

TWISTED AVENUE

By

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FADE IN:

A MAGAZINE PHOTO of a perfectly ordinary suburban street. The image faded and weathered.

The page flips to more PHOTOGRAPHS OF BEAUTIFUL HOMES. The magazine is old and worn, but the houses still look idyllic and peaceful. A YOUNG GIRL'S HAND traces over them.

JENN

Did your house have windows?

HENRY

Of course, Jenn. Lots of them.

As we pull away, we see JENN (9) sitting at an old wooden table, the magazine in front of her, a child's curiosity in her longing gaze. She wears shabby, old clothes. Her dad, HENRY (late 40s), tired, unshaven, packs a RUCKSACK with various canned goods in the small kitchen behind her.

JENN

Were you friends with your neighbors?

HENRY

We were friendly with them, I suppose. But to be honest sweetie, we really didn't know them all that well.

JENN

Why not?

HENRY

We were busy. They were busy. Everyone had their own lives. Their own problems. It's just the way it was back then. Easier to just keep to yourselves.

Jenn flips to another page in the magazine, revealing a FAMILY OF FOUR playing outside of a house. She gazes at their image.

JENN

Dad... Did the monsters kill your neighbors?

HENRY

They killed everyone. And everything. They destroyed our home. Our neighbors' homes. Just not us.

JENN

Because we're the strong ones. The survivors.

Henry smiles. His daughter can always brighten his day.

HENRY

And you're the strongest of all.

He tousles her hair. As he walks away from her, we reveal that we are inside of a --

BUNKER

SHELVES lined with CANNED FOOD and JUGS OF WATER. BUNK BEDS. CINDER BLOCK WALLS PAPERED WITH REMINDERS OF A LONG DEAD WORLD.

Henry grabs a worn jacket off a hook. Pulls on a pair of thick gloves. Fastens a UTILITY BELT around him.

HENRY

There's another store I have to search. Might have some food and water left. I'll probably be gone a day or two, but mom and Isaac should be home soon.

JENN

Dad?

(off his look)

When all the monsters are dead, can we live in a house? With windows. And neighbors. Like you used to?

HENRY

I hope so, sweetie.

He puts on a RESPIRATOR. Uses a KEY to unlock the IRON DOOR. Steps through with a wave. Jenn waves back.

JENN

Be careful, dad.

The iron door CLANKS SHUT. The bolt turns, locking it closed.

Leaving Jenn in the small, silent space. Alone.

INT. BUNKER -- LIGHTS ON -- LATER

Jenn sits on her bed, reading a worn MATH TEXTBOOK. She tosses it aside, bored.

Then goes to a wooden BOOKCASE, filled with ADVENTURE BOOKS. Her hands trace over the creased spines of Robinson Crusoe, Swiss Family Robinson, the Count of Monte Cristo, etc.

She pulls out an old SKETCH PAD. Opens it to reveal DRAWINGS OF MONSTERS. Childish but still intimidating to her young eyes. She TEARS OUT A PAGE and hangs it on the edge of the bookshelf.

Then reaches under her bed and pulls out a WOODEN SWORD.

She stares down the monster drawing. And WHACKS IT with her sword. She steps back, before LUNGING AND CRACKING IT AGAIN. And again. And again. She takes her practice so seriously, unaware of how adorable she looks.

The IRON DOOR'S LOCK TURNS. Jenn quickly hides the sword and pulls down the drawing as the door opens --

TWO FIGURES enter, dressed similarly as Jenn's father, PACKS OF SCAVENGED GOODS strapped to their backs. They lock the door and remove their respirators, revealing MARIE (mid 40s) and ISAAC (15). Grime on their faces. Dirty hands.

JENN

You made it!

Jenn runs over to them, hugging her mom tightly.

MARIE

Of course we did. It was a good run.
Look what your brother found.

ISAAC

Consider it an early birthday
present.

He tosses her a DIRTY STUFFED ANIMAL. She eyes it, unimpressed.

JENN

Thanks.

INT. BUNKER -- LIGHTS ON -- LATER

A dented up old pot sits on a BURNER.

Jenn, Marie, and Isaac sit around the small table, bowls of stew in front of them, holding hands.

MARIE

Let us be thankful for all that we
have, and that we get to be together
in spite of everything that's
happened.

ISAAC / JENN
Amen. / Amen...

Isaac and Marie dig into their dinners, but Jenn hesitates.

JENN
Mom... You said when I was older,
I'd get to go outside.

Marie and Isaac stop eating. Exchange a glance.

JENN
I'm gonna be ten tomorrow.

MARIE
Honey... We know you're brave...

JENN
I can help you, mom. I want to help
you. I... I can fight the monsters.

Isaac scoffs.

JENN
What? I know what they look like --

ISAAC
But do you know how fast they run?

The question hangs.

ISAAC
Or how they'll sneak up behind you
and you won't even know it until you
can smell the blood and rot on their
teeth. They're ferocious, Jenn.

MARIE
Isaac --

ISAAC
There's no way that you could outrun
one. And there's nothing that mom or
dad or I could do to save you.
They'd eat you while you were still
alive, kicking and screaming and
crying --

MARIE
Isaac, that's enough!

Jenn glares at her brother.

JENN
I'm not afraid.

INT. BUNKER -- LIGHTS OFF -- LATER

The lights have been DIMMED DOWN. Marie and Isaac sleep in their bunks.

But JENN LIES AWAKE. Paging through her notebook, small flashlight illuminating the MONSTER DRAWINGS.

She turns to the GEAR HANGING in the corner.

Then carefully gets out of bed, eying Marie and Isaac to make sure they're asleep. She tiptoes across the bunker. Lifts one of the utility belts off the wall --

Revealing a DOOR KEY hanging from it. She quietly works to unhook it. THE KEY SUDDENLY POPS FREE and CLANGS TO THE FLOOR.

Jenn gasps. Isaac stirs, but doesn't wake.

Jenn picks up the key, eyeing it.

INT. BUNKER -- LIGHTS ON -- LATER

Isaac and Marie gear up to go out on another search. Jenn sits at the table, eating canned peaches, watching them leave.

MARIE

We'll go over your school work tonight, sweetie.

JENN

Okay, mom.

Marie walks over and leans in close to Jenn, fixing a strand of her hair.

MARIE

Daddy will be home soon. How about we do something special tonight for your birthday. Maybe we can play a game together, as a family. Does that sound fun?

Jenn nods, forcing a smile.

ISAAC

Mom, we need to go.

Isaac stands impatiently by the door.

MARIE

We all love you, Jenn. More than you know.

She kisses Jenn's forehead. Then grabs her utility belt. But she doesn't notice that the key is missing. Jenn averts her gaze as Isaac unlocks and opens the door with his key. They step outside. The door clanks shut and locks.

Jenn pulls the KEY out of her pocket and sets it on the table, staring at it.

INT. BUNKER -- LIGHTS ON -- LATER

A monster drawing hangs on the bookshelf. Jenn HITS IT OVER AND OVER WITH HER WOODEN SWORD, letting all of her aggression out. She stops, catching her breath. Sets down her sword.

She goes to the gear hanging by the door. Rummages around, before pulling out a large KNIFE. Unsheathes it, inspecting the sharp blade. Turns back to the monster drawing... And STABS THE KNIFE CLEAN THROUGH.

Then she turns to the iron door.

SERIES OF SHOTS

- Jenn pulls on protective clothes, all a bit too big for her. Worn coat. Gloves.

- Fastens a utility belt around her waist.

- Grabs a RESPIRATOR MASK off the wall and puts it on, cinching up the straps.

She approaches the iron door, knife in one hand, key in the other. She slides the key in. Turns the metal bolt. Steeling herself, she pulls with all her strength.

The iron door SWINGS OPEN WITH A CREAK. She looks up --

INT. STAIRWELL -- CONTINUOUS

A steep, old WOODEN STAIRCASE, shrouded in DARKNESS. DAYLIGHT shines around the edges of the DOOR at the top.

Jenn slowly proceeds up the stairs, step by anxious step, clutching her knife tightly, breathing deeply through her respirator. Until she reaches the door.

She tries the knob. It's unlocked. She turns and pushes. The door opens, BLINDING LIGHT dissipating to reveal --

INT. HOUSE -- DAY

SUNLIGHT streams in. Jenn has to guard her squinting eyes as she sees --

PRISTINE HARDWOOD FLOOR beneath her feet. WHITE WALLS. FANCY FURNITURE, just like in the magazine. Jenn looks around, not comprehending.

She has emerged into a MODERN SUBURBAN HOME. Her clothes and appearance standing out drastically from the surroundings.

Through a doorway, she sees the --

LAUNDRY ROOM

The DIRTY, HAND ME DOWN CLOTHES HER FAMILY WEARS hang nicely on wooden hangers.

But everything else is perfectly clean, except for a BIN FULL OF DIRT AND ROCKS. On one side of it is a STACK OF PRISTINE NONPERISHABLE FOODS. On the other side are DIRTIED NONPERISHABLES, just like all those in the bunker.

KITCHEN

Marble countertops. Stainless steel appliances.

Jenn opens the REFRIGERATOR. It is filled with food in colorful packaging. Fresh vegetables. Beverages.

Jenn stares, the horror beginning to sink in.

LIVING ROOM

Jenn steps in. She traces her hand over the nice LEATHER COUCH. Stares at the EXPENSIVE ENTERTAINMENT CENTER, full of devices that she doesn't recognize. Then she sees --

THE FRAMED PHOTOS. Her FATHER, MOTHER AND BROTHER POSING TOGETHER in nice, clean, modern clothes. BUT THERE ARE NO PHOTOS OF JENN. Nothing to suggest that she even exists.

Tears begin to well up in her eyes.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE -- DAY

Jenn walks outside, squinting in the sun.

She looks around the SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD. MODERN HOUSES. MANICURED LAWNS.

And the NEIGHBORS. Watering their grass, washing their cars. We'll meet them all later.

One by one, each of the neighbors stops and stares at her, confused by her otherworldly outfit.

Jenn sheathes her knife and pulls off the respirator. Breathes the perfectly clean air.

A CAR drives down the street. Jenn watches, having never seen such a sight. It pulls into the driveway, slowing to a stop.

Her FAMILY CLIMBS OUT, dressed in modern clothes, carrying GROCERY BAGS.

MARIE

Well you'll have to tell him you can't go.

ISAAC

Mom, he knows that I don't have plans. That's why he asked me.

HENRY

You can't be gone an entire week.

Suddenly Isaac sees Jenn.

ISAAC

Oh my God...

MARIE

Jenn...

Jenn stares her family down. For a moment, no one moves.

Then Henry RUNS FOR JENN. He PICKS HER UP and carries her towards the door as she STRUGGLES AND SCREAMS.

JENN

No! No! Let go of me!

Neighbors watch from across the street, alarmed.

INT. SUBURBAN HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Henry carries Jenn as she continues to fight him.

JENN

You lied to me! You lied to me!

HENRY

Did the neighbors see her?!

ISAAC

I don't know!

MARIE

Get her downstairs!

Jenn struggles as they carry her towards the basement.

JENN

No! Don't lock me up, mom! I don't
want to go back in there!

They force her through the doorway into the --

STAIRWELL

And back down the stairs, their footsteps echoing.

JENN

Let me go! Let go of me!

MARIE

It's gonna be okay, honey. It's
gonna be okay.

Marie opens the iron door as Henry pushes Jenn in --

BUNKER

Jenn falls to the floor. She looks up at her family with
hate filled eyes.

JENN

There's no such thing as monsters!!

Her family stares down at the little girl. Marie struggles
to hold back tears.

MARIE

Yes there are, sweetie.

She pulls the key out of the lock and SLAMS THE DOOR SHUT.

JENN

NO!!

She lets out an AGONIZING SCREAM. Gets to her feet and SLAMS
HER FISTS AGAINST THE DOOR, POUNDING AS HARD AS SHE CAN.

JENN

YOU CAN'T KEEP ME DOWN HERE! LET ME
OUT! LET ME OUT! LET ME OUT!

She rips food off shelves. Pushes over the table. Throws her
books on the floor. Her eyes dart around, the walls seem to
be closing in, the room becoming smaller. She lets out
another HORRIFIC SCREAM.

Then crumples to the floor, crying, destroyed.

JENN

There's no such thing as monsters...

She continues to sob, all alone in the claustrophobic room.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE -- DAY

The house stands tall, looking perfectly normal on this bright sunny day. Jenn's cries from within slowly fade away, until we can't hear them anymore.

It's just another ordinary house on another ordinary street.

SMASH TO BLACK.

TITLE OVER: "TWISTED AVENUE"

FADE IN:

EXT. TWISTED AVENUE -- MORNING

OPENING CREDITS play as we move down the seemingly ordinary suburban street. Quaint houses. Well maintained lawns. Middle class cars. We could be in a neighborhood on the opposite side of the country... Or simply on the next block over.

We move towards one of the houses...

INT. BEDROOM, KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- MORNING

A COLLAGE OF FASHION MODELS FROM MAGAZINES covers the walls. FRAMED PHOTOGRAPHS adorn the dresser, showing a girl winning beauty pageants, from childhood to adolescence.

That girl is KAYLIE RICHARDS (17), thin, beautiful, innocent. Finishing her morning yoga routine.

She self consciously looks over her figure in the mirror. She's stunning to us, but she doesn't seem to see it that way. Her eyes trace over a nearby calendar. "X"s mark off the passing days. "STATE BEAUTY PAGEANT" on an upcoming weekend.

TAMARA (O.S.)
Kaylie, sweetie. Breakfast!

KAYLIE
Coming.

She takes one more look in the mirror. And with a deep breath, she puts on a glowing smile, forcing it.

EXT. TWISTED AVENUE -- MORNING

Another house... Every shade drawn. Weeds in the flower beds. A melancholy about it.

INT. BEDROOM, HELEN'S HOUSE -- MORNING

HELEN (40s), a frail woman who looks older than she is, walks around the quiet room that looks like it belongs to a teenage girl. She wears frumpy sweats and looks like she hasn't slept in days. Her hand lightly traces over the clothes. The keepsakes.

She eyes the various PHOTOGRAPHS OF JOHANNA (17). Smiling with friends. An attractive girl with a rebellious spirit. Wearing a BLUE HEART SHAPED PENDANT in every shot.

Helen sits on the bed, suppressing a sob. After a long moment, she takes out her CELL PHONE. Dials a number. Waits anxiously as it rings.

RECEPTIONIST (FROM PHONE)
Police department.

HELEN (INTO PHONE)
Hello, this is Helen James. I'm
calling to see if you have any new
information about my daughter.

EXT. TWISTED AVENUE -- MORNING

Another house... The garage door wide open.

INT. GARAGE, IAN'S HOUSE -- MORNING

Lines of computer code scroll by on a monitor. Tweezers and a finely tipped soldering gun link nodes on a circuit board. Fingers delicately affix small, fiber optic leads into plugs on the device.

The eyes of the creator look down at his invention through the magnifying glass light. DR. IAN PRESTON (40s), a chronic workaholic, surrounded by electronics, laptops, monitors and keyboards.

The door opens and his wife, MELONY (early 40s), pokes her head in.

MELONY
Ian?

He either doesn't hear her, or he's not paying attention.

MELONY
Ian!

IAN
(not looking up)
Yeah?

MELONY

Did you sleep at all last night?

IAN

Not yet.

MELONY

Well, do you want breakfast?

IAN

In a few minutes.

He still doesn't look up. Frustrated, she closes the door. Ian continues to work, as if the exchange never happened.

EXT. TWISTED AVENUE -- MORNING

Another house... The nicest one yet. With colorful, blooming flowers and a neatly trimmed lawn.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- MORNING

NATALYA BAKER (late 20s), a beautiful, Russian blonde, lies on the bed. Her husband, FRANK (40s), on top of her, grunting in pleasure with every thrust. Going harder and harder.

Natalya lets out the occasional moan. But her thoughts are elsewhere. She's waiting for it to end.

INT. KITCHEN, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- MORNING

Dirty dishes from breakfast sit on the counter. Natalya scrubs them each by hand, piling them into the drying rack. She may be wearing yoga pants for around the house, but she still looks gorgeous with perfect makeup and hair.

FRANK (O.S.)

Let's go, Hugh. I don't want to be late again.

HUGH (O.S.)

I'm coming, dad.

NATALYA

(Russian accent)

Wait, I'll be right there.

She sets down the dish and eagerly hurries towards the front of the house.

INT. ENTRYWAY, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

She gets there just in time to see the front door close.

Pushing back the curtain on the window, she waves after Frank and HUGH (10). But neither of them look back. She watches as they get in the car and drive away. Her hand slowly falls.

EXT. TWISTED AVENUE -- MORNING

Another house... The biggest on the block.

INT. DINING ROOM, GLENN'S HOUSE -- MORNING

GLENN CHASE (40s), a handsome doctor type, sits on the opposite end of the table of his wife, EMILY (40s).

EMILY

So then she starts talking about how her other foot is hurting too. And I said, you should go to the doctor before I get there. But apparently she wants me to go with her, so now we're gonna spend half my visit in the doctor's office...

She continues to speak in an animated fashion. Glenn nods along as her VOICE DROWNS OUT. He's not listening to a word she says.

INT. FRONT ROOM, GLENN'S HOUSE -- MORNING

Glenn hugs and kisses Emily goodbye.

GLENN

It's only for one night.

EMILY

I'll still miss you anyway.

GLENN

I'll miss you too.

She looks into his eyes.

EMILY

Are you okay?

GLENN

Of course. Never better. Just didn't sleep very well.

He smiles reassuringly. She gives him one more kiss. Then grabs her BAG and heads out to the waiting TOWN CAR. Glenn continues to smile as he waves goodbye to her.

But the moment the car drives off, his expression hardens.

EXT. TWISTED AVENUE -- MORNING

The last house on the block... More working class, a step below the rest in scale. A TRUCK in the driveway labeled, "DANIELS HEATING & AIR CONDITIONING."

INT. BEDROOM, CLAIRE'S HOUSE -- MORNING

CLAIRE DANIELS (17) is the kind of girl who blends into a crowd. She sits at her desk, studying from a thick, worn TEST PREPARATION BOOK. Sips an energy drink, pushing herself to keep going.

We get the sense that she's been studying all night.

INT. BEDROOM, CLAIRE'S HOUSE -- LATER

Claire's hands tremble as she brushes her hair. Buttons her dress shirt.

She stands in front of her mirror, now dressed in a SCHOOL UNIFORM - black skirt and white shirt. She stares at her reflection, apprehension in her eyes. This is a big day.

CLAIRE

Finds the answers, Claire... Find
the answers...

CUT TO BLACK.

HELEN (PRE-LAP)

There's something wrong with this
place...

INT. KITCHEN, HELEN'S HOUSE -- DAY

Helen sips coffee with MIRANDA (40s), a kind hearted woman who knows how to listen.

HELEN

We all go about our business.
Smiling and nodding when we see each
other. And when something bad
happens to one of us, we say,
"That's sad," and sit still for a
moment. And then that's it. We just
move on and go back to our lives, as
if nothing ever happened.

She takes a shaky sip of coffee.

HELEN

The day after Johanna disappeared,
all of the other neighbors called.
(MORE)

HELEN (CONT'D)

But ever since, no one's said a thing. It's like they'd rather pretend it never happened. Not one call, not one visit...

MIRANDA

They're probably trying to forget what happened. It's cowardly, really, if you ask me.

HELEN

I can't believe it's been three months... I keep waiting for her to walk right in the front door. To say that she was just running a little late. That everything is okay.

MIRANDA

Have the police found anything new?

Helen shakes her head 'no.'

HELEN

They said that whoever took her must have done it before. That he knew what he was doing because he covered his tracks so well.

(chokes up)

I told her not to go out that night. I said why not just stay in for once. Or go next door to your house to hang out with Leslie. You know, watch a movie or something. But she didn't listen. She never listened.

MIRANDA

You can't keep beating yourself up over this. Whatever happened, it's not your fault. Or Johanna's.

HELEN

My mother tells me I should move. Says I need a change. She even forced me to look at some houses in other neighborhoods.

MIRANDA

A little change might help.

HELEN

No. No matter where I went, it all looked exactly the same. The same kind of houses.

(MORE)

HELEN (CONT'D)

The same kind of people. The same kind of smiles. It's like I can't escape it.

(beat)

Besides if I were to move, I'd be giving up. Johanna needs this house to come home to.

She finishes her coffee and sets it down.

HELEN

You know what I think about when I try to fall asleep? I think about having dinner with my daughter. Just one last family dinner together. Like we used to.

A long moment.

MIRANDA

Well there's no reason for you to keep eating alone. Why don't you come over to our house tonight.

HELEN

Oh no, I can't.

MIRANDA

I've been dying to cook something special and just need an excuse. You'll be giving me one.

HELEN

I should stay here. Just in case she --

MIRANDA

Helen, please.

She takes her hand.

MIRANDA

You need this.

Helen hesitates and forces a nod.

INT. BATHROOM, HELEN'S HOUSE -- DAY

Helen showers, the water cleansing, refreshing.

SERIES OF SHOTS: Helen changes into a dress. Does her hair. Puts on makeup for what must be the first time in months.

She looks over herself in the mirror, trying to build up her courage. With a deep breath, she grabs her purse.

INT. GROCERY STORE -- DAY

Helen nervously walks down the aisle, basket in hand, feeling out of place amongst society's normalcy. She rounds a corner and stops in her tracks.

HUNDREDS OF WINE BOTTLES line the shelves. Helen looks like a deer in headlights. She reaches for one but hesitates, unsure of herself.

MARIE (O.S.)

Helen?

Helen turns to see Marie, Jenn's mom, holding a bottle of wine.

MARIE

I haven't seen you in ages. How are you?

HELEN

Well, I... I'm getting better.

MARIE

Any word on...

Helen shakes her head 'no.'

MARIE

I've been meaning to call. I hate making excuses but it's just been so hectic around our house. Henry's been working nights and I've been putting in overtime and Isaac has been swamped with school. He's supposed to get his drivers license this year. They just grow up so fast.

The last line sticks. Marie realizes it.

MARIE

Oh Helen... I'm so sorry.

HELEN

It's okay.

MARIE

Listen... Don't give up. She's still out there somewhere. And I'll bet she's missing you as much as you're missing her.

HELEN

Thank you.

HENRY (O.S.)

Marie.

They turn to see Henry and Isaac pushing a shopping cart FULL OF NONPERISHABLE GOODS at the far end of the aisle. Henry motions to his watch.

MARIE

I have to go. It was nice seeing you.

HELEN

You too.

Helen watches as Marie, Henry and Isaac walk off.

EXT. PARKING LOT, GROCERY STORE / INT. HELEN'S CAR -- DAY

Helen climbs into her car and shuts the door. Takes a moment. Then notices Kaylie and her mother, TAMARA (late 30s), loading groceries into their car. A mother and teenage daughter, together.

And now the tears come. Helen sits there, sobbing in her car, completely alone.

The SOUND of LAUGHTER and CLINKING SILVERWARE carries us into --

INT. MIRANDA'S HOUSE -- EVENING

A pot roast sits in the center of the table. Helen quietly sips wine as Miranda eats and converses with her husband, CARL (50s), and their daughter, LESLIE (17). Helen absentmindedly smiles along.

CARL

So I saw something strange earlier today. The little Thompson girl was outside in some kind of Halloween costume.

MIRANDA

A Halloween costume?

CARL

Yeah. Almost like she stepped out of some nuclear fallout shelter. Never seen anything like it.

LESLIE

The Thompsons don't have a daughter, they have a son.

MIRANDA

She's right, dear. What's his name... Ivan?

HELEN

Isaac.

They all turn to her, surprised she's spoken up.

HELEN

Their son's name is Isaac. They don't have a daughter, I just saw them at the grocery store.

CARL

Well, they sure acted like she was theirs. Carried her back in the house, kicking and screaming the whole way.

LESLIE

Maybe she was just their niece or something.

HELEN

Did you call someone?

CARL

No. Should I have?

HELEN

Well you said she was screaming. What if something was wrong?

CARL

Guess I didn't want to meddle.

Helen nods, unsure. Miranda clears her throat.

MIRANDA

Well, on a lighter note, I have an exciting announcement to make. Leslie here passed the test today with flying colors. Her teacher thinks she's cut out to be a doctor.

CARL

Hear, hear, that makes this a celebration.

Carl applauds along with Miranda. Leslie beams. Helen manages a polite smile.

CARL

I remember taking that test. Hated every second of it. Couldn't wait to get out of that room.

MIRANDA

It feels like so long ago now. To this day, I don't think I've ever been so stressed out. Leslie, I don't know how you did it.

LESLIE

It wasn't that bad. Once it was over.

HELEN

Johanna would have failed.

A tense beat.

MIRANDA

Helen?

HELEN

She refused to study. I had been on her about it for months, but she just refused. You know her. The day she... The day she disappeared... That's what we had argued about. It seems so trivial now. Just one stupid little test.

LESLIE

I'm sure she would have passed. She was really smart.

MIRANDA

Is smart.

LESLIE

Is smart. Sorry.

Helen nods, trying to hold back tears.

MIRANDA

Helen, can I get you anything else? You've barely touched your plate.

HELEN

I'm sorry, it's not that I don't like it, it's just...

MIRANDA

What?

Helen sighs. Her silverware clangs as she sets it down.

HELEN

I think you're wrong, Miranda. I think it was my fault.

MIRANDA

Helen, please --

HELEN

I was a lousy mother. All I ever said was don't do this, don't wear that, don't go there, don't go out with him, don't leave the house. Don't, don't, don't. I was always so scared of what could happen to her. If I was Johanna, I would have hated me too.

Leslie shifts uncomfortably. Helen takes another long drink of wine.

HELEN

I didn't kill my daughter. But I didn't let her live either.

(beat)

I just... I just want to know what happened to her...

CARL

Maybe it's better not to know.

HELEN

I have to know!

A desperate fire in her eyes. Miranda and Carl exchange a look, not sure what to say. Leslie forces a smile.

LESLIE

This is a really great roast, mom.

MIRANDA

Thank you, sweetheart.

Helen sighs and takes a small bite of her roast.

HELEN

It is pretty good.

She smiles, tension fading.

CARL

Not to say there's anything wrong with this, but personally, I still prefer my mother's recipe.

MIRANDA

Oh Carl, will you stop that. Your mother always overcooked her roasts. They were far too dry.

HELEN

It's all better than the microwave dinners I've been living on these past few months.

She chuckles and everyone joins in.

MIRANDA

Well, in my opinion, the trick to making any good roast is patience. I like to dry age it at home until it's just right. Most people skip that part. Like your mother.

(eyes Carl)

But a meat's true flavor emerges with time. Just like a fine wine.

Miranda raises her glass towards Helen.

MIRANDA

Time always makes things better.

Helen raises her glass with a teary-eyed smile.

HELEN

Thank you, Miranda. For everything.

They clink glasses. Helen takes another bite of meat.

Then cringes, her teeth biting something hard. She brings her napkin to her mouth and delicately spits the meat out into it.

For a long moment, she just stares.

Buried within the meat, SOMETHING METALLIC AND BLUE glints in the light.

It's a HEART SHAPED PENDANT. JOHANNA'S PENDANT.

Helen looks up to see Miranda, Carl and Leslie all staring at her. Miranda's smile hasn't wavered.

MIRANDA

Is that piece too tough, Helen?
Would you like me to slice you
another?

Helen looks over all the meat on the table, the sickening realization taking hold.

HELEN

(sotto)
Johanna...

MIRANDA

You said you wanted to have one last family dinner with your daughter. So here we are.

Tears form in Helen's eyes, her body beginning to tremble.

HELEN

How... How could --

MIRANDA

How? Well, it's rather simple really. You just pick out the best cuts, slice away the fat, season it to taste, and roast it in the oven. Just like a cow. Only I much prefer this flavor.

She takes another bite, chewing, savoring it.

HELEN

You... You took her... You took her from me...

MIRANDA

No... She came to us. You see, Johanna didn't go into the city that night. She went right next door, just like a good girl, just like you told her to. So I suppose in a way, you were right. It was your fault.

Helen covers her mouth with her hand, as the tears start to flow. Panic swelling up and taking its grasp.

MIRANDA

You wanted to know what happened. Well now you do.
(beat)
Would you like some more wine?

HELEN

You killed her! You killed my little girl!

CARL

Slaughtered is the more appropriate term I think.

Helen gasps. She stands up, knocking over her chair.

MIRANDA

Oh you poor dear...

Helen turns to see Carl and Leslie circling around her, blocking every exit route.

MIRANDA

Why don't you sit down. Stay awhile.
After all...

Miranda smiles warmly.

MIRANDA

There's always room for dessert.

Helen SCREAMS.

Leslie suddenly CLAMPS HER HAND OVER HELEN'S MOUTH. Carl FORCES HELEN'S HEAD DOWN ONTO THE TABLE. Miranda grabs a Mallet, raises it high, and SWINGS IT DOWN --

CUT TO:

A delicious frosted CAKE sitting on a table.

INT. KITCHEN, KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- MORNING

Kaylie, the teenage pageant queen, sits at the table, staring at the cake desperately.

TAMARA (O.S.)

Go on... Taste it...

Tamara, her mother, a faded beauty, sits next to her.

TAMARA

It must be absolutely divine. The cream and the chocolate all mixed together so perfectly. It's pure ecstasy. Like a little taste of Heaven.

KAYLIE

Mom, please...

TAMARA

Come on... Just one little teensy weensy bite... That wouldn't hurt, would it? It would taste so good... So good... You know you want it...

Kaylie cringes, trying to withstand it.

TAMARA

But there's something else you *don't* want, isn't there? You don't want to look like *them*. All those other girls. With their fat hanging out over their jeans. Their arms sagging. Their faces all chubby. Their legs already turning into seas of cellulite. Just look at the other girls on this block. They're repulsive. You'll wind up looking like them too... Unless you have discipline. Unless you have self control. Unless... You make the right choice...

Kaylie looks to the other plate on the table. A GRAPEFRUIT on it, along with a glass of GREEN VEGETABLE JUICE and a VITAMIN.

TAMARA

So which choice will you make today?
Do you want to be like the rest...
Or do you want to be the best?

Kaylie hesitates. Then pulls over the grapefruit, picks up her spoon and takes a bite. Tamara smiles, proud.

TAMARA

You see. Nothing tastes better than a good decision.

Kaylie nods, obedient. Sips her green juice, restraining a cringe. Tamara picks up the cake and throws it in the trash.

TAMARA

Only three more days until the pageant. You're almost there.

KAYLIE

Until the next one.

TAMARA

Tell you what... After you win, I'll take you out for a cheat meal. Maybe a pasta dinner, just like grandma did for me. How's that sound?

Kaylie allows herself the slightest smile. Something to look forward to.

INT. BATHROOM, KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- MORNING

Kaylie looks herself over in the mirror. We see a beautiful girl, albeit very thin.

But she sees something far less attractive.

KAYLIE
Three more days...

SERIES OF SHOTS: Kaylie grabs various makeup products. Creams. Glosses. Lipsticks. Eyeliners. Gels. Sprays.

CUT TO:

Kaylie all made up. An image of perfection. But she has to force herself to smile.

INT. HALLWAY, HIGH SCHOOL -- DAY

Kaylie maintains her smile as she walks confidently, dressed in her school uniform. The center of attention.

EVERY GUY'S HEAD TURNS, gawking. But not a single one approaches her, all too intimidated. EVERY GIRL SMILES. But those smiles turn to jealous glares the moment she passes.

She's the most popular, and the least popular, girl in school.

INT. LUNCHROOM, HIGH SCHOOL -- DAY

Kaylie sits on her own, eating a minuscule salad. At an adjacent table, Leslie and other girls laugh as they chat. For a moment, Kaylie watches them enviously.

Until she notices their food.

Leslie chomps on a FATTY PIECE OF RIB MEAT, eating it straight off of the bone out of a TUPPERWARE CONTAINER. The others consume school lunches. French fries covered with chili. Nachos slathered with yellow gelatinous cheese. Greasy pizza slices.

SERIES OF SHOTS: The girls' mouths, their teeth tearing at fatty meats. The oozing juices running down their chins. Their tongues licking their fingers clean.

Kaylie looks away, unable to take it anymore.

INT. HOME GYM, KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- DAY

Kaylie SPRINTS ON THE TREADMILL, wearing a SWEATER and SWEATPANTS that are soaked through.

INT. BATHROOM, KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- DAY

Kaylie washes her face methodically. Hands moving in practiced patterns, cleansing every last inch of her skin.

INT. BEDROOM, KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Kaylie sleeps soundly, face covered with cream.

But high up above, in the corner of the room, is a small COBWEB. With an itsy bitsy spider crawling upon it...

INT. KITCHEN, KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- MORNING

Another day. Another grapefruit.

TAMARA

What is that?

KAYLIE

What?

TAMARA

That red spot... It looks like some kind of bite.

Kaylie's hand traces over her skin until she finds the small RED SPOT on her cheek. She tenses upon touching it.

TAMARA

Did you open your window again?

KAYLIE

No...

Tamara eyes her sternly.

KAYLIE

No!

TAMARA

Wash it and cover it up.

Kaylie nods. Goes back to her grapefruit.

TAMARA

That means now, Kaylie.

INT. BATHROOM, KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- MORNING

Kaylie applies heavy makeup, trying to remain calm as Tamara watches over her. She finishes, taking in the sight of herself.

KAYLIE

I think it'll be okay.

TAMARA

I can still see it.

KAYLIE

That's because you're looking. If you just glanced at me, you'd never notice.

TAMARA

Kaylie, no one just glances at you. They stare at you. And they're all going to see it.

Kaylie gives it another stern stare in the mirror, knowing her mother is right. Tamara sighs.

TAMARA

You'll just have to get through the day. So long as it's gone before the pageant, everything will be fine.

INT. HALLWAY, HIGH SCHOOL -- DAY

Kaylie walks down the hall, but now she's self conscious. Her eyes avoiding the passing glances and stares. She hears students WHISPERING. But is it about her?

She walks faster.

INT. CLASSROOM, HIGH SCHOOL -- DAY

Kaylie sits in the back, hiding her face behind the guy sitting in front of her, trying to remain invisible. The TEACHER lectures, voice DROWNED OUT, until --

TEACHER

Kaylie?

Kaylie looks over his shoulder, caught off guard.

KAYLIE

Ye-Yes?

TEACHER

Do you have an answer?

The students turn to STARE AT HER. Some of their eyes narrow, focusing on her imperfection. A couple smirk. Others begin to chuckle.

She can barely breathe.

INT. GROCERY STORE -- DAY

Tamara pushes a cart as Kaylie follows behind, her red spot noticeably bigger. Tamara tosses in kale, quinoa, broccoli, and every other healthy, low calorie food in sight.

As Kaylie walks, she sees other SHOPPERS glancing in her direction. Just for a moment in every case, but enough for her to see.

KAYLIE

Mom, can I wait in the car please?

TAMARA

Kaylie, you're a grown girl. I'm not going to shop for you.

KAYLIE

I feel sick.

Tamara turns, looking at her face. Kaylie averts her eyes.

TAMARA

Oh you poor dear. You're embarrassed, aren't you?

Kaylie nods.

TAMARA

That's good. Now you know what it feels like to be undesirable. To have people look the other way. Or worse yet, to not look at you at all. So take this feeling and hold onto it. This should be a learning experience. It'll make you work harder.

Kaylie nods again, tears in her eyes.

TAMARA

Now go and find me some couscous, will you?

Kaylie walks off, keeping her head low as she searches.

She passes TWO GOOD LOOKING GUYS (20s) who don't even glance at her, their attention elsewhere.

GUY

Jesus Christ will you look at her.

Kaylie turns to see their focus, Natalya pushing her cart, looking sexy from afar.

GUY 2

I didn't even know it was possible to make 'em that hot.

Kaylie hurries away, the words stinging.

EMPLOYEE (O.S.)
Care for a sample, miss? Freshly
baked.

She turns to a table where an EMPLOYEE is serving FOOD
SAMPLES. Miniature chocolate chip cookies.

KAYLIE
Oh. No. No thank you.

A MOM and her YOUNG BOY (8) help themselves to some samples.

YOUNG BOY
Mom... What's that on her face?

MOM
Shh... Sweetie, it's not polite to
stare.

YOUNG BOY
But it's gross.

She ushers her son away. Kaylie breathes deep, trying to
keep it together.

Then grabs a handful of cookies and walks off, scarfing them
down.

INT. KITCHEN, KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Kaylie and Tamara eat salads across from each other, the
tension thick.

TAMARA
It's getting bigger, you know.

KAYLIE
I know.

TAMARA
Have you been off your diet?

KAYLIE
No.

TAMARA
You know what chocolate does to your
complexion.

KAYLIE
I haven't had any.

But her voice trembles slightly. And Tamara notices.

TAMARA
Go and wash your face.

KAYLIE
I just did an hour ago.

TAMARA
Well, you clearly didn't do a good
enough job.

INT. BATHROOM, KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Kaylie scrubs the red spot vigorously. Harder and harder,
faster and faster. Tears welling up.

She lets out a gasp. Sees that there's BLOOD on her fingers.
Looks to see more blood on her face from where she cut it.

But the spot remains.

Kaylie starts to sob. Taking in her hideous reflection in
the mirror. Unable to stand it, she turns the light off. And
continues to cry in the darkness.

INT. WAITING ROOM, DERMATOLOGIST'S OFFICE -- DAY

Kaylie sits, a BAND-AID on her face. Tamara next to her,
holding her hand.

Kaylie eyes the other PATIENTS sitting in chairs. One has
some kind of grotesque RASH on her cheek. Another with
BANDAGES covering half her face.

She forces herself to look away.

INT. DERMATOLOGIST'S OFFICE -- DAY

Dr. Glenn Chase delicately pulls Kaylie's band-aid off,
revealing what is now a disgusting RED BOIL. Tamara looks
away, repulsed.

GLENN
Looks like a spider bite to me. Do
you feel any pain around the area?

Kaylie shakes her head 'no.'

GLENN
Fever? Chills? Nausea?

Again, Kaylie shakes her head.

GLENN
That's good news then.
(MORE)

GLENN (CONT'D)
It's probably just an allergic
reaction. It'll go away in a few
days. A few weeks at most.

Kaylie and her mom exchange a look.

TAMARA
Doctor... We don't have that long.
Isn't there anything you can give
her?

GLENN
If it itches, I could give you some
cream to help with that.

TAMARA
I'm not concerned about whether it
itches.

GLENN
Then what exactly are you concerned
about?

TAMARA
(sighs)
Dr. Chase, my daughter cares very
much about her appearance. I'm
worried that this... Imperfection,
could adversely affect her self
esteem. Couldn't you just... Cut it
off?

GLENN
Well, I could freeze it and
surgically remove it. But that'd
take weeks to heal. And it would
probably leave a small scar.

Kaylie stiffens.

TAMARA
That's not an option.

GLENN
Listen, these things tend to work
themselves out naturally. You'll
wake up one morning and it'll be
gone.

TAMARA
But she has a pageant coming up.

GLENN

No reason to let something like this
stop her. True beauty's on the
inside, right?

He chuckles. Kaylie looks horrified.

INT. HALLWAY, HIGH SCHOOL -- DAY

Kaylie walks, head down, wearing a HOODIE over her uniform,
averting all eye contact. The other students steal glances.
Leslie walks by with her friends and outright laughs.

STUDENTS (V.O.)

(whispering)

Did you see the size of that thing?
/ Talk about the world's ugliest
zit. / Makes me wanna throw up.

The whispering builds, more and more voices, until it
becomes INDISCERNIBLE. Kaylie walks faster, trying
desperately to ignore it.

INT. KITCHEN, KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Kaylie's hand trembles as she takes a bite of her salad. The
red spot is now bulging and repulsive. Tamara sits across
from her, food untouched.

KAYLIE

I suppose I'll have to forfeit.

TAMARA

You'll regret it for the rest of
your life. Just like I did when I
had to forfeit.

She shoots Kaylie a look, accusatory.

TAMARA

Though there is another way...

She places a small SEWING NEEDLE on the table. Kaylie
tenses.

KAYLIE

The doctor said not to. He said to
wait and it'll go away on its own.

TAMARA

Kaylie, those judges are not going
to wait weeks for you. One day
you'll be old, like me, and you'll
look back on the way you used to be.

(MORE)

TAMARA (CONT'D)

Is this how you want to remember yourself?

Kaylie hesitates, tears in her eyes.

TAMARA

Do you remember that woman we saw yesterday? In the grocery store parking lot? Sobbing all alone in her car.

Kaylie nods.

TAMARA

That's a woman who lives with regrets. And I will not allow you to grow up to become someone like her. I've worked too hard for you, Kaylie. I've sacrificed too much. I've given up everything, every dream I ever had, for you. So don't you dare talk to me about forfeiting.

KAYLIE

Do you think I'm beautiful, mom?

Tamara doesn't answer. She can't even look at her daughter.

KAYLIE

Mom?

TAMARA

I think you could be.

INT. BEDROOM, KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Kaylie looks over all the pictures of the models on her wall. To the framed photos of her winning pageants.

Then eyes the sewing needle in her hand.

INT. BATHROOM, KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Hot water flows into a bubble bath, steam rising from it. Kaylie's hand grips the faucet, turning the water off. She disrobes and steps in. Picks up her washcloth and washes the red spot delicately. Gently pats it dry.

Then ever so slowly, she takes the needle from the tub's side and brings it towards her cheek, cringing.

She steadies herself. Focusing.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
For the third year in a row, your
winner is... Miss Kaylie Richards!

Wild applause. Kaylie's tension fades.

TAMARA (V.O.)
Oh Kaylie, I'm so proud of you.

Kaylie beams. She holds the needle over the red spot for a long moment, relishing the adulation --

And then PUNCTURES IT.

It lets out a soft rush of air. Kaylie breathes a sigh of relief. It didn't even hurt. She closes her eyes with a smile, finally relaxing.

For a moment, all is peaceful.

Then a TINY BLACK SPIDER crawls out of Kaylie's cheek. It moves across her face, so light she can't even feel it.

Another spider follows. Then another. And another.

Kaylie's eyes snap open in terror --

INT. BEDROOM, KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- SIMULTANEOUS

Tamara lays out Kaylie's pageant dress on her bed.

Her daughter's SCREAMS echo from the other room.

INT. BATHROOM, KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Tamara opens the door and covers her mouth.

Kaylie violently thrashes about in the bathtub, head smacking hard against the porcelain tile as she screams bloody murder. HUNDREDS OF TINY SPIDERS CRAWL ALL OVER HER, having emerged from the eggs laid in her cheek.

KAYLIE
HELP ME! MOM! MOM!!

She continues to thrash about, screaming and crying.

And Tamara is too horrified to move.

CUT TO:

Ian waking up with a start.

INT. GARAGE, IAN'S HOUSE -- MORNING

Ian looks around, disoriented. Only to realize that he's sitting at his desk in his garage, having fallen asleep working. Lines of computer code continue to scroll by on nearby monitors. His half finished contraption before him.

With a sigh, Ian picks up his tools and gets back to work. No rest for the weary.

IAN (PRE-LAP)

I'm close, dad. I'm closer than I've ever been.

INT. NURSING HOME -- DAY

Ian sits next to his father's bed. THOMAS PRESTON (70s) lays there, looking withered and decrepit, eyes staring away at nothing. Medical equipment monitors his vitals.

IAN

Just have to sort through all of the noise and isolate the data coming from the source. It's just a matter of time now. Just a matter of time...

He takes his father's limp hand in his.

IAN

I know you're still in there, dad. And I'm going to help you find your way out again. I promise.

His father stares aimlessly at the ceiling. No response.

INT. IAN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Family dinner. Ian sits at the table with his wife, Melony, and their son, TOM (15). Ian scribbles furiously on his TABLET, Tom tapping text messages on his PHONE. Melony looks back and forth between them, restraining frustration.

MELONY

So why don't you tell us about your day, Ian?

IAN

It was good.

He doesn't look up, barely paying her any mind.

MELONY

How's your father doing?

IAN

He's fine.

She nods silently.

MELONY

Tom?

TOM

What?

His fingers don't slow down, taking a tone of flat annoyance that she would even bother.

MELONY

How was your day?

He doesn't respond.

MELONY

Tom?

TOM

It was good.

A silence persists. Melony looks from her husband to her son. Then continues eating quietly.

MELONY (PRE-LAP)

I need to know that all of this is leading to something...

INT. GARAGE, IAN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Ian is back at work, Melony standing over him.

MELONY

We're behind on the mortgage. I can't keep us afloat by myself forever.

IAN

As soon as this is finished, I'll go back to being a cog in someone's machine. We'll get back on track.

MELONY

But how long?

IAN

As long as it takes.

MELONY

Ian, your father has been unresponsive for over a year. At this point he's not going to get better. You know that. Maybe... Maybe it's time...

IAN

Time for what?

For the first time, he looks up at her.

IAN

Time to kill him?

MELONY

It's not killing him. It's letting him rest peacefully. The way he's meant to. It's the merciful thing to do.

IAN

Merciful? And what if he doesn't want to die?

MELONY

How can you talk about what he wants? You don't even know if there's anyone left inside.

IAN

But I will.

(beat)

Every day, dad told me that he was proud of me. Every night, he told me that he loved me. This is the least I can do for him.

He takes her in his arms.

IAN

I'd do the same thing for anyone that I loved.

She stares into his loving eyes, then nestles into his chest as he holds her close.

EXT. IAN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Ian stands alone outside, smoking a cigarette. His eyes are drawn across the street to a LIT WINDOW. Inside, Helen dines with Miranda's family. From Ian's point of view, it's a lively dinner. A family dinner. For a moment, he gazes at them longingly.

Then his eyes are drawn to another house. Inside, a mother and father eat dinner. But in an upstairs window, Claire studies alone. Ian stares at her for a moment, feeling a kinship with his fellow workaholic.

He takes a long drag, holding the cigarette in front of his face, staring at the glowing embers. Exhales the smoke, blowing it over the nub, making it burn even brighter. The embers drift out of focus in front of his eyes as he stares away into the darkness, deep in thought.

But then he suddenly blinks hard, refocusing his eyes on the glowing nub.

IAN
That's it...

INT. GARAGE, IAN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Ian frantically types on the keyboard, filling out line after line of new code, muttering to himself.

IAN
Tie in a parser to the optic
nerve...

He spins in his chair, turning his attention back to the workbench. More focused than ever.

IAN
Isolate the data in the triangulated
region...

He plugs a lead from the computer into the small circuit board, and a spider web of fiber optic leads within a membrane on a mannequin's bald head.

IAN
Then we feed that directly to the
Broca...

Ian tentatively reaches in with his tweezers, but he hesitates as his hands begin to tremble. This is the moment of truth. With a deep breath, his hands steady, and he connects one final fiber optic to the circuit board.

The moment he does, the fiber optics BEGIN TO TWINKLE WITH LIGHT. Ian's eyes widen. A smile spreads across his face.

INT. HALLWAY, MEDICAL BUILDING -- DAY

Ian hurries down the hall, fueled by caffeine.

A door opens. Kaylie steps out, crying. Tamara behind her. As they pass Ian, Kaylie turns her face away.

Ian glances at her, then passes the door labeled "Glenn Chase, Dermatologist." He moves to the next one --

"Christopher Preston, Neurologist."

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE -- DAY

Ian sits across from his brother, DR. CHRIS PRESTON (40s).

CHRIS

You want me to put what in your head?

IAN

It's a device. Something that will let me talk to dad again.

CHRIS

Talk to dad how?

IAN

With my mind. I'll be able to hear his thoughts.

CHRIS

Jesus Christ, Ian.

IAN

It all has to do with registering the harmonics of the electrical impulses within the brain. When we isolate those occurring in a specific region of space and time --

CHRIS

Are you listening to yourself?

IAN

Yes. And I know what it sounds like. But it's the only chance we have. Dad is a vegetable on the outside. But inside, he's still there.

CHRIS

I assume you've tested this out on rats or dogs or... Something?

IAN

What would a dog do with human thoughts?

CHRIS

So you're the test subject?

IAN

I can't ask anyone else to do it. It has to be me.

CHRIS

This is crazy, Ian.

IAN

Every brilliant idea is crazy to start with. If this works, it will revolutionize communication. And not just for us, for everyone. Deaf people will be able to hear what others are thinking. Mute people will be able to speak again, not with their hands but with their thoughts. And people like dad, who are trapped in their disabled bodies, who everyone has given up on... They'll no longer be silent. This is the future, Chris. But I can't do it alone.

CHRIS

What you're asking me to do is unethical. Illegal. I could lose my license. You could die.

IAN

What I'm asking is for you to help me communicate with dad again. To help others talk to their loved ones again. Just imagine what kind of world that would be. If there's a chance that this will work, we have to take it.

Chris studies him for a long moment.

CHRIS

No one can know about this. No one.

IAN

Of course.

CHRIS

Until... They write about you in the history books. Then you can mention me.

Ian smiles.

IAN

I knew you'd understand.

INT. OPERATING ROOM -- NIGHT

Ian lies down on the operating table. Chris stands above him, wearing a surgical mask and gloves. He aims the operating light at Ian's face, then moves to the anesthesia.

CHRIS
Last chance to chicken out.

IAN
Yours too.

Ian looks his brother in the eye through his surgical glasses. They exchange a smile.

CHRIS
Alright. Count backwards from ten.

He turns a nob and watches liquid drip into Ian's IV.

IAN
Ten... Nine... Eight...

FADE TO BLACK:

LIGHT begins to creep in, steadying and taking form --

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE -- DAY

IAN'S POV: Chris looks down at us. We hear a SLIGHT RINGING. Then it slowly fades away...

CHRIS (V.O.)
(distant)
Ian? Ian?

HIS MOUTH DOESN'T MOVE. He only stares at us.

CHRIS (V.O.)
Ian, can you hear me?

We see Ian. Looking up at his brother.

CHRIS (V.O.)
Ian. If you can hear me, blink your eyes.

A long moment passes. Then Ian blinks. And smiles.

CHRIS (V.O.)
Welcome to a new world.

INT. HALLWAY, MEDICAL BUILDING -- DAY

Ian steps out, a small BANDAGE on the back of his head. He walks past a JANITOR mopping the floor. He nods as Ian passes.

JANITOR (V.O.)
Cheap bastards don't pay me jack
shit for all I do for them. God I
hate this damn job.

Ian turns sharply. The Janitor looks up at him, confused.

JANITOR
Help you with something, sir?

IAN
No, no... I'm good, thanks.

He walks out, giddy with excitement.

EXT. MEDICAL BUILDING -- DAY

Ian steps out into the sunlight. Several PASSERS-BY in the outdoor courtyard. He turns to a MOTHER pushing a stroller.

MOTHER (V.O.)
I hope he doesn't have the flu, I
don't have the vacation time to take
off work.

To an OLD WOMAN looking over the flowers.

OLD WOMAN (V.O.)
They're so beautiful. Marty hasn't
gotten me flowers in years...

To a COUPLE holding hands.

GIRL (V.O.)
Please let me be pregnant, please
let me be pregnant...

GUY (V.O.)
Please don't let her be pregnant,
please don't let her be pregnant...

The voices continue to swirl around him, blending in with each other. Ian can't help but smile. It's all so beautiful.

INT. NURSING HOME -- DAY

Ian quietly steps in. He goes to his dad's bedside.

IAN

Dad?

No response. Just staring away aimlessly, as always. Ian gently turns his dad's head to face him.

IAN

Dad...

He takes his dad's hand, looking into his eyes.

IAN

I can hear you now. I can hear everything. Just tell me what you're thinking. You don't have to say a word. Just think it...

He holds his dad's hand, waiting.

IAN

Dad? Dad, please.

But there is only silence.

IAN

I know you're in there somewhere. Think to me. I'll hear you.

And then out of the silence, distant but clear --

THOMAS (V.O.)

Ian...

Ian smiles, tears filling his eyes.

THOMAS (V.O.)

Ian... Is that you...

IAN

Yes, dad. I'm here. I can hear you.

THOMAS (V.O.)

How...

IAN

I built something. Something that's going to change the world. You don't have to be alone in there anymore.

THOMAS (V.O.)

Why...

IAN

Why? Because I wanted to hear you again.

THOMAS (V.O.)
Why... Why are you torturing me like
this? Why are you keeping me alive?

IAN
What?

THOMAS (V.O.)
Kill me...

Ian steps away in horror, dropping his father's hand.

THOMAS (V.O.)
Kill me... You son of a bitch, kill
me now. Put me out of my misery.

IAN
But... I built this so that we can
talk again.

THOMAS (V.O.)
I don't want to talk. I don't want
to see you again. I want to die.
Just let me die.

Ian backs away from his father.

THOMAS (V.O.)
Where are you going?! I said to kill
me. Pick up that pillow, you coward.
Pick it up and finish me off!

INT. NURSES' STATION -- CONTINUOUS

Ian closes the door behind him. He leans against it,
catching his breath. A DOCTOR passes by.

DOCTOR
Ian. How's your father doing today?

IAN
Fine. He's fine.

But he's clearly not fine. Ian takes off, walking fast. The
doctor watches him go, concerned.

INT. GARAGE, IAN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Ian stands alone, looking over his schematics. His
electronics. His garage that now resembles a mad scientist's
lair.

He reaches for a BASEBALL BAT hanging on a wall, gripping it
tightly. Then -- SMASH!

He CRIES OUT AS HE SWINGS THROUGH EVERY PIECE OF EQUIPMENT, breaking them to pieces with unbridled fury, tears filling his eyes.

Until he finally slows, looking over his destruction.

MELONY (O.S.)

Ian?

He turns, still holding the bat, looking like a crazy person.

MELONY

Ian, what happened?

Concern in her voice. Then --

MELONY (V.O.)

He's lost it. Jillian's right. You have to get out of here. You have to leave him.

Ian flinches, dropping the bat. It clangs on the garage floor. Melony approaches him, taking a consoling tone.

MELONY

Ian, talk to me. Tell me what's wrong.

(V.O.)

Don't talk to him. You always talk to him. Let him deal with his own shit for once --

IAN

Shut up!

She stares back, caught off guard. Ian hurries out the door.

MELONY

Ian, wait!

EXT. TWISTED AVENUE -- NIGHT

Ian walks quickly, trying to clear his head, teetering on the brink. All around him, he hears VOICES.

He glances in a window -- Inside, Miranda and her family eat a big dinner together.

MIRANDA (V.O.)

This just didn't turn out right, Helen had too much fat on her. Maybe we should try one of Leslie's classmates next. I could go for some tender, young meat for a change.

To another house -- Jenn's father pacing nervously.

HENRY (V.O.)
 Someone saw her, I know someone saw
 her. If they find out we've been
 keeping her locked in a basement,
 God knows what they'll do to us.

Another house -- Natalya standing alone, staring at photos
 on the wall.

NATALYA (V.O.)
 I loved them... I loved them both...

Ian looks all around him as the voices PILE ON TOP OF EACH
 OTHER. Some we recognize. Others we'll come to know soon
 enough.

NEIGHBOR (V.O.)
 Who was that little girl? Maybe I
 should call someone. What if she's a --

JENN (V.O.)
 Somebody help me! Please, someone
 get me out of here!

CLAIRE (V.O.)
 Find the answers, Claire... Find the
 answers...

GLENN (V.O.)
 Just stay calm. You won't last long
 without medical care. Any moment
 now, you'll slip away. Any moment
 now...

Ian falls to his knees and covers his ears, trying to drown
 them out. The voices ring louder and louder, faster and
 faster, becoming an INDISCERNIBLE MASS OF MISERY. Unable to
 take it anymore, he SCREAMS OUT IN AGONY.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY

CLOSE on Ian's face as he stares just past us. We hear a
 SWIRL OF VOICES around him, indistinguishable from one
 another, like an unending hum.

IAN
 You have to do something. Please,
 you have to stop them. People are
 going to die if you don't do
 something. You can't just sit back
 and let this happen. I'm begging
 you! Why are you just standing
 there?!

As we move back, we see TWO DOCTORS in lab coats looking down at Ian, who's wearing a STRAIGHT JACKET.

IAN

You don't believe me. You think I'm crazy. I know that you think I'm crazy. But I'm telling you, if you don't listen to me, bad things are going to happen. Very bad things. Horrifying things. These people... They're evil. And you'd never know it by looking at them. You'd never know.

The door opens and Chris walks in.

DOCTOR

Dr. Preston, thank you so much for coming.

CHRIS

I got here as soon as I could.

IAN

Chris! Tell them! Tell them what I can do! Tell them what I invented!

Chris looks down at his brother with sad eyes.

CHRIS

I'm afraid I don't have any idea what he's talking about.

IAN

What?

A new voice rises above the swirl --

CHRIS (V.O.)

How's it feel to change the world, Ian? My little brother, always clamoring for the spotlight. Well, now you have it. In your own head.

IAN

He's lying! I can hear him, he's lying!

MELONY (O.S.)

Ian...

Ian turns as Melony and Tom enter, gravely concerned.

MELONY

What happened? What's wrong with him?

IAN

Melony! Chris! Don't listen to them, they're all lying! Please, you've gotta get me out of here!

Melony and Chris just stare sadly.

MELONY (V.O.)

This couldn't be more perfect. Now they'll give me everything in the divorce. Every last thing.

TOM (V.O.)

I wonder if the psycho left any cash in his wallet. Not like he's gonna be needing it anytime soon.

Chris puts his arm around Melony to comfort her.

CHRIS

It's alright. He's going to be okay. We'll get through this, I promise.

He turns to Ian with the slightest smile.

CHRIS (V.O.)

Don't worry, I'll take good care of her. I'm going to lay her out and ravage her like you never could. After I'm through, she'll never even think about you again.

IAN

Get out of here! All of you, get out! Just leave me alone! Leave me alone!

DOCTOR

Come on. Why don't we give Mr. Preston some peace and quiet for awhile.

He ushers everyone out. Chris is the last one to go.

CHRIS (V.O.)

By the way, I'm pulling the plug on dad. Just not worth the expense when I could use a new boat.

He winks and closes the door.

Leaving Ian alone, devastated. He struggles to catch his breath.

But more VOICES emerge. Distant but clear.

PATIENTS (V.O.)

I'm not crazy. They're the ones
that're crazy. / They're listening
to me now, aren't they? I can see
them through the walls. / I'll do
your bidding, just tell me who is
next. / This is such a beautiful
home. I really love it here.

Tears fill Ian's eyes as he begins to cry.

IAN

Make it stop... Make it stop...
Please God, make it stop!

But they don't. They only get louder and louder, building to
an overwhelming cacophony...

CUT TO:

A jarringly silent house.

INT. NATALYA'S HOUSE -- DAY

It's DEAD QUIET in these immaculate rooms. Everything in its
proper place and impeccably organized. It looks like a model
home, as if no one lives here at all.

Until we begin to hear a subtle but rhythmic SWOOSHING
SOUND. Distant. As we see more rooms, we get closer to the
sound.

INT. LIVING ROOM, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

The SWOOSH SWOOSH sound is almost overwhelming, but
everything in the room is perfect. Until we move behind the
couch to reveal --

Natalya on her hands and knees, scrubbing the trim with a
toothbrush. It already looks perfectly clean, but she
clearly sees something that we don't.

INT. BATHROOM, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Blue water swirls down a toilet bowl. Natalya scrubs the
pearly white toilet, getting her head down nice and close to
make sure it's spotless.

INT. FAMILY ROOM, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- DAY

A FAMILY PHOTO of Frank, Hugh and HUGH'S MOTHER (40s). Everyone is smiling broadly. They look so happy. Natalya picks up the frame and dusts every square inch of it.

Then she looks more closely at Hugh's Mother. Blonde like her with similar features. An older and less attractive version of Natalya.

Natalya sets it back down and starts dusting the next family photo, none of which she is a part of.

EXT. NATALYA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Wilted flowers are yanked out of the ground. Natalya sticks her gardening trowel into the soil and creates a hole for a fresh, colorful flower. A sense of frustration in her actions as she tirelessly pats the soil down.

INT. MASTER BATHROOM, BAKER HOUSE -- DAY

Steam rises out of the shower. We can just make out Natalya's outline through the frosted glass as she washes her hair.

INT. KITCHEN, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- EVENING

Natalya wears a colorful dress underneath her apron, her hair and makeup done up once again. Even high heels. She hurries around the kitchen, steaming vegetables, putting rolls in a basket, steaks sizzling on the stove's grill top.

Sounds of the front door opening and closing.

NATALYA

Frank? Honey is that you?

The homegrown phrase sounds forced with her accent.

NATALYA

Frank, I'm just in the kitchen here finishing up dinner.

FRANK (O.S.)

Natalya?

The tone of his voice is enough to make her stand up a little straighter, on edge.

NATALYA

Yes, what is it dear?

FRANK (O.S.)

Natalya, come in here.

Natalya grabs a towel, drying her hands as she hurries into --

INT. LIVING ROOM, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Franks stands in the middle of the room. With his thinning hair and growing gut, Natalya is far out of his league, but that doesn't seem to matter in this arrangement.

FRANK

We have a problem, Natalya.

NATALYA

What?

FRANK

You don't see it?

Natalya's eyes frantically dart around the room. Everything in its place.

NATALYA

No.

FRANK

Well it's right in front of you.

She continues to look around the room. Then she sees it. A SMALL STREAK down the mirror's glass. Barely noticeable.

NATALYA

I'm sorry. I didn't see it.

FRANK

Well, now you do.

She hastily goes about wiping the streak away with her towel. He walks off before she's even done.

FRANK (O.S.)

How long until dinner's ready?

NATALYA

Just a few more minutes.

The door opens. Hugh walks in, wearing a SOCCER UNIFORM.

HUGH

Hey dad, guess who scored three goals in our scrimmage today?!

He runs right past Natalya like she's not even there, TRACKING MUD the whole way. She stares at the sight. But says nothing.

INT. NATALYA'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Natalya finishes wiping off the kitchen counter. Turns off the light. She walks through the house, turning the lights off one by one.

Then she comes to a bookshelf and stops, looking over the titles. She slides out a copy of PINOCCHIO, flipping through the pages, having a thought.

INT. HUGH'S ROOM, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Natalya stops in the doorway, looking in on Hugh, lying in bed, playing a game on his smart phone. She takes a hesitant step in.

NATALYA

Hugh? I thought that maybe... I
could read a story to you tonight.

He doesn't look away from his game.

HUGH

Why?

She moves forward to sit on the edge of his bed.

NATALYA

Well, because that's what parents
are supposed to do for their
children. They read their favorite
stories together so that they can
share in the experience.

HUGH

You're not my mom.

NATALYA

I know I'm not. But I would like to
be. In time.

HUGH

I don't want to hear you read a
story with your accent. You'll make
it sound all weird.

NATALYA

It will still be the same story.

HUGH

Not like my mom would tell it. You
don't sound anything like her.

Natalya takes a quivering breath, struggling to hold back her emotions. Then she forces a smile.

NATALYA

I'm sorry I have an accent. It's part of who I am. But as long as you can understand, that's what matters most. Because it means I can tell you that I love you.

HUGH

Well, I don't love you back.

He continues to play his game, not even looking at her. Natalya stares at him for a long moment, pain shining through.

INT. MASTER BATHROOM, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Natalya lies in bed, now wearing a low cut silk night gown. Frank nuzzles up to her, hungrily kissing her neck. But she's not reciprocating.

NATALYA

Frank... Have you and Hugh... Have you talked much about our... Situation?

FRANK

What situation?

NATALYA

Our family.

FRANK

He's a smart kid. He understands.

He gropes her more aggressively, reaching under her gown.

NATALYA

Well sometimes I just feel like...

FRANK

Come on, baby, do we have to do this right now?

She relents. He enters her from behind, beginning to thrust. And she just takes it. Staring lifelessly away.

INT. GROCERY STORE -- DAY

Natalya slowly walks the aisles with a long list of groceries. She meekly places items in her cart, not making eye contact with anyone she passes.

THE SOUND OF LAUGHING causes her to turn. She stares at Marie, Henry and Isaac, pushing their cart through the store.

Isaac is telling a story that she can't quite hear from this distance, but they look happy together. A happy family.

Natalya watches for a long moment. Then quickly pushes her cart down another aisle.

She slows, looking around to see a wall of HARD ALCOHOL bottles in front of her. She glances up and down the aisle -- no one watching her. And she snatches a BOTTLE OF VODKA off the shelf and puts it in her cart.

INT. CHECKOUT LINE, GROCERY STORE -- LATER

The CASHIER scans items as Natalya waits.

She notices Helen in the next line over, eyeing the bottle of wine in her hand self consciously. Natalya watches her, seeing a like-minded soul.

CASHIER (O.S.)

ID please.

He holds the bottle of vodka as she looks back.

NATALYA

Excuse me?

CASHIER

ID please.

NATALYA

Oh yes, I'm sorry.

Natalya quickly regathers herself, going through her wallet. She holds out her ID, forcing a smile.

INT. KITCHEN, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Natalya eyes the dirty dishes piled on the counter and in the sink. Taunting her. But she doesn't move.

Instead, she unscrews the cap on the bottle of vodka. She pours some into a glass. And stares at it. Daring herself.

Then she quickly picks it up and downs it in one swig. Gasps for breath, wincing at the taste.

She pours another shot and gulps it straight.

Then another. And another.

INT. NATALYA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Natalya moves around the house with her glass in hand. She creates disorder in every room. Unmakes the beds.

Cants pictures on the walls. Shoves furniture out of place. Throws towels on the floor.

And all the while, she continues to drink, her movements growing more and more wobbly by the minute.

INT. BATHROOM, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Natalya throws up into the toilet, on her hands and knees hugging the bowl. It's all coming out.

INT. MASTER BATHROOM, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- EVENING

Natalya stands by the window, staring out it absently. Hair disheveled. Makeup smeared.

The distant sound of the front door opening.

FRANK (O.S.)
Natalya? Natalya, where are you?

She doesn't move.

Frank's heavy footsteps approach.

FRANK (O.S.)
Natalya?

He walks into the room and stops dead on sight of her.

FRANK
What the hell is wrong with you?

She stays silent for a long moment.

FRANK
Natalya, tell me. Now.

With a deep breath, she works up the courage.

NATALYA
I love you, Frank. And I love Hugh.
But I understand if you will not
love me back. I know that I am not
the same as your old wife. All I ask
is that you treat me with respect.
That you treat me like... A person.

He glares back.

FRANK
Natalya, I think we have a
misunderstanding...

He goes to her side, his eyes boring into her.

FRANK

I'm not sure what's going on in that head of yours, so let me make this very clear. You don't get to disagree with me. You don't get to argue with me. You do what I say, when I say it. That's our arrangement. Otherwise, I'll send you back to where you came from. Is that what you want?

She shrinks away at the harshness of his tone.

FRANK

Is that what you want, Natalya?

She shakes her head 'no.'

FRANK

Good. Now why don't you get back to showing how much you love us.

INT. NATALYA'S HOUSE -- EVENING

Natalya straightens all of the disorder that she created. Remakes the beds. Fixes the pictures. Moves the furniture back into place. Frank glaring at her the whole time.

EXT. BACKYARD, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Natalya sits across from her friend, POLINA (late 20s), both of them sipping tea. Another Russian beauty just as striking as Natalya, with a similar accent.

POLINA

I just feel so blessed to have all that we do.

Natalya forces herself to nod along.

POLINA

Charles took Lily and I to the place where they used to go on picnics as a family. It's this beautiful field outside of town that's filled with wild flowers. We put down our blanket and had lunch on top of the hill under the sun. And he brought a blue kite with a yellow tail that they used to fly together. Lily showed me how to get it up in the sky. Her laughter was like music to my ears. It was so beautiful.

Natalya sips her tea.

NATALYA

I read stories to Hugh every night.
Just like his mother used to.

POLINA

That's so sweet. He must love that.

Natalya forces another nod.

NATALYA

Do you... Do you and Charles ever
have... Disagreements?

There's a twinge of fear in saying it out loud. Polina notices.

POLINA

Oh Natalya, of course we do. We have
disagreements all the time. I mean,
I'm usually the one that's wrong,
but sometimes it's him too.

NATALYA

How do you get past them?

POLINA

I just remember where we came from.
We're so lucky to be here, Natalya.
That's what I keep telling myself
every day. We're just so lucky to be
alive.

Natalya nods along.

POLINA

You should do something that makes
you happy. Then it will make your
family happy too. You will see.

Natalya manages a smile. Hopeful.

INT. KITCHEN, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Beautiful as always under her apron, Natalya cooks the best
dinner she knows how to. Fresh baked salmon with lemons.
Garlic herb mashed potatoes. A steaming hot loaf of bread. A
homemade apple pie.

She sets it all out on the dinner table with fancy napkins
and flatware. She even lights candles.

NATALYA

Boys, dinner's ready.

Frank and Hugh walk in. Neither of them sits. They toss aside the napkins on their plates and begin to fill them up.

NATALYA

I thought maybe... Maybe we could all eat at the table tonight. As a family.

Frank and Hugh exchange a glance.

FRANK

Why?

They both keep filling their plates. Serving up pieces of salmon. Ripping apart the beautiful bread. Cutting up the perfect pie. Spilling sauce, crumbs and apples across the pristine white table cloth.

Natalya watches it all, cringing with every movement.

Frank and Hugh walk towards the entertainment room, leaving her behind. Sounds of the TV turning on. The laugh track of some sitcom.

But Natalya hasn't moved, staring at the devastated remains of her dinner. Her breaths become shaky. Something welling up from deep inside of her. Deeper breaths. The muscles in her face becoming more rigid.

Then her shaking hand reaches for a BUTCHER KNIFE sitting on the counter.

INT. ENTERTAINMENT ROOM, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Natalya slowly steps into the doorway, knife in hand, stone-faced.

She approaches Frank and Hugh from behind as they sit on the couch, laughing along with the sitcom on TV. Neither of them looks back as she stands there for a long moment.

Natalya's eyes rise to take in the images on the TV. A family gathered around a table, talking and laughing together. The happy mother the center of attention.

For the first time, tears fill Natalya's eyes.

Then she raises the knife... And SLITS FRANKS THROAT.

Hugh screams, dropping his dinner all over the floor.

Natalya turns to him, knife and arm covered with blood. He stares back in horror as she approaches. He SCREAMS LOUDER --

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- LATER

Natalya slowly walks to the sink. Blood covering the knife. Splatter on her face and dress. Showing no emotion.

She calmly turns on the water. Gently washes the knife. Red bubbles washing away down the drain.

When all the blood is gone, she turns off the water. Picks up a hand towel and gently pats the knife dry. Slides it back into the block where it belongs.

She walks over to the table and blows the candles out.

Then picks up the phone and dials a number.

NATALYA (INTO PHONE)
It's Natalya... Natalya Baker. I've
done something wrong.

INT. ENTRYWAY, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

The front door opens to reveal a CLEANUP CREW in black jumpsuits with a corporate logo on their breasts. They walk in without a word.

INT. KITCHEN, NATALYA'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Two Crew Members enter to see Natalya sitting silently at the table, still covered in blood.

CREW MEMBER (O.S.)
The bodies are in here.

CREW MEMBER 2
Alright, take care of them. We'll
handle her.

He touches Natalya's shoulder. She doesn't move.

NATALYA
I loved them... I loved them both...

CREW MEMBER 2
Natalya. You need to come with us
now.

INT. CORRIDOR, HOSPITAL -- NIGHT

Natalya lays on a gurney, being rolled by TWO MASKED NURSES in black scrubs.

NATALYA
I loved them both so much...

INT. OPERATING ROOM -- NIGHT

Natalya lies on the operating table, unconscious, bright light shining down on her face. We don't see the bustling activity around her. We just HEAR the beeps of machines and the DOCTORS and NURSES working with all due haste.

DOCTOR (O.S.)

What do you think happened to her?

DOCTOR 2 (O.S.)

Virus of some kind. No one seems to know what's causing it. Scalpel, please.

She takes the instrument and uses it to delicately SLICE ALONG NATALYA'S HAIRLINE. A trickle of blood is dabbed away by a Nurse.

DOCTOR 2 (O.S.)

Forceps.

She slides them into the incision. Grabs onto something beneath the skin. Manipulates the forceps. Then there is a distinctly METALLIC CLICK. She slides the forceps back out --

Now holding a COMPUTER PROCESSOR.

DOCTOR 2 (O.S.)

No visible signs of damage.

DOCTOR (O.S.)

After all these incidents, you don't think they're going to recall this model, do you?

DOCTOR 2 (O.S.)

Don't even say the R-word. Our stock options would be worthless in a few hours.

(beat)

Do we have the new processor?

NURSE (O.S.)

Right here, doctor.

She takes the shiny NEW PROCESSOR in the forceps and inserts it into Natalya's forehead. Another metallic click and --

NATALYA'S BRIGHT EYES SNAP OPEN.

DOCTOR 2 (O.S.)

Model seventeen, can you hear me?

NATALYA

Yes.

DOCTOR 2 (O.S.)

Model seventeen, how do you feel?

NATALYA

I feel... Happy.

A smile slowly spreads across her face.

CUT TO:

Dr. Glenn Chase forces a smile as he looks himself over in the mirror. Fixes his dress shirt. His hair. A nervous energy about him. We get the sense that today is a big day.

INT. GLENN'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Glenn opens the blinds, letting the sunlight stream in. He peers out, taking in the neighborhood. Outside, Jenn stands with her respirator mask and knife, eyes darting about.

GLENN

Huh...

But his eyes are immediately drawn to an older CAR pulling into his own driveway. Glenn closes the blinds and takes one final look in the mirror.

The DOORBELL RINGS. He takes a deep breath.

FRONT DOOR

Glenn opens the door to reveal VIKTOR (20s). Tough, rugged, clearly from another part of town.

VIKTOR

Dr. Chase?

GLENN

You must be Viktor. Please, call me Glenn.

He smiles warmly and shakes Viktor's hand.

VIKTOR

You're not what I was expecting.

GLENN

Neither are you. For some reason, I assumed you'd be wearing a suit. Please...

He motions and Viktor steps inside. As Glenn closes the door, we hear in the distance --

JENN (O.S.)
No! No! Let go of me!

But Glenn's door slams shut.

INT. STUDY, GLENN'S HOUSE -- DAY

Glenn mixes Viktor a drink.

GLENN
Your associate said you were one of
the best. I appreciate you making
the trip up here.

Glenn looks over, seeing Viktor perusing the FAMILY PHOTOS,
enamored. Glenn approaches to join him.

GLENN
(pointing to photos)
That's my wife, Emily. My son, Adam.
He goes to Berkeley.

VIKTOR
Sounds like a nice life.

GLENN
Thank you. I've worked hard for it.

Viktor turns to Glenn, looking him in the eye.

VIKTOR
So why do you want someone killed?

A beat. Glenn smiles, amused.

GLENN
How often do you think about death?

VIKTOR
I don't.

GLENN
Really? I would think a man in your
line of work would think about it
all the time. All the lives you've
ended --

VIKTOR
I don't think about it.

GLENN

Well I do. I obsess over it. And
what comes after.

He hands Viktor his drink. Then lifts an ornate HOUR GLASS
from a table, pondering it.

GLENN

Let's say that this hour glass
represents the wealth of knowledge
and possibility that the universe
holds. One little grain of sand is
what a *living* human being is capable
of understanding. Is it so wrong
that I want to know more?

(off Viktor's look)

I've lived a good life, Viktor. But
I've grown tired of my cage and I
want to know what happens next. I
need answers. Who are we? What's our
purpose? Is there a God? If so,
which one is it? These questions
have been swirling around my head
for as long as I can remember. It's
become overwhelming. But so long as
I'm alive, I'll never know the
truth.

VIKTOR

So why don't you just wait a few
more years?

GLENN

I could. But I'd much rather go out
now, at my peak... Rather than
sticking around until I'm old and
decrepit. It's just not worth the
wait.

VIKTOR

You don't need me, you need a
shrink.

GLENN

I'm not depressed or psychotic. In
fact, I'd say that I'm the opposite.
My mind has never been more clear.
You see, I know exactly what I want.

VIKTOR

You want to die.

Glenn chuckles.

GLENN

Quite the contrary. You know, earlier today I saw a young girl in my office. She had a horrible spider bite on her cheek. She was heartbroken over it. But I found that I couldn't care less. I knew I should, but I didn't. I haven't cared about anyone or anything in a very long time. In a way, I'm already dead. But I don't want to be. I want to live again. Only not in this life. In the next.

VIKTOR

You're crazy.

GLENN

Not crazy, Viktor. Just curious.

VIKTOR

So off yourself.

Viktor turns to leave.

GLENN

I can't!

Viktor turns back. A flash of emotion in Glenn's eyes.

GLENN

My wife and son would blame themselves. It has to be murder. That's why I need you.

VIKTOR

I won't help you throw all of this away.

GLENN

I'm offering you fifty thousand, cash.

Glenn approaches him, the consummate salesman.

GLENN

Money like that can change your life. You could get your own house. Start your own family. Maybe even get a respectable job. Or... You can walk out that door, go back to whatever hole you crawled out of and keep offing scumbags for a few grand a pop.

(MORE)

GLENN (CONT'D)

You'll do just fine, until one day some old lady happens to catch a look at your face as you're leaving a hit. Or a gray hair falls off of your head, placing you at a scene with DNA evidence. You know it's just a matter of time before you're sent to prison to rot in a cell like a rat. Is that the life you want, Viktor? Because if you walk out that door, that's the choice you're making.

A long moment as Viktor glares back at him. Then --

VIKTOR

How do you want it done?

Glenn smiles.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Glenn sits alone at the table, eating a fancy steak dinner, savoring every bite.

GLENN (V.O.)

Come back tonight. I'll be alone. My wife is visiting her mother. She won't be home till morning.

INT. SHOWER -- NIGHT

Glenn leans his face into the hot stream, closing his eyes.

GLENN (V.O.)

The back door will be unlocked.

INT. BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Glenn shaves. Gently. Delicately.

GLENN (V.O.)

I'll be waiting in my bedroom. It's the first door to your right at the top of the stairs. I want two shots to the head, just to be safe.

INT. STUDY -- DAY -- BACK TO SCENE

GLENN

After it's finished, make it look like a burglary. Lots of broken glass.

(MORE)

GLENN (CONT'D)

Don't worry, we don't have an alarm.
This street is as safe as it comes.
And be sure to help yourself to
anything in the house. As much as
you can carry. Consider it a tip for
a job well done.

VIKTOR

What if nothing happens?

GLENN

What do you mean?

VIKTOR

What if you just... Die. That's it.

The statement hangs in the silence.

GLENN

Well, they say that death is the
last great adventure... What's an
adventure without any risk?

He holds out an ENVELOPE.

GLENN

That's ten thousand up front. The
rest will be in my hand tonight. You
can pry it out once I'm dead.

Viktor hesitantly takes the envelope, unnerved.

GLENN

It's been a pleasure doing business
with you.

He shakes Viktor's hand with that same warm smile.

INT. BEDROOM, GLENN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Glenn sits on the bed, dressed in silk pajamas, staring at
the FAMILY PHOTO in his hands. Emotionless.

A DOOR SQUEAKS as it opens downstairs. Glenn smiles. He sets
the photo down and picks up a nearby MANILLA ENVELOPE FILLED
WITH CASH.

His anticipation builds as he listens to the FOOTSTEPS
slowly climbing up the stairs, getting closer... And closer.
Then the DOOR OPENS --

Viktor stands in the doorway, wearing a black ball cap,
latex gloves on his hands, HOLDING A GUN.

GLENN

If you wouldn't mind, I'd like to
enjoy one last breath.

Glenn closes his eyes and inhales deeply, savoring it, then exhales slowly. He opens his eyes. And nods.

Viktor cocks the hammer. Steps close to Glenn. The gun trembles in his hand.

VIKTOR

This is your last chance, Mr. Chase.

GLENN

No, Viktor, it's not my last
anything. Just another beginning.
Now do it.

GLENN'S POV

Viktor sighs. He raises the gun to Glenn's forehead. A long moment passes. Then his hand steadies. A LOUD BANG --

And a BRILLIANT FLASH OF WHITE ENGULFING EVERYTHING. It fades away, revealing --

Viktor standing at the foot of the bed, staring down at us.

GLENN (V.O.)

Something's wrong. I'm still here.

Viktor bends down and picks up the manilla envelope of cash. He tucks it into his jacket.

GLENN (V.O.)

Viktor, shoot me again. I said two
shots. Viktor, I'm still alive.

But Viktor doesn't respond. He pulls out a RAG and wipes down the gun.

Then leans over and picks up Glenn's hand, PRESSING GLENN'S FINGERS AROUND THE GUN. Index finger on the trigger.

GLENN (V.O.)

What are you doing?

Viktor lets go, letting Glenn's hand flop out of sight. Then steps back and pulls a WHITE ENVELOPE out of his coat. He sets it on the dresser where it's easy to see.

GLENN (V.O.)

Viktor! Viktor you son of a bitch!
We had a deal!

(MORE)

GLENN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I said it can't look like a suicide!
 Take something! Take everything!

But Viktor just looks down at us with sad eyes, shaking his head. He walks out the door without leaving a single clue to suggest he was ever there.

GLENN (V.O.)
 Viktor!
 (beat)
 This can't be happening... Alright
 just stay calm. You won't last long
 without medical care. Any moment
 now, you'll slip away. Any moment
 now...

Outside the window, the SUN SLOWLY RISES...

CROSS DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BEDROOM -- MORNING -- GLENN'S POV

The sound of a DOOR OPENING.

EMILY (O.S.)
 Glenn, I'm home!

GLENN (V.O.)
 Emily?

FOOTSTEPS coming up the stairs.

EMILY (O.S.)
 Glenn? Are you hiding up here?

GLENN (V.O.)
 Emily, wait! Don't come in here! I
 don't want to see this!

The door opens and his wife, Emily, steps in. She SCREAMS. Our perspective shifts as she cradles Glenn's head, sobbing.

GLENN (V.O.)
~~Emily? Glenn? Oh my God! I'm still here!~~
 I'm still here!

Emily looks up and SCREAMS LOUDER. We see her BLOODY HANDS as she lets go of us. We land facing the wall --

IT'S COVERED WITH BLOOD AND BRAIN MATTER.

GLENN (V.O.)
 Oh my God... I am dead...
 (MORE)

GLENN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I have to be. But... No... Wait...
Something... Something's supposed to
happen! Why isn't anything
happening?!

FLASH! A camera snaps a photo, bringing us into --

INT. BEDROOM -- LATER -- GLENN'S POV

Several pairs of BLACK BOOTS walk around us. One of them
kneels down into frame, a CAMERA in his hand. FLASH! He
turns our head so we can see the room again, now filled with
LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL. Flash!

GLENN (V.O.)
Please... Somebody... Can't anyone
hear me?!

DETECTIVE
(re: white envelope)
You get your pictures of this?

CSI
Yup.

The Detective picks up the envelope off the dresser with
gloved hands and pulls out the TYPED LETTER.

GLENN (V.O.)
Wait...

DETECTIVE
(reading)
"Dear Emily and Adam... I'm sorry,
but I just couldn't take it anymore.
Goodbye. Love, Glenn."

GLENN (V.O.)
I didn't write that!

The Detective shakes his head as he puts the letter into an
evidence bag.

DETECTIVE
Life insurance sure won't be paying
out to his family for this. Selfish
bastard.

CSI
Tell me about it.
(flash!)
I'm all done here.

GLENN (V.O.)
I didn't kill myself you idiots! It
was Viktor! He killed me!

TWO CORONERS enter. Our perspective shifts as Glenn's body
is lifted and set down on the floor.

GLENN (V.O.)
Wait... What are you doing? Where
are you taking me?!

A ZIPPER IS PULLED OVER US, closing the BODY BAG.

GLENN (V.O.)
Just relax, Glen. It's all gonna end
soon. It has to. It has to...

A BLINDING WHITE LIGHT pierces the darkness.

GLENN (V.O.)
Yes... This is it... This must be
it...

The whiteness sharpens into the MEDICAL LIGHTS of an --

INT. AUTOPSY LAB -- NIGHT -- GLENN'S POV

TWO MEDICAL EXAMINERS in aprons and masks look down at us.

GLENN (V.O.)
Wait... No... No. This isn't
right...

The light glints off the electric BONE SAW in the Medical
Examiner's hand as he brings it towards us.

MEDICAL EXAMINER 1
Mind getting the eyes? Always freaks
me out when I see them staring at
me.

MEDICAL EXAMINER 2
I know. Almost like they're still
alive.

GLENN (V.O.)
No! Stop! I'm still here!!

The whine of the BONE SAW SPINNING UP. Glenn wails as his
EYES ARE CLOSED, plunging us into --

DARKNESS

The sickening sounds of THE SAW SPLINTERING BONE. SKIN
SLICING AND TEARING. GLENN SCREAMS through it all.

Until finally, silence.

Then HUSHED VOICES rise around us.

MOURNERS (V.O.)

I'm so sorry for your loss. / He was
a wonderful man. / He left us too
soon.

GLENN (V.O.)

I know those voices...

ADAM (V.O.)

My father was the best man I ever
knew. Dad, wherever you are... We
miss you, and we love you.

GLENN (V.O.)

I don't want to be here. I don't
want to hear this.

EMILY (V.O.)

Glenn... Why did you leave us? I
thought we were so happy.

GLENN (V.O.)

This isn't right. This isn't fair.

EMILY (V.O.)

(crying)

Promise you'll wait for me, okay?
I'll see you again some day. I know
I will.

GLENN (V.O.)

(choking up)

Oh God... Emily... I'm so sorry.

VIKTOR (V.O.)

So what's it like, Mr. Chase?
Everything you dreamed it would be?

GLENN (V.O.)

Viktor... Why didn't you stop me?
You should have stopped me!

The sound of an ORGAN PLAYING.

PRIEST (V.O.)

May the soul of the faithful
departed, through the mercy of God,
rest in peace.

ALL (V.O.)

Amen.

GLENN (V.O.)
 This can't be all there is... There
 has to be something more! There has
 to be!

A deep THUD. Followed by the sound of DIRT filling his
 grave.

GLENN (V.O.)
 No! Wait! Emily, please, don't let
 them bury me! Don't let them bury
 me! I want to go back! I want to go
 home! I want to live! I want to
 live! I WANT TO LIVE!

Silence. For several long moments.

Until it's broken by CLICKITY-CLACK sounds from above.

GLENN (V.O.)
 What is that?
 (beat)
 How long have I been down here?

More noises, louder now. HUNDREDS OF MINIATURE APPENDAGES
 CRAWLING IN FROM ALL DIRECTIONS.

GLENN (V.O.)
 No! Get them off me! Get them off
 me! PLEASE GOD, GET THEM OFF ME!

CUT TO:

Claire sits at the kitchen table, dressed in a school
 uniform, picking at her food.

CLAIRE
 I'd rather die than take this test.

INT. KITCHEN, CLAIRE'S HOUSE -- MORNING

Her mother, MARY (40s), moves about with a nervous energy.

MARY
 Oh Claire, don't be so morbid.
 Everyone takes the test. It's just
 part of finishing high school.

Claire musters a nod.

The house is decidedly working class. Aged furniture. Dated
 wallpaper. Everything old or hand me down.

MARY

Seems like just yesterday I was getting ready for it. It won't be long before you're making breakfast on your daughter's test day.

CLAIRE

I just want it to be over with.

MARY

Claire, don't say that. You know how important this is. You only get to take it once.

Her father, ALAN (40s) walks in, wearing dirty MECHANIC'S OVERALLS.

FATHER

There's my little genius. All ready?

Claire hesitates, trepidation in her voice.

CLAIRE

What if I do badly?

ALAN

Sweetie, you're gonna do great.

CLAIRE

But what if I don't?

She looks over her parents with their old clothes and tired eyes, implication clear.

MARY

You're gonna do great, Claire.

(beat)

You have to.

INT. CAR -- DAY

Claire stares out the window as her father drives. She notices Helen, tending to the flowers outside her house. Her eyes meet Claire's as they drive past.

CLAIRE

Johanna should be taking the test today.

ALAN

You can't think about that now. Just stay focused.

Claire eyes all of the homes that they pass, shaking her head.

CLAIRE

I can't wait to get out of here.

ALAN

Do well today and you will.

They drive on in silence.

INT. CAR / EXT. HIGH SCHOOL -- DAY

They slow to a stop in front of the old BRICK BUILDING. Claire looks out, seeing the other STUDENTS in their uniforms hugging their parents goodbye. Nervousness and tension in every embrace.

ALAN

Remember... It's not a sprint, it's a marathon. Just take your time, and find the answers. When students rush, they make their mistake.

CLAIRE

Is that what happened to you?

ALAN

(sighs)

The test didn't beat me Claire, I beat myself. I didn't study like you. I didn't realize how much it mattered.

Regret in his eyes.

ALAN

But that's not gonna happen to you. The test can be your ticket out of here. It can get you into the best schools and you'll be able to do so many incredible things with your life. So much more than me or your mother. There's not a doubt in my mind that you're gonna ace this thing.

CLAIRE

You really think I can?

ALAN

A boy named Billy Engels aced the test my year. We were all in awe. Now maybe I'm biased... But I think you're smarter than he ever was. I know you can do it.

He smiles at her.

CLAIRE

Thanks, dad.

She hugs him tightly.

INT. CLASSROOM -- DAY

Claire steps in. The desks are aligned in rows. STUDENTS in UNIFORMS whisper quietly to one another from their seats. The sense of unease is palpable. As Claire walks past, we catch snippets.

STUDENTS

I heard Manny's parents got him a
tutor. / My parents made me do the
prep program. / I didn't even bother
studying. / I couldn't sleep at all
last night.

Claire takes her seat in the middle of the room, avoiding all eye contact. A loner.

LESLIE (O.S.)

Look at them...

Claire turns to Leslie, sitting adjacent to her. Leslie smirks as she glances out over the students.

LESLIE (O.S.)

... All about to begin their long
journey towards mediocrity. Thank
God we can finally get it over with,
right?

CLAIRE

Yeah. I guess so.

LESLIE (O.S.)

You think you're gonna ace it, don't
you?

CLAIRE

I never said that.

LESLIE

You've got that look in your eye.

CLAIRE

So do you.

They hold each other's gaze for a moment. Competitors.
Leslie smiles.

LESLIE

Don't be so nervous, Claire. I mean
it's only the rest of your life.

Claire stiffens.

The sound of the DOOR OPENING makes every student look up.
The PROCTOR (30s), an attractive woman in a nice suit with
glasses, steps in.

PROCTOR

Please clear off your desks. We're
about to begin.

LESLIE

Here we go...

The Proctor begins passing out TEST PACKETS and PENCILS.

PROCTOR

As a reminder, only approved pencils
are allowed on the test.

She places a test packet and pencil on Claire's desk.

PROCTOR

Fill in the bubbles to spell out
your name, date of birth and student
identification number.

SOUNDS OF PENCILS SCRATCHING PAPER as Claire and the other
Students fill in bubble after bubble.

PROCTOR

I cannot answer any questions once
the test begins. So does anyone have
any before we start?

Students exchange glances. But no one dares raise a hand.

PROCTOR

Very well. You may now break the
seal and open your test packet. Fill
in only one answer bubble per
question. Good luck.

STUDENT

What do we do when we're done?

PROCTOR

(smiles)

I cannot answer any questions once
the test begins.

She takes her seat. For a moment, none of the Students do anything, hesitant to start.

RIP! Leslie breaks the seal of her test packet. The others follow suit. Rip! Rip! Rip!

Claire looks down at the test packet before her.

CLAIRE

(sotto)

Find the answers, Claire... Find the answers...

With a deep breath, she break the seal and begins.

WE NEVER SEE THE QUESTIONS, only Claire's hand as she fills in the answer bubbles. Her face as she considers each potential response.

Most of the students look flustered, unsure of themselves, expressions revealing their doubt.

But not Claire. She's in her element now, filling in the bubbles quickly and methodically, becoming more and more confident with each passing moment. Until --

The DOOR OPENS. Claire looks up, surprised.

An OLD MAN (70s) stands in the doorway, wearing a dark business suit. An authoritative air to him.

OLD MAN

Mr. Henderson?

All turn to MANNY HENDERSON (17), who looks up, confused.

MANNY

Ye... Yes?

OLD MAN

Would you please come with me?

MANNY

But... I have to finish the test.

OLD MAN

That won't be necessary, Mr. Henderson. Please come with me.

MANNY

Just gimme a second --

He quickly fills in more bubbles.

PROCTOR

Mr. Henderson, your classmates are trying to concentrate. Please, do as you're told.

MANNY

But the test isn't over yet!

OLD MAN

Mr. Henderson, your answer to question seven was regrettably incorrect. The test is over. For you.

Claire can't mask her shock. She watches as Manny stands and walks to the front. He turns, as if hoping someone will come to his aid. But no one dares speak. He walks out. The Old Man nods to the Proctor and closes the door.

A dreadful silence fills the room.

LESLIE

Where did he take him?

PROCTOR

I cannot answer any questions once the test begins.

LESLIE

But why didn't he get to finish?

PROCTOR

I cannot answer any questions once the test begins.

Then Claire suddenly sees it --

A SECURITY CAMERA mounted above the door. Claire's eyes widen as she turns to see CAMERAS MOUNTED IN EVERY CORNER. ALL AROUND THE ROOM.

She turns to see Leslie, looking just as nervous. But after a moment, she goes back to her test.

Claire looks to hers, anxiety rising.

With a shaky breath, she turns the page to continue.

MONTAGE SEQUENCE

Claire marks her answers, slowly, carefully, nerves on end. The tension in the room growing. It's a pressure cooker in here.

Every few moments, the DOOR OPENS. Claire looks up every time, fearing the worst.

OLD MAN
(different shots)
Miss Clark... Mr. Adams... Miss
Jacobs...

One by one, Students take the lonely walk to the front and out the door. Some go willingly. Others cry or even scream.

Claire keeps filling out answers, frequently glancing at the cameras, hand trembling, answer bubbles beginning to blur. She's about to crack, but forces herself to keep going.

All around her, STUDENTS FADE AWAY, until --

INT. CLASSROOM -- LATER

Only Claire and Leslie remain. They exchange a glance.

Claire looks to her answer sheet. There's only one left. She reads the question, and moves to fill in "B."

But she hesitates. Re-reads the question, indecisive as her pencil hovers over B and A. A and B. B and A. Finally, she moves to mark "A" --

The door opens. Claire halts her pencil just above the paper.

OLD MAN
Miss Halloway?

Claire turns to Leslie, who glares at the Old Man, infuriated.

LESLIE
It's not fair. I tried to erase it.

She erases vigorously but THE MARK WON'T GO AWAY.

OLD MAN
Miss Halloway, let's not make a
scene...

LESLIE
But I know the answer!

OLD MAN
Miss Halloway, you had your chance
and you failed. Now please, come
with me.

Claire watches as Leslie sets down her pencil. She stands, looking towards Claire.

LESLIE

Good luck.

It clearly pains her to say it. She walks out the door without looking back. The Old Man stares at Claire, as if laying down a silent challenge. Then closes the door.

All around the room, the SECURITY CAMERAS ROTATE TO FOCUS ON CLAIRE. The Proctor stares, emotionless, waiting.

Claire closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. Then grips her pencil firmly and marks "B." She looks to the door.

It remains shut.

PROCTOR

When you are finished, please turn
in your test packet to me.

Claire stares at the Proctor, barely believing it. She slowly gets up and walks forward, handing over her test packet and answer sheet.

PROCTOR

I had a feeling about you, Claire.
From the moment I walked into this
room.

Claire smiles. The weight of the world off her shoulders.

Then she hears the DOOR OPEN. She turns to see the Old Man standing in the doorway. He smiles warmly for the first time.

OLD MAN

Congratulations, Miss Daniels.

INT. HALLWAY, HIGH SCHOOL -- EVENING

Claire steps out of the classroom with the Old Man to see --

HER PARENTS waiting for her. Claire runs to them and they embrace her, swelling with pride.

MARY

Oh sweetie, we knew you could do it!

ALAN

What'd I say? First person to ace
the test in years!

Claire laughs, excited. The Old Man clears his throat.

OLD MAN
Come along, Claire.

CLAIRE
To where?

OLD MAN
Your new school. A place more aptly
suited to your level of
intelligence.

Claire looks back to her parents. Tears in their eyes.

MARY
We're so proud of you...

Claire hugs them tightly.

EXT. NEW SCHOOL -- DAY

A BLACK SEDAN pulls up. The Old Man opens the door and Claire steps out, feasting her eyes on the BEAUTIFUL MODERN BUILDING.

OLD MAN
Follow me, Claire. Your new
classroom awaits.

Claire beams and follows him.

INT. NEW CLASSROOM -- CONTINUOUS

A door opens. The lights are off inside. Claire steps in as the lights turn on to illuminate --

AN EMPTY ROOM. White walls. No windows.

She turns around, confused --

The DOOR SLAMS SHUT behind her. Claire tries to open it but it's PADDED with NO HANDLE.

CLAIRE
What's going on? What is this place?

INTERCOM (V.O.)
You have an exceptionally rare and
extremely dangerous level of
intelligence, Miss Daniels.

The VOICE ECHOES ALL AROUND HER. A CAMERA looks down from the corner.

INTERCOM (V.O.)

If left unsupervised, you would inevitably question our authority and attempt to change our way of life.

CLAIRE

What are you talking about?!

She looks around at the blank walls, panic setting in.

CLAIRE

You can't keep me in here!

She frantically pounds on the padded door but it doesn't budge.

CLAIRE

My parents will never let you do this! The others... The others will --

INTERCOM (V.O.)

Your former classmates will be sent to new schools to begin career training based on their respective scores. Some will become doctors, others accountants, electricians and the like.

CLAIRE

But I beat them! I beat them all!

Claire bangs on the door and walls.

CLAIRE

Please! Somebody! This is all wrong! I shouldn't be here! I passed the test! I passed the test! I passed the test!

No response. Tears fill her eyes.

Then a smile creeps across her face.

CLAIRE

I'm still taking it, aren't I? This is all part of the test!

Her eyes scan the blank white walls, searching.

CLAIRE

Find the answer, Claire... Find the answer...

She starts to pace, more driven than ever.

CLAIRE
Find the answer, Claire... Find the
answer... Find the answer, Claire...
Find the answer...

The image flickers to BLACK AND WHITE --

INT. CONTROL ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

We're looking at a SECURITY MONITOR. Claire paces on screen.

VOICE (O.S.)
How long does this usually last?

VOICE 2 (O.S.)
Some give up after a few days.
Others keep searching for years...
Until their minds are completely
gone.

We pull back, revealing a WALL OF MONITORS. Men and women, young and old. Some slouch in corners, sanity waning. Others pace in their cells, still searching for that final elusive answer. Genius forever confined.

FADE TO BLACK.

JENN (PRE-LAP)
There's no such thing as monsters...

We see a NEW SECURITY MONITOR, its image black and white. But on this one, we see Jenn, the little girl from the beginning. Trapped alone in the bunker. We pull out, revealing that we're in --

INT. LIVING ROOM, JENN'S HOUSE -- EVENING

Where Marie, Jenn's mom, stares at the small wireless monitor, tears in her eyes. Henry and Isaac behind her.

HENRY
Marie...

She doesn't turn. Doesn't respond.

HENRY
Marie, we have to tell her the
truth.

MARIE
We can't.

HENRY
We're running out of time. If one of
the neighbors calls about her --

MARIE

We don't even know if anyone saw her. And even if they did, they might just think she's our niece or Isaac's cousin or something. They might not have recognized her for what she is.

ISAAC

But what if they did?

Marie looks from her husband to son, realizing it's two against one.

MARIE

The best thing we can do is stay here and stay calm.

HENRY

It's too dangerous to keep her here any longer. We have to pack up and leave. Tonight.

Marie turns back to Jenn's image on the screen, torn.

HENRY

You can tell her or I will. But either way, we have to go.

INT. BUNKER -- LIGHTS ON

Jenn sits on the floor, surrounded by scattered canned goods, fallen books, upended chairs, all of the destruction that she caused earlier. Tears in her eyes.

The sound of the IRON DOOR OPENING. Jenn gets to her feet as her mother enters.

JENN

Stay away from me...

MARIE

Jenn...

She starts towards her.

JENN

Stay away!

Her mother stops. An unnatural distance between them.

JENN

You lied to me. You said there were monsters.

MARIE

Jenn... What you saw out there... It isn't what you think. It's not like in the magazines. It's a scary place. A terrible place. You wouldn't survive.

JENN

It didn't look scary.

MARIE

All those people you saw, they're not what they seem. I know it's hard for you to understand, but everything, everything we have ever done, we did it because we love you. Because we want to keep you safe.

JENN

Safe from what?

MARIE

From the monsters, Jenn... There are monsters in the world...

JENN

You're the only monsters.

MARIE

No Jenn. We're the only good people left --

JENN

Then let me out! Let me out of this cage!

She throws a can across the room at Marie. Marie ducks out of the way, staring at her daughter, shocked and hurt. Tears welling up, Marie retreats back out the door, closing it behind her.

Jenn sits back on the floor, her own tears forming.

After a moment, she hears the voices of her arguing parents filtering down through the floorboards overhead.

MARIE (O.S.)

She didn't believe a word I said.

ISAAC (O.S.)

Of course she doesn't. Why would she? We've been lying to her her entire life.

Jenn looks up to the ceiling, hatred swelling.

HENRY (O.S.)

It doesn't matter what she believes.
What matters is that we keep her
safe. Now I don't care if we have to
tie her up and drag her out of here
kicking and screaming, we're leaving
the moment --

POUND!

Jenn freezes. What the hell was that?

The sound is distant. Like something hitting the front door
of the house. Jenn looks up towards the ceiling.

POUND!

HENRY (O.S.)

They're here!

MARIE (O.S.)

Get Jenn!

POUND!

Jenn gasps as the overhead LIGHTS SUDDENLY FLICKER AND GO
OUT, leaving only the dim night lights glowing.

SMASH! SOUNDS OF THE FRONT DOOR BREAKING IN. Jenn jumps to
her feet, looking up at the ceiling.

CHAOTIC SOUNDS FROM ABOVE. POUNDING FOOTSTEPS. YELLING AND
COMMOTION. A SHRILL ELECTRONIC WHINE --

Followed by a THUD. MARIE SCREAMS. TWO MORE SHRILL WHINES
and TWO MORE THUDS.

And all is silent.

Jenn listens, terrified, as --

THUMP. THUMP. THUMP. SOMETHING IS COMING DOWN THE STAIRS.
Getting closer and closer. Jenn stares at the iron door.

Then scrambles back onto her bed. She grabs the stuffed
animal that her brother brought her, holding it tight.

JENN

There's no such thing as monsters...

SMASH! Incredibly loud. The iron door shakes.

JENN

There's no such thing as monsters...

SMASH!

JENN
There's no such thing as mon --

SMASH! The IRON DOOR FLIES OPEN.

FLASHLIGHTS CUT INTO THE DARKNESS as --

SOLDIERS IN BLACK TACTICAL GEAR MOVE IN, faces covered with MASKS and HELMETS. They stand over Jenn, blinding her with their lights, GUNS trained.

An OFFICER steps forward, speaking through his mask.

OFFICER
Pursuant to the 'One Child'
population control regulation, you
are hereby remanded to federal
custody.

Horror all over Jenn's face. The Officer reaches down, roughly seizing Jenn and yanking her up as she SCREAMS --

INT. LIVING ROOM, JENN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

The Officer holds Jenn's wrist, pulling her out of the house.

JENN
No! Let me go! Let go of me!

She sees Isaac lying on the floor as a Soldier roughly ZIP TIES HIS HANDS. Her Mother and Father pinned down by two others.

MARIE
Jenn!

JENN
MOM!

Jenn pulls away, but the Officer grips her tightly, forcing her towards the door.

HENRY
Let go of her you son of a bitch!

Her Parents lunge towards her but Soldiers violently hold them back.

MARIE
She hasn't done anything wrong!

HENRY

You can't take her! I won't let you
take her!

JENN

MOM, DON'T LET THEM TAKE ME! DON'T
LET THEM TAKE ME --

MARIE

Jenn, listen to me! We're gonna find
you! We're gonna find you --

The SHRILL ELECTRONIC WHINE as a Soldier presses a TASER
into Marie. She WAILS IN PAIN as her BODY SPASMS.

Jenn SCREAMS as the Officer yanks her away.

EXT. JENN'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

The Officer pulls Jenn towards a BLACK PRISONER VAN.

JENN

DAD! MOM!!

MOST OF THE NEIGHBORS have gathered outside, watching it
unfold. Tamara. Miranda and Carl with Leslie. Chris and
Melony with Tom. Glenn's wife, Emily. Claire's parents.

JENN

Help us! Somebody help us!

But they all just stare back, some shaking their heads
sadly.

The Officer opens the van door --

There are other CHILDREN (ages 4-7) cowering inside, crying.
Jenn stares at them in horror. An Officer picks her up,
forcing her inside.

JENN

NO! NO! DON'T PUT ME IN THERE! MOM!
DAD! PLEASE, SOMEBODY HELP ME --

The DOOR SLAMS SHUT. Jenn presses against the window, but we
can no longer hear her screams through the glass.

The van drives past the neighbors, down the suburban street.
Miranda turns to her family.

MIRANDA

Come on. Let's not let it ruin our
night.

She heads back inside. Her family follows. Then one by one, the other neighbors go back inside.

Until all is once again peaceful and quiet.

INT. KITCHEN, MIRANDA'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Miranda, Leslie, and Carl wash the dirty dishes together. Discarding the bones and fat in the garbage.

MIRANDA

Leslie, why don't you invite your friend Jacob over sometime? He seems so sweet.

LESLIE

I was actually thinking of inviting Shawna over.

CARL

Why not both of them?

Leslie smiles knowingly and nods.

INT. TAMARA'S BEDROOM, KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Tamara sits on her bed, holding a FRAMED PHOTO of Kaylie and her from years ago. They look so beautiful. So happy. Tears stream down Tamara's face.

She sets down the photo and starts to sob.

INT. KAYLIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Framed photographs of Kaylie's past pageants line the dresser.

STUDENTS (V.O.)

Did anyone see her face? / I heard
she's being home schooled. / I heard
her mom makes her wear a mask.

In a reflection off the glass, we see Kaylie as she is now. Her face covered by HUNDREDS OF RED SORES from the spider bites. She is hideous.

INT. IAN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Chris, Melony, and Tom eat pizza together, talking and laughing. Chris sitting where Ian used to. As they laugh, he and Melony exchange a knowing look. Lust simmering.

INT. PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL -- NIGHT

Ian lies on his bed, alone in his small cell, arms and legs strapped down. Head bobbing from side to side, whimpering as he cries.

IAN
Make them stop... Make them stop...
Make them stop...

The SOUND OF A DOORBELL brings us into --

INT. HOUSE -- NIGHT

The front door opens to reveal a MAN IN A BUSINESS SUIT. Natalya next to him in a colorful dress with a bright smile.

Inside the home is MR. PERKINS (40s) and his DAUGHTER (5).

SUIT
Mr. Perkins, I'm Stan Green,
Biocybernetics Corp. And let me
introduce your brand new model
seventeen...

Natalya curtsies to him. There's no missing the lust in his eyes. Then Natalya bends down to the little girl's height.

NATALYA
Hi there. I'm Natalya. What's your
name?

EXT. CEMETERY -- NIGHT

Emily stands over a grave, crying. The stone reads - "Glenn Chase: Loving Father. Devoted Husband."

EMILY
Glenn... I don't know if you can
hear me. But I miss you so much. Why
did you leave us? Why did you leave
me?

We look down at the grass in front of Glenn's grave, where six feet below, he rests. But all that we hear is silence.

INT. BEDROOM, CLAIRE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Mary looks over Claire's desk. At the test preparation books. Empty energy drink cans. Alan appears in the doorway.

MARY
I miss her...

ALAN

I do too.

He puts his arm around his wife.

ALAN

But she's at a better school now.
Learning new things. Making new
friends. She's gonna change the
world, Mary. Our little girl is
gonna make us so proud.

MARY

She already has.

She leans into him as he holds her close.

MARY

We're so lucky, you know that.

ALAN

I know.

INT. VAN -- NIGHT

Jenn sits huddled in the back of the van, surrounded by the other illegal children. Tears on her face, knees pulled in close to her chest, muttering to herself.

JENN

There's no such thing as monsters...
There's no such thing as monsters...

One of the other children looks up at her.

CHILD

Yes there are.

Jenn meets his gaze, knowing that it's true.

EXT. TWISTED AVENUE -- NIGHT

The van reaches an intersection, slowing to a stop next to the street sign -- TWISTED AVENUE.

It turns, heading out of the neighborhood and down another street as we PULL UP AND AWAY, higher and higher...

Until we're looking down at Twisted Avenue from above. An ordinary street on a peaceful night. Surrounded by other streets. Other neighborhoods. Other towns.

The endless sprawl of suburbia that could be anywhere.

SMASH TO BLACK.