space-floating, life nurturing.

We see a GREEN WORLD, floating in space.

Lucifer tilts his head, noting Sandman's shift in strategy. Choronzon does not hesitate:

CHORONZON

I am a nova, all-exploding, planet cremating.

WHITE LIGHT from a bright nova OBLITERATES the world.

SANDMAN

I am the universe--all things
encompassing, all life embracing.

Choronzon leans toward Sandman. His top and bottom mouths alternate on each word now, his tone low and deadly:

CHORONZON

I am the dark at the end of everything.
The end of universes, Gods, worlds... of
everything.

Sandman pauses. The assembled demons grin, lean forward, pleased with the move. Several of the closer demons lick their fangs. Choronzon senses victory.

CHORONZON

Sss. And what will you be then,
Dreamlord?

Sandman speaks softly:

SANDMAN

I am hope.

Lucifer's brow furrows. Choronzon is caught off guard. All eyes are on him. He stammers.

CHORONZON

Oh. Then I am... sss. I...

He starts to sweat. He looks around for help, inspiration.

CHORONZON

I...

(he swallows)

I... don't know.

Lucifer stands, a look of hate and disgust on his face--

EXT. PLAINS OF HELL - DAY

Lucifer and Sandman stand on a flat plain, demons forming a wide circle around them. Choronzon, bound in barbed wire,

writhes and SCREAMS for mercy. Two demons hold him tight.

LUCIFER

Take this pathetic creature from our sight. Demonstrate to him our displeasure.

The demons pull Choronzon away. Lucifer turns--he holds Sandman's helm in his hands.

LUCIFER

Here, Dream Master. Your helm. You have won it fairly.

Sandman takes the helm.

SANDMAN

Thank you. The king of Hell is honorable.

LUCIFER

Honorable? You joke, surely. Look around you.

(he sweeps his arm)

The million Lords of Hell stand arrayed about you. Tell us--why we should let you leave?

Sandman looks. Legions of demons stare back, shout words of hate.

LUCIFER

Helm or no, you have no power here. What power have dreams in Hell?

SANDMAN

You say that dreams have no power here? Tell me, Lucifer Morningstar...

His voice grows stronger; he raises it to include the rest:

SANDMAN

Ask yourselves, all of you... What is Hell, without the dream of Heaven?

Silence.

Lucifer has no answer. Sandman turns away from him, walks into the mass of demons.

Noiselessly, demons move aside, parting before Sandman, unable to meet his gaze. His back to Lucifer, Sandman dwindles into the distance.

PULL BACK to include Lucifer in frame, seemingly huge now, hundreds of feet tall. He watches Sandman take leave of Hell.

LUCIFER

One day... one day we shall destroy him.

EXT. GATES OF HELL - DAY

The Gates shut heavily behind Sandman--

He slumps; his posture more exhausted than imperial. He looks at his hands, one holding his pouch, the other his helm. Both hands are shaking. He smiles a grim little smile--he has gotten away with his bluff.

He concentrates, and darkness swirls up, surrounding him, obscuring the Gates of Hell--

INT. DREAM REALM - DREAM'S PALACE - DUSK

Matthew and Lucien sit in the hallway, amongst stacks of books. The Pumpkinhead now wears a hard-hat, and is setting up construction warning sawhorses outside the Library doors.

MATTHEW

So if his nibs and the Dreaming are destroyed... that's it for us too, huh?

SANDMAN

That is true.

He has appeared beside them, startling them.

MATTHEW

Geez--I hate when you do that!

(re: the helm)

(MORE)

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Glad to see you survived your trip.
Welcome back. We're all doomed.

SANDMAN

Indeed ..? Lucien?

LUCIEN

I fear he's right, my lord.

CUT TO:

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: Rose, sleeping, a troubled sleep. Her eyes open,
and she glances over--

Moonlight through the window cuts across the darkened room.
Rose's closet door is cracked open, just a little bit. Just
enough to drive you crazy wondering what might be in there.

Rose climbs out of bed. Steps across to the closet. Shuts the
door. Turns, gets back into bed. She glances over--

The closet door still hangs open.

Rose stares. She gets up. Approaches the closet, much more
warily this time. Reaches out. Gently pulls it open--

A YOUNG WOMAN stands there, smiling.

Rose jumps back.

The smiling woman does not move. We may recognize her,
because it is RACHEL, Rose's mother. But not the Rachel we
last saw stoned on dreamsand. A youthful Rachel, as we first
met her with Burgess.

ROSE

Who are you?

Rachel's face falls. Her gaze lowers, unhappy at not being
recognized. Then she looks up, raises a hand, and PULLS OFF
HER HEAD--

--revealing another head beneath: Rachel, as we last saw her

lying in bed, wrinkled, decrepit. Rose gasps.

ROSE

Mother. My God. This is a dream. I'm actually having a dream.

Rachel reaches up again, and again PULLS OFF HER HEAD. Revealed beneath this one is another version of how she looked as a young woman. She smiles.

ROSE

I've heard about this... a dream where somebody who's died comes back, to let you know they're all right.

Rachel shakes her head. Gestures for Rose to follow her. She steps aside--

We see the closet is no longer a closet. It opens onto a courtyard, moonlit, stark, high-contrast black-and-white. A little phony-looking, actually, like an old B-movie horror film set. Amazing how scary those old sets can look.

Rachel again gestures, turns, glides into the courtyard.

Rose follows.

EXT. DREAM REALM - NIGHT

Rose moves through corridors and around corners, following Rachel, getting just glimpses of her, always just one step behind...

EXT. ROSE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

A big wide convertible pulls to a stop. The driver climbs out --it's the Corinthian. He heads inside.

EXT. DREAM REALM - SANDMAN'S PALACE - HALLWAY - DUSK

The library doors swing open. Sandman, Lucien and Matthew look out at--

A HUGE, SWIRLING VORTEX. There is no library--a whole section of the palace has been consumed. Parts of the landscape are pulled into the vortex as they watch.

SANDMAN

So it begins once more. The first vortex of this era.

(musing)

Nonetheless, there is something about this one--this time--that I don't understand.

MATTHEW

That makes two of us. Though I don't think I would've understood it any time.

SANDMAN

This has been growing for nearly two decades. Had I not been imprisoned, I would have dealt with it at the time of its conception.

LUCIEN

Perhaps this is how the Corinthian escaped... he found a rift in the Dreaming, and slipped out.

SANDMAN

Hm ...

(beat)

The recovery of my Ruby must wait. I must deal with the Vortex, first.

LUCIEN

How will you locate it?

MATTHEW

Yeah, boy... that's gonna be a toughie.

(as if seeing the Vortex for the first time)

Hey! There it is!

LUCIEN

That's merely the manifestation of the
(MORE)

LUCIEN (CONT'D)

Vortex, Matthew. The Vortex itself is usually a mortal.

MATTHEW

A person? How does he deal with it, then?

LUCIEN

How? He terminates their existence, Matthew. To protect the dreaming.

MATTHEW

Oh. Makes me feel kinda sorry for him. The mortal, that is.

SANDMAN

The Vortex is not a he. It is a she.

He points - DIRECTLY AT THE CAMERA.

SANDMAN

If you look closely you will see her observing us, now, from the corner of the throne room.

Matthew flutters over, STARES AT US. We realize this whole scene has been a POV SHOT (from Rose's POV). The effect is quite disconcerting.

MATTHEW

(tilting his head)

Huh. She doesn't look like much.

CAMERA BACKS AWAY, indicating the POV character's retreat.

LUCIEN

She looks quite young.

MATTHEW

I say the Boss can take her.

A BLUR as the CAMERA PANS AWAY--

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rose comes awake even as she is shoving herself backwards-- out of the bed and onto the floor, startling her kitten.

ROSE

OW!

She gets her bearings. Rubs her head.

ROSE

Christ, that sucked. I don't think I need to dream after all.

SANDMAN

Unfortunately that is not true for the rest of the world.

Rose looks up. SANDMAN steps out of the shadows--or did he just appear from them?

ROSE

Oh my God! Stay away from me!

She scrambles for her nightstand drawer, pulls out a .38 revolver.

ROSE

Stay back! I should have known you were some kind of freak! How did you get in here?

SANDMAN

You know.

She does. Sandman looks down. At his feet, the kitten mews. He picks it up, scratches its ears absently.

SANDMAN

Once in every era, Rose Walker, there is a Vortex. The Vortex, by its nature, destroys the barriers between dreaming minds; destroys the ordered chaos of the Dreaming...

ROSE

This has nothing to do with me.

SANDMAN

(over her)

Until the myriad dreamers are one. Then the Vortex collapses in upon itself. And then it is gone. It takes the minds of the dreamers with it; damages the Dreaming beyond repair. It leaves nothing but darkness.

The kitten has grown tired of the attention; it squirms. Sandman sets it down.

SANDMAN

It is one of my functions to prevent this from occurring again.

ROSE

Again?

SANDMAN

It happened once... A world was lost, Rose Walker. Aeons ago, and half a universe away. I... failed in my duty. A whole world perished.

(downcast)

It will never happen again.

The kitten comes to Rose. She lets it crawl into her arms, but she doesn't lower the gun. She almost speaks to the kitten:

ROSE

Why me?

SANDMAN

Who was your father, Rose Walker?

ROSE

My father? I don't know. My mother never...

SANDMAN

Your father was a dream. A dream your

(MORE)

SANDMAN (CONT'D)

mother conjured, from my pouch of sand. You were born of the union of a mortal and a dream. You are both, and neither, and by being--and not being--such, you have become the Vortex.

ROSE

But if you're the King of Dreams--can't you just, I don't know, wave your hand and make it stop?

SANDMAN

I am not omnipotent. No matter how strange the circumstances of your birth, you are of the living. You are the Vortex. Only when the Vortex is dead is the Dreaming safe.

He moves nearer, crouches to be closer to her.

SANDMAN

Death is not always a bad thing, Rose ...

ROSE

Yeah? Well, you first.

SANDMAN

You could come and stay in the dreamworld. Some mortals are given that option. My raven, Matthew, was once a mortal man.

ROSE

I don't want to die.

SANDMAN

I... I am sorry, Rose.

CORINTHIAN

Yes, you are. You are the sorriest excuse for a murderer I've ever seen.

The Corinthian stands in the doorway. Rose raises her gun back up, aims it at him.

ROSE

What--who are you?

SANDMAN

Corinthian. Do not interfere with this.

ROSE

You know him?

CORINTHIAN

Yes, he knows me. He created me. And now I've come to challenge him. It's just the same old story, huh?

He moves across the room, to Rose. She keeps the gun steady.

CORINTHIAN (Cont'd)

But here's a cool twist: I'm here to save you!

(beat)

He won't let you stay alive, you know. The dreaming will fall apart. It's already happening. I can feel it.

(to Sandman)

This woman is now under my protection. Got that? Leave her be, or suffer the consequences.

SANDMAN

Corinthian. I did not think it possible for you to surprise me.

CORINTHIAN

I've walked the waking world for almost two decades now. As much as I've taught these humans, I've also learned.

He holds up the Ruby.

CORINTHIAN (CONT'D)

For instance: One shouldn't limit one's ambition.

SANDMAN

That ruby is mine, little dream. I command you return it.

The Corinthian considers. His voice resonates with sarcasm:

CORINTHIAN

Have I not earned the praise of my creator? Look what I have done. Look what I have found. For you.

SANDMAN

It is not in your nature to be beneficent.

(holds out his hand)

Do not force me to unmake you.

CORINTHIAN

(shrugs)

Hokay. Your call.

He tosses the Ruby to Sandman, who catches it. Sandman holds it up.

SANDMAN

At last--

The ruby GLOWS, throwing off ELDRITCH FIRE--

Sandman SCREAMS. The ruby drops from his hand. Sandman drops to his knees, face wracked with pain. He doubles over.

SANDMAN

...you have... changed it...

CORINTHIAN

Uh-huh. It's mine now. The power behind it may be yours, but I'm the one who calls the shots.

He picks up the Ruby, aims it at Sandman. Considers. Then kicks Sandman hard in the side.

CORINTHIAN

There. Was that more in my nature?

ROSE

That's enough.

She's got the gun leveled at the Corinthian. He looks at her. The Ruby glows.

CORINTHIAN

What are you going to do with that?

Instead of the gun, Rose is now holding the kitten in a two-handed grip. It YOWLS. She drops it in shock.

The Corinthian holds out his hand to her.

CORINTHIAN

Now... come with me if you want to live.

Rose looks at Sandman, then back at the Corinthian.

ROSE

I... don't think so.

CORINTHIAN

Rose. You must come with me.

ROSE

No!

CORINTHIAN

No, see, it's not a request.

He PUNCHES the side of her head, hard. She pitches forward. The Corinthian catches her in a fireman's carry.

EXT. ROSE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAWN

Whistling a monotonous tune, the Corinthian dumps Rose into the convertible, hops in, and ROARS off.

CUT TO:

EXT. NORTHERN CALIFORNIA - SANTA CRUZ - DAY

Flying along low over green rolling hills. Pacific Coast Highway is a winding ribbon below. Ahead we see a plain two-story hotel on the ocean side of the highway.

The tall sign in front looms up; it reads: WELCOME CEREAL

CONVENTION.

INT. HOTEL - DEALERS' ROOM - DAY

A typical convention floor: dealer tables are laid out with videos, books, posters for sale. Poorly lit. Far more men than women. We pick up snatches of conversation, almost documentary-style. A DEALER and CUSTOMER chat:

DEALER

--the TV version? The TV version
butchered it! But I hear you can get it
uncut on video in Canada--

A TIRED MAN gets a drink from a vending machine:

TIRED MAN

Hate these little hick towns. Wouldn't be
seen dead here, if it weren't for the
convention--

Two BUYERS examine the liner notes of an old LP record album:

BUYER

Yeah. He slays me. You heard him do the
'I am John's coathanger routine?'
Hilarious--

INT. HOTEL - MAIN LOBBY - DAY

A man strides through the lobby; he carries a clipboard, wears square eyeglasses and a worried expression. His carefully hand-lettered name tag reads: NIMROD.

He comes to the registration table. Funland runs it, the metal folding chair straining under his massive bulk.

NIMROD

Do we have the Corinthian?

Funland flips through index cards in a tiny metal box. He now wears a little black skull cap with little black cat ears on it that once may have been little black mouse ears.

FUNLAND

Hasn't checked in here yet. But don't worry--I'm sure he's coming.

NIMROD

He can't not come. He's our guest of honor. Have we got any other big names so far?

Funland's thick fingers flip through the cards again.

FUNLAND

Um. Moon River, but he seemed kind of shy. And the Candyman, you know, the one from Connecticut. The guy with the candy-canes. Umn, the Lip Collector is here--

NIMROD

How many so far?

FUNLAND

Eighty people have registered. Pretty good turnout, huh?

NIMROD

Eighty? Jesus. Didn't think so many would show--

INT. HOTEL - MAIN AUDITORIUM - DAY

Nimrod, a little nervous, stands at a lectern, looking out over a sea of faces. All types: young, old, professional, blue color. Very few women.

NIMROD

Hello.

(beat)

I, uh, heard a story recently I thought might amuse you. It seems that the telephone rang in a police station. The duty cop answers and a woman's voice says, "Help--I've been reaped!"

Nimrod takes a breath--he's a terrible storyteller.

NIMROD

He says, "Don't you mean raped?" "No, she says. "He used a scythe."

A half-second of endless pause while the punchline sinks in, then there is an explosion of laughter. Nimrod visibly relaxes.

NIMROD

It's really good to see so many of us here. So many. This is the first of these cons, and if you want to see another, there are a couple rules we must adhere to.

(raises a finger)

Firstly, use your preferred sobriquet. No civilian names

(raises two fingers)

Secondly, we don't shit where we eat. Nobody does any collecting until the convention's over and you're at least two hundred miles away.

VOICE IN CROWD

Aw...

NIMROD

This rule must be followed, with so many of us at risk. We've reserved the entire hotel; there are no other guests, so you shouldn't be tempted.

A few good-natured laughs at this.

NIMROD

So. Don't miss the keynote address-- it's at eight, and it's from the Corinthian, the man who's inspired so many of us--

A sudden BURST of APPLAUSE. A few people stand. Hoots of approval. There's no doubt who everyone is here to see. Nimrod backs away, a little shocked, but he smiles--

NIMROD

Welcome to Cereal Con '98!

INT. HOTEL - RESTAURANT - DAY

A distinguished man--THE GOOD DOCTOR--sits at the counter, sipping coffee and examining a flyer. Next to him is PHILIP (aka THE BOGEYMAN). Young, wild hair, wrinkled jacket, he stares sideways at the Doctor in awe.

PHILIP

Excuse me, but I've seen you before, haven't I? You're that doctor. To think you're a--a collector.

GOOD DOCTOR

Thank you. You are?

PHILIP

I'm the Bogeyman.

GOOD DOCTOR

I've heard of you. The newspapers, in their facile way, have also christened me Flay-by-Night.

(out of nowhere)

Seventy nine.

PHILIP

Sorry?

GOOD DOCTOR

"Give me a number." That's your line, isn't it? Seventy nine.

CLOSE ON Philip, as his expression becomes dreamy while he remembers:

PHILIP

Oh yeah, right. She was, like, she had these beautiful eyes, like patches of sky early in the morning, and she screamed like an angel...

A woman catches Philip's eye--her nametag identifies her as DOG SOUP. Philip is amazed, eyes glued as she passes by.

PHILIP

Dog Soup is a woman? Oh, man. I gotta go talk to her.

He bounds out of his chair, dashes to go catch the woman. The GOOD DOCTOR frowns, follows Philip with his eyes--

EXT. SANTA CRUZ - HOTEL - DAY

A big, long, mean-lookin' convertible pulls up in front of the hotel. The Corinthian leaps over the door before the valet can get to it--

The Corinthian lifts the wide lid of the rear trunk. Looks big enough in there for a family of five, but right now there's just one LARGE OLD SUITCASE TRUNK.

BAM! The trunk hits the pavement. BAM! The rear lid slams down.

bam!-bam!-bam!-bam! As the Corinthian pulls the trunk behind him up the concrete steps, into the hotel.

INT. HOTEL - LOBBY - DAY

CORINTHIAN'S POV as we move through the lobby. Smiles and waves from people as they pass by. The Corinthian's name is whispered and people point--it's a rock star's entrance, creating quite the stir.

Funland has a packet waiting--he extends it as the Corinthian arrives.

FUNLAND

Here's your stuff, Mr. Corinthian. Uhn, wear your badge at all times. You won't be permitted into the convention areas without it.

The Corinthian looks delighted at the materials.

CORINTHIAN

Certainly! Thank you, Funland. You're doing a fine job!

Funland glances curiously at the trunk as the Corinthian wheels it toward the elevator. Philip appears at the Corinthian's side, out of nowhere.

PHILIP

Wow. Mister Nimrod said you'd be coming, but... Um, we're all big fans of yours.

CORINTHIAN

I'm so glad you could come.

Doors part. The Good Doctor is in the elevator. Philip follows the Corinthian inside--

IN THE ELEVATOR:

The Good Doctor keeps an eye on Philip.

PHILIP

Say, you ever read a magazine called CHASTE? It's really terrific.

CORINTHIAN

I've heard of it.

PHILIP

Really?

(digs out a rolled-up copy)

Hey, can I have your autograph--

Up one level, the doors part--

CORINTHIAN

Nimrod!

IN THE HALLWAY,

the Corinthian hurries out of the elevator, drops the trunk-- THUD!--puts an arm around Nimrod.

NIMROD

You're here. Good. The convention hall is set up, but we still need to discuss the exact numbers for the banquet--

Phillip follows the Corinthian out, but he has been left behind, forgotten. The Good Doctor stays in the elevator. The doors close on his dark expression--

INT. HOTEL - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A panel discussion in progress. A wild-eyed man with a flowing gray beard holds the mic tightly, hoarding it from the other two guests, who look pissed. The name card in front of him reads DELIVERANCE.

DELIVERANCE

I am a merciful God and a just God. For I release men and women and children from the suffering and torment of their lives, and I give them a new life in my heaven!

He slams his fist down, rants on. Philip is in the audience, watching, rapt. He is startled when someone whispers:

NIMROD

Bogeyman, can we talk? In your room?

Philip turns, sees Nimrod, who wears a friendly smile.

BOGEYMAN

Uhn, well, I'm watching the religion panel, man, but... uh, sure.

INT. HOTEL - PHILIP'S ROOM - DAY

The door SLAMS open. Philip is shoved into the room hard; he stumbles, falls to his knees.

PHILIP

Listen, you guys--oh God--listen, what is this?

Philip has seen the Good Doctor, standing silently in the shadows of the room. Next to him is the LIP COLLECTOR--a tall, gangly man with a gaunt face and toothy grin.

PHILIP

I'm the Bogeyman. Really I am.

(soft)

Give me a number. Any number.

Nimrod goes through Philip's wallet. The Good Doctor picks up a copy of CHASTE magazine, casually flips through it. The Lip Collector hangs in the background, still grinning.

NIMROD

Your name is Philip Sitz. You're the editor, writer, whatever, of Chaste magazine. Your number's up, Philip. You aren't one of us.

PHILIP

No--no, I am. I understand it. Females are insects created for male pleasure. Strength. Energy. Lust. The willingness to sacrifice another's life for one's own gratification ...

He collapses, lowers his head, kneeling before them.

PHILIP

I understand it. That's why I had to get here. To see you all. To learn.

NIMROD

Big mistake, Philip. Big mistake.

The Good Doctor swings a metal suitcase stand at Philip's head. Philip sprawls to the ground. The Good Doctor and Nimrod stare at each other.

GOOD DOCTOR

"We don't shit where we eat," Mr. Nimrod?

NIMROD

Except when we have to, Doctor. Needs must, when the devil drives.

INT. HOTEL - CORINTHIAN'S SUITE - DAY

From the bathroom, we hear the SOUND of the SHOWER RUNNING.

The Corinthian in there, whistling happily.

The large old trunk sits on the bed. A loud THUMP, and it jiggles, shaking the bed. Something's inside. Another THUMP, and it moves closer to the edge. It's pretty comic, actually. A final THUMP--

The trunk tilts over the edge of the bed, falls, clasp-side-down. It splits open.

A foot appears, then a leg. Rose struggles out from under the trunk. Her hands are tied behind her back, and she is gagged. She looks toward the bathroom fearfully, bolts for the door.

INT. HOTEL - HALLWAY - DAY

Rose staggers down the hallway, her legs buckling beneath her. She's frightened, disoriented. She pushes her face against the wall, scrapes at the gag, rolling it, getting it out of her mouth. Above her is a hand-lettered sign: 4:30 PM panel discussion: MAKE IT PAY. VOICES come from inside:

INT. HOTEL - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A panel discussion in progress, the participants' names on cards in front of them:

CHOIRBOY

...even ten G's per victim identified
isn't too much to ask.

CARRION

Right. The thing to remember is that
they'll pay to know for certain. Even if
the cops don't go with it, the families
will.

HELLO LITTLE GIRL

But, Carrion, we don't do it for the
money--

There is some commotion at the back of the room. Heads turn as Rose stumbles in.

ROSE

Please. Someone. I've been kidnapped--

She's such the damsel in distress, someone LAUGHS.

VOICE IN CROWD

Boy, has she come to the wrong room!

2ND VOICE

No kidding!

VOICE IN CROWD

It's a joke. It's gotta be.

ROSE

Please--he's going to kill me ...

GALES of LAUGHTER at this. Rose backs away--

INT. HOTEL - HALLWAY - DAY

Rose turns, runs blindly into the bulk that is Funland.

FUNLAND

Geez. You okay, miss?

ROSE

Please. I need help. I need to get to a phone.

FUNLAND

You do? Sure. Sure. We'll get you to a phone. Here.

(unties her wrists)

Uh... this way.

Rose looks at him gratefully, mouths 'thank you.' Funland smiles, embarrassed. Leads her down the hallway. Keeps glancing down at her out of the corner of his eye.

FUNLAND

Say, you look pretty young. How old are you?

ROSE

Twenty.

FUNLAND

Oh, no. You can't be. I'd say you're younger than that. A lot younger. Right in here.

INT. HOTEL - BANQUET HALL - DAY

Rose steps through two heavy doors. Before her are rows of dining tables set for the night's banquet. Empty and silent. Rose frowns.

ROSE

Where's the--
(realizes)
Oh, God, no--

Funland slaps her across the face. Moves on top of her.

FUNLAND

We're going to play, little girl. We can make believe it's my special place.

He puts his hands around Rose's throat. She chokes--

FUNLAND

It's a small world, after all. I love that song. It's so true. So true.

He tightens his grip.

FUNLAND

Now, when we've finished you mustn't tell anybody that I played with you...

CORINTHIAN (O.S.)

Let go of her, Nathan Diskin.

Funland looks up, the expression of a boy caught with his hand in the cookie jar, except his hands are around Rose's throat.

FUNLAND

Huh? How--how did you know my name?

The Corinthian stands there, furious.

CORINTHIAN

Let go of her. You have no idea what you almost did.

Funland drops Rose. She scurries away, choking and coughing. Funland cowers under the Corinthian's glare. In a little-boy voice:

FUNLAND

Are you going to kill me?

The Corinthian advances on him.

CORINTHIAN

You don't seem to understand the rules, Funland. Too bad.

(in his face)

I guess I'll have to remind you, then. Let me tell you, Funland, what the first rule is--

(he wags a finger)

No killing.

The Corinthian laughs. Funland, panting in fear, laughs, too. The Corinthian turns, grabs Rose, who shrieks as he pulls her away.

EXT. SANTA CRUZ - REDWOOD FOREST - CLEARING - DAY

A rope is tossed over a branch. Philip, gagged, no shirt, his chest bare and vulnerable, is strung up by his arms.

NIMROD

I won't bother to ask how you got Bogeyman's invitation. We'll talk about something else.

We are PHILIP'S POV--Nimrod stares up at us. Behind him are rows of huge lovely redwoods, a cathedral of trees. An otherworldly scene, like in a dream.

NIMROD

You said you came here to learn. Okay.
We'll teach you. Teach you that this
isn't about sex; it isn't about power; it
isn't about cruelty.

(beat)

You'll learn.

Behind Nimrod, the Good Doctor steps INTO FRAME. Stares at Philip, staring right at us.

NIMROD

The Good Doctor Likes to skin people
alive. Lip Collector--well, the name
says it all.

The Lip collector steps into frame on the other side, shy,
hunched over, but still grinning.

NIMROD

And I am Nimrod, the hunter. I can bone,
joint and gut any animal in minutes. And
you know what we're going to do now,
Philip?

(a deadly smile)

We're going to take turns...

EXT. SANTA CRUZ - REDWOOD FOREST - LATER

Philip stands up in the forest, looks dazed. OFF SCREEN there
is an odd SOUND, the FLUTTERING of many wings.

PHILIP

Wow! When they strung me up, I thought I
was a goner for sure!

Death steps up right next to him, but she's facing the
opposite way, looking back toward the clearing.

DEATH

That's what you thought, huh?

Philip looks at her, a little confused, unsure.

PHILIP

Yeah...

DEATH

(nods toward the clearing)

Say, aren't you going to watch? They're not nearly finished, yet.

Philip turns, looks back toward the clearing. We hear the final sounds of his body being killed. The reality of his death sinks in.

PHILIP

So that's it? That's all I get?

DEATH

'Fraid so--

Death squints a little, looking toward the clearing.

DEATH

Wait a second. I know those guys!

PHILIP

So?

DEATH

So in my line of work I don't get many, y'know, long term relationships. Huh.

She looks at Philip with interest.

DEATH

You're one lucky guy, Philip.

PHILIP

Really?

DEATH

Really. Really-really. Most people worry their death has no significance. Yours could be one of the most significant of all time.

PHILIP

Cool!

Death smiles, puts her arm around Philip. He seems to like it. She walks him away from the clearing.

DEATH

So, where would you like to go?

PHILIP

Um. You mean, I get to pick?

DEATH

That's how it works ...

They disappear behind a huge redwood. OFF SCREEN is that odd sound again--the loud FLUTTERING of many WINGS--

INT. HOTEL - HALLWAY - DAY

Death moves down the hallway, looking around with interest, peeking into various conference rooms.

DEATH

(to herself)

Shit, I don't believe this...

A sign reads: 'THERE IS NO SANITY CLAUS.' Inside the room, a nervous professional man answers a question:

CANDY MAN

Uhn, look, as a practicing psychiatrist, I, uh, well, look, none of you, uh, well, there's no more evidence of mental abnormality among us people than amongst, um, them. Less, maybe.

Death raises an eyebrow, moves to the next room. This one is titled WOMEN IN SERIAL KILLING. In the front, DOG SOUP sits between a NURSE and a WOMAN IN BLACK. They don't look to pleased as she speaks:

DOG SOUP

I tell you, I'm sick and tired of women in
(MORE)

DOG SOUP (CONT'D)

our line being stereotyped as black widows
or killer nurses. I'm a serial killer, and
a woman, and I'm proud of it...

She moves on to the next room: WE ARE WHAT WE ARE. She peeks
in to hear:

OREGON DEVIL

...fundamental act of humanity is to
kill. They are the sheep and cattle. But
we know the truth. We're alive.

Death stops, shakes her head in disbelief.

DEATH

Little brother, what have you done?

She turns around, goes back the way she came--

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Typical artist's apartment. Messy, canvasses of many sizes
strewn everywhere. Weirdly, all of the canvasses are BLANK.

Paul (who we haven't seen in a while, he's Rose's artist
friend, the guy with the nightmares) sits in a large open
windowsill, feet dangling over the edge. He looks drunk,
wasted. He turns, stares INTO CAMERA.

PAUL

Who are you? How did you get in?

He follows someone as they move closer--it is DEATH. She
shrugs.

DEATH

Sorry. Didn't mean to disturb you. The
door was open.

PAUL

Cigarette?

Death holds up a hand.

DEATH

Not for me!

PAUL

Who are you?

(she just looks at him)

Did you come for me?

DEATH

No. I'm searching for my brother. He's here somewhere, nearby. I've got to find him.

PAUL

Matter of life or death?

Death smiles. Glances at the windowsill.

DEATH

(gently)

It'll be soon enough, Paul. Why rush it?

Paul looks at the many empty canvasses. Haltingly:

PAUL

I used to think I was special. But I'm not. I'm just like everyone else. I'm going to be dead one day, just like everyone else, and then that's it.

Death nods. Moves toward the door. Stops.

DEATH

Just go ahead and do whatever you want. It's not going to make any difference.

Paul looks at her questioningly.

DEATH

Everybody always gets the same deal, no matter what. One lifetime. No more, no less.

Paul turns away, a thoughtful look on his face--

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - DAY

CLOSE ON: SANDMAN, as he opens his eyes, squints into the sun streaming in through the window. We hear that loud FLUTTERING SOUND--like the wings of birds--

DEATH (O.S.)

There you are!

SANDMAN'S POV: looking up as his sister, Death, leans over him, blocking the sun.

DEATH

(mock ominous)

I've come for you, little brother!

Sandman struggles, leans up on his elbows. Death laughs.

DEATH

Just kidding.

Death watches as Sandman slowly recovers.

SANDMAN

Sister--thank you for coming to my aid.

DEATH

I'm not coming to your aid, I'm here to kick your butt.

Sandman stares at her, frowns. She leans close to him, explains:

DEATH

I've found your escaped nightmare, little brother. He's tearing the world apart at the seams, and near as I can tell it's your fault.

INT. HOTEL - BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

No empty seats; the place is packed with serial killers, many of the faces familiar to us now. The mood is expectant, excited. Nimrod addresses them; he's become a confident master of ceremonies:

NIMROD

...they've called him the Eye Guy, and the Dark Angel, and Shades, and maybe a thousand other names. But we've always known it was one man--

(he starts clapping)

Gentlemen. Ladies. Our guest of honor: the Corinthian!

The Corinthian leaps onto the stage amid thunderous APPLAUSE. He gestures for quiet, and the crowd reluctantly complies.

CORINTHIAN

Is this on? All right. Many of you know this story. But for those that don't...

(he coughs)

Once upon a time--

Renewed APPLAUSE--like a rock-concert crowd recognizing the opening bars of a favorite song. The Corinthian grins, waits, starts over:

CORINTHIAN

Once upon a time, the mean Lord of Dreams was captured. A child was born of his magic dream sand, making a rift in dreams ...and allowing your humble servant to escape.

The Corinthian bows low. APPLAUSE rises up; he basks in it.

CORINTHIAN

That child, I am happy to say, is here with us today!

A sweeping gesture. From a side door, Rose Walker is wheeled out--she's gagged, blindfolded, and bound head-to-toe to a moving dolly. Catcalls and screams. She is left in the middle of the stage.

The Corinthian takes the mic in hand, moves into the crowd like a daytime talk show host.

CORINTHIAN

And the Vortex, continued to grow,
weakening the Sand King, allowing your
humble servant to take his magic Ruby
Dreamstone!

He raises the glittering Ruby high above him. CHEERS from the crowd.

CORINTHIAN

And now, the happy ending. Soon, the
dreams will all be gone... all there
will be left is reality.

(gathers them by eye)

You are special people. Very special
people. And the new reality will be
created in the shape of your dreams!

The Corinthian speaks in an evangelical fervor. He whirls,
points to Deliverance in his long gray beard--

CORINTHIAN

Deliverance! In the new world, you will
cleanse the world of the wicked, and lead
your people to righteousness!

And WE SEE a quick image, FLAMES bursting to life, a house on
fire, Deliverance praying as people inside begin to SCREAM--

BACK TO SCENE,

as the Corinthian whirls, points to Funland--

CORINTHIAN

Funland! You will be a funny giant, and
your little friends will come running to
play with you, and never make fun of you...

And WE SEE it--Funland, dancing in a line of kids, holding
hands, and it's more than a little disconcerting.

BACK TO SCENE,

on Funland's blissfully smiling face. Someone stands up next
to him--it is Dog Soup, the female serial killer.

DOG SOUP

Excuse me...

CORINTHIAN

Yes? A question?

DOG SOUP

I wanted to ask, uh, how do we know that it works? The Ruby.

The Corinthian blinks.

CORINTHIAN

Works? It's already working. Look at this convention. You're serial killers, for godsakes. How can we be getting away with this? Where are the maids--the bellboys? You think this is normal?

Some of the audience shift uncomfortably in their chairs.

The Corinthian holds the Ruby aloft.

CORINTHIAN

It seems normal--it has become normal--because of this.

(quoting)

'Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye ... '

(smiles)

You will walk this world like giants. You will be the celebrities, the stars--

Suddenly, the room is filled with ADORING MEDIA: spotlights from mini-cams, flashes from cameras.

CORINTHIAN

You will be the heroes of books and movies, and--uh...

Looking out into the crowd, we notice a DARK FIGURE, seated, unmoving. The Corinthian frowns, but keeps speaking:

CORINTHIAN

...and the faces on the cover of People magazine...

Now we get a good look: it is SANDMAN, sitting in the crowd, watching. The Corinthian is unnerved. The reporters stare into the crowd--

CORINTHIAN

We are gladiators, and we are swashbucklers and warriors and... uh, kings ...

Sandman stands. ALL SOUND DROPS OUT. Only the Sandman and the Corinthian seem real--all others have been reduced to backdrop.

CORINTHIAN

...of the night...

SANDMAN

What... what do you think you are doing?

The Corinthian twirls the Ruby.

CORINTHIAN

Actually, I'm glad you're here. I think I've got the hang of this.

(regards him)

But you don't look strong enough to make it interesting. Do you?

SANDMAN

You must not do this. I forbid you.

CORINTHIAN

You abandoned me. I waited for your return. I remember the gray days that stretched into years and into decades. The slow crumbling of walls... the rooms that were no longer there...

Sandman lowers his head slightly.

SANDMAN

I... am sorry, Corinthian.

CORINTHIAN

Well, that doesn't cut it! You see, I like the waking world. It needs a few changes, that's all. I'm staying.

Lightning quick, Sandman reaches beneath his coat, and extracts his POUCH OF SAND. He tosses a handful--

--into the Corinthian's eyes. He staggers back.

CORINTHIAN

No!

He backs away, holds the Ruby up like a talisman, clawing at his eyes. Sandman slips quickly to Rose's side. Her bonds fall away.

ROSE

You came for me...

SANDMAN

I had to.

He lifts her in his arms, and hurries toward a side exit. The Corinthian blinks, searching, still unable to see--

INT. HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

Sandman sets Rose down.

ROSE

You've got to stop him. He'll destroy the world.

SANDMAN

I do not know if I can stop him. I may not be strong enough.

ROSE

Because... because of me.

He says nothing. Rose stares at him.

ROSE (CONT'D)

What... are you going to do?

Sandman considers. His brow furrows as he weighs his options. And then he decides--

SANDMAN

Nothing. I will do nothing.

(trying to convince himself)

There are countless other planes beyond this one. We can travel them together, and leave this one to the Corinthian.

Rose stares up at him. She can't believe what he is saying.

SANDMAN (CONT'D)

I cannot find it in me to harm you, Rose. You did nothing to deserve it.

ROSE

Deserve. Deserve has nothing to do with it, does it? Things just happen sometimes ... and all you can do is the best you can with what you've got.

SANDMAN

You sound very much like my sister.

ROSE

Then I'd like to meet her sometime.

(beat)

Listen--this is my world. This is where I live. This is where my friends live.

(beat)

He has to be stopped.

(no arguments)

He has to be.

SANDMAN

You know... what you are asking?

ROSE

(nods)

I know. I have to. It's... it's my responsibility.

Sandman studies her face. She returns his gaze. Tears well up in her eyes. She turns away.

ROSE

Do it!

Sandman nods slowly.

SANDMAN

It is my responsibility.

He cradles her in his arms, touches her face as her eyes close--

SANDMAN

Wait!

Rose's eyes snap open.

SANDMAN

There is another way.

ROSE

No--

SANDMAN

Yes! Of course. He is nothing but a dream. And you--you are that which can destroy dreams. Together, we can beat him. Together.

(beat)

We must join our souls.

ROSE

How?

SANDMAN

How do any two people join their souls?

Sandman leans down--

--and KISSES HER.

INT. HOTEL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

The doors slam open. The Corinthian spins--

Sandman and Rose stand there, hands linked, power radiating from them.

SANDMAN

Come, Corinthian. Let this be finished.

CORINTHIAN

Yes. Let it be finished, one way or the other.

The Corinthian lunges forward, the RUBY metamorphosing into a DAGGER.

Sandman pours sand from the pouch into Rose's palm, then his own.

SANDMAN

Follow my lead.

He claps his hands together, draws them apart--

HE HOLDS A SHIELD OF SAND. He parries the Corinthian's charge, shoves him away.

Rose follows suit, creating a sword. She looks at it, surprised, then lunges forward, swinging for the Corinthian--

The Corinthian ducks, STABS the Ruby Dagger into her leg.

She CRIES OUT. The sword becomes sand again, cascading to the floor.

Sandman slams the Corinthian with the shield. The ruby dagger still protrudes from Rose's leg. Sandman hits the Corinthian again--his sunglasses go flying, revealing his eye sockets LINED WITH TEETH.

Cornered, the Corinthian steels himself and PUNCHES--

--THROUGH THE SHIELD. He grabs Sandman by the throat. Sandman struggles to break free. The Corinthian leans in, EYE SOCKET MOUTHS snapping for Sandman's throat, drawing closer--

Suddenly, the Corinthian STIFFENS--an eerie double scream issues from his eye sockets. He staggers back--

The Ruby Dagger has been plunged deep into his back. Rose stands behind him, staring at her handiwork. The Corinthian reaches toward her, almost shrugging--and then he is dead.

Rose looks up at Sandman.

Sandman steps to her, sweeping her up into his arms, looking deep into her eyes--

THEY KISS AGAIN, passionately, as we

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DREAM REALM - SANDMAN'S PALACE - DAY

Sandman and Rose break their kiss. In best fairy-tale movie fashion, they now stand in the throne room of the palace, dressed in finery. Sandman leads Rose up the steps, to--

TWO THRONES, identical, equal. He gestures for her to sit. She does; he takes his place beside her. Rose looks around in happy wonder at the palace. She turns to look at Sandman, who is already watching her.

CAMERA MOVES IN as he takes her hand, their fingers intertwining--

DEATH (O.S.)

Brother...

INT. HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

Death stands there. She is subdued, sad.

Sandman looks up. A tear runs down his cheek.

DEATH

That was a lovely final dream you gave her.

Sandman cradles Rose in his arms. Her head lolls back. She is

dead.

SANDMAN

She deserved no less.

Death nods. She sweeps an arm across Rose's body--

There is the SOUND OF WINGS, and then Death is gone.

Sandman rises. There are mirror tiles on one entire wall. Sandman glances at his many reflections--

Floating just beyond one of them is DESPAIR.

DESPAIR

No. Do not enter. I do not want you in my realm.

SANDMAN

Nor do I wish to be there.

He turns away from the mirror as Despair fades.

CORINTHIAN

So, you did it.

The Corinthian stands in the hallway. He stares at Rose's body, prone on the tarmac.

CORINTHIAN

Why, you're an inspiration to us all.

(looks up at Sandman)

I still have the ruby. It is enough to kill you. More than enough.

Sandman stands, reaching beneath his coat, producing his helm.

SANDMAN

Perhaps it can. It has absorbed much of my soul-self already. But if you would fight me, you shall not do it here. The dream realm is repaired.

Sandman puts on his helm, giving his voice an even more otherworldly sound--

SANDMAN

If you would steal a dreamlord's power,
than you shall do it in dreams.

Sandman pulls darkness around himself, and then he is gone.

CORINTHIAN

COWARD.

(to the Ruby)

Follow him. Take me into dreams, my
darling ...

The RUBY FLASHES BLOOD RED--

EXT. DREAM REALM - DUSK

A LINE OF LIGHT appears, becomes the outline of a door. The door opens, and the Corinthian steps through--

CORINTHIAN

(shouting)

I'm no mere nightmare now, Sandman. I'm
here to kill you.

The Corinthian stands in a CEMETERY. A grave stands empty.

CORINTHIAN

Show yourself, Sandman. You can't hide
forever...

A pause. No answer. The Corinthian uses the ruby to BLAST a section of the cemetery--

--and the illusion of a world is RIPPED AWAY, torn like a painting. Revealed behind the tear are many CLOCKWORK GEARS.

CORINTHIAN

Can you see me, stinkard lord of piss and
mire? Look!

Another BLAST--the clockworks fly to pieces, as well as the rest of the cemetery.

Revealed behind the clockworks are--

HUNDREDS of FACES, floating in darkness, eyes shut in sleep. A sky of faces, a landscape of faces, surrounding the Corinthian. This is the world of the Dreaming.

CORINTHIAN

Can you see me using your power to rip your ragtag dreamworld apart? Can you see me?

Another BLAST--the faces twist in pain, wavering. Several scream out.

SANDMAN (O.S.)

Stop! Enough, Corinthian! I am here! Desist.

The lenses of Sandman's helm reflect the Corinthian, who smiles.

CORINTHIAN

Yes. You're here. Hello.

(indicates the ruby)

This is a lovely thing, isn't it? It contains your life. Your magick. Your power.

(beat)

RIGHT?

SANDMAN

... right.

CORINTHIAN

And the last time you used it, it sucked out more. Yes?

(beat)

YES?

SANDMAN

Corinthian... stop. You are tampering with the order of things ...

CORINTHIAN

SHUT UP! I'm going to ruin all of it. Every bit.

He holds the Ruby over his head. It GLOWS. A BEAM knives into Sandman's heart. He moans--

CORINTHIAN

Does that hurt? I bet it does. I bet it hurts. A lot.

The beam widens. Sandman slumps, seemingly shrinking--

CORINTHIAN

What does it feel like? To have the life sucked out of you?

SANDMAN

Stop--the dreamers--

The faces still look on, themselves being drained of vitality, growing gaunt, withered, desiccated--

CORINTHIAN

I hold your life in my hands. I can kill you.

He closes his hands around the Ruby, squeezing--

CORINTHIAN

This IS your life, dreamsnak. And I'm crushing it out with my hands!

EXT. DESTINY'S GARDEN - TWILIGHT

Destiny stands in his garden, reading from his great book. His finger traces the words, reaches the bottom of the page. He prepares to turn to the next one--

--and HESITATES. Just a moment--

And then he turns the page--

EXT. DREAM REALM - DUSK

The Corinthian's knuckles are white with strain--

The ruby SHATTERS--

BLOOD-RED LIGHT flares, hurting the eyes, filling the screen

--and then it fades, leaving a WHITE SCREEN--

--and the small figure of the Corinthian, looking surprised, and then smug.

CORINTHIAN

It worked. He's gone.

He can scarcely believe it.

CORINTHIAN

The king is dead. And long live the king!
Look who's in charge of the Dreaming, now ...

(glances around)

... what's left of it.

He takes a few steps. The world remains PURE WHITE. He drops to his knees. Alone, by himself, the Corinthian actually smiles--a genuine, relieved smile.

CORINTHIAN

I'm free again. Finally.

SANDMAN (O.S.)

Thank you, Corinthian.

CAMERA PULLS BACK, way back, revealing--

The Corinthian has been standing in the pale white palm of Sandman's hand.

PULL BACK MORE. Sandman is huge now, a giant. He peers down at the tiny figure of the Corinthian.

SANDMAN

It has been so long. I had forgotten...
I had forgotten how much of my power I
had placed in that jewel. And you
released it.

(considers)

I doubt I would have thought of that.

The Corinthian looks up at Sandman, not quite cowering, but

no longer cocksure. Timid.

CORINTHIAN

What are you going to do to me?

The Sandman begins to shrink.

SANDMAN

You disappoint me, Corinthian. You were my masterpiece, or so I thought.

He stands beside the Corinthian now.

SANDMAN

A nightmare created to be the darkness and the fear of darkness in every human heart. A dark mirror, made to reflect everything about itself that humanity will not confront.

He touches the Corinthian's face.

SANDMAN

But look at you. Twenty years walking the earth, and what have you given them? Nothing. You've told them there are bad people out there.

(sadly)

And they've known that all along.

The Corinthian wrenches away from him.

CORINTHIAN

Do you expect me to submit quietly? To go back--to never again know the delights of an eye as it pops between my teeth? Is that it?

SANDMAN

No. That's not it.

He grabs the Corinthian by the jaw, tight.

SANDMAN (CONT'D)

I created you poorly, then. As I do uncreate you now.

The Corinthian SCREAMS--

His skin dissolves, leaving the skeleton--

The skeleton fades away, except the skull, still in Sandman's hand. Sandman stares into its eye sockets filled with teeth.

Behind him, around him, the sleeping faces FADE IN. Hundreds of them, all races, all ages, all genders...

...and all sleeping peacefully.

Sandman TURNS TO CAMERA--

SANDMAN

And YOU, that call yourselves collectors--

EXT. HOTEL - BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

He's behind the podium, addressing the audience of killers.

SANDMAN

Until now, you have all sustained fantasies in which you are the maltreated heroes of your own stories.

Nimrod slouches in his seat. Funland looks away.

SANDMAN (CONT'D)

Comforting daydreams in which, ultimately, you are shown to be in the right.

(beat)

No more.

And now all the eyes in the room are on him.

SANDMAN (CONT'D)

For all of you, the dream is over. I have taken it away. For this is my judgment on you:

EXT. HOTEL - NIGHT

The killers leave the hotel. Some seem to want to talk to others, but ultimately, they don't.

SANDMAN (V.O.)

That you shall know, at all times, and
forever, exactly what you are. And you
shall know just how little that means.

(tired)

Now, leave.

Funland is one of the last. He takes off his cap, and drops it. The wind kicks up, blowing it across the parking lot. The killers just drift away, fading into the darkness.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

A bright day, not at all proper for a funeral. The white flowers around the casket look almost festive in the sun.

Rose's friends are gathered at the gravesite. Most we met at the party, including Kelly, Sam (holding Rose's kitten), and Paul, who stands at the head of the grave.

PAUL

I, uh, I'd like to read something... a
poem, from one of Rose's--

(his voice breaks; he gathers
himself)

This is from Rose's favorite book, and
it, uh--it meant a lot to her...

(clears his throat)

"In Wonderland they lie
"Drifting as the days go by
"Watching as the summers die
"Lying in the golden gleam ... "

EXT. DREAM REALM - SANDMAN'S PALACE - DUSK

The palace has been rebuilt. The surrounding land is green. Sandman stands on a balcony, head inclined, listening.

PAUL (V.O.)

"...Life is but a dream."

Lucien steps onto the balcony, nervous about disturbing Sandman. Matthew, perched on Lucien's shoulder, is not.

MATTHEW

Hey, boss. Heads up.

Sandman raises his head, but does not look at them.

SANDMAN

Yes?

LUCIEN

My lord... there are nightmares to be inspected.

Sandman turns. He peers at the two of them.

SANDMAN

Lucien... In my absence, you did not leave. You remained at your post, in the Library.

LUCIEN

Ah... yes, lord. I'm a librarian, after all.

SANDMAN

That is true. Still...

(beat)

Thank you, Lucien.

Lucien is startled--but genuinely pleased.

LUCIEN

You--you're welcome, my lord.

Matthew flutters to Sandman's shoulder. Cocks his head.

MATTHEW

You've changed, boss... you know that?

SANDMAN

Have I? I am still Dream, and I still have my responsibilities.

LUCIEN

The nightmares..?

Dream glances down--almost as though he's looking back at the funeral.

SANDMAN

Of course. But, first, I think something a bit more... inspirational.

EXT. DREAM REALM - ROCKY SPIRE - DAY

We recognize Paul's dream: He clings to the spire, unable to climb higher, afraid to fall. He grasps for a better handhold, then glances up--

Sandman stands precariously, impossibly, on the very tip of the spire, Matthew perched on his shoulder.

PAUL

Who--who are you?

MATTHEW

Hey, buddy. You look screwed.

PAUL

I never should have climbed up here! I learned my lesson...

SANDMAN

Have you? It is sometimes a mistake to climb. It is always a mistake to never even make the attempt.

PAUL

But I'm caught here! If I even move, I'll fall! I'll die! Aren't you scared of falling?

MATTHEW

Not me.

SANDMAN

Hush, Matthew.

(to Paul)

Is it that bad to fall? Sometimes you
wake, and sometimes, yes, you die.

Sandman turns and nonchalantly walks away--across thin air.
He pauses, turns back to Paul.

SANDMAN

But there is a third alternative.

Paul stares into his face. It is the same face that Roderick
Burgess looked into nearly seventy years earlier: the same
aquiline nose, the same sharp cheekbones, the same dark
eyes but now it is less harsh. Less foreboding.

Paul swallows. He nods. And--

PAUL LETS GO. He arcs away from the spire, out and down in
slow motion. Is he falling--or is he flying?

INT. PAUL'S LOFT - NIGHT

Paul wakes up. Across the room, a large blank canvas stands
on an easel, beckoning, taunting. Paul stares at it, then
rises. Like a sleepwalker, moves toward it--

Paul mixes paint on a palette--He uses a roller to create a
powder blue sky, like the one in his dream--He sketches in the
spire with charcoal--He begins to paint a figure--

The figure is in mid-air, having let go of the precipice--
And it is flying, arms outstretched. But it is not Paul.

It is ROSE, smiling as she soars.

CAMERA PUSHES IN on Rose's smiling face, closer and closer
until detail is lost in nearness, and we

FADE TO BLACK

THE END