REMINISCENCE

Written by

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EXT. DOWNTOWN MANHATTAN - DAWN - NEAR FUTURE

Though the sun is yet to rise - the city is bathed in a dull glow emanating from bright ads projected onto the night sky. Under this technicolor canopy...

NICK BANNISTER (40s), pulls his cap down to cut the glare. He walks with a slight LIMP - the remnant of an old injury.

Around him, commuters rush to work and automated cars flit by in fluid streams. Only Bannister seems unhurried. Out of pace with the rest of the world.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
It's bad for business, but it's true... There are certain moments that never leave you...

Bannister heads for the one building in all of Manhattan that isn't covered in LED ads. At the foot of the stairs...

He spots a split GOLD SHELL (the size of a grape) on the ground. He studies it, a flicker of irritation.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
They tug at you like the slow refrain of a song you heard long ago...

Bannister kicks the shell into the gutter. Climbs the stairs to a door over which hangs a wood shingle. Its peeling paint announces: "**BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES.**"

BANNISTER (V.O.)
They remain always as real to a man as the minute they happened...

Bannister unlocks the door and enters.

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - HALL - CONTINUOUS

Bannister flips a sign in the door to "Open." Calls out:

BANNISTER
Wake up, Sparky!

He hangs his coat on a rack. Rounds a corner into:

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

A modest lobby with peeling walls. **SPARKY** (60s, heart of gold, liver of bourbon) talks with a woman in a cape, with a hood pulled over her head. They look up as Bannister enters.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
... Like the moment I met her.

The hood falls from the woman's temple. Reveals a shock of red waves. The kind of face you never forget. This is **MAE.**

Sparky smiles at Bannister, clocking his expression:

SPARKY
We got a walk-in needs a nudge.

The woman offers a pale hand. Her black nail polish has the fresh sheen of tarmac in the rain. But the thumbnail polish is already chipped.

WOMAN
I'm Mae.

BANNISTER
(shakes her hand)
What can I do for you?

MAE
I'm locked out. Find my keys?

BANNISTER
Sounds like a job for a locksmith.

MAE
Sparky says you're faster... and cheaper.

Bannister shoots Sparky a look. He shrugs:

SPARKY
Pretty girl's been out all night. Give her a little nudge so she can go home for some shut-eye.

Reluctant, Bannister caves. Waves her into a back room.

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A dingy office with the usual amenities: desk, cabinets, chairs. And one unusual addition: a COFFIN-SIZED TANK filled with a dark liquid in the center of the room.

Mae glances out the window at the "Bannister & Associates" sign.

MAE
False advertising, isn't it? You only got one associate.

BANNISTER
Sparky and I run a tight ship. But we get by.

MAE
They say you're the best archaeologist in town.

BANNISTER
They say I'm the cheapest. But I've never burned a client. And I'm discreet. Not like the pods.

MAE
Seems they're hacked every other day.

BANNISTER
Their clients don't care. Most are Mobius - stuck in loops they won't ever leave.

MAE
You don't do that?

BANNISTER
I prefer my clientele with one foot in the living. But the living have secrets. So I keep my records hard copy.

He knocks on an INDUSTRIAL FILING CABINET lining the wall.

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
Sparky watches over it.

MAE
Day and night, looks like.

Mae looks out a venetian-blinded window to the lobby. Sparky folds up his MURPHY BED. Bannister snaps the blinds shut.

MAE (CONT'D)
You think you can find my keys?

BANNISTER
Depends. They lost or forgotten? Forgotten things can always be fished up and dusted off. But the lost? Those things people never took much notice of till they were gone. They're defined by their absence. Can't remember something that never made an impression.

MAE
Let's say the keys are "misplaced."

BANNISTER
It's your money. Robe's behind the door. I'll slip out while you-

He glances up. Mae's dress is a puddle of silk on the floor. She steps out of it. Naked. Kicks off her shoes.

MAE
You're going to see it all anyway, aren't you?

She climbs into the tank's dark water. Bannister's unruffled:

BANNISTER
Sparky! Kit!

Bannister turns to wash his hands and prepare a syringe while -

Sparky enters with **THE KIT:** a suitcase, which opens like an old-fashioned portable record player, but inside is a computer screen, a wired helmet, a respirator, and a lot of dials, switches, and wires.

Sparky places the WIRED HELMET on Mae's head. Rigs it to some wires on the computer.

Bannister glances over. Clocks that Mae's still wearing a pair of JADE EARRINGS. He barks, gruff:

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
Earrings off.

Mae unclips them. Hands them to Sparky who rests them on Bannister's desk. She eyes Bannister, uneasy:

MAE
Your boss has quite the bedside manner. He's not going to fry my brain, is he?

SPARKY
Don't worry. Nick never goes over twenty-five volts. Always gets you in the moment.

MAE
How does he know which moment?

SPARKY
Same way a bartender knows your drink or a psychic knows your sign.

SPARKY (CONT'D)
Archaeology’s about reading people - then giving them the right prompts to fill in the details. Ain’t no better prompter than Bannister. He’ll get you right back to your memory. The sounds, the sights, the smells - everything just as you experienced it the first time.

Bannister approaches with a SYRINGE.

BANNISTER
Thiopental. Relaxes the neural pathways, for the prompts.

He injects the liquid into her neck.

SPARKY
Now settle in. And relax. It always works out fine.

MAE
Don’t say “always.” “Always” makes promises it can’t keep.

Mae loses consciousness. Sparky slips a respirator over her mouth. Lowers her into the tank until she’s submerged in its dark water. He checks her biometrics off the kit’s computer.

SPARKY
Vitals are good.

He pulls up a digital map of the brain’s neurological paths.

SPARKY (CONT’D)
Ready for the lull.

Bannister talks into a mic feeding to Mae’s headset. His voice is soothing, sweet - all his tenderness, saved for the tank.

BANNISTER (INTO MIC)
You’re going on a journey. Your destination? A place and time only you know.
(then)
Imagine your mind like a long hall with a series of doors...

A small LED in the kit projects Mae’s memory onto a SCREEN.

ON SCREEN: We find ourselves in a long hall, with doors stretching far as the eye can see. As we float down the hall:

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
... Behind each door is a memory. We can close the door and walk farther down the hall... make new memories. But the events behind each door remain as real and alive as the moment they happened.

ON KIT COMPUTER: A neural map of Mae's brain sees a surge of light in synaptic junctures. Sparky adjusts some knobs.

SPARKY
Ready for the prompt.

BANNISTER (INTO MIC)
You are about to open a door... A door you have only recently left...

ON SCREEN: Mae's hand reaches for a door. Twists the knob.

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
The door leads to last night. You're getting ready to go out...

The door swings open and we are in...

INT. MAE'S LOFT - NIGHT (REMINISCENCE)

(**NOTE: ALL REMINISCENCES SHOULD EVOKE THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE PERSON IN THE TANK**). In a rush, Mae moves through a cluttered studio apartment with a kitchenette, a claw-foot tub, a bed, and not much else.

Mae utters a mix of strange voweled arpeggios and glottal groans as she tromps through the apartment.

IN BANNISTER'S OFFICE: Bannister and Sparky share a look - confused by the odd noises she's making.

BACK TO SCREEN: Mae's POV shakes - up and down as if one leg is higher than the other. Then we see why...

Mae peers under the bed. Finds a STRAY STILETTO next to a lipstick, a mug, a stray stocking, a small vibrator. She puts on the heel. Her gait steadies as she clips out the door...

INT. MAE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - HALL - NIGHT (REMINISCENCE)

Mae closes the door as a neighbor with a PIT BULL passes by.

BANNISTER (INTO MIC)
Do you lock up?

Mae takes out her keys as the pit bull barks. Startled, she drops her keys. Retrieving them, she scratches her thumbnail - resulting in the nail polish chip Bannister noticed earlier.

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
(to Sparky)
You check the purse?

SPARKY
Nada.

Bannister turns back to the screen. Prompts Mae:

BANNISTER (INTO MIC)
When did you next open your purse?

INT. COCONUT CLUB - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT (REMINISCENCE)

Mae sits at a makeup mirror next to **CINDY**, a trashy blonde with a smoker's mouth. She complains as she brushes her hair:

CINDY
Last night, I only made fifty.
Barely enough for a bao.

Mae fumbles through her makeup console, looking for something.

MAE
You seen my earrings?

CINDY
Which ones?

MAE
My lucky ones. The jade.

The bouncer, **HARRY** (30s), built like a shithouse, enters:

HARRY
You're up next, Mae.

She empties her purse on the table, rifles through the contents for the earrings. OFF SCREEN, Sparky clocks the keys:

SPARKY (O.S.)
We got the keys again.

Mae finds the earrings. Beelines for a bathroom:

HARRY
Hurry. You're in three.

INT. COCONUT CLUB - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS (REMINISCENCE)

Mae locks the door to a dingy bathroom. Lowers the toilet seat. Sits. Then... her face crumples.

She begins to cry.

IN BANNISTER'S OFFICE: Sparky shoots Bannister a look.

SPARKY
The hell?

Bannister's silent - disarmed by this private vulnerability.

IN THE BATHROOM: Mae's crying is interrupted by a knock:

HARRY (O.S.)
Thirty seconds, Mae!

MAE
(stifling her tears)
Just a second!

She quickly powders her nose, hiding the redness. Then consults the mirror, giving her reflection a pep talk:

MAE (CONT'D)
You can do this.

With effort, she smiles, hiding her sadness. Then heads to:

INT. COCONUT CLUB - STAGE - NIGHT (REMINISCENCE)

Mae slowly walks onto a stage. Steps into the bright spotlight of a small supper club. She approaches a mic.

SPARKY (O.S.)
Prompt her again. See if she comes back for the keys.

BANNISTER (O.S.)
In a sec.

Mae faces an audience of shadowed men. Ignores a catcall. A PIANIST begins to play. She begins to sing:

MAE
When I grow too old to dream / I'll have you to remember / When I grow too old to dream / Your love will live in my heart...

Her voice haunts. Far too beautiful for the dive she's in. She's an angel in a beer-stained bar.

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - OFFICE

Bannister watches Mae sing, transported. He's never seen or heard anything like this. Sparky reminds:

SPARKY
She's not payin' for a full reminiscence.

BANNISTER
I said, just a sec.

MAE (ON SCREEN)
So kiss me, my sweet / and so let us part / and when I grow too old to dream / Your love will live in my heart / Your love will live in my-

Sparky checks his watch. Urges Bannister:

SPARKY
We've got a ten o'clock.

Bannister snaps out of it. Refocuses.

BANNISTER (INTO MIC)
After the song... you go backstage.

INT. COCONUT CLUB - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT (REMINISCENCE)

Mae removes her makeup at the mirror. Cindy smokes next to her. Swigs from a flask of whiskey. Offers it to Mae:

CINDY
Daycap?

MAE
Not today. Gotta run.

She sweeps her belongings back into her purse. We NOTE her KEYS - as their chain catches on her purse strap.

Mae heads for the back exit. Morning light floods in as she turns and blows a kiss to Cindy.

MAE (CONT'D)
Sleep tight!

She steps out into the waking city. As she clips away, we hear a JINGLING THUD.

BANNISTER
Hear that?

Bannister reaches for the KEYBOARD. REWINDS a couple seconds: Mae heads out the exit. Again, we hear a JINGLING THUD.

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
Sounds like keys to me.

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - LOBBY - DAY

Bannister and Sparky talk to Mae as she towel dries her hair.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
I told her where she dropped her keys. She barely seemed surprised.

Mae nods, nonchalant. Pays Bannister some coin.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Some people are careless. Things show up as regularly in their lives as they disappear...

Mae heads for the door. Nods goodbye at Bannister and Sparky.

MAE
See you around.

She exits the room. Shuts the door behind her.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
... They don't hold on to anything too tight.

A beat, then - Bannister glances down at his desk. Sees Mae's forgotten her JADE EARRINGS.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Expect others to pick up for them...

Sparky runs to catch Mae at the door. But she's already gone.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
I had other messes to attend to.

Bannister shrugs: pockets the earrings. CUT TO:

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - OFFICE (MONTAGE)

A dour couple, both with post-tank wet hair, stare at the SCREEN: Replaying a memory of them arguing in their kitchen.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Punch and Judy come to reminisce about fights they had. Who said what. How did it start. In the he-said, she-said of their marital demise, I'm the court stenographer.

OFF the couple, now arguing about the on-screen scene in a fractal of discontent, CUT TO:

LATER: The ON-SCREEN reminisence of an adorable GOLDEN RETRIEVER running beside a TEENAGED BOY through a field.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Most clients come to remember the good times. Some have to look back farther than others...

ANGLE ON a wheelchair by the tank; an ARMY shirt hung over it.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
After the war, Hank found civilian life didn't fit anymore. He took to self-medicating: popping betel in the underground with the other broken toys.

Bannister crosses to the tank - stares down at **HANK** (30s), a legless amputee, smiling as he relives better days.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Occasionally, I hook him up with a different fix...

OFF Hank's smile as he moves his phantom limbs...

BANNISTER (V.O.)
But memories, even good ones, have a voracious appetite. If you're not careful... they consume you...

LATER: BANNISTER helps **BENNIE** (80s), a frail widower, into his jacket as he dresses, post-reminisence.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Since his wife died, the old-timer comes every day...

THE SCREEN is freeze-framed on Young Bennie cooking dinner with his then-young wife, clearly in love.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
His past life's more full than his present... his only tie to this world? Pinklepurr...

Sparky hands Bennie a pet case housing his pet SIAMESE CAT.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Still, he's lived a full life...

LATER: **ROSA SANCHEZ** (30s, pretty) floats in the tank.

ON SCREEN: Rosa kisses a HANDSOME OLDER LOVER (50s) beneath the ceiling fan of a cheap hotel room.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Miss Lonelyhearts has spent the last three years hung up on some old beau. Every week she gets back the one that got away. I offered her a hard copy of the projection to rewatch anytime. She says it's not the same as being there.
(then)
Who am I to judge?

LATER: Bannister drops a dated FLASH DRIVE labeled "**ROSA SANCHEZ**" in a filing cabinet. Slides the cabinet closed.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
I'm just a keeper of lost moments...

Bannister locks the file with a KEY he pries from a loose plank of wood in the doorframe. Then double secures the cabinet by typing a CODE into an electronic lock.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
But those moments keep me too...

He exits the office. Passes Sparky - who's pulling down the Murphy bed.

SPARKY
'Night, Nick.

BANNISTER
'Night, Sparky.

EXT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - NIGHT

The NIGHTLIGHTS rain their hail of colorful ads upon the city. (NOTE: One NightLight broadcasts breaking news, "**Skyvert CEO Walter Sylvan Dead at 67.**")

In the streets, the rush hour cram of driverless cabs darts silently past. The only gas vehicles are the occasional RICKSHAWS - cheap diesel trikes selling food and tchotchkes.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
... The usual things people want lose their appeal.

Bannister passes a rickshaw where a young couple kisses lustily as they wait for a bao. He eyes them pityingly:

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Happiness is just the first step to loss. Someone always ends up in the tank.

He passes a BETEL-STAND (a telephone booth-sized Plexiglas box). Inside, a BETEL-GIRL (20s), in a translucent plastic bikini, sells BETEL-CHEWS (hallucinogens arranged in colored pastel pills the size of gumballs).

She lasciviously rolls a betel-chew over her lips, enticing.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Still, there's no siren song like a regret in the making.

The girl swallows the chew, then spits out its shell and smiles invitingly at him. Exposes raw, bloody gums. The red gums morph into...

EXT. COCONUT CLUB - NIGHT

The RED NEON of the "**Coconut**" sign. Bannister pays the bouncer; descends the stairs as a distant song rises up:

MAE (O.S.)
I'll be seeing you / In every lovely summer's day / In everything that's light and gay...

INT. COCONUT CLUB - LOUNGE - NIGHT

Mae sings at the mic. She's more natural on a stage than in life. Her eyes closed, her body relaxed - she looks transported, almost innocent. Bannister watches, riveted:

MAE
I'll find you in the morning sun / And when the night is new / I'll be looking at the moon...

Bannister orders a drink. Pulls Mae's earrings from his pocket. Watches the jade pendulum swing back and forth.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
I told myself I was just returning her earrings.

She blinks open her eyes. Smiles directly at Bannister - like she expected to see him there.

MAE
But I'll be seeing you...

BANNISTER (V.O.)
She saw right through that.

OFF Bannister, swirling the ice cube in his glass...

TIME CUT: The ice has melted to a sliver. Bannister rests his glass in the coaster as a shadow falls over him. Mae.

He slides the earrings to her.

MAE
You coulda called me to pick 'em up.

BANNISTER
Thought I'd do you a favor.

MAE
You really wanna help, drink up. The more you drink, the more I get tipped.

BANNISTER
Not my vice.

MAE
What is?

It's an obvious come-on. She stares him down, challenging.

He considers a beat. Then changes the subject. Sincere:

BANNISTER
You have a beautiful voice.

For the first time, Mae looks taken aback. Vulnerable.

MAE
Four years working here - you're the first man ever complimented my voice.

TIME CUT TO: A bottle of nearly-drained bourbon later, Mae and Bannister lean over their drinks, talking flirtatiously:

BANNISTER
Why did you cry?
(off her confusion)
In your reminiscence. Before you went on stage...

MAE
(flushes, embarrassed)
Shit, I forgot you saw that.
(then)
Nerves. Happens before every gig. When I step on that stage - they don't wanna see a woman in a thrift-store dress, wondering how she'll make rent. They want to see something perfect. Untouchable. They want to be lied to...

BANNISTER
You don't seem like you're lying.

MAE
Then I guess it's working.
(then)
Your turn. How'd you start in the memory gig?

BANNISTER
After the war, the world got sentimental. I cashed in.

MAE
How unsentimental of you.
(then, presses)
So it had nothing to do with helping your fellow troops? Sparky told me you served. That where you got your limp?

BANNISTER
Not everyone likes looking back.

MAE
An archaeologist who doesn't care to reminisce?

BANNISTER
You don't have to use your wares to peddle them.

Mae studies him carefully. Pieces something together:

MAE
You mean... you've never been in the tank?

BANNISTER
Like you said. I'm not sentimental.

He sips his drink. Ends the conversation. Mae changes tack:

MAE
What about the ones who are? Bet you see a lotta kinky sex stuff in the reminiscences, don't you?

He smiles a vague admission. She presses on:

MAE (CONT'D)
What else?
(off his guarded look)
No names. Just stories...

BANNISTER
I see a lot of crimes. Used to freelance for the D.A. - recording witness testimony.

MAE
Bet that got ugly.

BANNISTER
So does the sex.

MAE
What's the weirdest reminiscence you ever saw?

Bannister hesitates. Then takes a swig of his drink. Admits:

BANNISTER
There was a comedian. Good one, too. Used to come once a week for a nudge to his grade-school blacktop. A group of kids beat him up real bad. Tore his clothes. Pissed on him. Laughed while he cried. And in the middle of it, he has a *ricochet* - a natural memory within a reminiscence - and it's... lovely.

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
(then)
He remembers his mother combing his hair that morning. Fixing the collar of his shirt. Kissing his forehead as he leaves for school...

MAE
Then what?

BANNISTER
He snaps out of the ricochet. Back to his ass-kicking.

MAE
That’s it?

BANNISTER
That’s it.

Mae sits back, puzzled:

MAE
Why not just reminisce about his mother? Why go through the pain of remembering the bullies at school?

BANNISTER
I asked him once. Know what he said?
(off her look)
“For the punch line.”

MAE
For the punch line... I don’t get it.

BANNISTER
Me either.

They lock eyes. She smiles. Coaxes one out of him. CUT TO:

INT. MAE'S LOFT - NIGHT

Mae leads Bannister into the loft he saw in her reminiscence.

MAE
Sorry it’s so messy.

BANNISTER
Nothing I haven’t seen before.

She smiles - that’s right. Kicks off her shoes.

MAE
You want some water? I got tap -
(grabs a bottle of vodka)
- and Russian.

BANNISTER
Tap's fine.

She weaves to the sink. Drops some ice cubes in a glass. Fills it at the faucet. Bannister steps behind her.

Mae turns. He leans in. Kisses her. She hesitates a moment. Then kisses back. First slowly. Then fiercely.

The ice in the glass tinkles as the water runs into it. Mae hoists herself onto the sink's ledge. Hikes up her skirt. Pulls him to her. As they move together...

The cheap cabinets shake. The glass overflows with water. Runs into the sink, down a pile of dirty dishes.

INT. MAE'S LOFT - MORNING

Light filters through the blinds. Bannister blinks awake in bed. Sees Mae cooking at her small stove.

MAE
Hope you're hungry for dinner.

Bannister consults an alarm clock by the bed: it's 6 a.m. Mae brings a plate to the bed: lamb chops. She explains:

MAE (CONT'D)
With my hours, everything's backwards.

She offers him a WINE GLASS with hot coffee inside.

MAE (CONT'D)
Coffee. I lost my mug.

BANNISTER
Under the bed, by a lipstick, a stocking, and your...
(delicately euphemistic)
Neck massager...

MAE
You've been snooping in my-

BANNISTER
Saw it in your projection.

Mae searches under the bed. It's exactly as he said.

MAE
How come I didn't remember the mug?

BANNISTER
When people reminisce, they tend to notice the same things they were focused on in the moment. The things that were on the periphery stay on the periphery. Hiding in plain sight.

MAE
So without *you* watching, my keys would have been lost forever?

BANNISTER
In rare cases, people repeat the same reminiscence so many times - they notice new things. But it takes practice. You could end up practically Mobius.

MAE
That why you never go in the tank? Afraid of going Mobius?

Bannister kisses her neck. Inhales deeply.

BANNISTER
Memory's like perfume. Better in small doses.

She traces her finger down a scar on his stomach. The remnants of a nasty war injury.

MAE
Maybe you haven't made the right memories.

Bannister takes her hand. Flips her on to her back. He kisses her neck. Closes his eyes. Slips inside her. Then, a voice:

SPARKY (O.S.)
Fuck. You wanna have to disinfect the tank again?

Suddenly, Bannister is wrenched from Mae. He FLOATS up, away from the bed while Mae continues to moan and writhe, oblivious.

As he reaches for her, in vain... SMASH TO:

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - OFFICE - NIGHT

Bannister gasps as Sparky yanks him, soaking, from the tank. EVERYTHING WE'VE PREVIOUSLY SEEN HAS BEEN HIS REMINISCENCE.

BANNISTER
Put me back!

SPARKY
She's gone, pal! Let her go...

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - LOBBY - NIGHT

His hair still wet, Bannister sits on Sparky's bed. Sparky swigs a bottle of whiskey; studies his friend, concerned.

SPARKY
Two months, you've been playing your own archaeologist. This has to stop or you'll end up a burner... I can't keep turning a blind eye.

BANNISTER
I'm the boss. Not you. And I've turned a blind eye to plenty.

Bannister stares, significant, at the bottle of whiskey.

SPARKY
Difference is - *I know* the answer to my problems ain't at the bottom of a bottle. But you're searching for something in that tank you won't ever find.

BANNISTER
People don't pack up and disappear after a year. Not without word...

SPARKY
(sighs, covers old ground)
She settled up with her landlord. Emptied her apartment. Told the club not to book her any gigs...

BANNISTER
She would have told *me*.

Sparky nods toward a BLUE VASE in Bannister's office, with some rotted flowers.

SPARKY
What about the flowers? Leaving them the day she vanishes? Maybe it was her way of saying goodbye.

BANNISTER
Maybe she wanted to brighten the room. I don't know. *I* wasn't there.

SPARKY
She dropped off the flowers. Chitchatted. Left. And never came back.

BANNISTER
But why?

SPARKY
Why does it matter? She's moved on. You should too.
(then, inspired)
Hey... what if I call you a girl? A real beaut. Red hair. And not on betel-nut. Got a great smile...

BANNISTER
I don't want a whore!

SPARKY
Then how 'bout a dose of reality? It wasn't all rainbows and unicorns between you two. She was trouble. Things got bad. Maybe you should reminisce about *that* next time you go for a dunk.

Sparky leaves, slamming the door. Alone, Bannister thinks:

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Sparky doesn't understand. I don't need a reminder of the bad times...

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - OFFICE - 4 MONTHS AGO (FLASHBACK)

(NOTE: "Flashbacks" are natural memories. Unlike the crisp tank-induced reminiscences which are exact recreations of the past - FLASHBACKS are hazier, organic memories.)

Bannister puts a memory card in the files of his cabinet. Locks up as someone sneaks up on him.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Good memories are elusive...

He turns to find Mae. She smiles. Holds up a bento box.

MAE
Surprise. I brought “dinner.”

Inside is a breakfast of eggs, bacon, pancakes. Bannister sweeps her in his arms. As they kiss...

BANNISTER (V.O.)
They’re watercolors, washing away before they set...

The image of Mae begins to dissolve and we find ourselves...

EXT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - NIGHT

Bannister locks up for the night.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
But bad memories? They stain deep.

He descends the steps. Is surprised to find someone waiting in the shadows at the foot of the stairs.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
They’re always just a ricochet away...

The shadowy figure looks up. It’s MAE - her red hair barely visible from beneath the hood of her coat.

BANNISTER
Where have you been?

MAE
I’m sorry... I...

Her voice cracks, emotional. He rushes to her. Grabs her in his arms. Holds her tight a beat.

Then pulls back. Spots a mean BRUISE on her cheek.

BANNISTER
What the hell happened to you?

MAE
It was just an accident.

Bannister studies the bruise. Sees knots of blue.

BANNISTER
This accident had knuckles.

MAE
It was just a dumb drunk from work.

BANNISTER
At work? Where the hell was security?

She hesitates a little too long. Bannister sees through it:

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
You're lying.
(then, insistent)
Who were you with?

MAE
Someone from work.

BANNISTER
So if I went to the club right now-

MAE
Not the Coconut Club. I ran into a boss from an old job up north. Guess he didn't like the way I quit.

BANNISTER
Who the hell's this old boss?
(off her look)
What are you hiding?

Mae hesitates a beat. Realizes all she has left is the truth.

MAE
Before I knew you; years before I even came to New York. I hit hard times. I was skint. I needed work. Any work... It was a lifetime ago.

Her gaze travels, significant, to a betel-girl in her stand. In disbelief, Bannister scoffs:

BANNISTER
You were a betel-chew whore?

MAE
I wasn't a whore.

BANNISTER
'Only girls who do that are whores or junkies.

Mae blanches. Without knowing - he's hit the truth.

MAE
I started off on pinks. Made it feel like summer in my head. Pretty soon I worked my way from pastels to primaries. Then the hard stuff.

BANNISTER
Metallics.

MAE
An expensive habit, but I worked the high-end clubs. Got myself a dealer discount.

BANNISTER
Who was your boss?

MAE
We all have things we don't want to look back on.

Bannister studies her. Still doesn't quite believe her:

BANNISTER
I would have seen it...

MAE
Maybe you only saw what you wanted to see.

She hooks her fingers into her mouth. Snaps a DENTAL BRIDGE from her front teeth. Exposes raw, BLOODY GUMS - the telltale sign of an junkie. Bannister backs away, repulsed:

BANNISTER
All this time, you lied.

Ashamed, Mae puts her bridge back in. Shakes her head:

MAE
I'm not that girl anymore. I bottomed out... sobered up. It took years. Then, I came here. Got a real singing gig. Met you. Things were going so good... I figured maybe I deserved a clean slate. Shoulda known. I'm always on the wrong side of "maybe."

She starts to walk away. Bannister watches her go. Conflicted. Angry. Betrayed, but also... in love.

BANNISTER
Wait...

She turns. The SWOOP of her cloak takes us back to...

THE PRESENT: Bannister's still on the stoop outside his office, his key in the door. Mae was just a memory. He locks up. Walks into the night, alone.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - NEXT DAY

A bright new morning. A sea of lawyers in sharp suits and stiff WHITE WIGS (like those worn by UK lawyers and judges) bustle up and down the court's marble steps. Among them is...

A lithe, starch-wigged lawyer in a pantsuit sharp as a switchblade. This is **AVERY** (40s). She checks her watch. Looks around for someone. Doesn't find them. Beelines for a cab.

INT. CAB - DAY

Avery slides into the seat in the driverless vehicle. Immediately, the interface asks:

INTERFACE
What is your destination, please?

Before Avery can respond, the opposite cab door opens. In slides Bannister. Avery smiles at him. Responds to the cab:

AVERY
79th and Amsterdam.

INTERFACE
Please buckle up. It's the law.

Both Avery and Bannister oblige. The car begins to move.

AVERY
Thanks for meeting me.

Avery pulls off the white wig. Reveals spiky black hair with pink tips. A young neo-punk under the stodgy work getup.

BANNISTER
Sparky said you have a deposition?

She studies Bannister, deciding whether to trust him:

AVERY
I hear you've been hitting the tank.
Something about a missing girl?

BANNISTER
Sparky should keep his mouth shut.

AVERY
I need you on your game. Attorney General's been working this case for years.

BANNISTER
If you don't trust me, go to a pod.

AVERY
Hackers would leak this testimony in nanosecs.

Bannister smiles, confident.

BANNISTER
Then it seems you have no choice.
(presses again)
Who's the witness?

AVERY
Enforcer for a syndicate turning state's. He worked for Big Joe up north in Boston. Now he's spearheading New York expansion. So you know there's a lotta dirt in that skull of his. I need everything he witnessed or did: the hits, racketeering, bribery, prostitution, drugs...

BANNISTER
You know I don't like these jobs.

AVERY
Can you afford to say no?

BANNISTER
Can *you* afford it if I do?

Avery smiles. He's got her. She presses a folded piece of paper into his palm.

AVERY
Our proposed fee. Along with safehouse time and directions.

BANNISTER
I'll think about it.

The cab pulls to a stop and scans Avery's money card.

INTERFACE
Thank you for your payment. We hope you enjoyed your ride.

The doors automatically unlock. Avery turns to Bannister.

AVERY
Can I spot your ride home?

BANNISTER
I'll walk.

AVERY
How analog of you. Lemme know if you want the gig.

She exits the car. Then leans back in.

BANNISTER
And, Nick? Stay outta the tank. Whoever this girl is, you're better off without. Trust me, I haven't fucked anything without 'trodes since the war. Once you go bot. You never go back.

She slams the door and walks away. Bannister pockets the paper she gave him.

BANNISTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I should get dry. But even without the tank, the memories come...

Bannister turns to the side: sees his past self and Mae making frantic love in the backseat of the car.

BANNISTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Daydreams that edge their way into the present...

Bannister steps out of the car, leaving the phantasmagoric lovers to it. Walks out to:

EXT. STREET - DAY

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Fraying its edges. Staining its colors...

He stops at a corner for a red light.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
I see her walk on every street...

FLASHBACK TO: The same street. He walks arm in arm with Mae. Instead of waiting for the light, she jaywalks into traffic.

Bannister's terrified for her, but the cabs swerve harmlessly around her in automatic collision-avoidance mode. Mae laughs, reckless, as she beckons for him to join her.

BACK TO PRESENT: Bannister's light changes to green. He walks onward. Passes a TACO FOOD STAND. Glances inside...

BANNISTER (V.O.)
I hear her laugh in every haunt...

FLASHBACK TO: Mae feeding him a bite of taco at the stand. Salsa stains his shirt. She LAUGH as she wipes it off.

BACK TO PRESENT: A BUS passes by. Wipes us to:

INT. BANNISTER'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Bannister washes his face. Dries it. Looks in the mirror.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
She tucks herself in the corners of every room.

FLASHBACK TO: Bannister dries his face, staring into the mirror. He catches Mae's reflection as she applies her lipstick behind him.

INT. BANNISTER'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bannister sits alone on a couch in a dark room lit by a floor lamp. He drinks a bourbon and stares out at the NightLights. (NOTE: One NightLight should read, **"Skyvert stock steady despite Walter Sylvan's death.**") As Bannister stares outside:

FLASHBACK TO: Bannister, seated on the same couch, alone. Then Mae enters. Sits beside him.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
She's a ghost in my waking hours. A stain on my sleep.

Mae rests her head on his lap. He strokes her hair.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
She's a neon NightLight in a starless sky. I can't look away... I can't turn her off.

Bannister turns off his lamp. The room goes dark. The NightLights illuminate him as he truly is in:

PRESENT DAY... a man stroking the empty space where Mae's hair used to be.

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - LOBBY - MORNING

Sparky tries to detain a FAT-CAT client charging for the door.

SPARKY
He'll be here any sec.
(trying to stall him)
Hey, how 'bout this... we throw in an extra session... on the house.

It's no use. Fat-cat slams the door shut and disappears. A moment later -

Bannister enters. Sparky stares daggers at his partner.

SPARKY (CONT'D)
You're late. We lost the banker.

BANNISTER
I saw.

Bannister pours a coffee. Sparky follows him, stressed:

SPARKY
We're in trouble, Nick. Regulars are jumping ship. Punch and Judy got divorced. Miss Lonelyhearts musta moved on to a new beau. Even the old widower ain't been back... Pretty soon, *we'll* need tanks to remember money in our pockets.
(off his look)
Are you even listening?

Bannister downs his coffee. Speaks calmly:

BANNISTER
Get me the kit.
(off his look)
I'll take Avery's job.

SPARKY
Thought you swore off those gigs.

BANNISTER
Like you said. We need the money.

EXT. HUNAN PALACE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A chintzy Chinese pagoda that's seen better days. The windows are boarded, the paint peeling, and a "CONDEMNED" sign hangs from the door.

KIT in hand, Bannister raps on the door five times. Then:

BANNISTER
Got any pu pu platter?

The door opens a crack. **HARRIS,** an undercover Fed, peeks out:

HARRIS
Not the code, Bannister.

BANNISTER
Yet you know it's me.

HARRIS
You alone?

BANNISTER
(annoyed, sarcastic)
I brought a plus-one.

AVERY (O.S.)
Let him in, Harris.

The door opens a crack. Bannister steps inside. CUT TO:

INT. HUNAN PALACE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Bannister opens his REMINISCENCE KIT. Meticulously lays his tools out on a lazy Susan.

In the distance, Avery stands guard over the witness: **FALKS** (40s, pockmarked, neck thick as a hula hoop). Meanwhile, Harris cleans out a huge FISH TANK, lamenting:

HARRIS
I'm gonna stink like sushi for days.

Tools ready, Bannister runs a hose into the fish tank and starts filing it with water.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Courts used to rely on eyewitness testimony. Pin the tail on the donkey would have been more reliable.

Bannister pours some chemicals into the water.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
The tank's view to the past is crystal clear. But in cases like this, it's rarely pretty.

ANGLE ON the chemicals swirling in the water...

TIME CUT TO: The same water, now with FALKS in it. The Kit's LED projector plays Falks's reminiscences against the wall. Bannister, mid-deposition, prompts into the mic as...

ON SCREEN: **BIG JOE** (40s), crime boss, whispers in Falks's ear.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Falks had enough to put Big Joe away for life...

ON SCREEN: A brutally-massacred couple in a hotel. Their throats slit. Their naked bodies sprawled on the bed.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Whether it was settling scores...

ON SCREEN: Falks moves through the "hall" of his mind. Opens a door to a scene of him and some of Big Joe's thugs trashing a bodega as the owner and her husband beg for mercy.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Enforcing local taxes...

ON SCREEN: Another hall. Another door. Here, Falks brings boxes of new betel-nut chews to a girl in a Plexiglas stand.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Dealing with distribution...

She rolls out her tongue hungrily. He pops a BETEL-CHEW on it. Slaps her ass casually as she swallows.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Or greasing wheels of influence.

ON SCREEN: A swish crowd parties around a pool in a room recreated to look like a RAIN FOREST, complete with exotic caged animals. Betel-girls who look like supermodels offer billionaires chews from '40s-style cigarette boxes.

END MONTAGE: As the party scene plays, Bannister prompts:

BANNISTER (INTO MIC)
Quite the guest list at this party.

ON SCREEN: Falks scans the room. Clocks a SILVER FOX, lapping up a GOLD chew from a betel-girl's cleavage.

AVERY (O.S.)
There's the councilman...

Falks clocks a beautiful woman vomiting in a planter.

HARRIS (O.S.)
That's the actress - won all those awards a couple years back.

Falks beelines for a scowling goon, with SPIKED steel knuckles, looking over the crowd in the corner.

AVERY (O.S.)
That's Spike, Big Joe's main muscle.

Spike moves aside to allow Falks a seat next to BIG JOE.

AVERY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
And there's Big Joe himself, holding court.

ON SCREEN: A cigarette-box noses into Falks's POV.

BETEL-NUT GIRL
Can I tempt you, gentlemen?

Bannister reacts to the girl's voice.

BANNISTER (INTO MIC)
Wait. Who was that?

ON SCREEN: Big Joe eye fucks the girl. Speaks in Sino-slang:

BIG JOE
Lookit this fine *nu*.

Falks follows his gaze up the betel-girl's slim thighs, to the white of her exposed midriff, to the breasts she rolls a betel-chew over and finally... to her face.

Bannister catches his breath. The girl wears too much makeup. Her hair's a platinum blonde bob. Her accent's phony-posh. But she has the same smile. The same eyes.

IT'S MAE... years before he met her.

BIG JOE (CONT'D)
I don't trip at work. But *you* can bring some by my room, tonight.

Mae smiles, nervous, as Big Joe fingers the hem of her skirt.

BACK TO BANNISTER who shakes as he watches Mae on screen.

HARRIS
Ask him about the councilman - Big Joe's got half of Boston in his pocket.

Bannister says nothing. He's lost, staring at Mae.

AVERY
Bannister? We gotta know what other government's on the take.

Bannister considers them a beat, then:

BANNISTER (INTO MIC)
The girl. When did you next see her?

AVERY
What the hell!

But it's too late. The screen flashes to:

INT. BIG JOE'S BOSTON PENTHOUSE - HALL - NIGHT (REMINISCENCE)

Falks stands outside the master bedroom. Platinum Mae clicks her way up the marble stairs in a pair of stilettos.

PLATINUM MAE
I'm here to-

FALKS
You should pop a silver. I hear the trailers are great when you're getting fucked.

PLATINUM MAE
I'm not a whore.

FALKS
(shrugs, unconcerned)
Take the gold. It makes becoming one easier.

He opens the bedroom door. Smiles, lascivious, as she enters:

INT. HUNAN PALACE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Bannister's gutted as Mae disappears into Big Joe's bedroom.

AVERY
Get back on subject, Bannister!

Harris grabs the mic from Bannister. Barks his own prompt:

HARRIS (INTO MIC)
Tell us about the councilman! How'd Big Joe get him in his pocket? Was it bribery? Extortion?

Suddenly, the computer starts BEEPING wildly. Falks begins THRASHING in his tank like a fish out of water. And the screen image cuts to digital snow.

AVERY
The fuck! What the fuck is that!

Bannister sits back calmly in his chair. Crosses his arms.

BANNISTER
He's blanking.
(to Harris)
You really should let the professionals do the prompting.

HARRIS
I just asked a question-

BANNISTER
You asked a *leading* question. Presupposed Big Joe had that councilman in his pocket. Apparently, he didn't. There's no memory to access, so you hit static - put Falks in a neurological whitespace.

The machine's beeping gets more rapid and insistent. Falks's thrashing intensifies. Bannister shakes his head:

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
He blanks more than a couple minutes - he'll get brain damage.

Avery grabs the mic from Harris. Hands it to Bannister.

AVERY
Fix it. Get him back.

Bannister hesitates before taking the mic.

BANNISTER
No more interruptions?

AVERY
Goddamn it, Bannister! Just do it!

BANNISTER
I'll take that as a yes.

Bannister slides on the mic. Prompts soothingly:

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
It's all right. You took a misstep. Opened an empty door. But now, you're back. Back to something you know...
(then)
Tell me about the girl... the platinum blonde...

Harris groans. Avery pushes over her chair, pissed. But Bannister continues - no turning back...

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
When was the last time you saw her?

INT. BIG JOE'S PENTHOUSE - HALL - MORNING (REMINISCENCE)

Falks knocks on Big Joe's door. Platinum Mae answers in a silk robe. She looks different. Classy. Well-kept as a Pekingese. She's Joe's pet now. Falks is respectful:

FALKS
Sorry to wake you. Joe told me to pick up the week's supply.

Mae opens the door. Waves him in.

INT. BIG JOE'S PENTHOUSE - MAIN ROOM - DAY (REMINISCENCE)

A room full of sports memorabilia and photos of Mae and Joe. They've made a lot of memories together. Mae pours coffee.

PLATINUM MAE
Cuppa?

FALKS
I should just hit the safe and go-

PLATINUM MAE
I insist.

Falks takes the cup Mae offers. Drinks swiftly.

AVERY (O.S.)
Why are we on this bullshit!

Falks spots a SUITCASE by the door. Mae clocks his gaze:

PLATINUM MAE
He’s taking me to Ibiza for my birthday.

Falks nods. Downs the coffee. Places it on the table:

FALKS
I should get the betel-chews...

The word “chews” comes out distorted - muffled. Falks rises. Stumbles a little. His world is going blurry.

HARRIS (O.S.)
What's wrong with the feed!

BANNISTER
(watches the screen)
It’s not the feed...

ON SCREEN: Falks is remembering things as he experienced them. He looks down at his hands. They’re turning black. Rotting. He looks up at Platinum Mae - her face a decaying mask. We’re in a FIRST-PERSON ACID TRIP.

FALKS
You dosed me? Why...

He glances again at the suitcase. Behind it, he can make out another bag filled with a stash of betel-chews. All GOLD.

Disoriented, Falks looks up. Sees Mae charging him with a raised baseball bat. WHAM. She nails him. Lights out.

INT. HUNAN PALACE - NIGHT - INTERCUT

The screen is BLACK. Harris and Avery are freaking out.

HARRIS
He’s fucking our deposition!

Avery approaches Bannister. Leans. Looks him in the eye.

AVERY
We brought you here to do a job.
Not to chase some druggy slut-

BANNISTER
(stands, resolute)
Get yourself another archeologist.

He rips off his mic. Storms from the room. CUT TO:

EXT. MANHATTAN STREETS - NIGHT

Bannister charges down the street, reeling from Falks's reminiscence.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Everything about her was a lie...

Mae's voice comes back to taunt him.

MAE (O.S.)
Maybe you only saw what you wanted to see...

In a passing cab, he imagines he sees himself and Mae locked in a lovers' embrace. But now...

The couple pulls apart. They are strangers - not embracing - but arguing. The woman's face is streaked with tears.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
My memories mock me...

He stops at an intersection. Imagines Mae jaywalking into a flood of cabs. She beckons him to join. His own words come back to haunt him:

BANNISTER (V.O.)
She waits in every street...

Bannister steps after her... HONK. An old, non-automated RICKSHAW nearly plows him over. Bannister stumbles back - the Mae of his memory is gone. The rickshaw driver curses at him in Spanish as he speeds past.

Bannister keeps walking. Passes an alley. Imagines Mae laughing in a darkened corner:

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Laughs in every haunt...

Mae turns. Reaches into her mouth. Pulls out her teeth. Laughs through her bloodied gums.

Bannister stumbles onto a new street. Stops at:

EXT. MAE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Bannister remembers walking Mae home the FIRST NIGHT they met. She wears the red dress from her lounge act.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
She's a neon NightLight in a starless sky. I can't look away...

RED MAE (O.S.)
I'm not a whore.

BANNISTER (O.S.)
You lied to me!

Bannister remembers Mae grabbing his collar, leading him up the stairs of her building. As they enter the building, his vision of them fades. The street is once again empty.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
I can't turn her off...

Drunk, he chokes down his grief. SLAMS his fist against a garbage can. Just then -

The LIGHT in Mae's studio flicks on. This is NOT A MEMORY.

It's REAL. Bannister watches, shocked, as Mae's silhouette passes before the window, undressing. CUT TO:

INT. MAE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Bannister pounds on Mae's door furiously.

BANNISTER
Open up, Mae. I know you're there.
(a beat, then - he slams the door, furious)
I'll break this door down if you don't-

Silently, the door swings open. A backlit woman steps into the hall. And though the hair and silhouette is the same...

It's not Mae. It's CINDY, the blonde from the Coconut Club.

INT. MAE'S LOFT - NIGHT

Cindy runs a bath. Kicks off a heel. Massages her foot.

BANNISTER
What're you doing here?

CINDY
I could ask you the same thing.

Bannister studies her as she lights a cigarette.

BANNISTER
You work at the Coconut Club with Mae, don't you?

CINDY
'Til she quit.

BANNISTER
You seen her since?
(she shakes her head)
Then what the hell are you doing here?

CINDY
I live in Jersey. Mae used to let me crash here after a long shift. Figured she wouldn't mind. This place is paid till the end of the quarter.

Bannister studies her a beat. Believes her story.

BANNISTER
How'd you get in?

CINDY
Used the spare.

Bannister looks at her, curious. Cindy holds up a KEY.

CINDY (CONT'D)
I told her it's dangerous. But she always keeps one under the mat. Said it saved her ever being locked out.

As this hits Bannister like a ton of bricks... CUT TO:

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - LOBBY - NIGHT

Bannister charges in. Sparky's immediately concerned.

SPARKY
Shouldn't you be at the meet?

Bannister pushes past him, into...

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Bannister rummages through his desk for a voice recording labeled "CABIN." Plays it in the RECORDER as he strips:

BANNISTER (RECORDING)
You're going on a journey. Your destination? A place and a time only you know...

Sparky runs in as Bannister heads for the tank.

SPARKY
What the hell are you-

BANNISTER
Everything about Mae was a lie. Even how we met. Did you know she used to work for Big Joe?

SPARKY
The Boston gangster?

BANNISTER
I saw her. In the deposition...

SPARKY
You asked about Mae in the depo? Let her go, Nick! She wouldn't have wanted this.

BANNISTER
You don't know what she wanted. No one does.

SPARKY
I know this...

He fishes a WRINKLED PAPER from his pocket. Hands it over.

SPARKY (CONT'D)
A week after she disappeared, I found this slipped under our door.

Bannister unfolds it and reads: **"Remember Orpheus and Eurydice? Don't look back. Love, Mae"**

BANNISTER
How could you not tell me?

SPARKY
I thought it would make things worse.

BANNISTER
It does. Between us... Get out. You're fired.
(off his hesitation)
GET THE HELL OUT!

Sparky backs out of the room. Bannister climbs into the tank.

BANNISTER (RECORDING) (CONT'D)
Imagine your mind like a long hall with a series of doors. Behind some doors is darkness. Behind others...

He PLUNGES his head beneath the DARK water of the tank. Sinks lower and lower in the murky water until it begins to clear into a sun-dappled blue... We find ourselves UNDERWATER IN:

EXT. LAKE - DAY (REMINISCENCE)

Mae swims by in a two-piece, her hair trailing behind her like a mermaid. Bannister grabs her ankle. A moment later -

BANNISTER (RECORDING)
... It's spring again...

They surface into the bright sun for air. Mae kisses him.

MAE
I love you.
(off his look)
You'll believe it one day.

Gingerly, he touches the fading bruise on her cheek.

MAE (CONT'D)
It'll be gone soon.

She splashes him playfully. She rises out of the lake. Races naked up the shore, toward a CABIN surrounded by pines...

INT. CABIN - HALL - DAY (REMINISCENCE)

Bannister follows Mae's dripping footsteps down a hall lined with Bannister's childhood photos. Mae touches a frame:

MAE
Your parents left you this place?
(off his nod)
You must have been close.

BANNISTER
They were good parents.

MAE
How come you never talk about them?

BANNISTER
It’s like trying to describe a song without humming it. How do you sum up someone you lost?

MAE
I can do my parents up with a couple four-letter words.

BANNISTER
You never talk about them.

MAE
If you don’t got something good to say... ‘Sides, I hit the road when I was fourteen.

BANNISTER
Little young, isn’t it?

MAE
I looked older. By the time I got off the streets... I felt it, too.

Bannister studies her tenderly, wishing he could save her from the past:

BANNISTER
How did you finally get off the streets?

MAE
I musta been seventeen, eighteen... Hitching through the country. Running out of options, food, and favors...
(then)
One day I stumble on this little road that sounded like something out of a fairy tale. “Lullaby Lane.” Can you believe it? I followed it till it dead-ended in this pink barn. It seemed totally surreal at the time - later I found it was supposed to be red, but the sun faded it to this pale pink. I’d never seen anything like it. That first night, I crashed in the stables... Felt so good to have a roof over my head, I slept in. Next morning, the owner - Myrna - found me. Instead of kicking me out, she gave me a room. Let me stay as long as I needed.

BANNISTER
Did you ever see her again?

MAE
Years later, after I bottomed out, I locked myself in that same room to detox off the betel. All the places I've been - it's the only one where I actually felt safe.

Bannister touches her face gently.

BANNISTER
You're safe with me.

MAE
I hope so.

She reaches back. Unties her bikini top. Turns:

MAE (CONT'D)
Wanna give me the rest of the tour?

OFF Mae tossing the bikini toward him, CUT TO:

INT. CABIN - BEDROOM - DAY (REMINISCENCE)

Dusty baseball caps and toys shake on a shelf. Beneath them, the old, wood headboard of a twin bed slams against the wall.

BANNISTER (RECORDING)
You take her in places where even before you met her, you dreamt of her...

As Mae and Bannister have sex, he runs his thumb along the bridge of her front teeth. More mesmerized than repulsed:

BANNISTER (RECORDING) (CONT'D)
Even the broken parts you find... you want.

Mae moans. Kicks over a lamp. It shatters and we SMASH TO:

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT (REMINISCENCE)

A black sky lit only by stars. On a distant horizon, the city's NightLights shine like a faraway firework. Mae and Bannister watch from the porch. She stares at the stars:

MAE
I almost forgot what the sky looked like before they turned it into a giant billboard.

Bannister brushes some stray hairs from her cheeks. Stares at the bruise in the moonlight.

BANNISTER
You ever gonna tell me who did this?

MAE
Let's leave it behind us.

BANNISTER
There is no "behind." No "ahead," either. Time doesn't work that way. Time used to be a line. Now? It's a deck of cards scattered on a table. Can't order it any more than you can order stars in the sky.

Mae throws her arms around him.

MAE
Then I choose this moment. Only this one.

BANNISTER
You can't do that.

MAE
We could stay here. Find work. Who needs the city? We'd be happy...

Bannister smiles a bit. Then sees the look on her face:

BANNISTER
You're not serious...

She hesitates a moment. Deciding. Then:

MAE
People spend their whole lives chasing some perfect moment. What if we've found ours?

BANNISTER
We can always come back.

MAE
What if things change?

BANNISTER
This won't. Not for me.

He kisses her, tender.

BANNISTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It was the last night we had together. Even without knowing that, I didn't want it to end...

Their kissing grows more passionate. She slides to sit on top of him. As she straddles him, he kisses her neck and the tops of her breasts. She unbuttons his shirt. Suddenly -

The porch swing begins to sway - subtly at first, then more violently. As Mae kisses him - Bannister notices the entire porch is beginning to SHAKE - then the cabin itself.

Mae keeps kissing him, oblivious. Even as the quiet of the night is replaced by DEAFENING SIRENS and the sound of people WAILING.

Finally, the walls of the cabin begin to CRUMBLE and fall to the ground. Revealing behind them...

... PITCH BLACKNESS. We are in...

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - OFFICE - TANK - MORNING

Bannister blinks awake inside the dark waters. Hoists himself out of the tank. Yanks the respirator out. Sees:

The walls around him are indeed shaking. And a deafening chorus of wailing and shrieking is rising up from the street.

The vibrations from the ruckus have caused his RECORDER to fall off the windowsill. The feed to the tank has come unplugged and Bannister's voice plays in the room:

BANNISTER (RECORDING)
After she fell asleep.... You picked her up. Carried her to bed. Imagined a life where every night would always end like this-

Bannister SNAPS the recorder off. Puts on a robe. CUT TO:

EXT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - DAY

Bannister stumbles outside to investigate the commotion. The sidewalks are packed with observers watching...

A WAILING - the loud, ostentatious funeral processions thrown for the dead with money. Professional mourners beat their breasts and wail into megaphones. Large, elaborate floats memorialize different chapters of the deceased's life. LED projectors graffiti every wall with images of the deceased. Priests throw coins to street viewers who cry along.

Bannister turns to a NEIGHBORING woman, who dabs at her eyes.

BANNISTER
Another wailing?

NEIGHBOUR
The richer they die, the louder they wail.

BANNISTER
Who's this one for?

NEIGHBOUR
You been in a cave? CEO of Skyvert. Owned all the NightLight airspace.

The Priest Float passes by. The Neighbour screams and wails. They throw a couple coins her way. As she pocket them:

NEIGHBOUR (CONT'D)
'Least the bastard can buy me a beer.

The final float passes with the deceased's son, **JEREMY SYLVAN** (17), and the widow, **TAMARA SYLVAN** (40s), her face hidden beneath a black veil. A gust of wind ruffles the widow's veil - reveals a patrician beauty, her eyes glazed from heavy sedation. Bannister stares at the face. Mutters:

BANNISTER
I knew her.

The Neighbour shoots him a knowing look.

NEIGHBOUR
The widow? I'll bet. Lots of friends and family comin' out of the woodwork now that there's an estate to settle...

She gives him a wink and heads away. Bannister stares after Tamara. This isn't a con. He really did know her. He recalls:

INT. BANNISTER'S OFFICE - 15 YEARS EARLIER (FLASHBACK)

Tamara Sylvan (25), now a couture-clad beauty in her prime, pushes a wad of bills toward him.

TAMARA
There's more where that comes from-

BANNISTER
Money isn't the problem.

TAMARA
It's just a few extra jolts.

BANNISTER
I never go above twenty-five.

TAMARA
Other people do.

BANNISTER
Other people care more about lining their pockets than preserving your brain cells. Besides... it wouldn't help. You're looking for something you can't get by reminiscing.

TAMARA
A few years ago, I was his everything. Now, he barely sees me. I want things back like they were.

BANNISTER
I won't burn you 'cuz your husband's neglectful. Maybe you should get him in the tank - remind him what he's missing.

TAMARA
(laughs, bitterly)
Tank's for the people who get left behind. Men like him? They move on.

OFF Young Tamara dabbing at her eyes... SMASH BACK TO:

EXT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - DAY

Bannister watches Tamara's float disappear down the street.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
I never imagined, years later...
I'd be the one standing still.

BANNISTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But if I was to stand still... I was determined to stand alone.

Bannister pulls on his hat. Walks down the street, against the crowd. CUT TO:

INT. MEMORABILIA INC. POD - REMINISCENCE ROOM - DAY

A bright, cheerful room housing TANKS and comfortable chairs for guests. At the base of each tank is a SCREEN playing the nostalgic's reminiscence. On the wall hangs a banner:

"**Memorabilia Inc. Long-Term Pods for the Time of Your Life.**"

HAL (40s), gives Sparky and Bannister a tour:

HAL
Everything's automated. Prompts are pre-recorded. Food is intravenous. Waste is emptied through catheters-

He drones on while Bannister thinks to himself:

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Sparky always said he'd rather be in a tank than work in a pod. But this is the best I can do... I can't take him where I'm going.

Sparky examines the state-of-the-art tech, skeptical:

SPARKY
You got so many doodads and whatnots - waddya need me for?

HAL
Some of our medium-term nostalgics have guests during visiting hours.

OFF a young mother and her children, sitting by their grandmother's tank - cheering as they watch her reminiscence about being crowned high school homecoming queen.

HAL (CONT'D)
They find the human element comforting.

SPARKY
So I'd be window dressing.

HAL
You'd also monitor vitals and power spikes. Make sure there's no burns.

He leads them out of the room, into...

INT. MEMORABILIA INC. POD - HALL - DAY

HAL
Of course, less supervision is needed for long-term guests on loop.

Hal leads them through a set of doors:

INT. MEMORABILIA INC. POD - CATACOMBS - DAY

A dimly-lit room stacked with tanks stacked like graves in a catacomb, as high and far as the eye can see.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
The Mobius room. For nostalgics who never leave the tank...

Hal leads Sparky through the room, talking shop. Bannister lingers, staring into the glass coffins as he walks:

BANNISTER (V.O.)
A controversial practice, but since its widespread adoption, suicides are down ninety percent. Why end it all when you can begin again?

OFF A TANK: An OLD WOMAN remembers herself as a young prima ballerina dancing with her Prince Charming.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Why be alone when you can be adored?

OFF ANOTHER TANK: a FAT MAN remembers his father teaching him to ride a bike. He peddles down a sidewalk, wobbly...

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Why grow old? When you can stay always on the verge of becoming the exact person you'd dreamt you'd be?

OFF FAT MAN'S TANK: As his father lets go of the bike and the little boy he once was races away.

Bannister stops in front of an empty tank. Sees his own reflection in the glass...

BANNISTER (V.O.)
The past fits everyone better.

Hal's voice interrupts Bannister's thoughts:

HAL
Isn't that right, Mr. Bannister?

BANNISTER
Pardon me?

HAL
I was just telling Mr.-

SPARKY
Sparky.

HAL
Mr. Sparky. We normally don't hire such... senior techs.

BANNISTER
Your pod's been trying to buy out my shop for a long time. You hire Sparky, you get the best of it.

HAL
We'd love to have the both of you-

BANNISTER
It's a one-man deal.

Hal looks at Sparky's shaking hands, dubious. Then:

HAL
You could start tomorrow.

Sparky hesitates, unsure. Looks to Bannister, hopeful:

SPARKY
I'm sure Nick needs me a couple more weeks to tie up-

BANNISTER
Start as soon as you want.

Bannister turns on his heel, cold, and heads for the door.

INT. MEMORABILIA INC. POD - HALL - DAY

Bannister passes a nostalgic being pushed on a gurney toward the catacombs. He motions to the **TECH:**

BANNISTER
Just a second?

He looks at the nostalgic's toe-tag. It's BENNIE, the widower who used to come to his shop to reminisce about his wife.

TECH
You know him?

Bannister nods. Looks at the feed.

ON SCREEN: Benny (70s) and his wife (70s) sit on a porch. His wife pets a Siamese cat. All look happy. Content.

Bannister's glance shifts to the tank. On top of it rests a frayed collar with the name "Pinklepurr." He touches it:

TECH (CONT'D)
Keep it if you want.
(nods to a cabinet of IV bags and syringes)
'Pental he's on? He won't miss it.

Bannister releases the collar. Not sentimental.

BANNISTER
Thanks. I'm fine.

The Tech nods. Pushes the widower into the catacombs.

BANNISTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He's better off here...

Before the catacomb doors close, Bannister glimpses Sparky slipping his arms into a new white tech coat.

BANNISTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
They both are...

Bannister beelines for the drug cabinet. Surreptitiously breaks the lock. Opens the cabinet. Grabs a SYRINGE and a few vials of thiopental. CUT TO:

EXT. STREETS - NIGHT

Bannister hails a cab. Steps inside:

INT. CAB - NIGHT

INTERFACE
What is your destination, please?

BANNISTER
Boston.

They begin to move through the packed streets.

BANNISTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The human brain has a billion neurons...

Bannister stares out at the sea of pedestrians. PULL OUT TO:

EXT. NEW YORK STREETS - NIGHT

Banister's cab joins a chain of city traffic:

BANNISTER (V.O.)
... All with a thousand connections to other neurons...

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Bannister's ride races north on highway arteries flowing with red of taillights and the white of headlights.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
... Adding up to a trillion connections, each leading to a different moment or memory...

INT. CAB - NIGHT

Bannister stares out the window - his reflection gliding over a highway sign: "**WELCOME TO BOSTON.**"

BANNISTER (V.O.)
With all these connections, it was easy for some memories to slip through the cracks. Fade away.

EXT. BOSTON BETEL-BAR - NIGHT

The cab pulls up to a high-class BETEL-BAR. At the entrance, Harajuko betel-girls dance and wave techno streamers. Bannister steps out of the vehicle.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Not anymore...

A betel-girl blows a kiss at him. He heads into the bar.

INT. BOSTON BETEL-BAR - NIGHT

A vast space filled with googie hipsters and steampunk suits. Betel-girls dance on raised platforms - amping the crowd.

Bannister locks eyes on the mobster, BIG JOE, being ushered by BODYGUARDS into a private BACK ROOM of the club.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
... Now, there's no such thing as bygones.

His eyes stalk Big Joe as he recedes into the back room.

A betel-girl, enhanced to look like an **ANIME**, approaches:

ANIME BETEL-GIRL
You want one, mister?

Below her tits is a cigarette box full of betel-chews.

ANIME BETEL-GIRL (CONT'D)
All the colors in the rainbow.

BANNISTER
I'm looking for something stronger. Silver, platinum... maybe even a little gold.

ANIME BETEL-GIRL
It's illegal to distribute metallics in this state.

She starts to walk away; Bannister grabs her. Pulls her back.

BANNISTER
I'm not a narc. I'm just looking for a good time. I hear Big Joe's the man to go to...

ANIME BETEL-GIRL
No one talks to Big Joe.

BANNISTER
Then consider me "no one."

He slips her some coin. A bit more. Finally, she relents.

ANIME BETEL-GIRL
I'll get you halfway there. Then you're on your own.

She nods for him to follow. As they weave through the crowd:

Bannister reaches into his pocket. Finds the SYRINGE he stole from the pod. He shoves it up his sleeve.

Anime leads him to a BURLY **BOUNCER** guarding a back room. Tells the guard over the noise of the club:

ANIME BETEL-GIRL (CONT'D)
He wants to talk to Big Joe.

BOUNCER
(sizes him up)
Big Joe don't wanna talk to you.

Bannister thinks fast. Pulls a name from Falks's reminiscence:

BANNISTER
Sure he does. I'm a friend of Spike's. He said Joe'd hook me up.

Bouncer studies him a beat. Then, nods for Bannister to...

INT. BETEL-BAR - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

The same room Bannister saw in the deposition. It's a postmodern Hieronymous Bosch. Trippers frolic in the grotto. Betel-girls dance and fuck for high rollers. EXOTIC ANIMALS prowl in cages for the trippers' amusement.

Bannister approaches Big Joe, who eats a bowl of raw meat with chopsticks. Two GUARDS flank him. The Bouncer whispers into Joe's ear. Joe nods. Sends the Bouncer away. Then -

Big Joe beckons for Bannister to approach. He smiles:

BIG JOE
Friend of Spike's, eh? You got *guan xi* with me, pal?

BANNISTER
I'm looking to graduate from pastels. You've got heavy metals.

Big Joe seems amused. Sizes up Bannister:

BIG JOE
Vet, huh. You folks even starch your sentences. I'm a patriot. But the war's over, *pengyo*. Now's the time to be civil-like. Show some motherfuckin' manners. Per instance, if I talk about *guan xi*; you don't jump straight into commerce.

BIG JOE (CONT'D)
Per instance, if I call you *pengyo* - you return it with an appellation your own: something friendly, but respectful. Erring, given the power differential between us, on the motherfuckin' respectful. Per instance, I smile benevolent and welcome at you. I don't need to do that. It's social graces. Noblesse oblige. Motherfuckin' *minzi*. But you? You get all laconic with some Dirty Harry jaw clench. Now I'm not looking for a *kowtow*. But a polite nod, a smile that engages the eyes?

BANNISTER
I just want to score some tinsel.

Big Joe leans toward Bannister, who still does not smile.

BIG JOE
You got balls. Bocce-sized. Like Hamlet over there...

He gestures to a LION HEAD mounted on the wall.

BIG JOE (CONT'D)
Before the Boston zoo went belly up, he lived in a big motherfuckin' cage with a big motherfuckin' sign: "King of Beasts."

Big Joe raises a bite of dripping meat to his lips.

BIG JOE (CONT'D)
Who's the king now?

Bannister refuses to flinch. Insists again:

BANNISTER
All I want is some gold. An eight bag.

BIG JOE
Bulk, eh? There's the bocces again. You got so much swagger, you'll buy without a taste?

Big Joe snaps at a betel-girl. She brings a cigarette box of metal betels to Bannister.

Under Big Joe's watchful eye, Bannister takes a gold ball. Chews. Swallows. Spits out the shell. After a beat:

BANNISTER
Fine. Let's discuss payment.

BIG JOE
Don't you get it, my friend?
Payment is not the *wunti* holding up
this here transaction...

A guard GRABS Bannister's arms from behind. Big Joe gets right up in Bannister's face. Slips a brass knuckle on.

BIG JOE (CONT'D)
It's trust. *Guanxi.* Per instance:
your "friend" Spike's been dead for
years.

He PUNCHES Bannister in the face. Bannister falls back. Spits blood. Big Joe's guards hold him down while...

BIG JOE (CONT'D)
Spike didn't send you.

Big Joe WRENCHES open his mouth. Rips out a HEALTHY TOOTH.

BIG JOE (CONT'D)
And you're no user.

Big Joe's fist SLAMS toward Bannister. CUT TO BLACK:

LATER... a SPLASH. Bannister awakes to a BUCKET of water thrown at his face. He coughs. Sits up. Finds himself in:

INT. BETEL-BAR - BACK ROOM - CAGE - NIGHT

A large cage linked to an adjoining cage with OPHELIA, an angry TIGRESS, prowling inside. Bannister's hands are tied behind his back. Big Joe approaches the bars.

BIG JOE
You've got yourself in a
predicament, *pengyo*.

BANNISTER'S POV: Big Joe's voice is distorted and his movements leave gold TRAILERS (hallucinogenic streaks) in their wake. The betel-chew hallucinogen is taking hold.

BANNISTER
I'm looking for my woman.

BIG JOE
Your woman? She suck my dick? That
why you here?
(off his look)

BIG JOE (CONT'D)
Chill. More *nus* suck down this shit than 7-Up. It's a rite of passage.

Joe waves, dismissive. Starts to walk away. Then:

BANNISTER
She played baseball with your goon's head. Made off with a case of golds.

Big Joe stops in his track. Turns, suddenly interested:

BIG JOE
You've seen my favorite chanteuse. Tell me... where?

BANNISTER
She was in New York. Disappeared a couple days after her old boss beat her up.

BIG JOE
So you come to my *jia* looking to settle the score. Sorry, *pengyo*, I haven't seen her in years.

BANNISTER
You're lying.

BIG JOE
(laughs at his gall)
I'm lying? I'm lying...

Big Joe turns serious. Strides toward the cage.

BIG JOE (CONT'D)
You ever hear a swan song, *pengyo*? It originates from the Ancient Greek belief that when a swan dies, this otherwise-mute bird sings what is meant to be the most transportive *yinyue* you've ever fucking heard. I cannot comment on the veracity of this ornithological anecdote. But I do got insight into the more metaphorical aspects of the term. Per instance, the thinking goes that the moment before a person dies - everything they've been holding back pours out in a swan song - a moment of truth, if you will...

As Big Joe lectures, Bannister struggles to wrench his hands from their ropes. It's slow, laborious work, made slower by the fact his betel high is kicking in full throttle.

BIG JOE (CONT'D)
But I know for a fact: dying motherfuckers are the biggest liars there is. Put a gun to a man - and you get some of the sweetest fictions ever told. It's beautiful, really. Sometimes I wish I had a notepad. But it's not even for my benefit. They're lying to *themselves*. Trying to convince themselves they got no regrets, their shit don't stink -
(sings, glib)
They did it theirrrrr way...
(then)
'Course, it's all bullshit.

Bannister's wrists bleed from chafing at the loosening ropes.

BIG JOE (CONT'D)
You know who doesn't lie? The people who put 'em in their mortal predicament. The moment before you kill someone is very liberating. Very intimate. It's the one moment in your life - you can tell someone a secret and you know for damn sure they're not gonna repeat it.
(off the tigress in cage)
So before you and Ophelia get acquainted...

Big Joe grips the bars. Locks eyes with Bannister.

BIG JOE (CONT'D)
Truth. I haven't seen Mae since she skipped out years ago. And it's not for lack of trying. I even put a reward on her head. Broke my heart when no one cashed in. See, it wasn't just about the betel she stole. With that girl, it was...
(hand to his heart)
Ai. Real *ai.* Funny how love sounds like a cry of pain. But chinks were smart that way. They knew - you can't have one without the other. So trust when I *gao su ni*: I never saw our mutual friend again: if I had, I wouldn't have beat her...

BIG JOE (CONT'D)
I would have snapped her whore head right off her whore neck and mounted it next to Hamlet over there. Any questions?

BANNISTER
Would you like to see her again?

Suddenly, Bannister wrenches his hand free from the rope. Shakes the SYRINGE from his sleeve, and PLUNGES the needle into Big Joe's hand. Then he YANKS Joe's arm through the bars of the cage. Hovers his thumb over the plunger.

As Joe reaches for a gun tucked in the back of his pants...

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
Don't move. There's enough thiopental to make you Mobius for three lifetimes. 'Less it kills you on the spot.

Big Joe's guards unlock the cage. Run in. Thanks to the hallucinogen, time seems to slow down for Bannister:

BIG JOE
Shoot this motherfucker!

In a flash, Bannister SLAMS the plunger on the syringe - INJECTS Big Joe. Then grabs Big Joe's gun through the bars.

BAM. Bannister shoots Guard 1. He goes down, hard. The BLOOD splatters, shooting out in a cataract of gold trailers.

Guard 2 aims at Bannister. GRAZES his arm. Bannister drops his gun. Rolls to Guard 1. Uses his body to absorb the gunfire from Guard 2.

Behind them, Ophelia ROARS, enticed by the smell of blood. The sound distracts Guard 2. Bannister sweeps his feet. He goes down, leaving diagonal trailers in his wake.

Bannister and the guard wrestle for the gun, sliding in the slick puddle of Guard 1's blood. Around the cage, a couple betel-chewers notice the fracas. But instead of being disturbed, they watch, mesmerized as the frenetic movements of the fight weave trailers all over the cage.

Back in the cage, Guard 2 reaches the gun. Bannister pushes it away just as he fires off a couple rounds. A couple trippers admire the bullets' trailers as they sore across the room and lodge in a passing betel-girl's head.

Guard 2 slams Bannister against the rails. Ophelia SWIPES through the bars of the cage at him just as...

Bannister flips Guard 2 against the rails. SWIPE. Ophelia runs her claws down the guard's back. He drops to his knees, screaming, as blood seeps through his shirt.

Bannister stumbles out of the cage. As he leaves, he PULLS a lever, lowering the division between the cages.

Ophelia stalks into the cage with Big Joe and his downed guards. She'll eat well tonight.

EXT. BOSTON BETEL-BAR - NIGHT

Bannister stumbles out of the club, cradling his arm where he's been shot. He hails a cab. Opens the door:

INTERFACE
What is your destination-

BANNISTER
New York. Take me home...

He stumbles into the car and collapses across the seats, a bloody mess. As he pulls away, CUT TO:

INT. BANNISTER'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Exhausted, Bannister stumbles into his room. Flips on the lights. Is startled to find Sparky pouring himself a drink.

BANNISTER
Sparky?

SPARKY
I know you wanted to be alone. But-

Before Bannister can react, Mae steps out of the kitchen with a homemade BIRTHDAY CAKE laced with candles.

MAE
Surprise!

SPARKY
Your gal insisted.

TIME CUT: The cake is eaten. Sparky snores on the floor, bleary from booze. Mae curls up with Bannister on the couch.

MAE
Tell me a story.

BANNISTER
What kind of story?

MAE
One with a happy ending.

BANNISTER
No such thing as a happy ending. All endings are sad. Especially if the story was happy.

MAE
Then tell me a happy story and end it at the middle.

He places his hand against hers, touches her fingertips.

BANNISTER
Ever hear of Orpheus and Eurydice? They were a couple. Very in love. Till one day, Eurydice died.

MAE
That's a horrible story!

BANNISTER
I'm not at the middle yet. Orpheus descended to hell. Begged the devil to release her. The devil agreed: Orpheus could take Eurydice by the hand and lead her back to the land of the living. But there was one condition. He couldn't look back until they'd escaped the gates of hell or Eurydice would be stuck in the underworld forever.

MAE
So what happened?

BANNISTER
Orpheus took her hand and led her back to life.

MAE
And they lived happily ever after?

Her voice is obscured by a KNOCKING filling the room. With each of the knocks, the air in the room seems to ripple.

BANNISTER
What?

MAE
And they lived happily ever-

More KNOCKS drown her out.

Bannister stands. Figures someone's at the door. He crosses to it. Opens it to find...

SPARKY, waiting in the hall, holding the tank's prompt recorder, unplugged in his hands.

Confused, Bannister turns back to the room - sees a second Sparky still sleeping on his floor.

He turns back to the Sparky at the door, who speaks:

DOOR SPARKY
(muffled, distorted)
Get up. Get the hell up, will ya?

BANNISTER
(straining to understand)
What?

As he speaks, a trail of BUBBLES leaves his mouth. CUT TO:

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - OFFICE - MORNING

Bannister blinks awake inside the dark tank - air bubbles from the respirator float around him. Beyond them, looming over the tank is...

Sparky, holding the unplugged RECORDER in his hands as he waits for Bannister to come to.

OFF Bannister hoisting himself out of the tank... CUT TO:

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - LOBBY - DAY

Still bloody and missing a tooth from the night before, Bannister sits bundled in a robe on Sparky's Murphy bed.

Sparky sets a tank KIT down heavily in front of Bannister.

SPARKY
Avery dropped off your kit. I told her I don't work with you no more. She said, then throw it out for all she cares.

Bannister pulls a bloody napkin from his mouth - exposes the gap where his tooth used to be.

BANNISTER
Guess she's still pissed about the deposition?

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
(then, awkward)
Thanks for dropping it off.

Sparky nods. Starts for the door. Then... changes his mind. He pulls up a chair by Bannister. Motions to his shoulder.

SPARKY
Lemme see.

BANNISTER
It’s just grazed.

Sparky hoists up his sleeve. Exposes the ugly gunshot wound.

SPARKY
You oughta go get patched.

BANNISTER
Scars make the man.

SPARKY
Infections make the corpse.

Sparky grabs a FIRST AID tin from under the bed. He cleans the wound. Finds something:

SPARKY (CONT’D)
You got a souvenir in there.

He GRABS a whiskey bottle. Bannister reaches for it. But Sparky pulls it away. Drains most of it himself. Bannister grimaces as the alcohol bites into the blood.

Sparky holds a flame to a pair of TWEEZERS. Reaches into the wound, searching for the bullet. Bannister sweats, pained:

SPARKY (CONT’D)
You fire me so you could kill
yourself faster?

BANNISTER
You here to help me finish the job?

Sparky smiles. Pulls the bullet out of Bannister’s arm. Then he wraps gauze around the wound - tying it in a tight KNOT.

SPARKY
This’ll hold you... for a while.

Sparky packs the first aid kit. Readies to leave:

SPARKY (CONT’D)
Better go. Traffic’s fucked with
all the protests.

BANNISTER
Protests?

SPARKY
The stargazers?
(off his look)
Goddamn Bannister, you gotta get out more. Bunch of folks protesting the NightLights now that the CEO's kicked it. While his estate's in flux - they're hoping to cram in some new laws - make it so the night sky's filled with stars instead of hemorrhoid cream and yogurt ads.

BANNISTER
Tamara'd lose a fortune.

SPARKY
Who the hell's Tamara?

BANNISTER
The widow? She came to me once, long time ago, for a consult.

SPARKY
Guess you're a full-service shop. Cater to the wife and the mistress.

BANNISTER
What do you mean?

SPARKY
Miss Lonelyhearts, remember? The beau she couldn't get over. That was the rich NightLights stiff.

Bannister FLASHES to a memory of Miss Lonelyhearts's reminiscence of her affair. The memory is vague and blurred.

BANNISTER
You sure?

SPARKY
Pull her file if you don't believe me.

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - OFFICE - DAY

Bannister unlocks his filing cabinet while Sparky looks on.

BANNISTER
What's Lonelyhearts's name again?

SPARKY
Rosa. Miss Rosa Sanchez.
(then, concerned)
Your short-term memory's going.

BANNISTER
Don't start with that.

SPARKY
You're spending too much time in the tank. Soon you won't remember your own name without a dunk.

Bannister runs his thumb over the "**S**" files. Reads aloud:

BANNISTER
Salt, Samuel, Sarnoff... no Sanchez.

OFF BANNISTER'S what-the-fuck... TIME CUT TO:

LATER: Sparky and Bannister sit on the floor, sorting through files. They've turned the office upside down searching.

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
Someone stole it.

SPARKY
You sure you remembered to put it away after her last session?

BANNISTER
How could I forget?
(off his look)
My memory's fine, okay? I wasn't even using the tanks then. Rosa's last session was months ago. I haven't even seen her since... Mae left.

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - DAY (FLASHBACK)

It's Bannister's first consultation with Mae. He points to the filing cabinet.

BANNISTER
... The living have secrets. So I keep my records hard copy.

She looks at it with interest as we CUT TO:

LATER: Mae brings a waffle dinner to Bannister's office.

MAE
Hurry up. Before it gets cold.

He locks up his files, dialing the code. He glances back. Instead of setting the table, Mae watches him intensely.

BACK TO SCENE: Bannister turns to Sparky, the truth dawning.

BANNISTER
Mae was the only one with access...

Sparky anticipates where this is going. He shakes his head.

SPARKY
No way she would steal some random file. Besides, I woulda noticed her rifling through the cabinets.

Bannister's glance falls on the empty blue VASE.

BANNISTER
That last day. When she brought the flowers. Were you with her?

SPARKY
'Course I was.

BANNISTER
The *whole* time?

Sparky hesitates as he glances at the vase. CUT TO:

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - LOBBY - DAY (REMINISCENCE)

SPARKY'S POV: The same vase, now full of hyacinths, sits on a small coffee table in the lobby. Sparky and Mae sit on the Murphy bed. Toast coffee mugs. Mae pours liquor into hers.

MAE
Nightcap?

SPARKY
It's seven a.m.

MAE
Not in my time zone.

Sparky nods. She pours a healthy shot into his drink.

MAE (CONT'D)
To you, Sparky!

She toasts him. They each swig, happily.

MAE (CONT'D)
How come they call you Sparky, anyway? From the...

She mimes putting electrodes on her head. He shakes his head:

SPARKY
Nah. Before that. During the war, I did munitions work. Twisting little wires in little drones.

MAE
Your patriotic duty.

SPARKY
I wanted to do my part. And, we needed the money.

MAE
"We"?

SPARKY
My ex.

MAE
You had a wife?

SPARKY
A son, too. It didn't last. I tried to do right by them. Even stopped drinking...
(wistful, then)
But the rub about being dry... The mind is clear. But the hands... they shake.
(then)
Was only a couple wires. But it lit up the place like Independence Day.

MAE
Was anyone hurt?

SPARKY
(shakes his head)
Hurt the bottom line. Management shut the plant. Moved the work to bots. That last day, with everyone off to the breadlines and some off to enlist... I remember how they said it... "Thanks a lot, Sparky." "Nice one, Sparky." Like they were spitting the word. The wife packed up and left - not that I blame her. I went back to the bottle.

SPARKY (CONT'D)
Only thing saved me from drowning in it was Bannister. He takes to lost causes like I take to liquor.
(raises his mug)
So we got ourselves this détente.

He swallows the booze, trying to forget. Mae studies him.

MAE
What's your real name?

Sparky hesitates. It's been a long time since anyone's asked.

SPARKY
George. George Sanders.

MAE
A good name. It suits you.

Despite himself, Sparky's eyes water. He hides it:

SPARKY
'Scuse me. Gonna hit the head.

She nods. Sips her drink. Sparky makes his way to:

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - BATHROOM - DAY (REMINISCENCE)

As Sparks takes a piss, he glances at his reflection in a cracked mirror over the urinal. Whispers at it:

SPARKY
George. George Sanders...

His voice cracks over his last name. As though years of disuse have made it impossible to say. Then he hears...

A METAL SCRAPE from outside. George hurriedly zips his pants.

SPARKY (CONT'D)
You all right, Mae?

MAE (O.S.)
Fine, Sparky!

As Sparky washes his hands, PULL OUT TO REVEAL:

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - OFFICE - DAY - INTERCUT

Sparky's in the tank as Bannister watches his memory.

Bannister crosses to the filing cabinet. Opens it. Hears the same METAL SCRAPE. He punches the cabinet, furious. Then:

ON SCREEN: Sparky walks out of the bathroom to find...

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - LOBBY - DAY (REMINISCENCE)

Mae leaving Bannister's office. He studies her, suspicious. She points to the vase of flowers she's left on the office window ledge.

MAE
Just dropped off the flowers. Don't they look sweet?

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - OFFICE - DAY - INTERCUT

Bannister stares from the screen to the vase on his window. Then, he grabs the vase and SMASHES it onto the ground.

LATER: Sparky dries off from the tank. He stares at the smashed vase. Cautions his friend.

SPARKY
Don't jump to conclusions, Nick.

But Bannister's mind is already made up. He heads for the door as Sparky calls after him:

SPARKY (CONT'D)
At least get the tooth fixed!

EXT. 5TH AVENUE / 42ND STREET - DAY

Tooth not fixed, Bannister works his way toward a massive stone building. Over its towering arches are etched:

"**NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY.**" But an LED "**HOUSING**" sign now hangs over the word "Library." The once-great cultural institution is now a tenement building.

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY TENEMENT - ATRIUM - DAY

A **DOORMAN** snoozes at the checkout counter. Bannister RINGS the ancient bell on his desk, startling him awake.

BANNISTER
Sanchez? Rosa Sanchez's residence.

The doorman stares, rummages through an old CARD CATALOGUE whose files have been repurposed to hold addresses.

DOORMAN
West wing, 206. Between Ancient Greece and Poetry.

Bannister pushes through a turnstile. Enters a great hall that now serves as a common atrium where some thug tenants barbecue (using old books for kindling). He turns into:

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - WEST WING - DAY

The shelves, now boarded with drywall, serve as walls for row after row of small, windowless apartments.

Bannister finds the area where the Poetry and Greek wings meet. Knocks at door 206. **SOPHIA** (20s) wearily answers.

BANNISTER
I'm looking for Rosa?

Sophia looks him over head to toe - sizing him up.

SOPHIA
You Freddy's pop?
(off his confusion)
How good a friend were you?

BANNISTER
We have business together.

SOPHIA
You mean *had.*
(off his look)
Rosa's dead. Accident at the docks almost three months ago, now.

BANNISTER
I'm so sorry. Are you family?

SOPHIA
Just a roommate. Two years we shared this dump - but I barely knew her. Only person she talked to was Freddy.

BANNISTER
Who's Freddy?

SOPHIA
Her son?
(off his look)
You didn't know about Freddy?

She trudges to a dingy bookcase. Finds a PHOTO of FREDDY (3), a dimpled, brown-eyed boy. This is FREDDY.

BANNISTER
Cute kid. Who's the father?

SOPHIA
No idea. Rosa never said.

BANNISTER
Then where's Freddy now?

SOPHIA
My guess, bottom of the Hudson. Disappeared the same night as his momma. He was only three. Easy to miss a little guy like that in a river drag.
(then)
Real shit hand those two got. Sorry to break it to you.

Bannister nods, grim. Sophia presses the door closed. Bannister turns down a hall, defeated. As he walks, we see the SHADOW of a man following him. CUT TO:

EXT. MEATPACKING DISTRICT - HIGH LINE - DAY

The raised subway / public garden of the HIGH LINE is now filled with overgrown weeds and graffiti and surrounded by water. The erstwhile meatpacking district is totally flooded: transformed into a modern-day Venice.

10th Ave. is now a BUSTLING WATER MARKET crammed with colorful canoes, packed flank to flank. In each canoe, merchants sell hot dogs; baos; souvenirs; betel-chews, etc.

A lattice of small wooden planks links the canoes so merchants can walk from one boat to another. Bannister skirts along the bridged walkways. On his SMARTPHONE he consults an article:

"**Mother and son illegals presumed drowned in Flower Market Accident.**" Above it is a photograph of Rosa's bloated body, floating in the water by a dock, surrounded by flower petals.

Bannister beelines for the cluster of canoes brimming with flowers. This is the FLOATING FLOWER MARKET where Rosa died.

He approaches an OLD LADY cutting thorns off roses.

BANNISTER
Did you know Rosa Sanchez? She worked here until an accident-

The Old Lady waves him off, dismissive.

QUICK CUTS OF Bannister approaching other boat workers. All of them ignore him or wave him away. HOURS LATER...

Bannister, sweating and exhausted, talks to a **SUNBURNT MAN** sweeping dead petals from his canoe.

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
I just have a couple questions about Rosa. I won't mention you-

SUNBURNT MAN
Told you. Never heard of her.

Sunburnt's stonewalling. Bannister looks away, disappointed. Clocks **TITCH** (6), a skinny, precocious girl watching intently from a distant flower boat. He calls out:

BANNISTER
Hey!
(she stands, skittish)
Wait. I just want to talk...

Titch gives him the finger. Takes the planks, jumping from boat to boat, to disappear further into the market. Bannister follows: steps onto Sunburnt's boat. Sunburnt swats at him:

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
Sorry...

Bannister makes his way from boat to boat, toward the girl. She sees him coming. Gains speed, running nimbly as a colt.

Bannister's progress is clumsier. The vendors curse and swat at him as he leaps onto their boats. He gets tangled in the plastic clotheslines of a boat selling secondhand clothes.

He leaps onto a food boat. His bad leg gives out. And he falls fast - catching himself centimeters from faceplanting in a boiling bowl of soup. Meanwhile...

Titch has reached the far shore. Bannister picks himself up. Begins leaping the final boats toward her.

Titch sees him coming - runs into the street just as a RICKSHAW bears down upon her.

At the last moment, she stumbles backward, out of harm's way... and into Bannister's arms. She struggles against his grip:

TITCH
Stop crampin' me. I got papers, pig.

BANNISTER
I'm not a cop. I'm just a friend of Rosa Sanchez's who wants to help.
(releasing her slightly)
What's your name?

TITCH
Titch.

BANNISTER
You knew Rosa, didn't you?

TITCH
(shrugs, noncommittal)
Freddy and me hung.

BANNISTER
You hang the day of the accident?

TITCH
Accident my ass. Sewer rats like us don't slip off no boards. And we don't drown 'less you hold us down.

BANNISTER
So what do you think happened?

TITCH
Ask the bitch that took Freddy!
(off his look)
I told the pigs - but they don't see shit 'less it goes down in a penthouse.

She spits on the ground, jaded beyond her years.

BANNISTER
I care. Tell me about this woman you saw with Freddy.

TITCH
Some redhead bitch, bought flowers from Rosa that same day. Didn't even haggle coin. Shoulda known shit was up. She was even nice to Freddy. But something 'bout how she looked at him gave me the creeps.

BANNISTER
Did she give Rosa the creeps?

TITCH
Not until the very end. Red whispered something to her. Whatever it was - Rosa goes *gringo blanco*. Starts crying.

BANNISTER
What happened next?

TITCH
Hell if I know. Shit was getting too adult. I bailed.

BANNISTER
Did you see the woman again?

TITCH
(nods)
That night, Freddy fished off the docks - while Rosa hosed boat. I was bringing him some bait when I hear Rosa screaming, "*Run, Freddy, Run!*" Next thing I know, that crazy redhead comes out of nowhere. Grabs Freddy and books it with him crying his goddamn head off. Never saw either of 'em again.

BANNISTER
The woman who took Freddy. This her?

Bannister opens a photo of Mae on his watch. The girl nods:

TITCH
That's her all right.

OFF the photo of Mae, smiling for Bannister's lens, CUT TO:

EXT. HIGH LINE - SUNSET

Bannister stares at Mae's photo as the boaters pack up their wares and hose down their boats.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Who was she? Who, when not with me?

PUSH IN on the photo's pixilated colors. These Seurat dots MORPH into flower petals floating in the now-empty canal.

PULL OUT to reveal it's night. The boats are gone. The markets closed. Bannister is alone. He pockets Mae's photo. Heads for home. Walks into:

INT. TUNNEL - NIGHT

A quiet underpass. Bannister takes the pedestrian sidewalk as an automated car whizzes past silently. Behind him, he hears footsteps, gaining speed.

Bannister glances back, but it's too dark to see the other pedestrian. He picks up his pace. So do the footsteps...

Headlights from a passing car cast against the tunnel wall the shadow of: the man behind Bannister as he pulls out a BATON and charges toward him. Bannister turns just as...

WHAM. The baton SMASHES into his face. CUT TO BLACK.

A long moment of DARKNESS, then...

MAE (O.S.)
Are you awake?

INT. BANNISTER'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bannister blinks awake. He's back in his own bed, lying curled toward the window. Mae lies behind him, her leg thrown over his body. She hoists herself up. Whispers:

MAE
I love you.

Bannister closes his eyes, taking in the confession.

MAE (CONT'D)
You can say it back, you know.

He turns on his back. Stares up at her. Says nothing.

BANNISTER
Lot of people say it. Mean it, too. Till time makes liars of 'em.

MAE
You only believe in truths you can control. How does it feel, being so honest?

Disappointed, she drops back onto the bed. Bannister turns back on his side. Stares silently into the night. CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Bannister blinks awake. Finds himself in a white, antiseptic room. An IV in his wrist. Sparky leans in toward him:

SPARKY
You're awake. Thank god. The docs kept you under while they patched you. Touch and go, but now you're good as new. Even fixed the tooth.

Bannister touches his mouth. Finds a shiny new tooth to replace the missing one.

BANNISTER
How long have I been here?

SPARKY
Little over a week. Rickshaw found you half-dead in the street. You don't remember what happened?

Bannister thinks back, recalls nothing.

BANNISTER
No.
(rising from bed)
But I will.

He sits up in bed. Rips out the IV, determined. CUT TO:

INT. TUNNEL - NIGHT (REMINISCENCE)

As before, Bannister hears footsteps. Turns just as a BATON hits him in the face. Banister hits the ground. Stares up at his attacker: sees the backlit figure of a man we'll come to know as **DENTS** (40s), huge with a deeply-SCARRED NECK.

Bannister tries to pick himself up, but Dents steps on his bad leg. Bannister yells in agony. Dents showers him with blows from the baton. Through his ringing ears, Bannister hears:

DENTS
Forget about the girl. She's not your business no more.

As Bannister bleeds on the ground, Dents spits out a betel-chew shell and walks away. The last thing Bannister sees before blacking out is its GOLD SHELL rolling toward him.

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - OFFICE - NIGHT

The SCREEN is frozen on the gold betel-shell. Sparky tries to help Bannister out of the tank, but Bannister takes out his respirator and insists:

BANNISTER
Again.

SPARKY
You wanna get burned? Have this beatdown in your brain forever?

BANNISTER
I'll do it till the image is crystal fucking clear. Again.
(lifts the respirator)
With a little more juice.

Sparky wrenches the HEADPIECE off Bannister's head. Throws it against the ground. Bannister leaps out of the tank, furious.

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

SPARKY
Saving your junky ass.
(off the screen image)
While you were reliving your time as a human piñata, I did some digging. I think I can place this guy.

Sparky REWINDS Bannister's reminiscence. FREEZES on a frame where a passing SmartCar vaguely illuminates Dents's face. Bannister studies the thug's snarling mug and scarred neck.

SPARKY (CONT'D)
Recognize this?
(Bannister shakes his head)
Funny. All this time you been chasing Mae. Reliving the past. But it's always been *your* past. Through *your* eyes.

He pulls MAE'S FILE. Plugs *her* REMINISCENCE in the computer. ON SCREEN, a familiar scene plays:

INT. COCONUT CLUB - STAGE - NIGHT (REMINISCENCE)

Mae's POV as she slowly walks onto the stage of the club. Steps into the bright spotlight. She approaches a mic.

Mae faces an audience of shadowed men. Ignores a catcall. A PIANIST begins to play. She begins to sing:

MAE
When I grow too old to dream / I'll have you to remember / When I grow too old to dream / Your love will live in my heart...

As she sings, she looks around - her eye falling on several shadowed customers.

SPARKY (O.S.)
Now watch...

MAE
So kiss me, my sweet / And so let us part / And when I grow too old to dream...

Mae's glance falls to the back corner of the room. A man LIGHTS a cigarette. In the glow of his match, we see the faint outline of the same silhouette. It's **DENTS.**

MAE (CONT'D)
Your love will live in my heart...

INT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - OFFICE - NIGHT - INTERCUT

Bannister stares at the dual images, concludes:

BANNISTER
He was watching her.

Bannister PRINTS the frozen image of Dents's face.

SPARKY
What are you doing?

BANNISTER
I find him, I find Mae.

He pockets the image. Heads for the door, but Sparky warns:

SPARKY
Unless she's lost. Lost person's like a lost memory. You can't find a thing defined by absence.
(off his look)
In the time you knew her, how much did you really *know* her? How much did you really look?

BANNISTER
I didn't need to. She was always right there.

SPARKY
Women. So simple till they leave you. Then, how infinitely complex they become.

BANNISTER
Guess you'd know, Sparky.

He steps out. Slams the door behind him. CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

A shut door. Bannister knocks three times. A shifty JANITOR chewing on a toothpick opens the door and sizes Bannister up. Bannister bribes him with some coin. The Janitor spits the toothpick out. Then opens the door and beckons him into...

INT. WHITE HALL - NIGHT

A long, sterile hall gleaming like a futuristic spaceship. The hall is lined with doors; each with a small window covered by a sliding panel. As they walk down the hall, the Janitor opens the panels. Lets Bannister peek inside.

Behind each door is a 10x10 padded, soundproof room. In each antiseptic room, a person wearing a pair of GOGGLES and a WIRED, FUTURISTIC BODYSUIT gyrates and moans sexually.

This is a SEX SHOP: the newest way to safely indulge every fantasy. The goggles let the user view any fantasy from a first-person perspective, while the wired bodysuit provides corresponding physical stimulation to nerve endings.

It's a tableau of erotic dumbshows. They pass a fat man pantomiming getting spanked; a woman taking part in an invisible threesome; a thin man choking his invisible mate. Finally, they reach the end of the hall...

A LITHE WOMAN moans as she straddles an invisible partner. Bannister watches her a beat, then nods at the Janitor.

The Janitor silently unlocks the door to the room...

INT. SEX ROOM - NIGHT

Bannister strolls into the padded room, past the gyrating woman who's moaning, oblivious, in her own digital fantasy.

LITHE WOMAN
Fuck... fuck... fuck...

Bannister flips the switch in a CONTROL PANEL, turning the simulation off. The woman plummets from ecstacy to annoyance.

LITHE WOMAN (CONT'D)
FUCK! What the fuck!

She rips off her goggles to reveal she's - AVERY, the D.A.

BANNISTER
You weren't returning my calls. Thought I could catch you here in private. I need help.

AVERY
You screw my deposition, then you screwed my screw, and now you expect my help?

BANNISTER
I'm running out of friends, Avery.

Her anger softens as she sees he's in bad shape.

AVERY
Must be if you've come to me.

BANNISTER
I'm sorry about the deposition. I know Big Joe's a big catch for you.

AVERY
Was. Someone turned Big Joe into tiger kibble.

BANNISTER
(poker-faced)
Any idea who?

AVERY
Witnesses were too hopped on betel to help. And the D.A.'s office is not about to waste resources playing avenging angel for a psychopathic mobster. Whoever did it got lucky.
(then, significant)
He should try to stay that way.

BANNISTER
No one's a miser with luck. Only way to use it is to use it up.

Avery sees he's not backing down. She relents:

AVERY
What do you want?

BANNISTER
Your gov file access. I need an ID on this guy.

Bannister pulls out the printout of DENTS's image.

AVERY
You're looking for him because...

BANNISTER
We have a mutual friend.

AVERY
This about that girl again?
(off his look)
Tell you what, I'll spot you an hour in this place. You can bang a simu of her. Or a dozen simus of her. Any way you want. No judgments. Just get her out of your head.

BANNISTER
Please. Avery.

He looks down at the image of Dents. She swats it away.

AVERY
You don't need my files. I know that sociopath. Name's Colin Dents. Used to be a cop.

BANNISTER
Used to be?

AVERY
Ran the beat in Boston. Then got transferred here. We fast saw why. He was too bent even for our crooked force. We could never prove it, but word was, he was running side scams for extra coin. Blackmail, intimidation, taking cuts of betel sales. Disappearing key witnesses - and I'm not just talking gang bangers. I'm talking women and children.
(then)
This sonofabitch was so bad, his own men tried to burn him to the ground.

AVERY (CONT'D)
'Course fire can't kill the devil.
But it did leave some pretty scars.
(off Dents's scarred neck)
He never bothered to patch 'em.
Wears 'em as a badge of pride.

BANNISTER
Any idea where he is now?

AVERY
Force suspended him indefinitely. So he did what any other agro-sociopath looking for a dayjob does.

BANNISTER
He went private?

AVERY
Penthouses always need goons. He moonlit with all the big fams:
Lius. Rochesters. Andruses. Sylvans-

BANNISTER
As in Walter Sylvan, NightLights CEO?

AVERY
(nods)
Know him?

BANNISTER
Met his wife once. Maybe it's time to get reacquainted.

AVERY
I doubt she'll remember you-

BANNISTER
Don't underestimate my charms.
(kisses her forehead)
Thanks, Avery.

Avery wipes the spot he kissed her with the back of her hand - unaccustomed to human fluids. As Bannister leaves, she warns:

AVERY
Careful, Nick. Dents has quite the body count. Hate to see you pad that number.

But Bannister just waves as he crosses out the door...

EXT. SYLVAN TOWER - DAY

An opulent art deco highrise in the toniest part of town. Bannister stares up at the tower, impressed. Enters:

INT. SYLVAN TOWER - BUILDING LOBBY - DAY

A gilded lobby full of mirrors and mahogany. A **BELLMAN** studies Bannister as he approaches:

BELLMAN
Do you have an appointment?

BANNISTER
(bluffing)
Yes. With Ms. Sylvan.

The Bellman consults his appointment book.

BELLMAN
You're Thomas?
(off his nod)
We were expecting you at two.

BANNISTER
(shrugs, cavalier)
I'm a little early.

BELLMAN
I suppose she won't mind.

The Bellman nods for Bannister to take the elevator.

BANNISTER
Which floor's hers?

BELLMAN
All of them.

Confused, Bannister steps into the elevator. Sees...

INT. SYLVAN TOWER - ELEVATOR - DAY

... there's only one button - "SYLVAN." He presses it. As the brass doors churn closed and it whirs to life, CUT TO:

INT. SYLVAN TOWER - LOBBY - DAY

The elevator deposits Bannister in a massive space filled with Renaissance furniture and art.

In the corner, a grand automatic piano plays Mozart. Bannister watches the keys, moving in ghostlike perfection.

Heels click across the marble floor. A **MAID** approaches:

MAID
Mrs. Sylvan's two o'clock?

INT. SYLVAN TOWER - GLASS ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

The Maid walks Bannister into a second glass elevator linking the ten floors of the Sylvan property. She hits "PENTHOUSE."

They travel through floor after floor of immaculately-preserved rooms - each decorated with original furniture from a different era of history (i.e., medieval, art deco, modern).

BANNISTER
Quite a collection.

MAID
Mr. Sylvan was quite the collector. Most of the MET was auctioned here.

BANNISTER
It barely looks lived-in.

MAID
Mrs. Sylvan prefers the penthouse. And her son keeps mostly to his room. You know high schoolers.

They stop on the penthouse floor. The Maid opens the door to:

INT. SYLVAN TOWER - PENTHOUSE - DAY

A vast open floor, entirely unfurnished, save a WALLED AREA in a corner of the penthouse. From within its thin walls comes the sound of TICKING. The Maid leads him toward it:

MAID
This way, please.

INT. SYLVAN TOWER - WALLED AREA - HALL - DAY

A portion of the walled area has been designed to look like the dingy hall of a modest apartment building.

The TICKING comes from a WHITE DOOR at the end of the hall. Next to the door is a HAT RACK with a HAT and TWEED JACKET. The Maid gestures for Bannister to put them on.

MAID
Try to stick with the script.

The Maid turns on her heel. Leaves Bannister alone. Hesitant, he knocks. The door opens a crack. Out of it peeks:

TAMARA SYLVAN. Her hair is unbrushed. Her eyes wild. Her skin pale from lack of sun. She speaks in an urgent whisper:

TAMARA
You came!

She grabs him with a wiry arm and wrenches him inside.

INT. SYLVAN TOWER - WALLED AREA - TAMARA'S ROOM - DAY

The room has been decorated to look like an old studio apartment. Cuckoo clocks line the walls and lie in disrepair on the floor. The furnishings are sparse and threadbare.

TAMARA
Did anyone see you?

Bannister hesitates, unsure. After a beat, Tamara answers as though he's already responded.

TAMARA (CONT'D)
(relieved)
Thank god. Daddy would murder us.
I've been here since he found out.
(then, emotional)
What are we going to do?

She collapses in a chair and weeps softly. Seems to wait for some movement from Bannister. He watches, impassive:

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Most burners are torn apart by the worlds they straddle - the real one around them and the one replaying in their mind.

Tamara suddenly snaps out of her girlish reverie. Barks:

TAMARA
You're supposed to stroke my hair!

When Bannister doesn't move, she acts out his part of the script. Begins to stroke her own matted hair, soothing.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Only the rich mold the world to meet their delusions.

BANNISTER
Do you remember me? We met once-

Tamara covers her ears, traumatized by his words.

TAMARA
Walter, please-

BANNISTER
Name's Bannister. I'm here about Colin Dents.

For a moment, Tamara looks confused. Then she recedes back into her burned memory. She gazes lovingly at her stomach.

TAMARA
They say you can't tell yet. But I know it's a boy.

She guides Bannister's hand to her stomach. He pulls it away.

BANNISTER
Your boy's grown now.

She guides his hand to her stomach yet again.

TAMARA
Are you happy? Tell me you're happy.

He wrenches his hand away. Rips off Walter's hat.

TAMARA (CONT'D)
Put it back on! Put it on!
(then, back in trance)
It's silly, there's no music.

BANNISTER
Dents worked security for you. Ring a bell?

TAMARA
"Blue Danube."

She laughs, hysterical. Then holds her hands out, adamant.

TAMARA (CONT'D)
Ask me to dance!

BANNISTER
Listen to me! A woman is dead. Her son is missing. And your old security guard is mixed up in it.

Tamara stares, trying to process. Then she closes her eyes. Sways slightly, as though listening to a song.

TAMARA
I hear it, Walter... I hear-

She rests her head on Bannister's shoulder. Rocks in a swaying box step. At a loss, Bannister DRAGS her to the door.

INT. SYLVAN TOWER - WALLED AREA - HALL - DAY

Bannister pulls her down the half-constructed hall and out of the walled area into:

INT. SYLVAN TOWER - PENTHOUSE - DAY

The empty penthouse. He points to the tiny walled-off area meant to house Tamara's delusions.

BANNISTER
I'm done playing. Tell me about Dents.

Tamara's eyes uncloud. She stares at him with near clarity.

TAMARA
You'd have to ask my husband.

BANNISTER
Your husband is dead.

TAMARA
Nonsense. Walter and I are expecting our baby any day now...

She looks down at her stomach lovingly. Then balks. It's so flat. She studies her hands - the wrinkled fingers.

TAMARA (CONT'D)
When are we?

BANNISTER
It's been years, Tamara.

He ushers her to the window. She sees the ghost of her reflection in its glass. Touches her wrinkled cheek.

TAMARA
What a strange thing to happen to one so young.
(then, remembers)
When did I change?

BANNISTER
Over time, like everything changes.

TAMARA
Not Walter's tastes. Those stayed fixed on the young and beautiful.

BANNISTER
Did you know about his affair with Rosa?

TAMARA
One of many flowers.

BANNISTER
Only this one was different. She had a child. But now she's dead. And the child is missing.

TAMARA
Walter never liked sharing. That's why he told Dents.

BANNISTER
Told him what?

TAMARA
Kill them. Kill them both.

She shudders at the thought: revolted.

BANNISTER
You heard him order the hit?

TAMARA
He's not the man I thought he'd be. When you're young, you think the future will be one thing. You see it play out like a string of dominoes. You have no idea... the things that are lined up.

BANNISTER
When Walter hired Dents, was there another woman with him?

TAMARA
(thinks a beat, then)
Did anyone see you?

She begins to sway, dancing again. Her mind in the past:

BANNISTER
Was there a redhead with Dents?

TAMARA
Thank god. Daddy would murder us... I've been here since he found out.

BANNISTER
Focus, Tamara! I need to know where that woman is!

TAMARA
(still in reminiscence)
What are we going to do?

BANNISTER
(sighs, defeated)
Fine. At least tell me about Dents. Do you know where he went?

TAMARA
That horrible man... He chased the orbs... Like golden pearls.

BANNISTER
You mean betel? Dents was chewing?

TAMARA
Down, down, down, he sank. Good riddance, I say. Trash like him belongs underground.

BANNISTER
Underground... You mean he went to *the* Underground?

Her eyes glaze over. Bannister shakes her roughly and yells:

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
Come on, Tamara. Stay with me.

Alerted by the yelling, a bodyguard barges in with the Maid and JEREMY SYLVAN (still wearing his high school uniform).

JEREMY SYLVAN
What is going on?

MAID
I thought he was here for the reenactment.

JEREMY SYLVAN
Get him out! Now!

Jeremy sees his mother crying, confused, in a corner.

JEREMY SYLVAN (CONT'D)
Mom? Mommy?

Instead of speaking, she holds up the Walter's old hat.

TAMARA
Please...

Reluctant, Jeremy takes the hat in his hands. Puts it on. Gets ready to play his dead father's part.

Meanwhile, Bannister and the guard exchange blows.

TAMARA (CONT'D)
They say you can't tell yet. But I know it's a boy...

Tamara smiles, calm. Takes her son's hand and places it on her belly. Utters the familiar line:

TAMARA (CONT'D)
Are you happy? Tell me you're happy.

Jeremy holds up his hands, inviting her to dance:

JEREMY SYLVAN
I'm so happy I feel like dancing.

TAMARA
It's silly. There's no music!

Reluctantly, Jeremy plays his dead father's part.

JEREMY SYLVAN
We don't need music, Sparrow. What's your favorite song?

Another guard rushes in. They corner Bannister. Punch him in the gut. He doubles over. Meanwhile...

TAMARA
"Blue Danube."

JEREMY SYLVAN
On the count of three, imagine it. From the very beginning. I will, too.

The guards grab Bannister. Drag him towards the door.

JEREMY SYLVAN (CONT'D)
One... two... three...

TAMARA
(closes her eyes, moved)
I hear it, Walter. I hear it...

They dance to a song only they hear as Bannister's dragged from the room.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - NIGHT

Bannister, looking worse for wear, walks down a quiet street. He stops by a BOARDED UP area of the sidewalk. Atop the boards are a cluster of spent BETEL-SHELLS.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
The only link to Mae was Dents. And the only link to him was a bad habit...

Bannister brushes the betel-shells aside. Then pries a plank of WOOD off the ground, revealing a set of stairs.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
So I chased it down to where bad habits are a way of life...

As he descends, tilt up to a faded SUBWAY SIGN.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
The Underground.

INT. SUBWAY - NIGHT

The empty underground is lit by dim emergency lights. A Thai man plays the *erhu* - its strings screech like a dying cat. The subway's been closed for years and is now a no-man's land of lost souls and discarded trash.

Bannister sweeps some ancient newspapers off a subway seat and sits. Presently, a distant LIGHT shines from within the tunnel. The light glows brighter as the vehicle approaches. But it isn't a train. Instead...

A MOTORBOAT, carting a platform made of old water bottles and debris, floats toward him in the brackish waters that have flooded the subway lines.

The boat's CAPTAIN, a bum dressed in rags, stares up at Bannister, expectant. Bannister tosses him some coin. Then steps onto the boat's platform. The Captain throws the boat into gear and tugs him into the tunnel...

INT. SUBWAY TUNNELS - NIGHT

In the flickering glow of the emergency lights, Bannister takes in the denizens of this underworld: An old woman bathes herself in the filthy water. A couple kids fish for detritus from a ledge in the tunnel. A burner claws at the walls, talking to himself. A homeless man with a dog warms a can of beans over a small fire.

Bannister passes through another tunnel. The water grows littered with small floating balls - BETEL-SHELLS. Bannister watches them bobbing up and down. Then:

The engine to the boat cuts out. Bannister looks around, curious about why they've stopped. The captain whistles to someone in the darkness. Before Bannister can react -

A bag is thrown over his head. His world goes dark as a few sets of strong arms grab him. CUT TO:

INT. N/R TRAIN - NIGHT

The bag is pulled off Bannister's head. He finds himself tied, arms akimbo, to the metal handrails inside an OLD SUBWAY TRAIN. The floor of the train puddles with water tinted pink from rust or blood.

The people in the train look like commuters - if the next stop on the line was hell. Burners, homeless, and the insane sit in plastic chairs, jeering at Bannister.

At the end of the train are two makeshift thrones constructed of subway detritus. The thrones are flanked by two THUGS with machine guns. Suddenly, the doors at the end of the subway swing open. In enter...

THE JUSTICES: two pale, tall, androgynous individuals dressed in makeshift chainmail comprised of the watches, necklaces, and rings poached off of underground visitors.

The **CLERK**, a broken-looking busker in a tattered hospital gown, stands. Calls down the subway train:

CLERK
Order! The tribunal is in session.

One of the thugs releases a burst of MACHINE GUN fire. Immediately, the train falls silent - save for a druggy on the side seats, puking quietly into his lap.

JUSTICE 1
We are gathered here for the trial
of the flatlander...

The Clerk pulls Bannister's license from his jacket. Reads:

CLERK
Nicholas Bannister. Will you mount a defense or admit guilt?

BANNISTER
I just came down here looking for a couple friends.

JUSTICE 1
The flatlander stipulates to freely entering our domain in search of "friends."

JUSTICE 2
Admission to the crime of trespass - noted!

Justice 1 and 2 nod, solemnly. Then:

CLERK
On to the next charge.

BANNISTER
What charge is that?

JUSTICE 1
If innocent, you need not know.

JUSTICE 2
If guilty, you already do.

JUSTICE 1
Who are these so-called friends you seek?

The Clerk clears his throat.

CLERK
I would like to enter into evidence - Exhibit A and Exhibit B.

The Clerk pulls the printout of Dents and a photo of Mae from Bannister's jacket. Places them before the Justices - who scrutinize them silently.

CLERK (CONT'D)
(off the photos)
Exhibit A. Exhibit B.

JUSTICE 2
Why would you seek these friends here?

BANNISTER
They like betel. Stuff you can't get above ground. Metallics. So I figured I might find 'em here.

JUSTICE 1
If you need to find your friends, perhaps they aren't so friendly.

JUSTICE 2
Perhaps, indeed, they're hiding from you.

JUSTICE 1
Because, perhaps, you are a narc.

BANNISTER
I'm not a narc.

JUSTICE 2
A common refrain... for narcs.

JUSTICE 1
They come here preaching liberation...

JUSTICE 2
Rehabilitation.

JUSTICE 1
They do not see - the dimensions we inhabit here...
(points to her head)
Are far more wondrous than what their sad, sober worlds conceive.

BANNISTER
(mutters)
Until they O.D.

JUSTICE 1
The body cannot always withstand the bliss of the mind. It is of little consequence.

JUSTICE 2
A hard concept for a narc to grasp.

BANNISTER
I'm not a narc!

JUSTICE 1
So you said. Twice.

JUSTICE 2
Note: he protesteth too much.

The Justices share a look. The Clerk ventures:

CLERK
Is the tribunal prepared to issue its sentence?

The Justices nod solemnly.

JUSTICE 1
Trial by drowning.

JUSTICE 2
Trial by drowning.

Bannister tries to protest - but the train erupts in loud cheers from the bloodthirsty crowd.

JUSTICE 1
If you survive, you prove your innocence.

JUSTICE 2
If you die, we confirm your guilt.

The thugs throw open the subway doors. Outside, more observers have gathered for the drowning. The thugs unchain his arms, but shackle his legs to long metal chains.

BANNISTER
That doesn't make sense.

JUSTICE 1
Our court values simplicity over sense. Much more democratic.

JUSTICE 2
Everyone can be a simpleton. Not everyone can be sensible.

The thugs remove Bannister's watch. Hand it to the Justices.

CLERK
(off Bannister's look)
Tribunal fees.

Outside, the motorboat revs its engine. The crowd roars with anticipation. Bannister begins to sweat.

JUSTICE 1
Fear not. Justice will be served.

JUSTICE 2
The tribunal has never been wrong.

The thugs chain the loose ends of Bannister's leg shackles to the motorboat. The boat REVS its engine as the crowd starts feverishly chanting: "*Drown the Narc! Drown the Narc!*"

Desperate, Bannister grabs the subway railing - straining against the pull of the boat. A thug SLAMS the butt of his gun into Bannister's solar plexus. He crumples over, releases the railing and falls to the ground.

The boat surges forward, dragging Bannister down the length of the train floor and out the door. A second before he drops into the water - Bannister GRABS onto the subway door.

EXT. SUBWAY TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

Bannister hangs over the filthy water, clinging for his life. As the crowd screams around him, Bannister's fingers start to slip. He has only a second left. Then, a voice rings out:

MAN (O.S.)
He's not a narc! I can vouch!

The crowd quiets as a wheelchair-bound man pushes through the crowd. It's HANK, the vet Nick gave free reminiscences to.

INT. SUBWAY TERMINAL - DAY

A bonfire with vets and homeless gathered round. Bannister sits apart from the crowd with Hank - who turns the photo of Mae in his hands.

HANK
Go home, man. You don't belong here.

BANNISTER
Not till I get a lead on 'em.

HANK
You're shootin' without a spotter, Nick. This gal's got you so spun-

BANNISTER
This isn't just about Mae. My client's dead. Her son's missing. No one else cares.

HANK
Don't care too much. You'll live longer.
(then, sighs, reluctant)
Come with me.

Reluctant, Hank leads Bannister into a shabby TENT.

INT. HANK'S TENT - CONTINUOUS

The small space is equipped with a cot. An electric cooker. And a 3-D DOT-PRINTER. Hank presses a button - the printer whirs to life, creating an object.

HANK
You go around here, asking questions about your girlfriend and her partner - they'll peg you for a narc so fast - only thing'll save you is gills. Or this.

Hank reaches into a desk drawer. Hands Bannister a six-pack of metallic chews.

BANNISTER
What's this?

HANK
Next best thing to gills. You gotta blend.

Hank reaches for Bannister's jacket. Rips the sleeves.

BANNISTER
This is my good jacket!

HANK
That's the problem.

Hank claps some dust onto it. Wrinkles the jacket's collar. Studies the results critically. Then -

HANK (CONT'D)
In case you don't blend so good...

Hank crosses to his 3-D printer. Grabs the object it printed. A working plastic GUN. He places it in Bannister's hands.

HANK (CONT'D)
Completely untraceable. Holds six rounds.

BANNISTER
Print me some extra bullets in case the lynch mob starts up again?

HANK
If it does, you'll have five extra.
(significant)
Beats drowning.

Bannister nods his thanks. Heads for the door.

EXT. HANK'S TENT - CONTINUOUS

Bannister exits the tent. Feels the eyes of the others on him. Sizing him up as a flatlander.

He conspicuously takes a metallic chew from the bag. Swallows. The others turn away, suspicions allayed.

Bannister makes his way toward a darkened tunnel. As the blackness engulfs him. We begin a MONTAGE...

INT. SUBWAY PLATFORM - DAYS LATER (MONTAGE)

Weary and rumpled, Bannister flashes the photos of Mae and Dents to a group of New-Age hippies. They wave him away.

As he leaves, a skinny drugged-up HIPPY grabs him in a kiss - pushes a BETEL-CHEW into his mouth with her tongue. CUT TO:

INT. SUBWAY LINE - DAYS LATER (MONTAGE)

Bannister moves through the tunnels on the platform of a motorboat. He flashes the photos at the other travelers. None recognize Mae or Dents. Dejected, he pops a betel-chew.

INT. TUNNEL - DAYS LATER (MONTAGE)

Bannister sits, slumped on a narrow ledge overlooking the water. His clothes are tattered. His hair, disheveled. His eyes glazed. The betel has taken its toll.

He attempts to show Mae's photo to one of the druggies next to him. But it slips from his hand and falls into the water. The glow of her red hair is the last thing to be engulfed in the black waves. OFF this blackness, CUT TO:

INT. SUBWAY PLATFORM - NIGHT

Bannister lies on the ground, sleeping off a bender. A boot nudges him awake. It belongs to a straggly-haired **BURNOUT.**

BURNOUT
You the guy flashing those photos all the time?
(off his look)
I think I saw your man around the Prince Street stop. He's shopping for metallics. And he ain't asking nicely.

Bannister pulls himself up. Starts to leave.

BURNOUT (CONT'D)
Don't I get some sugar?

He hands the burnout his entire bag of remaining betel-chews. Then disappears down the tunnel toward...

INT. PRINCE STREET STATION - SUBWAY PLATFORM - NIGHT

Gun in hand, Bannister races to the end of the tunnel. As he approaches Prince Street Station, he hears an argument. He ducks into the shadows and sees:

DENTS shaking down a scrawny, one-eyed dealer in an **EYEPATCH.**

EYEPATCH
Really, Dents. Precious metals is, y'know... precious. I got no more.

Dents PULLS a knife. Uses it to flip up the dealer's eyepatch - exposing a scarred socket.

DENTS
'Member what happened last time you let me down?

Eyepatch swallows. Then squeezes out a tight smile.

EYEPATCH
I do. That's why I got backup.

A **JUNKY** cohort sneaks up behind Dents. Levels a gun at the back of his head. Dents tsk-tsks Eyepatch.

DENTS
You never learn, do you.

Without turning, he swings his knife back into Junky's groin. Junky screams and drops, clutching his privates.

Dents picks up the Junky's gun. Aims it at Eyepatch.

DENTS (CONT'D)
Give me everything you got.

Eyepatch hands him a bag of metallics. Dents takes it. Then -

SHOOTS Eyepatch in the foot. Eyepatch screams.

DENTS (CONT'D)
I said, *everything*.

Eyepatch hands over a second bag of metallics.

EYEPATCH
That's over a grand worth.

DENTS
I'm short on coin. And you're short on manners. Let's call it even.

Dents heads for the door. Eyepatch yells after him:

EYEPATCH
You're fucked, man! You can come in here and bust shit up. But you don't pay - the tribunal'll have your ass.

DENTS
(turns and smiles)
Then they'd better not find out.

BAM. He shoots Eyepatch dead. Then turns to leave.

Bannister checks his gun is loaded. Follows Dents up the subway steps and out into...

EXT. MIDTOWN STREET - DAY

Bannister blinks - blinded by the first sun he's seen in days. Ahead of him, Dents buys a BURNER PHONE from a coolie at a tech stand. Phone in hand, Dents ducks into...

EXT. MIDTOWN ALLEY - DAY

Bannister follows at a distance as Dents makes a call:

DENTS (ON BURNER PHONE)
Miss me? We gotta meet... I need coin. Tide me to the payoff...

BANNISTER
(whispers to himself)
Mae...

A rickshaw chugs down the street. The gas motor drowns out Dents's conversation. Bannister pushes closer. Hears:

DENTS (ON BURNER PHONE)
You ungrateful little bitch. We're partners, remember? I go down for this - you do too.
(then, menacing)
I'll be seeing you real soon.

Dents hangs up. Tosses the phone in the trash. A plume of smoke rises from its electronic parts.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
I knew he would lead to Mae...

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - NIGHT

Bannister follows Dents through Times Square: packed with the usual neon lights, suffocating crowds, and now...

INTERACTIVE HOLOGRAPHS, created when storefront scanners ID pedestrians and present them with tailored, 3-D ads.

As Bannister passes a clothes shop - a **DAPPER MAN** holds a perfectly-sized suit up against Bannister.

DAPPER MAN
Come on in! We've got your size!

Bannister pushes through the holograph. Sees Dents turning slowly in the street - enraptured by a holographic ad meant just for his eye. He ducks into a nearby shop.

Bannister tries to follow, but a pneumatic **BLONDE** blocks him.

BLONDE
Hey, handsome, want company?

BANNISTER
Not tonight.

He tries to walk around her. But she suddenly multiplies into three playful brunette **TRIPLETS.**

TRIPLETS (IN UNISON)
How about us? The more the merrier.

The Triplets multiply into an array of **SEXY GIRLS** that circle Bannister, blocking his view of Dents.

SEXY GIRLS (IN UNISON)
Whatever your fantasy, we'll give you what you want.

The girls part, making a path to a SEX STORE with prostitutes in the window. Then they disappear.

Bannister scans the street wildly for Dents. No sign of him.

Then he spots his figure in the distance, walking briskly away with a familiar REDHEAD.

Bannister reacts. At long last: MAE. He follows them to...

EXT. DENTS'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A shitty Midtown apartment with a rusted fire escape. Dents escort Mae into the building. A few moments later - the light on a fifth floor apartment turns on. Dents walks to the window. Closes the shades.

Bannister checks his gun. Makes his way to the fire escape. Begins the climb to Dents's flat. CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE ESCAPE - NIGHT

The fire escape deposits Bannister at Dents's kitchen window. From the next room come sounds of Dents and Mae.

DENTS (O.S.)
Take off your shirt. That's right.
(a beat, then)
Now the skirt.

Bannister reacts, sickened to the core. He jimmies open the kitchen window. Crawls inside as he hears:

DENTS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Come here...

INT. DENTS'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Old betel-shells and beer cans litter the floor. A flickering fluorescent light casts shadows of the dead flies caught in its plastic shade. Bannister creeps to the living room as:

DENTS (O.S.)
On your knees.

He hears Dents unbuckle his belt. Moves toward the room:

INT. DENTS'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dents sits on a Murphy bed with his back to Bannister as Mae, her face obscured, kneels on the ground, giving him head.

Bannister creeps up behind Dents. Takes out his gun and COLD COCKS him. Dents falls to the ground, out cold.

Bannister turns the gun on Mae, who crawls for the window, hysterical. He levels the gun at the back of her head.

BANNISTER
Stop, Mae.

She turns to face him. Only the tear-stained face that looks up toward him isn't Mae's.

REDHEAD
Please, don't hurt me...

Bannister realizes the woman's the redheaded hooker he saw advertised in the sex shop hologram. He lowers his gun.

BANNISTER
Get out of here.

LATER: Dents's living room is ransacked; his drawers emptied, closets spilled open, bed torn apart. Amidst this chaos is...

The sound of lovemaking. We follow it to its source...

INT. DENTS'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Projected on the tile wall is Rosa's reminiscence of her affair with Walter Sylvan. Below the projection...

Dents is zip-tied to the radiator, out cold. A FLASH DRIVE pings his face. Bounces off.

BANNISTER
Time to wake up, Dents.

Bannister sits on the bathtub ledge, Rosa Sanchez's STOLEN REMINISCENCE FILE open on his lap. It's filled with hundreds of flash drives. Bannister flicks another one at Dents. As Dents comes to:

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
I found the file Walter Sylvan hired you and Mae to steal. Figured you'd keep a copy for yourself. I could call the cops right now. Or we could work something out.

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
(leans in, conspiratorial)
See, I'm not after you. All I want is Mae... Tell me where she is.

Dents stops struggling. Stares at Bannister. Begins to laugh.

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
What's so funny?

Dents smiles sadistically, a cat playing with his mouse.

DENTS
I seen a lotta dead men. One with his throat cut open like a gill. Another with guts tore open so wide he had a picture window where his belly button was. But the look on their faces didn't compare to...
(off Bannister's face)
What Mae leaves behind. See, the dead are resigned to their fates. They *know* they been had. But Mae's victims? Even as they bleed out, they still got that *look*. That *hope*. Like maybe they got it all wrong. Maybe they got her all wrong.

BANNISTER
I have a pretty good picture of Mae. And you.

Bannister pulls out a syringe. Fills it with thiopental as:

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
Walter Sylvan was dying. Wanted to make sure his legacy was intact. But there was a problem... Freddy.
(flicks the syringe)
You were hired to take care of the kid and anything linking him back to Sylvan's estate. Including his mother and her reminiscences.

Bannister approaches with the needle. Dents eyes it, warily.

DENTS
What the hell's that?

BANNISTER
Thiopental. Gets you nice and relaxed for the tank.

He STABS the syringe into Dents's neck. As Dents struggles:

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
Go ahead and fight. Just makes the sedative absorb faster.

Abruptly, Dents stops moving. Bannister pulls out the needle.

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
Tell me about Mae. What did she do with Freddy? Bring him to you? Kill him herself?

Dents blinks slowly, the sedative kicking in.

DENTS
What's the point if you can rip it from my head?

BANNISTER
Context helps with the prompts. Saves tank time.
(then)
Here's an easy one. Where's Mae now?

DENTS
(groggily)
You gotta hard-on for yourself. Think you're some avenging hero?

We see him through Dents's eyes: haggard from betel; pale; desperate; angry. Suddenly, our hero looks like a villain.

DENTS (CONT'D)
You're just an empty man looking for a woman to blame.

Dents's eyes close. His jaw slacks. Out cold.

Bannister grabs a switchblade from his pocket. Leans over Dents. Considers a beat, then - CUTS the zip-ties off.

He drops the blade to the ground. Grabs Dents under the shoulders. Drags his limp body toward the tub / makeshift tank. As he struggles to heave the body...

Dents's eyes FLICK open. Sharp and focused. In a flash, he grabs the discarded SWITCHBLADE. STABS Bannister in the calf.

Bannister yells, stunned. Dents GRABS his knees - bringing him to the floor. He holds the knife to Bannister's throat:

DENTS (CONT'D)
Betel's an upper. Takes more than a syringe of 'pental to knock me out.

He raises the knife, readying for the kill strike. Then stops -

Bannister's grabbed his gun from the back of his pants. He's aiming square at Dents's heart. A shocked moment, then -

Dents dives out of the bathroom as... BAM! BAM! BAM! Bannister fires after him. But he's already gone.

INT. DENTS'S APARTMENT BUILDING - STAIRS - NIGHT

Dents, disoriented from thiopental, bounds down the steps. Bannister follows, limping from his bleeding calf...

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Dents runs across the busy street; looks for somewhere to run. BAM! Bannister's exited the building and begun firing at him. A fleet of passing cabs provide momentary cover.

An old man in a RICKSHAW food stand works the corner. Dents brandishes his knife. Unhooks the food stand. Straddles the man's trike and peels into traffic, away from Bannister.

Bannister looks around for another rickshaw. But his only option's a passing cab. Bannister hails it. Climbs in.

INT. CAB - NIGHT

Bannister slides behind the emergency steering wheel.

BANNISTER
Follow that trike.

INTERFACE
Invalid option. Please enter your destination.

BANNISTER
Drive north. Fast!

INTERFACE
State law requires you fasten your harness.

Bannister jams his safety belt on. The car starts moving. But they're going half the speed Dents is traveling at.

BANNISTER
Can you go faster?

INTERFACE
This vehicle optimizes speed and safety via our patented algorithms and 360-degree echolocution tech-

Bannister sees Dents make a sharp left.

BANNISTER
Turn left onto Broadway!

The cab pulls to the intersection. Slows for a yellow light.

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
Keep going!

INTERFACE
Invalid option.
(as the light changes)
Red light.

Bannister grips the emergency steering wheel. Attempts to manually drive the car through the red. No dice.

INTERFACE (CONT'D)
Manual override is for emergency use only.

Bannister pounds the steering wheel, furious. Passengers in nearby cabs stare. Finally, the light changes.

EXT. BROADWAY - CONTINUOUS

As Bannister's cab turns onto the street, he sees Dents, in the distance, speeding past all the other cabs which, in collision-avoidance mode, part to make way for him. Bannister realizes to catch Dents, he'll need to override the cab's automation. He kicks the interface. Shatters it.

INTERFACE
(with digital static)
Damage detection: interface.

He pulls wires from behind the interface.

INTERFACE (CONT'D)
Damage detection: air conditioning.
Damage detection: speed control.

Bannister's cab speeds up. Dents sees Bannister gaining speed. To lose him, Dents veers the WRONG WAY down a one-way street. Bannister tries to follow:

BANNISTER
Turn left!

INTERFACE
Invalid option. One-way street.

They reach the next one-way street, with traffic flowing in the direction Bannister needs to travel.

BANNISTER
Left! Now!

The cab obeys. As they run parallel to Dents...

Bannister fidgets with the wiring behind the interface. The windshield squirts fluid, the horn beeps, and the radio flips from channel to channel. Finally, he finds the right wire:

INTERFACE
Emergency manual control activated.

The recessed steering wheel extends toward Bannister. The brake and accelerator emerge from the floor.

Bannister's in control. He pulls the handbrake. Fishtails a 180. Speeds down a connecting street to follow Dents.

EXT. ONE-WAY STREET - CONTINUOUS

Bannister turns the wrong way down the busy one-way street. Dents is only a couple blocks ahead of him.

INTERFACE
Illegal action. One-way street-

He hurtles toward the oncoming traffic, but the cabs automatically pull to the side of the street, parting for him like guppies for a shark.

Suddenly, an old rickshaw pulls into the street. Without automation - its driver isn't fast enough to move out of the way. They're headed for a CRASH course. With seconds to lose -

Bannister SLAMS on the brake. Pinwheels into the road. Cabs scatter to avoid him. Bannister's car CRASHES into a fire hydrant. A cataract of water shoots into the air.

INTERFACE (CONT'D)
Impact detection-

Through the hydrant water, Bannister sees Dents turn down an alley. He FLOORS the cab. Peels away from the hydrant.

EXT. MARKET STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Bannister chases Dents through market-packed streets. Pedestrians scream and duck for cover as they topple stalls.

Dents turns sharply down a NARROW ALLEY with a flight of STAIRS leading down to a PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY skirting the waterline below. The walls of the tight alley sheer Dents's trike, sending a cascade of sparks in his wake.

Bannister pulls up to the alley - but his cab is too wide to fit down it. Instead, he revs his engine and speeds ahead on the market streets which overlook Dents's walkway.

Bannister races along the high road, hugging the GUARDRAIL which overlooks the drop to Dents's road and the water. He keeps his eye on Dents - gaining speed.

Finally, Bannister pulls even to Dents. But there's no way to get down to the waterline. He stares ahead at a curve in the road. Instead of slowing down, he speeds up.

INTERFACE
Caution. Impact imminent-

Bannister floors the accelerator. SMASHES through the guardrail. The car FLIES into the air. The ground hurtles toward him as he nosedives toward certain death. Then:

EXT. PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY - CONTINUOUS

A second before impact, the car deploys both internal and external emergency airbags. The airbags break the cab's fall. It lands on the walkway at the exact moment Dents's trike smashes into it in an explosion of dust and chaos.

INT. CAB - INTERCUT

Bannister is momentarily stunned by the impact. Then:

INTERFACE
Airbags deployed...

Bannister unfastens his harness. The airbags begin to deflate. He pushes through them for the door. Meanwhile:

EXT. PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY - INTERCUT

Dents's trike is a crumpled, burning scrap of metal. Bleeding, Dents crawls slowly away from the blazing car just as -

BOOM - the fire reaches the trike's engine and causes an explosion - raining trike bits all over the walkway. Dents lies flat on the floor, covering his head. When at last the world goes quiet and the debris stops falling -

Dents turns around to inspect the damage. Finds himself staring straight up at the muzzle of Bannister's gun. CUT TO:

INT. MAE'S LOFT - NIGHT

Bound and sedated, Dents sits naked in Mae's tub as it fills with water. Bannister checks the water. Then straps the tank HELMET and RESPIRATOR on Dents. As he works, he talks aloud:

BANNISTER
I should have known not to waste time talking to you. Men love their secrets. Hold onto 'em tighter than their lovers, their money, their morals... Secrets are the one thing you actually can and *do* take with you when you go...
(then)
At least, they *were*.

Bannister injects a syringe into Dents's neck. Tosses it on the floor near two other used syringes.

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
Extra thiopental.
(off Dents's glazed look)
Won't kill you. Though detox from betel might.

Succumbing to the drugs, Dents's eyes close. Bannister frees Dents's hands. He sinks into the water.

Bannister crosses to his KIT. The computer shows Dents's vitals at a steady low thrum. Satisfied, Bannister puts on his mic. Begins to prompt in a soothing voice:

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
Imagine your mind like a long hall with a series of doors...

On the computer, the model of Dents's brain flashes with the silver synapses of his neurons. PUSH IN on the neurons as:

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
Behind each of those doors is a memory. In a moment, we will open a door...

We race along the path of the synapsing neurons until they dead end at the image of a CLOSED WOODEN DOOR.

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
A door that leads to Mae...

The door creaks open. We are transported to:

INT. COCONUT CLUB - NIGHT (REMINISCENCE)

Mae finishes her song as Dents watches from the crowd.

MAE
... So let us part / And when I grow too old to dream...

INT. MAE'S LOFT - INTERCUT

Bannister watches Mae on screen through Dents's eyes. She looks soulful. Uncorrupted. This is the Mae he fell for.

MAE (ON SCREEN)
Your love will live in my heart / Your love will live in my heart...

The song ends. Mae walks off stage. Bannister prompts Dents:

BANNISTER (INTO MIC)
But you weren't there to hear her sing, were you?

We PUSH IN to the COMPUTER as another door pops up ON SCREEN:

EXT. COCONUT CLUB - BACK ALLEY - NIGHT (REMINISCENCE)

The back door swings open. Mae walks out: scrubbed of makeup and dressed casually - she looks younger, innocent almost.

Dents watches from the shadows as Mae puts a cigarette between her lips. Fumbles through her purse for a light.

While she's preoccupied, he rushes toward her. He's almost upon her when, instead of pulling a lighter from her purse...

Mae pulls out a TASER. Aims it at Dents.

MAE
Not one step closer.

Dents steps out of the shadows, calm:

DENTS
Is that any way to treat an old pal?

MAE
I don't know you, pal.

DENTS
But I know you. You died your hair. Took some time to kick the chews, by the looks of it. But you're still the same girl used to sell me metallics at the clubs.
(then)
You're Big Joe's old *nu*.

Mae circles Dents warily, Taser raised.

MAE
I don't know who that is.

DENTS
Easy come, easy go, huh? Too bad. Big Joe still has a hard-on for you.... 'Specially after you stole all his betel and disappeared.

Panicked, Mae realizes she's busted. She FIRES the Taser, but -

Dents KNOCKS it from her hands and PUSHES her to the ground. Presses his knee on her windpipe. As she chokes:

DENTS (CONT'D)
Is that any way to treat a friend?
(off her look)
That's right - we're gonna be pals. See, I'm not gonna rat you out. But I expect a little quid pro quo.

She struggles to talk. He eases his knee off her throat.

MAE
What do you want from me?

DENTS
I want you to do what you do best.
(takes out a photo of Bannister)
To him.

INT. MAE'S LOFT - INTERCUT

Bannister reacts to seeing his photo in Dents's hand.

BANNISTER (INTO MIC)
So you chose the mark. And she reeled him in?

ON SCREEN: Dents's POV as he watches from afar as Sparky lets Mae into the office the morning she "lost her keys."

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
Seduced him...

ON SCREEN: Dents watches from the shadows the first night Mae walks Bannister back to her loft.

ON BANNISTER, who spits out the ugly conclusion.

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
... Then screwed him and never looked back.

Suddenly, the computer starts BEEPING wildly and Dents begins to THRASH in the tank. He's blanking.

Bannister clutches his mic and tries to calm him:

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
It's all right. You took a misstep. Opened an empty door. But now you're back...

Bannister paces, searching for a different prompt. Then:

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
After Mae made contact with the mark - she met with you again.

Suddenly, Dents stops thrashing. The computer's BEEPING abates. The SCREEN'S STATIC clears. In its place...

ON SCREEN: We see silver neurons rushing toward a series of doors. One of the doors swings open and reveals:

INT. DENTS'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (REMINISCENCE)

Mae standing at the threshold to Dents's place, crying.

MAE
I can't do it.

Dents roughly pulls her in. Shuts the door behind them.

MAE (CONT'D)
This woman whose file you want me to steal. What'll happen to her?

DENTS
Does it matter?

MAE
It will to her... to Nick...

DENTS
Aw, that gimp screw a conscience into you? Quick reminder-

He PUNCHES her hard in the face. She CRASHES into the wall beneath the window.

Dents hoists her up. Pushes her bloody face against the cold glass. In its reflection, we see him as he sneers:

DENTS (CONT'D)
In our line of work, a conscience gets you killed.

INT. MAE'S LOFT - NIGHT

Watching the scene, Bannister looks like *he's* been punched.

BANNISTER
It was *you*.

His own memory FLASHES to...

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Mae, with a BRUISE on her cheek, as she sits on the porch with Bannister. She turns to him, hopeful:

MAE
We could stay here. Find work. Who needs the city? We'd be happy...

INT. MAE'S LOFT - NIGHT - INTERCUT

Bannister speaks as much to himself as for the prompt:

BANNISTER (INTO MIC)
She tried to back out. But I brought her back here... to *you*.

ON SCREEN: Dents's silver synapses take us to:

INT. COCONUT CLUB - LOUNGE - NIGHT (REMINISCENCE)

Mae sits across from Dents. Slides an envelope to him. He opens it. Sees hundreds of FLASH DRIVES.

DENTS
You sure you got the whole file?

MAE
(nods, then)
What are you gonna do with them?

Instead of answering, he stands to leave. Mae stops him:

MAE (CONT'D)
You a pervert, Dents? You get off watching other people make love?

DENTS
You watched the flash drives.

Mae ignores the threat in his voice. Presses on:

MAE
I recognized the girl's boyfriend. That rich guy, Sylvan, the one who hired you?
(off his look)
Gotta be a lotta coin in a job for him.

DENTS
You've done your part. By this time tomorrow, it'll all be over.

INT. MAE'S LOFT - NIGHT - INTERCUT

BANNISTER (INTO MIC)
But it wasn't over, was it?

ON SCREEN: Silver synapses take us to...

INT. BOAT - BELOW DECK - NIGHT (REMINISCENCE)

Rosa cleans the flower boat. Suddenly, someone holds a knife to her throat. Dents. She sees him reflected in a cracked mirror hung over the door.

DENTS
Where's your son?

Suddenly, an ELECTRIC SIZZLE. Dents falls to the floor, spasming. Rosa stands over him with a TASER. MAE'S TASER.

ROSA
She told me you were coming.

As Dents writhes on the floor, Rosa threatens with the Taser:

ROSA (CONT'D)
Tell your boss to leave my son and me alone. We don't want anything. No money. No contact. No-

BAM. Dents sweeps her legs. Rosa goes down, the Taser clattering out of reach. As Rosa crawls to the door, Dents picks himself up. Retrieves his blade. But by the time he looks up... Rosa has fled the boat.

EXT. DOCKS - NIGHT (REMINISCENCE)

Dents chases Rosa down the docks. She's sure-footed on the boards, swiftly putting space between her and Dents. Then:

She sees Freddy on land, fishing by the water.

ROSA
Run, Freddy! Run!

Freddy looks up at her, frozen in fear.

She looks back at Dents, running with the BLADE in his hand. Knows she has to buy Freddy some time to escape.

Rosa stops in her tracks. Turns toward Dents. Then CHARGES him - trying to shove him off the docks.

She barrels into the thug with all her might. But he doesn't fall. Instead, they struggle on the boards. Rosa fights like an animal. But she's no match for Dents's sheer size.

He shoves her roughly to the ground. She hits her head on a deck ballast. Loses consciousness.

Dents kicks her body into the water. As it sinks...

Dents looks up. Sees Freddy alone and unprotected. Then -

A flash of motion from the shadows. MAE runs out. Whisks Freddy in her arms. And steals off into the night.

INT. MAE'S LOFT - INTERCUT

Bannister is stunned by what he's seen. Moved, he touches the screen where Mae runs away. Whispers:

BANNISTER
You saved him...

He smiles, a wave of relief cresting over him. Then prompts Dents, gloating:

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
She got away from you, you sonofabitch.

Suddenly, a familiar BEEPING. The computer turns to STATIC and Dents begins to thrash. He's blanking.

Bannister realizes something's wrong about his prompts.

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
No...

He paces, trying to calm the spiral and soothe Dents.

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
It's all right. You opened an empty door. But now, you're back... Back to something you know...

The beeping subsides somewhat. But Dents is still in a whitespace. Bannister sits, at a loss.

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
Back to...

He strains to think of a prompt. Then, he spots a single strand of her red hair on Mae's pillow. He picks it up. Gingerly turns it in his fingers. Thinks aloud:

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
Mae...

Suddenly, the SCREEN comes to life with an image:

EXT. BANNISTER & ASSOCIATES - NIGHT (REMINISCENCE)

Mae glances around, furtive. Then scrawls on a note:

"Remember Orpheus and Eurydice? Don't look back. Love, Mae"

BANNISTER (INTO MIC)
(realizes aloud)
She came back. She came back again... For me...

Mae slides the note under Bannister's door. But as she leaves, Dents emerges from the shadows. Pulls a gun:

DENTS
You know what they say about conscience...

INT. MAE'S LOFT - INTERCUT

Bannister stands abruptly, toppling his chair. Panicked by the turn this reminiscence is taking:

BANNISTER (INTO MIC)
What did you do to Mae?

ON SCREEN: The image changes to:

INT. MAE'S LOFT (REMINISCENCE)

Mae tied, bloody and bruised, to the very chair Bannister was sitting in. Her eyes follow Dents as he circles her:

DENTS
Where is the boy?

Mae grits her teeth. Stares at him, silent.

WHAM! He backhands her across the face. She topples backward in her chair. It splinters beneath her. Mae groans.

DENTS (CONT'D)
Where is the boy?

Mae spits blood. Tries to sit up in her loosened constraints.

DENTS (CONT'D)
Where is the boy?

Dents BACKHANDS her again, knocking her back to the ground.

Mae stares up at him - obstinately silent. He kneels before her. Speaks almost gently:

DENTS (CONT'D)
Your silence touches me. Really. It's a gift. See, this is the fun part for me.

DENTS (CONT'D)
Get some cardio - some company - nice coffee machine for some lattes...
(checks his hands)
I haven't even bruised my knuckles yet. But sooner or later, you'll tell me what I need to know. That's when things get easier for you. But it's my least-favorite part of the job.
(then)
Do you know how hard it is to get bloodstains out? To scrub for DNA? You're a slender girl - but tall. Disposing of your body - it's gonna take some work. So feel free to prolong this. Make the good times last.

He grabs her by the hair. Yanks her to her feet.

DENTS (CONT'D)
You think that's a problem?

Her eyes well up, she pouts - feigning vulnerability.

MAE
Please... Don't hurt me.

She touches his shirt, seductive. Even tries to smile at him.

MAE (CONT'D)
We can work something out... Together... I know we can.

DENTS
There she is. My old Mae.

Her smiles widens, full of hope. Then - he slams her against the wall. Squeezes her throat. As she struggles:

DENTS (CONT'D)
Save the theatrics, sweetheart. I don't give a shit about your sympathetic backstory; your charming jokes; your bedroom eyes. Your pussy could be the portal to Shangri-la for all I care.
(squeezes tighter)
I'm not like other men. I don't wanna own you or tame you or fuck you or flatter you. I'm not gonna underestimate you or overvalue you. I'm an enlightened man. A feminist.

DENTS (CONT'D)
When I look at you - I don't see man or woman, virgin or whore. I'm not *judging* you. I'm just using you for the one thing you're good for.
(then, as she turns blue)
Tell me where the boy is.

He releases his grip. She falls against the wall, WHEEZING as she struggles to catch her breath.

MAE
Ya... Ya... You...

DENTS
Enunciate, bitch. Where's the boy?

Finally, between gasps, Mae manages:

MAE
You already know. I told you once.

DENTS
You didn't tell me shit-

MAE
My safe place... where I went when I was a kid.

Mae stares into Dents's eyes. But we realize she's not talking to him. She's seeing past him and talking to...

INT. MAE'S LOFT - INTERCUT

... Bannister. As Bannister watches her through Dents's POV - he realizes what she's trying to tell him:

MAE (ON SCREEN)
The pink barn.

BANNISTER
The pink barn.

Mae nods like she can see Bannister through the screen.

MAE (ON SCREEN)
You already know the way.

INT. CABIN - HALL (FLASHBACK)

As before: Mae, in her bikini, tours Bannister's house. She recalls her troubled childhood, describing:

MAE
... this little road that sounded like something out of a fairy tale. “Lullaby Lane.”

INT. MAE’S LOFT - NIGHT

ON SCREEN: Mae draws closer to Dents - her face filling the screen as she approaches. She speaks tenderly, lovingly:

MAE
You were right all along.

She takes Dents’s hand, imagining that it is Bannister’s. Holds it to her cheek, genuinely moved.

MAE (CONT’D)
People like us don’t fall in love. We plummet to places dark and deep. But love? Love is the thing we climb to. If we can just hold on.
(then)
I wish I could have held on longer, Nick.

At the sound of “Nick” - Dents grabs Mae roughly.

DENTS
‘The fuck do you think you’re talking to?

Mae stares back at him, steely-eyed and clear. Tells Dents:

MAE
The man who’s going to kill you.

DENTS
You stupid bitch.

Enraged, he throws Mae to the ground. KICKS her stomach.

DENTS (CONT’D)
You think someone’s coming for you?

Losing control, he kicks her over and over and over again. Blood spurts. Bones crack. But he doesn’t stop.

DENTS (CONT’D)
Who’s gonna save you, bitch? Who’s gonna save you now?

Dents gives a final kick, then steps away from Mae. Her limp body stares back at him. Her eyes are lifeless as a glass doll's. But on her lips, the faintest trace of a smile.

INT. MAE'S LOFT - NIGHT

Bannister rips off his mic and turns away from the screen, unable to watch more. He cries quietly as...

ON SCREEN: Dents drags Mae's body to the kitchen. Wraps her in garbage bags. As he works, we glimpse him in a mirror: his body splattered in blood; his eyes like a wild animal.

Meanwhile, Bannister stifles his tears. Walks to the tank. Stares down at Dents, who floats calmly in the water.

Bannister takes out a SWITCHBLADE from his pocket - hovers it over Dents's sleeping body. Draws the blade back. Then PLUNGES it toward Dents's chest. Only, at the last minute -

Bannister stops himself. Hands shaking, he drops the blade. Then, he leans over Dents's floating body and whispers:

BANNISTER
Mae was wrong. I won't kill you. Dying is easy - a few moments of suffering, then - nothing. No fear, no pain, no grief.
(then)
You deserve more than nothing. You deserve to remember.

Bannister puts his HEADSET back on. Prompts Dents:

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
You are back in the long hall of your mind.

ON SCREEN: Silver synapses takes us back to Dents's hall. As he glides down the hall, past a series of doors...

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
At the end of the hall is a door. A door you've tried to forget...

ON SCREEN: Dents sees a door boarded over with caution tape strung from it. He hesitates, fearful.

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
A door you've boarded shut. But it's always been there... waiting.

ON SCREEN: Dents's eyes go wide with terror. He tries to back away from the door - but the prompt already has him in its lull - pulls him helpless to the door.

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
You know what's behind that door.
Your worst fear. Your worst pain.
(then, smiles sadistic)
How did you get your scars, Dents?

ON SCREEN: The doorknob begins to glow MOLTEN RED. Inside, we hear a fire raging. Dents screams, but his screams make no sound in the hall of his memories.

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
Open the door.

Despite himself, Dents grabs the knob. His hand sizzles and burns. The door swings open. He takes his hand off the knob - its skin has been seared off, exposing raw flesh.

He glances through the door. Inside is a RAGING INFERNO - his memory of the arson incident gone wrong.

As he stands at the threshold, Dents's clothes begin to burn. His hair smokes. The scars on his chest glow red and raw.

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
Feel the fire? Burning just like it did that night. But this night will never end. This night will be with you for the rest of your life...
(with evil relish)
Step inside, Dents...

ON SCREEN: Dents steps into the fire. The flames engulf him. He begins to scream in anguish.

BANNISTER (INTO MIC) (CONT'D)
... *Burn*.

Bannister turns the KIT's VOLTAGE from 25, past 50, into the red-zoned 75, then all the way to 100. The computer beeps ominously as it SEARS the fire irrevocably into Dents's brain.

Dents writhes in the tank, seized by pain that will never end.

Bannister puts on his hat. Walks silently from the room.

EXT. MEMORABILIA INC. POD - DAY

Sparky sits on a park bench, enjoying his lunch break. A shadow falls across him. He looks up, startled:

SPARKY
Nick...
(off his look)
I'd ask how you've been - but from the looks of it, I don't wanna-

BANNISTER
I burned someone...
(before he can react)
On purpose.

His words hang in the air. Sparky panics a beat, confused. Then launches into a forced laugh.

SPARKY
You're such a kidder, Nick. Joking about something like that.
(then, significant)
Everyone knows it would get you more time than murder. But I always loved that perverse sense of humor-

BANNISTER
It's not a joke.

Sparky sees Bannister's not backing down. He hisses:

SPARKY
You gotta death wish? D.A.'ll pluck that little confession right outta my head with the tank-

BANNISTER
I want them to.

He hands Sparky an envelope. Inside are TWO FLASH DRIVES.

SPARKY
What is this?

BANNISTER
Reminiscences. From Rosa Sanchez. And Colin Dents - the man who killed her and Mae...

SPARKY
Mae, she's...

He doesn't have to finish the sentence. He knows from the look on Bannister's face that Mae is dead.

BANNISTER
(off the flash drives)
I need you to get them to Avery.

SPARKY
She'll depose me. Ask about you.

BANNISTER
I'll tell you everything she'll want to know. Including where Rosa's son is-

SPARKY
Rosa has a son?

BANNISTER
The heir to the Sylvan estate.

SPARKY
Look, with this kind of information, you could make a deal. You could go to Avery yourself...

BANNISTER
(smiles, evasive)
After Avery deposes you. You'll get a note explaining everything.

SPARKY
Why not tell me now?

BANNISTER
All in good time. First, you have to hear my full confession.

He takes a seat next to Sparky.

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
It started with a walk-in; said she'd lost her keys. Needed a nudge...

As he begins his story, CUT TO:

INT. SYLVAN TOWER - TAMARA'S ROOM - DAY

Tamara waltzes with another "Walter," this one played by her son, Jeremy. He wears his father's hat as he hums "Blue Danube" and dances with his mother, lost in the moment. Then -

A door slams. Bannister strolls into the room. Jeremy immediately pulls away from Tamara.

JEREMY SYLVAN
What the hell are you doing here?

BANNISTER
Security let me in.
(flashes his gun)
I can be quite persuasive.

Tamara continues dancing alone, unaware of the interruption.

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
We need to talk.

JEREMY SYLVAN
I have nothing to say to you.

BANNISTER
Then I'll talk, you listen.
(off his look)
I know the truth. You hired Dents to kill Rosa and her son so you'd get your daddy's money to yourself.

JEREMY SYLVAN
This is bullshit.

BANNISTER
Your own mother tried to tell me. Said "Walter" hired Dents for the hits. She confused you and your father. Easy to see how...

He eyes Walter's old hat, which is still perched on Jeremy's head. Jeremy rips it off guiltily.

JEREMY SYLVAN
Mother gets confused-

BANNISTER
Not about this. Dents proved it with a phone call.

EXT. MIDTOWN ALLEY - DAY (FLASHBACK) - INTERCUT

Bannister follows at a distance as Dents makes a call:

DENTS (ON BURNER PHONE)
I need coin. Tide me to the payoff...
(listens, then enraged)
You ungrateful little bitch. We're partners. Remember? I go down for this - you do too.

INT. SYLVAN TOWER - TAMARA'S ROOM - INTERCUT

BANNISTER
I thought he was calling a woman I was looking for. Now I know, she was already dead. So was your father. The dead don't take calls... but you do.

Bannister takes out a cell. Dials the number he saw Dents call. Jeremy's phone begins to RING in his pocket.

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
Shoulda tossed your phone.

Jeremy slumps into a chair. Tamara glances up from her dancing - a small part of her aware her son is in trouble.

JEREMY SYLVAN
Name your price. I'll have as much as you need once the estate clears.

BANNISTER
I doubt that. Your half-brother Freddy, though, he'll be quite comfortable.

JEREMY SYLVAN
Freddy... he's...

BANNISTER
Alive, yes...

EXT. LULLABY LANE - FARMHOUSE WITH A PINK BARN - DAY

Hidden on the sidelines, Bannister watches a fleet of cop cars pull up to the quaint house. The house's white-haired owner, MYRNA (60s), waits for them on the porch with a smiling brown-eyed boy... FREDDY.

BANNISTER (O.S.)
Two hours ago, the cops picked him up from a nice old lady on Lullaby Lane.

Sparky steps out of the first squad car. Walks sweetly up to Myrna and Freddy. He hands the boy a lollipop. The kid smiles. With Myrna's encouragement, he takes Sparky's hand. Lets him lead him to the squad car. CUT BACK TO...

INT. SYLVAN TOWER - TAMARA'S ROOM - INTERCUT

Bannister continues his conversation with Jeremy:

BANNISTER
The cops will be here for you soon.

Jeremy visibly pales. But Tamara continues in her reverie. She crosses to the door. Opens it. Invites in a ghost:

TAMARA
Thank god. Daddy would murder us. I've been here since he found out.
(then, emotional)
What are we going to do?

Tears stream down Jeremy's face. Shaking, he asks Bannister:

JEREMY SYLVAN
How long do I have?

Bannister slides his gun to Jeremy.

BANNISTER
Up to you. One bullet left.

Jeremy grabs the gun. Aims it at Bannister. Bannister shrugs:

BANNISTER (CONT'D)
Go ahead. Just one more crime to think back on when you're rotting away in jail. You'll have a lot of time to reminisce. But me? I'm tired of looking back. The past is a prison you can't ever escape. So please, take the shot.
(then, significant)
Between memory and oblivion - I know which torture I'd choose.

Bannister rises and heads for the door, his back to Jeremy.

Tamara sees Jeremy cock the gun. She dimly wants to help - but she can't shake loose of the past she's stuck in.

TAMARA
They say you can't tell yet. But I know it's a-

BAM. Bannister stops in his tracks. Looks back.

Jeremy is slumped on the table. His mother stands behind him, her dress stained with his blood. She places her dead son's hand on her stomach.

TAMARA (CONT'D)
Are you happy? Tell me you're happy.

Bannister closes the door softly behind him. CUT TO:

EXT. MANHATTAN STREETS - NIGHT

Alone, Bannister saunters down the streets, toward his home. Stares up at the NightLights that bloom in the sky.

One of the headlines reads: "**NightLights future in jeopardy as heir, Jeremy Sylvan, arrested for murder.**"

BANNISTER (V.O.)
It's been said that when one door closes, another opens...

Suddenly, the headline disappears. As do all the lights in the sky. They're replaced with -

The simple beauty of the dark sky and its distant stars.

Bannister smiles at the sight.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
As an archaeologist, I know better...

He unlocks the door to his apartment. Steps inside to...

INT. DARK HALL - CONTINUOUS

A long, dark hall filled with doors.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
There is no such thing as a closed door. A finished moment...

Bannister moves down the hall, glancing in the half-open doors. Inside each, he glimpses a VIGNETTE from his past: Mae slipping off her dress in the office; Mae and him drinking at the Coconut Club; Mae bringing him morning "dinner" in bed...

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Life is a hall filled with doors, half-open. And behind every door...

More doors: Mae with her black eye, arguing with him on his stoop; Mae slamming Falks with a baseball bat.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
An infinity...

More doors: Mae laughs with Sparky in the office; Mae pleading with Dents for her life; Dents beating Mae.

Bannister pauses at a door. Inside, Mae lies broken on the floor. Her eyes cloud over as she takes her last breaths.

BANNISTER (V.O.)
Even death is not an end. It is simply another door.
(off Mae's death)
But it is not the one you stopped at.

Bannister turns away from the door. Instead of being morose, he looks healthy, strong, full of hope.

He opens another door: Inside, he writes a letter in his apartment. We catch the words: "***...my house in the country...***"

He tucks the letter into an envelope addressed to "**Sparky.**"

Bannister turns back into the hall. Walks to a half-open door glowing with light. He pushes it open. The light takes us to:

INT. BANNISTER'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

As before, the night of Bannister's birthday. The cake is mostly eaten on the coffee table. Sparky sleeps on the floor.

Mae curls in Bannister's lap on the couch. Smiles:

MAE
Tell me a story.

BANNISTER
What kind of story?

MAE
One with a happy ending.

BANNISTER
No such thing as a happy ending. All endings are sad. Especially if the story was happy.

MAE
Then tell me a happy story and end it at the middle.

He places his hand against hers, touches her fingertips.

BANNISTER
Ever hear of Orpheus and Eurydice? They were a couple. Very in love. Till one day, Eurydice died.

MAE
That's a horrible story!

BANNISTER
I'm not at the middle yet. Orpheus descended to hell. Begged the devil to release her. The devil agreed: Orpheus could take Eurydice by the hand and lead her back to the land of the living. But there was one condition. He couldn't look back until they'd escaped the gates of hell or Eurydice would be stuck in the underworld forever.

MAE
So what happened?

BANNISTER
Orpheus took her hand and led her back to life.

MAE
And they lived happily ever after?

This time, unlike the past reminiscence, Bannister responds:

BANNISTER
And they lived happily ever after.

Bannister and Mae kiss. It's the ending they never got.

PULL OUT TO SEE the scene plays on a small screen in:

INT. BANNISTER'S CABIN - DAY

In a tank in his childhood bedroom floats Bannister. But he's no longer the young lover kissing Mae in the reminiscence. Nor the haunted man who chased down her killer.

Twenty years have passed. His skin is wrinkled. His eyes lined. His life support is controlled by tubes and machines.

A recorder plays an old recording of his voice. We realize the **V.O.s WE'VE HEARD THROUGHOUT THE FILM HAVE ALL BEEN RECORDED PROMPTS FOR A GRAND, LOOPED REMINISCENCE ABOUT MAE.**

BANNISTER (RECORDING)
Not long after, she fell asleep.... You picked her up. Carried her to bed. Imagined a life where every night would always end like this...

OFF THE SCREEN IMAGE of Bannister carrying Mae to bed.

OLD MAN (O.S.)
Now play it again... From the beginning, like I taught you.

A precocious little girl, **HANNA** (8), approaches the computer. Scrolls Bannister's audio recording back to the start.

BANNISTER (RECORDING)
It's bad for business, but it's true. There are certain moments that never leave you...

ON SCREEN: As before, Bannister enters his office.

As the recording plays, Hanna turns to the Old Man and asks:

HANNA
Grandpa, why did he want it over and over? Why doesn't he skip the bad parts?

BANNISTER (RECORDING)
They tug at you like the slow refrain of a song you heard long ago....

ANGLE ON "**Grandpa**" - it's SPARKY (now in his late 70s). The years have stooped his back and clouded his eyes, but he looks happy; at peace. A man who's outlived his mistakes.

GRANDPA SPARKY
Guess he's still waiting.

HANNA
Waiting for what?

BANNISTER (RECORDING)
... they remain always as real to a man as the minute they happened...

Grandpa Sparky smiles as he remembers something:

GRANDPA SPARKY
The punch line.

ON SCREEN: Bannister enters his lobby. Sees a hooded woman standing next to Sparky. She looks up as Bannister enters. The hood falls away. Reveals a shock of red waves. Mae.

BANNISTER (RECORDING)
... Like the moment I met her.

CUT TO BLACK.

<u>THE MIDDLE</u>