

FIRST YOU HEAR THEM...

by

Sean Harrigan

INT./EXT. PRIUS - NIGHT

Lime green. This year's model. Not a scratch on it. A TULANE UNIVERSITY ALUMNI sticker on the bumper.

*
*

Coasting down a shadowed, vacant New Orleans city street.

*

INSIDE two white WOMEN. Barely peeking into their twenties. Underslept. Their bodies humming with panic.

*

And out of place here at this hour.

They tail behind a black SUBARU IMPREZA, keeping their distance. Their eyes locked on it. Urgent. Terrified.

LILY
Don't get too close.

MORGAN
I won't.

The Impreza parks next to a dark, RUNDOWN PARK, surrounded by a low chain-link fence.

On the other side of the street, a row of old houses.

The woman driving the Prius, **MORGAN**, pulls over beside the park, several cars back.

She swims in a bland, overly big sweatshirt. Round figure. Hipster glasses. No make-up. Staring ahead at the Impreza.

MORGAN
What's he doing?

LILY
Give it a minute.

They don't seem like they'd be friends. **LILY** is younger. Wears trendy clothes made more expensive by the lack of fabric.

Ahead, the DRIVER of the Impreza gets out. A tall and broad-shouldered silhouette. He walks to an old house ACROSS THE STREET. Knocks. Someone opens the door. The Driver steps in.

LILY
Alright, let's--

A disjointed LAUGH echoes from the park at their side, halfway between a bark and a cough. Their heads dart toward the sound.

But there's nothing in the park except shadows.

They fumble with the handles. Jump out of the Prius.

OUTSIDE

MORGAN

Wait.

Morgan opens her trunk. Pulls out a spare tire kit. Her fingers land on a tire iron she pulls from a sleeve.

She nods to Lily.

They speed-walk along the sidewalk toward the Impreza.

Halfway there, another low, mangled LAUGH from the park.

The two TENSE. Turn again toward the sound. Still nothing.

They move faster, up to the passenger door of the Impreza, opposite from the old house.

Morgan scans the house for any sign of movement.

Seeing none, she tries the Impreza handle. Locked.

Her hand tightens on the tire iron. She looks to Lily.

But Lily is still watching the dark, quiet park.

Morgan follows Lily's gaze and her eyes go wide with panic.

It takes a second to spot it. A THIN WOMAN stands shadowed among the trees, emaciated and pale. Bowed head tilted to the side. Standing stock still and staring into space.

LILY

She doesn't see us. I'll tell you
when she does.

Morgan turns toward the Impreza. Raises the tire iron. Gives a clumsy swing into the passenger window.

The window CRACKS but doesn't break. She swings again.

CRACK. Again.

The window SHATTERS.

She opens the door. Leans in. Checks the glove box.

Inside are baggies of pills. Powder. She searches through.

ACROSS THE STREET - The old house's porch light turns on.

They don't see it. Lily's eyes stay on the park. Growing with terror.

LILY
Oh shit. Morgan. She sees us.

Morgan turns. The Thin Woman's gaze is locked on Lily as she takes shuffling steps toward them.

MORGAN
Okay, okay, go. I'll find it.

Morgan crawls into the--

IMPREZA

Winching as her hands and knees get cut by the glass.

The park's chain link fence SHAKES behind her.

She plops onto the front seat. Searches the center console. Her eyes light up as she spots a baggie there.

SLAM.

The passenger door closes shut.

Morgan's head darts up. The Woman stands outside the door. Her bare, spiny back to us. Standing between Lily and the car.

MORGAN
Lily, go!

Lily backs away toward the park.

DRIVER (O.S.)
Hey! What the fuck?

Morgan turns from Lily and the Woman. Looks ACROSS THE STREET--

Where the Driver stands on the stoop of the old house.

Morgan now has the Driver on one side, Lily and the Woman on the other.

A CRACK. A GARGLED CRY. From Lily. Morgan TURNS BACK.

The Woman has her arms draped over Lily's shoulders in a tight hug, the Woman's back still toward us.

We can see Lily's head over the Woman's shoulder.

Lily's jaw has been dislocated to one side. Her neck bends the other way, skewed to an odd angle. Broken.

Her muscles shake. Disobeying her commands.

Morgan stares at her. Horrified.

The Thin Woman slowly uncurls her arms from Lily's shoulders.

Lily takes a jerky step back, her weight giving way beneath her. She collapses onto the sidewalk, out of view.

The Thin Woman peers back over her shoulder, so we can see the briefest shadow of the woman's face. *

Jaw dislocated to one side.
Her neck bends the other way.
Just like Lily.

She barks out a jerky, joyless LAUGH through her broken mouth. *

ACROSS THE STREET - The Driver storms the car from the other side. As he moves closer, we can make out a pistol in his hand.

In one, panicked move, Morgan grabs the baggie from the console. Plucks something out. Puts it in her mouth. Swallows.

Then closes her eyes tight. Shutting it all away. Holding up her hands in helpless surrender.

DRIVER

Get out of my fucking car.

She opens her eyes. Looks around. It's quiet. The Woman's gone.

Morgan's breath begins to still. A calm comes over her.

The Driver's eyes lock onto Lily, lying on the sidewalk, just out of our view.

DRIVER

Oh, fuck.

He doesn't move. Too horrified by what he sees.

Morgan steps out. Looks down. Face unnaturally easy.

In shock, the Driver waves her away with the pistol.

DRIVER

Get away. Close the door.

Morgan gets out of the car. Shuts the door behind her. Steps back. Her eyes not leaving the spot where Lily fell.

The Driver gets in, his gaze lingering on the ground. He turns on the car. Drives off.

As he leaves, we get a full view of Lily, curled in a fetal position on the sidewalk. Her open eyes a crusted yellow.

Her mouth hangs open. And from it, a growth. A small and twig-like stalk, sprouting from the corner of her lip.

Morgan's expression is blank. The only sign of movement is her finger and thumb, rubbing the baggie.

Inside, we can just make out two brown, flaky pills.

FADE TO:

INT. SONATA - DAY

A silver SONATA, a decade old. Parked in a lot overlooking a small, medical building.

SHAE HOWLAND, 24, black, stares ahead at the building from the driver's seat, chewing her lip. Considering. *

She wears a professional blouse and blazer. Put together. But with eyes that burn with energy and impatience and want.

And right now, she looks like she wants to be anywhere but here.

Her phone's on speaker. RINGING on the other end. Finally--

MORGAN (O.S.)
(voicemail)
Hi, this is Morgan. I'm not
available to take your call...

Shae waits for the BEEP.

SHAE
Morgan, it's me. Where are you?

She SIGHS. Shakes her head.

SHAE
If you didn't want to come, I get
it. I just thought with
everything, it'd be nice to have
you here for this. But it's fine.
I can handle it. Just call me
back. Okay?

*
*
*
*
*

Shae hangs up. Looks down at the time. Drums her fingers on the steering wheel, trying to make up her mind.

She can't wait any longer. She opens her door, steps out.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

As she does, we see the sign on the outside of the building:

"SUNRISE HEALTH CENTER"

"A Drug Rehabilitation and Wellness Center."

INT. SUNRISE HEALTH CENTER - LOBBY - DAY

An ELDERLY WOMAN stands by the front desk, trying to follow along with what the RECEPTIONIST is saying.

Shae frowns at the woman, surprised to see her.

SHAE

Grandma? What are you doing here?
I thought you were resting.

GRACE COOKS, 83, turns back. Thin and wiry. Sharp eyes blunted by time. Every day's become a puzzle she has to piece together.

GRACE

Oh, Shae. Did they call you too?

SHAE

No, no one - I'm visiting Mom
today, remember?

GRACE

(confused)
Right. Yes. Yes.

SHAE

What's wrong, what happened?

GRACE

They needed me to come pick up her
stuff. She's fine, they said,
but...she left. Last night.

Shae can't help but laugh.

SHAE

Of course she bails today.

She turns to the receptionist, Shae's voice not unkind.

SHAE

You couldn't do anything to keep
her here?

RECEPTIONIST

I'm sorry, it's all voluntary.

SHAE

Did she say where she went or...?

RECEPTIONIST

We can't share that information.

SHAE

Okay, I guess I'll take the stuff.
What, do I need to sign something?

RECEPTIONIST

Um, well, your mother was overdue
on her payments. We tried to run
the card but...

Grace speaks low. Embarrassed. Uncertain.

GRACE

I...I thought I had more on there.

SHAE

She got you paying for her again?

Shae leans in toward the receptionist. An easy smile.

SHAE

Be honest, what happens if we just
don't pay? I figure if it messes
with my mom's credit a bit, at
this point, I'm good with that.

RECEPTIONIST

Late payment fees? But those are
gonna go to the card on file.

Grace squints, struggling to keep up with all of it.

GRACE

What's she saying, Shae?

SHAE

Nothing, Grandma. Just a small
charge. I got it.

GRACE

No, Shae, you can't...

SHAE

I'm fine. I interviewed at another
place today. Seems like I
basically got it. So I'm set.

*
*

Shae hands over her credit card.

SHAE
Put it on this.

RECEPTIONIST
It's gonna come out to 15 hundred.

Shae tries to fake a smile.

SHAE
Sure. Great.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Grace lingers by the building's entrance.

SHAE
How'd you get here?

GRACE
Took my Masarati.
(smirks)
I called an Uber.

SHAE
I'll drop you off.

Grace touches Shae's elbow in gratitude. As they walk toward Shae's car, Grace pulls an envelope out of her purse.

GRACE
I have this for you. It's...from
your mom and I.

Shae takes the envelope. Opens it by the front of her car.

A birthday card. Shae barely looks at the check inside. Smiles down at the message.

SHAE
Thank you, Grandma.

GRACE
You got it, sweetie. Happy
Birthday.

She gives Shae a warm smile. Shae returns it. Unlocks the door.

Grace gets inside. With a last look to the rehab center, Shae does the same.

INT. SHAE'S CAR - LATER THAT DAY

Shae drives down New Orleans streets, Grace no longer with her. *

Shae again tries Morgan on speaker phone. Still no answer. *

She's getting worried.

She reaches out to hit END. Sees a notification banner pop up.

An EMAIL from OCHSNER MEDICAL CENTER. *

Keeping one eye on the road, Shae opens the email, nervous.

"Dear Ms. Howland, While we enjoyed speaking with you, we are unfortunately unable to offer you a job at this time..."

Her body sags in disappointment. She flips away from the message, frustrated. Looks up and--

CRASH.

Shae jolts forward as she HITS the car in front her, suddenly braked in traffic.

SHAE

Shit.

The driver pulls away. Only a fender bender, but his bumper is dented. Shae's bumper tilts forward, barely staying on.

The driver puts on his signal to pull over. Shae shakes her head as she follows behind.

INT. SHAE'S ROOM - DAY

A typical first place out of college. Cramped but with personal touches. A Goodwill raided for its best finds.

Shae shuffles into the room. Lets her purse fall on the floor.

Stops when she sees clothes piled on her floor. Two of Shae's dresses have been cut up, left in swaths of bland fabric. *

MAETHA BALIWAG, 23, drifts into the room, scissors in hand.

Filipina. Goes by **POPPY**. Spacey and lanky, she seems to float wherever she is. Wearing the easy appearance of someone who seems utterly unbothered by much of anything. *

POPPY

Hey. You're home.

Shae doesn't even lift her eyes from the floor.

SHAE

It was a whole thing. What are you doing with all this?

POPPY

Making you something to wear.

SHAE

I have something to wear, Poppy. These are my clothes. I wear these.

Poppy wrinkles her nose at her.

POPPY

Yeah, but like, you shouldn't. Don't worry, this is what I do. It'll be ready by tonight.

SHAE

Wait, why? What's tonight?

POPPY

A surprise party.
(off her look)
The gesture, Shae. It's the whole gesture that's the surprise.

SHAE

No, I told you, nothing tonight. I got one more interview tomorrow--

POPPY

At 2 pm.

SHAE

--and today's been rough. I just want to take it easy.

POPPY

Yeah, I know it's your day, but I don't really want to do any of what you're saying.

Shae opens her mouth to object.

POPPY

Cause I know you'll rally and have a great time and maybe get fucked by a wonderful, disposable man. Get you over Carson.

JAVIER (O.S.)

That there was a fucking keeper.

Shae turns to **JAVIER**, 25, of Mexican descent. *

He leans in the doorway, vape in hand. Slender frame, fluid movements. He lives at a lower bpm, eyes quiet but watchful. Setting the world to his tempo. *

He takes in the scissors, and Shae's clothes on the floor.

JAVIER
(to Shae)
You got her dressing you now?
Codependent much?

Shae and Poppy both flip him off.

JAVIER
You do gotta come tonight though.
I can get us into Swine. *

Poppy raises her eyebrows expectantly. Shae gives a blank look.

JAVIER
Holy shit, girl, you need to get culture. Someone who had it would be very impressed. At my vast industry connections.

POPPY
Some Insta star isn't able to make it. You just have to pretend to be her. Not the whole night. Only to the door guy. So...?

Shae mulls it over, both of their gazes heavy on her.

POPPY
Shae, I invariably know what's best for you. So stop pretending you got a choice and just accept it bitch.

SHAE
Fine. For a little bit.
(on the other hand)
But if you really want to do something special, how about you cover part of my rent? Just until mid-month. Maybe next month.

POPPY
If I do that, then you're staying out until fucking sunrise.

Poppy winks at her. Gathers up Shae's tattered dresses into her arms. Before they leave--

SHAE
Either of you heard from Morgan?

POPPY
Nope, can't say I have.

Poppy leaves a little too quickly. Javier shrugs, follows her. Shae stares after them, something shifty in their whole reply.

INT. WAREHOUSE NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

*

Shae dances with a FRIENDS in a warehouse club. So seedy it's trendy. She lets loose all of the day's frustrations, as electronic music pulses and lights swirl around her.

*

*

She wears Poppy's creation - a mash-up of Shae's cut dresses, now wholly original and actually stylish.

She locks eyes with Poppy. A big, I-told-you-so smile on Poppy's face.

As Shae turns, she spots two WOMEN across the club doing a line of coke. Shae looks away. But her eyes are drawn back to them.

She closes her eyes. Keeps dancing.

LATER

Shae shuffles over to the bar. Checks her phone. 11:15. She looks tired. The day and night wearing on her.

She flags down the BARTENDER.

SHAE
Could I just get a water?

He nods. She leans her back against the bar. Scans the crowd.

Poppy dances in the middle of the throng, in her element.

Javier hovers by the wall, body inches away from a SMIRKING GUY. Whispering into the guy's ear.

Shae's eyes drift over to a handsome STRANGER down the bar. You can tell he's been trying to catch her eye.

Shae smiles back. He drifts over, just as the bartender brings Shae the water. The stranger nods to the cup.

STRANGER
Ah, and I was gonna offer to buy you a drink.

SHAE

I'm a cheap date. This is water.

STRANGER

Let me get you something then.

SHAE

Nah, I'm okay. It's not you. I actually don't drink.

STRANGER

Oh. Okay. Are you an alcoholic?

This is turning quickly.

SHAE

No, I guess I just never saw the appeal.

STRANGER

Huh. So why the fuck are you here?

He holds her stare. Shakes his head. Scoffs. Walks away.

DEREK (O.S.)

What an asshole.

Shae turns back to see --

DEREK, standing behind her. 25, white. He smiles under bloodshot eyes. A backpack slung over his shoulders. So either he's making a fashion statement or he's a drug dealer. *

SHAE

Derek!

DEREK

Hey, happy birthday. Shit, I didn't you get anything. I mean, normally I got a whole bag of birthday gifts in here.

He tilts his shoulder toward her, showing off his backpack.

DEREK

But I'm gonna guess if you're drinking water, you're still not taking other goodies yet?

Shae smiles. With Derek it's endearing.

SHAE

Nope, not yet.

DEREK

Such a waste of potential. Ah, but now I'm the asshole for trying to tempt you. You should just look me in the eye and say fuck you.

SHAE

Fuck you.

They laugh. A thought occurs to Shae.

SHAE

Hey, have you seen Morgan?

DEREK

Nope. Not in a minute.

(an afterthought)

Probably with her brother though.

*

SHAE

What?

DEREK

Yeah, with Carson. He got back in town...

Derek remembers too late.

DEREK

...oh shit. Ah, sorry, right.

Yeah, he came back.

Shae's face drops. Exhaustion giving way to confusion and hurt.

Derek tries to cover from what he let slip.

DEREK

I wouldn't worry about him. I heard he got clean.

This hits hardest. Her eyes cloud over. Looking for a way out.

DEREK

But also, you know him. I mean, how long can that last, if we're--

POPPY (O.S.)

There you are. Hey Derek.

Shae turns around to face Poppy.

SHAE

Did you know about Carson? That's where Morgan's at?

POPPY

It was a guess. I heard he got back into town, so I assumed... You know, it's her brother. She's gonna side with him.

SHAE

So what? All the shit he pulled, she's welcoming him back? No consequences. Fucking forgiven?

POPPY

You don't know that...

SHAE

How could you not tell me?

POPPY

I know how you get with him. I was trying to keep you from all--

SHAE

I'm tired. This whole day's been... I'm going home.

Shae starts to move but Poppy grabs her arm.

POPPY

No. Stay. This is what happened when you were with him. You draw up inside yourself. Be here with us. Stop letting them - no, you know what, come with me.

Poppy pulls Shae over to Derek.

POPPY

Derek. My friend. You got anything special for Shae's birthday?

SHAE

Poppy...

DEREK

No, I was just telling her that normally I got a whole...

(a slow dawning)

Wait... Oh, shit. Really? Yes.

He checks around to make sure they're not being watched. Waves them toward a corner of the bar.

Nearby, Javier pauses the flirting, following with his eyes.

SHAE

Ah, I don't know. I don't think...

POPPY

Just trust me a second, okay?

Derek swings off his backpack. Doesn't even unzip it all the way before Poppy starts digging inside. Through baggies of pills and powder of all colors and sizes.

DEREK

Hey. Poppy, come on.

JAVIER (O.S.)

What's going on over here?

Javier steps in. Sees the backpack. Shae. His eyes light up.

JAVIER

Holy shit, Shae. Yes, I'll take whatever she does.

He starts searching the bag with Poppy.

DEREK

Fuck, guys, a little patience.

SHAE

Pop, I'm not sure what'll happen if I...

POPPY

Shae. You need this. You're wound up so tight that you're gonna - You are not her. Stop thinking you are.

SHAE

But what if I--

POPPY

You won't. We're here for you. We're not gonna let you spin out. Your mom never had that. I'm with you every step of the way.
(frowning down)

Ew, what the fuck are these?

She pulls out a single, small baggie. Inside, six brown pills. They seem to be molding. Flaky. Some fungal growth caking it.

JAVIER

Those look truly gross.

DEREK

Yeah, maybe not these. They're expensive. I tried that shit today and it will definitely fetch some fucking bank--

*
*
*

Poppy flips on a dime. Face serious.

POPPY

Derek. It's for Shae.

She doesn't wait for him. Digs out a pill and holds it out to Shae. Slowly, Shae takes it. Poppy grabs one for herself.

POPPY

I'm not doing this without you. So if you don't want me to take it, just say so now.

Poppy puts it to her own lips, eyebrow raised, like a strange game of chicken. Pauses. And places it on her tongue.

Smiles at Shae. Your turn.

Shae takes a breath. Tosses it into her mouth without thinking. And gives a small, surprised laugh.

SHAE

Holy shit. Alright.

POPPY

That's my girl. Javi?

She holds the baggie out to him.

JAVIER

Uh, nope. I'm good on that.

He sifts through the backpack.

JAVIER

I got a whole rainbow of possibilities here. No need for moldy brown lumps.

Javier takes two blue pills with a smirk.

POPPY

Asshole.

LATER

Shae and Poppy sit on couches surrounding a table with a cake on it. Caught somewhere between nervousness and boredom.

*

Javier lies across from them, a plate of cake balanced on his stomach. He rips off pieces and eats them with his hands.

Poppy gives Shae an apologetic frown.

Shae waves it away. Looks around. Considering.

That's when her expression begins to change.

At first, it's like she's listening for something in the background. The prickle of a sensation.

She takes a deep breath and the sensation seems to fill her. She breathes out and it's serenity.

Her lip curls up. A grin spreads across her face.

She turns to Poppy, whose hands are flexed on her lap. Like she's bracing herself against the sheer joy.

POPPY
You feel that?

Javier turns, pausing mid-bite.

JAVIER
What?

SHAE
Nothing Javi, you're good.

JAVIER
No, what is it...what do you feel?

SHAE
Ah, sorry, I can't... Too bad you didn't want to try it, huh?

Javier leaps to his feet. Runs out onto the club floor.

JAVIER
Hey yo, Derek!

LATER

Shae and Poppy dance in the center of the crowd. Javier at their side, body pressed against the Smirking Guy.

Shae moves softly to the music. Hanging on every sensation. It's not just pleasure she feels. She looks like she's finally come home. Like no one's ever come close to feeling this good.

INT. SHAE'S ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Shae slowly wakes, a grin rising up in her, like the morning after with a new fling. She runs her fingers over her lips.

She checks the time on her phone. 12:43 pm. She laughs to herself. Lays her head back on the pillow. Relaxed.

Until her lips form an O. Like, *Oh, shit*. She bolts out of bed.

HALLWAY

Shae makes a bee-line for the bathroom, where Poppy's washing her face. Poppy looks up. Gives her a wary, studying look.

POPPY

Good morning. How you feeling?

SHAE

I'm fine. Fine. Just running late.

POPPY

Good. Great.

(just to doublecheck)

But like, you're sure though?

SHAE

Why?

POPPY

Cause earlier I heard, I don't know, it sounded like someone was crying.

SHAE

Wasn't me.

POPPY

Huh. Maybe the neighbors. Or Javi.

They laugh but the question seems to weigh on Poppy. Shae looks *
from her to the shower.

SHAE

Do you mind if I...? I'm gonna be late for--

POPPY

Yeah. Oh shit, yes. Shower. Go.
I'll pack you a lunch. You're gonna need, you know, food.

Shae nods in thanks. Closes the door after Poppy.

BATHROOM - LATER

The shower turns off. A standing tub by the back wall. The spout settles into a slow DRIP.

Shae steps out, wrapping herself in a towel.

DRIP

She dries her face. Unfogs the mirror.

DRIP

Grabs her toothbrush. Runs it under the sink.

DRIP

And just as the sound dies--

TAP TAP TAP

Three deliberate sounds. Light. Different than the drips.

Shae looks up. Peers around her. Curious.

Goes back to putting on the toothpaste.

TAP TAP TAP

Shae frowns. Places the sound. From the window above the tub.

She steps in. On her tip toes. Looks out. Their apartment is on the second story. Nothing outside but trees.

TAP TAP TAP

She turns to her side. Confused.

It sounds like the tapping is coming from the inside.

GASP

Behind her. A single inhale. Dry, labored and hollow.

Shae jumps back. Knocking against the shower wall. Turns.

There's nothing behind her.

She shakes her head, confused. Rushes out of the bathroom.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Shae steps out from the hallway, clothes damp, like she threw them on fast. Her whole body's on edge, on the verge of panic.

Javier lounges on the couch, looking quite content. Poppy eats cereal at the kitchen counter, preoccupied.

She brightens when she sees Shae. Nods to a paper bag nearby.

POPPY

Lunch is on the counter, my dear.

SHAE

Thanks. Hey, either of you feel weird? Like after last night?

JAVIER

I feel great, but the key to that might be that I'm still high.

(off their look)

What, it's my day off. I want to veg out. Maybe watch something animated. With animals in it.

POPPY

And what are you high on, Javier?

She sees a baggie on the coffee table with two more brown pills in it. The rest of what Derek had.

JAVIER

Hey, I fucking paid for it. Believe me. Derek did not give a discount for that shit.

GASP

Another sharp, choked rasp from behind Shae.

SHAE

What is that?

Poppy turns to the sound too. Before she can respond--

JAVIER

And see, me, I'm not so high-strung as you two. Getting all worked up over every last thing.

Poppy takes her spoon and flicks cereal at him.

Shae looks to the kitchen, trying to place the sound. Silence. She runs her hands over her face. Her movements jittery.

SHAE
Shit. Shit.

POPPY
Hey, you're okay. It was just a pipe or something.

JAVIER
I didn't hear it. It's probably some weird come down. Who really knows what Derek gave us?

POPPY
That's the opposite of helpful.

SHAE
No, it feels like something's going wrong with me.

POPPY
Do you want to cancel?

SHAE
Yeah. No. Fuck, I need this job.

POPPY
I'll go with you. Stay in the car.

SHAE
I don't need you to babysit--

JAVIER
You could smoke a bowl.

SHAE
I'm not smoking weed for the first time before my interview.

JAVIER
No, right. What you *should* do is take a little more of what we had.

They look at him like he's a fucking idiot.

JAVIER
Not much. A little nibble. Like a microdose. No high, no comedown. So you can freak out later, in the comfort of your own home.

POPPY
...that's not awful.

Shae shakes her head, even as her eyes linger on the pills.

SHAE
Nah, I'm not gonna do that.

JAVIER
Bring it with you. Leave it in
your car. My gift to you. You
change your mind...

Shae looks to Poppy, to confirm it's a bad idea.

POPPY
Honestly? It's all mental. It
might give you peace of mind,
knowing it's there if you need it.

JAVIER
Oh, leave one for me though.
(off their look)
Or for Poppy. Whoever wants it.

Poppy shrugs. Digs one out. Shae's able to crack a smile.

SHAE
Nah, you two are shady. I'll
handle it on my own. I'm good.
Hey, I'm good.

INT. SHAE'S CAR - DAY

Shae parks in a full hospital parking lot. Turns off the car.

TAP TAP TAP

From the passenger side. Like a finger knocking on the window.

Shae grips the wheel tight. Her breath quickens. She stares
ahead, barely daring to look out to her periphery.

Nothing there.

She shakes it away, opens the door.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

A waiting room outside several offices. One wall a floor-to-
ceiling window. Shae sits there along with two other WOMEN.

She chews her lip, nervous. Keeping her eyes forward.

She pulls out her phone. Sends a text to Derek:

SHAE: *Derek, what did you give us? I feel super weird today.*

TAP TAP TAP

Hollow against the window. Shae shakes her head. Refuses to look. One of the women pretends not to be watching her.

A slow SCRATCHING SQUEAKS on the glass. Like nails against it.

Shae can't help it. She finally looks over.

But there's nothing there, even as the sound continues. SCRAPING along the glass.

Shae hops to her feet. Takes shaky steps to the door.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)
Shae Howland?

An INTERVIEWER emerges in front of her from the nearby offices.

SHAE
I'm sorry, I just realized I left
my resume in my car, can I go--

INTERVIEWER
You can grab it after.

SHAE
It'll just be a second.

She tries a smile. Speeds out of the office.

INT. SHAE'S CAR - DAY

Shae leans in. Digs through the glove box.

Pulls out the baggie with the pill. She brought it with her.

She looks around. No one's nearby. She pulls it out. Breaks it in half. It crumbles in her hands.

She shoves half the crumbles into her mouth. Waits a second. Then tosses the entire thing back.

INT. INTERVIEWER'S OFFICE - DAY

Shae sits across from the interviewer. Nervous. Distracted.

INTERVIEWER
So Ms. Howland, tell me a little
about yourself and what brought
you into nursing.

Shae swallows, trying to focus.

All at once her breath steadies. A small smile plays on her lips. She looks the interviewer in the eye. Confident. Relaxed. She takes a breath to speak.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Shae walks out holding a new hire folder. A wide grin on her face. The high and more than the high. Wearing her success.

She pulls out her phone. Sees two messages. From Morgan.

MORGAN: Sorry Ive been MIA, but ill make it up to you
MORGAN: Found something amazing. But it seems like you already know. A winking emoji.

Shae frowns. Types back.

SHAE: What are you talking about? Where've you been?

Shae opens the door to her--

CAR

Looking down at the three little dots of Morgan texting.

MORGAN: Meet me at Dereks!!
SHAE: Wait, why?

Shae stares at the phone, but there's no response.

Her eyes drift to the glove box, caught somewhere between fear and fascination.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Shae's already speaking as she steps through her front door.

SHAE
Hey, I got a weird text from
Morgan, she said...

She trails off as she notices Javier in the middle of the living room, pacing back and forth, staring up at the ceiling.

Poppy watches him move, trying to follow along.

JAVIER
I'm being serious, Poppy, don't
play with me.

POPPY
I'm not, I don't hear...
(noticing Shae)
Thank God you're back.

JAVIER
There. You hear that?

Poppy looks to Shae, helpless. The room is quiet.

JAVIER
Are they pounding on the walls?

POPPY
We don't share walls with anyone.

SHAE
What are you hearing Javi?

POPPY
He's been going on like this. I
didn't know what to do.

SHAE
(to Poppy)
Did you take another pill?

POPPY
A little after you left, why?

There's a mellow certainty to Shae, filtered through her high.

SHAE
Yeah, okay, fuck this, let's go. I
want to know what we took.

EXT. DEREK'S HOUSE - EVENING

Shae pulls her Sonata in front of the house. Poppy in the seat next to her. Javier in the back.

The car's barely in park when Shae hops out. But the other two don't follow. Poppy looking to Javier, who isn't budging.

JAVIER
Nah, I'm good right here.

POPPY
Fine, stay. I'm going with Shae.

SHAE
No, I'm okay, Pop. Stay with him.

Poppy nods reluctantly.

Shae hustles to the door. KNOCKS. No one answers. She looks inside. Can't see anyone. Chews her lip, thinking.

She tries the knob. The door OPENS.

SHAE
Derek? Anyone home?

INT. DEREK'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Shae steps into the living room. Empty. *

SHAE
Hello? *

Passes down a hallway into-- *

DEREK'S BEDROOM *

She doesn't see the MAN hiding behind the door, his back pressed up against the near wall.

White. Stringy, tall, gaunt. 24, but he doesn't wear his years well. Like some years have aged him twice over. *

He watches Shae, studying every move she makes. His expression turns urgent when he sees her moving toward the bathroom. *

He sweeps her in his arms, hand covering her mouth. *

She gives a muffled SCREAM. Struggles against him.

But he's stronger than her. He holds her tight. Kicks the door shut behind them. *

MAN
Stop, stop, it's okay.

The man loosens his grip and she wrenches free. He holds up his hands to calm her.

MAN
Shae, it's okay. It's me.

SHAE
Carson?

She shakes her head at **CARSON**. At a loss. Her eyes trail over him. Caught up in him. *

He's handsome but unkempt. Unshaven, shaggy hair, and wrinkled clothes. His eyes are drooped and tired. A euphoria clings to him, too close to the surface.

CARSON
What are you doing here?

SHAE
I know Derek. What are you - why
are you here?

CARSON
Like on a spiritual level?

His tone is dry. He smiles at her. It's a nice smile. She can't help but return it.

SHAE
I heard you got clean.

CARSON
Yeah yeah, I did.

She looks at his haggard appearance. There's a beat. If Carson was clean, he certainly isn't now. He changes the subject.

CARSON
I was looking for Morgan. My folks
said they haven't talked to her in
days. And if they actually called
me, I know they're worried.

SHAE
You haven't seen her?

CARSON
Not for...shit, I don't know how
long. But she texted me. Told me
to meet her here.

SHAE
She sent me the same thing.

CARSON
I didn't know you two were close.

SHAE
We didn't used to be. But recently
we've had more in common.

He looks down, ashamed.

CARSON
Listen, Shae, I came back to see
you. I wanted...

She looks away, caught by something else. Another CHOKED
BREATH, whistling and obstructed.

Not again.

CARSON

What?

She ignores him. Follows the source to the BATHROOM.

CARSON

Wait, Shae.

It's clearer here. Behind the shower curtain. She closes her eyes as she RIPS it back, as if afraid to see nothing there.

Nothing's in the tub. But that's not what draws Shae's eye. *

On the wall, a messy spot of blood. Like the side of bleeding face was pressed against the porcelain. *

Along with a few spatters of red spit. *

Shae holds back a scream. Turns away, struggling for air.

Notices Carson. He's not surprised to see the blood there. *

SHAE

What happened? Did you do this? *

CARSON

Come on, no. I got here, I saw this, then you knocked. *

The RASPY BREATH behind her. She glances to the tub.

But there's still nothing but the bloody face print. *

SHAE

No, no...what's happening?

CARSON

What are you hearing?

Shae stares at him, lost.

The BREATH behind her again.

She looks back to the tub. As soon as she does...

...the sound comes from the OTHER SIDE of her. *It's moving.*

She recoils. Eyes darting around wildly.

CARSON

Hey Shae, did you take something?
Some kind of pill? Brown with--

SHAE
Just stay there.

The sound moves to the other side of the closed bedroom door.

As Shae and Carson step out, we barely see what they don't-- *

In the CORNER, behind the bathroom door. More blood. Large fragments of bone. Some attached to a scalp. Hair. Caked in a brown, fungal residue, growing out of the pieces. *

LIVING ROOM

Shae steps out from the hall. Looks around. No one there. *

Digs her fingers into her scalp. Barely holding on. *

Carson follows in behind her.

CARSON
Hey it's okay, it's okay. But you
have to answer me, alright? How
much did you have?

Shae stares at him in confusion and panic.

INT. SHAE'S CAR - SAME

Javier and Poppy watch the house, anxious and impatient.

A LOUD THUD comes from the trunk of the car.

POPPY
What was that?

JAVIER
Oh, you hear it now?

Poppy looks out the back. Sees nothing there.

More THUDS. Like someone banging from inside the trunk.

Javier and Poppy exchange a look. Poppy gets out of the car.

INT. DEREK'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME

Carson gives Shae her space.

CARSON
Shae, when did you have it last?

Her eyes hang on him. Unable to look away.

CARSON
It gets worse the longer you go.

She shakes her head, looking for a way out.

CARSON
But as long as you keep having
more...

EXT. DEREK'S HOUSE - SAME

Poppy steps up to the trunk. THUDS. Louder. More insistent.

She hesitates. Opens the trunk...

...but there's nothing inside.

She frowns, confused. Shuts the trunk door. Shrugs at Javier through the window.

The THUDS follow again, from the trunk right below her.

INT. DEREK'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME

Shae glances to the front door. Fight or flight kicking in.

SHAE
I need to go.

CARSON
Let me come with you, I can help.

SHAE
I don't want your help.

CARSON
Okay, okay, wait. Just one second.

He hesitates. Struggling with some choice. Turns away and moves toward Derek's room.

CARSON
(calling out)
You can't stop taking it.

She looks over to see Carson searching Derek's room.

He finally finds a jewelry box on the dresser, hidden beneath a discarded shirt. He digs through. Grabs something.

CARSON
Here...

He returns with a small baggie of the same brown, fungal pills.

CARSON

Take half. I want you to.

SHAE

Nope, I'm done. I can't do this.

CARSON

It's only gonna get worse. You'll want these. And a lot more.

SHAE

So why would you give them to me?

CARSON

Because...I still--

SHAE

Okay, you know what, fine.

She cuts him off by waving the bag over. He taps out a few pills. As the last one falls, she pulls back.

SHAE

I wasn't here, Carson. If you find Morgan, tell her to call me. I'll give you five minutes, then I'm calling the cops.

She backs up toward the door. Opens it. Looks out. Poppy stands by the trunk of the car, frowning down at it.

Shae glances back to Carson. Runs out the front door.

INT. SHAE'S CAR - NIGHT

Shae drives. Not saying a word.

POPPY

...what happened in there?

THUD. THUD.

Shae STARTS. Looks back. She and Javier meet eyes. He nods.

Shae pulls the baggie out of her pocket. Opens it.

POPPY

Where'd you get those? You think that's a good idea?

Shae doesn't answer. Swallows one of the pills. Holds the baggie out to Poppy. Nods her head. *Take one too.*

Poppy studies Shae. The change that's come over her. The certainty.

She fishes two out. Looks to Shae to confirm. Takes one. Hands the other to Javier. Trusting without question.

They sit there, the drug slowly working. Faster this time. The calm, the elation, the distance from what's happening.

For Shae, not even the trauma can fully hold back the now familiar expression of homecoming.

She listens. Quiet. The thudding has stopped.

POPPY
Shae, what's happening?

INT. SHAE'S CAR - LATER

Shae parks outside their APARTMENT BUILDING. Poppy and Javier get out. But Shae doesn't turn off the car or move to follow.

Poppy looks back to Shae as Javier wanders ahead.

POPPY
What are you doing? Come on.

SHAE
No, no, I can't. I know how this goes. I'm freaking the fuck out. I need help, Pop. I don't know what I'll do if I can't get it.

She leans over to hand Poppy the baggie with the last pill.

SHAE
Here take this if you need it.

Poppy takes it reflexively.

POPPY
How are you just gonna leave? I can't do this on my own.

SHAE
You're not on your own, you two have each other.

This only makes it worse. Poppy looks back to Javier, standing by the building entrance, floating through his high.

POPPY
Yeah, sure, fine.
(MORE)

POPPY (CONT'D)
Javi and I will take care each other. Do whatever you're gonna do.

Poppy takes a few steps back. Shae puts the car in drive. Leaving her in the rear view.

INT. SUNRISE HEALTH CENTER - LOBBY - NIGHT

The same rehab center where she went to see her mom. The same RECEPTIONIST behind the desk. Shae approaches her, tentative.

SHAE
Hi, um, I don't know if you remember me. I'm not sure if I should be here. But, uh, I feel like I need to see someone... I don't know what to...

RECEPTIONIST
Okay, alright. Do you have health insurance, a card you can give?

SHAE
No, I don't have anything.

RECEPTIONIST
Let's see what we can do for you.

LATER

Shae steps through the door from the lobby, held open by RUTH DAVIS, 45, like most nurses, a force of perpetual calm.

RUTH
Hi Shae, I'm Ruth. I'll be your nurse. I'm gonna get you settled.

Ruth holds out her hand to a room a few doors down the hallway.

Shae's eyes linger further down. A bland, hospital yellow. But she can also see into a few bedroom doors. A common area. Made to look more like a home than a clinic.

OFFICE

Shae steps in a cramped office. Her eyes scan the space, lost.

RUTH
You can have a seat.

Ruth closes the door behind them. Sits across from Shae.

RUTH

I'm gonna ask you some questions. Normally our intake coordinator does this but she's not here at night, and we didn't want to keep you waiting. So bear with me.

She picks up a tablet screen. Reads off of it.

RUTH

First I need to know what substances you've been using?

SHAE

I don't know. Some brown pill.

RUTH

You don't know anything more than that? That's okay. And how long have you been taking this?

SHAE

No, I'm sorry, this is a mistake. This is for people who--

RUTH

This is for whoever needs it.

SHAE

I only took it a few times. But I've been hearing things. Whenever I stop taking it.

RUTH

So auditory hallucinations? Maybe more? It's not atypical to have a psychotic episode after a drug leaves your system. That can happen after just one time. Especially since it runs in the family. You're not wrong to come here, if that's what you're worried about.

The reality of it all hits Shae.

SHAE

Fuck. I'm sorry, I just...

RUTH

It's okay. It's good to have you here. I think we can help.

INT. HALLWAY - MINUTES LATER

Shae follows Ruth down the hallway.

Other RESIDENTS stare at her from the bedroom doors. Some of them hostile. Some giving small, understanding smiles.

*

Ruth stops in front of a door halfway down the hall.

SHAE

Is this where she...?

RUTH

I'm sorry. It was the only one we had open.

Shae steps into a homey bedroom. A floral bedspread. Oak dresser. Like it was decorated by somebody's aunt.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Shae sits up in bed. Ruth stands over her, holding a pill cup and a glass of water.

RUTH

The doctor prescribed haloperidol to help with some of the symptoms you've been experiencing. It might make you feel a little groggy.

She hands Shae the glass of water.

RUTH

I have to remind you during detox we can't let you leave. Any other time, it's an open door policy. But until it's out of your system, the doors are locked. To your room and the outside.

Shae nods her head. Ruth gives a motherly smile. Hands her the pill cup. Shae takes it and swallows.

RUTH

If you need anything. Tap on that call button by your bed.

Ruth nods to the night stand, where a long cord leads to a handheld call button, glowing with a soft, blinking red light.

RUTH

You get some rest.
(MORE)

RUTH (CONT'D)

I'll be checking on you every fifteen minutes or so, in case you need me. But I'll try not to wake you.

SHAE

Thanks.

One more smile and Ruth's gone, locking the door behind her.

Shae leans back in the bed. Breathing deep. Studying the room with her eyes. Waiting.

LATER

Shae slowly wakes up. The lights are out. It's dark outside. She looks at the clock. 4 am.

She SIGHS. Almost in relief. Already feeling better.

She reaches a hand out to feel for the water glass. Starts to drink. Closing her eyes. Groggy.

Her eyes open, and go wide in terror.

There's SOMEONE standing in the corner of her room.

She lets the glass fall. It lands with a THUD on the carpet. She struggles to grasp the shadow of a lamp on the night stand.

The figure doesn't move. We can only see its shape.

The lamp falls onto the bed. She grabs it. Clicks it on.

Revealing no one there.

Not even a shape that could be misunderstood in the dark.

She stares at it. Shaking her head. Holds the lamp in front of her like a beacon. There has to be something there.

That's when she hears it.

The GASP of an obstructed BREATH. Coming right from the spot where the figure was standing.

Shae backs up toward the far end of her bed. Pressing herself against the bedroom wall. In barely a whisper--

SHAE

It's in your head.

The repetitive GASP again. This time from the far corner.

She shines the light at it. Mumbling to herself.

SHAE
Stop it. Stop.

Another GASP. Crawling beneath her. Under the bed.

She draws her mouth in a hard line. Not wanting to look.

The ragged BREATHING continues. Softer now.

She leans down, pulling the lamp with her. Unable to resist.

She lowers her head. Past the mattress. Box spring.

We get a glimpse of the FORM under the bed.

A huddled body, in a fetal position.

Frail and slender.

Only its outline visible.

Its face bowed and hidden from view.

Shivering, as it takes in ragged, gasping breaths.

Shae SPRINGS back. The lamp cord RIPS out. The room goes BLACK.

She falls from the bed. Scrambles backward on hands and feet.

Until she bumps against the back wall.

She desperately feels for the door handle. Tries to open it.

Locked.

She POUNDS on the door.

SHAE
Hey, hey, help! Let me out!

GASP

Behind her. Still under the bed. A CRACKLE to the sound.

Shae stares back across the room. The only light comes from the dull, red throbs of the call button.

Her eyes stay locked on the button as she rises. Walks her hands along the wall behind her. Tracing it toward the bed.

One slow step. Another.

GASP. Closer now. *She's moving toward it.*

She takes a deep breath. Another step. Reaches out in front of her. Feeling for the night stand.

She grabs the edge of it. Runs her hands over to the button.
GASP. Right below her.

She squeezes down on the call button. Over and over, until--

RUTH (O.S.)
(from down the hallway)
Coming! I'm coming!

Relieved, Shae takes a step back toward the door.

And her foot catches on something behind her.

She FLAILS backward, down to the floor.

Her eyes fixate on what's lying beneath her feet.

The curled up form lying prone. Hands and arms outstretched,
like it clawed its way forward.

Shae tries to scramble away, the form GROANING beneath her.

And it crawls after her.

In jerky, wounded movements.

Its bent form lit red in the pulsing call light.

Hand straining up, reaching out.

Not at Shae but just past her. Randomly feeling out.

Its long fingernail scratching Shae's cheek.

The bedroom door opens, casting light into the room.

Shae stumbles toward the door. Bounds past Ruth into the--

HALLWAY

Shae bangs against the wall of the drab hall.

RUTH
Shae? What's going on?

SHAE
I don't...there was...

RUTH
You okay? Did you hurt yourself?

Shae feels her scratched cheek. A thin line of blood runs down.

She wipes it away. Looks down at her hand, like it's proof of
something. Giving her a growing sense of certainty.

SHAE
This wasn't me, I didn't do this.

RUTH

Why don't we get you back in bed?

Shae's eyes go wide as she sees something past Ruth, coming from Shae's open doorway.

The form steps out, now standing upright.
An old woman with black hair streaked white.
No, not quite old.
But wrinkled. Withered past her years.
Dressed in a frayed nightgown.
Limbs cut and bleeding.
Like some demented **CRONE**.
Facing Shae but staring into space.
Giving a long, strangled GASP.

SHAE

Look! Look! Do you see her?

She points behind Ruth. Ruth looks back. Not phased.

RUTH

There's nothing there, Shae.

Shae glances to the Crone. The thing doesn't seem to see Shae. But starts taking slow, aimless steps in her direction.

SHAE

I need to get out of here.

RUTH

No, you're okay. You're safe here.
(calling out)
Mike. Can you come here a minute?

Ruth keeps her distance. Hands held out in a calming gesture.

RUTH

Why don't we get you back in bed?
We can sit down and talk.

SHAE

I'm sorry, I can't.

She backs away. But the hallway leads to a dead end behind her.

Ruth follows in. A burly nurse, MIKE, running up to her side.

RUTH

Shae, Shae, it's okay.

Shae flicks her gaze past their shoulders. The Crone continues her shuffling steps toward them. Closer now.

Mike moves in, his hands up. Like calming a cornered animal.
Shae suddenly runs at him. Tries to dodge one way. Another.
He GRABS her around the waist.

She twists and writhes. Trying to get free.

Her movement KNOCKS Mike into the back wall. He sags down to the floor, but still holds on tight.

MIKE
I've got her.

Ruth is already prepping a needle, syringe, vial.

RUTH
It's okay, Shae, this is something
to calm you.

As Shae struggles, she glances up to the Crone three feet away.

Ruth fills the vial.

Another step. Two feet away.

The Crone leans down. Gaze still unfocused.
Face covered in sores the same brown color of the drug.
Fungal and blistered.

She tilts her head, like she's hearing Shae from far away.

A hand GRASPS Shae's arm. Ruth. She holds tight.

Her needle breaks Shae's skin. She pushes the liquid in.

Shae's eyes go wide with absolute terror and helplessness,
locked onto the Crone's face, now inches away.

In a last effort, Shae snaps her head back. Into Mike's nose.

He YELLS out, his hands instinctively reaching to his face.

Shae scatters out of his arms. Pushes past Ruth. Sending the nurse tripping back.

RUTH
Ugh. Shae, wait!

Shae stumbles up to her feet, lurching sideways into the wall.
Using it to keep herself upright.

The Crone only turns her head as Shae squeezes past. Follows
after with a slow, stilted step.

The floor sways under Shae as her bare feet bound down the hall. Her eyes fluttering open and shut.

She looks down. The needle and syringe dangles from her arm. Half the liquid drained into her.

She pulls it out, throws it to the floor.

Ruth and Mike scramble up behind her.

GASP.

The ragged breath. Following after her.

Shae moves faster. Passes a doorway set in the middle of the hallway. Closes it behind her. Finds the lock. Turns it.

Ruth and Mike rush up to the door. There's a narrow slit of a window set into it. They POUND against it. Shae ignores them.

Mike points behind them. Another way around. They run in the other direction.

The lobby door is ahead. A small window in that too.

Shae slips into the office where she first spoke with Ruth.

OFFICE

Searches the desk. Inside a drawer, a bag with her stuff in it. On top, a paperweight -- an oblong meditation stone.

She grabs both.

HALLWAY

TAP TAP TAP

Shae looks back. At the window in hall door, where Ruth and Mike just were. The Crone's there now, fingers to the glass.

SCRATCH

As the Crone mindlessly drags her nails against it--

Shae spins away. Steps up to the lobby door. THROWS the stone into the window there.

The glass SHATTERS. Shae reaches a hand through. Opens the door from the outside. Bursts out into the lobby.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Shae runs outside. Her car ahead. She skids up to it. The asphalt scraping her bare feet. Gets in.

Ruth and Mike jog out from the side of the building.

RUTH
Shae, come back!

Shae's gaze is bleary and unfocused. Her head lolls forward, like she can barely keep awake.

She starts her car and SWERVES out of the lot.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Shae races into her apartment. Slams the door behind her.

She flicks on a light. Starts searching the place. Still blinking her eyes against the dullness of the sedative.

WHIMPERING from down the hallway. Shae tries to shut it out.

Spots the corner of a baggie on the coffee table. The last pill still inside it.

Her hands shake as she tears the bag open. Takes the pill out. Shoves it into her mouth.

The WHIMPERING continues.

Her eyes stay locked down the hallway. Waiting for whatever comes first, the high or the haunting.

It's the high. Erasing her fear. Setting her whole body at ease. The epitome of relief.

But the crying keeps on. She frowns, listening closer.

She eases her way toward it. Slow. Careful.

The cry comes from one of the bedrooms. She opens the door.

BEDROOM

Javier lies on his bed. Curled into a ball. Softly moaning. Eyes closed. Like he's trying to block everything out.

SHAE
Javier?

His body jerks, startled as he looks up at her.

MOVEMENT from the hallway. Shae's eyes dart back.

And POPPY bounds into the room. In a state of absolute terror.

POPPY
Shae? Holy shit, you're back.

SHAE
I know, I'm so sorry--

But all that seems forgotten, as Poppy grabs onto Shae in a tight, desperate hug.

POPPY
No, I am. I am.
(pulling back)
I heard someone in my room. They
were... But no one's there.

Javier suddenly FLINCHES, hopping up to his feet. He reaches a hand to his neck. Feeling for something there.

Shae goes into mother mode. Like comforting scared children. Her high making it all so easy.

SHAE
Are there any pills left? No?
Alright, I'm gonna make a call.

INT. LIVING ROOM - A HALF HOUR LATER

Shae throws open their front door to Carson, standing outside. He wears the same distant high that she does.

CARSON
I got here as fast as I could.

JAVIER (O.S.)
Yo, shut the door. Quick.

Shae lets Carson in. Closes the door. He looks to Poppy clinging to the couch, Javier next to her, trying to stay calm.

JAVIER
Don't even know why he needs to be
here.

SHAE
To help you, asshole.
(to Carson)
I'm sorry, they're freaking out.

JAVIER
I'm not freaking out, I just--

CARSON
Wait they had it too? What's left?

SHAE
Nothing. I took the last a little while ago.

CARSON
That wasn't...those were just for you.

Something draws Poppy's gaze to the front window.

POPPY
Shae. Hey, do you see that?

SHAE
No, I don't see anything, Pop.

CARSON
Can I talk to you?

Shae holds up her hand. Talk. He gives an uncomfortable look to Poppy and Javier.

CARSON
I'm sorry, I don't have anything for them.

SHAE
Oh, for them? Really? Fine. Fuck you, Carson. We'll do it on our own then.

She points him to the door. He clocks her resolve. Rubs his hair, thinking it through. Exhales through gritted teeth.

CARSON
Okay, okay, no, you're right. You're right. I said I'd help you. So if this is helping you...

Carson digs into his pocket. Pulls out a baggie with three brown pills in it.

CARSON
But it's all I have left.

He hesitates. Hands one to Poppy. Holds another out to Javier.

JAVIER
No man, I'm done with that.

CARSON
No man, you're really not.
(Javier doesn't move)
Just hold it a second.

Javier does. Carson breaks off half for Shae.

CARSON
It's better if we're all on the
same schedule.

Shae accepts it. Before they swallow it--

CARSON
Don't take it until I tell you. I
need to make sure you understand
what's happening here.

POPPY
Oh sure. Please. Explain it to us.

Carson moves to the front door.

CARSON
Just don't shout. I'm guessing we
don't want to wake your neighbors.

He opens the door.

Javier rises, seeing something in the empty doorway. Poppy
hides behind him.

CARSON
What do you see?

JAVIER
(lying)
There's nothing there.

His eyes trace something walking into the room.

CARSON
What do you see? Describe it.

JAVIER
I don't...you don't see it?

CARSON
I took some before I got here.

Javier and Poppy stare at the spot across the room, not moving.
Shae looks between them and the spot, seeing nothing.

JAVIER
Man, there's a girl. A teenager.

CARSON
(to Poppy)
What is she wearing?

POPPY
Um, a sweater? But it's torn, and,
God, her chest is open. Like it's
been cut or something.

CARSON
Yeah, she's one of mine. I call
her Delilah. Just for fun. What
color is her hair?

JAVIER
Blonde.

CARSON
Both of you seeing the same thing?
(they nod)
Does she see you yet?

JAVIER
Nah, I don't think so. Look okay,
I'm just gonna take it now.

CARSON
No. Don't. Not until I say.

SHAE
Carson, stop. Just let them--

CARSON
I'm happy to share it with them. I
am. But I need to make sure it
doesn't go to waste.

SHAE
What's that supposed to mean?

POPPY
Hey, hey. She's looking at us.

CARSON
Okay take it now. Quick.

They all do, Shae taking her half. Carson swallows the last
crumbles in his hand.

CARSON
Go into the back. Close the door.

Javier and Poppy obey. Running into the closest bedroom down
the hall. They SLAM the door shut behind them.

The door THUDS a moment later. Something knocking into it.

Shae drifts toward the door to get a closer look.

As she does, SCRATCH marks strike into the wood. Four of them, evenly spaced. Like fingernails digging in.

SHAE

Do you see those too?

Carson nods.

Another FOUR SCRATCHES. Another.

Over and over and over.

Then silence.

CARSON

You can come out.

The bedroom door eases open. Javier and Poppy step out, shaken.

CARSON

First you hear them. Then you see them. Then they come for you.

JAVIER

No, I mean, this can't...this is fucking crazy.

POPPY

Shae, he's right. There has to be some other--

CARSON

Why the fuck did I bother?

Shae tries to maintain her calm. Zeroes in on Carson.

SHAE

What are they supposed to be then?

CARSON

I have no idea. I've pieced together a bit. Everyone has their own. One, two, maybe more, that hang around you. I've got mine, you've got yours, but we all see the same thing.

POPPY

Okay, you know everything, so who did this? Where did it come from?

Carson holds up his hands, unsure.

POPPY

Oh so you don't know anything
that's actually useful. Perfect.
So glad we had you over.

CARSON

You had me over so I could give
you the last of my drugs.

SHAE

How do we move on from it?

CARSON

Nothing's worked yet.

JAVIER

So what do we do?

CARSON

Find more.

JAVIER

"Find more?" For how long?

CARSON

I haven't really gotten to think
that far ahead.

POPPY

Great solution. Well, thanks for
coming, it's been real--

CARSON

Hey, I'm here to help Shae right
now. You want to do this on your
own, be my guest.

POPPY

(to Shae)

This can't be the only option.
There has to be someone who knows
something. Who can, like, help us.

CARSON

I took it first maybe six weeks
ago? Almost everyone I knew who
had it since is dead or missing.

JAVIER

No, fuck that...

SHAE

So who're the lucky survivors?

CARSON
I'm hoping Morgan.

Shae studies Carson, sees his worry.

CARSON
I need to find her. But we won't
last if we don't get more.

SHAE
No, I don't care about getting
more, I want to know what the fuck
is happening.

She's not entirely convincing.

CARSON
How much money do you have?

SHAE
Why?

CARSON
A buddy of mine, Seth, he found
someone selling it. I think it's
who your friend Derek got it from.
Maybe the dealer knows something.
Or has seen Morgan. But he's
wholesale. We need at least 5
grand to walk through the door.

JAVIER
Are you fucking with us right now?
Shae, how are you gonna trust this
guy after all he put you--

SHAE
Javi, give it a rest a second,
okay?

CARSON
I cleaned out my money days ago...

POPPY
Now it makes sense.

CARSON
If I wanted to rip you off,
there'd be easier ways to do it.

JAVIER
Right. You would know.

Carson's eyes trail over to Shae, unable to hide his guilt. She
looks away, not wanting to get into it.

SHAE
How much do you guys have in your accounts?

POPPY
What? No, you can't be serious.

SHAE
What else would you rather spend it on?

EXT. SHAE'S CAR - DAY

Shae pulls up outside a commercial bank. Javier and Poppy in the back, Carson in the passenger seat.

Poppy checks a message on her cell phone.

POPPY
Okay, one of my clients'll give me an advance. But it won't go through until later today.

CARSON
Fine, we'll get yours out last. Who else has their money here?

JAVIER
What, you trying to save us the ATM fee?

CARSON
Most limit at 500. Have to go in.

JAVIER
Jesus. Okay, then just me.

He opens his door. Poppy eyes Shae, her words weighted.

POPPY
I'll go in with you, Javi. We have to stick together, right?

She gets out, leading the way to the bank. Javier follows, glancing back at Carson with a hard stare.

CARSON
He looks like he wants to rip my head off.

SHAE
Nah, Javi is chill.
(MORE)

SHAE (CONT'D)

I've never seen him worked up about anything for more than five minutes. It's Poppy you have to worry about.

CARSON

I get it. It's what I deserve.
(a breath)
For a long time, I wanted to call.
See you. Say I'm sorry...

SHAE

You about to pay back all that money you took? Because if not, let's maybe hold off on sorry's.

She seems to feel Carson's hurt next to her. Softens.

SHAE

But thank you for helping us.

Carson shrugs. *No problem.*

Silence.

SHAE

Were you close to the people who died?

CARSON

Some of them.

SHAE

What happened to them?

CARSON

They weren't as persistent. Who'd have thought being a total fucking addict would be such an asset?

He gives a hollow smile. She can't help but laugh.

CARSON

I did get clean. Before all this. So I could try to make it up to you. I just had one bad night, but with this... But I'm here now. I can help you. And maybe when we get through this, we can...

SHAE

Carson we're so far from all that,
I can't even think - but hey, who
am I to judge? At this point am I
that different?

*
*

CARSON

Yeah you are.

She and Carson lock eyes. Shae looks away. Uncomfortable at the intimacy there.

INT. SECOND BANK - DAY

Shae waits in line. Through the window, she can see the group in the car outside. Nervous and on edge.

The teller waves her forward.

Shae hands over her debit card. Pulls out a folded check. The one Grace gave her. Hands that over too.

INT. SHAE'S CAR - LATE AFTERNOON

Shae parks the Sonata outside a battered, double shotgun-style house near the Lower 9th Ward. Around it, overgrown grass. Large industrial buildings a half block down.

*
*

CARSON

I should probably go alone.

SHAE

That money is ours. And I have
questions I want to ask.

There's no room for argument. Carson holds up his palms. Steps out. Before Shae can follow him--

POPPY

Hey, Shae, wait. Look, I know I
got us into this, but we can
figure it out. We can't trust
Carson to--

A loud THUD from the trunk.

SHAE

Let me just do this, Pop. Then we
can talk about whatever's next,
okay? I'll be right back.

Poppy gives a feeble nod. Shae leaves her and Javier behind.

EXT. OLD HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Carson tucks the money away. Opens the metal gate on a warped fence, Shae following close after.

A mangy pit bull chained to a front post watches them. It seems to turn its head toward the THUDS coming from their trunk.

The front door opens as they near it.

A heavy set man, **ESTEBAN**, 40s, Argentinian, steps outside. His face is puzzled but not unfriendly. He looks alternately dangerous and like someone's doting papa. *

CARSON

Esteban? I'm a friend of Seth. He told me you might have--

ESTEBAN

You were a friend of Seth.

CARSON

Yeah, I didn't know if you heard about that. He said--

ESTEBAN

Sorry my friend, but I don't know you. And Seth isn't here to vouch for you, so...

SHAE

We're looking for someone who has a brown pill. Ugly things. Look at us, you know any cops that look like him?

She nods to Carson's haggard appearance. He smirks back at her.

ESTEBAN

No, not cops. But informants look all kinds of ways. Though you...
(studying Shae)
You look familiar.

SHAE

Yeah, well maybe you should let us in then. Figure out how we know--

VOICE

No, no, no, aaaaAAAAaa...no, no, stop, stop, aaaaAAAAaa.

A hard gravelly voice coming from the side of the house.

Shae shifts back, like she's ready to move. Carson stands in front of her, protective.

Esteban studies their faces. Reading their sudden panic. He goes inside. But leaves the door open behind him.

They look to each other, uncertain. But they don't hesitate to follow, away from the loudening VOICE.

INT. OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Shades drawn. Lamps turned at upward angles so they glare at us. Blocking parts of the room. The furniture in odd places. A couch diagonal on the floor. A TV in the middle of the room.

*
*

Various picture frames on the wall and shelves are turned backwards, so the pictures can't be seen.

A shadow TRACES the opposite side of the room. Shae and Carson don't notice.

Esteban navigates the maze of furniture into another room.

Shae looks to Carson. Watchful and wary.

Esteban returns a moment later. Holding a Ziploc gallon bag filled with brown powder. A scale tucked under his arm.

The pistol now in his hand is so casual it's like he forgot it was there. He doesn't notice Carson and Shae ease back a step.

He kneels down by a coffee table swimming in a sea of floor space. Places the scale and bag on it.

ESTEBAN

How much money do you have?

SHAE

That isn't it. That's not what we're looking for.

ESTEBAN

No, not heroin? Black tar?

Shae shakes her head. Esteban breaks out into a manic grin.

ESTEBAN

Of course you're not. And this is not that. It's the same thing you've been having. The same thing you should have pretty soon. But not pretty soon...here.

He gestures to the room around them.

ESTEBAN
Don't swallow it.

He puckers his tongue.

ESTEBAN
Bad taste. Won't do shit. It'll
waste it. Gotta snort it.

CARSON
We had it as a pill.

ESTEBAN
I don't. So how much do you have?
Money.

SHAE
5k.

Esteban nods. Removes pinches of the powder and sets them on the scale. Using one hand. Never releasing the gun.

Shae eyes the drug with a sort of hunger. Notices Carson looking at her. Refocuses on Esteban.

SHAE
Have you had it? You know what it
does?

ESTEBAN
Oh no, I don't do drugs.

He gives Carson a wry wink. Drops one more pinch of the powder onto a small mound of it. Waves over the money.

Carson takes a step forward but Shae stops him.

SHAE
That's all?

ESTEBAN
You came to a stranger because you
know where else to get it?

SHAE
So you're gonna screw us over?

ESTEBAN
I'm not screwing you over. This is
popular. Rare. And so...expensive.

Esteban waves over the money again. Carson looks to Shae. She nods her head. He hands the money over.

ESTEBAN

He has good training.

He flips through the bills, satisfied. Scoops the powder into a smaller baggie. Holds it up.

Shae grabs it too eagerly. Her eyes staying on his gun.

SHAE

So what is it? Where does it come from?

ESTEBAN

You haven't figured that out yet?

SHAE

You want to tell me?

ESTEBAN

People have a residue. *Things*.
That hang around. That haunt them.
Lurking. Influencing. We make
them, they make us. And when you
touch something this good...
(nods to the powder)
...you open yourself to them.

Esteban waves away the thought, like it's not quite it.

ESTEBAN

I like to wait as long as I can.
Until they're looking me right in
the eye. Okay, that's all.

He stands up. Like he's ready for them to leave.

SHAE

We have nowhere to be. We're just
talking, right? You know your
shit. You must know how to make it
stop?

ESTEBAN

Why would you ever want it to?
They're yours.

She hesitates. He smiles. Waves toward the door with his gun.

ESTEBAN

Run along now. Come back when you
need more.

CARSON

Wait, we're looking for someone.
(MORE)

CARSON (CONT'D)
My sister. Blonde girl. Pretty.
She had some of this and then--

ESTEBAN
I don't sell to little white
girls, they bring trouble.

CARSON
Come on man, she might have come
by with--

ESTEBAN
I already told you. She didn't.

He looks down. Seems to notice he's holding a gun in his hand,
as if for the first time.

ESTEBAN
Huh.

His eyes move to Shae, like he's curious if she notices the gun
too. Can see she does. Nods.

Then turns. Wandering down the hallway, disappearing from view.

SHAE
Wait, please. You can help us. How
do we get out of this?

For a moment, there's silence. Then, from the other room--

ESTEBAN
No getting out. I'll be back in
two minutes. Don't be here.

Shae moves after him. Carson grabs her arm. Gives a gentle pull
toward the door. Even if it costs him something to go.

Shae shakes her head. But as she looks back to the hallway, a
tall SHADOW walks from one room to another.

It's not Esteban.

She grits her teeth. No other choice. Her gaze is pulled down
to the drug in her hand. The need clear on her face.

She follows Carson out.

INT. SHAE'S CAR - DUSK

Parked outside Esteban's. Carson nods to the bag.

CARSON
You first.

Shae glances up. Esteban stands the doorway, watching them.

SHAE
We can't do it right here. Let's
get away a little, find a spot.

Reluctantly, she puts the car in drive. Pulls out.

POPPY
I am not snorting that.

SHAE
Pop, it's gross no matter how you
take it.
(to Carson)
Once we do, then what? That was a
dead end. Where do we go now?

CARSON
We'll figure it out. I promise.
This bought us time.

She meets his eyes with a nervous nod, comforted by his words.

Poppy tracks the look between them.

POPPY
Wait, I'm sorry, that's your plan?
I thought the whole point of us
giving you our fucking money is
you would find a way to stop this.

SHAE
We tried. You don't know what
happened in there.

POPPY
Um, cause you left me in the car?
Shae, come on, it's so obvious
what he's doing here. What he
always does? Works his way in so
he can take more of your money.

CARSON
Right, what about what everything
I gave you?

POPPY
So we'll pay you back. Have a
pinch of that stuff. And we can
drop you off. Here's good. Call
yourself an Uber.

As they speak, Javier leans forward in his seat.

JAVIER
Hey, hey, stop, you see that?

SHAE
What?

She looks to where Javier is pointing. They pass a lime green Prius parked outside a worn warehouse.

SHAE
What the fuck?

CARSON
Pull over. Pull over.

Shae makes a U-turn.

POPPY
Is that Morgan's?

She parks face to face with the car. Can't see anyone inside.

Carson rushes out first. Shae follows, tucking away the powder. Taking out her cell phone, dialing Morgan.

EXT. WAREHOUSE STREET - CONTINUOUS

A blue light from Morgan's front seat. Shae presses her face against the window. Morgan's phone lights up on the dash.

Shae tries the handle. The door opens. She silences Morgan's phone. Hands it over to Carson. Looks around.

The warehouse sits isolated in this area. It looks vacant. Surrounded by an asphalt lot on one side, dirt on the other.

SHAE
See there?

The caged fence outside the warehouse is warped at the bottom. It looks like it has been bent up.

Carson jogs over to it. Crawls under. Lifts up the edge for Shae to do the same. Javier grabs her arm.

JAVIER
Shae. You don't know what's...

Shae ignores him, crawling under.

Javier swallows. Follows Poppy through.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Shae and Carson follow a trail of footprints in the dirt along the side of the warehouse. The others are a dozen steps behind.

She searches the path ahead. Her face filling with a sense of anticipation. Of foreboding.

They come toward the end of the building...

...and see a pair of bare feet sticking out. Someone sitting with their back to the other side of the warehouse.

Shae takes a few quick steps forward. Then stops.

MORGAN wears the same overly big sweatshirt. Eyes bloodshot and open. Her neck is etched with purple and blue finger marks from where she was strangled to death.

CARSON

No, no, no, no.

Carson moves past Shae. Right up to Morgan's side. His hand reaching out to her face but not touching her.

CARSON

Oh fuck, Morgan. No, Morgan.

Too late, Shae realizes Javier and Poppy have caught up. She tries to reach out to stop them, but Poppy steps past her.

POPPY

What...oh, no.

Poppy shakes her head. Turning away. Right back toward the car.

SHAE

Poppy, don't go...

Javier can't look away from Morgan, frozen.

Shae's drawn back to Carson's emotion, his eyes filled with desperate tears. And drawn to Morgan. Studying her.

The wisp of something comes from Morgan's mouth. Javier sees it too. Leans forward. Springs back in revulsion. Turns away.

JAVIER

Oh fuck.

Shae sets her jaw. Kneels down by Carson. Puts her hand on his back. And inspects Morgan's lip.

A small stalk grows out of her mouth. Dark and fungal.

Brown flakes gather at her eyelids. Pool around her nostrils.
Shae rises. Walks in a circle. Rubs one hand over her face.

SHAE

FUCK!

Shae opens her eyes, brushing away tears. And her eyes go wide.
Someone else is standing there with them.

A teen, preppy in a sweater.
Her chest cavity torn open.
Her heart exposed.

DELILAH

She's looking down at Morgan. Softly MOANING.

JAVIER

Hey, I'm sorry, but we need to go.

Delilah turns, like she's listening for Javier's voice.

JAVIER

Shae, she's gone. She's gone.

Shae shifts her weight side to side, wanting to stay.
Delilah makes gaping, empty sounds.

DELILAH

Bah...bah...bah.

SHAE

Carson.

She touches Carson's shoulder. He shakes his head.

SHAE

Come on. I got you.

Her voice is comforting. He slowly lets himself get pulled up.
Shae's arm stays around his shoulders as she leads him away. He holds her hand against his chest.
But still looks back at Morgan until she's out of sight.
Shae picks up the pace, as behind them Delilah's voice GROWS.

DELILAH

Bah...bah...bah.

Javier holds up the fence for both of them.

Shae spots headlights coming from way down the street. Hurries the group into the car.

INT. SHAE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Poppy's already in the back, cradling her face in her hands.

SHAE
We'll call someone when we're
safe. Let them know where she is.

Shae starts to drive. One hand staying on Carson's back.

She checks the rear view, the car behind them has slowed down outside the warehouse. She picks up speed.

A loud WHACK. Everyone looks back to Javier, who punches the seat below him. Slamming his fist down on it.

JAVIER
God damnit! God fucking damnit!

POPPY
It's okay, I know. I know.

JAVIER
I don't need to be comforted,
Poppy. I'm not scared. I'm fucking
angry.

POPPY
Okay. Alright.

Carson desperately searches through Morgan's text messages.

CARSON
Texts to you. Me. And wait, some
random number. They told her they
knew where to get more. But
there's nothing else here.

Poppy wipes away her tears. Leans in toward him.

POPPY
Hey, Carson? Carson? I'm sorry. I
want you to know how sorry--

The THUDDING sound brings them back to the moment.

SHAE
Let's take the powder. We need--

The flashing of RED AND BLUE LIGHTS stops her.

The car behind them followed their turn and speeds toward them.
Shae looks to the others. Weighing her options.
Three THUDS from the trunk again.
She pulls over.

JAVIER
What are you doing?

SHAE
We're not gonna run from the cops.

They sit there as the red and blue lights brighten behind them.
Willing it to pass by.

But it pulls to a stop a few feet behind their car.

Shae hands Carson the bag of powder. He leans down a hair to
put it under the seat.

Shae grips the steering wheel.

The THUDDING again. Only this time it keeps up. Continuous.
OVER and OVER until--

A KNOCK on the window. Silencing the THUDS. Shae rolls it down.

A flashlight shines in her face. Obscuring **OFFICER EGGERS**.
White. Clean-cut. A Boy Scout.

*

His PARTNER hovers back behind their car.

OFFICER EGGERS
License and registration.

SHAE
The registration's in the glove
box, that okay?

The officer nods. Carson opens the glovebox. Pulls it out.
Hands it to Shae, who passes it over with her license.

OFFICER EGGERS
You were trespassing back there.

SHAE
(a quick lie)
I used to work there. We were in
the neighborhood. Just wanted to
take a look...

A LOW GROAN from the trunk. Desperate and helpless. Shae's face
drops. She looks to the officer, but he seems unfazed.

*

OFFICER EGGERS
In the neighborhood doing what?

SHAE
Visiting a friend.

The GROAN continues. Javier's back goes rigid. Contorts forward, *like he's feeling something pressing behind him.*

Shae's eyes are drawn to the rear view, giving a glimpse of--

The middle of the seat, between Javier and Poppy. It BULGES out, like someone's pushing against it from the other side.

OFFICER EGGERS
Right, I'm gonna need the address.

SHAE
Of course, it's uh, 8452, North--

The pushing against the seat intensifies. CLAWING SCRAPES. Shae's eyes are again pulled toward the mirror.

SHAE
North Bronson Street--

OFFICER EGGERS
Why do keep you looking back there?

SHAE
Where?

OFFICER EGGERS
At the trunk.

SHAE
I'm nervous. You seen the news over the last...well, always?

She gives a pointed look to his uniform. He surprises her with a regretful shrug of his eyebrows.

OFFICER EGGERS
Still. Open it for me.

SHAE
Don't you need a warrant for that?

OFFICER EGGERS
Not if I have probable cause.
Trespassing will do the trick.

Shae looks to the others. Sees no choice. Pops the trunk.

Eggers turns to his partner, who eases toward it, gun aimed. Shae's eyes are glued to the mirror.

OFFICER EGGERS
Anything there?

PARTNER
Nothing.

OFFICER EGGERS
(to Shae)
Wait in the car.

He walks back to his cruiser, not done yet.

Just as Shae relaxes the faintest bit, the GROAN sounds out. Louder. Coming from right outside the car.

They all turn their heads, just as...

...a towering, stooped OLD MAN passes Javier's window. Escaped from the trunk.

His skin flaked and peeling off.
Eyes vacant and beast-like.
He takes small, shuffling steps forward.

His hand flashes out to the side of him.
Pounds on the window with three slow THUDS.
The **THUDDING MAN** hardly seems to notice his own flailing.
As if his hand is moving of its own accord.

JAVIER
Shae, we need to take some of it.

SHAE
Not with a cop ten feet behind us.

THUDS at Carson's door. The Thudding Man pounding mindlessly.

He rounds in front of the car. Shuffling until he's right ahead of them. Staring out toward the road. Paused there.

Slowly, his head turns. *And he sees them for the first time.*

His eyes go wild. His body LURCHES forward. Fast. His torso propelling the rest of him. Right toward Shae's open window.

Shae hurries to roll up the window.

The Thudding Man doesn't even try to reach through. Just POUNDS on the car. On the window. With both fists. Relentless.

Poppy SCREAMS.

BEHIND THE CAR

Officer Eggers hears her. Sees nothing. Reaches for his gun.

THE THUDDING MAN

Pounds harder. GROANING and frenzied. Until the glass BREAKS.

OFFICER EGGERS

Sees the window SHATTER in front of him. No sight of the Thudding Man, just the sudden explosion of glass.

THE THUDDING MAN

Reaches through. Claws at Shae's face. Grasps for her throat.

In a panic, Shae puts the car in drive. Slams on the gas.

The Thudding Man TWISTS as the window frame KNOCKS into him.

He struggles to hold on. But falls to the ground as the car picks up speed, leaving him behind.

OFFICER EGGERS

Watches the car speed off. Runs back into the police cruiser.

SHAE

Checks the rear view, in disbelief of what just happened. The red and blue lights momentarily growing distant behind them.

CARSON

They have your plate.

SHAE

I know, I know. I had to.

She spots a spots a sign ahead. A turn off for CITY PARK. *

The red and blue lights linger behind them.

CARSON

We can't keep driving in this.
Even if we can lose them.

POPPY

What does that mean?

Shae turns into CITY PARK. *

Twice the size of Central Park. Narrow streets flow past bayous, lakes, moss-covered live oaks. *

SHAE
We can't leave my car.

CARSON
If they get us, take us in...

Her eyes rove back and forth. Checking off her options and coming up short.

SHAE
Shit. Fine. Okay. Grab the stuff.

Javier reaches down behind the front seat. Pulls out the bag from underneath before Carson can.

JAVIER
Yeah, I got it.

SHAE
Whoever has it. Get ready to run.

She jams on the brakes. Right in the middle of the street. An approaching car HONKS.

SHAE
Go, go.

Shae opens the door. Runs out of the car.

EXT. CITY PARK - CONTINUOUS

*

Outside, a grass park leads to an expanse of trees.

*

The group runs toward them.

A line of cars forms behind Shae's. The cop car stops at the back of it.

The cops rush out. Gaining on the group as they rush into the--

TREES

Shae darts through, stumbling, tripping, breathing heavy.

*

Poppy struggles to keep up. Loses a shoe. Javier stays close to her. Gives her a hand to keep her upright.

Out of nowhere, a SHADOW descends on them. TACKLING Javier.

Poppy scrambles free. Stumbles forward a few steps.

Shae turns around, sees Javier ROLLING on the ground with the shadow. Before she can turn back--

Carson's on the move, running right for Javier.

But he hesitates when he makes out the shadow.

The silhouette of OFFICER EGGERS. Wrestling with Javier. Trying to pin him down. From underneath the officer--

JAVIER

Run! Run!

Poppy takes a few uncertain steps backward.

Carson covers the ground between them. GRABS onto Poppy's hand. Just as Officer Egger's PARTNER nears Javier. Drawing his gun.

Carson wrenches Poppy forward. Waves at Shae to keep moving.

CARSON

Go! Go!

Shae hesitates. But backs away. Finally breaking into a run.

We only see the shapes of the officers pinning Javier to the ground. Pointing a gun down at him. Subduing him.

They pry open his fist. Revealing the bag of powder there.

Shae and the others put some distance between them and the officers. Shae leading the way. *

Things BLUR by in a rush of FOOTSTEPS.

SECONDS PASS. MINUTES.

POPPY

Can we stop a second?

They do. Paused in the shadows next to a winding bayou in the middle of the park. Alone for now. But they stay on edge. *

POPPY

Oh God, Javier.

SHAE

I know.

CARSON

He had the bag.

SHAE

What does that matter? He wouldn't have had time to take any. We have to help him before...

CARSON
Shae. The bag.

POPPY
Are you kidding me? Our friend--

CARSON
Shae, you know why I'm saying
this, right? Why this matters.

POPPY
It's easy for him. He doesn't give
a shit about Javi. He's just happy
you're on his level now.

Shae takes a breath. Stares down at the ground.

POPPY
Shae, I didn't mean...

SHAE
No, no, it's fine. It's
just...we're supposed to be
finding a way out of this.

CARSON
We're not gonna get that far
unless we have more.

POPPY
How can you worry about us when--

CARSON
What else can I do? Morgan's gone,
I won't... How can I lose her too?

He raises an arm toward Shae. It catches Poppy and Shae off-guard. But something else draws Poppy's attention.

POPPY
What...what is that?

A soft CRYING. Coming from a hunched WOMAN nearby. We can't see her face.

Head resting on cradled knees. Leaned against a tree. SOBBING.

Shae moves toward her. Poppy stops Shae, eyes bulged in terror. *

POPPY
(mouths)
Don't.

They step back, turn...

...and spot another distant FIGURE through the trees.

A twisted, gnarled shape.
Caught by a nearby street light.
His mouth contorted and roiling.

The **TWISTED MAN** opens his spasming mouth wide.

TWISTED MAN
AaaaaAAaaa.

The same SCRATCHING, GUTTURAL YELL from outside Esteban's.

The Twisted Man charges at them. His legs bending inward. A shuffling gait that moves too fast.

SHAE
Go, go.

They run in the opposite direction, the YELL following behind them. Right out onto the open--

STREET

Searching around wildly.

They spot a city bus ahead, closing its doors outside a stop.

CARSON
Hey! Hey! Wait.

He POUNDS on the back of the bus as it starts to pull away.

It slows to a stop. They rush up to the front.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

As it drives away, they can't see the Twisted Man. But the closed door doesn't mute the GRINDING YELL.

They step up the stairs. Look around. Mostly empty at the late hour. Shae inspects the few riders. Sees no signs of threat.

They stand at the center of the bus, catching their breath.

CARSON
Any idea what we do now?

POPPY
Shae, Javi will be trapped in
there, with no--

SHAE

Hey, he'll be okay. Javi knows how to take care of himself.

POPPY

No, he doesn't. He acts chill, but he's not. And right now he's fucking terrified. Look I'm sorry for what happened to Morgan, and Carson, if you want to come along, that's fine, but Shae and I need--

SHAE

The only way to get him out is bail. And we don't have money. For anything. Nothing else matters until we do.

POPPY

We took out everything.

SHAE

There's something else. I know a way to--

SCRATCH

Shae takes a helpless look to the rear doors.

The Crone waits outside at the next stop. Fingernails raised to the glass. Smiles at Shae with broken teeth.

Shae nudges them. Nods to the front the door.

SHAE

Come on. Go, go.

They speed down the aisle to the front. Shae tripping on a seat. Scrambling up. Reaching the door.

She falls out onto the street.

Running again.

INT. UBER - NIGHT

Shae and the others crowd into the back seat. Keeping an eye out as the car drives off.

No sign of a threat.

Until the car stops at a light.

Ahead, Delilah walks through traffic toward them.

The light turns green. Delilah stares at them as they pass.

MINUTES LATER

The car parks in front of a Creole Cottage-style house. Patchy lawn. Worn paint. An alcove porch leading to the front door. *

SHAE
 (to the driver)
 Wait here a minute, okay?
 (to Carson and Poppy)
 I'll be fine. In and out. She'll
 never know I was here.

She steps out and walks toward the house.

INT. CREOLE COTTAGE HOUSE - NIGHT

*

Shae unlocks the door. Keeps it open, to let the light puzzle out the shadows. All is still.

The light catches photos on the wall. Of Shae. Of other family and friends. Of her grandmother, Grace.

We're in Grace's house.

Shae follows Grace's steady SNORING to her open bedroom.

GRACE'S ROOM

The lumpy form of Shae's grandma swims in decorative pillows.

Shae doesn't take her eyes off the bed as she moves to the far side of the room. Stopping in front of a mirrored jewelry case.

She pries it open. The hinges CREAK.

Grace stirs. Shae FREEZES, watching her in the mirror.

Her grandmother COUGHS. Turns over. Clicks her tongue.

Her breath steadies into something quieter.

Shae opens the case. Her fingers feel through the jewelry, pulling out pieces and slipping them into her pockets.

It takes a moment to notice another BREATH joins Grace's. Exhaling when she inhales. Inhaling in an raspy GASP.

Shae closes the mirror and glimpses the room in the reflection.

Movement at the corner of the glass. By the closet.

She bumps into the mirror as she backs up. The jewelry JINGLES.

As Shae moves, so does the CRONE. Stepping from the closet.

Shae looks from the woman to the open doorway. She and the Crone are the same distance from it.

In a sudden burst, Shae runs toward it.

And the Crone does too.

Shae reaches it first, rushing out into the--

HALLWAY

But hands WRAP around Shae's neck. The Crone there behind her.

Shae tries to pull away. Is HURLED into the wall face-first.

She falls onto the ground. Looks up at the Crone's shadow, circling around her. Blocking the end of the hallway. *

Shae backs up on hands and feet. Crawls her way to standing.

GRACE (O.S.)
(from the bedroom)
Who's there?

A light clicks on behind Shae. Fully illuminating the Crone.

Shae looks back over her shoulder.

Her grandmother Grace stands by the bed. Confused recognition clouds over Grace's face.

GRACE
Shae? What are you...?

SHAE
It's okay, Grandma. Go back to bed.

That's when Grace sees her jewelry in Shae's hand.

Before Shae can say a word...

...the Crone GRABS Shae around the waist.

Shae turns toward the Crone. Tries to push against her.

The Crone brings her crusted face up to Shae's. One pocked hand reaching up to Shae's mouth.

Shae wriggles free. Darts into the adjacent--

BATHROOM

SLAMS the door behind her. Locks it.

Outside, SCRATCHING and rasping BREATHS and Grace's voice.

GRACE (O.S.)
Shae? What's happening?

SHAE
Nothing. Everything's fine. I'll
explain in the morning.

Shae rushes to the narrow bathroom window. Pries it open.
Sticks her head through. Tries to squirm out.

Behind her, the bathroom door BUSTS open.

The Crone stands in the doorway. Beyond her, we can see Grace
step down the hallway, staring at the busted hinges.

GRACE
What'd you do to the door?

Shae's halfway out the window when the Crone GRABS her foot.

For a moment, we see things through GRACE'S eyes--

Shae's waist draped over the window sill. Trying to get free.
One leg swinging wildly behind her. Then we're back with--

SHAE

Kicking herself free. FALLING to the ground.

Her hand is GOUGED on a waiting rock.

She YELPS in pain. Scrambles to her feet.

EXT. CREOLE COTTAGE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

*

Shae runs around to the front of the house.

The Twisted Man HEAVES himself against the rear door of the
UBER over and over. Jumping up and BASHING into it.

Carson and Poppy cower in the back, SHOUTING, while the Uber
driver YELLS at them to get out.

Shae sees Grace's dusty, unused car in the driveway. Jumps in.

INT. GRACE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Starts it with a spare on her key ring. SLAMS it in reverse.

She COLLIDES into the Uber. Pinning the Twisted Man between the side door and her grandmother's bumper.

The Twisted Man WRITHES. Knocking his head and torso against each of the cars as he flops side to side.

Poppy and Carson climb out. Run toward Grace's car. Poppy takes shotgun before Carson gets to the car.

GRACE

Peeks out her front door. Again we see things as she does--

Her car SMASHED into the Uber. No creature pinned between them. Shae spins out the car. Drives off.

SHAE

Looks back into the rear view mirror as she drives off.

REAR VIEW

The Twisted Man lies crumpled on the ground. He slowly rises up. Limp after them on now broken and gnarled bones.

Beyond him, Grace stands on her front stoop, staring in hurt and bewilderment.

SHAE

Can barely pull her eyes away from her grandma, heart breaking at the sight of her.

Shae winces as her attention is pulled down to her cut hand. Her face goes still as her hand is caught in the light. *

A brown mold grows underneath the skin.

Poppy hands her some tissues from the side door compartment.

Shae uses them to cover it. Not letting Poppy get a look.

INT. GRACE'S CAR - NIGHT

Poppy sits in the front, Carson in the back. Waiting silent and on edge in the small parking lot of a PAWN SHOP.

Shae exits the pawn shop, holding a paper bag. Before she gets into the car, she stops, looking at someone on the sidewalk.

Poppy follows Shae's gaze over to--

A hunched figure sitting on the curb.
Middle-aged and flabby.
Crying softly to herself.
The same woman from the woods in City Park.

*

Shae gets in. Pulls out of the lot.

THE **CRYING WOMAN** looks at them as they do.
No, just at Poppy.
Her sorrow turns to anger at the sight of Poppy.
The woman rises to her feet, eyes filled with rage.

Shae drives off fast. Poppy looks back toward the woman,
watching her until she's out of sight.

CARSON
How much did you get?

She hands the paper bag back to Carson. He looks through.

SHAE
Four grand. After this is over,
I'll get it back. Before
anything's lost. I'll make it up
to her. I will.

POPPY
We can use the money for a bail
bond, right? That's a thing?

Shae hesitates. Swallows. Not quite looking over at Poppy.

SHAE
Poppy. Carson's right. We can't do
anything for Javier like this.

POPPY
You sure that's it, Shae? Because
now you do sound like...

Poppy stops herself. But she doesn't take it back.

SHAE
Like who Poppy?
(no response)
Unbelievable. The only reason this
happened was because you couldn't
do one fucking thing on your own.

POPPY
I thought it was your choice.

SHAE
What else was I gonna choose?

POPPY
I was only trying to help.

SHAE
How would it have helped? If I'm
so much like her? It doesn't
matter what we took, I was gonna
end up right where she did.

Shae's jaw goes tight. Carson puts a comforting hand on her
shoulder, unsure what else to say or do.

Poppy looks away, folding her arms over her chest.

POPPY
So we're giving up on Javi?

SHAE
No, we'll get him after.

POPPY
With what?

SHAE
We're buying in bulk, right?

CARSON
Hey, Shae, wait...

POPPY
You want to *sell* it?

SHAE
We have nothing else that's worth
anything.

POPPY
You'd put someone else through
this?

SHAE
Yeah, if it means them or Javi. Or
you. Either of you.

Poppy checks back with Carson, who looks as uneasy as she does.

SHAE
Nothing else matters.

EXT. OLD HOUSE - NIGHT

Shae parks outside Esteban's. Gets out. Poppy doesn't move.

SHAE
Come on, Poppy.

Shae looks up. A FIGURE shuffles down the block toward them.

SHAE
Poppy. Please. Let's do this
quick. Then, we'll help him.

Poppy gets out.

Ahead, Esteban's door is wide open. The three look to each other. Shae nods them forward.

Carson leads the way, on guard. As he ushers them into the darkness, we CUT to--

JAVIER

Walking through another DARK doorway. Into a--

INT. JAIL - SAME

Barred cells line each side. Two officers lead him down the long corridor. They come to an open, empty cell.

Javier hesitates. We can't see what he's staring at. But he turns around, terrified. Trying to run.

The officers grab onto both of his arms, holding him back.

JAVIER
Please, no, please. Don't.

They drag him through the cell door. Throw him onto the floor.

And SLAM the door shut.

Javier uses the bench to claw himself up. Sits on the absolute far end of it, right up against one set of bars.

As the camera ROTATES, we see what he does, what sits behind the other set of bars, in the far cell beside his.

The flaky, peeling skin of the Thudding Man.
His long form stooped over the bench.
His animal eyes vacant.

Slowly, he turns his head toward Javier.

INT. OLD HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME

Shadows line the periphery. Vague forms that linger wherever Shae and the others aren't looking.

THUDS. GROANS. TAPS. More than the creaking of an old house. *

In the light, we can see the house has been torn apart. Furniture overturned. Drawers thrown on the floor. Ransacked. *

Esteban sits in the middle. Tied to a chair. Bound at wrists and ankles. His face bruised and swollen. One eye closed shut.

CARSON

Oh my God, what happened?

ESTEBAN

Fucking junkies. Stupid. They'll just end up back here.

Carson looks around the shadows for a sign of threat, eases toward Esteban. Recoiling at some smell.

CARSON

How long have you been like this?

He kneels and starts to work the rope around Esteban's wrists.

SHAE

Wait.

CARSON

What? Why?

Esteban glances up at Shae from his open eye. Smirks.

ESTEBAN

No, you wouldn't make it easy, would you?

SHAE

How much did they find?

ESTEBAN

Not all of it.

A low GRUNTING sound from outside. Esteban can't help but look over to it. And Shae notices.

SHAE

So where's the rest?

POPPY

Shae, what are you doing?

SHAE

We'll help him. He just has to tell us where he has more.

ESTEBAN

Not here. But close. Yeah, I could take you to it.

POPPY

Okay, let's just do it. Whatever gets us done with this.

SHAE

Why would we trust him?

CARSON

Because we have money. We're not trying to rob anyone. We'll pay. That's what we came here to do.

ESTEBAN

Sounds fair.

TAP TAP TAP. Coming from the front door.

But Shae doesn't move.

POPPY

Jesus, what are you waiting for?

Shae's eyes stay on Esteban, letting the threat hang there.

SHAE

Yeah, okay. But we won't pay what we did before. You'll give us a good deal for helping you, right?

He considers this, his eye staying locked on her.

SHAE

Or do you think you have longer than we do?

POPPY

Shae, don't do this.

SHAE

You feel sorry for him? All this came from him. Because of him.

ESTEBAN

No, I won't apologize for that. You know another way to keep them close? To court death?

(MORE)

*
*

*
*
*

*
*
*
*

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)

If my enterprise lets me do that,
I choose that every last time. But
since you're so superior, sure,
I'll give you *more*.

*
*
*
*
*

Shae nods. Okay. But notices the way Poppy's eyes stay on her.

*

SHAE

You wanted to save enough money
for Javi. Well. So let's untie
him. But keep a close eye on--

*
*
*

A FORM steps fast out of the darkness behind Esteban, as Shae and the others scatter back.

A frail adolescent girl dressed in a hospital gown.
Her lips parched and cracked.
Draped in medical wires and tubes.
Hanging from her hands. Face. From her midsection.
Dragging along the floor.

The GIRL IN THE GOWN wraps her arms around Esteban from behind, an embrace. Esteban leans his head against her shoulder.

ESTEBAN

Mija.

The girl's hand rises up. Her nails cracked and pointed.

Esteban's body turns RIGID. He struggles against the ropes binding him, as the girl's thumb nail glides across his throat. Slitting open the skin in a large gash.

A clumpy, brown fungus crusts around the opening, a stem peeking out, before blood spurts out.

SHAE

Run, run, run.

They back away, moving toward the front door.

The girl gives a GUTTURAL HISS. Lets Esteban fall. Glides out in front of them in shuffling steps. Blocking their path.

CARSON

This way.

Carson pulls Shae down the hallway. Poppy trailing just behind.

The girl chases after them.

They follow Carson into a back--

BEDROOM

Slam the door. Turning the lock.

POUND POUND POUND POUND POUND

Flailing against the door, straining the lock. Carson pushes his weight against it, trying to keep it closed.

Shae and Poppy turn back, looking for an escape.

Only one window in the darkened room. Boarded up. Nailed shut.

SHAE

Shit. There has to be a way out.
Or some of it left somewhere?

She searches the room wildly, looking everywhere.

It was also ransacked. But there's an emptiness beyond that. Bare drawers half-open. One side of the closet cleaned out.

CARSON

Shae...

SHAE

What?

CARSON

Did you see it? His throat.

SHAE

What are you talking about?

CARSON

The stem, the twig. It was growing
through him.

It takes Shae a moment to see where he's going.

SHAE

No, you can't be...

POPPY

What's he talking about?

CARSON

I can try to knock her back. Give
you a second. Grab Esteban, try to
pull out the stem, eat whatever--

*

POPPY

Oh fuck no.

POUND POUND POUND POUND POUND

CARSON
Please, Shae. Go.

SHAE
No, no, you're not doing that.

Shae shakes her head. Looking under the bed. Face desperate.

That's when she sees it. A discarded baggie deep under the back corner of the bed.

SHAE
Poppy, help me move this.

Shae and Poppy drag the bed out of the way. As Carson does everything he can to keep the door shut.

Shae stretches her arm down. Pulls out the baggie.

There's a small amount of brown, lumpy powder left in.

SHAE
It's only a little but--

POPPY
Thank fucking God.

Shae dumps the powder out onto the dresser. Divides it into three little clumps. Waves Poppy over.

POPPY
I will gladly shove that shit up
my nose, rather than--

She shudders at the thought. Leans down. Snorts the first bit.

Shae follows. Inhaling the second.

SHAE
Carson, come on.

She and Poppy move in to hold the door shut. Carson stumbles toward the dresser. Takes the last of it.

POUND POUND POUND POUND POUND

SILENCE

The three breathe heavy. Listening out. Eyes slowly taking on the unnatural calm of the drug.

SHAE
You think it was enough? Is she
gone?

Carson nods. Shae unlocks the door. Gives it a beat. Opens up the door and steps out to the--

LIVING ROOM

Her fear replaced with a calm sort of watchfulness.

Esteban's body lies on the ground, still tied to the chair. In a puddle of his own blood. The stem poking out from his wound.

Across the room, Carson sees a small mound of burner phones on a crowded shelf. Picks one up. Another.

CARSON

He was texting people. The same thing over and over. Telling them he knew where to get more.

Next to Esteban, Shae spots a broken picture frame. One that got knocked over in the scuffle--

Esteban with WIFE and KIDS at a BBQ. One of them looks just like the Girl in the Gown. Dressed in glasses and a sweater, Esteban is like any other family man. Plain and content.

Her gaze traces over to Esteban as he is. Dead and haggard.

CARSON

This one's to Morgan's number. It was him. He texted her.

This only gets a nod from Shae. Too numb to be affected by it.

Her focus moves to Esteban's pant leg, raised up just a hair by the rope when he fell. His pistol is tucked into his sock.

SHAE

Sure we could trust him.

She bends down to grab it. In her high, her movements have become automatic. She points to the money.

SHAE

Grab that. We can get Javi. It's not too late.

CARSON

We should get the stem too.

Shae and Poppy watch with horror as they track his eyes to Esteban's wound.

CARSON

What we had wasn't much.
(MORE)

CARSON (CONT'D)
It won't last long. And...and when
Javi gets out, he'll need...

POPPY
Oh fuck.

She looks away in disbelief. But no one disagrees.

CARSON
I can do it.

He kneels by Esteban's body. Grabs onto the long stem. Pulls it out with a crunch. His fingers come away covered with blood.

EXT. BAIL BOND STORE - NIGHT

Carson swerves Grace's car into a PARKING LOT. Shae rushes out of the passenger side, the money in her hand.

She runs into an open storefront that reads BAIL BOND STORE. Speaks urgently to the BONDSMAN inside.

INT. GRACE'S CAR - LATER THAT NIGHT

The three wait in the car, parked outside the STATION.

The station's front window gives a view of the waiting area, where the bondsman talks to an OFFICER behind the front desk.

POPPY
We should go in, right? Make sure
it goes okay?

SHAE
They saw us before. This is
already closer than we should get.

The bondsman turns to a far door. They can't see what he sees.

Then, Javier steps into view, another OFFICER at his side.

The officers take the bondsman through the paperwork.

Javier's wild eyes search around for a sign of threat. Wander to the window. He squints out. Sees Shae and the others.

A small smile of relief escapes out.

Shae holds up her hand to wave.

As Javier starts to wave back--

His head JERKS to the side.

His neck mutely breaking in one SNAP.

Until his head turns all the way around.

In an instant, he sags to the floor, out of sight.

Shae's face melts into surprise. Her horror made distant by the still lingering high. She pounds against the passenger window.

SHAE
No, Javier! Javi!

The cops and bondsman rush in around him.

Poppy presses up to the car window, unsure what she's watching.

POPPY
What? What happened?

Carson's the only one who reacts fast. They can't be here. He turns the car on. Pulls it into reverse.

SHAE
No, Carson, what are you doing?

Carson shakes his head. Speeds out of the lot.

Shae's emotion is distant. Struggling to understand.

SHAE
Go back. Hey, go back.

Poppy softly breaks into SOBS.

Shae tries the handle, but Carson holds down the locks.

SHAE
Go back, Carson.

Carson's voice is quiet.

CARSON
No, Shae, no. He's gone. We can't help him. He's gone.

INT. GRACE'S CAR - LATER

Parked in an empty strip mall lot. Dawn isn't far away.

Carson leans out of the car to rinse off the last stem with a water bottle.

No one looks at each other. No one says a word. Too shocked to process any of it.

A loud GUTTURAL YELL in the distance.

Carson rips the stem in three. Hands some to Shae and Poppy.

He and Shae take theirs without thinking. Poppy shudders. Hesitates. Eats hers too.

LATER

They drive slow. Their euphoria barely holds back the trauma.

CARSON

Where do we go next?

SHAE

I don't know.

CARSON

I know what you're going through.
I'm there too. But when this wears
off, we're going to wish--

POPPY

We should stop.

CARSON

Where?

POPPY

Stop taking it.

CARSON

What? Why would we--

POPPY

We don't have a choice do we? Or
do we know, like, *anywhere* else to
get it? No?

CARSON

And let them do the same thing to
us they did to--

POPPY

It's a drug, right? So maybe we
just have to...get it out of our
systems or something.

CARSON

How did that work out for Javier?

POPPY

You know what, fuck off Carson.

Poppy leans forward, focusing right in on Shae.

POPPY

Shae. Javi is gone. How are we gonna end up any different?

Shae glances back, weighing her words.

SHAE

Waiting it out could take a while. A day. Maybe more.

POPPY

So we could keep moving, right? Just drive. Only stop for gas.

SHAE

No. I mean...at least not to start. It'd be better to stay in one place.

Carson can see it turning against him.

CARSON

Wait, what? Shae...

SHAE

What else do we do? Go looking for it, out in the open? And still might come up short. We could take the time, set ourselves up.

Poppy gives a relieved, grateful smile. Carson's fingers drum on his knee, suddenly on edge.

SHAE

What do we know about them?

A **SERIES OF SHOTS** of the three of them as Shae continues:

- Going through a **HARDWARE STORE**.
- Buying nails. Hammers. Wood. Deadbolt door locks. A thick wooden door. A power saw.

SHAE (V.O.)

They show up wherever we go. Like they got there a second before we did.

- Unlocking the door to **SHAE'S APARTMENT**.

SHAE (V.O.)
But once we see them, they're
limited. No walking through walls
or shit, even unlocking doors.
Like the thing in the trunk. Or
Javier. It didn't get him while he
was locked inside.

- Drawing the blinds on all of the windows.
- Outfitting the bedroom doors with stronger locks.
- Boarding up the front door with planks of wood.
- Cutting a hole into a darkened wall.

SHAE (V.O.)
They're right there in the room
with you. But shut them away, and
they're stuck like anyone else.

BACK to the **PRESENT**, in Grace's car:

POPPY
Until another one shows up.

SHAE
Right, but there's only so many of
them. So we keep putting enough
stuff in between us and them.

CARSON
For what?

SHAE
Detox, right? Like with anything
else.

INT. SHAE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The three in the center of the living room, looking to one
another. All the lights on.

Their high is gone. Replaced now by a dull fear.

*All of what we see in the apartment is ceaseless. Not a cut.
Never straying from the trio.*

Poppy sits on the floor. Cross-legged and scared.

Carson tries to hide his terror by pacing back and forth.

Shae leans against the kitchen counter, scanning the room.

A KNOCK at the front door.

Their eyes dart toward it. Waiting.

Nothing follows.

SHAE

Last time it was, what, 20 hours?
And they still went strong.

CARSON

So eight more to go. Or forever.

Another KNOCK at the door. Shae ignores it.

A THUD from the living room wall.

Carson pulls out a crumpled cigarette pack from his pocket.

Another KNOCK.

A beat. A THUD.

SHAE

Since when do you smoke?

CARSON

Saved them for when I'm sober.

Shae takes him in. Not just the fear but the withdrawal.

SHAE

Thank you for being here.

CARSON

Of course. Always.

The windows VIBRATE. Like an earthquake is rattling them from the outside. Something they can't see through the blinds.

They all listen.

TAP TAP TAP. Coming from behind the window shades.

Carson takes out a cigarette. Lighter.

POPPY

You're not about to smoke in my
fucking living room.

CARSON

You want me to go outside?

He glances to the boarded up front door. Poppy just shrugs. He shakes his head. Puts the pack away.

At the same time--

TAP TAP TAP.
KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

POPPY
Hey, Shae? We're okay, right?

Shae barely spares a glance from their surroundings.

SHAE
Yeah, sure. We're fine.

POPPY
That's reassuring.

SHAE
What do you want me to say, Pop?
We're doing what you wanted. We're
trying this out. And maybe we'll
live long enough to deal with shit
like, "if we're okay."

The slow GASP of an obstructed breath. Coming from the darkened
back corner of the room. There's nothing to match the sound.

The lightbulb above them SHATTERS.

Carson SHOUTS in surprise, as glass falls down around them.

Shae leans forward. Poppy jumps to her feet.

SHAE
Don't move yet. Not until we see
more of them.

SCRATCHES at the window.
THUDS from outside.

Continuous but staccato. Coming at random intervals.

Another GASP. The breath coming closer now. Right next to them.

They all back up, circling around the sound.

SCRATCHING at the window.

GASP. BREATH. From a shadowed spot by the front door.

POPPY
Now?

SHAE
Not yet.

The movement begins. The group catching bits and pieces of it, as they turn in a steady circle.

Delilah. Walking into the kitchen.

The Twisted Man whips out of a corner.
His legs still broken from Shae sandwiching them with the cars.
His hands feel out the walls.
Reaching out to touch what he can't see.

He knocks into the shades, sending them swaying.
A YOUNG WOMAN stands in the dark outside the window.
Not much more than silhouette.
Looking inside but not yet directly at any of them.

A MOAN from the kitchen.

DELILAH
Bah...bah...bah.

And the Crone, standing by the front door, staring into space.

SHAE
Okay, that's good, let's--

VOICE
Shae?

And immediately...THUD.

They turn around.

And see JAVIER standing there.

His eyes vacant.
His head turned halfway in front of him.
Like it's as far as he can turn his broken neck forward.

He punches the wall the same hollow way the Thudding Man did.

His voice is HOARSE. RASPY.

NOT JAVIER
Poppy? Poppy?

Poppy takes a step toward him.

SHAE
That's not Javier. That's not him.

A loud WAIL from behind. Shae turns.

Between the shifting shades, the shadowed Young Woman SHOUTS, smashing her fists against the sliding door. Looking back over her shoulder. Terrified of something coming from behind her.

As if spurred by the sound, the Crone turns toward them.

SHAE
We need to go. Now.

NOT JAVIER
Please. Poppy. Where am I?

His arm swings out in another empty PUNCH to the wall.

Poppy takes another step toward Javier. Shae grabs tight onto her arm. Looks to Carson.

SHAE
Help me with her.

The Twisted Man whips around the room in a shuffling frenzy. Reaching out at random places. Like he's trying to find them.

Carson wraps an arm around Poppy. They drag her down the hall.

POPPY
No, it's Javi. It's Javi.

Shae pulls her into--

SHAE'S BEDROOM

Carson's about to shut the door.

But Javier REACHES a hand inside, blocking him.

Shae grabs the door's edge. Trying to push Javier's hand away.

NOT JAVIER
Shae?

POPPY
Shae! Let him in.

SHAE
Grab her. Keep her back.

Carson pulls Poppy further into the room, as Shae wrestles with the door. Javier's hand striving through the narrow opening.

NOT JAVIER
Shae? Are you there? I can't feel anything.

He tries to grab her wrist. She pushes his hand back.

POPPY
Javi, why are you doing this?

NOT JAVIER
I don't know.

SHAE
(to Poppy and Carson)
Get in the closet.

Carson ushers Poppy through the closet door.

Javier heaves against the bedroom door. Knocking Shae back.

Shae leaps up. Javier circles around her.

Outside the door, the Crones lurches down the hall toward them.

Shae slams the door. Shutting herself inside with Javier.
There's a key in the handle. Shae locks it. Removes the key.

Javier moves in toward her.

Shae scrambles back. Falls into the--

BEDROOM CLOSET

She reaches up to grab the unpainted door. The same thick one they bought at the hardware store.

She SLAMS it shut before Javier can reach it. Locks it.

It's a walk-in closet. A heavy dresser off to the side.

Carson and Poppy help to drag it in front of the door.

They look around. They're alone. Trapped in the narrow space.

THUDS outside. And Javier's voice. Alone and desperate and sad.

NOT JAVIER
You're gonna help me, right?

Glass WARBLER and SHATTERS in the other room.

SHAE
We're okay. Hey, we're okay.

We slowly ZOOM on Shae's face. Listening to the sounds outside.

A MOAN. A RASPY YELL. SCRATCHES.

THUD. THUD. THUD. BREAK.

The heavy door starts to give.

BREAK.

A small, *Here's Johnny* gash is made in the door.

BREAK.

Another one. Shae looks to the others. The fear on their faces.

SHAE

I thought it'd hold longer. Okay.

She nods and they kneel down, moving to the back of the closet.

There's a hole cut in the back wall, leading to--

POPPY'S BEDROOM

Shae follows them in through the Poppy's closet.

They close the door behind them. Carson grabs some 2x4's next it. A hammer. Nails. Starts boarding up the closet door.

Shae checks the lock on Poppy's door. Tries to gather her thoughts.

A sound joins the others. A soft, low crying.

They look into the corner.

See the CRYING WOMAN huddled there.
She feels the heat of their gaze.
Looks up. Right at Poppy.
Rises slowly.

CARSON

Come on. Go.

Carson passes by Shae. Unlocks the door. Rushes out into the--

HALLWAY

Shae follows. Poppy shutting the door, locking the Woman in.

The living room is blocked, the Twisted Man spinning around wildly from corner to corner. GRUNTING.

THUD. From Shae's locked bedroom door. Poppy turns back toward it. Almost hopeful to see Javier there.

She doesn't see the Crone emerge from the dark behind her.

The Crone grabs Poppy by the back of the neck. Long nails dig into her skin. She closes her other hand over Poppy's throat.

POPPY

Shae!

Shae points Carson to the bathroom. Circles around Poppy.

Pulls Esteban's gun from her waistband. Unfamiliar in her hand.

She cocks it. Raises it. FIRES. Right into the Crone's head.

It WHIPS to the side. Her jaw breaking from where the shot caught her. Bloodlessly absorbing the bullet.

Shae helps Poppy toward the bathroom, where Carson waits for them. She pushes Poppy inside, but stops, staring ahead.

Standing in the living room is the Young Woman, her face now caught by the light. Features swollen and sprouting the fungus.

It's MORGAN. Her eyes terrified and lost.

GASP. A mangled sound behind Shae. She turns back.

On the ground, the Crone's eyes blink. Before she calmly pushes herself to sitting. Her jaw dangling loose. She looks at Shae.

The upper part of her lip smiles while her jaw hangs down.

CARSON

Come on!

Carson pulls her into the--

BATHROOM

SLAMS the door. Locks it. The standing tub has been moved near the door. Its feet loosened from the bathroom floor.

The three of them heave it against the bathroom door.

Carson nails in a few more waiting 2x4's as Shae searches the room. Looking for anything that might come from the shadows.

They're alone. Except for the SOUNDS.

SCRATCHES at the door. A distant MOAN. And THUDDING from the other side of the bathroom wall. Followed soon by--

NOT JAVIER (O.S.)

Shae. Poppy.

Loud but muffled. From the neighboring bedroom.

SHAE

This place always had thin walls.

More SCRATCHING. THUDS. MOANS and CRIES and LAUGHTER. And--

NOT JAVIER (O.S.)
Poppy. Help me help me help me.

POPPY
What is he?

Shae stares down, like she doesn't want to put words to it.

Poppy looks away out the window. It's the only escape. The street a story below. But there's a tree close enough to climb.

CARSON
You think we're safe in here?

SHAE
Maybe. Hope the walls aren't too thin.

The sounds BUILD. Continuous. Manic. Along with a--
CRACK. CRACK.

The SNAP of walls splitting open. Of bones breaking.

A pipe seems to BURST on the other side of the bathroom wall. Like something is clawing its way through it.

None of it from supernatural strength. Just the endless POUNDING of bodies breaking themselves against hard objects. Until those surfaces start to bend...

SHAE
We never should've stayed here.

POPPY
Hey, you had a good idea. It got us started. We knew we might not make it here all night. Let's just run for the car and--

SHAE
No, it was dumb to stop taking it. Like we could do better than everyone else who tried. We could have found more. Or answers.

POPPY
Well, it's like, too fucking late for that now, so...

SHAE
Yeah, well, is it?

Water soaks into the bathroom. Pooling out over the floor.

SHAE
Esteban said he had more, right?
Close. So some place he could get
it whenever he needed...

She stops, an idea right there.

SHAE
Why was Morgan at that warehouse?

POPPY
I don't know. Maybe running from
all the stupid--

SHAE
Carson, hand me her phone.

CARSON
What?

She waves it over. Carson pulls it out. Hands it to Shae.

SHAE
If she got it from Esteban, why
would she go all the way over...

Shae stops. Holds up Morgan's phone. The Waze app on the screen
with a list of recently visited places. She points to one.

SHAE
That address, it's near Esteban's.
It's where we found her.

CARSON
She wanted to go there. She was
looking for it.

The door splinters. An eye peers through the opening.

They back up to the window, looking to each other in panic.

SHAE
We could get more. Find out more.

POPPY
Or find an empty fucking
warehouse.

SHAE
You want to move right? Might as
well move our way over to there.

Shae checks to Carson. He nods his head.

CARSON

I'm with you wherever you want to go.

Shae smiles back. Nods.

Poppy says nothing. Just looks down to Carson's hand, squeezing Shae's. And neither of them letting go.

Shae checks back with Poppy to gauge her reaction. Poppy holds up her hands. What else can she say?

SHAE

Come on, we can climb down.

Carson opens the window to the tree outside.

EXT. SHAE'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Poppy hops down from the tree last, following after Shae and Carson as they run down the empty street to Grace's car.

They get inside. But Poppy stops outside the car door.

SHAE

Poppy, quick, get in.

POPPY

I'm not going.

SHAE

What? What are you talking about?

POPPY

I'm sorry. I've been going along cause I love you. And I've felt really fucking bad for getting you into this. But whatever is there, it doesn't change anything. So I'd rather try it my way. You can join me or you don't have to. But I'm not going there.

Shae can only shake her head, in shock.

CARSON

He's coming. We need to go.

It's Javier. Stumbling down the street toward the car.

SHAE

I can't leave you--

POPPY
You're not.

Poppy takes a breath. Backs away, her eyes on Shae's for only a moment. Then turns. And runs into the dark of the neighborhood.

SHAE
Wait, Poppy! Poppy!

Shae steps out to follow, but Carson grabs her arm.

CARSON
Shae.

Javier runs toward them, getting close.

She SLAMS the door, just as Javier reaches it, slapping his hands against the window.

Shae stares through it. At the place where Poppy disappeared. At Javier's mindless eyes.

SHAE
I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

She peels off in the car.

Leaving Javier alone. A confused look on his face. Like he forgot what he was doing. He wanders in the other direction.

INT. GRACE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Carson looks back as they drive away.

CARSON
Shit, she's been following you
since I've known you. I didn't
think she had that in her.

Shae doesn't speak. Her eyes just drift to the rearview. As if she'll see Poppy in the vacant street they left behind.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

The car races down the nearly deserted streets...

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

...and swings up outside the warehouse where they found Morgan.

Shae and Carson get out. Crawl through the hole in the fence. Followed by a low, GUTTURAL YELL as they cross the dirt lot.

They rush up to the front doors of the warehouse. There's a chain around the handles. Locked.

Shae pulls out the gun. Fires at the chain. Breaking it open. They push the doors open and go inside.

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The sprawling warehouse floor is dark and barren. Barely lit by street lights through the clouded windows and open door.

SHAE
It's empty.

Carson shakes his head. Points ahead.

CARSON
There.

A beam of light cuts through. A back door, open a crack. They ease toward it. Watching for figures in the shadows.

A loud RING, echoing through the silence.

Shae's phone. She quickly silences it. Sees the ID. Answers.

SHAE
Poppy? Are you okay?

POPPY (O.S.)
No. I mean...I'm not sure.
They...they stopped seeing me.

SHAE
What?

POPPY (O.S.)
Right after I left you, they
just... I'm looking at one right
now, but she's not looking back.

SHAE
How? What did you do?

POPPY (O.S.)
Nothing. I didn't do anything.

A GUTTURAL YELL from behind them. Shae turns. The Twisted Man stands in the front doorway. Looking right at them.

SHAE
Fuck, I don't know, Pop. Cause
they still see me. Shit, he's
coming. I have to go.

Shae hangs up as The Twisted Man charges toward them.
She and Carson break into a sprint to the door.
Run through. Carson SLAMS it shut behind them.
There's two deadbolts on the door. Carson locks both.
Just as the Twisted Man KNOCKS into the door with a loud bang.
For now, it holds. Even as there's another BANG. Another.
They turn back. Below them, a stairwell. At the bottom, light.
Harsh and bright. Shae and Carson move down toward it.

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Grow lights hang above the room. To the side, tables stacked
with chemical containers, cleaning products, beakers.

Together, it looks--

CARSON

Like a fucking meth lab.

But what's different is in the center.

Six planter boxes set into pockets of broken concrete.
Lined in two rows of three.
Each box about four feet long.
Tubes lead from the chemical containers into the dirt.
Half the boxes are empty, but from the others...

Fungal roots sprout twisted, gnarling branches.
Molded and barnacled.
Curling into the air.
Parasitic brown mushroom spores cling to them.
The same color of the drug.

CARSON

What the fuck is this?

Shae takes it all in. Captivated.

SHAE

Everything Esteban was growing.

The BANGS on the door continue above them. Every few seconds.
Carson wanders down the aisle between the boxes.

CARSON

How long do you think we could last with this much? Enough to stop and figure things out. Get a night of decent--

SHAE

Oh fuck.

Before he can ask what, he sees it. In the box below him.

A torso. Covered in spores. Torn apart on one side by the branches that have spread out from the body.

It's what the drug is growing from.

CARSON

Holy shit.

Shae stares down at the same thing in the box below her.

CARSON

No, this is...this is...

He turns away, only to look right into the third filled box.

He stops. His eyes going wide. Spins back toward Shae. His voice taking on a new urgency.

CARSON

Look, let's just take a little and go. One of those branches by you.

SHAE

What is it?

She walks toward the box, but he steps in to block the aisle.

CARSON

Nothing, we've been through a lot. We should--

SHAE

What is it, Carson?

Before he can answer, she pushes past him.

And her face drops. Her features dissolving into a mess of loss and sorrow.

In the box, a middle-aged WOMAN. She'd almost seem peaceful, if it wasn't for the branches that have consumed most of her body.

Looking at her and Shae, it's easy to see the resemblance.

SHAE
Mom? Oh God, Mom?

A CRACK from the door. Like the locks are starting to give way.

SHAE
How did she...why would she...?

CARSON
I know. I know. I'm here. And we
can deal with all--

SHAE
She just left me. She left me with
no...I always thought she'd come
back but now...oh Mom.

CARSON
Come on, we need to take a little
more. Then, we can--

SHAE
(confused)
What?

CARSON
Something over here. Okay?

SHAE
No. No, I can't do that.

CARSON
You don't have a choice.

Her eyes trace over the table of chemicals in a mindless
rhythm. A thought rising up in her.

SHAE
Okay. Alright.

CARSON
Yeah?

She nods. Steps up to him. One hand curls in his pocket to pull
him close. She rests her head against his chest.

He holds her there a moment.

And her hand drifts further into his pocket.

He kisses her forehead. Pulls away. To one of the other boxes.

Rips a couple of mushrooms from a branch. Hands one over to
her. They put it to their lips at the same time.

Only Shae palms hers, not taking it into her mouth.

Another CRACK from the door above.

SHAE

Go hold him off, okay? Until it
kicks in. I want to say goodbye.

Carson hesitates, but sees the look on Shae's face. Gives her hand a squeeze. Runs up the staircase.

She lets the mushroom fall to the floor. Steps over to the table of chemicals. Grabs two containers of solvents.

Walks down the aisle, dumping solvents on all the boxes.

That's when we see what she pulled from Carson's pocket. His lighter. She lights it to the chemicals in the first box.

The fire moves through them like a wave.

She does the same with the second box. Wanders to the third. The one with her mother in it. She gives her mom one last look.

Then, lights this one too.

She watches until the body disappears in the flames.

As the smoke gathers, she turns around. Runs up the stairs.

Carson braces against the door as there's another CRACK.

SHAE

Okay, I'm done.

CARSON

I'll come back later. So you don't
have to see--

He smells something in the air. Looks back to smoke gathering in the basement. His eyes go wide.

SHAE

I'm sorry. I know it wasn't fair
to decide for both of us. But I'm
not turning out like my mom. I'm
not her. I'm not her.

Without a word, Carson leaves the door. Bounds down the stairs.

SHAE

No, Carson, wait!

She follows him back down, into the gathering smoke.

He rushes toward the first box. Removing his jacket. Beating it against the burning box to try to still the flames.

Another CRACK from the door above.

SHAE
Carson stop! We have to go!

CARSON
Give me a minute. I'll be right
behind you. Get out of here.

He searches out unburnt branches. Gathers them into his arms.

SHAE
No, not without you, I won't--

CARSON
Shae, go!

She takes a step toward him...

...but flames reach one the table of chemicals. Erupting out in a ball of fire between them.

Shae stumbles back against the staircase. Looks out. The flames and smoke have blocked out any view of Carson.

SHAE
Carson! Carson!

No response.

A CRACK from the staircase. The door nearly giving way.

Shae's lungs begin to heave. The smoke filling the basement around her. The flames growing close.

She moves up the stairs a step at a time. Coughing hard. Eyes switching from the door above to the empty basement.

SHAE
Carson?

Still nothing.

And suddenly, even the stairwell door has gone silent.

She waits until she can't take any more of the smoke or heat. Stumbles to the top of the stairs. Unlocks the busted door.

And pushes her way through to whatever awaits.

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

She falls down onto the concrete floor. Coughing as the smoke in her lungs mixes with the clean warehouse air.

She checks behind her. But the doorway remains empty. The orange light of the flames grows as smoke billows out.

She looks up for a sign of the Twisted Man.

But it's the Crone who stands there. A few feet away. Jaw barely attached. Shae's face drops. Giving up all hope.

Only the Crone doesn't look at her. Just stares out dumbly. Eyes glassy and lost.

Shae can hear her, see her, but *the Crone doesn't see Shae.*

Leaving Shae to watch her there, lit by the glowing flames.

FADE TO:

EXT. GRACE'S CAR - DAYS LATER

Poppy sits in the front seat. The car parked outside the same pawn shop where Shae took Grace's jewelry.

The same jewelry Shae now holds in a plastic bag, as she walks up to the passenger door and gets inside.

They both look rough. Bags under their eyes. Sober and on edge.

Poppy starts up the car. Drives out of the parking lot.

SHAE

Thanks for coming with me.

POPPY

Of course. I'm always here for you. When you need me.

It's stated simply. As a fact. No hint of need or desperation.

Shae gives a small smile.

POPPY

What are you gonna say to her?

SHAE

I don't know. I'm sorry?

POPPY
You could tell her what
happened...

SHAE
How am I gonna do that to her?
What could I say? No, to her I'm
not any different than my mom now.

POPPY
Your mom never came back. And how
many times did your grandma
forgive her? At least she didn't
press charges.

SHAE
Yeah, the rest of them, they're -
but we get a fine and a slap on
the wrist. Lucky us.

POPPY
Better than jail. Locked in there
alone.

SHAE
Come on, we're never alone.

Shae gives her a wry smile. Sees Poppy's fear.

Poppy glances to the rear view.

POPPY
Shae? Why did they stop?

SHAE
I don't know.

They sit in silence.

Poppy suddenly JAMS on the brakes.

The Crone stands in the road, just a few feet from their car.

Poppy and Shae stare at her, unsurprised. Her jaw still hangs
by only a sinew. She looks around with absent eyes...

...and sweeps right over them. *She still doesn't see them.*

They breathe heavy. Shae closes her eyes. Tired.

Poppy's eyes slowly drift to the rear view mirror.

For the first time we see the back seat of the car...

...where the thing that's not Javier sits. Staring into space. Still straining his head to look forward on his broken neck.

Shae feels Poppy's gaze. Lets herself look in the side mirror.

Javier doesn't notice them. Doesn't see them. He's just there.

Neither Shae or Poppy look surprised. Like they've been living with this for days.

Shae looks away. Nudges Poppy. Points to the road.

SHAE

Come on, Poppy. Keep going.

Poppy nods. Starts the car slowly ahead.

We watch them through the windshield. Poppy and Shae drive off in silence. Javier back there in the middle. Right behind them.

FADE TO BLACK.