

TRADE OFFS

Written by

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INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - EVENING

A fairly busy and loud train. Passengers scroll through their phones, headphones in.

MARK (late 30s to early 40s), sharp, content, sits alone with a spare seat beside him. He wears the easy smile of a man who seems to have it all.

Across the aisle, a MOTHER (late 50s) and her SON (20s) unwrap homemade egg sandwiches. The smell is strong. Warm. Slightly sour. It fills the air quickly.

Mark glances sideways – a quick, subtle look – clocking their faces. No reaction. No expression.

He notes the seat number and carriage – C57.

EXT. LUXURY ESTATE HOUSE - EVENING

An expensive, two-story colonial-style home glows under the warm light of the setting sun. The porch and driveway lights are already on.

The house sits at the end of a long, gated driveway, discreetly hidden from the town around it.

A black SUV pulls up to the house.

INT. FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The last of the day's light spills in through skylights. The house feels warm. Lived-in. Comforting.

The smell of fresh-baked bread and homemade soup fills the air.

SARAH (30s), effortlessly elegant, slices bread at the kitchen island. A pot simmers beside her. Light music plays in the background.

At the large wooden table, OLIVER (8) and LUCY (6) quietly sketch cartoon animals.

Mark enters. Still sharp, unfazed by the commute. Smiling – the calm of a man whose day never ruffles him.

SARAH

Welcome home, darling. How was the day?

MARK

Oh, painless enough.

A wry smile crosses his face. The kids spring up from their chairs.

KIDS

Daddy!

They rush over and hug him together.

MARK

Hello, sluggers. Why don't you show me those drawings of yours?

Sarah kisses his cheek and hands him a wooden spoon from the pot.

SARAH

Thoughts?

Mark tastes the soup off the spoon.

MARK

Perfection, my love.

Sarah crosses to the counter, pours him a whisky, and returns with the glass.

SARAH

Correct.

They share a smile – intimate, real. Clearly in love.

The family sits at the table. Laughter and chatter fill the room.

Outside, the last light of day fades behind the windows.

A moment of warmth. Complete. Content.

INT. FAMILY HOME – BOTTOM LANDING – NIGHT

Mark stands alone in the dark. The staircase winds through the center of the house like a snake.

He glances over his shoulder – listening. Watching. The house is still.

Sarah and the kids asleep upstairs.

He moves. Quiet. Practiced.

He opens a cupboard beneath the stairs. Pushes past coats and jackets... revealing a second door.

It's locked.

He pulls out a key, unlocks it, and slips through.

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

A small, windowless basement. Cramped. Silent. Pitch black.

Bare concrete walls close in – close enough to touch with an outstretched arm.

A single bare bulb dangles above, its weak light barely cutting the darkness.

At the center, the only object: a single wooden chair.

It faces a solid black wall. In the upper-right corner, a strange symbol is etched into the surface – small, precise.

Mark sits in the chair, staring straight ahead.

Silence.

Then – from the wall – the faint sound of breathing.

Uneasy. Ragged.

Mark smiles – calm, unfazed, as if he knows exactly what's coming.

MARK

The five P.M. train from Edinburgh
to London.

Carriage C. Seat 57.

A few seconds pass.

The breathing shifts – slower now. Stronger. Healthier.

Mark exhales, overcome. His eyes close. A deep, rising euphoria floods through him – like liquid joy injected straight into his bloodstream.

It anchors him. Calms him.

This feeling will carry him for days.

FADE OUT:

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

A sleek glass-and-steel skyscraper, its mirrored façade catching the morning sun and scattering reflections of the bustling city below. A revolving door spins with a steady rhythm as streams of suited professionals flow in and out with their lanyards on.

INT. MEETING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A long mahogany table dominates the room, surrounded by men and women in crisp suits. Glasses of water glisten untouched. Laptops glow faintly.

The clock ticks, steady and loud in the silence.

Mark wears his constant, chirpy smile. A man adjusts his tie. A woman shifts - her chair squeaks.

MARTIN

We've had it passed down - every engineer's goals and objectives need to be in by the end of the month. Take it up with your teams.

Mark, Simon - platform teams covered by the end of the week.

MARK

No problem.

MARTIN

Remember the structures: deliver technical success. Cut down technical debt. Use the new AI tools to improve productivity.

He counts off the items on his fingers like he's said them a thousand times.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Follow the themes. I don't want engineering dragging behind product.

He leans over the shoulder of the nearest suited body, pointing at the roadmap, eyes narrowing.

Treat this as top priority as we shift into modernization.

He flips through a few generic slides until he lands on the feedback survey. Scrolling through Helen's results with a frown.

MARTIN (CONT'D)
For the feedback survey – Helen,
your numbers were poor. Step it up
on engagement, or we'll find
someone who can.

HELEN (40s, blonde) shifts in her chair, eyes down. She forces a tight smile – bracing for more.

SIMON (30s, grey hair) raises a pen.

MARTIN (CONT'D)
Simon, a question?

SIMON
More for awareness than a question.
The graduate cohort's wrapping up –
I suggest we take them on.
Not sure about Danielle though –
she's always on her phone.

Simon smirks. His rivalry with Mark is an open secret – sharp but never hostile.

MARTIN
Mark, she's one of yours?

Mark looks surprised, but the smile never fades.

MARK
No problem. For the numbers we've
got, she's the weakest. I'll
probably let her go. I'll report
back.

MARTIN
Good. Give me the nod by the end of
day.

Martin closes his laptop with a decisive snap.

MARTIN (CONT'D)
Right – that's it. Let's crack on.

INT. OFFICE KITCHEN – CONTINUOUS

The harsh formality of the boardroom is gone.

The kitchen is smaller, warmer. White cabinets gleam under fluorescent lights. A fridge hums. The faint smell of burnt coffee lingers.

Mark leans casually against the counter, stirring sugar into his coffee, his trademark smile in place.

At a small round table, Danielle (early 20s, sharp but tired-eyed) scrolls through her phone, tapping her fingers. The kitchen is quiet – just the two of them.

MARK

How are you feeling about coming to the end of the program? Two years together, over already.

DANIELLE

I know. Okay, yeah. I'm still not sure it's for me.

She sinks lower in her chair.

MARK

What do you want? What's for you? You've clearly got the ability... when you can actually be arsed.

A cheeky smile still on his face. Danielle laughs.

DANIELLE

Well, we both know I won't be kept on, since our last conversation.

She pauses, thinks for a beat, then continues with a sarcastic edge.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

I'd happily be an influencer. All play, no real work. Some make hundreds of thousands off a single post you know.

Her tone softens, more honest.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

Then I could do something better for my mum.

She shows her phone – a generic Instagram model promoting a teeth-whitening kit.

MARK

Lovely.

Sarcastically, but cheery.

MARK (CONT'D)

You ever heard of the author John Updike?

DANIELLE

Is he on Instagram?

Mark grins as he knows she's being half sarcastic.

MARK

I hope not – he's dead. He once wrote:
"Fame is a mask that eats into the
face."

Danielle tilts her head, confused. Mark's wry smile grows.

MARK (CONT'D)

Meaning the persona you create can
become the real you. Fame can change a
person, make them reliant on the image
they project. Sounds painful the way
he puts it don't you think?

Danielle looks unimpressed but thinks for a minute.

DANIELLE

They do make good money though.

MARK

You'd make good money in finance and
software.

Mark sits opposite her, enjoying giving her something to think about. The fridge hum fills the silence. He picks up the unease of her mum's health and wonders what he can gain from her situation.

MARK (CONT'D)

Let's try another, a more
philosophical one.

BEAT.

He leans back, choosing his words carefully.

MARK (CONT'D)

Imagine a floatation tank. You could
live a perfect virtual life – all your
dreams, your ideal family, your
perfect job. All within this tank.
You'd never know it was preprogrammed.
You'd live the perfect life, then die
at 90, without pain, loss, or grief.
Would you take it?

Danielle thinks for a moment.

DANIELLE

Do I know I'm in the tank?

MARK

Once you're in, there's no memory of
the old life.
You just live your perfect life.

Danielle leans back, processing. She taps a finger on the table,
curious but cautious.

DANIELLE

So... I'd be happy. Safe. Everything I
want. But none of it's real.

MARK

Exactly. Perfect, but constructed.
Real to you.
The question isn't what you'd gain...
it's what you'd lose, if you have
anything to lose.

Danielle glances at her phone, then back at him. Content smile
across his face.

DANIELLE

Maybe, mum's still in the home.

MARK

In Murrayside right?

DANIELLE

Yeah, room 2B, hopefully not to be.

Danielle says sarcastically, lightning the tone.

Mark wants to capitalize on that feeling of grief of loss that
he knows is coming.

MARK

There's no "right" answer by the way.
Some people think messy is worth more
than perfect. That you need the good
with the bad.

But... what if you've already had the
bad? What if you've never had the
good?

You'd never have to have your mum
in a home. She'd never have gotten
ill in the first place. You'd have
had more time with your dad.

Mark leans back, a satisfied smirk on his face. Playful,
charming... and just a little dangerous.

For a moment, it's just the two of them, sharing a strange,
quiet understanding.

Danielle taps her fingers on the table, eyes distant but alert.
She smiles, a little.

Mark drums on the table with his fingers.

MARK (CONT'D)

I hope you'll find what you're looking
for.

Every movement, every expression radiates assurance – he's
untouchable, life perfectly balanced.

Danielle can't help but feel slightly disarmed.

DANIELLE

(tentative)

So... what's your secret?

Danielle studies him, sensing there's more than mere discipline.

Mark sips his coffee, eyes bright, aware, but perfectly serene.

The noise of the office around them – but Mark remains
untouched, untangled with a smile on his face.

MARK

Life's easier when you know it's all
exactly where it should be.

Mark stands, heading toward the door.

DANIELLE

What would you do... with the tank?

MARK

Well, I'm already in it... of sorts. Let
me know when you decide. I'll help you
out, or in I suppose.

He has a small laugh to himself.

MARK (CONT'D)

Keep in touch.

Mark gives her a playful wink as he leaves. Danielle watches him go, a small, thoughtful smile lingering.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - AFTERNOON

A small, bohemian coffee shop. Music plays in the background. Steam hisses from the frothing milk. Sunlight filters through dusty windows.

Mark waits at the counter, glancing at his watch. He shifts his weight, relaxed, eyes scanning the room without looking obvious.

BARISTA
A mocha for "Marc."

MARK
Thank you.

Mark notices the name is misspelled. He tilts his head, a wry smile forming.

MARK (CONT'D)
It's with a K - just for next time.

The Barista smiles, amused by his cheerful correction. Mark nods subtly, as if mentally noting her name badge.

EXT. PARK - CONTINUOUS

Sunlight spills across a green park. A wooden bench sits beneath a large tree, dappled shade moving with the breeze.

Simon sits on the bench, sandwiches laid out in front of him. Mark approaches, eyes briefly scanning the area, then casually takes a sandwich.

SIMON
Chicken pesto with mozzarella.

MARK
Thanks, chef.

Mark sits beside him, shoulders relaxed. His gaze drifts across the park - alert, calculating, yet at ease as always, content.

SIMON
How'd it go with Danielle?

MARK
Aye, as we expected. She won't make the cut... but might have other uses.

Simon raises an eyebrow, puzzled. Mark's eyes flick to the horizon briefly, considering the next move.

MARK (CONT'D)

The travel booked for India Friday?

SIMON

Yeah. Pam's booked it all. Check your email – I think it's an early flight. Private, though. Spoke to Martin. Looks like it'll be the whole week.

Simon pauses, a flicker of reflection crossing his face.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Who'd have thought, eh? Two lads from the same school, same town... ending up here.

Mark smiles faintly, a hint of tension under the calm. He taps a finger on the sandwich wrapper, thinking.

MARK

The whole week, eh? I better tie up some loose ends before we go. Put myself on an even keel.

He leans back, scanning the park, and then the city skyline beyond – always processing, always planning. A brief, satisfied smirk crosses his face.

EXT. THE STREET CITY – EVENING

The young man from the train (Carriage C, Seat 57) slips out of a corner shop, plastic bag dangling from his hand. His gaze never leaves his phone screen.

He stops at the curb. Traffic roars past – headlights, horns, the restless pulse of the city.

He hears the BEEP of a pedestrian signal on the other side of the road.

He steps forward–

A BLUR OF METAL.

IMPACT.

The CAR slams into him at full speed.

He's flung into the air, and crashes onto the road. His skull cracks against the road with a sickening thud.

The city noise swallows him. Horns blare.

CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - EVENING

Mark sits in the same seat as yesterday, glancing briefly at Carriage C, Seat 57 - now empty.

The same Mother from the previous day sits alone. Her face is pale, eyes red and swollen, cheeks streaked with tears. She fidgets with her phone, hands trembling.

Her phone rings. She answers.

MOTHER
(voice cracking)
No... no, no, no...

She collapses slightly onto the seat, body shaking. Passengers glance up; some move closer, reaching out to steady her. She screams, sharp and ragged, full of raw grief.

Mark slides his headphones in, ignoring the chaos. He stares out the window, the darkening landscape reflecting in his eyes. A wide, knowing smile curves his lips - calm, detached, ominously content.

The distant rolling of the train mixes with the swelling music.

SONG: "Me and the Devil" (Gil Scott-Heron) begins, low and insistent.

FADE OUT:

INT. CARE HOME - EVENING - SAME DAY

The care home is too warm, stuffy and airless - uncomfortable for visitors.

Old white raised pattern wallpaper clings to the walls. A television murmurs in the background down the hall. The faint smell of disinfectant lingers, mixed with something heavier - boiled vegetables from dinner.

Danielle sits beside her mother's bed. Her mother lies frail and skeletal under a heavy blanket. An oxygen machine hisses faintly in the corner.

Danielle adjusts the blanket, brushing her mother's hand – delicate, papery skin stretched over brittle bones.

Danielle forces a small smile, trying to mask the weight of helplessness pressing in on her. She is holding her thin hand in hers.

DANIELLE

Hi Mum, I hope you're feeling okay.
The nurse said you didn't eat
today.

BEAT.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

I can't stand that prick.
I'm sorry you're not somewhere
better.

Danielle exhales, releasing her mother's hand. She leans back in her chair, heavy with frustration.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

I need to find a new position now.
They won't take me on. Too many
distractions, I guess. I came across
as lazy.

She unlocks her phone, the glow of Instagram lighting her tired face.

A knock at the door.

DENNIS (30s, bald), the male nurse Danielle loathes, leans casually against the doorframe. His smirk lingers just a moment too long.

DENNIS

Hi Deandra, how are you?
Is Danielle looking after you?

His tone is syrupy, almost sarcastic – passive-aggressive with a sleazy undercurrent.

DANIELLE

Can we try bringing her some supper
please.

Dennis rolls his eyes.

DENNIS

Why? She won't eat it.

The words hang, sharp and dismissive.

Danielle bites back a retort. She stands, crosses to the bedside table, and pours a glass of water.

She lifts it gently to her mother's lips. Her mother takes a few weak sips, then sinks back into the pillow, already drifting to sleep.

Danielle sets the glass down, her jaw tight, eyes flicking briefly toward Dennis in restrained frustration.

DANIELLE

Leave us.

Dennis hesitates, smirking faintly as if to push back.

DENNIS

Alright, alright. Just checking in.

Danielle doesn't flinch. She steps to the door and closes it – gently, but firmly – in his face.

She returns to her chair, sinking into it, the fight draining from her. Her shoulders curl inward. She takes her mother's hand again, but her eyes are glassy, her breaths uneven.

After a long beat, Danielle pulls out her phone.

She hovers over the screen, typing – deleting – then finally sends a message to Mark.

ON SCREEN – PHONE TEXT

Danielle: How do I get into the tank?

INT. MARK'S HOUSE – LIVING ROOM – EVENING

A picture of comfort. A crackling fireplace throws a warm glow across the room.

Sarah with her apron still on sets a slice of cake and a steaming tea on the table in front of MARK.

The children, clean and ready for bed in matching pajamas, sprawl on the sheepskin rug, quietly drawing with crayons on thick sheets of paper.

The house is immaculate, almost staged. Family photos line the mantelpiece – smiling faces, golden holidays, the perfect life.

Mark takes in the scene, his calm, practiced smile never faltering.

Mark opens his phone. Danielle's message glows back at him:

ON SCREEN — PHONE TEXT

Danielle: How do I get into the tank?

Mark's smile widens. He types back:

ON SCREEN — PHONE TEXT

Mark: Away till next week, let's meet then.

SARAH

Oliver's teacher wanted to speak to me after school today.

Oliver looks up, curious at hearing his name.

SARAH (CONT'D)

They think he might be advanced for his age. They're considering moving him up a year.

Her face glows.

And Mrs. Wong — the music teacher — called Lucy a child prodigy on the cello. Can you believe that? Six years old and already dazzling the room. The cello's practically bigger than she is.

Sarah beams with pride. The kids glance at Mark, seeking his reaction.

MARK

I can believe it. If it's anyone, it's my two.

The children's faces light up at his recognition.

MARK (CONT'D)

That deserves late supper — hot chocolates with whipped cream.

The kids cheer. Sarah, smiling wide, turns on her heels toward the kitchen.

Mark watches her go, phone still in hand, his calm smile never slipping.

INT. BASEMENT - AFTER MIDNIGHT

The basement is stark – bare concrete walls, low ceiling. The air feels close, almost damp, the space tight and claustrophobic.

A single chair sits in the middle of the room – the only furniture. Mark squeezes into it, posture rigid, as though the room itself is pressing in on him.

He faces the far wall.

Etched into the concrete is a crude marking – an ouroboros, a serpent devouring its own tail, forming a perfect circle. Eternal beginning. Eternal end.

Mark stares at it in silence. The faint buzz of the house above is barely audible here, muffled and distant.

His face is calm, almost reverent.

BEAT.

He reaches out, fingertips brushing the marking, tracing the endless loop.

A faint smile curls across his lips – private, unsettling, as if the symbol carries a meaning only he truly understands.

Mark sits back in the lone chair, eyes fixed on the ouroboros carved into the wall.

Silence.

Then – the sound of breath as if coming from the wall once more. Heavy. Uneasy. Ragged. Not as broken as the night before... steadier now, as though he's appeased it recently.

MARK

I have a trip I need to take for work.
It'll be a week. But I'll be back...
then I can continue.

He pauses. Listens.

The room is dead still, yet Mark tilts his head – as if something has spoken back to him, something only he can hear.

MARK (CONT'D)

It won't be longer than a week.
I know the consequences. Please
don't say that.

Mark shifts uneasy in the chair.

MARK (CONT'D)
I'll keep the rhythm. Seven days,
no longer.

More concern than we have seen before. His words hang in the air, then swallowed by the wall he is facing.

MARK (CONT'D)

I know. I know.

He presses his hands against the chair, almost rising, then sinks back down.

MARK (CONT'D)
Before I go. 13:17pm today Lisa the
Barista at rapid coffee on Lothian
road, an early work trip gift.

Mark inhales, closing his eyes, anticipation spreading across his face.

MARK (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Yes... just like that.

A deep, rich euphoria washes over him – liquid, intoxicating. It courses through his veins, filling him from head to toe. His chest rises and falls with unrestrained joy, a grin widening across his face.

His hands grip the arms of the chair, yet he sags back, utterly calm, utterly consumed. The basement feels smaller, tighter, but the sensation in him is limitless – a pure, unshakable happiness.

MARK (CONT'D)
(soft, blissful)
All of it exactly as it should be.

FLASHES – the kids sleeping peacefully, Sarah asleep, reminders of his perfect life.

Mark remains still, savoring every drop of the invisible elixir, the ritual complete.

He exhales slowly, eyes still closed, a serene smile etched on his face – the world outside irrelevant, the week ahead preemptively conquered.

INT. MARK'S HOUSE - MORNING

Sunlight streams through the blinds.

Mark moves through the kitchen with effortless calm.

Coffee brews, toast pops up. Every motion is precise, serene.

Sarah hums softly and kisses him on the cheek.

The kids scurry around pleasantly, backpacks and lunchboxes.

Mark kneels, tying Oliver's shoelaces - perfectly even, gentle smile.

MARK

You've got this, you pair. Every note,
every step - nailed it.

Oliver beams. Lucy giggles, spinning her cello bow in tiny circles.

MARK (CONT'D)

I'm off. I'll see you all next week.

Mark grabs his suitcase and heads for the door, the warmth and laughter of his family life fading behind him.

INT. LAND ROVER - DRIVE - CONTINUOUS

The interior understated luxury: polished wood accents, brushed metal handles, and a faint new-leather scent.

Lightly tinted windows, reflecting Mark's calm, controlled expression.

Mark sits behind the wheel, calm and collected.

He pulls out his phone and dials Simon.

SIMON (V.O.)

Hello? I'm just on my way. You left?

MARK

Aye, that's me. Just need to make a
quick stop, then I'll be over.

SIMON (V.O.)

No problem. See you soon.

Mark hangs up, a subtle smirk forming - the calm, controlled energy of the morning still with him.

EXT RUNDOWN APARTMENT BLOCK - MORNING

A concrete jungle of grey council estate, looming tower blocks.

On the pavement, wrecked push bikes lie abandoned – wheels missing, chains rusted.

The stairwells are scrawled with graffiti, layers of tags over years of neglect. The smell of stale piss hangs in the air, mixing with the damp reek of the ruined walls.

Somewhere, a dog barks, frantic and ignored.

EXT. APARTMENT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Mark stands outside a battered door high up in the block.

A bottle of cheap whisky dangles from one hand, keys in the other. He glances over his shoulder, wary, as if guarding a secret no one else can know. Every movement is practiced, familiar – part of a routine.

He slides the key into the lock, the door sticking before it creaks open.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Dim. The curtains are drawn, but the morning sun seeps through cracks, bleeding a dull pink-red glow across the walls.

The hallway is cramped, air heavy with stale booze and cigarettes. Empty bottles litter the floor, clinking as the door nudges them aside.

At the far end of the room, slumped in a torn single Chesterfield chair, a man in his late 70s sits in a dressing gown. His head lolls forward, half-conscious, eyes clouded, skin papery.

The TV flickers faintly in the corner, sound turned low – endless static and late-night reruns.

INT. APARTMENT MAIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mark steps in quietly, setting the cheap whisky on a cluttered side table. He glances at the wall – at a dusty, crooked frame.

Inside: a faded photo of the man, decades younger, with a boy no older than ten. The boy's grin is unmistakable – a younger Mark.

He straightens the frame, wipes a finger across the glass.

MARK

Brought you something, Uncle.

Uncle stirs, blinking through the haze. His voice is slurred, but a flicker of warmth breaks through.

UNCLE

Damien?

Mark doesn't answer. He simply watches – still, calm – the familiar smile creeping back, feeding off the man's weakness.

MARK

You look like shit. I'm glad to see it.

Do you even know what day it is?

The Uncle's hand trembles as he twists the cap, lifting the whisky to his lips. He gulps greedily, as though drinking life itself, then lowers the bottle, breath ragged, eyes glassy.

UNCLE

(quiet, rough)

I know what day it is.

Mark's Uncle looks around the mess in the room.

UNCLE (CONT'D)

Grief.. it eats us all but I still know who I am.

He sits up and at Mark.

But you... you're not our Damien anymore.

He sinks back into the chair, clutching the bottle like a lifeline, already drifting into stupor.

Mark lingers in the silence, savoring the moment. His smile widens – satisfied, reassured.

FLASH: Oliver and Lucy laughing in the living room, Sarah pouring hot chocolate, the sheepskin rug beneath their little hands.

The memory of his perfect, curated family life fills him with quiet triumph.

MARK

Too fucking right.

The uncle slumps further, asleep and broken, the room smelling faintly of whisky and decay.

Mark stands, taking in the ruin and his own reward – a life balanced perfectly outside these walls. He turns to leave, calm, collected, untouched by the ruin around him.

EXT. PRIVATE PLANE - MORNING

A sleek private jet taxis, then roars down the runway, lifting gracefully into the bright morning sky.

INT. PRIVATE PLANE - CONTINUOUS

Mark and Simon sit in wide leather recliners. A pair of whisky glasses rest beside them, half-filled. Their laptops glow as they scroll through strategy documents.

The steady hum of the engines underpins their quiet conversation.

SIMON

We'll split them into teams of ten. Align the products, have most of the team as engineers, a few leads to wrangle, and someone to own product decisions. Seven teams should cover it.

MARK

Agreed. Anyone we need to review for performance already, I'll take them on. I'm in that mood this morning. You can thank me later.

SIMON

I'll cheers to that.

They clink glasses as the plane climbs higher, bound for their work trip abroad.

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY (MONTAGE OVER THE NEXT WEEK).

Danielle sits opposite two older white men on an interviewing panel at a corporate finance and software firm.

Laptops sit in front of the two men as they take notes of everything that has just been said.

There is silence as the typing continues.

Danielle looks tired and slightly nervous.

INTERVIEW ONE

INTERVIEWER #1

Thanks. So our next question: can you tell us about a time that you made a mistake?

INTERVIEWER #2

And how did you learn from it, adapt, or implement changes?

Danielle takes a deep breath and braces herself.

INTERVIEW TWO

A different panel, similar sterile room. Danielle's posture is slightly more slumped, eyes tired.

INTERVIEWER #1

How do you prioritize when multiple tasks are critical?

INTERVIEW THREE

INTERVIEWER #1

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Danielle stares down at her résumé, fatigue etched on her face. The panel murmurs quietly among themselves.

She exhales deeply, shoulders slumping. She nods politely, rises from the chair, and walks slowly toward the door.

Her face showing a defeated expression.

INT. OFFICE - INDIA (ONE WEEK LATER)

Mark and Simon sit in a sleek, heavily air-conditioned office, both in crisp white shirts.

Mark talking to himself under his breath.

MARK

Seven days. Today's the day. Still thousands of miles away.

The thought gnaws at him, a quiet unease he can't shake. He glances at his watch, then the ceiling, as if the walls might whisper reminders. The flight home can't come soon enough, as long as he is home tonight, no consequences.

Simon's phone vibrates.

SIMON

Change of plans. We don't leave until tomorrow. Martin wants us meeting with the India lead first.

Mark stiffens. Fingers tap the table—quiet, precise. His serene smile flickers, sweat forming at his temple.

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT (MARK'S MIND)

Concrete walls close in. The ouroboros on the wall glows faintly. His chair. The ritual. Liquid euphoria waiting.

BACK TO: INDIA
OFFICE

SIMON

You hear me? We're delayed until tomorrow. You alright? Never seen you look flustered before, it is roasting in here.

Mark forces a smile, eyes scanning documents but seeing only the circle on the basement wall.

MARK

Yeah...Yeah tomorrow. Let's head back ASAP. I promised Sarah and the kids a nice family weekend.

His tapping continues—silent, steady. A pulse counting down to the basement, to control, to perfection.

INT. CARE HOME - DAY

Danielle sits beside her mum, who's propped up in bed. She looks brighter today, nibbling at a few chocolates on a wooden tray.

DANIELLE

Good to see you eating, Mum. You always were tough as nails... and a menace with chocolate.

Her mum smiles.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

Do you remember how Dad used to hide
chocolate around the house for you?
Never in the cupboards—too easy.

Danielle smiles to herself.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

I once found three Mars bars and a
Turkish Delight stuffed in a shoe box.
Must've forgotten about them... they
were six months out of date.

Her mum lets out a faint chuckle. The sound is small but it
lands.

Danielle watches, softens.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

I'm not having much luck with
interviews right now. But I'm meeting
my old manager soon—maybe he'll have
some advice. Maybe a way forward.

Her mum pushes the tray aside and turns toward her, voice weak
but insistent.

MUM

You'll be alright, Danielle. One
life. Take your time. You'll know
what's right when it comes.

DANIELLE

We need the money, Mum. Unless you've
been hiding a fortune along with dad
hiding the chocolate.

They share a look.

MUM

Just... do what's right. Keep your
head. Don't lose yourself chasing
it. You always loved helping
people. Don't forget that.

She coughs, fragile but still holding onto her strength.

DANIELLE

It's alright, Mum. I'll figure it out...
I just—

Her voice softens, almost to herself.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
Remember when we used to—

FADE OUT.

EXT. CARE HOME - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Danielle steps out into the cold air, still carrying the weight of the conversation with her mum. She pulls her coat tighter around her.

She sees Dennis, the carer, who leans against the wall, cigarette in his mouth.

He raises his voice to get her attention.

DENNIS
Well, if it isn't the devoted daughter. In there again, eh? You'll wear the carpet out at this rate.

Danielle forces a polite half-smile, trying to sidestep him.

DANIELLE
Just visiting my mum.

He pushes himself up off the wall.

DENNIS
Mhm. Your mum's a lucky one. Most don't get half the attention. Not that she's got much to look forward to, eh?

He laughs at his own remark — dry, mean-spirited. Danielle stiffens.

DANIELLE
(quiet, controlled)
You don't need to talk about her like that.

DENNIS
Hey, I'm just saying. End of the day, I do the dirty work. You get to play the good daughter. You'd be surprised what I know about the people in there. What they say when no one's listening.

He exhales smoke deliberately close to her face. Danielle fights the urge to react, instead pushes past him.

DANIELLE
Have a nice day, Dennis.

He smirks to himself.

DENNIS
Always do.

Danielle walks away quickly, her jaw tight, shaking off the encounter.

INT. PRIVATE JET - MORNING

The jet dips through clouds, descending toward the UK.

Mark slouches in his seat. For once, he looks worn - no charm, no smirk.

MARK
Can we just land already?

The HOSTESS appears with a drink.

HOSTESS
Your drink, sir.

A sudden bump. The drink sloshes onto Mark's shirt.

MARK
For fuck's sake, are you thick?!

The hostess freezes, stung.

Mark's eyes rake over her - badge, uniform, face - filing her away.

She turns quickly and hurries down the aisle.

Simon calls after her.

SIMON
Sorry!

He turns back to Mark, bewildered.

SIMON (CONT'D)
What the hell was that? Since when do you bite heads off? You crushed it over there. Big bonuses coming, guaranteed.

MARK

"One week," he said. It's almost been nine bloody days. I've got things to deal with.

Mark pushes up from his seat, blotting at his shirt-

PILOT (V.O.)

Ladies and gentlemen, please take your seats.

We're beginning our final approach.

INT. MARK'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mark slips the key into the lock and shuts the door behind him.

The house feels... wrong. The usual serene, has been replaced.

He steps onto a child's toy by the door.

SQUEAK.

The sound echoes unnaturally, bouncing off the walls.

Mark freezes. Eyes scan the entrance. The room is subtly askew - a chair nudged toward the door, mail scattered across the floor, a glass of water left half-full on the table.

He moves forward toward the kitchen, glancing at the door behind the stairs. Each step slow and deliberate. The floor creaks beneath him. The smell of the bin has replaced the warm scent of bread.

A faint footstep behind him. He spins, heart racing. Nothing.

On the kitchen counter, a photo frame lies face down. Mark hesitates, then flips it over. The image is a family: Sarah, the kids and another man.

A THUD from behind.

Mark turns violently.

Sarah stands there. No apron. Not polished. She blinks at him, confused, as if she doesn't quite recognize him at all.

SARAH

What's going on?

Mark pauses and stares at her.

MARK

I... it's me. Mark. I live here...

Sarah takes a cautious step back, eyes narrowing. Her voice trembles, but it's firm.

SARAH

No. You're... I don't know who you are.
That's not... you're not my Mark.

Mark glances at the photo again. The room feels smaller, closing in.

MARK

I will be.

A wry smile crosses his face.

Sarah panicked as if she recognizes him from something more sinister.

SARAH

GET OUT! GET OUT OF MY HOUSE! You're
not my Mark!

Mark shoves past her toward the door beneath the stairs, knocking her to the ground. She scrambles up, panicked, screaming, and follows him. But the door slams shut before she can reach it.

Sarah pounds the door, kicking and shouting.

SARAH (CONT'D)

You're not my Mark! Where's my Mark!?

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

The sounds of Sarah pounding the door continues but fades as Mark descends into the basement and sits on the chair facing the wall.

Mark closes his eyes and tries to focus in.

The breathing from the wall loud and broken, raspy as if in need of life.

MARK

(muttering to himself)
Not even forty-eight hours gone and
you let all this work fall apart!?
This is my life... my perfect life.

The banging at the door intensifies, shaking the entire basement.

Mark takes a deep breath.

MARK (CONT'D)
The air hostess this morning's flight,
Eilidh 6:30 am Vanguard Aviation
Edinburgh to India.

He braces himself for the familiar reward.

Nothing.

The pounding at the door continues, relentlessly.

Mark freezes, as if hearing a voice only he can hear.

MARK (CONT'D)
Not enough? Not enough!? After
everything... after her... after them... my
loss!?
I won't lose another. I'll keep
this life. No more grief, no more
pain. I can't have them back... I'll
keep the perfect life. I won't go
back to nothing.

Mark pauses for a moment, eyes narrowing in focus.

MARK (CONT'D)
I'll bring in another. They can
help. They'll make up for it.
They'll make up for my mistakes.
Please.

FLASHES - Danielle and her mum sitting in the care home,
reminiscing about good times.

Mark exhales, relieved, as though the voice has accepted his
terms.

MARK (CONT'D)
Deandre. Murrayside Care Home. Room
2B.

A slow, twisted smile spreads across his face. The banging in
the basement stops. The familiar, sickly sense of nothing but
happiness washes over him.

Mark closes his eyes.

Exhaustion and relief mingling in his features.

Hours later, he wakes. Slowly, deliberately, he stands from the chair and heads back up the stairs, the house eerily silent.

INT. MARKS HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The floor is spotless. Mail neatly stacked. The half-full glass on the table is gone.

The familiar scent of a clean, porcelain-perfect home fills the air.

Sarah moves around the kitchen, humming softly to herself, apron back in place. Everything looks perfect.

Mark enters the kitchen.

SARAH

My darling, you're back. How was the trip?

She looks at him with warm affection, every gesture and glance filled with love. Nothing on the surface hints at the twisted reality lurking beneath.

Mark steps forward, kisses her gently on the forehead.

MARK

It's good to be home.

He scans the room. The photo is gone.

INT. CARE HOME - MORNING

Danielle stuffs clothes into a black bin bag, bundling them together without care.

She sits on the bed, eyes fixed on the wall ahead.

Silence.

The white wall fills the frame – stark, blank. It carries the same weight as the wall Mark sits against in the basement, only here it's white.

She lets out a slow sigh.

Beside her on the bed lies her mum's gown. She lifts it, and a Polaroid slips out.

A picture of her mum, her dad, and a young Danielle.

Her fingers trace the edge of the photo. For a moment, her jaw softens, her eyes misting as a memory flickers behind them. She blinks, swallowing it down. She places the photo in her pocket.

She hears footsteps coming past the door.

DENNIS V.O.

2B will be back in use tomorrow... it's about time that one died.

Danielle's jaw tightens. She glares at the door, fury simmering behind her eyes, ready to snap.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - AFTERNOON

The same coffee shop Mark visits near his office.

A HELP WANTED sign hangs in the door.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Mark and Danielle sit across from each other, each with a coffee.

Danielle looks tired, worn down, but dressed in business attire that seems meant to impress—perfectly pressed, precise. Her hands sit on the table.

Mark is back to his usual collected self, a wry smile tugging at his lips. He sips his coffee, legs crossed, relaxed, the picture of casual confidence.

MARK

I was sorry to hear about your mum, Danielle. I'm glad you still wanted to connect.

DANIELLE

Thanks, it's been hard. I'm not sure what to do with myself.

She pauses, clearly upset, weighing her next words.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

Your tank metaphor has been on my mind a lot recently. Especially when things were bad there with mum.

You know, at the minute I don't want others to be happy, which is a first. I don't feel any happiness for them either.

(MORE)

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

One of my friends got a new job.
The other is on a cruise with her
mum to the Caribbean. I mean fuck
off. Just fuck off. You know?

Mark doesn't respond and Danielle doesn't really wait for a response anyway.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

Here I am. Just starting out. No job,
no mum, no dad... and this constant
sinking feeling in my gut that I'm on
my own. Completely on my own.

She looks Mark in the eye.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

I clearly never got in the tank if
there was a choice before.

She lifts her coffee with both hands, brings it to her lips,
then sets it back down.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

And what might have been... that's the
kicker. A whole different life, based
on a different outcome, a different
test result—positive or negative. Life
or death. A good life or a shit one.

She shifts into a formal, clinical tone, mimicking a doctor:

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

Congratulations, Mr. Bryce. Your tumor
has responded positively to treatment.
I'm sorry, Mr. Bryce... it's spreading
aggressively. There's nothing we can
do. You won't see your daughter
graduate.

Back to her normal voice:

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

All of it changing on a phone call,
your whole life changed in a phone
call. Watching the ones you love have
their heads sit heavy in their hands,
faces grey, color drained. Broken. All
off a result that could have gone the
other way.

She pauses, trying to collect herself, but her gaze hardens as a thought strikes.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

And how come good people go... like
mum. But other rats, like the carer
at the home, get to keep going? How
is that fair? How does that work?

She takes another moment, drawing a shaky breath, trying to steady herself.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

Sorry... that's not why I wanted to
connect. I needed to ask if there's
anything you can do, or any
references you could write to help
me get another job.

MARK

Of course. Anything you need.

That familiar smile tugs at the corner of his mouth—subtle, endearing, disarming... and perfectly predatory. Another person broken by grief, ready for him to manipulate while others pay the price.

MARK (CONT'D)

You know I'm no stranger to grief,
Danielle.

Danielle stares at him, empty, drained after bearing her grief—but curious what he'll say next. She wipes at the tears pooled in her eyes.

MARK (CONT'D)

And they say misery loves company.

He leans forward, measuring how far she might let him in.

Danielle doesn't notice the edge to his gaze. She just blinks, swallowing, trying to collect herself, still raw and exposed.

MARK (CONT'D)

I had a family before Sarah and the
kids. I grew up poor... My parents died
when I was young. Just like you.
Younger, even.

He leans back slightly, eyes flicking past her as if recalling old pain, voice tightening.

MARK (CONT'D)

I was raised by my alcoholic uncle.
My family... they were taken from me.

His hands clench briefly around his coffee cup.

My parents... taken from me. My life...

He lets the silence hang for a beat, letting her absorb it. The faint twitch of a smile at the corner of his mouth hints at something more—an edge beneath the grief, as if he's testing how much of her vulnerability he can draw in.

MARK (CONT'D)

But I found a way to move forward.

His gaze sharpens, measuring her reaction.

MARK (CONT'D)

You said it yourself—who cares about anyone else's happiness? Why should they be happy when they're worse than you? You deserve better. We deserve better.

He leans in again, slightly more, voice soft but insistent.

MARK (CONT'D)

You don't deserve this... not while some "caregiver" gets to live his happy life after you've lost your mum... your dad.

Danielle shifts in her seat, grief-stricken but intrigued, wary. Her fingers tighten around her coffee cup, eyes locked on him, absorbing every word.

MARK (CONT'D)

We both know life's not fair. Take two people. One eats clean, plays by the rules, loves his family. The other spends every night in the pub—overweight, careless, undeserving of his kids. Yet one dies in his early fifties, the other lives into his late seventies. Where's the fairness in that? What's the point in following the rules?

Marks sits back a little.

MARK (CONT'D)

Now imagine this. A button sits in front of you on the table. Press it, and somewhere in the world, someone guilty of atrocious crimes dies. And when they do? Your life changes.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

You'd have fame. Fortune if you wanted it.

You'll never get sick.

Your parents, your child—they'll live long, healthy lives.

All of you, gone peacefully in old age.

One life. And not even a life that deserves saving traded for everything you love.

Would you press it?

BEAT

MARK (CONT'D)

I know I would.

Danielle looks up at Mark, tears drying in her eyes.

DANIELLE

(quietly)

I'd probably press it too.

Mark leans forward, a flicker of excitement breaking through.

He's starting to enjoy this now.

MARK

What if you couldn't guarantee it was someone guilty of atrocious crimes?

What if it was just... someone. No connection to you. No difference to your life.

You'd never even know who it was. Would you press it then?

DANIELLE

That's... different.

She looks down at her hands, twisting her fingers together.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

If it wasn't some monster... if it was just anyone...

(quietly)

I don't know.

She doesn't believe herself. She looks back up at Mark, searching his face.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
But if it meant my future child never
suffered?
I think I'd still press it.

Mark looks relieved but studies her for a moment. The smile still spreading across his face.

MARK
That's it. That's honesty.

He chuckles under his breath, almost savoring her confession.

MARK (CONT'D)
Most people lie to themselves. Pretend
they're better than that.
But you? You'd press it.

Eyes gleaming now.

MARK (CONT'D)
And that makes you just like me.

Danielle smiles enjoying being compared to him.

MARK (CONT'D)
Alright. Let's take it further.

Elbows on the table, eyes locked on Danielle, pupils sharp, assessing.

MARK (CONT'D)

What if it wasn't just a stranger...

But someone of your choosing. Not
too obvious—so no one notices.

A stranger, still.

But someone you know you're better
than.

Someone who doesn't deserve the
life they have.

He sits back slowly, letting the weight of his words hang, fingers drumming lightly on the table.

The same reward.

Your child still lives.

Your parents still live.

You still live.

You can have anything
eventually—fortune and fame.

Happily ever after.

Would you press it then...?

Or is the weight too much?

Danielle shifts in her seat, shoulders tense, lips pressed tight, eyes narrowing with suspicion.

DANIELLE

Who decides they're not deserving...
and that I'm better than them?

MARK

You... and let's say the button you're
pressing—a partnership.

He picks up his coffee and takes a sip.

MARK (CONT'D)

Think of the person. Press the
button. If it's accepted, you'll
feel the reward.

You'll see it in your life.

DANIELLE

(hesitant)

A partnership...?

She glances down at the table, twisting her fingers, tapping one foot rapidly.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
So... I choose someone, press it...
And get everything I want?

Her gaze locks onto Mark's, searching for truth, doubt flickering across her face.

Her breathing quickens slightly.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
And no one else is hurt...
Or does it not matter?

MARK
It matters... only to you.

He taps the table rhythmically, eyes never leaving hers, letting the tension suffocate the space between them.

MARK (CONT'D)
The rest of the world? They'll
never know. All that matters is
what you gain and what you know.

He looks at her, as if the answer is obvious.

MARK (CONT'D)
Wouldn't you take it... if it meant
protecting everyone you love?
Having anything you wanted. An easy
trade off.

DANIELLE
I suppose I would.

Her eyes flick down, lips parting slightly as she swallows hard.

MARK
I think I can help with that.

Mark tilts his head, voice calm, unsettlingly steady.

DANIELLE
Help with what?

MARK
All of it. And don't worry about the
new job—that'll come with this.

BEAT

MARK (CONT'D)
Meet me tomorrow night. I have
something to show you. Bring shoes you
don't mind ruining.

He leans in slightly.

MARK (CONT'D)
We'll be in the woods.

Danielle exhales, her fingers unclenching. A flicker of
anticipation—or fear—crosses her face. She nods.

Mark rises, pushing in his chair.

MARK (CONT'D)
I need to get back to work. I've got a
call with the new hires.
This is a good thing. You deserve
better—you should have better.

He starts toward the door, then glances back.

MARK (CONT'D)
All you'll have to do is press the
button.

A wry smile spreads across his face.

He exits the coffee shop. The camera lingers on the door, the
HELP WANTED sign filling the frame.

FLASHBACK - CEMETERY - DAY

Rain falls. A freshly covered grave.

Young Mark stands beside his Uncle. Both wear dark coats – but
Mark's is worn and ill-fitting. His uncle's face is stricken
with grief, a half-empty bottle of whiskey clutched tightly in
his hand.

Mark's eyes drift down to the headstone.

ON HEADSTONE:

Here rest Sarah, David and Lila Carter

Together in eternity

Forever in our Husband & Fathers heart

The uncle tips the bottle back, then wipes his mouth with the
back of his hand. He looks at Mark with hollow eyes.

UNCLE

(hoarse)

We don't always get what we deserve,
Mark. But if you want something bad
enough... you take it. You don't want to
end up like me, like them.

Mark stares at the inscription, unmoving, rain streaking down
his face.

The uncle takes another swig of whiskey.

UNCLE (CONT'D)

Do whatever you need to do. Whatever
you can live with.

BACK TO PRESENT

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - AFTERNOON

UNCLE (V.O.)

Do whatever you need to do. Whatever
you can live with.

Mark walks down the street, his face calm, his stride
deliberate.

INT. OFFICE CORRIDOR - AFTERNOON

Fluorescent lights buzz overhead, cold and sterile.

Mark and Simon walk side by side, low voices trading notes on
the upcoming meeting for the new employees.

SIMON

We'll keep it simple. Orientation,
contracts, quick Q&A. We won't
overcomplicate it.

Mark nods, but his mind elsewhere.

MARK

Right. Let's just get this nonsense
over with.

Ahead, the meeting room door. Voices spill out - muffled, then
clearer as they draw near.

NEW HIRE ONE (V.O.)

What do you think?

They slow. Mark's expression doesn't change.

NEW HIRE TWO (V.O.)
You're lucky you've had Simon.
We've been stuck with weird Mark.

Ask him a yes or no question and
he'll take you to the kitchen for
half an hour's conversation.

Last review he went on about *Man's
Search for Meaning* for most of it.

He's a total weirdo.

And what's with that smile?
Always...weird.

Simon and Mark exchange a look. Simon gives an awkward smile.
Mark's face stays unreadable.

They knock, then step inside.

INT. MEETING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Five graduates sit around a table in a small office.

A large TV hangs on the wall. Laptops open. Coffee cups half-
full.

The chatter dies as Simon and Mark step in.

Awkward silence. Everyone looks up.

SIMON
Hello everyone. Thanks for being here
on time.

He sets down a laptop, smiling at the graduates.

Mark lingers by the door for a beat longer than necessary.

His wry smile on his face as he looks over the graduates in the
room.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Today's simple. Orientation,
contracts, a quick Q&A. Nothing heavy.
The real work starts next week.

A couple of the graduates relax, smiling faintly.

MARK
Before we begin... who thinks work
should mean something?

The question hangs for a moment. All the graduates raise their hands.

MARK (CONT'D)

Excellent! We wouldn't want to be wasting your time now would we. Or for you to be wasting ours. There's plenty of those who didn't make the cut that would be dying to be here. A sense of purpose is a magical thing. Without it you can feel lost, but with it, with it you get direction.

SIMON

And that's what today is about, partially. Helping you find yours, and showing you how you fit into the new team.

Simon and Mark smile at each other. Simon clicks the TV remote.

A slide lights up: **WELCOME NEW HIRES.**

The room exhales – relieved.

INT. MARKS HOUSE – EVENING

The house glows warm. Content.

Oliver and Lucy sit at the kitchen table, crayons scratching on paper.

Sarah, in her apron, stirs a pot of freshly cooked soup.

The place is immaculate. Not a thing out of place.

A family snapshot – replayed again and again. Every detail eerily the same as before.

SARAH

Welcome home, darling. How was your day?

MARK

Oh, painless enough.

A wry smile crosses his face. The kids spring up from their chairs.

KIDS

Daddy!

They rush over and hug him together.

MARK

Hello, sluggers. Why don't you show me those drawings of yours?

Sarah kisses his cheek then hands him a wooden spoon from the pot.

SARAH

Thoughts?

Mark tastes the soup.

MARK

Perfect. Just like always.

Sarah crosses to the counter, pours him a whisky, and returns with the glass.

Mark's hand is already waiting, outstretched – as if he knew the moment was coming.

SARAH

Correct.

They share a smile.

The family sits at the table. Laughter and chatter fill the room.

FADE TO BLACK

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Mark sits in the chair.

His eyes lock on the wall – the ouroboros painted there, a serpent devouring its own tail. Eternal beginning. Eternal end.

Then the familiar sound of breathing coming from the wall. Steady. This time... healthy.

The ouroboros stares back at Mark from the wall. The breathing of the room is steady, alive.

A voice slips into the silence – smooth, dark.

THE WALL (V.O.)

Tomorrow night. You'll bring her.

Mark doesn't flinch.

MARK

Danielle's ready. She just needs... a push.

THE WALL (V.O.)

She'll follow?

A faint smile touches Mark's lips.

MARK

She wants more than what she's been dealt.

We can give her that.

She'll learn – what better looks like.

THE WALL (V.O.)

And she'll make the offer?

Mark's eyes linger on the ouroboros, unblinking.

MARK

Yes.

Mark exhales – relief, or devotion.

MARK (CONT'D)

And I'll get more?
This life, this family?

He pauses to himself reflecting.

MARK (CONT'D)

I still feel the pain.
It still comes.

THE WALL (V.O.)

It will end.

No more grief.

No more struggle.

Mark exhales, trembling. Relief – or surrender.

MARK

I need to make space. The mocker today, the new one. The girl who spoke my name with poison.

The silence stretches. Then the voice again, closer now.

THE WALL (V.O.)
An offering? Accepted.

Mark shudders. That familiar liquid happiness floods his veins.
Safe. Free.

The ouroboros ceases its glow.

TITLE SATURDAY NIGHT.

EXT. THE WOODS - NIGHT.

Danielle and Mark move cautiously through a dense, shadowed forest. Towering trees blot out most of the sky, letting only thin slivers of moonlight pierce the darkness.

The air is damp, earthy, smelling of moss and wet leaves. Nocturnal animals cry out in the distance—an owl hoots, something scurries through underbrush.

Leaves rustle and brittle branches snap under their feet with every careful step. A sudden gust shakes the trees, sending a cascade of dead leaves down around them.

Shadows twist and shift in the corners of their vision. Every sound feels magnified—heartbeats, footsteps, whispers of wind.

Mark leads Danielle to a wall cloaked in thick ivy. A massive tree stands directly in front of it, its gnarled roots twisting into the earth, partially obscuring whatever lies beyond.

DANIELLE
Where are we?

MARK
How long have we known each other
Danielle?

DANIELLE
Over two years.

MARK
Well this...this... is where I came to
take my own life.

He gestures toward the thick limb stretching over the ivy.

Danielle freezes, stunned, silent, listening intently.

MARK (CONT'D)

See that branch? I didn't have a way forward... not after I lost my wife, my kids. Nights spent in hospitals, in the hospice... there was nothing left but a life I didn't deserve. No path forward, nothing like the way I can show you.
So I came here... and I hung myself from that branch, with my belt.

FLASHBACK - THE WOODS - NIGHT

A young Mark stands beneath the gnarled tree, soaked, clothes torn and damp. A frayed piece of rope hangs loosely around his waist, his belt, a poor substitute.

He climbs carefully, the wood slick under his fingers. He ties a crude knot in the rope, looping the other end into a makeshift noose. His breaths are shallow, trembling.

He slips the loop over his neck, pausing to steady himself. Hesitation lingers—he contemplates stepping off. As he shifts to sit on the branch, his footing gives way. The rope bites into his skin. He kicks frantically, panic etched across his face, as the makeshift belt snaps under his weight.

Mark plummets to the ground, scraping across the ivy. Pain shoots through his body, but something catches his eye—the ivy peels away in chunks, revealing a small cavity carved into the rock, hidden and shadowed.

On the back wall, a faint light glows—the ouroboros, the serpent devouring its own tail, forming a perfect, unbroken circle.

Mark lies on the ground, chest heaving, staring at the glowing symbol. In that small, hidden space, a flicker of possibility—the first glimmer of a way forward—sparks in his eyes.

BACK TO PRESENT - THE WOODS - NIGHT

Danielle's eyes widen. She glances from the branch to Mark, the weight of his confession sinking in.

MARK

Now.. to answer your question. Where are we? We are at the beginning of solving all your problems. I've told you things I've never told a living soul.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

Tell me about this care home worker
who treated your mother so
terribly.

Danielle hesitates, her voice quieter as she cautiously begins
to speak.

DANIELLE

He ran her care with calloused hands.
Treated her like she was nothing—just
for getting older, for getting sick.

Danielle tightens her jaw, recalling all the times she held
back, biting her tongue instead of speaking up.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

(mocking)

"Why, she won't eat it."

(normal voice, bitter)

I wish I'd stood up for her more... Told
him what a prick he is.
He doesn't deserve to think he can
live his life, treat people like
that, with no consequences.

MARK

He doesn't. To me, he sounds like he
doesn't deserve the life he has.
And you... you've lost so much. Your
mum deserved better. You deserve
better.

Danielle's face tightens, grief and pain still visible in her
eyes.

MARK (CONT'D)

So... tell me, Danielle. If it came down
to it... if pressing that button could
change your life, would you do it? No
more grief.

Danielle swallows hard, her hands curling into fists.

DANIELLE

I... I don't know if I could.

MARK

Honesty, Danielle. Come on... we're past
pretending.

That's why we're here. You'll see
what it really takes.

Mark places his hand on the wall, thick with moss and ivy.

The surface feels strangely warm under his fingers, almost pulsing.

A gust of wind rustles through the trees, carrying a low whisper of movement from deep within the forest.

Mark jerks his head toward the sound, alert, eyes scanning the shadows as if something—or someone—is watching.

The wry smile spreads across his face, sharp and knowing, as if he already anticipates the choice Danielle is about to make.

Danielle watches him nervously, taking a hesitant step closer to the wall. Every snapping twig and rustling leaf seems amplified in the darkness, pressing on her chest.

MARK (CONT'D)

It's simple, Danielle. One choice.
That's all it takes.

Take from someone who doesn't
deserve it... and give it to someone
who does—you.

With deliberate calm, Mark sweeps aside the ivy, revealing a hidden cavity in the rock. Concealed. Forgotten. Waiting.

Danielle's eyes widen, her breath catching as the shadows inside seem to pulse with possibility... and danger.

INT. THE CAVE - CONTINUOUS

Danielle steps closer to the small, shadowed space, fingers brushing the damp rock. On the wall facing her is the same small carved ouroboros symbol.

Mark watches her, calm, almost reverent, a wry smile playing across his face.

MARK

Don't overthink it. Everything
changes.

Danielle's chest tightens. Images flash—her mother's weakness, the nurse's cruelty, years of silence caged in her throat.

She glances at Mark, searching his face for hesitation, for doubt... finds none.

DANIELLE

(whispering)
What is this?

A low gust of wind rattles the ivy. Danielle's hand hovers over the small ouroboros etched onto the cave wall.

Her chest tightens. Every fiber of her being screams caution... and desire.

Mark's voice, soft but compelling.

MARK (V.O.)
No more pain, no more grief.
Everything you deserve.

The cave plunges into darkness around Danielle. The symbol begins to glow faintly, pulsing against the rock.

She focuses on it. Silence stretches, heavy and suffocating.

The ouroboros brightens, pulse syncing with her heartbeat.

Then—breath. From within the wall. Broken, ragged, human.

DANIELLE'S VISION - THE CAVE

The serpent coils shimmer, jaws devouring its tail. The shadows stretch, bleeding into the stone... into her.

FLASHES - Her future self: two kids and a husband. Healthy. Laughing. A big house. Fortune. Warmth.

The vision fractures.

FLASHES - Danielle alone in her cramped apartment. Her mum, lifeless in bed. Danielle herself, older, slumped in the same bed, alone.

The ouroboros blazes brighter - The vision flips back. Family. Laughter. Security. Warmth.

FLASHES - An image of Danielle, grey-haired but surrounded by her children - All of them alive. All of them well.

The glow pulses with her heartbeat, pulling her toward it.

A tear streaks down Danielle's face.

THE WALL (V.O.)
All you have to do... is offer.

The ouroboros burns white-hot, devouring vision after vision - joy, grief, desire, terror—until Danielle's face is bathed in its searing light.

Her lips part.

DANIELLES MUM (V.O.)
You'll know what's right when it
comes.

BEAT

Danielle shakes, torn apart by the weight of the choice.

DANIELLE
(whispers, breaking)
The Care Home Worker...Dennis Logan,
Murrayside Care Home.

Silence.

Danielle trembles, waiting—eyes locked on the burning serpent—

THE WALL
AN OFFER...ACCEPTED

Danielle is consumed. Ecstasy surges through her veins.

Her lips curl into a smile as liquid happiness floods her body.

One life... for another.

BACK TO WOODS

The glow dies. Darkness swallows the walls.

DANIELLE'S MUM (V.O.)
(faint)
You always loved helping people, don't
forget that...

Danielle now stands outside. The ivy has grown back, covering
the wall as if nothing had ever been there.

She stares at it, unsure if what just happened was real.

MARK
Welcome back Danielle.

Mark steps into view, a broad smile on his face — as if he too
has been rewarded.

Danielle turns to him. Tired. Conflicted. But with a smile of
her own.

Her face says everything — shock, dread, and the confusion as to
what just happened.

DANIELLE
What... what did I do?
What happens now?

MARK
You made a decision to start the life
you deserve.
Soon, I'll show you what's next.

Danielle's smile falters, her eyes clouding with uncertainty.

MARK (CONT'D)
I knew you had it in you. People like
us... we have to do whatever we need to
do. Whatever we can live with.

BEAT

MARK (CONT'D)
And trust me - you'll find you can
live with a lot.

Danielle holds his gaze, wrecked, her smile trembling - trapped
between dread and the faintest flicker of something she can't
yet name.

Mark just smiles back at her. Unblinking. Certain.

The silence between them stretches... heavy, unnerving.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

A lively bar. Music thumps under the chatter and laughter of
Saturday-night drinkers.

Glasses clink. Laughter erupts from a corner.

At a booth, Dennis sits with two mates, pints of lager sweating
on the table.

He leans back, smug, mid-story-already half-drunk.

DENNIS
It's a shame she doesn't visit the
care home anymore though. Gorgeous she
was, plus you know she'd be keen for
it. Best part of my day adding more
material.

He taps his temple and mimics wanking to his mates.

His mates howl with laughter. Dennis takes another long swig,
foam clinging to his lip.

MATE #1
Christ, you are rotten, man.

DENNIS
(grinning, proud)
What? Just sayin'. She loved the
attention. Proper little tease.

He licks his teeth, smug.

MATE #1
You'd shag anything that breathes.

DENNIS
Yeah? And you wouldn't? Place is full
of old biddies—
(staggers a laugh)
—half of them would pay me for it.

MATE #1
Thank Christ my mum's dead. She'd have
spent all my inheritance.

For a moment, the table roars with laughter – but there's
something sharp and joyless under it.

Dennis basks in it anyway, grinning wide, pounding the table for
effect.

The barman drops off three fresh pints. The noise dips – a lull
in the night.

MATE #2
How is your dad Den?

Dennis stares into his pint for a beat, the grin slipping.

DENNIS
Like I've already buried him.

His mates fall quiet, shifting in their seats. Dennis downs half
his pint in one gulp, wiping his mouth hard.

DENNIS (CONT'D)
Anyway. Bollocks to that. No point
crying over what you can't change.

The heaviness lingers – until Dennis shakes it off, forcing a
grin.

DENNIS (CONT'D)
There's a new girl they got in the
home. Blondie.

He starts to smirk.

DENNIS (CONT'D)
Should've seen her bending over the
meds trolley. Had me thinking I might
sign myself in early.

His grin grows wider.

DENNIS (CONT'D)
Wouldn't even need Viagra.

His mates burst into laughter, clinking pints. The rowdy
noise swells back around them.

Dennis laughs with them – but it doesn't quite reach his
eyes.

They sink deeper into the booth.

The pints shrink. Another round of laughter bursts—then dies
just as quickly.

The jukebox changes track. Glasses clink.

Another lull.

DENNIS (CONT'D)
Right, I'm off. Early start
tomorrow.

His mates boo, calling him soft. Dennis gives them the middle
finger with a laugh and heads for the door.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE - NIGHT

The door swings shut behind him, muting the roar of music and
laughter.

Cool night air hits his face. Dennis zips his jacket, swaggering
down the pavement.

He fumbles with his phone, not looking up—when he slams
shoulder-first into a PASSERBY.

DENNIS
Oi! Easy lads.

Two men stand back to him. Hoodies on. One drawn tight, the
other hanging loose.

The one keeps a hand buried deep in his pocket.

PASSERBY
Now don't be smart. Say sorry.

His voice is low, confident. Menacing.

DENNIS
FUCK YOUR SORRY.

Dennis squares his shoulders, puffing himself up, drunk and cocky and pushes into the passerby.

In a flash, the Passerby grips the back of Dennis's neck— yanks him forward— and buries a blade into his stomach.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five savage thrusts.

Dennis gasps, choking, his body folding.

The Passerby lets him drop to the pavement. They turn and run.

He stares up at the night sky — eyes wide, terrified — as the light drains from them.

The street is silent now, save for the faint echo of revelers inside.

INT. DANIELLE'S FLAT - MORNING

A modest one-bedroom ground-floor flat. Outside the window, the faint shuffle of commuters passing by. The living room blends into the kitchen — cramped, but orderly.

On the sofa, Danielle sits still, eyes distant, lost in the aftermath of the night in the woods.

Her phone RINGS on the coffee table.

On the screen: UNKNOWN.

She hesitates then answers.

DANIELLE
Hello?

SIMON (V.O.)
Hi Danielle, it's Simon Reeves, one of the senior managers from your graduate programme...

DANIELLE
Oh, hi Simon.

SIMON (V.O.)

We've had a space open up for our new hires, and we'd like to offer it to you.

I know it's short notice, but if you want it, it's yours.

Danielle exhales, shoulders loosening.

A flicker of relief flashes across her face – impossible to hide.

DANIELLE

Oh wow... I don't know what to say. What's changed?

SIMON (V.O.)

Full transparency with you Danielle we've had issues with one of the new hires turning up to work and responding to calls. The spot's gone back to the market.

DANIELLE

Oh... em... yes... yes, I'll take it.

SIMON (V.O.)

Excellent. If you can come along to the office this week. I can cover your onboarding. Let me know. Congratulations.

DANIELLE

Thanks, Simon.

SIMON (V.O.)

I'll let you get back to your day. See you shortly and congratulations again.

Danielle sits with a smile on her face, in disbelief at what has just happened.

She takes out her phone and sends a text message to Mark.

Seconds later a response comes through.

ON SCREEN – PHONE TEXT

MARK: Excellent news, congratulations dinner at ours tonight?

ON SCREEN - PHONE TEXT

Danielle: Sounds great.

ON SCREEN - PHONE TEXT

Mark: Looks like things are looking up, saw the care home's down an employee too.

A link arrives. Danielle taps it.

ON SCREEN: ARTICLE - EDINBURGH LOCAL

Knife attack outside pub - one man dead.

As quickly as Danielle's smile came from being offered the job, it vanishes.

A wave of sickness twists in her stomach.

She drops the phone onto the sofa, presses a hand to her mouth.

For a moment, the flat is silent except for the faint sound of commuters outside.

Danielle stares at the window, conflicted - then grabs her coat and keys.

EXT. CARE HOME - CONTINUOUS

A grey building under a heavy sky. Flowers wilt by the gate.

No police tape, no reporters. Life has moved on - but not for Danielle.

She approaches slowly, scanning the grounds - eyes drawn to Dennis' usual smoking spot.

Empty.

Her steps falter the closer she gets to the entrance, her relief from earlier now fully replaced by dread.

INT. CARE HOME - RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS

The reception is silent, almost too ordinary. No staff at the desk.

Danielle lingers, waiting.

Across the room, the receptionist speaks quietly with a woman and a young boy. Their voices are hushed, heavy.

Along one wall: a row of staff lockers. A few hang open – uniforms, bags, coats.

Danielle's eyes find one locker in particular: Dennis'.

Danielle lowers herself onto one of the two seats opposite the lockers. She sits there, frozen, watching.

A staff member unlocks it for the woman, murmurs a few kind words, then moves past Danielle without a glance.

The woman begins to empty the small locker. A coat. A battered lunchbox. A pair of worn trainers.

The woman pauses mid-pack, sensing eyes on her. She looks up – meeting Danielle's gaze.

For a moment, neither of them speaks.

WOMAN

Did you know him?

Danielle glances at the young boy by the woman's side, then back to her.

DANIELLE

My mum was here, he... he helped take care of her. She recently passed away.

The woman softens, her hands still on Dennis' things. She nods faintly – a small, shared grief passing between them.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

Are you his wife? I didn't realise he was married.

WOMAN

No. I'm his sister, needed to lend a hand to help organise and take care of Junior here.

She looks down at the boy.

From the locker, she pulls a small pin badge. She fastens it to his jumper. It reads: "NO REGRETS"

WOMAN (CONT'D)

This is Dennis' son.

Danielle stares at the boy (12), her relief from earlier long gone – replaced by something far heavier.

Danielle stares at the boy, her throat tight, words failing her.

DANIELLE

I'm sorry for your loss.

WOMAN

And yours.

The woman goes back to the locker, quietly going through Dennis' things.

Danielle finally stands, backing away from the seats. One last glance at Junior.

Then she turns and walks out, tears in her eyes.

EXT. CARE HOME - CONTINUOUS.

Danielle steps outside into the cold grey light. She takes a long breath, trying to steady herself, but it doesn't help.

Her eyes flick back to the building – then down to her phone in her hand.

ON SCREEN - PHONE TEXT:

Mark: Excellent news, congratulations dinner at ours tonight?

She swipes the screen dark.

Danielle pulls her coat tighter and walks away, her figure small against the looming building.

INT. MARK'S HOUSE - EVENING

By the fire, Mark sips whisky. A soft piano sonata drifts.

A knock at the door.

Mark smiles. He rises, crosses to the door, and opens it.

Danielle stands in the doorway.

MARK

Welcome, welcome. Right on time. Come on in.

He gestures her inside.

The music plays on. The silence between them grows.

Through the kitchen doorway, Sarah passes by in her apron. The gentle sound of children drawing drifts in.

DANIELLE

Impressive setup.
Is this what the sacrifice of
others will get me?

Her anger and guilt from today's news and visit to the care home is already coming to the surface.

Mark doesn't flinch. He smiles, steady.

MARK

Dinner first. Sarah's prepared a lovely meal and the kids will head up to bed shortly.

Danielle swallows her next words.

DANIELLE

Lead the way.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The table glows under warm light. Plates filled. Wine poured.

Sarah serves with practiced grace, apron on. The children chatter softly, crayons neatly aligned on their placemats.

At the head of the table, Danielle sits beside Mark.

She watches the children quietly coloring, Sarah moving back and forth from the kitchen worktops.

Everything clean. Perfect.

Mark and Danielle raise their glasses.

MARK

To new beginnings for Danielle.

Mark takes a slow sip of his wine. Danielle only touches hers to her lips, then sets it back down.

She looks around the kitchen once more – every surface gleaming, everything in its place.

Her jaw tightens.

DANIELLE

Quite the picture.

Sarah – was this all you?

Before Sarah can answer–

MARK

She can work wonders, my wife.

Can't she?

Sarah approaches, leans down, and kisses Mark on the cheek.

Danielle's eyes follow them.

DANIELLE

Are you not eating with us Sarah?

Before Sarah can answer–

MARK

Why don't you show Danielle your drawings, kids, before Mum takes you off to bed.

The children hop up, excited. They run over and hold out two large sheets of paper – bold, colorful drawings, impressive for their ages.

Danielle studies them.

DANIELLE

Impressive. Let's hope the world you inherit is as neat as these lines.

She darts her eyes up to Mark.

The children glance at each other, not quite understanding.

Danielle takes a breath and lets her shoulders drop.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

They are great pictures, you should be so proud of them.

The kids smile at her and one another then hop back up on their seats at the table.

Sarah is still pottering around the kitchen. Never quite finding the time to sit down.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

Do they get their artistic ability
from you Sarah?

Sarah pauses, caught off guard. A flicker of hesitation before she answers.

Mark watches closely, ready to smooth the moment.

SARAH

I'm...I'm not sure.

She looks to Mark for assistance or permission.

MARK

Of course they do.
Their mother has a creative flare,
don't you, darling?

Sarah nods quickly, relieved but unsure, echoing his words with a smile that doesn't quite reach her eyes.

Danielle watches the exchange, the corner of her mouth tightening.

Mark takes a sip of wine, calm.

MARK

Why don't you take the kids up now,
Sarah? It's getting late.

Sarah gathers the children, ushering them out with soft goodnights.

The sound of little footsteps fades upstairs.

Danielle and Mark left alone at the dining table.

MARK (CONT'D)

Quite the display.

DANIELLE

I could say the same to you Mark.

What is this?

She looks around the kitchen.

MARK

Are you not happy your life is already
changing for the better?

Your job back in a matter of days.

Your future back.

Danielle sits in silence. She studies him. Then her wine glass.
Then the perfect table between them.

The soft classical music continues to play.

DANIELLE

A man's dead Mark... what so I could
have my job back?

MARK

Christ, that wasn't a man, Danielle.
You said so yourself – he didn't
even deserve the life he had.

BEAT

MARK (CONT'D)

You deserved more.

I helped you get what you deserved.

This... was just the beginning.

Danielle's breath catches – guilt, anger, disbelief all flashing
across her face.

The music plays on, mockingly calm.

Tears begin to roll down her cheeks.

DANIELLE

He had a kid, Mark.

I went to the care home today.

I met his fucking kid.

Mark takes a moment to steady himself.

MARK

You did that kid a favour, Danielle.
That poor wee lad would've grown up
to pay his dad's debts – never
getting ahead, never getting out of
the spiral.

BEAT

MARK (CONT'D)

The future was not going to be kind to that boy.

But you – you can ensure it's kind to you.

Don't you want the future to be kind to you, Danielle?

Danielle sits in silence, unsettled, emotional.

The music plays on, painfully serene.

MARK (CONT'D)

Think of why you made this choice in the first place. Think of your mum's care, think of your future.

You deserved more Danielle and it's starting to come.

Start moving forward.

Danielle dries her eyes. Breath slowing.

Somewhere in Mark's words, she finds small comfort. A fragile, guilty comfort.

She looks at him – unsettled, but softening.

DANIELLE

How did you do it, Mark?
When you lost your family?

BEAT

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

I still feel the grief for my mum.
What could have been. The life I
should have had... but it's softened.

She swallows hard.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

Right now it's just layered with the
guilt of what I've done...

BEAT

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

...to that... prick.

Mark studies her – calm, steady, a hint of satisfaction in his eyes. A slight smirk.

MARK

It's like I told you before – life's
easier when you know it's all exactly
where it should be.

He looks around the room.

MARK (CONT'D)

I know exactly where it should be.

He opens his arms, gesturing around the spotless kitchen, the order, the glow.

MARK (CONT'D)

That's what this is.

Danielle follows his gesture, eyes roaming the perfection surrounding her.

She doesn't speak. Just breathes. Taking it in.

MARK (CONT'D)

Go into the office tomorrow, meet
Simon and start down your new path.

We can talk about the next steps
later, now's not the time for you.

Danielle nods faintly. Uneasy, but comforted.

The music lingers.

Mark raises his glass again. Calm. Certain.

Danielle mirrors him, lifting hers with a trembling hand.

They drink.

The music swells. The glow of the room holds steady.

FADE OUT.

INT. THE BASEMENT - EVENING

Mark sits in the chair, facing the wall.

The OUROBOROS symbol glows faintly, the wall breathing – slow, disturbingly human.

MARK

It's all in hand. I'll cover the next steps.

He pauses as if listening to a reply only he can hear.

MARK (CONT'D)

I never thought she'd go down to the home...

The chances of meeting his fucking kid...

She needs more time.

He reflects on the situation he is in.

MARK (CONT'D)

I need more time.

Mark composes himself.

MARK (CONT'D)

But I have her back on side. One more, and she will be with us forever.

The symbol in the wall glows brighter.

A voice rises – not quite human, not quite separate from the sound of the wall.

THE WALL (V.O.)

Still, now her reward is your reward.
Her loss is your loss.

The breathing deepens. The glow pulses.

MARK

I know! You don't need to remind me. I have it under control.

THE WALL (V.O.)

24 hours.

Mark lowers his head, defeated by the news.

The glow flares... then fades.

Mark jolts forward. Desperate.

MARK

Don't take them from me!
I'll do what I can!

The wall offers nothing. No glow. No sound.

Silence.

Mark's face twists. The desperation curdles into rage

MARK (CONT'D)

Answer me!

He slams his fist against the wall – once, twice, again – each strike being swallowed by the cramped basement.

MARK (CONT'D)

You don't get to shut me out!
You can't take them!

He pounds the wall until his knuckles bleed.

The wall stays silent.

He stumbles back, gasping.

Slowly, he straightens, wiping blood from his hand onto his shirt.

The mask of calm returns – but his eyes burn with barely contained rage.

He adjusts his collar. Composes himself.

EXT. PARK – MORNING

Danielle sits alone on a bench. The morning sun warms her face as she cradles a cup of tea. She's not yet dressed for work – a hoodie and trousers – but her feet are still in slippers. Her gaze lingers on the trees swaying gently in the breeze.

She closes her eyes, taking a couple of steadying breaths. It's her first day back at work.

A shadow stretches across her face.

Danielle opens her eyes.

An OLD MAN stands before her – an elderly man in his late sixties, early seventies. Grey hair, stubbled beard, like he's been on the road for a few days.

Worn walking shoes. Dirty trousers. A fleece with a small hole.

A rucksack hangs on his back, a snood loose around his neck.

Despite his rough appearance, his kind eyes and gentle smile soften him.

OLD MAN

Do you mind if I sit here? I could
do with a quick rest.

DANIELLE

Yes of course, I was just finishing
up anyway.

OLD MAN

Thank you. Please don't feel you
have to leave on my account. I
won't be long, just need to rest my
legs.

Slowly he sits himself down on the bench next to Danielle.

DANIELLE

Have you far to go?

OLD MAN

Lands end To John O'Grotes, my
dear.

DANIELLE

Wow. You look to be traveling
awfully light, are you not?

OLD MAN

Only what I need.

He smiles at Danielle, pats his backpack, then pulls out a
nearly empty water bottle and drains the last drops.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Is there a fountain in this park I
can use?

He gestures to his water bottle. Danielle laughs.

DANIELLE

Not here, I'm afraid. Not quite the
area for water fountains.

The Old Man looks around, taking in the greenery.

OLD MAN

A lovely park though and on a
lovely morning.

Danielle smiles.

DANIELLE

I can fill it up for you if you
like. I'm not far from here.

She gestures down to her slippers.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

I'll come back in a couple minutes
with it for you.

OLD MAN

Oh that would be wonderful my dear.
Thank you.

Danielle takes the bottle, stands, and walks a few paces
away. She pauses and turns back.

DANIELLE

Would you like a cup of tea? I can
bring one of those too.

OLD MAN

Oh lovely, I would love a cup of
tea.

DANIELLE

How do you take it?

OLD MAN

Just a drop of milk, thank you.

Danielle nods with a small smile, then turns and walks off
across the park.

The Old Man settles back on the bench. He rubs his knees, flexes
his legs, then looks up, following the birds darting between the
trees.

A tune slips from him – something old, half-forgotten,
clearly from his youth. He hums it with absent joy, like a
man keeping company with himself.

From his rucksack he produces a pair of reading glasses,
balanced delicately on the end of his nose. He digs deeper,
retrieving a small notebook, its cover softened by years of use.

He opens it carefully, removes a small photo and begins to
read, his finger tracing each line as he murmurs the words
under his breath.

Danielle returns, a small tray in her hands – the water
bottle, a pot of tea and some pieces of toast.

DANIELLE

Here you go.

The Old Man looks up, removes his glasses, carefully folds them into their case, and sets his notebook aside.

OLD MAN

Oh my dear how wonderful. That's a kindness.

He smiles up at Danielle.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

You can always rely on the kindness of strangers. That's one of my travel rules you know.

He grins as though he's just shared a great secret.

Danielle smiles, something soft shifting inside her. For the first time in days, she feels warm.

DANIELLE

I thought you might be hungry, so I've brought some toast too.

OLD MAN

Wonderful.

Danielle places the tray over his lap and sits down beside him, intrigued.

DANIELLE

What are some of your other travel rules?

The old man takes a piece of toast and bites into it.

OLD MAN

Always walk forwards – that's a good one. One foot in front of the other, you know. Served me well in life.

He chuckles to himself, brushing a few crumbs from his top.

Danielle reaches for the teapot, steady hands pouring a strong, steaming cup. She passes it to him with a faint smile.

The Old Man accepts it reverently, as though it's far more than just tea.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Ahh, perfect. Another travel rule –
never say no to a good cup of tea.

DANIELLE

How long have you been walking for?

The Old Man looks thoughtful for a moment, then his eyes
twinkle.

OLD MAN

Since I was about two, I think.

Danielle laughs softly. She leans back on the bench, relaxing
into the moment – enjoying the company of someone so bright,
so oddly positive.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

What does a lovely kind woman like
yourself do for a living?

DANIELLE

It's actually my first day back
today. A long story but a job at a
large corporation.

The Old Man nods, sipping his tea with quiet thoughtfulness.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

What did you do?

OLD MAN

I was a teacher. I loved it. Every
moment of it, even the bad ones.
The students too.

He leans closer to Danielle.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Even the bad ones.

DANIELLE

You did?

OLD MAN

Well of course!

He reaches for another piece of toast, takes a hearty bite,
and speaks through a scatter of crumbs.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Once you reach my age you see it
all for what it is. You have the
time. The ups the downs.

(MORE)

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Without the bad students I'd have
never met my wife.

He chews, swallows, then gestures with the toast.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

She was the counsellor you see, or
had that responsibility back then.

Danielle chuckles, watching more crumbs tumble down his
fleece.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

I'm doing this walk for her and
every step she's with me.

He smiles and pats the notebook beside him and sets the crust of
toast back on the tray, his hands resting quietly in his lap.
For a moment, his eyes wander upward - to the birds, the sky,
the morning light filtering through the trees.

Danielle watches him, moved. For a moment, the eccentric old
traveler feels like the wisest, most human soul she's ever met.

Then her face falls - the past few days and weeks catching up
with her. She lowers her gaze, staring down at her hands.

DANIELLE

Do you ever wish you could have
changed it?

OLD MAN

Life?

DANIELLE

Yeah.

OLD MAN

Oh no. That's a young persons game.

He chuckles, shaking his head.

No more "I want to change X to have
Y"... or "once I have Z, then I'll be
A-B-C-D-E-F-G."

He takes another sip of tea. Danielle just studies him,
silently absorbing every word.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Life's what you make it you know?
You get what you get, and you have
to make the most of it.

(MORE)

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

I wouldn't change a thing. Not when things were picnics in the park... and not when things were funerals in the rain and at my age there's been plenty funerals in the rain.

DANIELLE

What if you could have changed it. Why not change the funerals in the rain?

OLD MAN

To sunshine?

Danielle gives him a playful look, though she's waiting for a real answer.

The Old Man sets his teacup down carefully on the tray.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

It's what's happened. And for everything that's happened—good or bad—it's my story. My life. I don't want it rewritten, or carved in stone. I want to live it. Sometimes that hurts, sometimes it's wonderful.

He gestures to Danielle, then to the tray.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Like having a picnic in the park.

Danielle smiles.

DANIELLE

But isn't it hard, isn't it too painful?

The Old Man laughs softly to himself, then looks at her with warmth, sensing she needs comfort.

OLD MAN

Painful? Oh yes... life can be painful. But I've learned it's not about what you can live with or live through. It's about what you live for. For me, that's the memories... and the people long gone.

(MORE)

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

But it can just as well be for
those you haven't met yet, what's
still to come.

Danielle sits quietly, her gaze drifting across the park. The
Old Man leans in just a little, voice gentle.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

You'll be alright, one foot in
front of the other.

Danielle blinks, her breath catching, then checks her watch
almost as a distraction.

She looks at him softly.

DANIELLE

It's been really nice meeting you.

Danielle rises from the bench, slipping her hands into the
pocket of her hoodie.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

Take your time. I need to get ready
for work. I'll come back for the
tray.

OLD MAN

It was lovely to meet you, dear.
Thank you for the kindness - the
world's full of enough sorrow as it
is and it doesn't have to be much
to make a difference to someone...
just a crumb here, a crumb there.
It all adds up. You have a great
day.

She gives a small nod before walking on, the sun catching her
face.

The Old Man settles back, wipes the crumbs from his fleece,
lifts his cup, and hums his tune again - softer this time,
but full of life.

EXT. PARK - LATER

Danielle, now fully dressed and sharp for work, returns to the
bench. The morning sun has climbed higher, the park a little
busier.

The bench is empty. The Old Man is gone.

On the tray, arranged carefully from blades of grass, are two words:

"THANK YOU."

Danielle stares at it, a soft smile forming – warmth blooming where doubt once sat. She picks up the tray and walks on, the warmth of the morning carrying her.

INT. OFFICE – CONTINUOUS

A sterile conference room. Fluorescent lights buzz overhead, faintly flickering.

A large TV hangs on the wall, screen dark and reflective.

To the left, neon company art glows in corporate cheerfulness – its colors clashing with the room's gray carpet and beige chairs.

At the long table, Danielle sits alone. Her laptop is open, screen glowing pale on her face.

She glances at the empty chairs. Checks the clock. Waits.

Her phone buzzes against the table. The screen lights up.

ON SCREEN – PHONE TEXT

Mark: Come by tonight. Next steps. Enjoy the onboarding.

She looks at the neon art – a slogan reads: "WE TRUST EACH OTHER."

She exhales and straightens her posture, forcing professionalism and responds with a thumbs up emoji.

A knock at the door.

Simon enters.

SIMON

Sorry, sorry – got caught up talking
to Mark down on the ground floor.

He lowers his voice.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Keep it to yourself, Looks like he's
up for promotion.

Danielle's eyes widen, surprised. She pulls her chair in, takes a deep breath.

DANIELLE

Good for Mark. A good person to know.

Simon laughs a little.

SIMON

I'm sure.

DANIELLE

You've worked together a long time right?

SIMON

A long time yeah, we've been here since we were graduates ourselves. But not just that, same school, same town just a few years apart.

Simon gets the TV to wake up – the screen flickers, then fills with the onboarding presentation.

Simon drops into a chair.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Alright, let's get this show on the road.

DANIELLE

What was he like?

SIMON

Mark?

DANIELLE

Yeah, at school or when you started? Was he always so... philosophical?

Simon laughs, catching the teasing in her tone.

SIMON

He used to be a lot quieter you know, loved comic books and graphic novels.

Simon pauses and has a sip of his coffee.

SIMON (CONT'D)

He's done so well for himself, to be fair. Had a rough upbringing.

Danielle leans in, curious.

DANIELLE

He told me yeah, raised by his uncle
he said.

Simon nods, thoughtful.

SIMON

That's right. His parents passed when
he was young and I don't need to tell
you how difficult that can be. His
uncle stepped in. Tough guy, but lost
his wife and kids in an accident.
Don't think he ever recovered.

Danielle takes this in, softer now.

DANIELLE

Terrible.

She takes a breath.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

He's got that... survivor energy. Like
nothing rattles him.

SIMON

Yeah. You wouldn't guess it now, but
there were years he was scraping by in
and out of school, rough years. He
deserves where he's got to.

Danielle sits back, thoughtful. (hanging on that word
"deserves")

DANIELLE

Funny word, "deserves." Depends who's
handing it out.

Simon glances at her, caught off guard by the weight in her
tone. He laughs.

SIMON

Well, in this place, it's usually your
boss or HR with a checklist.

Danielle smirks despite herself.

Before Simon can click into the slide, Danielle interrupts.

DANIELLE

Comic books are surprising. I couldn't
see that now. A philosophy or research
paper, maybe.

She smiles, keeping the tone from going too heavy.

Simon smiles back at her.

SIMON

Escapism I suppose. I loved them too.
Hopefully he saw something in them
that's helped him get to where he is
now.

All these origin stories start with
pain or grief.

The making of a hero or villain.

One decides the pain is unbearable
— so bad they vow to shield others
from it. The other decides: if I
must suffer, then the world will
suffer with me or for me.

Danielle listens, intrigued.

SIMON (CONT'D)

There's plenty to take from heroes to
keep moving forward. Taught him to
pick himself up again, I suppose.

You should ask him. You've got more
in common than you think.

Danielle smiles at Simon.

DANIELLE

Thanks Simon. Sounds deeper than I
thought, maybe the start of that
philosophical life. I hope you don't
think I was intruding.
I just knew you and Mark were
close. After losing my mum and
connecting with him more it's nice
to hear it from someone else.

Life really isn't fair. Not fair,
he also lost his family.

Simon looks at Danielle, confused.

SIMON

His family?

Danielle freezes, concern flickering across her face. (scared she's said too much)

DANIELLE

Before he met Sarah and the kids?

SIMON

Mark never had a family before Sarah and her kids.

The words hit Danielle like a blow. Her smile falters. The air seems to thin around her.

In an instant, pieces rearrange in her mind – late-night conversations, Mark's confessions, the quiet intimacy she thought was trust. A story she believed... crumbling.

INSERT FLASHES –

Mark's voice, low and confessional – Reminders of their previous discussions:

MARK (V.O)

"My family... they were taken from me."

Mark's wry smile, lingering, unreadable.

MARK (V.O) (CONT'D)

"Life's easier when you know it's all exactly where it should be."

A half-drained glass of wine between them.

MARK (V.O) (CONT'D)

"Trust me – you'll find you can live with a lot."

BACK TO PRESENT –

Her chest tightens. Breathing shallow, uneven.

Her chest rises sharply, breath shallow. She grips the edge of the chair as if it might anchor her.

A sheen of sweat forms along her temple. She dabs at the back of her neck, but it doesn't help.

Her mind races – their bond, their confidences, his manipulation – every moment replays now with doubt, with betrayal.

SIMON

You ok?

DANIELLE
Maybe... maybe I misunderstood.

SIMON
You must have. He met Sarah and the
kids not long after her husband –
also called Mark – passed away.

Simon leans back.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Honestly, seems like the best thing
that ever happened to him. But
...he's managed a few miracles.

Simon studies her, still noticing her discomfort.

SIMON (CONT'D)
You sure you're okay? Sorry, this is
probably a lot right now for you.

Danielle's face is pale, bloodless.

DANIELLE
Yeah, I'm okay. Sorry...

She fidgets with her pen, avoiding his eyes.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
It just... brings a lot to the surface.

SIMON
You're right. Let's move on. Focus
time.

Simon smiles at her. Danielle smiles back – but it's hollow,
distracted.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Onboarding, day one. Let's make the
magic happen.

Simon begins talking through the onboarding presentation.

Danielle stares at the glowing slides but doesn't register them.
Mark's manipulation replaying in her mind.

CEMETERY – DAY (FLASHBACK)

Rain falls, steady and cold.

A freshly covered grave. Mud clings to shoes.

A young Mark stands beside his Uncle, both dressed in black.

Mark's Uncle stares down at the grave, jaw tight. He wipes the back of his hand across his mouth.

UNCLE

Find yourself what I had, Damien – and
don't let it go.

Your own family. Your own wife.

He turns to Mark, eyes hard.

UNCLE (CONT'D)

Whatever you can live with.

Young Mark stares back at his uncle, searching his face.

Trying to process. Trying to understand.

The rain hammers down, filling the silence between them.

BACK TO PRESENT

INT. MARK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mark sits cross-legged on the sofa, eyes fixed on the clock. His knee bounces – restless, distracted.

Sarah moves quietly around the room, dusting the shelves, apron tied around her waist.

A knock at the door.

MARK

It's go time.

He pats Sarah on the bum as he walks past, she stiffens, a flicker in her eyes, but says nothing.

Mark opens the door.

Danielle stands there – composed on the outside.

Mark smiles, warm but practiced.

MARK (CONT'D)

Glad you could make it. Come in we,
don't have long.

Danielle steps inside. Sarah watches from across the room, cloth in hand, expression unreadable.

For a moment, the three of them share the same space –

Danielle's eyes flick to Sarah: a loose strand of hair, a faint mark on the apron. Odd. Out of place.

She says nothing, just files it away.

Marks eyes focused on Danielle.

DANIELLE

Thanks for having me again.

Sarah smiles thinly and moves off into the Kitchen.

Mark closes the door, his warm smile dropping the second it is closed.

MARK

(low, urgent)

We don't have long. Let's sit.

He gestures toward the living room.

Danielle hesitates, unsettled.

DANIELLE

I'd prefer to stay here Mark.

Mark looks at her uneasily, worried.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

You never had a family did you, before Sarah?

BEAT

I keep telling myself you wanted to help... in your way... but I can't do this anymore.

MARK

Now don't be rash Danielle.
What I told you – they were taken from me. And I stand by that.

Mark's voice trembles. Panic creeping in.

MARK (CONT'D)

What life offered me... it wouldn't give me a family. I lost mine, like you lost yours.

He leans in, insistent

MARK (CONT'D)

Your future — I've helped you get
it back.

Danielle doesn't move. She studies him in silence, eyes calm but cold.

Her breath slows.

She lowers her gaze, then looks back up at him — recognition in her eyes.

No words. Just distance.

Mark falters, the silence more cutting than anything she could have said.

DANIELLE

I quit the job today, Mark.

We should have never done any of
this.

Mark's eyes widen. His face sinks, uneasy.

MARK

You did what!?

The sharpness of his voice echoes.

From the hallway, soft footsteps.

Sarah reappears. The apron is smudged now, a faint streak across her cheek she hasn't noticed. Her hair is a little loose, messy, not the polished image from before.

She dries her hands slowly on a damp cloth, watching them both.

SARAH

(soft, but strange)
What's going on?

Her voice carries a weight — calm, but not quite steady.

MARK

(sharp, low)
Get back in the kitchen.

Sarah freezes. The thin smile disappears. She lowers her eyes and turns away, retreating back without a word.

Danielle watches, stunned — the illusion of Mark's "perfect family" shattering in real time.

Mark exhales, steadying himself, then looks back at Danielle – trying to recover control.

MARK (CONT'D)

Look, you don't understand, we are running out of time.

DANIELLE

No, I do. I finally do.

All those stories – the pain, the family you "lost." It wasn't truth, Mark. It was rehearsal, mimicry.

Danielle gestures towards the kitchen.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

Does she even know it's happening?

Mark stiffens, eyes narrowing, caught.

Finally, his shoulders drop. He exhales, almost a laugh – bitter.

MARK

I had nothing. No family. No start. Just scraps.

And when I could take no more – opportunity knocked.

BEAT

MARK (CONT'D)

So I made one. I took one.

His voice rises.

Whatever I could live with.

He catches himself.

Because I deserved it.
Just like you deserve it.

DANIELLE

What about all the others, Mark? The ones you've taken from – including Sarah!

MARK
You know what it costs, what it takes
to hold it together.

Mark leans in.

MARK (CONT'D)
I deserved more!!

He collects himself.

MARK (CONT'D)
Think about what you deserve, what
your mum would have wanted for your
life.

Danielle stops. His words hang in the air.

From the kitchen – the sharp CRASH of a glass hitting the floor.

INT. THE KITCHEN – CONTINUOUS

Sarah stares at the shattered glass on the floor.

A dull throb builds in her head.

She drags her fingers through her hair, scratching at her
scalp until it's a mess, strands falling out of place.

FLASH –

INT. CHURCH – DAY

Sarah sits between Lucy and Oliver.

A coffin looms before them.

Above it, a framed photo of Sarah with her ex-husband – back
when they were a family.

A tear slips down Sarah's cheek.

SMASH BACK TO:
KITCHEN

The same tear burns down her face.

She rips her hands from her hair, staggers—nearly losing her
balance.

FLASH -

INT. COFFEE SHOP

Sarah sits at a table reading a book, a takeaway cup with her name scrawled across it.

Mark drops into the chair opposite, his grin sharp, cocky.

MARK

Sorry - it's packed in here. Do you
mind if I sit for a minute while
they finish my coffee?

Sarah smiles politely, accommodating.

SARAH

Sure.

Mark settles in like he owns the table,

MARK

Thanks. Always feels awkward,
squeezing in next to a stranger.

Sarah closes her book and looks at him.

SARAH

Sorry, I'm not really looking for
anything at the moment.

Mark leans forward, voice playful but edged.

MARK

Of course. But what if I told you...
before long, you won't even
remember what life was like without
me?

SMASH BACK TO:
KITCHEN

Sarah leans against the counter, disheveled. Her breath ragged,
eyes glazed.

She lifts her head.

The knife block waits across from her, gleaming in the dim
light.

BACK TO: HALLWAY

SARAH (V.O.)
Mark, what's going on!?

Mark stays locked on Danielle. Unblinking

Danielle reflects – then lifts her head, steady now.

DANIELLE
This isn't what she would have wanted.
She just wanted me to be happy.

BEAT

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
You can't build a monopoly of grief,
Mark.

She steadies herself.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
You've taken so much – from so many –
in so many ways. All for what you
think you deserve.

A tear rolls down her face, her voice strong.

We get what we get! You need to make
the most of it! And if grief's the
price of love... then how lucky are we
to have had any of it! I won't do it!

Mark stares at her, gutted.

Danielle's eyes glisten, but her voice doesn't waver. She steps
back, then turns and walks toward the door.

Mark watches her turn, stricken, powerless.

Danielle turns back around.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
You need to move on Mark, you need
to let it all go.

She turns again, hand reaching for the door.

MARK
If you walk away now, we lose
everything! Danielle...I lose
everything too!

We deserve a better life.
(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

We don't have to settle while the
undeserving live with better.

What we got isn't good enough! You
can't make the most of nothing!

A sound—sharp, metallic—cuts through the moment.

Sarah reappears.

Her apron is still tied, but she's unraveled—eyes wild, hair
disheveled. A kitchen knife glints in her fist.

Mark turns, startled.

MARK (CONT'D)

Sarah—

Before he can finish, Sarah drives the knife into his neck.

His eyes widen, choking on shock and blood.

Sarah holds firm, her expression unhinged and wild eyed.

Danielle freezes at the doorway, stunned.

Mark collapses to the floor.

Silence.

Sarah lifts her gaze to Danielle.

SARAH

(crying out)

He's not my Mark... where's my Mark?
She drops the knife. It clatters on
the floor.

Her apron is smeared red, hands shaking as sobs break out of
her.

Danielle hesitates, then approaches carefully. Her eyes never
leave Sarah.

She nudges the knife away with her foot, sliding it out of
reach.

Sarah collapses onto her knees, trembling, broken.

Danielle stands over her — silent.

FADE OUT.

ONE MONTH LATER

EXT. CEMETARY - MORNING

Grey skies. Damp grass.

A casket lowers slowly into the ground.

Danielle stands among a small scattering of mourners, her face still, unreadable.

She glances toward the temporary placard at the head of the grave:

"MARK DAMIEN CARTER."

The name hangs heavy in the quiet air.

Danielle exhales softly, then turns.

Without a word, she walks away from the grave - leaving the others behind.

INT. PRISON VISITING HALL - AFTERNOON

Rows of plastic chairs. A long table divides the room, guards posted along the walls. The low conversations bleeds together, broken by the occasional clang of a door.

Prisoners in jumpsuits sit across from visitors - family, friends, strangers.

Danielle sits at a table, in a nurses uniform for a care home, hands folded waiting.

A side door opens.

Sarah enters in a prison jumpsuit, escorted by a guard. Her hair is pulled back, her face pale but her eyes sharp - no trace of the "perfect" housewife remains.

She sits across from Danielle. The guard steps back, watching.

For a moment, neither speaks. Just the weight of everything between them.

SARAH

Thanks for coming again Danielle.

DANIELLE

Of course.

SARAH

Any news?

Danielle shakes her head.

DANIELLE

I'm sorry, Sarah. None.
There was nothing in the basement
when they checked, just a chair.
I can't find anything in the woods
he took me to.

BEAT

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

I've tried. I'll keep trying. We'll
find evidence, I promise.

Her eyes heavy with guilt.

Sarah nods, but her hands tighten around the edge of the table,
knuckles white.

SARAH

It's alright. I know no one will
believe us.
But at least he can't hurt anyone
anymore.

Sarah exhales, her grip on the table easing.

They smile at one another.

The two women sit in silence, the weight of Mark finally gone.

EXT. A HOUSE IN SCOTLAND - A FEW YEARS LATER

An old stone cottage rests on a quiet country road. Ivy climbs
the walls. Lavender sways in the breeze.

DENNIS'S SON arrives on a bike. The pinned badge reading: "NO
REGRETS attached to his jumper.

He rests the bike against the house and crosses to a small
garage tucked at the side of the cottage. With effort, he pulls
the door open.

Inside, the air is still. He kneels, prying up a hidden hatch in
the floor.

A dark opening yawns beneath.

Without hesitation, he climbs down.

INT. UNDERGROUND ROOM - CONTINUOUS

His eyes adjust. On the far wall, a faint glow pulses.

The ouroboros – a serpent eating its own tail – burned into the stone, alive with light. Eternal beginning. Eternal end.

He stares at it, transfixed.

From the wall... a breath. Slow. Steady. Inhuman.

His eyes widen.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END