

INNOCENT MONSTERS

Written by

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OVER BLACK:

JAX (V.O.)
My wife is the writer.

FOREWORD.

"Scarcely anything in literature is worth a damn except what is written between the lines." - raymond chandler

JAX (V.O.)
But as you are stuck with me, I
will do my best to put together the
pieces of her story.

FADE IN:

INT. JAX'S PENTHOUSE - DAY

It's a flash-forward, and it's cold, beautiful in the way that statues are - untoouchable. Dreamlike.

JAXON HELLER, 35, awakens next to a BLONDE (face unseen but helluva body). He pulls aside the white comforter, rises.

JAX (V.O.)
You think you know what happened,
that's why you're reading this. You
saw some glamorized article about
my wife, you wanted to read the
novel behind the tragedy. But you
have no idea. How could you,
reader? I was there, and even I
could not see what was happening.

He crosses to a closet, pulls out a SHOEBOX, and looks inside. Something dark here. He puts it back.

Goes to the floor-to-ceiling windows, looks down at the city.

JAX (V.O.)
This is just another piece of
fiction, yes. But it took hold of a
real person, and to me, their
stories will always be intertwined.

He looks down at the book on his coffee table. With shaky hands, he lifts it, runs his fingers over the cover.

FOCUS ON THE TITLE: "INNOCENT MONSTERS."

EXT. LAGUARDIA - NIGHT

A plane takes off into the night.

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

WINNIFRED CRANE HELLER, 27, smart-girl pretty, lives in her head, watches New York's lights fade away through her window.

She's numb, distant. Hoodie up, turtle in her shell.

Next to her, Jax (age 34), eyes her like a concerned doctor. Her long fingers clutching so tight to the seat they are white. Chipped grey nail polish. Chewed off tips.

He puts his hand over hers, squeezes.

She doesn't look at him, but her hand squeezes back.

INT. BAGGAGE CLAIM, PALM SPRINGS AIRPORT - DAY

Exhausted (and currently solo) Winnie looks for a place to sit. The siding on the baggage carousel says "DO NOT SIT."

She sits on it anyway.

Checks to make sure Jax isn't in eye-sight, then pops a few pills from a prescription bottle.

She scribbles in her NOTEBOOK. Flips to her favorite section - "QUOTES 2 cum back 2." There it is, at the top:

'Life swarms with innocent monsters.' Underlines 'monsters.'

The BLARE of the sound announcing bags falling, and the blinking RED lights. It almost seems a warning for something more. But... no, just bags falling.

Jax returns with a CART. He gives her an encouraging smile. She tries weakly to give one back.

JAX

You don't have to fake a smile for
me.

It drops off her face quickly, but his remains. An OPTIMIST. Or at least, in front of her, he is.

EXT. PALM SPRINGS AIRPORT - DAY

Winnie pulls from her vape (THC not tobacco), slow, somber, as Jax arranges their baggage on the cart.

Jax looks at her, has a thought, whispers something in her ear. She grins genuinely.

WINNIE

Really?

ZOOM! Winnie rides the baggage cart as Jax PUSHES IT, fast, both of them giggling their asses off and annoying everyone.

He'd do anything to see her smile.

Then, they are waiting for a while, her still on top of the cart.

JAX

There he is.

Jax waves to a car pulling up. Kid driving it is TOBY, early 20's. He helps Jax load the baggage into the back.

EST. PALM SPRINGS - DAY

Classic locations. Usually packed, currently abandoned as it's the off-season. Eerily quiet. Achingly hot.

Zero in on the desert, where Toby's car is driving...

INT. TOBY'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Winnie and Jax in the back, Toby drives. The car's thermometer reads: 108 degrees.

Winnie looks out the window at the desert (hood up, sunglasses on.) Jax tries to make conversation with Toby.

JAX

So you work for Wes?

TOBY

Wesley and Monica, yes. They instructed me very carefully about how to get y'all set up. I was going to stay in the house, actually, before you guys swooped in last minute.

Winnie and Jax exchange a look - Toby's bitter.

JAX

Sorry about that, man. Hey, if it makes you feel better, we're not just vacationing.

TOBY

No?

JAX

My wife here - I know this may surprise you because she's so beautiful--

WINNIE

Stop it.

JAX

But she's a genius writer, and she and Wes share the same agent, who is very pushy, if you've met her..? Anyway, she thought it would be good for Winnie's book.

TOBY

(still bitter)

Very nice. So it's set in Palm Springs?

JAX

No, actually--

WINNIE

Can you turn up the A/C?

Toby does. Jax realizes Winnie's getting anxious from the subject of conversation. Looks at her, gives her the attention she needs.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

I hate it here in the summer, look at this.

She points out the sound her legs make when she sticks/unsticks them from the seats.

JAX

Maybe you should take off that hoodie then.

WINNIE

I like the hoodie.

EXT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE - DAY

Toby pulls up to the HOUSE. Everything is old but because of how well maintained it is, feels stuck in time. Authentic vintage - old things only rich people have.

Speaking of which, there is car beneath the open garage, a '54 Mustang. Toby indicates it as they head inside.

TOBY

You'll get full use of their car while you're here. It gets stuck sometimes, there's starter fluid in the back seat.

Jax lingers by the Mustang, admiring it.

JAX

She's gorgeous.

Winnie is hot, annoyed and doesn't give a shit about the car.

WINNIE

Can we go in?

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE

Toby unlocks the door, lets them in. He greets the large puppy, as well as the shy black cats (two of them) who wander the halls with expensive collars.

TOBY

Hey buddy! This is Hemingway. The cats are Coco and Chanel.

Winnie mimes vomiting and without a word, disappears into a bedroom. Jax puts his arm kindly on Toby's shoulder, leads him further away from Winnie.

JAX

Don't mind Winnifred, she has difficulty traveling. Why don't you show me the ropes?

Toby nods. The two walk through the house.

It's decorated lavishly, half vintage, half crystal-grunge. Low, velvet green chaise. Massive windows with pale lace curtains billowing. A pricey-looking chandelier.

The wife is a jewelry designer, so we probably see her shit (it's like, dream catchers, tarot cards, 'health crystals' hanging from a large fake moose head).

IN THE BEDROOM -

Winnie watches through the curtains, just peeking through...

Watching as Toby shows Jax the outdoor patio, the pool, the cleaning supplies, etc.

We don't hear words, just indistinguishable sounds as they speak. Toby points around, at the neighbors, various directions. Jax asks a few questions, points, nods.

Winnie seems curious that he exists apart from her. And part frustrated he hasn't come in to check on her yet.

As they turn to come back towards inside, Winnie quickly closes the curtain. Lays down.

Jax opens the door.

JAX (CONT'D)

Hon? I know you're resting, but there's one room I think you're going to want to see first.

WINNIE

Is the boy gone?

JAX

Listen.

WINNIE

Jax, is that--

JAX

Listen. You never learn patience, Winnie Crane, that's your issue, you know that?

And there it is: the sound he meant her to listen for... Toby's car pulling away.

He kisses her, takes her hand.

INT. WRITER OFFICE - DAY

Darkness. Jax's hands rise up to reveal Winnie's POV of:

A perfect writer's room.

She glows. It's not hers, but it has everything a writer could need.

JAX
And I'll bring up your books.

WINNIE
I didn't pack my books, they're too heavy.

JAX
I know.

He winks and goes to grab one of his suitcases.

WINNIE
Baby, you didn't...

He did; his biggest suitcase is full of all her writing things. Pads, pens, books. She's moved by the gesture.

WINNIE (CONT'D)
How did you even fit your own stuff?

JAX
I read that article about men being more productive when they wear the same thing every day, so expect a whole lot of this...

He indicates his current outfit.

WINNIE
That's men that have a closet full of the same things. They don't *not* wash the things.

JAX
You sure? Steve Jobs was reportedly a very smelly guy.

WINNIE
Now we're off topic.

He sniffs himself.

JAX
Not exactly...

She laughs, holds his face, is PRESENT for this moment. And wants to show him, *I'm here.*

WINNIE
The topic being, that you are the best husband in the world.
(MORE)

WINNIE (CONT'D)

Thank you for everything. I love you. I'm sorry I've been... you know.

JAX

Don't worry about me, worry about your work. When it's done, you'll feel like yourself again. You always do.

He wraps his arms around her from behind, kisses her ear.

She sighs, relaxes. It emphasizes just how TENSE she's been this whole time. Night and day.

Jax smiles to himself, satisfied, hopeful. We think "aw" quickly followed by, "that poor bastard." (The MUSIC speaks to a darker outcome.)

INT./EXT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE

Jax feeds the animals, plays with them. Surveys the pool. He gets a call from "TRACEY." (Winnie's agent).

TRACEY (V.O.)

How's she settling in?

JAX

We just got here.

TRACEY (V.O.)

You know how much time we have. Unless you're willing to pay back her advance yourself--

JAX

Stop talking like that, Trace, we just got here.

TRACEY (V.O.)

You said that. You really believe in her, don't you?

JAX

Yeah, I do.

TRACEY (V.O.)

Either that, or you're not liquid.

JAX

What?

TRACEY (V.O.)

Just a rumor I heard, that the last
of your fortune's tied up in
holding, probably nothing.

JAX

If you want me to help you, you
should try being nice.

TRACEY (V.O.)

So not just a rumor then, huh?

IN THE OFFICE -

Winnie sets up the room.

She pulls out all her medication bottles - and there are five, maybe catch a glimpse of the ZOLOFT, ADDERALL, KLOONOPIN. Puts them in a drawer, shuts drawer.

She opens her laptop.

PROLOGUE.

"What's so hard about that first sentence is that you're stuck with it... And by the time you've laid down the first two sentences, your options are all gone." - joan didion

She has all these notes to herself. Voices that begin to overwhelm. (Hear them OVER each other).

She shuts the computer, voices stop. She needs something simpler... The TYPEWRITER.

She sets it up. Knows her way around the thing.

Takes a deep breath, feeling for the fictional world.

WINNIE (V.O.)

The story started when she began to
disappear again.

FLASHES OF: a YOUNG GIRL in a WHITE DRESS. Flashes of knives, blood, flowers.

This is Winnie trying to get into the "zone." It's a bit messy, feeling for whatever raw creative energy is there, letting her mind wander. (As the story solidifies, the "flashes" will diminish).

WINNIE (V.O.)

Bleeder, wake up!

INT. BEDROOM --

Two people in shadows on a bed. Call them SHADOW WINNIE and SHADOW JAX. Feels like a memory/fiction hybrid.

WINNIE (V.O.)
 He reaches for her / she recoils
 curls begins to unfurl / feels the
 cold crawl finger first into her
 bones /

He reaches for her, she pulls away.

WINNIE (V.O.)
 Bursting bruises at every bureau
 corner, every subtle submerge in
 purging affection like a bulimic
 bored of being thirteen thirsty and
 hurting/

FLASH OF: A razor blade. A claw-foot BATHTUB.

SHADOW WINNIE
 Can you save me?

SHADOW JAX
 Save what?

SHADOW WINNIE
 Can you take this and see it and
 not leave it?

He looks at her with scared love-eyes.

SHADOW JAX
 There is no need to save/ that
 which is not making out with death.

FLASH OF: Thin fingers with red nails grabbing a bottle of pills. Lips and tongue as the pills are swallowed.

SHADOW WINNIE
 I am but your breath/ is better.

WINNIE (V.O.)
 ...Whispers the her before she
 buries head in his sweater/

Shadow Winnie does, but we go right back to the:

SUICIDE SCENE --

Girl shedding white dress, stepping out of it, slowly walking towards the bath. Flowers float in the water. Girl sinks into the bath. Her head lolls back.

WINNIE (V.O.)
'I'm like King Midas'/' she says/
'I'm the wishes that have not been thought through'/'

The bath water slowly turns redder and redder. Everything blurs. Then a PHONE begins to ring--

INT. OFFICE, PALM SPRINGS

And the ringing jerks Winnie back into reality.

She sees there is a retro LANDLINE hidden behind some papers. She lifts it.

WINNIE
Hello?

A piercing SCREAM causes Winnie to immediately hang it up.

Looks around, paranoid of everything. Freaked.

A DARK FIGURE passes by her window. She turns, catching just the end of it.

INT. BEDROOM, PALM SPRINGS - EVENING

Winnie twitches in her sleep, having a vivid nightmare. She awakes VIOLENTLY.

She catches her breath, calms down, squints at the clock.

IN THE KITCHEN -

Winnie goes around the corner to see Jax is cooking.

JAX
Sleeping beauty! I hope you're hungry.

They eat dinner. Braised tenderloin, garden salad, red wine.

Winnie watches him drink.

WINNIE
How many glasses is that?

JAX
Are you serious?

WINNIE
How many?

JAX
It's my third.

WINNIE
Okay.

JAX
(half-kidding)
Is that okay?

WINNIE
I thought it was your fourth.

(She's still rattled from trying to write earlier, and takes it out on him. He knows this, takes it well.)

JAX
Baby, chill. Nothing is wrong. Stop trying to make something wrong. How about I roll you a Jaxon special, like old times, huh?

EXT. PATIO - EVENING

They smoke a beautifully rolled blunt, lay out in the hammock, look out at the mountains. (Note here, how close their neighbor's house is to theirs.)

WINNIE
Do you still want to have a baby with me?

JAX
Of course I do.

WINNIE
Even though I'm crazy?

JAX
You're not crazy.

She laughs mid-toke, and coughs a bunch. Gives him a look.

JAX (CONT'D)
Okay, maybe you're not winning Sanity Awards. But we all have our shit.

WINNIE

I know...

She looks at the window that leads to the writer office.

JAX

You okay?

WINNIE

Yeah.

(shakes it off)

Yeah, I'm just stoned.

JAX

Good. Because I'm putting a baby
inside you. Tonight.

He kisses her, brings his A game.

INT. BEDROOM, PALM SPRINGS - NIGHT

They have sex. At first, it's great. But she's doing it to show him she's okay, and they quickly fall out of sync.

It becomes impersonal, loses all passion. Boring. Done a thousand times. It's neither one's fault - they are just in different worlds.

EXT. STREET - LATER THAT NIGHT

Headlights of a car as it pulls up to the neighbor's house.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jax is asleep. Winnie is wide awake, laying in an awkward position to increase fertility - while also smoking her vape.

When she hears the CAR next door, she is curious, and climbs out of bed to the window to see...

A light goes on in the neighbor's house.

Winnie watches as a shadowy figure becomes a blurry BRUNETTE, who begins undressing. Body of a Victoria's Secret Angel.

The girl stands in the window opposite.

For a moment, we wonder if she is looking out - but in fact, she is looking at her own reflection in the dark window - admiring herself.

The confidence in this is mesmerizing to Winnie, who regards the girl with fascination, as if she's an alien creature.

EXT./INT. MARA'S CHILDHOOD HOME, CONNECTICUT - EVENING

Painted on a wooded home:

CHAPTER 1. "A man's face is his autobiography. A woman's face is her work of fiction." - Oscar Wilde

Pan across to the WINDOW, where there is a girl looking out.

The exact same angles and expression as the BRUNETTE NEIGHBOR (clearly inspired by her, will be played by the same actress) - except for minor differences, including that this girl is BLONDE. This is Winnie's protagonist, MARA CALLOWAY, 16.

(Note: this hyper-real world is shot like a music video or fashion editorial. It's vibrant, playful, twisty. In contrast to the Palm Springs Reality, with its bleached out pastels and sweaty, orange-yellow emptiness; this fictional world is POLYCHROMATIC PUNK, Candy Warhol, avant-garde. It comes alive in ways reality never could.)

MARA (V.O.)

When do you become a woman?

A FLASH OF IMAGES too fast to comprehend. Clubs, coke, cash. Lipstick and lollipops, overdoses and bloody noses.

MARA (V.O.)

Is it the first time you bleed?
First catcall, first fuck? The
first time you look in the mirror
and hear the voice that says, 'not
enough.'

MORE FLASHES. Bodies fucking violently. Some kids passed out in a bathtub with LIQUOR BOTTLES everywhere. Someone dressed as DEATH doing a line. Smoke seeping from sexy lips.

MARA (V.O.)

First drink, the first love, the
first loss? First time you blow
smoke in a boy's eyes.

INT. BEDROOM, PALM SPRINGS

Winnie looks over at Jax, sleeping.

MARA (V.O.)

First faking it.

Winnie exits the bedroom.

INT. OFFICE, PALM SPRINGS - NIGHT

Winnie sits down at the typewriter, types away. It's what we just heard. 'When do you become a woman' etc.

MARA (V.O.)
Is there even a moment at all?
Maybe for some women, it's just a
gradual feeling of settling into
the person you're going to be.
Maybe for most women, even.

Winnie pauses. A flash of MARA. She's begging to be written.

MARA (V.O.)
But not for me.

INT. MARA'S CHILDHOOD HOME - NIGHT

Mara turns away from the window. Puts her hair back, brushes her teeth.

MARA (V.O.)
For me, it was a very specific
moment, at a very specific time...

She walks to her mother's bedroom. Pushes the door open.

FREEZES. On her face as her jaw slowly drops.

MARA (V.O.)
...and I could describe each detail
as if it happened this morning
because I could never forget even
if I wanted to.

Mara's SCREAM pierces the night, cutting through.

LATER THAT SAME EVENING -

Mara is sobbing. She has blood all over her face, her body. She wipes her mouth - blood is getting in it.

We realize she is at a CRIME SCENE, and there are detectives and COPS there, and yellow tape blocking the room behind her - her mother's bedroom.

COP
Anything else about the man that
you can tell us?

MARA
 (still crying)
 I barely saw him. He, um, he had a
 mask. He was like, normal height. I
 don't know, please, I just want my--

MR. CALLOWAY, 45, a professor, enters urgently.

MARA (CONT'D)
Daddy.

She runs to her father, hugs him. He is in shock, doesn't know how to react. The cops address him.

COP
 Mr. Calloway?

He drops to his knees, sees the HORRIFIC SCENE (as we see it too for the first time).

A woman (presumably Mrs. Calloway) lies in bed, her stomach slashed open violently, and blood sprayed all over the room.

Friendly reminder: this is pop-art version of death, so it's not necessarily as stomach-turning as it sounds. In fact, the blood is not red, but a dark, thick GOLD.

Mr. Calloway stumbles to find words, all of them gone.

COP (CONT'D)
 Sir?

MR. CALLOWAY
 We were pregnant.

INT. DINING ROOM, PALM SPRINGS - DAY

A FORK stabs into an egg yolk, and it leaks yellow over the beautiful Eggs Benedict.

We're at breakfast with Jax and Winnie. Fresh fruit in a mason jar. Steaming French press. (Knowing them as we do now, it's clearly the work of Jax.)

WINNIE
 So these guys you're seeing, are they... like, band friends?

JAX
 We might jam a little, yeah. As much as I hated the whole scene, I do miss some parts of it, you know? It'll be good, I think.

Done with his breakfast, he goes to get ready. In the mood to DO things. Winnie still picks at her food.

WINNIE
Oh hey, baby?

He comes back.

JAX
Yeah?

WINNIE
The neighbors on that side, did the assistant guy tell you anything about them?

JAX
Yeah, actually, he mentioned it was a producer. But the guy's out of town. Why?

WINNIE
I saw a girl over there.

JAX
I dunno, maybe his daughter? You want to go make friends or something?

WINNIE
Nevermind, forget it.

INT. OFFICE, PALM SPRINGS

She sits at the desk, edits her earlier pages, makes notes in the margins. Blows smoke rings with her vape.

Jax knocks on the door. Peeks his head in, freshly showered, looking dashing.

JAX
Sloan.

She regards him quizzically over her reading glasses.

JAX (CONT'D)
The neighbor girl you're so curious about. Toby says her name's Sloan.

Oh, right. She smiles. He kisses her. Waits a moment.

JAX (CONT'D)
You look beautiful, by the way. You
getting to work?

WINNIE
Hope so.

He heads to the door, blows her a kiss. She catches it with her mouth (crunch!) and blows one back.

He catches it even more dramatically, like a pet getting a treat. He still doesn't leave.

WINNIE (CONT'D)
Go!

JAX
Okay, sorry. You're hard to leave.

She shakes her head, can't help smiling.

WINNIE
So not true.

JAX
So very true.

He makes her do the blowing kisses one more time.

She leans in the crack of the office door, watching him nuzzle the dog before leaving.

She shuts the door and hears the mustang pull away. She goes back to her desk to find:

One of the BLACK CATS blocking the typewriter, looking straight at her.

WINNIE
Please move.

When it doesn't, she pushes it off, and it falls with a hiss but of course lands on it's feet.

It's a bit more brutal than she needed to be, and she knows it, and feels guilty for a moment before settling into her new desk and putting her fingers on the keys.

EXT. MANHATTAN - NIGHT

Glorious flashes of a surrealist version of Manhattan at night. Entire buildings PINK, NEON, etc. The skyline is never exactly set, moves, lives -- ink that isn't yet dry.

A BILLBOARD READS:

CHAPTER 2. "Life has no meaning, the moment you lose the illusion of being eternal." - sartre

Settle on a HOTEL...

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Mara stands with Mr. Calloway, taking everything in, starry-eyed. But, cutting through:

MR. CALLOWAY
...The cheapest room available.

MARA
Pardonez-moi?

MR. CALLOWAY
We have to be smart right now.

MARA
Gross.

She addresses the CONCIERGE with total confidence.

MARA (CONT'D)
We'll take the most expensive room
you have, please.

MR. CALLOWAY
I apologize for Mara. A simple room
will be fine, thank you.

An evil spark in Mara's eye.

MARA
You sure about that?

Their relationship is clearly off - though to what degree is not yet clear. Mr. Calloway is not a smooth man, he is a bit stilted, wears his personality much like his ill-fitting suit. Mara is more formed, and has a power over him.

Having lost their silent battle, a defeated Mr. Calloway turns to the concierge.

CONCIERGE
Penthouse suite okay?

Mara grins as she watches the key slide across the counter.

INT. PENTHOUSE SUITE, HOTEL - NIGHT

Mara immediately goes to the minibar. Mr. Calloway lays down.

MR. CALLOWAY
I'm doing the best I can here.

She leans down over him. It's weird Lolita vibes.

MARA
My poor daddy, you've been through
so much. You rest, okay?

MR. CALLOWAY
You won't be mad?

She kisses him on the forehead. He reaches for her wrist. Pulls. Brings her down on top of him, so that he is hugging her chest. He seems to NEED her in some desperate way.

She waits for him to be done, then she wriggles out.

There is a KNOCK. Mara turns around from her mini-bottle of vodka. The knock came from... *the bathroom*?!

Another knock. Mara swallows, very carefully goes to open the bathroom door, only to find:

THE SAME CLAW-FOOT BATHTUB, filled to the brim, overflowing with blood - but this blood is the color of REAL blood, it's a vivid RED. It doesn't belong here, and yet here it is.

A woman's body inside. Wrists slit open, dripping.

It's Mara's pregnant mother.

Then, suddenly, it becomes MARA HERSELF. Mara's eyes widen as she stares at her own corpse.

But then, even STRANGER - it's WINNIE.

We are jerked back, as in reality--

INT. OFFICE, PALM SPRINGS

--Winnie is pressing the backspace key. A low groan - pain and frustration.

But for the first time, we see up close: THERE ARE SCARS ON HER WRISTS. Very faded, but clearly were deep.

The image of the red bathtub starts to make sense...

A THIRD KNOCK sounds, and we realize it's coming from Winnie's front door. Winnie sighs, rises.

AT THE FRONT DOOR -

Winnie opens it.

WINNIE

Look, now is really not a...

She stops as she realizes who is standing before her.

The GIRL NEXT DOOR - SLOAN, late teens, maybe 20, and a total fucking knockout. Her honey-brown hair glows in the sun.

(We should also note that, seeing Sloan next to Winnie should highlight their physical similarities; should feel like Sloan is the actress who would play Winnie in a movie. They have similar styles, but Sloan is taller, slimmer, younger, and overall more AIRBRUSHED, animated, larger than life as well as *unscathed* by it.)

WINNIE (CONT'D)

Sorry, you're the neighbor, right?
Sloan?

SLOAN

I got you at a bad time?

WINNIE

Ah, it's alright, I was just
failing to write--

SLOAN

Oh good, then we can hang.

Before Winnie can say another word, Sloan is already on her way in. Manners don't factor in. Everything she sees, somehow belongs to her.

Winnie is too curious to really be upset, follows Sloan.

INTO THE KITCHEN -

WINNIE

My husband's out at the moment, so
it's just me. I'm Winnifred, you
can call me Winnie. I...

Sloan rifles through things, eats a strawberry.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

Is there something I can help you
with, Sloan?

Sloan turns, a bit of the strawberry juice running down her designer lipstick lips. She just looks at Winnie for a long moment, then grins, and walks past her.

SLOAN
Here we go.

Sloan's found the liquor, pours herself from vodka.

SLOAN (CONT'D)
Want some?

WINNIE
You're not 21. Are you?

SLOAN
Weird how greasy those numbers get
once you come of age, huh.

She hands Winnie a glass.

SLOAN (CONT'D)
Chill. You don't have to try to be
a grown up in front of me.

Sloan snoops around, pretty invasive about it too.

SLOAN (CONT'D)
This is a nice place. The
Robertsons never let me over,
they've private people I guess.

Sloan finds a photo album. It's the Robertsons. Intimate photos, which Sloan finds entertaining.

Winnie just regards her with increasing curiosity, drawn.

SLOAN (CONT'D)
So you're a writer? What do you
write about?

WINNIE
I don't know, the truth in a
prettier dress, basically.

SLOAN
Soundbite goes *crunch*!

WINNIE
What?

SLOAN
(like, duh)
You sound like a soundbite.

WINNIE

That was from something. An interview I did once. I guess it sounds stupid, huh.

SLOAN

You should do something else for a living. No one wants the truth these days.

WINNIE

No? Why not?

SLOAN

The truth is too scary.

WINNIE

That's why there's the dress.

SLOAN

That just makes it a scary thing in a pretty dress.

Beat.

WINNIE

You remind me of my protagonist, a lot actually.

Hemingway starts BARKING LOUDLY. Winnie tries to calm him.

SLOAN

Yeah? What's she like?

WINNIE

(to the dog)
Will you shut up?
(to Sloan)
Sorry. One sec.

She puts Hemingway in the bathroom, then exits to find Sloan spotting the leftover joint from the night before.

SLOAN

Yes! I knew you were a pothead.

WINNIE

We shouldn't--

SLOAN

Sis, breathe. You're not corrupting me, okay? It's fucking California, this is like our state flag.

EXT. PATIO - DAY

They smoke outside.

Winnie takes in the desert heat. How it dries out all the colors, everything seems somehow less alive. In the process of slow decay.

WINNIE

It's disgusting out here.

SLOAN

Don't you love it? It's like a free sauna.

(beat)

You're really pretty, you know. I mean, you should probably do something with your hair and use a little more makeup, and lose just like three pounds, but that's pretty good, you know. Solid eight.

WINNIE

Oh great.

SLOAN

No, that's good. I've done it with eights before. You're not really my type, though, no offense.

WINNIE

None taken.

SLOAN

You're just a little young for me.

WINNIE

(laughs)

I'm young for you?

SLOAN

You know, for all the pot you smoke, you have no idea how to relax.

WINNIE

I know how to relax.

SLOAN

You moved next to the right girl, I'm gonna help you out. And you need it bad, *trust*.

WINNIE

You training to become a therapist
or something?

SLOAN

With this body, don't be stupid.

(stands, stretches)

I'm gonna be famous, and party, and
do whatever I want, and fuck
whoever I want, and bathe naked in
champagne and eat nothing but
caviar and foreign chocolate. And
then I'm going to die dramatically,
tragically, and young. I'd love to
join the 27 Club, but I don't want
to seem like I'm *trying*, you know?

Sloan walks around the pool, poking at the blow-up pink
flamingo, blow-up shark, other random pool toys.

WINNIE

So you want to be famous and die
young?

SLOAN

Duh.

WINNIE

Why?

SLOAN

Why do I want to die young?

WINNIE

No, why do you want to be famous?

Beat. Sloan answers carefully.

SLOAN

When you are famous, you exist even
when you don't. Because no matter
what, somewhere, someone is always
thinking about you.

Winnie watches Sloan, INSPIRED, drinking up her words.

Wherever Sloan walks, Winnie even sees a COLOR shift, left in
Sloan's wake. Certain objects take on new, surreal color.

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE

Winnie lets Hemingway out of the bathroom.

WINNIE
You ready to be normal again,
Ernest?

He licks her hand. Guess so.

Winnie grabs a bottle of wine. Smokes another joint.

She puts on makeup and does her hair - channeling Mara, in some ways imitating Sloan, her real-life inspiration. Winnie tries on different facial expressions.

In the mirror, she repeats Sloan's words.

WINNIE (CONT'D)
When you are famous, you exist even
when you don't.

She smiles, sees something. We pan to her vision, TRAVEL THROUGH THE MIRROR...

INT. HOTEL BAR - NIGHT

And we are now looking from the mirror behind the bar, where Mara sits. There aren't many people still up. Two older men vie for the privilege of buying her drink.

The BARTENDER, 20's, leans in.

BARTENDER
You're not from here, are you.

MARA
What makes you say that?

BARTENDER
Because you're at this hotel at
this time of night.

MARA
Where should I be?

BARTENDER
Forget it.

MARA
I'm Mara.

BARTENDER
Opie.

MARA
Opie. Cute.

OPIE

You don't have to pretend I have a chance with you.

MARA

Don't you?

OPIE

Nah, gorgeous. And even if I did, I couldn't take it. Can't afford to take chances like that anymore. I know girls like you.

MARA

Trust me, you do not know any girls like me.

OPIE

Guess that remains to be seen.

MARA

Guess it does.

He draws something on a napkin. Shows it to her. It's:

CHAPTER 3. "Out on the edge you see all kinds of things you can't see from the center." - vonnegut

EXT. NEW YORK - NIGHT

Opie leads Mara through the street. He pops a couple pastel pills from an Altoids container, offers them. She takes one.

They enter a dilapidated door in a random building, and take the graffiti'd stairs down. Everything becomes increasingly jumpy, surreal.

INT. UNDERGROUND - NIGHT

A door leads to a door leads to long tunnel (like an out-of-use subway tunnel). You can hear music pounding somewhere. The lights flicker.

There are homeless people in the hall, but look homeless-chic, like it's on purpose for an editorial. They are all dressed from pure fantasy, Tim Burton meets Lady Gaga.

A model-looking chick in a glorious victorian-era gown holds a sign that says 'need \$ for champagne.'

An androgenous albino girl in star-sunglasses lays against a beautiful boy in a white fur coat but bare chest, wearing a golden crown.

Opie stops, offers them pills in exchange for the crown. They accept. He hands Mara the crown.

OPIE
You'll want this.

She puts it on.

As they grow closer to the end of the tunnel, there are more and more NEON SIGNS and badass graffiti.

OPIE (CONT'D)
Most people have to get through the front, the line goes around the block. But I know people.

MARA
Like, what people?

Glowing sign overhead reads: "we are all mad here."

OPIE
All of them.

The giant bouncers check Opie's KEY - vintage, old, and look Mara up and down, and then they are IN.

INT. WONDERLAND CLUB - CONTINUOUS

The enter through a series of doorway curtains. White, then beaded gold, then just hanging FLOWERS. Winnie pushes the final wall of flowers aside to reveal...

Well, fucking Wonderland. Imagine Studio 54 on steroids, with a mix of 90s CLUB KIDS and modern RAVER culture, and a sprinkling of 80s punk.

OPIE
Welcome to Wonderland.

The club is impossibly huge for being underground, but it doesn't matter. Mara takes it in...

WINNIE (V.O.)

Mara was a child of the bad revolution, the one that made stupid people famous - survival of the hottest and the richest - and this was the epicenter of everything.

There's an INDOOR FERRIS WHEEL. There is a "TV GARDEN" filled with old, fat TV's playing flickering black and white films. A million disco balls. Cages hanging from the ceiling.

Though many partiers are young, this is not a place that discriminates based on age - it's about being INTERESTING. You get in if your look is on point.

Slutty 'playing card' waitresses serving drinks.

OPIE

Everyone who says 'nothing happens overnight' has never lived in new york. This is where you need to be.

Mara knows he's right. She spins around. Sparkles fall from the ceiling. She feels free, and alive.

Then she hears the sound of a sweet guitar solo - and it's the DJ, who has plugged into the amps. He reminds us of a young Jaxon, or some version of him. (Opie is another version of Jaxon as well, but this may be less obvious).

OPIE (CONT'D)

I'll be right back.

He disappears into the VIP room.

Mara watches the DJ, makes eyes with him. She's not the only one with a crush. The GREEN-HAIRED BOY next to her swoons.

GREEN-HAIRED BOY

He is *to die for*.

MARA

Totally.

When Opie returns, he brings to the DJ BOOTH, introduces Mara to the DJ. (We'll call him DJ SIN here.)

OPIE

Mara, this is a friend of mine, Cynical Sinner. Sin, Mara.

DJ SIN
It's spelled the other way, like
Sinical Cynner.

MARA
I like that.

DJ SIN
Opie, where'd you find this girl?
She's way out of your league.

OPIE
I've already informed her as much.

Opie and the DJ exchange drugs/money in their handshake.

Mara understands what this means; Opie isn't IN, he's just
the In Peoples' dealer.

DJ SIN
(to Mara)
You party?

MARA
Was that a question?

DJ slaps Opie on the shoulder.

DJ SIN
I'm already in love.

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE

Winnie comes out of writing and the guitar is still going,
and we follow her through the house to Jaxon, who is playing.

WINNIE
You're back.

JAX
Didn't want to disturb you. How's
it going?

WINNIE
I met our neighbor.

JAX
Yeah?

WINNIE
She's the worst and I'm obsessed
with her.
(MORE)

WINNIE (CONT'D)
I swear, she's like, not even a
real girl. You have to meet her,
you'll know what I mean.

JAX
I don't think I've seen you this
happy in a very long time.

She pours herself a glass of wine, joins him.

WINNIE
You know what? I am happy. How
weird. I hope it lasts.

JAX
You're always thinking about
endings before it's even relevant.

WINNIE
You're the idiot who married a
writer.

JAX
I knew what I was getting into.

WINNIE
Did you?

JAX
What does that mean?

WINNIE
Keep playing and you'll find out...

She gives him the guitar back.

WINNIE (CONT'D)
Something I can dance to.

He's surprised, but thrilled. Plays guitar while she dances.

INT. DJ SIN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

It's not as nice as you expect; he may be big on a local
stage, but he's still on his way up.

But for Mara, it's a place to start.

MARA
I'm going to freshen up.

He points down the hall, and she disappears.

He rifles through her things, stumbles upon her LICENSE. Her age. Not 18 for two more years. FUCK. He weighs the risks, we can tell because he tilts his head slightly and frowns. (Thinker, this one.)

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE

Back in reality. The dance Winnie does is sultry, seductive... and turns into a STRIPTEASE.

JAX
Are you still ovulating?

WINNIE
This isn't about that, don't even think about that. This is about you and me.

It gets more heated. She gets on top of him, grinding.

WINNIE (CONT'D)
I want you to fuck me. And not because you should, and not even because you want to, but because you *need* to, because you need me, because the very idea of you not getting to fuck my brains out, drives you MAD.

She bites his ear, and as she leans in to whisper, we're--

INT. DJ SIN'S APARTMENT

And Mara is whispering into the DJ's ear...

MARA
You are dying in the desert and I'm a cold glass of water. Drink me.

So he forgets her age and goes for it. As he rips her clothes off, tosses them...

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE

Winnie's clothes land on the floor. Jax's follow.

Caught up in a feverish passion, they are lost in each other.

JAX
I'm not minding this new character one bit.

INTERCUT

-Winnie and Jax having great sex. Like, really great sex.

-Mara and the DJ also fucking (the two scenes informing each other stylistically.)

-As Winnie comes, gloriously, so does Mara. When Winnie looks in the mirror, there is a FLASH of Mara looking back at her, as if it is the character and not her that is coming.

END INTERCUT

Winnie looks back at the mirror. It's only her again. She shuts her eyes, lets herself drift off.

A neon sign in the dark reads:

CHAPTER 4. "It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality." - virginia woolf

A clock TICKS as flickers of eerie light begin to illuminate:

INT. MIRROR MAZE - NIGHT

A MAZE OF MIRRORS and CLEAR GLASS. Creepy fun-house that is the opposite of fun. This is a RECURRING NIGHTMARE.

Winnie, looking very young in a white dress and Mary Janes, wanders through the maze, feeling her way forward, unsure what is mirror and what is space.

She is invisible then visible again, as the reflections fracture her image.

As she continues forward, we notice that her reflections remain with different poses and expressions than Winnie; they are taking on lives of their own.

Linger on one - a figure in shadow, MADE of shadows - a silhouette coming to life.

Winnie - unaware of the creature - discovers a WARM LIGHT ahead. She tries to go towards it, but hits a dead end.

She turns back - and heart stops as she sees the SHADOW CREATURE (as we will now call it/them).

Where eyes should be - just CAVERNOUS BLACK HOLES.

Regular lips, but when it smiles - it's full of FANGS.

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE - NIGHT

Winnie awakens with a gasp, struggling for air. She tries to wake Jax, but he's out cold.

What's more - the Shadow Creatures AREN'T GONE.

IMPOSSIBLY LONG ARMS reach from every direction, towards Winnie, fingers outstretched.

She RUNS, freaking the fuck out.

IN THE KITCHEN -

She grasps the bottle of vodka, drinks heavily from it.

She goes to sit down. Rolls herself a joint. Tries to read, tries to watch TV, can't do anything.

OUTSIDE THE BEDROOM -

She debates waking her husband up. Decides against it.

IN THE OFFICE -

Instead, she retreats here. Drinks. Writes in her JOURNAL.

SLOAN

No one said to take Hemingway literally, you know. He DIED.

Winnie would normally jump out of her skin, but she's now hammered, and Drunk Winnie thinks in slow-mo, just like...

WINNIE

What? The dog?

SLOAN

Yes, the dog. The dog said, 'Write drunk, edit sober.' Smart dog.

WINNIE

You're joking.

SLOAN

I am impressed though.

Sloan crouches to make eye contact with one of the BLACK CATS. It stares right at her, tense.

WINNIE

Impressed by what?

SLOAN

How much you've imbibed. Respect.

She reaches to pet the cat, and it SCREECHES and scurries away. She laughs.

WINNIE

It's the middle of the night,
shouldn't you be home?

SLOAN

"Where should I be?"

Winnie frowns, then realizes Sloan is READING from her pages, quoting Mara. (How she got the pages isn't clear. Maybe just snatched them when we weren't looking. The girl is FAST though. It's suspect - we should be wary of Sloan even when Winnie isn't).

SLOAN (CONT'D)

"Wonderland?"

WINNIE

It's not done.

SLOAN

Oh believe me, it's been done.

WINNIE

That's not what I meant. Give it--

But Sloan dances just out of reach, continuing to read.

SLOAN

"Mara was a child of the bad revolution." Deep. Oo, underage sex, this is fun--

Then Winnie physically fights her for the pages, it gets out of hand, and Sloan accidentally knocks over a shelf. Books fall down, fall open. And it's LOUD.

SLOAN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

WINNIE

I'm sorry, this was stupid--

And then they see:

One of the books is one of those hide-a-key things, and inside is the writer dude's DRUG STASH.

Sloan is pretty thrilled. It's a solid collection.

SLOAN

Damn girl.

WINNIE

It must be Wesley's...

As Winnie is still cleaning up, Sloan has already opened the bag of coke and done a bump.

SLOAN

This shit's optimus PRIME.

WINNIE

Don't.

SLOAN

You want some?

WINNIE

It's not a matter of want.

SLOAN

Everything is a matter of want.

WINNIE

Look, I'm too drunk to explain why I can't do cocaine to the teenager that broke into the house I'm supposed to be taking care of.

SLOAN

Good, because there's a much easier option, and you're not too drunk for it.

They both look to the coke. Off Winnie's hesitation...

Fast cuts of them doing a shitton of lines. Mara likes to party, so Winnie likes to party.

SLOAN (CONT'D)

Hey, wanna wake up your hubby, see if he wants a threesome?

Winnie cracks up.

WINNIE

Omigod, no. I mean, it's very generous of you to offer--

SLOAN

Yes, it is.

WINNIE

But even if we weren't -
(another line)
- trying to have a baby -
(another line)
He'd... he'd know we were on drugs,
and he'd kill me.

SLOAN

What's he got against drugs?

WINNIE

They almost killed him.

SLOAN

Oh, well that's fair.

WINNIE

He can't even drink very much. It's not that he's an addict or anything, he just kind of has a... a 'thing'... I'm high, I shouldn't be telling you this.

SLOAN

Don't worry, it happens all the time. I wear my darkness on the outside, and dark people are drawn to that, and they want to tell you all their secrets.

Winnie nods, then stops, processes this.

WINNIE

Why do you think I'm dark?

SLOAN

I always look at peoples' wrists when I meet them.

Winnie immediately hides her wrists, uncomfortable, exposed.

SLOAN (CONT'D)

No judgement here. The world's a dump, anyone who hasn't considered bailing is just an idiot. Can I smoke in here?

Sloan lights up her cigarette without waiting for an answer. They party. And laugh. And there's lights and it's blurry.

Secrets and music and smoke rings and girly things. Through the chaos, catch only one scene sharply.

CU: Sloan whispers in Winnie's ear.

SLOAN (CONT'D)
Fuck the world, Freddie.

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE - MORNING

Winnie wakes up on the chaise with the worst hangover ever. She goes to the kitchen, washes her face, CHUGS some water. Takes four aspirin. Puffs heavily on her vape.

Looks at her phone, nearly chokes. MISSED CALL & VOICEMAIL from "RJ." She plays it, in a hungover daze.

RJ (V.O.)
 Just returning your call. I miss you too. Did your mother tell you I'll be in town? They're showing a film of mine out there. Crazy timing, huh? It's been too long. Hit me back when you get this.

Winnie angrily deletes the message.

IN THE BEDROOM -

Jax wakes up, finds Winnie asleep in his arms. Has no idea how recently she crawled into bed. He kisses her forehead and gently lays her back down.

He doesn't seem to notice that there are Shadow Creatures once again emerging from the corners, reaching for Winnie.

They grab her arms and legs, they cover her eyes and mouth.

She wakes up, immediately struggles, gasping, trying to SCREAM, and it all goes dark.

Suddenly, it's all calm. Same light. No shadows. Quiet.

WINNIE
 Just a dream.

But... wait... she doesn't look so good.

Pale, she clutches at her stomach. Rushes to the bathroom.

This time, she throws up violently. Only, it's not vomit. It's DARK INK with MIST emerging from it like dry ice.

She backs away, horrified, paranoid, still holding her stomach. She doesn't know what is real anymore.

She looks up at herself in the mirror.

Her jaw drops.

In the reflection: a flicker of that SAME shadow-creature from her nightmare, with the black-hole eyes and fangs.

It REACHES THROUGH THE MIRROR - its spindly fingers grasping.

She stumbles back, away. Turns, runs.

IN THE KITCHEN --

She runs straight into Jax.

JAX

Hun?

WINNIE

Where did you go? I needed you, there's something here, can't you feel it? There's something bad...

She's still looking around, paranoid.

JAX

Nothing's here. You're okay. Hey.

He holds her closely, calms her. She catches her breath in the harsh light of day. Her frantic energy slowly fades.

A little later, on the couch...

JAX (CONT'D)

This is my fault, everything that happened in LA... I'm sorry, I didn't think.

WINNIE

It's not that.

JAX

Maybe - I know it's hard - but maybe if you told me more about 'him'--

WINNIE

It's not him.

JAX

You sure? Do you want to talk to Dr. K about it?

She shakes her head.

JAX (CONT'D)
Not talking about them doesn't make
them go away.

She wants to cry, be vulnerable. But something is stopping her. Just as she's pushing past that wall--

Her phone rings, it's RJ. She declines. He leaves another voicemail, and she deletes without playing.

JAX (CONT'D)
Is that your new friend?

She hesitates. Then she lies.

WINNIE
Yeah. It's Sloan.

EXT. MUSTANG - LOOKOUT POINT - SUNSET

Sloan holds a BLACK LOLLIPOP over the sun. Mini-eclipse. Then pops it back in her mouth.

They are lying on hood of the car, drinking, watching the sunset. Both are hot, half their clothes shed.

WINNIE
Come on, you're torturing me.

SLOAN
Sorry, I get distracted easily.

Sloan goes back to the PAGES Winnie has brought with her.

WINNIE
I still can't believe I told you
about RJ. No one knows that stuff.

SLOAN
Even Jax?

WINNIE
Keep reading.

SLOAN
I need a cigarette.

She tosses the lollipop into the sand, lights a cig.

WINNIE
Jax knows what happened, but I
blurred the details, we just refer
to my "ex" or "him."

Sloan nods, offers Winnie a cigarette.

WINNIE (CONT'D)
I quit. A long time ago.

SLOAN
Okay.

She begins to read the pages out loud.

SLOAN (CONT'D)
Learn value of cash, learn what it can and cannot buy. Learn value of body, learn what it can and cannot do. Mold it until perfect. Fold imperfections into flaps in skin, STAPLE, then forget they ever existed.

Winnie is at first uncomfortable, but soon becomes mesmerized by Sloan's voice.

Closer and closer on Sloan as she reads.

SLOAN (CONT'D)
Find strengths. Enhance. Find weakness in others. Expose. Begin to realize hating everyone is making me strong. 17 and I've broken as many hearts in as many months.

Sloan pauses, notices Winnie staring at her lips.

SLOAN (CONT'D)
You sure you don't want one?

She offers her American Spirits. Winnie takes one.

Use the flame to transition to:

EXT. WONDERLAND CLUB - NIGHT

Someone lights a SOCIALITE's cigarette. She continues without even looking at the guy who lit it. Meet the reigning queen of the underground scene: ZARA, a SADCORE PRINCESS, with the kind of gown you see at the Met. (Zara's family runs the town, the Kardashian/Jenners of this world.)

Massive lines around the block as everyone tries to get in, or get a glimpse of the famous faces entering.

Zara is certainly a main attraction, but so are the members of her girl squad. As we meet each of them, their names are stamped across the screen in FLASHY BUBBLE LETTERS.

VYXN, boyish figure in suspenders, sex on a stick, is ignoring a hot girl drooling over her.

NIGHTSHADE, quiet, quirky foreign heiress, goes up to a photographer and - without a word - puts her lipstick on him.

REESE, grunge, daughter of a dead rockstar, is on her phone, chewing gum.

ZARA
Babies!

They immediately listen to her, all enter.

INT. WONDERLAND CLUB

The party tonight is a DEATH THEME. Everyone has sparklers and colored smoke bombs. On the stage, behind an elaborate dance number, we find:

CHAPTER 5. "In the U.S. you have to be a deviant or die of boredom." - burroughs

From above, find Opie and Mara in the crowd - she's walking away, he's following her. Mara doesn't take her eye off: the VIP room and the socialites within. Zara, etc.

OPIE
I should have never intro'd you to those girls.

MARA
Don't be bitters, darling. You know I have to play this right.

Mara kisses his cheek, and continues on alone. He watches with apprehension as she disappears into the VIP room.

INT. VIP ROOM, WONDERLAND - CONTINUOUS

Inside, Mara spots Zara, Vyxn, Nightshade, and Reese. They welcome her in; she's clearly on some sort of "trial run" as one of their squad.

(Note: there is Queen Bee tension between Zara and Mara, but the other girls all love Mara so Zara puts up with her.)

Reese runs her fingers through Mara's long, white-blonde hair. They all drink champagne, party.

The nights BLEED INTO EACH OTHER. Flashes of several parties, different outfits.

MARA (V.O.)

It Girls are back, bitches. I'm the only one who wasn't born with everything handed to them, but whatevs, right? I learned the rules, so I get to play.

All their legs up on the table, along with drinks, drugs, ashtrays shaped like body parts, shimmery purses.

MARA (V.O.)

This is the currency now, throwing a decent decadent party, because the world is crumbling and everyone just wants to get fucked up and pretend the American Dream wasn't up in smoke ages ago.

In some parties, DJ Sin is with them. In some, the others have various girlfriends and boyfriends and famous friends.

Everyone in the whole club is trying to just get a glimpse of these girls and who they're with. And they know it.

MARA (V.O.)

They still want to dance around the ashes marching bolivian marching powder up noses, powdering the power hungry with sycophantic placation and pedantic evasion. No one wants to stop the music.

There's a smug smirk on Mara's face that should scare anyone.

MARA (V.O.)

When the music stops, that's when it's all gonna really go mad.

EXT. POOL - MORNING

The BLAZING SUN is blinding as it rises.

MARA (V.O.)

I look forward to it.

Maybe a few days have passed, maybe a few weeks.

Winnie wakes up on a lawn chair with a big surprise: her hair is now a white BLONDE, the shade of Mara's. She clearly does not remember dying it.

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE - DAY

Jaxon makes coffee. Winnie comes down from taking a shower.

JAX
(re: her hair)
I'm never going to get used to
that.

WINNIE
You don't like it.

JAX
I do. I love it, it's just
different, that's all. Really, you
look gorgeous.

She smiles.

JAX (CONT'D)
Oh, before I forget, your mother's
been asking why you haven't called.

Winnie heaves a sigh. She's clearly dreading this.

CATHERINE (PRE-LAP)
So what are you going to do?

EXT. PATIO - DAY

Winnie paces in the shade while she talks to her mother, CATHERINE, on the phone.

CATHERINE (V.O.)
Five years is a big deal.

WINNIE
We've only been married for three.

CATHERINE (V.O.)
But you are doing something?

WINNIE
I'm sure Jax has something planned,
he's such a romantic.

CATHERINE (V.O.)

Hold onto that one. And you better bring him to visit before you head back east. Your father and I--

WINNIE

Please don't call him that.

CATHERINE (V.O.)

Why not, he practically raised you.

WINNIE

I have a father, somewhere--

CATHERINE (V.O.)

I'm not going into this again.

WINNIE

Well, I'm not calling him my father, he's not even my stepfather - he never married you.

CATHERINE (V.O.)

Now you're trying to hurt me. That's cruel. You're cruel to me.

WINNIE

Mom, stop it.

CATHERINE (V.O.)

I did the best I could, you know how young I was when I had you...

Winnie pulls the phone away from her ear as Catherine continues.

CATHERINE (V.O.)

...Who knows why he isn't into marriage, but maybe you can talk some sense into him. He always did listen to you...

Catherine just KEEPS going. Winnie shakes her head.

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE

Jaxon drinks his coffee, eyeing Winnie talking to her mother. He watches her come inside.

JAX

So how's Catherine?

WINNIE
You need to ask?

JAX
There's coffee.

Winnie goes to get some.

WINNIE
Hey baby, we have plans for Friday,
right? You've made reservations or
something?

JAX
I can. You've been so wrapped up in
research and writing, I didn't
think you wanted anything.

WINNIE
(disappointed)
Yeah.

JAX
I'm sorry.

WINNIE
No, that makes total sense.

Jax feels bad. Winnie could make it better by giving him some affection, but she doesn't.

INT. MR. CALLOWAY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Follow Mr. Calloway as he enters. It's a cramped place, he's been there a few months maybe.

MR. CALLOWAY
Hello?

He inspects the place.

He touches Mara's toothbrush. Dry.

Checks his phone. Oh shit, he's TRACKING her.

But as he watches her dot moving in Brooklyn, he gets an incoming call from Connecticut.

MR. CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
Calloway. Hello, detective, any
news?
(listening)
I'm not sure about that one.
(MORE)

MR. CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
(getting nervous)
I'm not sure on that either. I'm
sorry, but it's all a bit foggy
that night.
(getting even worse)
That's not what I meant. I-- yes.

Mr. Calloway gulps, hears something. CHATTER from somewhere.

MR. CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
Listen, is it alright if I call you
back? Thank you.

He glances around anxiously, increasingly suspicious.

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE - DAY

But Winnie has to stop writing, because the CHATTER from the book has grown distracting - and is in REALITY.

She peeks around the corner to see:

Jax having a conversation with R.J. ALEXANDER, 50's.

JAX
I'm sorry I'm so unprepared, she
didn't tell me anything about
inviting you.

Winnie retreats. Processes.

IN THE OFFICE -

Winnie's LANDLINE rings. She answers. It's Sloan; they can see each other through the opposing windows.

SLOAN
You're not letting RJ see you like
that, are you?

BATHROOM -

Winnie puts makeup on, smokes. Jax enters.

JAX
Is that a cigarette?

WINNIE
Mara smokes.

He shakes it off. Bigger fish.

JAX

Okay, well, you have a visitor.

WINNIE

I heard you talking. I don't want to see him.

JAX

Come on. I know you guys didn't leave things on the best of terms, but some part of your subconscious must have wanted to make things right. Right?

WINNIE

Not really.

JAX

Win. Honey. We're going to have a baby, and he's family, and he's in our home. Well, our temporary home. You have to give him a chance.

She sighs, he knows he's won.

JAX (CONT'D)

This is gonna be great, you'll see. It'll be good for everyone.

IN THE OFFICE -

The three of them. It's awkward as hell. Definitely NOT good for everyone.

JAX (CONT'D)

Well, I'll let you two catch up.

Jax exits (avoiding Winnie's gaze). Win and RJ left alone.

WINNIE

You shouldn't be here.

RJ

You invited me.

WINNIE

I don't know what I said in my message, but I was blackout drunk so any invitations delivered therein were, according to the basic standard of human decency, null and void.

RJ
Is that right?

WINNIE
Yes.

RJ
Well, I didn't realize my presence
would cause so much pain.

Winnie hesitates, doesn't know what to say to this.

RJ (CONT'D)
Did you get my voicemail? I have a
screening out here next week. New
movie. You're invited.

WINNIE
Thanks, we'll think about it.

It's obvious by her tone she's not planning to go. RJ sighs.

RJ
Your husband...

He leans on the word, 'husband.' Causes so much distaste that
it cuts off the sentence, and he has to try again.

RJ (CONT'D)
Your husband tells me you're
struggling with the new book.

WINNIE
It's coming along.

RJ
You look thin. You're not still
starving yourself, are you?

WINNIE
Course not. I'm fine. I'm great.

Beat. She can't help opening up to him. He has a power over
her; she wants his approval, his opinion, his sympathy.

WINNIE (CONT'D)
Or I was for a while, anyway. I
don't know. After I stopped
cutting, the food shit got worse.
Now it comes and goes. What're you
gonna do.

And he knows, from this moment, that his power over her isn't
gone. It's a quiet victory born in the slightest sneer.

RJ

Listen, I get it, you and me -
 we're cut from the same cloth. Our
 pain is the only thing we know how
 to turn into art.

She appreciates this sentiment, chews on it. He appreciates
 that she appreciates it.

RJ (CONT'D)

You take everything so seriously.

You always have.

(beat)

In high school, you always had to
 be the best, but not just the best,
 but the best and the first and the
 youngest-- you had to be better
 than everyone else and even then
 you weren't satisfied. I wonder,
 are you satisfied now?

WINNIE

(wary)

What do you mean?

RJ

I mean with the book.

WINNIE

The book.

RJ

Yes.

WINNIE

What kind of question is that, am I
 satisfied with my book? Jesus.

RJ

I'm sure it's a masterpiece.

Winnie says nothing, just takes a deep breath, manages a
 smile-grimace.

RJ (CONT'D)

I'm here for you, always, no matter
 what. For anything, Freddie. You
 know that, right?

She nods.

RJ (CONT'D)
You proud of me for keeping my
distance? I've done so well,
everything you asked.

WINNIE
(quietly)
Thank you.

He watches her for a moment. Gently lifts her chin, touches her cheek. A sense of ownership about how he touches her.

He strokes his fingers through her newly blonde hair.

RJ
I like this. Blondie.

WINNIE
Yeah.

She tenses, pulls away. He feels it.

RJ
I know when I'm not wanted.

WINNIE
That's not it--

RJ
It's okay, I'm not some kid. You
don't have to pretend with me.

WINNIE
I know.

RJ
But you are. You're playing games,
and it's an insult to my
intelligence, honestly. I deserve
more respect from you. Don't you
think?

WINNIE
I think you should go.

RJ
All I want for you is to see you
reach your greatest potential.
That's all I've ever wanted for
you, Freddie. So don't go thinking
this is about me trying to 'take'
something from you somehow.
Alright?

She nods.

RJ (CONT'D)
 I hope to see you at the screening.
 (afterthought)
 EPs are throwing an afterparty as
 well, if you're up for it. Bring
 Jax if you want. Bring whoever.

He leaves.

She raises her hand in front of her; it's shaking. Then she runs to the bathroom and dry heaves. Stomach acid.

Then, still shaking, she sits down at her typewriter.

WINNIE (V.O.)
 I know that endless was your goal/
 but ends are less than and unless
 you undo the tangle towards entry
 into eternal/
 (the lies tying tongues and lungs
 in knots but not the way you want)/
 then there's nothing I can do but
 play the part you wrote/ be your
 scapegoat/

Shaking hands begin to RATTLE, as if there's an earthquake, but really, they are Mara's hands and we're:

INT. SUBWAY, NEW YORK - MORNING

On the train as it rumbles along its morning commute.

Mara stands, clutching the metal bar with distaste. She's so obviously doing a walk of shame, and everyone else is on their way to work. She glares daggers at humans.

MARA (V.O.)
 I disappear, describing my disease
 as I leave/ promising that the ease
 with which I scrape my initials
 into your skin is the most I've
 ever given anyone so just know/ it
 was never not too late.

EXT. NEW YORK

Mara walks down the street towards Calloway's apartment, dragging her feet, dreading what's to come.

MARA (V.O.)
 We act like we don't act and we do
 it well / but it was never going to
 last/ it was a disaster plastered
 by a master/

INT. STAIRS, MR. CALLOWAY'S APARTMENT

She climbs the stairs.

MARA (V.O.)
 What kind of father does what you
 did to your daughter?/ Well, here I
 am daddy, lamb for the slaughter/

On the door, "chapter" has been written before the apartment number 6 - "**CHAPTER 6.**" She enters.

INT. MR. CALLOWAY'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

A poster on the wall reads:

"The true man wants two things: danger and play. For that reason he wants woman, as the most dangerous plaything." - nietzsche

Focus on Mara as she enters. Calloway is furious. (It's the same day the cops called, a few hours later.)

MR. CALLOWAY
 Where have you been?

MARA
 Out.

MR. CALLOWAY
 Out? That's it?

She goes to the BEDROOM THEY SHARE (note the one bed), and packs a few of her dresses.

MR. CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
 Don't walk away while I'm talking
 to you. You'll treat me with the
 respect I deserve.

MARA
 I do.

She waits for this to sink in.

MR. CALLOWAY

What happened to you? You were such
a sweet little girl.

MARA

And *then* what happened?

MR. CALLOWAY

No, no-- don't put this on me, *you*
came onto *me*.

MARA

I was twelve years old! I was
fucking around, I was testing you.
And guess what? You failed.

MR. CALLOWAY

But I broke it off. I did the right
thing. I broke it off, didn't I?

MARA

Oh, nobel prize to you.

Suddenly, there is an odd SPARK in Calloway's eyes.

MR. CALLOWAY

I worried it was possible, when I
saw the body.

MARA

Worried about what?

MR. CALLOWAY

That it was you. You that killed
her. You that carved up her baby.

MARA

"Baby?" The thing was all placenta.

(off his reaction)

Oh, come on, I'm kidding.

MR. CALLOWAY

Just tell me the truth. I can
protect you.

MARA

You can't do shit. You're pathetic.

He grabs her by the shoulders and SHAKES, hard.

MR. CALLOWAY

That's ENOUGH! You will respect me!

MARA

Let go--

She shoves her way out of his grip. She looks long-ways at him, reading him carefully.

MARA (CONT'D)

Do you miss the way I feel? It's been a while, hasn't it.

MR. CALLOWAY

Don't--

She touches him.

MARA

Yep. A long while.

He tries to kiss her, and she DODGES it.

MARA (CONT'D)

Ew, don't.

She washes her hand with soap, makes a big show of it.

MR. CALLOWAY

You used to love me. Once, I know you did. Maybe even too much.

MARA

Back to that, come on, daddy-o.

She plays with a HUGE CARVING KNIFE. Somehow makes it sexual.

MARA (CONT'D)

You don't really think I murdered my own mother? I loved that woman. She made a totes decent low cal turkey meatball.

She turns on him, wielding the knife.

MARA (CONT'D)

How do I know YOU didn't kill her?

MR. CALLOWAY

Why don't you give me the knife?

MARA

Don't patronize me. We both know how much higher my IQ is than yours.

MR. CALLOWAY
You are a very intelligent girl--

MARA
I said, don't fucking patronize me!
I'm sick of you, I'm sick of this
sickness, whatever disease has kept
us connected-- I'm sick of the
leash you keep around my neck! I'm
done.

She starts gathering the things she packed.

MR. CALLOWAY
The hell you are--

He tries to stop her from leaving. She holds out the knife.

MARA
Get away from me. It's over.

MR. CALLOWAY
Is that how you see it?

He keeps coming toward her, so she attacks with her knife, but he overpowers her, forces her to drop it.

They scuffle. He holds her down.

MR. CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
I know you still want me.

MARA
I never wanted you, don't you get
that? It was just a game. A stupid
little game. And now, you need to
deal with the fact that it is OVER.

She spits in his face. He slaps her with full strength. She licks the blood from her split lip, and snarls, almost feral.

MR. CALLOWAY
If that's how you want it, fine.
That's how it'll be. Princess Mara.

He turns her over. Holds her wrists, his body keeping hers down.

MARA
No, stop, wait. Stop. Stop!

He rips her pants down, and is so focused that Mara has the opportunity to reach up and grab something--

MR. CALLOWAY
Ah-ah!

He slides the knife out of reach, and she cries out, lost...

And it's bad. She's screaming, he's pounding away. Except that she DID get what she was reaching for:

Her phone. And 911 is on speaker.

MARA
Please, stop. It hurts. Please--

MR. CALLOWAY
Shut up.

She sobs, cries loudly.

ON THE OTHER END OF THE LINE -

The 911 operator can hear a clear rape in progress. She RECORDS it.

MARA
Whatever you think I did, I'm sorry, daddy. Please. I just want to be your little girl again.

MR. CALLOWAY
Yeah, you know what, I like that. Tell me more about how much you love me. Tell me you belong to me.

MARA
(in a broken voice)
I... I belong to you.

He loosens his grip on her as he comes.

It's all she needs; she LUNGES for the knife.

Before he can even react, it's buried in his stomach.

MARA (CONT'D)
(shocked, horrified)
I'm so sorry.

But then she drops the mortification like a MASK.

She holds up the phone, shows that it's on 911 speakerphone, and hangs up.

MARA (CONT'D)
Oops. Silly speakerphone.

MR. CALLOWAY
You planned... all of this...

MARA
That's a pretty elaborate theory.

She smirks, goes in to finish him off.

MARA (CONT'D)
I wonder what your heart tastes
like, I bet I can still taste your
love for me, bittersweet--

But she underestimates him, and he LUNGES at her.

Manages to grab her ankle, PULLS HER TO THE GROUND.

She wriggles free and makes a break for the door. Her clothes
ripped, her hair wild, she is a mess.

He comes after her, stumbling, leaving a bloody trail smeared
down the stairs...

MARA (V.O.)
When do you become a woman?

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE

Winnie breaks down by herself, alone, in the safest place she
can find - underneath the desk. Holds her knees to her chest
and just falls apart. The scene has taken A LOT out of her.

MARA (V.O.)
The first time your world is
shattered? The first time you
shatter someone else?

Winnie looks at a picture of Catherine, RJ, and their son
(her half-brother), 7. Tortures herself with it.

EXT. PATIO - DAY

The two cats fight over a dying bird. It's bloody and brutal,
and Winnie just watches.

MARA (V.O.)
The moment you realize you can flip
a switch and feel nothing at all.

INT. OFFICE, PALM SPRINGS

She writes in her notebook: "I am the b in numb, the letter even the word doesn't feel." She is barely present. Dazed.

In this state, Winnie is able to REVISE her earlier "when do you become a woman" opening to include the horrendous taboo of the father/daughter incest...

MARA (V.O.)
For me, it was a very specific moment...

EXT. MARA'S CHILDHOOD HOME - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Mara shares a cigarette with Mr. Calloway. There is unstated INTIMACY. We are seeing how they used to be.

MARA (V.O.)
...At a very specific time...

Mara goes to kiss Mr. Calloway, but he STOPS her. Focus on his hand, where there is an ULTRASOUND. This is him breaking things off due to Mrs. Calloway's pregnancy.

MARA (V.O.)
And I could describe each detail as if it happened this morning, because I could never forget even if I wanted to...

As soon as Mr. Calloway finishes speaking and turns, Mara's face resolves from sadness to pure MENACE.

INT. MARA'S CHILDHOOD HOME - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Mara watches Mr. Calloway get in his car and pull away.

MARA (V.O.)
...And I didn't want to.

She sharpens a KNIFE.

MARA (V.O.)
It was the first time I tasted blood.

We follow her into her mother's bedroom. She kills her mother, drinks her blood. Lays her head in it.

MARA (V.O.)

Everyone bleeds differently, I learned. My mother's was so-so, there was too much regret watering it down. But my unborn brother, in the womb...

She digs her head into the warm flesh, ferocious.

MARA (V.O.)

I tasted innocence again, and I felt, in that moment, whole in a way I'd never been.

Show her now bloody, staring at herself in the mirror. A new light to her.

MARA (V.O.)

I looked like a 16-year-old girl, but I was a woman, and I knew hunger, I knew power, and I knew nothing would ever be the same.

She starts sobbing, acting in the mirror, increasingly horrified. We know it's fake but damn, she's good. We almost believe her anyway.

The police come, she collapses on the stairs in tears.

INT. POLICE STATION, MANHATTAN - PRESENT DAY

Mara performs the same thing for the cops, only this time for her father's stabbing (about two years later.)

She sobs. A kind female cop comforts her.

Close on some paperwork, where is written:

CHAPTER 7. "Selves will accumulate when one isn't looking, and they don't always act wisely or well." - Diane Ackerman

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE

A few pastel BALLOONS. Candles. Light music. A homecooked meal on the table.

It's Friday. Their anniversary. Jax has done as much as he can to give Winnie a good time, but she's already unimpressed. He pours her a glass of bubbly.

JAX

Champagne, my queen?

WINNIE
That's prosecco.

JAX
Can you really tell the difference?

WINNIE
Yes.

JAX
I didn't think it would matter.
(corny on purpose)
We have each other, isn't that
enough?

WINNIE
Yeah, no. Totally.

He sighs heavily, feeling the weight that she's putting there. He feels like HE is not enough.

JAX
You want to know the truth? The truth is, Win, that we're not liquid right now. As soon as the sale goes through, and I'm working as hard as I can on it with Harry, as soon as that happens, we can go back to normal. Till then, just bear with me, okay? Nothing's gonna change - nothing major. Just bear with me.

(off her anxiety)
We're okay.

WINNIE
But are we?

JAX
This is why I didn't tell you.

WINNIE
Thanks for that, by the way.

JAX
Well, look what it's doing. I know how you get.

WINNIE
Fuck you.

She grabs the BOTTLE of prosecco and drinks from it. Fire of her rage just gaining momentum.

JAX

Winnie--

WINNIE

No, you're supposed to tell me big things like this. How do you expect us to have a family? What if I can't finish this book, what will we do? This makes so much sense, this is why we're housesitting, why you're pushing me to finish-- have you been talking to Tracey?

JAX

You need to calm down--

WINNIE

Stop telling me what to do.

JAX

Honey, you have to--

WINNIE

I said, STOP IT!

She throws the wine bottle ACROSS THE ROOM. Some of the shards come sliding across the floor near Jax. He gives her a moment, then approaches. All her anger and energy seem to have smashed with the bottle.

Now she is quiet, small, frail.

(The effect of this is shocking; how quickly she transitions from larger than life - a formidable powerhouse - to this mousey girl-child.)

WINNIE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

JAX

It's okay.

WINNIE

I wasn't aiming for you.

JAX

I know. I'll clean it up.

WINNIE

Please don't.

(draws him closer)

I love you.

JAX
I love you too.

EXT. PALM SPRINGS NEIGHBORHOOD - EARLY MORNING

She walks Hemingway around the neighborhood. It's a ghost-town. She keeps blinking, seeing things out of the corners of her eyes.

INT. OFFICE, PALM SPRINGS

Winnie takes pills. Debates, then takes more.

Tries writing. Her eyes sunken, looking thin, tired, worn.

MARA (V.O.)
I've been playing it safe.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Black and white. A pretty girl is MURDERED. Pull back to show we're in--

INT. DJ SIN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Where Mara is watching the warehouse SNUFF FILM on a laptop.

She licks a cherry lollipop, a poor substitute for blood. She slams the laptop closed, frustrated. American psycho version of blue-balls.

MARA (V.O.)
After what happened, I wanted to be
careful, I know, *major yawn*. But
I'm over that now. I'm bored and
I'm hungry.

The DJ enters, and Mara eyes him. She kisses his neck, bites.

DJ SIN
Ow! Crazy girl.

MARA
You know you love it.

But now isn't the time. Mara can't do it because Winnie can't do it, because Winnie is--

INT. OFFICE, PALM SPRINGS

Ripping the pages out of the typewriter.

Sinking down into the corner.

Darkness surrounds her. Voices HISS at her. She shuts her eyes tightly. More pills. She dials her mother.

CATHERINE (V.O.)
Hello? Winnie?

Winnie hangs up. She tries to stay awake, but--

INT. MIRROR MAZE

Back in the dreamscape, Winnie knows what it is this time.

She starts running, trying to find the light - the way out. The shadow creatures are stronger than they've ever been.

The mirror maze leads her to a room with the claw-foot bathtub, filled with blood.

RISING FROM THE TUB - the Shadow Creature we saw before, becoming stronger each time.

Winnie almost gives up, but one of the mirrors reflects the LIGHT. So she runs again, the creature right behind her.

She makes a break for the room with the light - it's the PALM SPRINGS BATHROOM. She smashes it, just in time--

INT. BATHROOM, PALM SPRINGS

Winnie - back in reality - stands, dazed, looking into the CRACKED MIRROR.

She leans closer, seeing more behind the million pieces of Winnie. She touches the mirror at the center, where it splits, and as she does, she sees the fanged creature and tries to scream--

But instead, she CHOKES.

She starts pulling long CLUMPS of hair from her throat.

A muffled scream as she feels something PULSATING INSIDE HER.

Something - some energy - some force - is trying to carve itself from the inside of her stomach.

IN THE MIRROR: fingernail knives stab from within her belly, OUT, and slices up to her ribs. DARK BLOOD sprays everywhere.

The shape of a GIRL - fully grown - begins to emerge.

Bloody hand reaches out of the slit in her stomach like some twisted, mutated Cesarian section. For a moment, it's almost as if she's GROWING A THIRD ARM.

Physical impossibility, and yet we watch it happen.

The hand slides down the OTHER SIDE OF THE MIRROR.

She tries to open the bathroom door to escape - but it's locked. She bangs on it, unable to scream, throwing up more and more. Hair, organs, blood, an eyeball.

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE

Jax pauses playing guitar, hearing something. He goes to investigate.

IN THE BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jax comes in and finds her looking mental - fingers bent at odd angles, head down. Huddling in the corner, muttering, shaking. There is no longer blood or anything coming out of her - all appears normal. The mirror isn't even broken.

JAX

You need sleep, Win. You need to eat, and you need to sleep, these are human things.

WINNIE

No! I did, I can't. Please. I can't go back there.

JAX

You need help, baby, let me get you some help.

Winnie looks up, suddenly much more quiet, certain.

WINNIE

You can't help me. No one can.

Jax is lost, unsure. She struggles to her feet.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

She's hungry.

JAX

Does that mean you'll eat some food?

She looks sadly back at him, shakes her head, NO.

INT. OFFICE, PALM SPRINGS

Winnie pulls out her Adderall, a sugar-free red bull, and a martini glass. She pours straight vodka into the glass.

INT. WONDERLAND CLUB

The martini glass becomes a GIANT SET PIECE in Wonderland, where girls are swimming.

The party is themed so that everything is WAY over-sized, and you feel like a miniature person in another world.

Performers in skin-tight pill-costumes dance inside huge prescription bottles. DJ SIN does a set. Winks at:

Mara, in the crowd. She blows him a kiss, and he catches it just the way Jaxon does in real life, with a crunch.

INT. WONDERLAND, BACK OFFICE

Mara takes DJ Sin into the back office, using a KEY she's clearly stolen from Opie (the one he uses to get in the back door). They are going at it wildly. They fuck.

Then she slices his neck open.

MARA (V.O.)

The music finally stops, and this lovely, vicious world is mine.

Everything goes QUIET as she drinks deeply, and it's so satisfying. Life restored to each pore.

MARA (V.O.)

He tastes exactly as I imagine.

Mara catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror, her mouth dripping with SILVER SHIMMERY BLOOD.

MARA (V.O.)

Like applause and cherry pie.

BACK IN THE CLUB -

As she walks out, everyone ADORES her. The green-haired gay guy approaches.

GREEN-HAIRED BOY

I don't even like pussy and I'd fuck you. Just felt like you should know that.

She smirks, kisses him, and keeps walking. The IT GIRL SQUAD greets her (except Zara, of course, who is cold as usual.)

REESE

There you are. It's been ages!

MARA

I know, I've been looking rough so I didn't want to show.

NIGHTSHADE

What are you talking about, your skin looks amaze.

VXYN

Yeah, you're like, glowing.

ZARA

I can give you my doctor's number if you need some help. He's expensive, though, so...

And watching this whole thing is the owner of Wonderland: HENRY, 50's, brooding brand of handsome, something ominous behind perfectly tailored everything.

He watches Mara and then goes into the back office...

INT. WONDERLAND, BACK OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Where he finds the DJ's dead body, silver blood everywhere.

And he smiles and locks the door. Hand slides down his pants.

INT. LIVING ROOM, PALM SPRINGS - DAY

Jax talks to Dr. K (Winnie's shrink) over the phone.

JAX

...Besides that? She won't eat, she's barely sleeping. Like an hour a night, on average. I agree, and I've been trying to get her on the phone with you, but...

He hears Winnie coming, wraps it up.

JAX (CONT'D)
I'll try that. Thank you, doctor.

He hangs up as Winnie gets herself some water. He approaches.

JAX (CONT'D)
You're looking better.

WINNIE
I feel it. Sorry about before. It
was just-- you know how characters
make me.

JAX
Yeah, but it's never been this--

WINNIE
This what?

JAX
Nothing. I just think you deserve a
little break. Yeah? Let me take you
out tomorrow, celebrate how hard
you've been working.

WINNIE
Can we afford to?

JAX
I told you not to worry about that
stuff.

She shrugs, agrees. He kisses her.

EXT. PALM SPRINGS AERIAL TRAMWAY - DAY

They go up the tramway, with its GORGEOUS views. Jax is
overly positive. Calm before the storm.

INT. RESTAURANT AT THE TOP - DAY

It overlooks the valley, stunning.

When the food arrives, Winnie tries to cut it up and take a
bite but can't.

Then, when she finally does, she's chewing it and sees
MAGGOTS crawling all over it - and spits it out.

WINNIE
Please don't make me, please.

He doesn't want to make a scene, nods. Waves for the check.

Jax goes to Winnie's side of the table, calms her. She leans into him, grateful.

JAX
Baby, will you please call your doctor about this? For me?

The WAITER returns.

WAITER
I'm sorry, sir, your card has been declined.

INT. BEDROOM, PALM SPRINGS HOUSE - EVENING

They're back, and Winnie is urgently preparing to go out, sucking on her vape every other breath.

Jax is trying to stop Winnie as she is undressing.

JAX
You need to rest. You've had a long day, you shouldn't be going anywhere right now.

She sighs dramatically, pulls on a dress. Mara within her is telling her there's somewhere she needs to be right now.

WINNIE
She feels better, so it's fine. She wants to party.

JAX
I'm really starting to hate this Sloan girl. I don't think she's good for you.

WINNIE
I wasn't talking about--
(breaks off)
What are you doing?

He's blocking her, standing in front of the door.

JAX
You need to stay in, Winnie, you're not thinking clearly.

WINNIE

And you're gonna stop me, huh?

Something in this is dangerous.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

I know you've been drinking more.
Are you drunk right now?

JAX

No.

WINNIE

Because that's what you said that
one time. Oh that's right, you
can't remember. Want me to remind
you what happened?

Jax tries to speak, but he swallows whatever brutal pain this
has brought up. Instead, he steps aside. She wins.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

That's what I thought.

She exits. He watches her get in the mustang, then turns
away. He's biting back a BREAKDOWN.

He goes to the bottle. Hesitates. Fuck it, fuck her. The pain
is too sharp. He needs this.

Takes a few sips. Exhales a shaky breath, slowly steadyng.

INT. OFFICE, PALM SPRINGS

Half hour later or so. Jax pokes his head into the office.

Starts to look through her NOTEBOOK. He reads.

JAX

"I am not me anymore. I look in the
mirror and I don't know which
version of myself will stare back."

Struck by this, he flips to another page.

JAX (CONT'D)

"I grew up starving and now I don't
know how to be full. Jaxon is
getting sick of me, I know he is. I
saw the way he looked at me today,
not with love but the way I see
myself, and sadly--"

(breaks off, then:)

(MORE)

JAX (CONT'D)

"And sadly, the only real surprise is that it's taken him this long to see how broken I am, that he deserves better, because he--"

He breaks off again, unable to continue. We just see it on the page:

"...because he does. *RJ called me a dangerous girl. I drive people to insanity, that is the kind of person I am. A dangerous girl.*"

Jax stops there, closes the journal.

Hesitates. His phone rings. It's Winnie. She speaks first.

He listens to her for a while, clearly hearing a heartfelt apology because he softens considerably.

JAX (CONT'D)

It's okay. No, you've been cooped up, you have fun. You deserve it.

Beat. He listens.

JAX (CONT'D)

It's really okay. I... I should be cutting down on drinking anyway, you're right. I can't afford to blackout and lose control, I'd never forgive myself. Love you too.

INT. MANSION - EVENING

Sloan - dressed goth chic - climbs off the sink in the bathroom of the mansion and hands Winnie's phone back to her.

WINNIE

How did you do that? Your voice sounded exactly... that's crazy.

They exit the bathroom and enter THE PARTY. It's not that wild, since it's summer and everyone is hot and lethargic. But it's not nothing.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

How did you know what to say?

SLOAN

Boys like Jax, they always want to be the good guy.

WINNIE

You say that like it's a bad thing.

SLOAN

Good is bad, bad is good, down is high, boy is bye, and you, winning Winnie, are a dark-eyed party paradise.

WINNIE

Whatever you're on, I need some.

Sloan points to an elegant actress in a thin gold bodysuit.

Winnie heads over to ask about pills. Sloan, meanwhile, crosses to the kitchen and lights her cig on the gas burner. Sloan then watches as: RJ CROSSES THE ROOM.

Closer, with Winnie and the actress:

WINNIE (CONT'D)

You're so lovely, thank you.

RJ interrupts them.

RJ

I didn't think you'd make it.

Winnie greets him, waits for him to exchange cheek kisses with the actress.

WINNIE

Sorry I missed the screening.

(he waves this off)

I brought a friend too, Sloan--

Winnie suddenly realizes she doesn't know where Sloan is.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

Oh. She's here somewhere.

RJ

I look forward to meeting her.

He too takes a pill. Raises his glass to her. You can tell he thinks the fact that she's here really 'means something.'

But Win's focus is elsewhere...

WINNIE

Is that champagne? Real champagne?

RJ

Only the best. Six G's a bottle.
Can I get you a glass?

EXT. MANSION - EVENING

Sloan and Winnie lay outside on the edge of a MASSIVE pool, sharing a bottle of that expensive champagne, watching the pink-purple haze behind the jagged blue mountains.

SLOAN

I don't get it, what are you upset about? He *offered*.

WINNIE

Obviously I'm not taking it.

SLOAN

Why not?

WINNIE

Alright, genius, what do you think I should do?

SLOAN

Take RJ's money, use his connections to build an empire, fuck the world with your words. Oh, and dump Jax.

WINNIE

Very funny.

SLOAN

You think I'm joking? A man who can't pick up the check is not a man, he's a boy. It's totally fair to get upset if your guy goes broke. It's like if you gained fifty pounds.

WINNIE

How? How is it like that?

SLOAN

Seriously, Freddie, if you gained fifty pounds, like--
(blows up her cheeks)
You're telling me honestly Jax wouldn't be thinking about someone else? And if he did, that you wouldn't blame him?

WINNIE

Jax isn't like that.

SLOAN

Have you even been in the world recently? Have you forgotten how it works?

WINNIE

You know, for someone so intelligent, you're incredibly shallow.

SLOAN

Thank you.

(off her look)

I try not to overthink things, it limits the botox I'll need in the future. Keep to the lite versions of heavy subjects. The *diet* philosophy. Think of death in terms of life. Think of life in terms of things. Think of things in terms of how much envy they'll beget in the eyes of your frenemies.

WINNIE

Got any cancer? I'm out.

Sloan holds out a cigarette for her. The smoke drifts over the pool, transitions us into the fictional world...

INT. HOTEL ROOM, MANHATTAN - NIGHT

Smokey but fancy hotel room. Lacey white underwear on long legs. Curve around a perfect ass to find, tucked into the front, a sharp silver knife.

MARA (V.O.)

Welcome to the dark side; welcome to reality.

Flawless red nails slide down to the knife, and lift it out.

As Mara walks away, see, in the mirror, written in lipstick:

Chapter 8. "Power is the ultimate aphrodisiac." - kissinger

Focus back to the knife, held out next to that ass.

Mara carefully approaches the luxurious bed where HENRY is waiting for her.

He looks her up and down. He registers the knife, then offers a mirror stacked with cocaine. She uses the knife to deftly take a small line.

But then, she takes the knife TO HIS NECK. Clear silver blade against throbbing Adam's apple.

MARA
Why shouldn't I?

HENRY
Is this a test?

MARA
Maybe.

HENRY
If you want to, go ahead. But I think, between my death and this moment, there are much more appetizing options.

MARA
What if I've got a taste for blood?

HENRY
There are better bodies than mine to slake that lust, darling.

MARA
That's funny.

HENRY
Hardly.

MARA
You're not serious?

HENRY
Quite.

Mara draws back, evaluating him.

HENRY (CONT'D)
If you'll let me, I'll show you how serious I am. I'll call up a call girl for you right now.

He reaches for the phone, but she stops him, holding the knife to him.

MARA

It's not about what's on the outside. It's the thing the soul lives for.

HENRY

Fascinating. So what was it with the DJ, his fans? His influence?

She is scared for a moment. Draws back.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Don't worry, I cleaned it up. No one else knows.

MARA

What do you want?

HENRY

Your companionship for the days I've got left - a few years, according to my doctor. Terminal. In exchange, I will open the world to you, doors you never imagined existed. You're special, and I can help you, teach you, protect you. Let me spoil you rotten.

She contemplates his offer. Paces. Goes through his wallet.

MARA

At first, I thought you reminded me of someone. But now I see you're nothing like him.

HENRY

I hope that's a good thing.

Mara approaches, runs the knife from neck to balls - ever so lightly, a TEASE. Then she licks the knife, and puts it back in her thigh-highs.

MARA

You die on your own time, daddy. We're gonna make out alright, you and me.

Mara grabs a massive handful of cash from the wallet and sticks it in her bra. Wraps a fur around her body, lights a cig, blows Henry a kiss, and leaves.

INT. MANSION - NIGHT

As the party continues, Winnie seeks out RJ. He's in a room with some fans and D-list actors. He shoos them out when Winnie enters.

RJ
So. You're back.

She tries to be confident, strong.

WINNIE
Love does not conquer all. Love
must sometimes be conquered.

RJ
Who wrote that?

WINNIE
I did.

RJ
You did. About me?

WINNIE
Maybe.

RJ
You think about me a lot, don't
you.

WINNIE
Do you think about me?

RJ
Haven't you seen my movies?

WINNIE
My shrink says they would be
triggers.

RJ
You told her about us?

WINNIE
I told her the same thing I told
Jax. That you were famous and had a
family, and I couldn't use your
real name.

RJ
Very considerate of you.

WINNIE

I didn't do it for you.

(beat)

My mother... she really never
suspected anything?

RJ

At this point, it's hardly
relevant. Even if you told her,
nothing would change.

Winnie tries to grasp what he's saying.

WINNIE

You don't think she'd believe me?

RJ

Was that a threat?

WINNIE

No, what--

RJ

I was kidding. I know you'd never
hurt me.

Beat. Tense.

RJ (CONT'D)

Your mother believes what is
convenient for her to believe. I am
her boyfriend, her baby daddy, her
provider, the golden ticket for her
precious boy. The father figure to
her daughter. Her troubled,
difficult daughter, who struggles
with depression and delusions and...
well, you get the point.

These words - the implication of them - is not lost on her.

WINNIE

Yeah. I get it.

RJ

What was that?

WINNIE

Nothing.

RJ

I should take you over my knee for
that.

She doesn't move. He's testing her...

RJ (CONT'D)
You'd let me, wouldn't you. Even
now.

WINNIE
That's not fair.

RJ
But you would.

He takes her onto his lap like a little girl. She sits on one knee, lets him hold her, says nothing.

RJ (CONT'D)
Haven't you missed me, Freddie?
Haven't you missed me at all?

WINNIE
Of course I have.

RJ
Show me. Kiss me.

WINNIE
I can't, you know I can't.

She turns her head away.

RJ
And you talk about unfair. Do you
know what torture this is for me?

WINNIE
I'm sorry.

RJ
You're depriving yourself of a full
life experience. Monogamy is a
myth, Freddie. No one wants to tell
you that part.

Looking for an excuse to not be on his lap, she gets up to
get her purse. Checks something in it.

RJ (CONT'D)
You know what Faulkner said about
all this? He was being interviewed
for The Paris Review, and-- well,
I'll read it to you because you'll
appreciate it.

He finds the quote easily, reads to her.

RJ (CONT'D)

"The writer's only responsibility is to his art." Only responsibility, you hear that? Only. "He will be completely ruthless if he is a good one. He has a dream. It anguishes him so much he must get rid of it. He has no peace until then. Everything goes by the board: honor, pride, decency, security, happiness, all, to get the book written. If a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate; the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is worth any number of old ladies." I love that bit, any number of old ladies.

Winnie processes what he is saying. What it means. What it means to RJ, specifically. *Don't worry about your marriage, do whatever you want. And I know you want me, so...*

As she is leaving--

RJ (CONT'D)

Hey.

He nods to an envelope on the dresser. She takes it.

INT. OFFICE, PALM SPRINGS HOUSE

Winnie takes the CASH out of the envelope, puts most of it with the drugs in the fake book. Keeps a little on hand. Sits down to write.

In her notebook, she writes. "Everything is material." And directly after: "Everything is material."

Looks at the money. Ben Franklin carries us through to:

INT. MARA'S APARTMENT

A bed covered in hundred dollar bills. Mara makes a money-angel in it. Music blasts. She's in heaven.

This is her new apartment, and it's MAD COOL. It's covered in MIRRORS - much like the maze that Winnie is trapped in when she sleeps. There are doors that don't look like doors and secret compartments and glamour-punk decor.

(Note: while the mirrors are a terrifying trap for Winnie; for Mara, they re-enforce her own power.)

INT. STUDIO - DAY

PHOTOSHOOT - Mara lays on the hood of a familiar '54 Mustang as the cameras flash. Balloons hold up parts of her dress.

The camera's flashes take us in and out of various memories.

FLASH OF: Mara and Henry, their strange bond.

MARA (V.O.)

I learn from Henry, magic shadow
man of my dreams, man with all the
keys. He gets me.

Back to the photoshoot. Then:

FLASH OF: Mara auditioning to model.

MARA (V.O.)

Jobs come with confidence and
charm, and when you stop eating.
They want you to say you are 22 but
look like you are 12 and really be
somewhere like 16.

FLASHES: Runway. Other photoshoots. Mara skyrocketing to fame. Socialite appearances with the other girls.

MARA (V.O.)

They love you. Want you. Want to
love you. Love to want you. Offer
you dreams on the dotted line.
Complimentary cocaine on conference
room tables (better blow than
burger). Sign right there, where
there is an x.

INT. MARA'S APARTMENT - EVENING

A GROAN comes from the other room. It's the green-haired boy, bleeding from the head, tied up.

Mara approaches him with sadistic thrill.

MARA

Oh good, you're awake. What do you
think of my new digs?

GREEN-HAIRED BOY

Whatever you're planning, you won't
get away with it.

MARA

Oh, sweetie, that's the thing. I, like, totally will.

She lays her hands across his neck. He pulls away, scared out of his mind.

MARA (CONT'D)

You see, my new daddy takes care of me. He'll take care of you too.

(off his hope)

When I'm done with you, that is.

She laughs at his terror, a true villain now.

MARA (CONT'D)

I wonder what you taste like. I try to always guess first.

Her fingers have fake metal nails that act as individual knives (and double as a badass fashion statement).

She slices his neck open and we hear his screams slowly fade as Mara just watches, salivating.

MARA (CONT'D)

What do you know. The insides match the drapes.

His blood is indeed, the exact green shade as his hair.

LATER THAT NIGHT --

A small glass bottle of green is tied with bow, and labeled: "OBSESSION" and then brought to--

A secret compartment behind several layers of mirrors.

Within, there are already a few bottles. Gold, labeled "INNOCENCE." Pale yellow, labeled "FUTILITY." Silver, labeled "APPLAUSE."

There's a knock at the door. Excited, Mara goes to greet her date: Opie.

OPIE

This place is brill. You have to have a party.

MARA

Oh, I'm having a party. But it's going to be girls only.

OPIE

No fair.

MARA

I'll take pix for you.

OPIE

F'real?

MARA

Duh. I love you, dirty boy.

OPIE

God you're amazing.

MARA

Not love like THAT.

OPIE

I know.

He extends the Altoid container. In the background, a familiar CACTUS. The cactus takes us back to:

EXT. POOL - DAY

Same plant, poolside. Winne and Sloan are on floaties (flamingo, shark). Sunglasses, sunhats, bikinis, drinks.

SLOAN

Without perspective, we are everything. Play them, I'm listening.

Winnie plays a few of her VOICEMAIL MESSAGES.

RJ (V.O.)

Now that I've seen you, I've got to see you again. Come out to LA. Make some excuse. Please, I need to see you. I'll drive back out. I don't care.

(beep, next message)

Call me back, will you? You can't just ignore me. At least text or email or something.

(beep)

You know, you've got some fucking nerve. After all the shit I did for you? I don't care about the money, it doesn't matter. But Freddie, your whole life is because of me.

(MORE)

RJ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
You think you'd have anything at all? An education? An agent? Anything? No. You'd be in the streets. You're ungrateful and lost, and you chose someone that you could control.

WINNIE

And then there's, like, a million emails, texts, all this shit. How's that for perspective?

SLOAN

Being a man is hard. Being a girl is easy as long as you know what to say.

WINNIE

I *don't* know what to say. Or do.

They lay there for a while in silence.

Winnie's eyes are glazed over, watching something that glints in the light on the pool's surface, unsure what it is.

SLOAN

One night, like, a bajillion years ago, this guy - Zhuangzi - has this exceptionally dope dream where he's this baller butterfly with no worries, just flying around, chill as fuck. And then, Zhuangzi wakes up, right, and he goes, I have no way to know if I'm a man who dreamt he was a butterfly, or if I'm a butterfly dreaming - right now - that I am Zhuangzi.

Sloan finishes her drink, slurps through the straw. Winnie squints at the object, which now looks like a plastic bag full of goldfish.

INT. MARA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Goldfish in a plastic bag, held in Reese's arms - it's her housewarming gift. She hands it to Mara, who is welcoming all the girls to her party.

REESE

(admiring the apt)
Straight fire, betch, damn.

She's not the only one. They're all impressed.

Magnets on the fridge read:

CHAPTER 9. "Revenge is sweet and not fattening." - hitchcock.

ZARA

How do you afford this place? No
offense.

MARA

I make it work.

(leans in)

I got some *ode* pure white girl, but
I don't have much, you wanna...
maybe ghost the squad for a sec?

She nods toward the bedroom. Zara is *all about it*. As Zara
slips away to the room, Mara sets up the others to party.

Turns the volume on her pricey music system to MAX.

INT. BEDROOM, MARA'S APARTMENT

Zara looks over Mara's things. Mara enters, startles her.

MARA

I feel like there's been this
rivalry between us, and maybe it's
not just because our names are, you
know, but...

Mara pulls out a silver tray, a baggy of pure coke, and dumps
it out, starts cutting it up with a razor blade.

MARA (CONT'D)

Touch it. Straight from the coca
plant to your expensive nose.

Zara tests it out. Does a small bump. Is impressed.

ZARA

Gucci.

Mara rolls a couple hundred dollar bills, hands one to Zara.

MARA

It's our peace pipe.

ZARA

Is that like, offensive?

MARA

Probably. Or maybe thinking it's
offensive is the offensive part.

They do lines, both old pros. They bond over their similarities. Mara is slowly winning Zara over.

MEANWHILE --

Show the other girls, high, drunk, spacey, jumping on an indoor trampoline that has opened up beneath the carpet.

They're on some version of ecstasy so clothes are coming off.

Music blasts while a slasher film is projected on the wall - occasionally catching the girls bodies as well, as they jump.

BACK IN THE BEDROOM --

Mara has Zara exactly where she wants her, and now the games begin. She puts her cigarette out on her own tongue, and Zara draws back, like, wtf?

Then Mara pulls out a GUN. Toys with it, rubs it over her cheek, her neck. Cold metal, painted pastel pink.

She puts it to Zara's face.

ZARA

That's not real, is it?

Mara makes a face, drops the gun, giggles. She pushes Zara back on the bed, going into seductive mode.

ZARA (CONT'D)

Okay, but this doesn't mean I'm going down on you-- ooo!

She moans as Mara teases her.

MARA

I've been wanting to do this for a long time.

She plays with Zara, then starts fucking her with the gun - jams it up, making Zara gasp in pain.

ZARA

That's too hard!

Mara holds Zara's hair, pulling it tight at the base of her neck. Firm, gentle; trust me. Like an idiot, Zara does.

Mara kisses down her body... and joins the gun down below.

Zara enjoys herself - eyes closed - until she hears a CLICK.

Her eyes fly open with pure TERROR mere SECONDS before Mara pulls the trigger.

Mara keeps eating Zara out as she's dying, drinking the gushes of deep BLUE BLOOD pouring from between the girl's perfect legs.

MARA

'Privilege.' I knew it would be good, but WOW.

BACK IN THE MAIN ROOM -

Mara re-enters the party with extra glow.

VXYN

What happened to Zara?

MARA

I banged her. She *dead*.

Reese hears this, laughs. Vxyn is distracted by the unwieldy object in Mara's hand.

VXYN

What's that?

MARA

Oh this? It's a Coco Chanel chainsaw. They're all the rage.

It is, indeed (somehow) a designer chainsaw.

REESE

So is that, like, a display piece?

MARA

Nope.

She starts it up. The door is locked, they can't get out.

Nightshade runs for the bedroom, where she finds Zara, dead, in the same sitting position but with a plastic bag over her head with a smiley face on it that says "have a NICE DAY!"

Music blasts, and while the black and white slasher film is projected, Mara terrorizes and massacres everyone.

Girls bleed in lingerie, beg her to stop, plead.

REESE

Why?

MARA

It's my party and you'll die if I
want you to.

Feathers and varying shades of blue blood everywhere. (Except Nightshade's, whose is more purple - "Royalty.")

Pearls clutched in a hand. Trace up the arm to find: it's SEVERED. And not the only detached limb.

Random body parts around, like pieces of life-size Barbie dolls destroyed by someone's little brother.

Mara lies back, naked, covered in the blue-purple blood, absorbing it, in some other enviable dimension.

MARA (CONT'D)

I never thought I could be this
happy.

The genuine smile on her face is - despite everything - hard not to find sweet. It's so... peaceful.

On the wall, written in blood: "*VENI VIDI VICI, BETCHES*"

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE - EVENING

Winnie stares at the mirror, where the same thing is written. She scrubs at it.

Jax knocks, enters, just in time to see Winnie grasp onto the wall for support. She can barely stand. Jax catches her.

JAX

Have you been eating?

Silence. He looks around for a scale, pulls it out.

JAX (CONT'D)

Get on.
(she doesn't)
GET ON.

She does. Weighs 86lbs.

JAX (CONT'D)

Why do you do this to yourself?

She shrugs. He kneels at her feet, holds her thin legs, his head in her thigh gap.

JAX (CONT'D)

Baby, I'm losing it a little here,
please, just tell me what's going
on, tell me what I can do.

Her hand goes to his hair, fingers running through brown strands. A far-off look in her eye. Cheekbones too pronounced. Skin stretched across bone.

WINNIE

I just need to sleep a little. I'm okay. I'm...

He helps her to bed. She drifts off.

INT. MIRROR MAZE

This time, she dreams she is trapped inside a bottle, inside of the maze. The bottle begins to fill with water that rises from some unknown source.

The shadows crawl off the walls, reach across the floor for her - and manifest into the Shadow Creature, who circles the bottle in a fog of black mist.

It should become clear that the creature is a MONSTER VERSION OF MARA, and it is taking more and more of Mara's features.

MARA MONSTER

Are you ready to give in yet?

WINNIE

What more can you take?

MARA MONSTER

Faulkner told you. Knew him well.
You want to be immortal like that?

WINNIE

Yes, but I want to be a good person. I'm trying to be a good person.

MARA MONSTER

Obscurity it is, then.

The water rises up to Winnie's neck now.

WINNIE

What do you want?

MARA MONSTER

Bleeder, wake up! *Everything* goes by the wayside. I want your honor, your pride, your decency, your happiness. I want your heart, your hair, your brains, your guts. I want to scoop out your soul with a silver spoon and suck at the hole inside you until there is nothing left but the dust of your bones, which I will cut into lines and serve at parties. I want *all of you*.

Winnie tries to keep her head above the water, struggles.

The monster's fingers slither into Winnie's bottle like so many snakes. Winnie doesn't know if she should drown or let the shadows get her.

MARA MONSTER (CONT'D)

Do you know why you're scared?

Winnie is fully submerged in the water now, unable to breathe. The terrifying monster is right up to the glass, a mere INCH AWAY.

MARA MONSTER (CONT'D)

Because you want to give it to me.

The monster's fingers/vine/snake things finally GRAB Winnie and SQUEEZE, wrapping around her until she dissolves in the same black mist and--

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE - DAY

Winnie wakes up, gasping for air. She coughs up some water. Almost shouts for Jax, but then... her eyes catch on something and she cannot look away.

A BUTTERFLY. Hovering in the light. As she goes to get a closer look, it flies away. She follows it.

EXT. PATIO - CONTINUOUS

Winnie follows the butterfly outside. We begin to hear VOICES muttering, over each other, calling her.

The butterfly lands in the pool.

In a daze, she leans over the edge.

The Mara-Monster in the reflection of the water. Fiction drips into dreams drips into reality.

Winnie reaches to touch the water.

MARA MONSTER
Let go, Winnie. It's so easy. Just
let go.

Winnie FAINTS out cold, and falls into the pool. Blood spreads throughout the water, surrounding her like a cloud.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Winnie squints her eyes. Blurrily makes out Jax and a DOCTOR.

DOCTOR
....It's very common in the first trimester. I don't usually have any advice besides, try again, but in her case, you need to make sure she's healthy first, and looking at these numbers, she's got a ways to go. Even if she carried to term, in her malnourished state...

JAX
I understand.

Winnie shows that she is awake, moving, opening her eyes fully. Jax looks at her - doesn't say a single word, just KILLS her with this heartwrenching look, and EXITS.

INT. BATHROOM, HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS

Jax swigs from a flask, bottling a panic attack. Furious, he kicks the bathroom door. A mangled sob escapes him.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Winnie finds out the hospital bill. It's a lot. She discusses it with a NURSE - we don't need to hear the details. Just close on the document as she checks that they'll pay "CASH."

EXT. POOL, PALM SPRINGS HOUSE - DAY

Pool cleaners drag the pool. It looks odd, empty.

INT. MUSTANG - MOVING

Jax drives Winnie home. Tense between them.

JAX

How could you not tell me that you accepted that kind of cash?

WINNIE

That's what you're upset about? I just *miscarried*.

JAX

You don't get to tell me what to be upset about.

She sits in silence, sulking.

JAX (CONT'D)

You do this thing where you get all quiet so you can't be caught saying the wrong thing. It's bullshit.

(beat)

You have to start fucking eating.

Winnie is shaken by this, tries to speak, can't. Then:

WINNIE

(softly)

Okay.

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE

Inside, Jax stands over her and a plate of food, makes sure she eats every last bite. She cries, shaking.

WINNIE

I'm sorry, I love you, I'm sorry, I love you, I'm sorry...

She repeats it over and over, like a mantra. He holds her. They mourn the loss together.

INT. MASTER BATHROOM

Big beautiful tub. Winnie scared a little. What it means.

But this bath is not red. It is full of lavender bubbles. There are candles. Lighting is soft, delicate, flickering.

Jax gently helps Winnie out of her clothes and into the bath. He takes each limb and cleans it carefully and tenderly. A beautiful, intimate moment between them.

INT. BEDROOM, PALM SPRINGS - NIGHT

Late at night, Jax opens his eyes to find:

WINNIE is wandering around, naked, with a knife.

JAX

Winnie?

Winnie slowly shakes her head. A creepy grin spreads across her face. It's not Winnie. *WTF?!*

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE - MORNING

Jax removes all the knives in the house. He steps it up a notch on everything. He even UNPLUGS the landline.

He makes a call, whispers, makes sure he can't be heard.

JAX

RJ, hey, it's Jaxon Heller. Listen, I know you're a busy guy, but something's happening with Winnie, and I'm afraid it might be as bad as last time. You were there, I wasn't, I didn't know who else to call...

INT. PALM SPRINGS - EVENING

Winnie falls asleep. Jax makes sure of it before he leaves.

But as soon as he leaves, Winnie goes to the office.

INT. BAR - EVENING

Jax goes to meet RJ at a hotel bar.

JAX

Thanks for coming all the way out here.

RJ

'Course. You drinking? My treat.

JAX
I'm okay.

RJ
(to waiter)
Two scotches.
(to Jax)
You'll thank me when you try it.

This is the first time they have extended one-on-one time, and there's tension as they size each other up.

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE - EVENING

Winnie is sitting down to look at her writing, when the LANDLINE rings. It's Sloan.

SLOAN
Jax doesn't trust you, he's keeping secrets from you...

Follow the phone line down to see: it's still unplugged.

INT. BAR - EVENING

They sip their drinks. RJ makes a show of paying.

JAX
We appreciate your help. I want to assure you, we'll pay you back

RJ
Don't worry about it. Anything for Freddie.

Jax's ear catches on this. Things start to click for Jax, you can see the math happening behind his eyes.

JAX
Freddie. Her ex called her that.

RJ
Really? He probably got it from me.
(sips his drink)
Does she talk about him often?

JAX
Almost never. You knew him?

RJ
Quite well, actually.

Jax squares his jaw. Sips his drink. He *knows*.

JAX
Don't tell me his name, I'm afraid
I'll murder the bastard.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Big magazine cover photoshoot.

Graffiti on the fake wall behind her reads:

CHAPTER 10. "Love is what grown folk do to each other because the law frowns on killing." - mary oliver

Opie brings Mara a cherry cola with a straw. She sips, hands it back. A bunch of FLASHES and miscellaneous praise.

The photoshoot ends. Opie helps her change. He's like half her assistant, half her bestie.

MARA
Can I borrow some cash?

Opie rifles through his wallet, pulls out a 20.

MARA (CONT'D)
More.

He finds a hundred. She grins, then lights it on fire and uses it to light her cigarette.

OPIE
You're demented. And you're paying me back.
(seeing that she's frozen)
What?

He looks to see what she's looking at: Henry. He's waiting for her.

OPIE (CONT'D)
I hate that guy.

MARA
Someone's jelly.

OPIE
I really think you can do better.

MARA
I didn't ask you.

Mara hates that she cares, and struts off to Henry.

INT. MARA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mara and Henry smoke post-coital cigarettes.

HENRY
Knock knock.

MARA
Who's there.

HENRY
A bad joke.

MARA
(right at him)
Pretty bad.

She's not happy, something listless about her. He can tell.

HENRY
That boy you hang around with.

MARA
Opie.

HENRY
Opie. He's making you unhappy.

MARA
He loves me. And he's loyal.

HENRY
What am I?

MARA
Married.

HENRY
He thinks you can do better than
me, right?

MARA
Course not.

HENRY
You want him to accept you as you
are, to show him. But he will never
understand the sideways ways your
twisted mind works.

MARA
And you do?

HENRY
Was that a legitimate question? I'm offended. You'll never find anyone that'll take better care of you than me. But hey--

He starts to go.

MARA
Stop.

HENRY
There she is.

She traces her finger down his chest, sticks out her pouty bottom lip.

MARA
What's wrong with me?

HENRY
Wherever we owe people bits of who we are, they control us. Wherever we give trust and love, we are controlled. You've experienced the release that comes with destroying the ones that have built you, you are freed - not just of them - but of your past. Every king to claim a throne in the history of our shitty little planet, has known this feeling. In my own way, so too have I, though I prefer a box seat to the trigger.

MARA
And me? What am I?

HENRY
You, doll, you're the best seat in the whole damn house.

She grins, feeling herself again. But there's more.

HENRY (CONT'D)
But. I would hate to see you go down the wrong path.
(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)

I'm not saying what you should or should not do with the boy, but if I have learned anything in my life, Mara, it is this: you cannot trust anyone but yourself. And sometimes, not even that.

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE

Winnie is interrupted from writing by the entrance of her intoxicated husband. He TEARS through the office.

WINNIE

What are you doing? Jax?

JAX

The book he gave you. I know I packed it--

He finds what he is looking for, pulls it out triumphantly - a copy of "Letters to a young poet" and opens it.

Reads the inscription. "Freddie." "I love you in all the ways." Signed, "R."

JAX (CONT'D)

This whole time. It was RJ this whole time.

WINNIE

Jax, calm down, I can explain.

JAX

You made me look like an idiot. For FIVE YEARS. Does that mean nothing to you?

He exits to the kitchen and pours himself a drink. She follows.

WINNIE

I'm not the only one keeping secrets, you've been sneaking around--

JAX

I was trying to HELP you.

WINNIE

Please. You just like playing savior so you feel like less of a fuckup.

JAX

Are you fucking him?

WINNIE

Will you let me explain?

JAX

Why would I do that, *Freddie*?

WINNIE

You're drunk.

JAX

Well, you kept telling me I was, so
I figured, if I'm doing the time,
might as well...

He raises his glass to her, takes a nice, long sip. Stumbles, can't keep his balance as he speaks.

JAX (CONT'D)

I saw the best in you, but you
could only see the worst in me, and
now here we are, and I still love
you more than anything in the world
and I wish to God I didn't. All I
need from you, is to look me in the
eye, and for once, tell me the
truth.

WINNIE

I'll talk when you're sober.

JAX

You'll talk NOW!

He slams his hand on the wall next to her head, scares her. He breaks a bunch of shit, violently trashes the place. He takes the guitar, smashes it to PIECES.

Winnie collapses into herself, the madness coming back again. There are voices, whispers, everywhere.

WINNIE

No, no, no.

THE SHADOWS CREEP towards her, extending tentacles. She starts running. Somewhere in the far distance, someone calls her name. Maybe Jax, maybe someone else.

She keeps running, shadows at her heels...

INT. RJ'S HOTEL - EVENING

She is scared, goes to RJ for comfort. She is so unstable that she needs something stable, and like a fool, she feels RJ is the closest thing she has to that right now.

RJ
I'm glad you came.

When he moves, Winnie sees he already has a guest: Sloan.

WINNIE
What are you doing here?

RJ thinks she's talking to him.

RJ
Sorry?

WINNIE
Not you.

Winnie makes eye contact with Sloan, who hugs her, whispers sweet nothings in her ear.

SLOAN
Relax, gorgeous. This is what you need right now.

Sloan sets her martini glass down on the marble with a clink.

Next things we know, she's kissing Winnie, and it's hot, and Winnie's into it.

Then Sloan pulls away, puts a finger to Winnie's lips.

Sloan then approaches RJ, so beautiful, so confident. She kisses him, all the while, making eyes at Winnie.

Winnie can either leave now or become a part of this.

She walks over, suddenly not shy at all, almost as if she wants to prove something to Sloan.

They both start touching RJ.

RJ
Who are you?

WINNIE
Which one of us?

He laughs. Then it gets intense.

Sloan kisses RJ again, then Winnie, then slowly brings RJ and Winnie together.

SLOAN
(whispers in W's ear)
This is as far as I go.

RJ and Winnie are making out, and it's hot and heavy.

RJ
You're sure this is what you want?

WINNIE
This isn't about what I want. This
is about what she wants.

RJ stops for a moment, admiring Winnie.

RJ
You are a true artist.

He lowers her onto the bed and...

INT. MARA'S APARTMENT

Mara is the one we see being lowered. By OPIE. They are being romantic for the first time.

MARA
You love me, you honestly love
every part of who I am. You see me
in a way no one else does.

OPIE
Yes.

MARA
I want to feel it.

OPIE
Don't you?

MARA
I want to feel it... inside me.

She fucks him tenderly.

As he cumms, she whispers into his ear:

MARA (CONT'D)
I'm sorry.

Then she slices his neck open and drinks the geysers of blood. She holds his body closely.

MARA (CONT'D)
I will treasure your blood forever.

Close on: her adding a new bottle of blood to her now very large collection. This one is labeled "TRUE LOVE."

Opie bleeds out on the ground. Mara revels in the high his love-filled blood gives her.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

RJ finishes inside Winnie, just as she feels something happening with Mara -- it has a physical effect on her.

Winnie quickly gets off of RJ and just starts running.

INT. HALL, HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Clutching her stomach, half-dressed, looking out of her damn mind, she wobbles. Grasps the wall.

RJ
Freddie!

RJ exits the hotel room in a bathrobe, concerned.

Winnie's EYES ROLL BACK and she brandishes a knife (the same one from home, taken from her purse).

WINNIE
Stay away from me!

He backs off, and she shoves her way down the hall, vision blurring, seeing double.

EXT. HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

She tries to call a car, but she can't see straight.

Her stomach is PULSATING worse than ever. Whatever this thing is, it's coming. It wants to get OUT OF WINNIE.

She THROWS up, the same dark mist, but more of it. Wipes her mouth, and desperate, she goes back inside the hotel.

INT. HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

And BANGS on the first door she can find. A pale pretty boy opens it, an older man on the bed behind.

Winnie holds out the knife.

WINNIE

Get out. Both of you. Get out.

They are scared, and they do.

She locks the door and closes the curtains and finds the most comforting corner she can.

Winnie looks on with horror as the thing CARVES its way from the inside, out of her, the muse/demon C-section complete.

Winnie lies on the ground, bleeding, sobbing from the pain. Sweating, exhausted, dehydrated.

MARA has been born into the world. She wipes her face with a towel. Adjusts to her surroundings. Fangs shrink into regular teeth. Pops in a few dislocated bones.

Turns to looks at Winnie, shivering, hurt, freaked.

MARA

Don't worry, I'll take care of everything now.

Mara goes past her to the bathroom to wash up, her perfect curves illuminated as she walks through the door frame.

Winnie wipes her eyes, tries to rise, but is too weak.

But she doesn't have time to rest. The shower is going. It's now or never.

She pushes through the pain, grabs the drink on the bedside table - a screwdriver - and uses the strength from it to take her knife and start running.

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE - NIGHT/EARLY MORNING

Jax wakes up in the house he's trashed. Looks around. The night hits him like a ton of bricks.

JAX

Fuck. Winnie? Win?

He realizes she isn't in the house.

FLASH OF: Winnie running out the door, last night.

EXT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE

Jax tries to start the car, it won't start. He can't find the starter fluid. He panics.

EXT. PALM SPRINGS - DAYBREAK

Winnie is running. The sun is rising. She keeps looking behind her at the long shadows. She trips every other step, but keeps picking herself back up.

All she knows is she has to get as far from Mara as possible.

She sees a car coming.

She steps in front of it, preparing to die.

It stops. We realize what car it is - the Mustang.

Winnie doesn't move. Jax gets out of the car.

JAX

You can't just run away.

He tries to get her to get in the car, but she fights him.

WINNIE

Leave me here.

JAX

I'm not going to leave you out
here, you'll die.

WINNIE

So let me die! I want to die, I
can't do this anymore. I can't...

Mara leans out of the back seat, comfortable AF, smoking a cigarette. We know she's not real but she sure seems it.

MARA

You're pathetic.

Winnie stares at the girl in the backseat.

WINNIE

You already won.

JAX

Who wins? Who are you talking to?
Goddammit, Winnie, LOOK AT ME.

WINNIE

I fucked up, Jax. I really fucked up.

She sees another car coming the other way, and she runs for it but Jax stops her, brings her - kicking and screaming - back to the side of the road.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

Beyond gone, I'm a non-person now.
Just a fiction factory closing, let it close, let me go.

JAX

What does that mean? What are you saying?

MARA

Do it. Tell him. Maybe he'll let you kill yourself.

She shakes her head, tears in her eyes. But:

WINNIE

I made a mistake.

JAX

You did sleep with him.

WINNIE

Only after last night, after we fought, I went there and--

JAX

STOP. Just stop talking.

He needs a moment. Rocked to the core by her admission.

WINNIE

You don't understand, things were dark, it got bad and I needed you, you weren't there--

JAX

What about the million times I was, they count for nothing?

WINNIE

I didn't mean to, I didn't do it to
hurt you. She was there, and she
said I needed to--

JAX

She? The invisible friend you keep
talking to, this is her fault?

Jax is so full of fury that he doesn't know where to put it.
KICKS the car, YELLS, guttural and heartbreaking.

WINNIE

I'm so, so sorry, Jax.

Jax paces angrily, trying to bottle his intense rage.

JAX

You tried to warn me so many times,
you told me you fuck everything up,
and you'll hurt me, and I was so
sure you wouldn't that I-- I
reassured YOU. Do you realize how
fucked that is?

He laughs, a broken, tragic laugh.

JAX (CONT'D)

You still can't even look at me.

She meets his gaze. And it kills her, how little love is
there. How much fury.

JAX (CONT'D)

You need help.

WINNIE

I know.

(beat; this takes a lot)

Help me.

JAX

It's too late. There's nothing I
can do for you. You knew my past,
you knew exactly what it would do
to me, and you did it anyway.
You're not my problem anymore.

MARA

That's my cue.

Mara leans over Winnie.

MARA (CONT'D)
Eat me.

Mara's evil grin fills the screen.

She KISSES Winnie on the lips and it basically feels like she sucking Winnie's soul.

We are lost in the suction of a tornado of SAND.

Winnie tries to scream, but it comes out like dust. She is blown away, a mirage, and slams her eyes shut like this is just another nightmare.

Wake up and it'll all be normal.

INT. WONDERLAND CLUB, BACK OFFICE

But when she opens her eyes, she's SOMEWHERE ELSE - she's in Wonderland. She looks around, recognizing it from her novel.

In a small mirror on the wall, something ODD.

Instead of her own reflection, it's MARA - in the Palm Springs bathroom somehow.

MARA
Don't interfere. The writer was never God.

Winnie touches the mirror, tries to get through. Can't.

WINNIE
Interfere with what? What did you do?

MARA
The ending. You want a good one, right? So just relax and enjoy.

Mara spots something we can't see.

MARA (CONT'D)
Your hubby is actually a mad morsel. You don't mind, do you?
(shouting to Jax)
Baby, let's have a drink or five and talk this out.

WINNIE
Don't you fucking touch him.

MARA
 What do you think he tastes like?
 Say hi to me from me.

Mara kisses the mirror, leaving a lipstick mark, then disappears. Winnie screams, bangs at the mirror.

WINNIE
 Mara!!

Nothing. But - wait - there is an ARROW. This is her world, her baby, and it is loyal to her. It points to the door.

The door opens. Henry enters with a business associate, speaking in hushed tones.

HENRY
 You're sure there's no other way?

Winnie freezes, but soon realizes they cannot see her. She slips past them.

INT. WONDERLAND CLUB - CONTINUOUS

Winnie can't help but stop for a brief moment and enjoy the fever dream she's built.

A PARTIER bumps into her, freaks out about it to his friend.

PARTIER
 Mad cool energy right here, bro,
 you feel that?

He is wearing a shirt that says "This is not real." And an arrow tattoo on his arm points her...

To another neon sign arrow, then one on the ground, etc. The arrows point her urgently toward the VIP room.

INT. VIP ROOM, WONDERLAND

Mara drinks, smokes, leans back in the empty room. Enjoys the silence. But, when she gets to the bottom of the glass, she nearly chokes. After the final sip, a message has appeared:

"You have just been poisoned."

Winnie enters the room.

WINNIE
 I didn't think that would work.

MARA

Congratulations, you've fucked your own ending.

Mara FLICKERS like a bad TV.

WINNIE

You're dying.

MARA

You really think it matters if I die in your story? I have your REALITY. The one you were so ungrateful for. You had everything.

WINNIE

And you destroyed all of it.

MARA

(like, obvi)

You let me in.

WINNIE

Like I had a choice.

Mara gets worse, voice breaking and slurring as the poison hits her.

MARA

There's always a choice. You wanted me, this, Sloan. You wanted RJ. You wanted to make great art and fuck the world, and you knew the consequences. You chose this. And you chose well.

The word "well" plays over and over, like a skipped record. Then stops. Mara takes Winnie's hand, aims it into a gun. Puts it to her chin.

MARA (CONT'D)

You'll have to be Mara now. Good thing we died your hair, huh. You make a killer suicide blonde.

Winnie "pulls the trigger" and to her surprise, BRIGHT GOLD SPARKLES fly out of the back of Mara's head and she keels over, dead.

The sparkles turn to a thick liquid, spreading over the VIP room's leather seats and onto the floor. Winnie licks her lips, suddenly so, so thirsty.

She hesitates, holds her fingers dripping gold up, slowly brings them to her tongue. And swallows.

A RUSH of EUPHORIA and CLARITY. Strength she's long needed.

HENRY

Mara! There you are!

Winnie turns. Henry is coming towards her. He SEES her now. Fuck, she *is* Mara. (At least, that's what people see.)

HENRY (CONT'D)

You need to get out of here, the cops found some of the bodies, they've been onto us. You gotta get back to the apartment, get rid of evidence. I'll cover for you as long as I can. Hurry, go!

INT. MARA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Winnie finds herself in Mara's apartment.

The elaborate mirrors in there allow her FULL ACCESS to various rooms in Palm Springs.

She runs to the large panel where Mara is drinking with Jax, and Winnie sees up close that Mara is playing with a KNIFE in her hand. Winnie's knife.

Jax won't see it coming.

WINNIE

Mara!

Winnie bangs on the mirror. Stops. Thinks, then goes to the COMPARTMENT with the bottles of blood. She drinks the bottle labeled "True Love." Opie's. Tries the mirror again.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

Let me back in, I have to get back!

It doesn't work. She starts drinking all the blood flavors, trying over and over, still nothing.

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE

A very hammered Jax looks up at "Winnie." It's the same blank look he saw when she was holding the knife. Drunk as he is, he nevertheless recognizes that it isn't her.

JAX
Win?

Reaches out to touch her face. We close in on her EYES, where we can see tiny pale hands banging, trying to get out.

Closer and closer and we're back --

INT. MARA'S APARTMENT

And Winnie's fists fall down the mirror as she gives up.

In a final rush of FRUSTRATION and ANGER, she screams and starts smashing everything. She shatters the remaining bottles of blood, and they color the floor like a Pollock.

Winnie looks to see she's cut herself on the broken bottles. And she hears MARA react - in the real world, Winnie's own pain can still hurt Mara.

Just as she realizes this--

COPS BANG ON THE DOOR.

COPS (O.S.)
Open up, Mara Calloway, you are
under arrest!

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE

Mara examines the cut Winnie accidentally made from the bottle. Jax suspicion increases - something isn't right.

JAX
You're not... I mean, what are--

MARA
Less thinking, more drinking.

JAX
I can't, this isn't-- I've got to
make a call, I--

He tries to get up, stumbling. Mara sighs heavily. Looks in the KNIFE, reflecting Winnie.

MARA
You might want to look away for
this.

Jax is drunk, so is slow, but not so much that we don't catch the FEAR in his eyes.

As Mara RAISES the knife, TIME SLOWS. Close in on the knife, travel through to:

INT. MARA'S APARTMENT

Winnie watches the molasses reality -- as adrenaline rushes through her, everything happens at a fraction the speed.

The cops banging on the door comes slow and thundering like the heartbeat of a dying man.

It all slows to a near-stop as the knife reaches it's peak...

Then, as the blade comes down, we SMASH INTO ACTION:

Winnie makes a decision, reaches for a broken shard of mirror, and she STABS herself through the stomach.

The cops break the door down to find her keeled over, her own RED BLOOD mixing with the Pollock painting on the floor.

They turn her over, take her pulse. She's still alive, but barely. Eyelids flutter.

BLACK.

Then flickers of RED AND BLUE LIGHTS. Cop car? No...

INT. AMBULANCE - MOVING

Jax is above her in the back of an ambulance. She's barely holding on, bleeding out. Everything is muted, pale, dull.

No words. Just blood and a SMILE on her lips.

INT. JAX'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jax slams shut the copy of INNOCENT MONSTERS.

BLONDE

Babe?

We're back to the scene in the beginning. The sleeping blonde is waking up, turning -- maybe Winnie SURVIVED...?

But her face reveals: it's another Blonde, a vague lookalike.

She tries to come over and be affectionate, but Jax shrugs her off. This is a different man than the one we knew. A ghost of himself.

JAX

Get out.

BLONDE

What?

JAX

Get. Out. Now.

BLONDE

Fucking *fuckboys*.

She leaves furiously, and as the door closes, Jax exhales. This stuff is too personal for some stranger to see.

INT. AMBULANCE - MOVING (FLASHBACK)

Back in the ambulance, Jax holds Winnie's hand and WATCHES HER DIE. Her death haunts him.

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOUSE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

As Jax packs Winnie's things in a daze of depression, he stops at her NOTEBOOK. The one he'd peeked at. Her most private thoughts.

JAX (V.O.)

Reading her notebook was like finding all the pieces of Winnie she'd been keeping hidden away.

He reads through them. His fingers over the words, feeling them like Winnie is inside them.

JAX (V.O.)

The voices she heard. The monsters that haunted her. The darkness she could not escape.

INT. JAX'S APARTMENT - DAY

Present day. Jax drinks, does drugs.

He checks on the same SHOEBOX from the beginning. Whatever is inside keeps drawing him back. Again, puts it back.

Plays around with one of his MANY expensive guitars. None of them bring him any joy. Nothing does.

INT. VENUE, TRIBECA - EVENING

Dimly lit, wide space, dark hardwood, elaborate open bar. It's a classy (if slightly snooty) party for "Innocent Monsters" - now a BEST-SELLER.

JAX (V.O.)

I don't believe they excuse what she did, but it gave me something that I needed, for myself. I understood her in a way I never did when she was alive.

Jax floats through the crowd, vacant. He takes two drinks off a passing tray, drinks one, and then sips the other.

JAX (V.O.)

If someone can find beauty in that, good for you, and with all due respect, go fuck yourself.

Tracey, Winnie's agent, spots him. They chat absently. We don't hear it because it doesn't matter.

This is his story now but he doesn't know how to live it without Winnie.

ON STAGE -

Jax reads the INTRODUCTION for the gathered crowd (where the V.O came from), and is just at the end.

JAX

My wife is the writer. Not was, is.
(beat)
She got what she always wanted.
You're all talking about her now.
And so she lives.

He takes a breath, pained. People feel for him.

JAX (CONT'D)

"She lives." Right, well, you all know that's not true, but it's written here, and we're all here, so let's pretend. That's what being a human is, isn't it, pretending?

Tracey gives him a look.

JAX (CONT'D)

Anyway. Okay. Last bit here is a quote - Winnie always loved quotes.
(MORE)

JAX (CONT'D)

As she had not yet chosen a title,
it fell to me, and so I turned to
her notes, and in there, I found
one she had a particular fondness
for, by Charles Baudelaire. I hope
you will find it as apt as I do.

EXT. NEW YORK - LATER THAT EVENING

Jax walks down the streets, looking at peoples' faces, not angry nor pleasant, but with an unmistakable intensity.

JAX (V.O.)

"What strange phenomena we find in
a great city, all we need do is
stroll about with our eyes open...

INT. JAX'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Jax enters. Pulls out that SHOEBOX he keeps checking on. This time, he pulls out what is inside:

A GUN.

JAX (V.O.)

Life swarms with innocent
monsters."

Jax sits in his expensive chair with his expensive view, and, with "Innocent Monsters" on his lap, he blows his brains out.

All over the lovely Manhattan skyline.

FADE TO BLACK.