

"SEVEN SECONDS"

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FADE IN:

EXT. LIBERTY STATE PARK - MORNING

Winter, dawn. Snow falls in this desolate park, on the edge of the Hudson River. A slice of America on the Jersey mainland, sandwiched between the grandeur of lower Manhattan and its ugly, delinquent step cousin, Jersey City. Poor, corrupt, drug ridden.

But in the quiet morning light, Jersey City is at rest. At peace. Unmarred fields of white snow, arc of blue sky. On the water, the Statue of Liberty, her back turned to the park but still a vista of hope. America and its dream.

The stillness broken by a lone CAR speeding down the park's one road. Empty save for the speck of blue and silver against white fields of snow...

INT. MOVING CAR - CONTINUOUS

The driver, PETE JABLONSKI, white, male, late 20s, red-eyed and frayed, drives recklessly fast. He fumbles with his cell phone, distracted, punching in numbers. Suddenly it RINGS--

JABLONSKI  
(answers phone)  
Marie?

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)  
(from phone)  
Nah, it's me, you talk to her?

JABLONSKI  
(upset)  
I can't get through, I been callin'  
an' callin', fuck--

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)  
It's gonna be okay, man.

JABLONSKI  
I gotta go, I gotta call her--

Distracted by his phone, Jablonski takes a sharp turn in the road. Glances up just as -- seemingly out of nowhere a TEEN'S BMX BIKE, its rider obscured, materializes in front of his speeding car. Too late to stop--

Jablonski SCREAMS AS HIS CAR CRASHES VIOLENTLY INTO THE BIKE.

He jams the brakes and his car skids across the icy road, throwing him against the wheel, slamming into a snowbank, shuddering to a bone jarring stop.

For a long moment, Jablonski sits there, stunned. Through the windshield, the road unfurls like a black ribbon through the white fields. No bike, no rider. Nothing.

EXT. LIBERTY STATE PARK - CONTINUOUS

Jablonski exits his vehicle, cautiously surveys the road. It's empty. Did he just imagine it? Then--

A RHYTHMIC SNAPPING SOUND. Coming from the front of his car. Cautiously, Jablonski moves towards the sound.

Peers around the hood. Sees--

CRUSHED BENEATH THE CAR'S FRONT TIRES... THE BMX BIKE.

Its front wheel lazily spins. In its spokes, a CARDBOARD SEAGULL, intricately designed, in place of a bike spoke card. This is where the RHYTHMIC SNAPPING SOUND comes from.

But where's the rider? Jablonski searches in a slow circle, sees nothing but empty fields, an empty road. And then, about thirty yards away, in the middle of a snowy field... a TEENAGE BOY'S LONE SNEAKER.

Just beyond it is a tree line... a ditch. A SMEAR OF BLOOD on its snow-covered edge. Whomever he hit is down in that ditch, hidden from view.

Jablonski stares, unable to move, unable to breath. A man's gravelly voice breaks the silence--

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

(from phone)

Petey...? Hey!

The voice comes from his open cell phone. It lies on the car's floorboards. Jablonski goes to it, picks it up. Numbly--

JABLONSKI

Yeah. What.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

The fuck?

(beat)

What happened...? Pete?

But Jablonski has nothing to say. His gaze riveted on the smear of blood, the shoe. The ditch.

Seconds ago he was just a man driving through a winter morning. And now his life, in mere seconds, has changed forever.

MOMENTS LATER - POV

OF AN UNSEEN DRIVER as he spots, through his windshield, Jablonski in the distance. No longer in the middle of the road, Jablonski hunches against his car which is plowed against a snowbank...

EXT. LIBERTY STATE PARK - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON JABLONSKI, drawn to the sound of the approaching, unmarked sedan. A BUBBLE LIGHT on its roof. The police.

The timing couldn't be worse. Its occupants hidden behind tinted windows. The car slow, stops.

From the driver's side, MIKE DIANGELO emerges: late 30s, alpha male, unblinking eyes of a lifer on the force.

His passengers, FELIX OSORIO, early 30s, Puerto Rican, dressed like a shot caller, and MANNY WILCOX, same but white with a buzz cut and a guido strut, exit the vehicle. If it weren't for the BADGES on chains around their necks, they'd pass as shot callers.

Not giving an inch, Jablonski locks eyes with the approaching cops. They're almost on him when--

DIANGELO

Pete, you okay?

The same gravelly voice from the earlier phone call. DiAngelo is a friend not a foe, not here to apprehend but to help. And now we see that Jablonski has a badge on a chain around his neck. A cop too.

JABLONSKI

He came outa nowhere.

DiAngelo searches Jablonski's blank face, unsure what he's talking about. In rote cop speak, on auto pilot--

JABLONSKI (CONT'D)

I was traveling north at approximately 40 miles per hour, I took a turn in the road when the bike appeared.

(beat)

I hit it.

The others stare him, still uncomprehending, then--

OSORIO

DiAngelo.

One of the cops, Osorio, nods to the ditch... the distant blood smear, bright red on the white snow. For a beat, DiAngelo takes it in. Then he snaps into cop mode:

DIANGELO

What condition's he in? Male, female... what?

A pulse of panic in Jablonski's face which he forces down, gotta keep his head above water--

JABLONSKI

I don't know.

In charge now, DiAngelo stomps across the snowy field towards the ditch. The others look on in tense silence. When DiAngelo gets to the ditch's edge, he takes a long look down, his expression never changing.

Finally he trudges back. Goes to the front of Jablonski's car, searches the grill. Satisfied--

DIANGELO

You talk to your wife yet?  
(off Jablonski's  
confused look)  
How's she doin'?

It's surreal, this ordinary conversation a hundred feet from the ditch where the biker lies.

JABLONSKI

I, ah... nah, no one's tellin' me nothin'.

DIANGELO

Go see her, I'll take care of this.

JABLONSKI

What about E.M.T., we gotta call 'em--

DIANGELO

(interrupting)  
Did you go in that ditch? See who's down there?

He holds Jablonski's eye meaningfully, his cold look - the easy rage beneath it - instantly shuts down any questions, any protestations Jablonski may have.

DIANGELO (CONT'D)

I said I got this.

Still, Jablonski wavers, unsure. Suddenly, from inside his car comes muffled RINGING. His cell phone. He stands there, hanging in the balance, as it keeps RINGING.

DIANGELO (CONT'D)

You gonna answer that?

Jablonski weakens, it's easier to relinquish responsibility, to believe that DiAngelo, a man he desperately wants to please, has got it. And that RINGING phone...like a drill in his brain.

Jablonski turns and, without another word, climbs hurriedly into his car--

INSIDE JABLONSKI'S CAR

With shaking hands, he fumbles with the phone, answers.

JABLONSKI

(into phone)

Marie?

(listens, then)

I'll be right there, I'm comin' now.

Tell her I'm comin'...

He quickly guns the engine and lurches out of the snow bank. A SICKENING CRUNCH of tires over metal as the car runs over the bike again.

Jablonski swerves back onto the road, speeds away. Unobserved now by the others, there's fear in his eyes as he peers into the rear view where the bike, the cops recede into the distance.

BACK TO SCENE

In silence, DiAngelo and the others watch Jablonski's car disappear down the road. Then DiAngelo nods briskly at the destroyed bike.

DIANGELO

Get it outa the road.

Always the good soldier, Wilcox hurries to do as he's told. Only Osorio refuses to move, wants answers--

OSORIO

Who's down there?

DiAngelo ignores him, methodically scans the park, the empty road, the water. They are alone, no witnesses.

Until his gaze settles on an abandoned factory building, at a distance, abutting the park. Dozens of shuttered windows.

WILCOX  
 (re: the bike)  
 Whaddya want me to do with it?  
 (beat)  
 Di?

But DiAngelo remains fixed on the building, the imagined eyes watching from behind its dark windows.

INT. BAYONNE HOSPITAL - DAY

CAMERA TRACKS BEHIND Jablonski as he races down the hall, passing empty hospital rooms, beeping machinery. Pristine, antiseptic, white tile. He arrives at the last room and runs in--

INT. BAYONNE HOSPITAL - ROOM 20 - CONTINUOUS

To find his wife, MARIE JABLONSKI, Bayonne born and bred, mid 20s, joking with a young Latino MED TECH who's wiping gel from her bare, distended abdomen. She's PREGNANT, eight months in. Her tiny frame dwarfed by the baby.

JABLONSKI  
 I got here fast as I could--

MARIE  
 Babe, it's okay, just a little Braxton Hicks, he's fine--

JABLONSKI  
 (interrupting)  
 Where's the doctor?

MARIE  
 He's comin' back.  
 (to Med Tech, grinning)  
 I told you they shouldna called, he freaks out every time I come in--

JABLONSKI  
 (to Med Tech)  
 Get the fuckin' doctor.

Surprised beat. Jablonski's thrumming with manic energy, only way to keep his mind clear. The Med Tech rises--

MED TECH  
 I'll be back.

MARIE  
 (embarrassed)  
 Thanks, Angel.

As the Med Tech exits, Marie watches Jablonski, surprised at her husband's intensity. Still angry--

JABLONSKI

Jesus, why didn't they call me earlier?

(re: machine)

What's this?

MARIE

It's not a big deal, okay? They just wanna take a look at his heart--

JABLONSKI

(alarmed)

Again?

MARIE

It's routine, Petey, God. What's gotten into you?

JABLONSKI

They shoulda called me earlier.

MARIE

(patting the bed)

C'm here... Please?

Jablonski relents, takes a seat. She places his hand in on her huge abdomen. For a beat, he looks down at their child, somber. The fragility of hope - losing it, time and again - has clearly taken its toll on him.

Marie clasps his chin, forces him to look at her. Searches his face, misinterpreting the torment she sees there--

MARIE (CONT'D)

You don't gotta come runnin' every single time for every little thing.

(quietly)

You're not him, Petey. You're gonna be a great dad.

Jablonski nods, clearly his Achilles heel, his father. Desperate to believe he's different, a burden he's carried for years.

MED TECH (O.S.)

Dr. Tarawneh'll be here in a few...

The Med Tech returns, fiddles with the machine. Jablonski drops his eyes, embarrassed at how raw he is, how vulnerable.



MED TECH (CONT'D)

.. But if you want, you can take a look again.

MARIE

That'd be great, yeah.

MED TECH

(exiting)

Just let it run, it'll turn off itself.

MARIE

Thanks.

(beat)

Babe?

JABLONSKI

What?

MARIE

There he is, little poke.

Jablonski looks up at the machine. There, on its screen, a SONOGRAM OF HIS SON.

Nothing compares, bearing witness to your unborn child's heartbeat. Jablonski's seen it before, many times, but each time it take it blows him away.

MARIE (CONT'D)

See? He's fine. He's sayin' 'Hi Daddy.'

Jablonski stares at the screen, holding on by a thread. This life, the other.... He can't afford to think about that.

So he keeps his eyes on his son's fluttering heartbeat. The only thing in the world for him.

EXT. DOWNTOWN JERSEY CITY - MOVING TRANSITION SHOT

A city on the edge of the Hudson River: high rises and federal style buildings sandwiched between brownstones and cobble stone streets. In the sky above, clouds gather, threaten--

PRELAP SFX: RINGING SCHOOL BELL--

EXT. ST. PETER'S MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

Through a BIKE RACK, reveal a flood of 6TH GRADE BOYS sporting school uniforms, as they burst from the school doors. Jostling one another, grabbing BIKES and SKATEBOARDS from the rack. Exuberant to be free at the end of the school day.

In the schoolyard, parents and care givers pair off with their charges. MEGAN CONNELLY, 14, short uniform skirt, her pale face accented with kohl eyeliner, worriedly searches the crowd of departing boys, hers clearly not among them.

At the doors, the school secretary waves her good byes. This is LATRICE BUTLER, early 40's, African American, shy, churchgoing type with a sweet, easy smile.

But it fades as she spots Megan, alone, her young face pinched with concern.

INT. ST. PETER'S MIDDLE SCHOOL - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

CAMERA TRACKS DOWN the empty, shadowy main corridor of the school, recently emptied of its children. A feeling of their presence still, their shouts, their clattering feet. CHILDREN'S CRAYON and PAINT ARTWORK adorn the walls.

Through a doorway, come Latrice and Megan's voices--

LATRICE (O.S.)  
 ... It is a half day. You sure your  
 mom or dad didn't pick your brother  
 up and just forget to tell you...?

As CAMERA REVEALS--

INT. ST. PETER'S MIDDLE SCHOOL - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Megan stands at the front desk, land line PHONE pressed to her ear. On the other side of the desk, Latrice scans a thick REGISTRATION BOOK, worried.

MEGAN  
 ... I'm the one who gets Ryan, they  
never do.  
 (beat)  
 She's gonna be mad I'm calling, my  
 mom doesn't like to be woken up.

Latrice reacts, surprised. It's almost noon. Why would the woman be asleep at this hour? Megan holds out the phone--

MEGAN (CONT'D)  
 She's not answering.

Latrice listens, hangs up. Nods to the registration book--

LATRICE  
 You're just a few blocks away, maybe  
 your brother walked home--?

MEGAN  
 (interrupting)  
 Ryan wouldn't do that. He's supposed  
 to wait for me.

Her face reddens, tears threaten, this burden too much for a  
 14-year-old. Latrice takes in this child, knows she can't  
 just leave. Unhappy that her day just got longer.

EXT. CONNELLY BROWNSTONE - DAY

Coat on, Latrice rings the doorbell of a historic, three  
 story brownstone. A pocket sized park -- stately oaks and  
 pristine snow -- across the street. The nicer part of town  
 where Wall Street transplants and professional types live.

She's about to ring again when the brownstone's door opens,  
 revealing TAYLAR, 40s, white, former beauty queen, chronically  
 depressed. She's puffy-faced, just awoken, in a robe. A  
 flash of fear as she takes in Latrice.

LATRICE  
 (reassuring)  
 I work at your son's school, at St.  
 Peter's? I brought your daughter  
 home?

Latrice nods to the street where a belligerent Megan exits  
 Latrice's old Honda, glaring at her mom. Indifferent to the  
 oddness of her child with this stranger--

TAYLAR  
 (spacey)  
 Oh... Thank you.

LATRICE  
 Is your son here, Miss...?

Searching for a name, no idea who this woman is. Taylar  
 blinks back at her, confused.

TAYLAR  
 Didn't Megan pick him up?

LATRICE  
 She came by but your son had already  
 left.

TAYLAR  
 Ryan loves riding his bike near the  
 river.

Latrice peers into Taylar's eyes. The woman's clearly on  
 something. Carefully--

LATRICE

There's a storm coming in, they say we'll get twenty inches at least by this afternoon. It might be best for you to get him before then.

TAYLAR

Of course, yes, I'll do that. I just need to get my bag. Thank you, um...

LATRICE

Latrice Butler. Would you mind calling me here...  
 (hands her paper)  
 Or Miss Pilar, the principal, when you pick him up?

Taylor takes the paper and without another word, gently closes the door. A beat as Latrice stands there, guilty, knowing this woman is in no condition to find a missing boy.

As she turns to go, she sees that the sidewalk is empty. Megan gone. Latrice sighs, this is no longer her responsibility. She's done her duty.

As she heads down the steps, REVEAL, past this block of brownstones... Liberty State Park, less than a half mile away, bordering the edge of downtown Jersey City. Its snowy fields and the Statue of Liberty just a stone's throw away.

INT. MCGINLEY'S TAVERN - DAY

Post lunch, the only patrons left at this courthouse mainstay are a few well-dressed, solitary booze hounds. And the lone woman at the bar, squeezing a lime into her freshly poured G&T. Her hands tremble slightly, she drinks to steady them.

This is KJ HARPER, early 30s, African American, an elegance that shines through despite her fashionable-two-seasons-back couture. Once a believer but that was a long time ago. These days, a gin & tonic smooths out the rough edges, rounds out the jagged reality that life disappoints. Over and over. Better to drink than to believe anything matters.

In the way of longtime alcoholics, KJ doesn't seem drunk. Just intently focused on her glass, oblivious to the TV screen above the bar where a news report plays--

TV ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

(from TV)  
 ... Officers confront angry protesters... bottles flung at them...

On the TV screen: WHITE POLICE OFFICERS EMBATTLED IN SOME AMERICAN CITY. BLACK PROTESTERS HOLD UP PLACARDS: 'STOP KILLING ME 'THIS BLACK LIFE MATTERS', 'HANDS UP, DON'T SHOOT'.

KJ holds up her empty, gets an immediate refresh, the BARTENDER used to her routine. Knows what's coming next--

KJ  
(to Bartender)  
Where's my jam, G?

Over the sound of the TV comes MUSIC now (Soul II Soul's, "Keep On Movin'"). KJ smiles, closes her eyes, moves subtly along to her old school jam, still seated on her bar stool. No need to go anywhere. Got everything she needs right here.

But now, underneath the music, comes the muffled RINGING of a cell phone. KJ doesn't hear it, focused on her song and the glorious numbness spreading throughout her body.

But shit, that RINGING PHONE like a damned gnat buzzing at her ear. She doesn't open her eyes, but irritation flits across her face, a loss of concentration.

As the cell phone RINGS and RINGS, KJ slows her groove, opens her eyes. Reluctantly comes back to earth.

INT. HUDSON COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DEPT 712 - DAY

CLOSE ON a PEN tapping impatiently. Wielded by the PUBLIC DEFENDER, 50s, male, bad suit, cheap haircut. At the table with him is his client, Honey Boo Boo all grown up. No more zest in her lemon, an empty rind of a woman.

Like the rest of the court. If there's one place where the dregs of the justice system reside it's in shoplifting court.

The PUBLIC DEFENDER glances at the empty Prosecutor's table when, suddenly, the courtroom doors bang open, revealing a rushing KJ, now in a crumpled suit jacket, briefcase in hand. As she takes her place at the Prosecutor's table--

KJ  
(under her breath)  
Got tied up on the turnpike, sorry--

SHERIFF'S DEPUTY  
All rise...!

They do as Judge Lenox, 60s, white, faded, enters. By rote--

SHERIFF'S DEPUTY (CONT'D)  
The Superior Court of Hudson County,  
State of New Jersey, is now in  
(MORE)

SHERIFF'S DEPUTY (CONT'D)  
session, the Honorable Frederick J.  
Lenox presiding.

KJ  
Your honor, the State presents  
complaint number, ah...  
(searches papers)  
Uh... I got it. Right here...  
Complaint number five nine seven  
seven.

She forces herself to focus, it's painful to watch. But in  
this room filled with various versions of washed up, KJ's  
par for the course. Reads straight from the paperwork--

KJ (CONT'D)  
This is the defendant's, ah, third  
shoplifting charge. Ms.  
Lufts stole \$200 in cat food--

PUBLIC DEFENDER  
You've got the wrong defendant.

KJ  
What?

JUDGE LENOX  
That's not the complaint number I'm  
looking at, counselor.

Someone in the courtroom TITTERS. Mortified, KJ shuffles  
through her papers, her hands clumsy from that gin lunch.  
An uncomfortable silence that stretches on until--

JUDGE LENOX (CONT'D)  
Get your paperwork in order before  
you walk into my courtroom.

KJ  
I'm sorry, Judge, I've got it right  
here, give me one minute--

JUDGE LENOX  
(banging gavel)  
Next.

Assistant Prosecutor #1, baby-faced, pimped, ten years KJ's  
junior, bellies up to the table, bumping into KJ--

ASSISTANT PROSECUTOR #1  
The State presents complaint number  
five nine eight three...

And the wheels of justice grind on. Humiliated, KJ quickly gathers her belongings, can't get out of here fast enough. Every eye in the courtroom on her, pitying her.

INT. HUDSON COUNTY COURTHOUSE - HALL - CONTINUOUS

TRACK BEHIND KJ as she stiffly makes her way down the drab, fluorescent lit hall. The courthouse is pure utilitarian, green-toned, a relic of 1960's modernist architecture.

Distant APPLAUSE from the rotunda, the baritone voice of--

CONNELLY (O.S.)  
 (from speaker)  
 ...Our county stands as a shining  
 example of law enforcement working  
 hand in hand with its citizens....

KJ stops at the railing, looks down at a PRESS CONFERENCE.

KJ'S POV:

The courthouse rotunda. At the dais is her boss, Hudson County State Prosecutor JAMES CONNELLY, late 40s, white, leader of men, Jersey's Gavin Newsom. Behind him, a line of fresh faced ASSISTANT PROSECUTORS and UNIFORMED COPS.

CONNELLY (CONT'D)  
 The shameful police violence we're  
 witnessing in Black and Brown  
 communities throughout America has  
 no place in New Jersey. And my office  
 intends to keep it that way.

More APPLAUSE. Connelly and his entourage are impressive, formidable, the County's elite in law enforcement.

BACK TO SCENE

CLOSE ON KJ, her face working with longing, envy. She belonged on that dais once. Not anymore.

CONNELLY (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 Let me introduce my team of  
 prosecutors, the very finest lawyers  
 in the justice system...

As he turns to the row of Assistant Prosecutors behind him, Connelly looks up, catches KJ's eye. Beat.

Embarrassed at being spotted, KJ steps away, into the shadows.

EXT. BAYONNE - DAY - MOVING TRANSITION SHOT

A bucolic town on the edge of the upper Hudson Bay. Above, storm clouds brew and darken...

INT. JABLONSKI HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Doilies on every surface, this cozy room chock-a-block with Marie's tchotchkes. The kitchen table laden with bread, cold cuts, an open jar of mayonnaise. Jablonski slaps together a pile of sandwiches with manic focus, cutting them in half with military precision, keeping himself busy, no time to ruminate.

Suddenly, he picks up his phone, and before he can stop himself, quickly dials.

DESK SARGEANT (O.S.)  
(from phone)  
Greenville Precinct, Sargeant Tilden.

JABLONSKI  
(into phone)  
Yeah, Kev, it's Pete Jablonski.  
What's goin' on?

DESK SARGEANT (O.S.)  
Storm's comin' in so nada, lucky us.

JABLONSKI  
Yeah? So, ah, nothin', huh?

DESK SARGEANT (O.S.)  
You wanna talk to DiAngelo? Thought he was out, but I can go in the back, check for you--

JABLONSKI  
(quickly)  
Nah, I'm good, I'll reach out to Di later.  
(beat; then quickly)  
Keep me in the loop if anythin' comes in, wouldn't mind the OT, you know...  
Thanks, man.

He hangs up, thinking. Startles when he sees an unhappy Marie standing in the doorway. How long has she been there?

MARIE  
You're not leavin' me alone in this house again, Petey. He's already got you out there every night--



JABLONSKI

They're just breakin' me in, you know how it is.

MARIE

What're you doin' out there anyways?

A beat, Jablonski tenses. Marie rolls her eyes, shuffles to the fridge, complaining, tired--

MARIE (CONT'D)

Forget it, I'm not supposed to ask, whatever. I know you wanted this promotion but seriously? Patrol was better hours. Just cuz DiAngelo doesn't have a family doesn't mean you gotta neglect yours...

She continues to complain as Jablonski checks his phone, spacing out, not hearing a word until--

MARIE (CONT'D)

Hello? Anyone home?

JABLONSKI

What?

MARIE

(amused/irritated)

You gonna get that macaroni salad or what?

(beat)

Where you at, babe?

JABLONSKI

I don't know. Just tired.

Marie contemplates him, senses something's off. Before she can ask any more questions, Jablonski rises--

JABLONSKI (CONT'D)

I'll get it.

He quickly exits--

INT. JABLONSKI HOUSE - GARAGE

Jablonski trundles down the stairs to the fridge. Pulls out a family-sized tub of MACARONI SALAD.

As he heads back, he slows, looks over at his CAR. In the closed, shadowy garage, it's like a silent, waiting presence.

For a long beat, Jablonski contemplates it. The hood looming like a crouched animal in the tight quarters of the garage.

With effort, he tears his eyes away. Forces himself up the stairs. Slams the door shut, plunging the garage into darkness--

INT. ABANDONED SUGAR FACTORY BUILDING - DAY

Flashlight in hand, DiAngelo makes his way down a pitch black hallway. Methodically searching the abandoned, cavernous building, the same one he spotted from the park. It's been shuttered for years, pigeons rustle in its eaves, here and there the detritus of sporadic squatters. The type of place kids break in to scare the shit out of each other.

From a nearby room, Osorio ducks out, unhappy--

OSORIO

There's nothin' here, man, let's go.

DIANGELO

Finish this floor first--

WILCOX

Yo. Di.

Wilcox has materialized from a room down the hall. Waves DiAngelo over, his face grim--

INT. ABANDONED BUILDING - ROOM - CONTINUOUS

And now we see why. DiAngelo and Osorio do too, as they join him in the dark, corner room. There, by the window--

A runaway girl's MODEST HOMESTEAD: dirty sleeping bag and purple sheets, a recently burnt purple-hued veladora (prayer candle), a milk crate cum dresser. On it a glittery purple hand mirror, a filthy purple teddy bear with a vest. On it, the name: "NADINE". Whoever squats here likes the color purple. Maybe named Nadine?

At the window, some of the particle board's been yanked away. DiAngelo approaches the window, peers out--

DIANGELO'S POV

Through the window, a picture perfect vista of Liberty State Park. The tree line from this morning... the ditch. This angle giving the homestead owner a ringside view of the accident this morning.

If someone was here earlier, they saw it all.

BACK TO SCENE

CLOSE ON DiAngelo, fear in his face for the first time.

POV THROUGH CAR'S WINDSHIELD

Megan, the school girl from before, trudges down the sidewalk, nervously glancing around--

EXT. GREENVILLE STREET - CONTINUOUS

She's a fish out of water in this part of town: poor, Black, a world away from her own posh digs. HIP HOP blasts from storefronts, on every corner a posse of SHOT CALLERS -- some in WHEELCHAIRS, vets of gang wars. They blatantly stare at the white girl in her short school skirt, appraising.

Megan almost collides with a group of PAKISTANI MUSLIM MEN, puffy jackets over their salwar robes and taqiyahs when--

BEEP BEEP!

Pulling up to the curb in her beat up Honda is Latrice, angry, disbelieving. She quickly rolls down her window.

LATRICE  
Get in here. Right now.

INT. LATRICE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Megan climbs in, grateful, but hides it underneath a scowl.

LATRICE  
What do you think you're doing?

MEGAN  
My mom's not gonna get him.

LATRICE  
And you are? Walking around here?

MEGAN  
(defiant)  
It's on the way to the skate park.  
Why're you following me?

LATRICE  
I'm on my way home, where you should  
be--

MEGAN  
I'm not going home til I find my  
brother.

Megan chews her hair, deep worry lines between her brows. Latrice sighs, she can't just leave this girl to her own devices. Not in this neighborhood.

LATRICE

We can stop for a minute but if he's not there, you need to go home. Is that understood?

Megan looks at her warily, not used to trusting adults.

MEGAN

(nods; softly)  
Thanks.

LATRICE

You're welcome. Just don't get ideas 'bout walking around here again--

BEEP! A siren's bleat as a COP CAR suddenly pulls alongside. Inside, two YOUNG WHITE UNIFORMS cut their eyes angrily at Latrice.

She looks back, nervous, confused. On the corner, the shot callers point and rise, a few approach menacingly. The sudden threat of violence crackles in the air, Latrice's car caught in the middle. As the shotcallers close in--

The cops suddenly peel away, burning rubber, gone as quickly as they came.

MEGAN

Why'd they stop?

Latrice doesn't know, doesn't want to sit around to find out. As she pulls away from the curb, REVEAL, on the wall behind her, what the cops were eyeballing--

GRAFFITI: 'FERGUSON-BALTIMORE-CHICAGO' 'FUCK THE POLICE' 'COP LIVES DON'T MATTER' and below that, the spray painted image of a SHOT CALLER LOOKING DOWN THE BARREL OF A BIG-ASSED MAGNUM. Its barrel pointed straight at us.

EXT. ABANDONED INDUSTRIAL AREA - DAY

Latrice's car pulls up to the edge of the Hudson River where dilapidated docks line its banks. Dozens of YOUNG TEEN BOYS - all races, ages, classes - have converted this decay into their own version of Skate Land.

At the edge of the crumbling concrete flood barrier, they ride BMX BIKES, RAZORS and BOARDS down impromptu ramps.

Latrice and Megan exit, march towards the boys, searching.

LATRICE

Do you see him?

The sky is darker now, the storm on its way. Worry in both their faces as they stop at the edge of the skate park, scan the crowd of boys. No luck.

LATRICE (CONT'D)

Where else could your brother have got to?

MEGAN

I don't know.

LATRICE

Maybe he's walking back home, let's drive back that way--

MEGAN

(shouting)

Ryan! Ry-a-a-a-n!

Getting the attention of a 12-year-old boy in a messy school uniform, atop a BIKE. The missing brother, RYAN.

Not missing after all. He glares at them, embarrassed by his sister's presence.

INT. LATRICE'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Ryan clambers into the back seat, Megan into the front, both shivering, underdressed. Pissed off--

MEGAN

You little shit, I'm tellin' Dad--

RYAN

Fuck off.

Out of ear shot, Latrice wrestles the bike into the trunk, doesn't see Megan lean over her seat and hit her brother.

Ryan explodes on her just as Latrice enters the car--

LATRICE

(pulling them apart)

Stop that! Stop that now!

The kids slump in their seats, scowling.

LATRICE (CONT'D)

I will not tolerate that kind of behavior in my car, are we clear?

MEGAN

We can take the bus, you don't have to drive us.

LATRICE  
 (sharp; to Megan)  
 You should know better. You're older  
 than him...

Megan sulks as Latrice gets in, scolding--

LATRICE (CONT'D)  
 ... Almost grown, in fact. Is there  
 something you wanna tell him, young  
 lady?

MEGAN  
 (mumbling)  
 Sorry.

But Ryan's not looking at her anymore, he's gazing out the  
 windshield, eyes wide. Latrice follows his look to find a  
 blanket of snow falling silently from the grey-blue arc of  
 sky above. Ethereal, beautiful.

For an enchanted moment, they watch the snowflakes land  
 quietly on the windshield, cocooning them. An odd peace  
 settling over them. Broken by--

RYAN  
 I kinda sat on this, sorry...

From the back seat, Ryan holds up a CARDBOARD SEAGULL.

Exactly like the one from the bike, the accident.

Latrice takes it, eyes shining with pride--

LATRICE  
 My son, Brenton, loves sea gulls.  
 He's never actually been to the sea  
 but he loves them just the same.

MEGAN  
 It's pretty.

LATRICE  
 He made it himself. He did.

She carefully tucks the cardboard seagull onto the dash.  
 Starts up the car.

LATRICE (CONT'D)  
 Got your seat belts on? Let's go  
 home...

As Latrice pulls away into the coming storm, CLOSE ON THE  
 CARDBOARD SEAGULL on the dash...

EXT. LIBERTY STATE PARK - DAY

WIDE on a snowy field, a distant tree line. The ditch at its edge. In the foreground, the empty black ribbon of road.

This is why DiAngelo covered up the accident, warned Jablonski away from the ditch. In a post-Ferguson world, there are no accidents between a white cop, a black teenager.

Snow falls, the storm building. But between the road and the tree line, something flutters in the wind. The CARDBOARD SEAGULL, torn loose from the bike spokes. Left behind.

INT. HUDSON COUNTY COURTHOUSE - HALL - DAY

Outside the bank of elevators, KJ waits alone. She's ducking out early, needs to sleep off her low-grade headache.

A crowd of ASSISTANT PROSECUTORS, the same ones from the earlier press conference, approach. A flurry of chatter, triumphant laughter. In their midst is Prosecutor Connelly, the sun in their orbit.

The loner, KJ keeps her distance. Toggles the elevator button, prays it comes quickly. Bursts of LAUGHTER grate, make her lower rung status stark.

The elevator comes, the crowd gets on, but KJ hangs behind. Until she is, again, mercifully alone.

INT. KJ'S CAR - DAY

Windows sleeted with ice, a shivering KJ starts her old car, it sputters once, twice, then dies. Goddamnit.

Finally the engine chugs to life and KJ quickly turns on the heat, rubs her bare hands together.

Suddenly, the passenger door opens and Connelly slides in, bringing the snow with him. Larger than life in her cramped car.

KJ

The heat's on the fritz, sorry--

CONNELLY

I can only stay for a minute.

As he settles in, KJ drinks him in with her eyes. But Connelly's oblivious, fretting--

CONNELLY (CONT'D)

You see that fuckin' charade? Those bottom feeders're chumming for body parts. Mine specifically.

KJ

Future governor, fresh blood, they can't help it. When're you making the announcement?

CONNELLY

Next week. When I roll out the new development deal.

KJ

Lemme see... Liberty State Park by the people, for the people, million dollar views for every man, woman, and child--

CONNELLY

(impressed)

You remembered.

KJ

You forgot I came up with that sound bite bullshit. Maybe I should run.

CONNELLY

(chuckling)

You'd beat my lily white ass in this city, you were gonna rule the world once.

His use of the past tense purposeful, stings like hell. Better to ignore, joke--

KJ

Well all I'm ruling now is the night desk. But I'm free and clear til eight.

Her meaning clear. A sudden electric charge between them. But Connelly tamps it down, not why he's here.

CONNELLY

Look, we gotta... stop this.

(beat; uncomfortable)

I can't afford any fuck ups right now, you know how it's been in the office--

KJ

Actually, I have no idea how it's been since you got me working low level felonies.

Sharper than she meant, hurt at being shut out. Still, she needs to be in his orbit, badly. Back pedaling--



KJ (CONT'D)

Got your Glen 12 at my place. New bottle, waiting to be popped.

Trying to be light and bright but Connelly isn't looking at her now. The pity in his face palpable.

CONNELLY

Maybe some other time.

Ouch. KJ nods, covers with a quick smile. Humiliated--

KJ

Yeah. Okay.

CONNELLY

I can't afford dead weight either, KJ. Not anymore.

He's aware of her fuck up this morning. And from his look, it's not her first. But it will be her last unless--

CONNELLY (CONT'D)

I need you to perform.

KJ

I understand.

And with that he exits. A beat as KJ sits there, in the gathering storm, waiting for the heat to come on.

INT. JABLONSKI HOUSE - GARAGE - DAY

Darkness. Jablonski enters, flicks on the light. Stands at the top of the garage stairs, stares down at his CAR.

Its presence down here has haunted him for hours. He can't help but return. Like a tongue to a loose tooth.

Against his better judgment, he slowly approaches the car.

It's only when he's standing in front of it that he spots something... A DENT, almost invisible, on the front bumper.

He crouches in front of it: barely two inches long, a rupture in the hard plastic made by a sudden impact. The paint chipping off.

Jablonski runs his finger down the crease. Then he quickly rises, goes to door and clicks the garage opener, suddenly in need of air. He steps hurriedly out--

EXT. JABLONSKI HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

-- Into the storm. But he's barely aware of it, stares numbly out at his bucolic street of quaint, single family homes, postage stamp front yards. Any Town America.

Suddenly, with no fan fare, Jablonski turns and VOMITS onto the driveway. A short, violent burst and then he's done. Blank-eyed, he swipes at his mouth. Turns to go back inside--

Meets the surprised gaze of his NEIGHBOR, 40s, in snow gear, shovel in hand, in the next yard. An awkward beat, then the Neighbor raises his hand in greeting.

Jablonski raises a hand in return. Tries to play it off, but his paranoia growing. What does the Neighbor suspect?

He forces himself to walk casually back into his garage. From the shadows, a silhouette now, Jablonski hits the door remote. His face obscured by darkness, he watches it clank slowly shut.

EXT. BRIDGE - DAY - MOVING TRANSITION SHOT

An industrial wasteland in Jersey City, a bridge spanning the Hackensack River's dirty banks. Lonely place, not another soul in sight. Just a CAR, parked under the bridge--

INT. DIANGELO'S CAR - DAY

DiAngelo sits in the driver's seat, staring out his windshield, thinking. Storm in full swing now.

Making a decision, he dials his cell--

DIANGELO

(into phone)

Yeah, this is DiAngelo. Listen, I got a question about that old sugar factory near the park. One o' my C.I.s tells me they got squatters up in there, movin' all sortsa shit. Lowkey lemme know if anyone gets picked up there.

(hesitates, then)

Got interest in a girl, might go by the name of 'Nadine'. Call me here if she shows.

He hangs up as Wilcox climbs into the car, shaking off snow. He nods towards the river--

WILCOX

Insurance policy's sleeping it off.

Through the windshield and the driving snow, reveal, in the distance, a beat up, ancient LIME GREEN BUICK on the riverbank. Someone slumped in the driver's seat.

DiAngelo nods, grimly satisfied. His cell RINGS--

DIANGELO  
(into phone)  
What?

INT. OSORIO'S CAR - INTERCUT

Osorio sits in his vehicle, parked catty corner to the old, abandoned sugar factory near Liberty State Park, where they found the runaway homestead earlier. Eyes on its front.

Down the block, a group of 9-year-old BLACK KIDS play king of the hill on a dirty snowbank, fling snowballs, insults.

OSORIO  
(into phone)  
I got nothin' but a few bums takin'  
shits in the snow. How long you  
want me out here for?

DIANGELO (O.S.)  
(from phone)  
I'll let you know. Hang tight.

OSORIO  
Yo, ah, you hear from Jablonski?

DIANGELO (O.S.)  
Nah, why would I hear from him?

Suddenly suspicious. Osorio licks his lips, nervous. Weighing heavy on his mind all morning--

OSORIO  
Cuz he's gonna start askin' questions.  
(beat)  
About why we were in the park last  
night.

Cold silence from the other end. He's overstepped, damn well knows it. Finally--

DIANGELO (O.S.)  
Call me if anyone goes in that  
building.

He hangs up. Osorio sighs, puts his phone away, unhappy. Suddenly A SODA CAN SLAMS VIOLENTLY INTO HIS WINDSHIELD. What the fuck?

He jumps out of his car as the BLACK KIDS race off--

BLACK KID #1  
Fuck the police!

Osorio watches them, his face working. The streets smell a cop every time. Nowhere to hide.

PRELAP: GOSPEL MUSIC--

INT. EMMANUEL PENTECOSTAL CHURCH - DUSK

An early choir practice in this all Black, Pentecostal chapel. MUSIC fills the dingy white building like thunder, pushes the pain of the every day through its roof into the beyond.

At the front of the choir, the normally shy Latrice belts out the music from the secret crevices of her soul, relishing the sweat, the tears, the raucous joy the music evokes. Exuberant as she leads the CHOIR, call and response style, in Hezekiah Walker's "I'll Fly Away"--

LATRICE  
(singing)  
*... You see, I'm gonna fly away...*

CHOIR  
(singing; dancing)  
*Fly away, fly away...*

LATRICE/CHOIR  
(call and response)  
*I will be free / free one day/ I  
will be free / free one day / I've  
got a home in the sky / Gonna tell  
this world goodbye...*

She eyes the handsome keyboard player, ISAIAH BUTLER, 40's, African American, pressed suit, dignified, a man of few words. But in the House of God, Isaiah comes alive, pours his all into this room rollicking with a dozen rising voices--

LATRICE/CHOIR (CONT'D)  
*.... I will be free! / Free one  
day! / I will be free...!*

The song reaches a fevered pitch as Latrice holds his look, his smile, these two on fire for each other, for their God. The Dream lives in this house, deferred but certainly not forgotten. As the song hits its crescendo...

EXT. BUTLER'S HOUSE - FRONT YARD - DUSK

Storm tapers off in this working poor, Westside section of Jersey City.

Single family homes, modest postage stamp front yards. Held together by baling wire and raw determination. A mirror image of Jablonski's street, albeit dirtier, rougher.

Latrice and Isaiah run through the falling snow, unlock their front door, laughing, chattering--

INT. BUTLER'S HOUSE - FRONT HALL - DUSK

--Stamping snow from their boots--

LATRICE  
(scandalized)  
... You so crazy, 'saiah! Stop it!

ISAIAH  
Wasn't me eyeing Brother Jerrel and his bass.

Stifling a smile, Latrice shakes her head, tries to escape her husband's teasing with--

LATRICE  
Brent? Baby, you home?

No response from the empty rooms filled with PACKING BOXES, sparse furniture. A recent move for the Butlers. Despite its wear and tear, the old, creaky house seems to glow: half its rooms just got a fresh coat of new paint.

ISAIAH  
Brenton! Your mother's calling you!

An edge in his voice that makes Latrice nervous. Tries to mollify her husband with--

LATRICE  
He's probably in the backyard, I'll get him--

ISAIAH  
(irritated)  
He shoulda been here by now, he knows Seth's coming home tonight. What's got into that head of his...?

As he continues to complain, Latrice moves towards the back of the house, passing more empty rooms, more packing boxes.

INT. BUTLER'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Latrice stops at her make shift altar. A woman of faith, the fabric of her every day. She quickly bows her head--

LARICE

(whispered rote prayer)  
Thank you Father God for our blessed  
home, praise be to you Father God---

ISAIAH (O.S.)

He's been messin' with my TV again...

Out of sight, from the front room of the house--

ISAIAH (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I can't turn it on after he gets  
done playing his games on it.

Latrice finishes her rituals, clearly strained by her  
husband's irritation with Brenton. A long standing tension  
between them. Tries to joke--

LATRICE

Maybe you should keep it off seeing  
how you still got a house to paint.

ISAIAH (O.S.)

I heard that! I did most of it!

She smiles, hits the ANSWERING MACHINE'S play button as she  
unlocks the double deadbolted back door--

LATRICE

(under her breath)  
Half of it.  
(opening door)  
Brent--?

Stops, mid-sentence, when she sees the empty yard. Nothing  
but falling snow and a scraggly tree.

Behind her, the answering machine plays, muffled:

SCHOOL SECRETARY (O.S.)

(from machine)  
This is Clayton Powell High School  
with a message for the parents of--  
(rote voice)  
Brenton Butler--  
((back to regular  
voice)

Please contact the office regarding  
your child's absence today. This is  
a message for the parents of...

As the message repeats ominously in the b.g., Latrice's easy  
smile fades.

EXT. LIBERTY STATE PARK - DUSK

The storm has finally blown over. TWO JOGGERS, Indian yuppies in their 20s, and a DOG run leisurely down the road through the park. The lights of downtown Manhattan glitter against the cobalt blue sky, the Statue of Liberty shines on the water.

Suddenly, the dog makes a break for the distant tree line, BARKING frantically, headed towards a ditch. The same one from this morning.

MALE JOGGER

Max! Hey, boy, c'm here!

But the dog barks more urgently now as it plunges down into the ditch.

WIDE ON the joggers as they rush after the dog, call out. Then slow as they reach the ditch. Stare down into it.

The dog's frantic BARKING the only sound now, echoing through the quiet park, through the coming night.

INT. GREENVILLE PRECINCT - NIGHT

Latrice and Isaiah enter, somber-faced, on a mission. COPS go in and out of the reception area, two DRUNKS argue in a corner, a loud gaggle of DOMINICAN TEENAGERS sprawl on the chairs. The usual weekend-around-the-corner bedlam.

As they approach the desk, a crazy looking JOHN Q. ADDICT complains loudly to the DESK SARGEANT, white, 50s, grizzled--

JOHN Q. ADDICT

... He took my fuckin' cart and you ain't gonna do shit about it?

DESK SARGEANT

I told you to fill out that form and we'll get to you--

JOHN Q. ADDICT

That's bullshit, it's my cart, you feel me, it's my world--

DESK SARGEANT

Then fill out the form.  
(stressed; to Isaiah)  
Whaddya you need?

ISAIAH

My son... he's missing.

Latrice flinches, never thought she'd hear these words. The Desk Sargeant remains unimpressed, dime a dozen these cases--

DESK SARGEANT  
What's his age?

ISAIAH  
Fifteen. He wasn't at school today.

LATRICE  
(overlapping)  
We been driving everywhere, looking for him--

The Desk Sargeant pushes a piece of paper across the desk--

DESK SARGEANT  
Gotta fill out a truancy report.

ISAIAH  
No, you don't understand, this never happened before, my son's not a truant--

DESK SARGEANT  
Then he'll show up--

JOHN Q. ADDICT  
(interrupts, waves form)  
How'm I gonna write down a address when I don't got one...?

As he argues with the Desk Sargeant, Latrice and Isaiah share a frustrated, look. Interrupting--

ISAIAH  
My son may be in danger. He may be hurt somewhere.

DESK SARGEANT  
He have a history o' running off?

ISAIAH  
(growing angry)  
No. He's a straight A student, a good kid--

Interrupted again, this time by a loud radio call from behind the desk. The shit never lets up in this place.

RADIO DISPATCHER (O.S.)  
Shots fired, officer requesting assistance at the corner of Lowry and MLK--



DESK SARGEANT  
 (to UNIFORM #1 at  
 desk)  
 Where is he?

UNIFORM #1  
 MLK and Lowry, it's O'Mally...

As they talk urgently to each other, Isaiah's had enough--

ISAIAH  
 (banging the desk)  
 My son is missing!

Latrice startles, badly frightened by the anger in her husband's face. The Desk Sargeant looks up, eyebrows raised.

ISAIAH (CONT'D)  
 (loud)  
 He's not a truant, he's not a runaway,  
 he's missing--

UNIFORM #2 (O.S.)  
 You need to calm down, sir.

UNIFORM #2, beefy, tall, has materialized behind Isaiah and Latrice. In a measured voice, but louder than he intended--

ISAIAH  
 I am calm. I am here to report that  
 my son is missing--

UNIFORM #2  
 Don't raise your voice to me.

LATRICE  
 Please, we just want to find our boy--

UNIFORM #2  
 Shut up, I'm not talkin' to you.

Latrice drops her eyes but Isaiah glares, cut to the bone by the man's impertinence. To Isaiah--

UNIFORM #2 (CONT'D)  
 This is what's gonna happen, you  
 listenin'? You're gonna turn around  
 and walk out that door.  
 (takes Latrice's arm)  
 C'mon, let's go--

Not thinking, a knee jerk reaction, Isaiah shoves the cop away from Latrice--

ISAIAH  
Don't touch her.

Uniform #2 glares at him, stunned, angry. Isaiah knows he crossed a line but holds his eye, pouring all his frustration, his anger, onto this man.

UNIFORM #2  
Turn around.  
(beat)  
Now.

Reluctantly Isaiah does as he's told. Latrice, panicking--

LATRICE  
He didn't mean it, please. Our son's  
missing--

UNIFORM #2  
(taking out cuffs)  
You're under arrest for assaulting a  
police officer. You have the right  
to remain silent, anything you say  
can and will be used...

LATRICE  
But he didn't do anything!

ISAIAH  
'Trice.

He catches Latrice's scared eye, holds it. They know damn well there's no talking their way out of this. Lived in this world long enough to know when to be quiet. To be still.

ISAIAH (CONT'D)  
Call my brother. Tell him to come  
down here--

UNIFORM #2  
(done Mirandizing)  
... Let's go.

Uniform #2 escorts Isaiah towards the back of the precinct. Latrice watches him go, pained, suddenly aware that all eyes are on her. Trying to hold on to her dignity, she stands there, head raised high. But at sea, lost without her husband.

INT. MOVING JABLONSKI'S CAR - NIGHT

CLOSE ON Jablonski as he drives down the one road in Liberty State Park. His eyes red-rimmed and bloodshot. It's been over twenty four hours since he's slept, running on pure adrenaline now.

Through his windshield, at the distant tree line, FLASHING LIGHTS, POLICE CARS and TECH VANS parked haphazardly off the road, UNIS putting up tape... the spectacle of a crime scene.

EXT. LIBERTY STATE PARK - CONTINUOUS

Jablonski parks his car, exits. Beyond the police tape, UNIS and TECH mill around the ditch from this morning.

This is what Jablonski's come for. His face set, pale, he marches towards it on autopilot. Suddenly--

UNIFORM #3 (O.S.)

Hey, you!

JABLONSKI

(badging him)

Just drivin' through, heard the call out.

Uniform #3 waves him past the perimeter. Near the edge of the ditch a huddle of UNIFORMS and the detective who's directing them--

FISH

.... Canvas the projects behind the park and get a dog out here--

UNIFORM #4

Only dogs we got're in Weehawken. You gotta put a rec in for one.

FISH

Like I don't got nothin' better to do than fuckin' paperwork on a dog? Forget it...

This is JOE "FISH" RINALDI, mid 30s, Italian, thick Jersey accent, off-the-rack, crumpled suit. Doesn't notice Jablonski who hangs back behind the others, blends in.

FISH (CONT'D)

...We got a I.D. yet on the kid?

UNIFORM #4

Brenton Butler, Black male, 15-years-old--

Jablonski flinches, each word a blow. Hides it.

FISH

Notify the parents, they'll wanna get to the hospital.

UNIFORM #4

Mom's already en route, babbling  
about how Dad got locked up...

The Uniform continues to talk but his voice drops away as Jablonski stares, stunned, disbelieving... the hospital? Why's the kid at the hospital?

JABLONSKI

He's alive?

Only one who notices him is UNIFORM #5. Offhandedly--

UNIFORM #5

Yeah, prolly fuckin' brain dead,  
lyin' out here in the storm all night.

JABLONSKI

(holding it together)

Damn. That's a shame. I, ah, I'll  
see you around.

Jablonski ducks his head, walks away. Every cell in his being screaming with the blind, animal need to run, to get in his car and flee far away from this place. But he forces himself to walk steadily towards the police tape, the line of UNIS there watching.

Whatever torment he's feeling he shoves down, ducks casually under the tape and makes his way down the road. Only we see his eyes, the growing panic in them.

Jablonski climbs into this car and speeds off, tires squealing.

EXT. 1/9 TOLL ROAD - NIGHT - MOVING TRANSITION SHOT

Blurred headlights, taillights, sparse late night traffic - mostly trucks - on the lonely toll road. In the distance, the lights of downtown Jersey City, far away...

INT. KJ'S MOVING CAR - NIGHT

From the CD player, MUSIC (Lisa Stansfield's "All Around The World") blasts. KJ's eyes droop with exhaustion, at the tail end of a bender. Tries to focus on the road through the icy windshield.

But she's fading, fast. As her eyes close, stay closed--

HONK! HOOOOONK!

A TRUCK careens straight at KJ, BLARING its horn. She's veered across the line, into its path. Crying out, KJ yanks her wheel to the right, misses the truck by inches.

KJ

Fuck--!

She pulls over to the side of the road, eases the car a safe distance from the sparse, late night traffic. Too drunk, too tired to drive. Needs to sleep a little. Get straight.

KJ turns up the heat, wraps her coat tightly around her, reclines her seat all the way back until she's lying nearly horizontal. Trying to relax, she closes her eyes when--

RING! RING! Her cell phone. She ignores it until it stops. Then starts again. She opens her eyes. Shit.

INT. GREENVILLE PRECINCT - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON a Black man, in his 60s, clearly homeless. This is LOU DORSEY, booze-brained, talks slowly--

LOU

... I was sleepin' in my car under the bridge for the last day or two. I could be mistaken but I was sleepin' when them cops woke me up...

Fish Rinaldi, bored out of his mind, scribbles on a piece of paper. Enunciates slowly, as if to a half-wit:

FISH

You ever drive through the park, Lou? You drive through there this mornin'?

LOU

There's a place I park at, yeah. But I ain't been to it lately... I don't think.

Fish takes in the older man's befuddled face.

FISH

You been drinkin'?  
(off his expression)  
All live long day, right?

INT. GREENVILLE PRECINCT - OBSERVATION ROOM - INTERCUT

KJ watches the interview, sips from a styrofoam coffee cup, the REPORT FOLDER in front of her. She's bleary-eyed, feels like shit. Doesn't notice the door open behind her until--

DIANGELO (O.S.)

You the new prosecutor on night shift?

DiAngelo moves into the dark room, Wilcox on his heels. KJ nods, not happy to have company.

KJ  
Yeah, who're you?

DIANGELO  
Detectives DiAngelo, Wilcox, we brought him in.

KJ  
Why's narcotics interested in a hit and run?

DiAngelo appraises her coolly, sharper than he thought.

DIANGELO  
My C.I. spotted gramps cleanin' blood offa his hood. Matched the victim's blood type.  
(beat)  
Says that in the report. You read it, right?

KJ  
Yes. Of course I read the report.

Bullshit. KJ fumbles through the papers, embarrassed, angry, at being caught out by a cop. Tries to reassert her authority--

KJ (CONT'D)  
I'm gonna need more than a blood type match to file on this guy.

DIANGELO  
He's got two prior DUIs. But you musta already seen that.

KJ  
(rallying back)  
I didn't realize reports were read by every joe in the precinct.

RING! RING! Wilcox's cell. He tries to get DiAngelo's attention, but he's fixated on KJ. Time to put her in her place.

DIANGELO  
Name's Mike actually.  
(beat)  
I seen you before, at the courthouse. You work the shoplifting cases, right?

Wilcox guffaws and KJ reddens. Time to let this thing go. She picks up her things, readying to leave--

DIANGELO (CONT'D)

Got this thing tied up in a bow, I don't see the problem.

KJ

Where'd you pick him up?

WILCOX

(gleeful)

Haulin' ass up the turnpike, that's in the report too.

DiAngelo tenses, flashes a warning look at Wilcox. It's subtle, lasts only a moment, but KJ notes it.

KJ

Mr. Dorsey seems to believe he was asleep in his car when you arrested him.

DIANGELO

Then 'Mr. Dorsey's' mistaken.

DiAngelo stares daggers at her, done playing games. His cell RINGS but he ignores it as KJ tries to match his look. Knows something shady's going on but she's not built for confrontation. Not with the likes of DiAngelo.

She finally drops her eyes, opens the door. Weakly--

KJ

I'll be filing the paperwork tonight. See you in court in the morning.

She exits. Simmering, DiAngelo glares at a nervous Wilcox who knows he's fucked up somehow. Not sure exactly how.

RING! RING! Wilcox's phone again, he checks it.

WILCOX

It's Jablonski. He keeps callin'.

EXT. JC MEDICAL CENTER - NIGHT - MOVING TRANSITION SHOT

High on a hill above downtown Jersey City, the Medical Center is a far cry from the Jablonkskis' pristine hospital. A rundown, sprawling monolith of gothic architecture, byzantine wings, burnt out projects rise up around it....

INT. JC MEDICAL CENTER - HALLWAY - NIGHT

CAMERA TRACKS behind Isaiah as he races down the hall towards the ICU. On his heels, his younger brother fresh from Afghanistan, SETH BUTLER, early 30s, Air Force cams, exudes calm authority like his sibling.

Outside a hospital room, PENTECOSTAL CHURCHGOERS - Black, older, in de riguer suits and dresses - congregate around a disconsolate Latrice, including PASTOR PHELPS, 60s, wizened.

Latrice is the first to spot her husband, rises to meet him. Her eyes huge, haunted. She's aged decades in the last hours because--

LATRICE

Did you see what they did to our boy?

Isaiah goes cold. This is not his wife, this woman standing in front of him. This is a stranger, driven insane by grief--

LATRICE (CONT'D)

Did you see what they did to our baby--?

Isaiah pulls her into his powerful arms, crushing her against his chest, trying to soothe her, desperate to bring her back.

Seth and the others look on, dab at eyes, shake heads.

PHELPS

Father God's with you, brother, sister. Every step of the way.

CHURCHGOERS

(scattered, muted)

Amen / Go on / Praise Him...

Even in this sterile place, their God lives. It gives them comfort. Only Seth shakes his head in disgust.

Latrice and Isaiah look towards the room where Brenton, out of sight, waits. From inside come the SOUNDS of various machines keeping him alive. Isaiah takes a breath, holds his wife's hand. Then, together, they enter the dark room.

EXT. GREENVILLE PRECINCT - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

KJ hurries to her car, briefcase clutched to her chest. Stumbles a little in the snow, rights herself just as--

FISH (O.S.)

Yo! Hey, Ms. Harper!

Fish waves her down, jogs up. He's huffing a little as he reaches her, out of shape--

FISH (CONT'D)

You the assistant prosecutor on my job? I'm Joe Rinaldi, call me Fish...



KJ nods, just wants to get out of here. But Fish, a born gabber, doesn't notice.

FISH (CONT'D)

... Former NYPD but just got this place down on the shore? Fuckin' beautiful oceanfront, my kids love it, so here I am, JCPD as of today.

KJ

Did you need something from me?

FISH

Yeah yeah, listen, you'll wanna make nice with the family since Dad got locked up for shit tonight, had to yell at them asswipes to cut him loose, last thing we need is some lawsuit from the grieving relatives, right?

KJ's got a helluva hangover coming on and this guy's blah blah is making it worse. She opens her door to flee--

KJ

I'll meet you at the hospital, I have to, ah, pick up some paperwork--

FISH

Mind if I come with? My car's in the shop and the vehicle I was using here just got signed out. Fuckin' wild west this place, not enough mustangs for the cowboys.

The thought of his yakking face for the next few hours bums KJ out. Still, how to say no? She nods stiffly to the passenger side. Fish makes a beeline for it, over--

FISH (CONT'D)

Kid's at the Medical Center, on Hamilton Ave, 'bout ten minutes away--

KJ

I know where it is.

FISH

If we pass a bodega, you might wanna score some mints.

KJ freezes, looks at him over the hood. Fish returns it, nonplussed.

FISH (CONT'D)

Just sayin', outa respect to the family and all. I can smell you from a mile away.

KJ gawks, can't believe the nerve of this asshole. Hardens--

KJ

You know, I got some personal stuff to deal with first. Get your own ride.

With that, she climbs into her car, pointedly locks her doors. Pulls away, leaving Fish standing there in the cold.

INT. JC MEDICAL CENTER - FAMILY WAITING ROOM - LATER

In this sparsely furnished waiting area for families, CLOSE ON a stunned Isaiah seated alone in a corner, his head bowed. Deeply unmanned by what he saw in Brenton's hospital room. A muffled voice in the b.g., a meaningless blur of sound:

DR. SANGUPTA (O.S.)

... Impact anterior cortex...  
extensive brain damage... ability to  
function...respirator for the rest  
of his life...

SETH (O.S.)

But he could recover. That's a possibility too.

Seth's authoritative voice cuts through Isaiah's haze. He looks up, blinking. Nearby, Latrice, Seth and fellow Churchgoers circle DR. SANGUPTA, late 30s, Indian-American.

SANGUPTA

The young are resilient so, yes,  
full recovery is a possibility.

The others make sounds of relief. Raw hope now in Latrice's face as she looks over to Isaiah. But he just stares numbly back at her, seemingly untouched. Sangupta, no stranger to tragedy, wants to be clear:

SANGUPTA (CONT'D)

We won't know either way for awhile,  
certainly not tonight. But we'll do  
everything we can for your son.

Latrice waits for Isaiah to respond but he's staring at the doctor, out of it. Taking charge--

SETH

Thank you, doctor.

Compassion, but also pity, in Sangupta's eyes as he leaves. Was he telling the truth about Brenton's possible recovery?

Latrice touches Seth's arm, peers up at him, tremulous smile--

LATRICE

Brenton was countin' the days 'til  
he could see his Uncle in uniform.  
He'll be glad to know you're home  
safe.

Seth takes in his grief stricken sister-in-law, familiar with this type of disconnect from war zones. Gently--

SETH

I'll go in and see him in a bit.

ISAIAH

(gruffly)  
Let's pray first.

Isaiah rises stiffly, not looking at anyone, as the others circle him, take hands. Only Seth hangs back. So does Latrice--

LATRICE

I'd like to check on Brenton. May  
I?

Isaiah looks at her, surprised. She's never walked away from prayer. The bedrock of their family, their union.

ISAIAH

You don't have to ask for my  
permission.

Latrice nods, exits, not looking back. A small fissure, barely visible except to the two of them. Soon to become an abyss in the days, the agonizing weeks to come.

But for now, as the PRAYER BEGINS, Isaiah lets her go.

INT. JC MEDICAL CENTER - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

TRACK BEHIND Latrice as she makes her way down the quiet, dark hallway. The ICU late at night. Shadowy, empty.

A rare moment Latrice is alone this night, the wear and tear of the last hours show starkly in her face. As she enters Brenton's hospital room--

INT. JC MEDICAL CENTER - BRENTON'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The SOUND of the RESPIRATOR fills the room. There's someone standing at the foot of Brenton's bed, staring down at him.

A purple hoody obscuring their face.

As though sensing Latrice's presence, the person turns--

It is a teenage girl, white, heroin thin ... wearing a dirty, purple track suit, a glittery purple backpack slung over her shoulder. The runaway girl from the abandoned sugar factory earlier, NADINE.

LATRICE

Can I help you?

Nadine doesn't answer, just stares back with frightened eyes. Latrice takes a step forward, snapping Nadine out of it. She ducks her head, moves for the door--

NADINE

(mumbling)

I'm in the wrong room, sorry...

She exits. Latrice stands there, confused. When she turns to look down the hall, Nadine is gone.

INT. GREENVILLE PRECINCT - NIGHT

A red-eyed Jablonski makes his way through the inner sanctuary of the precinct, passing UNIFORMS, DETECTIVES at their desks, headed for a closed door down the hall marked "SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS". Jablonski throws it open--

INT. SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS UNIT - CONTINUOUS

A small, dark office, four desks in different corners. Osorio, at the far one, looks up in surprise--

JABLONSKI

Where's DiAngelo at? He's not pickin' up his phone, no one's pickin' up--

OSORIO

Get in here...

Osorio hurries to the door, slams it shut. Pissed, scared, tries to hide it--

OSORIO (CONT'D)

DiAngelo's gonna fuckin' lose his mind if he catches you here. We're takin' care of it, alright?

JABLONSKI

The kid was alive, that's what you call takin' care of it?

Osorio recoils, angered. Jablonski raises his hands, wants to reason things out--

JABLONSKI (CONT'D)

Look, all I'm sayin' is maybe we should rethink this thing, you know? It was a accident--

OSORIO

A white cop and a black kid? There are no fuckin' accidents and you know it.

Bitterness here, the in between a rock and a hard place for a minority cop. Jablonski sees the conflict in his friend's face, hones in--

JABLONSKI

There's gotta be a way. C'mon, Osorio, you know this is wrong.

OSORIO

(hardening)

Go home. The DA's filing the papers on a guy tonight, it's over--

JABLONSKI

What guy?

OSORIO

Who cares, man. Not you.

JABLONSKI

(beat)

What if he saw me? What're we gonna do then? This whole thing's gonna blow up, we're all gonna go to prison for this fuckin' accident--

He stops, forces himself to calm down. That's when he sees, for the first time, the stacks of FOLDERS piled up around Osorio's desk, every drawer emptied. Like a thief's ransacked the place.

Confused, Jablonski looks up, meets Osorio's eye.

JABLONSKI (CONT'D)

What're you doin'?

OSORIO

(beat)

I'll talk to DiAngelo. Have him give you a call.

In this moment, Jablonski knows Osorio intends to do no such thing. Knows he's on his own. Maybe they all are.

JABLONSKI

Yeah. Okay. You do that.

Without another word, he exits.

INT. GREENVILLE PRECINCT - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

CAMERA TRACKS behind Jablonski as he makes his way down the hall, paranoia growing, throwing glances back to make sure Osorio's not following.

He stops at a desk manned by the Night Watch Sargeant, ANNIE YATES, 40s, uniform, a bulldog buried deep in paperwork.

Jablonski stands there for a beat, looking over his shoulder, making sure the coast is clear. Then, casually--

JABLONSKI

Hey, Annie... who's the guy workin' the hit and run in the park?

YATES

(not looking up)

The new guy, Rinaldi. He's out, left a hour ago.

JABLONSKI

When's he gonna be back?

YATES

No idea, you wanna leave a message?

JABLONSKI

What about the Chief?

That gets Yates' attention. She looks up, amused--

YATES

Chief's at home. It's almost one in the mornin', Pete.

JABLONSKI

I, ah... I gotta talk to him.

YATES

You got a report, hand it in to your supervising officer--

JABLONSKI

How 'bout I leave my number? You get it to him soon as you can... Alright?

Curious now, Yates pushes her pad across the desk. Jablonski looks down, hesitating. He could turn around, run like hell from here. But before he can, he grabs the pen, scribbles furiously, shoves the pad back.

JABLONSKI (CONT'D)

Make sure he gets it?

YATES

Yup.

Jablonski walks quickly away from the desk, head down. He plows through Cop World and slams out the precinct doors.

INT. JERSEY CITY MEDICAL CENTER - HALLWAY

KJ exits the elevator onto the ICU unit, finds FISH waiting, slumped on a bench. He falls into step with her--

FISH

Got all your personal business done?  
Pick up the milk? Went to the bank?

KJ ignores, Fish keeps talking--

FISH (CONT'D)

Good. Cuz I'm gonna need a token  
for the bus when we're done here.

They turn onto the ICU where, at the end of the unit, the Butlers, Seth and Churchgoers mill outside Brenton's room.

FISH (CONT'D)

It's like a church revival on the  
Jordan.

KJ

Be sure to share that. They'll  
appreciate the humor, especially at  
this time.

Latrice is the first to notice them approach, touches Isaiah's arm. They rise. Seth sees them, too, and his face hardens.

FISH

(searching the group)  
Mr. Butler, Mrs. Butler?

ISAIAH

I'm Isaiah Butler. This is my wife.

FISH

Detective Rinaldi, KJ Harper from  
the prosecutor's office--

LATRICE

(to KJ)

No one's spoken to us, no one's told us what happened to Brenton.

Latrice instinctively latches onto KJ, expecting compassion, answers, from another Black woman. Instead, KJ avoids looking at her, fumbles with her briefcase--

KJ

There'll be, um, ah, a bail hearing tomorrow morning before the arraignment, at the County courthouse--

SETH

(sharp)

That's not what she asked. We need to know what happened.

Forceful, demanding. Fish pointedly directs to Isaiah and Latrice instead--

FISH

Your son was in a hit and run this morning at Liberty State Park.

ISAIAH

This morning? But they didn't call us til a few hours ago.

FISH

That's when he was found, by two joggers, their dog. He was in a ditch, off the road, out of sight.

A beat as Latrice and Isaiah process this horrible thing. KJ just wants to be done with this, hurriedly--

KJ

We believe we have the man who did this to your, ah... I'll be filing the paperwork with the judge as soon as we leave here--

She suddenly drops the DOCUMENTS, they spill all over the floor. Fuck, what's wrong with her?

KJ bends down, murmuring apologies as Latrice helps retrieve the paperwork. KJ avoids her grieving eyes, over--

FISH

Nice bike your son had there, same one them shot callers, the Five Kings, favor. D'you know that particular series goes for some serious bank--?



SETH

What're you implying? That Brenton's with a gang? You're seriously gonna do this right now?

FISH

You wanna step back, whoever you are, and let me talk to the family--

SETH

I am family and I don't appreciate you comin' up in here accusing him--

ISAIAH

Seth, let me handle this.

LATRICE

We bought him the bike.  
(rising, done with the papers)  
Brenton's sixteenth birthday's coming up so--

She stops herself, won't cry here, not now. In the face of the grieving mother, Fish is more than happy to let it go--

FISH

(to KJ)

You got anything else?

KJ shakes her head, stuffs papers into her briefcase, hates how unsure she is about this arrest. Desperate to get away from Latrice's eyes.

ISAIAH

What's going to happen to the man who... did this?

KJ

I'll be charging Mr. Dorsey with leaving the scene of a motor vehicle accident resulting in serious bodily injury and I'll, ah, suggest the maximum sentence allowable for this type felony.

SETH

Which is what, exactly?

KJ

(beat)

Five years.

The Butlers stare at KJ in disbelief. Seth is about to say something, but Latrice cuts him off. Directed at KJ--

LATRICE

My son lay there, in the cold, in  
the snow, in pain, for hours.

(voice breaking; reigns  
it in)

And no one came for him, no one,  
except... a dog. Brenton may never  
walk again, he may never wake up  
again and you're telling me the man  
who did this'll get five years?

(blurting out)

He deserves to die for what he did--

ISAIAH

Latrice.

Latrice bites her tongue, knows she's overstepped. Avoids  
the eye of Pastor Phelps, at a distance, but ever watchful.  
Still, a part of her doesn't trust KJ, doesn't understand  
why this woman keeps avoiding her.

KJ wants to leave. Right now.

KJ

We'll let you get back. I'm... I'm  
sorry.

She turns and quickly moves off, Fish following.

EXT. JC MEDICAL CENTER - PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

In grim silence, KJ and Fish make their way past snow-covered  
vehicles in the enormous parking lot. They finally arrive  
at her car and KJ impatiently clicks her key remote, yanks  
at the doorknob to unlock it. Nothing.

KJ

Goddamnit--

FISH

You're locking yourself out doing  
that, just click once--

KJ

I don't need to be told how to unlock  
my damned car.

Fish shrugs, nonplussed. Watches as she makes a few more  
futile stabs, then finally opens it. Without looking at  
him, she gets in but--

FISH

We gotta go to impound for the  
paperwork on Dorsey's car. You wanna  
file this thing tonight, that is.

(MORE)

FISH (CONT'D)

(beat)

The number nine bus doesn't make  
that stop otherwise I'd go myself.

KJ

Just get in.

He does. As they drive away, unhappy partners, reveal at the edge of the parking lot, under the street lamp, a parked car.

Inside, Pete Jablonski. Watching them.

EXT. JC POLICE IMPOUND - NIGHT - MOVING TRANSITION SHOT

The industrial edge of Jersey City, butting up against spewing smokestacks and the polluted Hackensack River. The Pulaski Skyway spans its dark waters, the metallic hum of sparse late night traffic over it. Inside the concertina wire, rows of impounded vehicles.

INT. KJ'S CAR - NIGHT

From the driver's seat, an impatient KJ watches Fish chat with the IMPOUND TECH, 20s, white, in uniform. She wants to get home, get her drink on. Desperate to numb out after the hospital, that mother's haunted eyes.

Remembering something, she pops open the glove compartment, roots around. Pulls out two airplane-sized bottles of VODKA. Bingo.

She downs both in practiced, efficient swallows, secrets the empties away. As she leans back in her seat, she notices Fish waving her over. Shitty timing, this guy's a bloodhound for booze breath. Reluctantly, she exits the car--

EXT. JC POLICE IMPOUND - CONTINUOUS

KJ trudges through the slushy, dirty snow to Fish and the Impound Tech.

FISH

He needs your John Hancock.

She signs quickly, ducking her head, keeping clear of Fish's olfactory range.

IMPOUND TECH

You wanna wait inside? It's gonna take about half an hour to release the paperwork on the vehicle.

KJ  
I'll wait in my car--

FISH  
(to Impound Tech)  
Why? We just need a sign off.

IMPOUND TECH  
My supervisor's on break, sorry.

FISH  
It's two in the fuckin' mornin',  
what's he doin'?

IMPOUND TECH  
(leaving)  
It's outa my hands. You can wait  
inside if you want.

RING, RING. Fish's cell. He answers as KJ stands there--

FISH  
(into cell)  
Nah, I'm waitin' on some paperwork,  
gimme a half hour... You gotta use  
the tape on his diaper, I told you.  
He'll be droppin' shit bombs all  
over the house if you don't...

KJ gestures to the car -- I'll wait there -- and moves off,  
grateful he's distracted.

As she does, she comes face to face with Lou Dorsey's LIME  
GREEN BUICK. The one we saw DiAngelo and Osorio skulking  
around earlier. The car that supposedly hit Brenton Butler.  
It's an ancient clunker, battered, rusty. Looks like it  
hasn't been driven in a hundred years.

BLACKENED BLOOD on its grill.... KJ stares, drawn in.

She opens the driver's side door. Takes in the filthy  
insides: beer bottles, a stained blanket and pillow, dirty  
clothing strewn everywhere. A man's home. His shitty castle.

The driver's seat is inclined all the way back, almost  
completely horizontal.

FISH (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
What're you doing?

Suddenly materialized at her side, snapping KJ out of it.

KJ  
Nothing.

She hurries off, clutching her coat tight around her. Fish glances into the Buick, curious what she was looking at.

INT. JC MEDICAL CENTER - HALLWAY - NIGHT

No more Churchgoers at this hour. Latrice and Isaiah sit side by side, miles apart. The adrenaline of tragedy drained away, leaving in its wake exhaustion, a state of disbelief.

Seth joins, takes a seat. Reluctant messenger--

SETH

That pastor of yours found a chapel downstairs. Wants you to head down for some holy rollin' with Jesus--

ISAIAH

(sharp)

Seth. Enough.

Seth ducks his head, shoots a look to Latrice. She holds it, sympathetic. Isaiah frowns, doesn't care for this exchange. And there's a question weighing heavily on him from earlier, troubling--

ISAIAH (CONT'D)

Why did you tell him we got Brenton that bike?

LATRICE

(blurting out; angry)

Did you see his face? He already made up his mind about what kinda boy Brenton is, a gang member, a king or whatever they call themselves. Because of what? Because he was riding a bike?

Isaiah gawks back at her, stunned by this outburst. So unlike Latrice. Still, he needs answers.

ISAIAH

Where did he get it?

Latrice looks back at him, silent, defiant. Isaiah sighs, rubs his face. Tired of how evasive she is about their son.

ISAIAH (CONT'D)

I won't abide you hiding things for him, not anymore. Not after this--

LATRICE

So this is my fault?

ISAIAH

I know he's been going back to the projects, sneaking around when I expressly forbade him--

LATRICE

He misses his friends. He misses his home--

ISAIAH

That's not his home. Or ours. Not anymore.

A current of shame under his words. A past he'd rather shut the door on.

LATRICE

I don't know where he got that bike.

Fear in her face, the same as Isaiah's. As worried as he is about what this bike business might mean. A tense beat, then Isaiah rises, heads off to the elevators alone.

SETH

You should go with him.

LATRICE

He's gonna suffocate Brenton with all his worries.  
(beat)  
Like he did you.

From Seth's surprise, it's clear Latrice's never spoken this thought aloud. But now she's said enough and knows it.

She rises, goes to join Isaiah at the elevators. Seth remains seated, staring down at his hands. Guilt in his face.

REVEAL, peeking out from under his sleeve, a faded TATTOO OF A CROWN. Beneath that the number "5". The Five Kings.

EXT. GREENVILLE - NIGHT - MOVING TRANSITION SHOT

The poorest part of town, its falling down buildings littered with graffiti, its snowbanks already black with soot, studded with garbage. The only soul in sight at this hour is an OLD BLACK WOMAN at a bus stop, headed in to work. A lonely silhouette underneath the only working streetlamp.

INT. KJ'S CAR - NIGHT

Heat on, engine running, KJ rests in the driver's seat, eyes closed, at ease now thanks to the vodka. Oblivious, Fish sorts through the report folder in the seat next to her.

They're still at impound, waiting on the paperwork. Been here for awhile now, their car windows fogged up.

FISH

Whoever took these crime scene photos is a bonafide artist. Jersey City's own Jackson Polack.

KJ

Pollock. Not Polack.

FISH

Kid musta been conscious for awhile. Shitload o' drag marks down in this ditch.

(holds out photo we don't see)

Lookin' for a way out, probably screamin' for his mama.

KJ flinches but doesn't open her eyes.

FISH (CONT'D)

What? You get the heebies from crime scene photos?

KJ

I don't need to look at them.

FISH

Isn't that, like, your job?

KJ

Nope. My job is to file the paperwork.

FISH

So why work for the D.A.? You could "file the paperwork" at some Wall Street fuckface firm on the water--

KJ

I'm tired of their eyes...

The alcohol loosening her up, making her more voluble than usual. Expressionless, her eyes still shut--

KJ (CONT'D)

Looking at you. Emptied of whatever else was there once but still... wanting answers.

Fish regards her. Senses how deep this goes. A valley of darkness she's been lost in for a long time now.

FISH  
You worked Homicide before?

KJ doesn't answer. Not one to let up--

FISH (CONT'D)  
Why'd you get bumped down to car crimes?

KJ  
(bitter laugh)  
'Car crimes', right. Five years for paralyzing a kid, guaranteed he won't do most of that time. Greatest show on earth, this shit.

Beat.

KJ (CONT'D)  
You see the driver's seat in Dorsey's car?

(off his nod)  
The narcs said they chased him down the turnpike, that's how they caught him.

FISH  
So what?

In answer, KJ inclines her own seat back all the way until she's almost horizontal. Mimicking Dorsey's seat.

KJ  
How do you drive lying down?

Her question hangs in the air, dares to be answered. She's crossed a line, questioning a cop. And it frightens them. At heart, they're the same animal: here for the paycheck, not to be heroes. No need to venture into closed rooms that should remain bolted shut.

FISH  
You wanna make out, KJ, just say the word.

Breaking the spell. KJ rights her seat, looks out her window. Rattled by how much she went out on the limb. Better to shut up and leave this thing alone.

FISH (CONT'D)  
Here comes asshat. Finally.

Approaching is the Impound Tech, waving paperwork. In awkward silence, they wait for him, avoid looking at each other. Fish cracks open his door, takes the papers--



IMPOUND TECH

You have a good night--

FISH

Yeah whatever.

He slams his door shut, deposits the paperwork on the dashboard. Dumps the report folder alongside it. Heaves himself out of the car, eager to escape.

FISH (CONT'D)

I'll Uber back home from here but yo, it was nice workin' with you.

KJ

Yeah. You, too.

Still, he hangs back. Something still eating at him.

FISH

You know, the dead don't want answers. They're just dead.

(beat)

You got a solid enough case here. File the paperwork. Take the win.

She nods, knows he's got a point. More importantly, wants to be done talking already.

FISH (CONT'D)

Anyways. Good luck in court tomorrow.

(beat)

Don't forget the mints.

She gawks at him. Motherfucker. Whatever nominal fellowship existed between them a few moments ago just froze over.

She leans over, grabs the door handle. Slams the passenger door shut in Fish's face.

Fish shrugs, ambles away as KJ, seething, watches him go. Then she quickly gathers the impound paperwork, the manila folder, eager to get out of here.

She unzips her briefcase, shuffles through it. Whatever she's looking for isn't there.

She pulls a mess of papers from her briefcase, quickly rifles through. No luck, it's not here. What the hell to do now?

INT. JC MEDICAL CENTER - HALLWAY - NIGHT

The ICU is dark, still. The only sound the beeping machinery in the quiet pre-dawn. Briefcase in hand, KJ hurries towards Brenton's hospital room.

No one around but a lone night shift Nurse at her station.

KJ quickly scans the floor, the empty chairs outside Brenton's room for her papers. Nothing.

Glances into the dark room. Hesitant to enter. No choice.

INT. BRENTON'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The sound of BREATHING, courtesy of a ventilator, fills the room. An echoing, mechanical presence, life suspended by a machine. As KJ enters, she keeps her eyes trained on the room's edges, averted from the bed.

She spots a thin STACK OF PAPERS on the windowsill, quickly rifles through. Bingo. Visibly relieved, eager to escape, she stuffs them hurriedly into her briefcase.

Glances up into the window. Accidentally catches there--

BRENTON BUTLER'S REFLECTION. Blurry, out of focus... but clear enough to see endless TUBES running into his child-like body. Clear enough to see his bruised, battered face.

KJ could look away, should look away. Flee quickly from this room and its sorrows. But she's frozen, transfixed by his reflection. Slowly, slowly, she turns around...

CAMERA STAYS ON KJ as she looks -- unblinking, unflinching -- for long moments. As she sees, close up, the profound damage a 2-ton machine does to a young boy's body.

HIS BREATHING, the inhale and exhale of the machine that keeps him alive, fills the room, fills her head. There is no other sound but this.

Unable to tear her eyes away, pained with the knowledge of how he waited, for hours, lying in the dark. Did he wonder why no one came for him? Or did he already know what every Black child learns -- what KJ herself learned as a girl -- that their lives don't matter in this world. So many lost on these streets, unaccounted for, unspoken for. KJ too lives in a post-Ferguson world. Lived in it long before.

So she stands for quiet moments, bearing witness, a Black woman looking down at a Black child. Knowing, in the core of her being, that if she goes along to get along, like she always has, she will be lost. If she walks away from this boy, there will be no going back. This is her chance to be the person she imagined she would be. Maybe once was.

NURSE (O.S.)

Excuse me?

The shadowy figure of a concerned Nurse in the doorway.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Are you family?

A beat, then, almost imperceptibly, KJ shakes her head. No, she is not family.

KJ

I'm his attorney.

Not a declaration of war but a simple statement of fact. She is the one entrusted to speak for Brenton Butler. There is no one else but her. But will she? Can she?

Hanging in the balance, KJ stares down at him. Not sure she's got what it takes anymore. To really look.

EXT. JABLONSKI HOUSE - NIGHT

Jablonski pulls up in his car, exhausted from driving around for hours. Finally come home, nowhere else to go. The street outside his house is still, quiet. The dark before dawn.

With effort, he exits his car, heads for the house. Suddenly, from down the street, HEADLIGHTS FLASH AT HIM.

Jablonski stops, peers down the dark street. The lights flash again and he shields his eyes, realizing--

INT. DIANGELO'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

DiAngelo sits in the driver's seat as Jablonski climbs in. For a beat, neither man speaks. Then, quietly--

JABLONSKI

I'm gonna turn myself in. No one's gonna know you were there. I'll tell 'em it was just me.

DiAngelo nods. Without rancor, gently even--

DIANGELO

Just to be clear, this is what's gonna happen. Your son, your little boy? He's never gonna know you. You're gettin' life for this.

(beat)

So before you do anythin', think about the kind of father you'll be. Behind bars, outa his life forever... Just like your old man.

Jablonski flinches, the one thing that could turn the tide and DiAngelo knows it. Still, quietly--

JABLONSKI

It was a accident.

A beat, then DiAngelo takes something out from his pocket, holds it out, almost apologetically. The NOTE Jablonski left for the Chief earlier. In shock, Jablonski stares down at his own handwriting.

DIANGELO

This thing goes higher than you, me. We weren't supposed to be in the park last night. You understand? This accident, it almost fucked things up.

(beat)

You gotta put it outa your mind. There's no other way, man. Can you do that?

Almost imperceptibly Jablonski nods. There is no other way. If he didn't know it before, he damn well does now. DiAngelo crumples the note, drops it on the dash.

DIANGELO (CONT'D)

Hold up, almost forgot...

From the backseat, DiAngelo hands him a GIFT BAG, a BLUE TEDDY BEAR peeks out.

DIANGELO (CONT'D)

Make sure your wife gets it or Krista'll have my fuckin' head.

DiAngelo chuckles as Jablonski numbly stares down at the teddy bear for a beat. Then Jablonski takes the crumpled note, stuffs it into his pocket. Wordlessly exits the car--

POV FROM JABLONSKI'S HOUSE

Jablonski, head down, gift bag in hand, trudges up the walk--

REVEAL Marie, in the dark front room, watching. Worry in her face. How long has she been standing in the dark?

INT. JC MEDICAL CENTER - HALLWAY - DAWN

TRACK BEHIND Isaiah as he makes his way to Brenton's room, two cups of coffee in hand. He stops in the doorway--

ISIAH'S POV:

Early morning light fills the room. Latrice sits in a chair close to the bed, sponges Brenton's arms, bare shoulders. Focused on her work, humming a song under her breath.

BACK TO SCENE

For a moment, Isaiah watches his little family. It takes his breath away. Breaks his heart. He can't look for long.

So he moves back down the hall, takes a seat alone. Willing himself to be still. Waiting for the storm inside to pass.

INT. BRENTON'S ROOM - INTERCUT

As Latrice sponges Brenton's arm, she moves down to his hand, which lies under the covers. She pulls back the sheet. There, nestled underneath his hand--

THE CARDBOARD SEAGULL FROM HIS BIKE. Torn, battered, but still a lovely thing.

She stares down at it, confused. Then she carefully lifts Brenton's hand, picks up the cardboard seagull.

Looks at it, uncomprehending. How did it get here?

Latrice glances up towards the door, remembering the girl from last night... did she leave it here? If not her, who?

OFF the cardboard seagull and its secrets--

INT. COURTHOUSE - DEPARTMENT 432 - MORNING

Morning bustle of LAWYERS, DEFENDANTS as DiAngelo enters. He takes a seat behind the Prosecutor's table over--

CLERK

... Complaint number three nine oh twelve, the State versus Lou Henry Dorsey.

From the prisoner's bullpen, the drunk driver, Lou Dorsey, shuffles into court, escorted by two SHERIFF'S DEPUTIES. Joins his dime-a-dozen PUBLIC DEFENDER at the table.

At the Prosecutor's table, a young NEWBIE Assistant Prosecutor sorts papers. DiAngelo cranes around, scans the court room. Where's KJ? JUDGE BLATT, ornery, glares--

JUDGE BLATT

Is the State gonna talk?

NEWBIE

Judge, it's not my complaint number.

JUDGE BLATT

Then where the hell's my prosecutor?

Everyone looks around, nervous, scandalized. No KJ in sight. DiAngelo sits there, stunned. His perfect plan is falling apart. Where the fuck is KJ?

EXT. LIBERTY STATE PARK - MORNING

CLOSE ON KJ as she exits her car, shivering in the cold morning light. Her eyes are bloodshot from her all nighter as she takes in the field, the ditch.

The park is empty, quiet. Remnants of POLICE TAPE blow in the wind. Above, SEA GULLS circle, caw. The only witnesses as KJ plods through the field.

At the edge of the ditch, she hesitates. A woman unable to look, almost pathologically so. Incapable of confronting the truth, avoids looking at every turn. But now, remarkably, she descends into the ditch. CAMERA STAYS CLOSE ON KJ as her breath quickens, her eyes widen in horror, in pity. What she sees in the ditch is terrible. What she sees here changes her profoundly. Maybe irrevocably.

There is a reason she doesn't look at crime scenes. AS CAMERA SLOWLY PULLS BACK, we see why--

KJ stands in the middle of a pool of blood. The bottom of the ditch, every inch of this frozen patch of earth, soaked in it. Bright red on white snow. Stretching into infinity. A testament to a life that leaked away for hours, for a day, for a night. No denying this truth. That no one came.

For the first time, a flicker of a question in KJ's eyes. A need for an answer. She has no idea of the trials that await her, of all she will lose along the way. How, in the days and weeks and months to come, this piece of earth and sky will reverberate throughout the rest of this city -- and beyond. Upending perhaps the very bedrock that this idea of country, this notion of democracy, is built upon.

As CAMERA CONTINUES TO PULL BACK, reveal beyond the ditch, beyond this terrible tableau, the magnificent Manhattan skyline, the Statue of Liberty with her back turned to this America. The world is vast. KJ just a bit player on its stage.

But she cannot let a young boy be forsaken. Or forgotten. This life must matter. This time.

So she looks.

END EPISODE