

LOVE ME TENDER

by

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2004 First Place

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A WARM BODY

FADE IN:

INT. COUNTY MORGUE - NIGHT

Deceased bodies laying on sterile metallic tables fill the room. Every person has a different expression on their face. There's a victim in shock. An angry fat man. A blank child.

WILL (V.O.)

You wake up, you shower, you go to work, you eat, sleep. Then you do it all over again. But one day, you wake up here, and you can't move, and you can't go to work. No more pain, no more suffering. You're finally at *the* resort. And you get the best sleep money can't buy.

INT. HALL - NIGHT

A JANITOR stands near the entrance to the examining room. He's mopping up, what seems to be spilled blood.

WILL (V.O.)

Our staff works around the clock to suit all of your needs.

INT. BREAK ROOM - NIGHT

ROGER, a medical examiner, is at a table, eating his midnight lunch: a plate of eggs, weenies, and a mountain of ketchup.

WILL (V.O.)

And cleanliness is next to Godliness here. You can feel at home with us.

As he shovels a spoonful of food into his mouth, some of the ketchup drips on his shirt, next to blood stains and residue of dead tissue. Roger doesn't even bother cleaning up the glob.

INT. EXAMINING ROOM - NIGHT

A phone rings on a desk, away from the bodies. One of the bodies on the tables rises. His eyes open, and the man, dressed in a stained white lab coat, stands on his feet.

WILL (V.O.)

And last but not least, you get the best doctors working day and night to find the reason why you're here.

WILL DAHL, 33, picks up the phone. As he talks, his face couldn't be more distant from the actual conversation.

WILL

Yeah?

(beat)

Okay.

(beat)

Five minutes.

(beat)

Okay.

He yawns as he hangs up the phone. Will looks down at the toe tag of a dead body. It reads, ROY GAYTON.

WILL (V.O.)

Roy Gayton, welcome to the Brucksen County Morgue.

INT. COUNTY MORGUE, FRONT LOBBY - NIGHT

Will is sitting at a chair, reading through a book as the Coroner's Van arrives at the front doors. The paramedics get the body out of the back and bring it in the building. Will watches them until they get close enough.

WILL

What do you got?

PARAMEDIC

Some guy blew his head off.
Neighbors called it in.

WILL

Any ID?

A uniformed COP approaches Will.

COP

His name was Daniel Lee Hatchet.

INT. EXAMINING ROOM - NIGHT

The Paramedic hoists the body onto a table. Will unzips the bag. He looks at the piece of flesh which adorns a pink robe. Will catches a glimpse of the Picasso ruptured face.

WILL

Where did they find him?

COP

His couch. There were some lines of
coke spread out on the table.

(MORE)

COP (cont'd)
 He did it with a .357 Magnum.
 Registered to his name.

WILL
 Another no brainer, huh?

COP
 No sign of foul play.

WILL
 This guy have a wallet, any
 information on him?

The Cop takes out a bag of belongings. He fishes out the wallet. The Cop shows Will an I.D. of the victim, Daniel Lee Hatchet.

FADE TO:

INT. OFFICES - NIGHT

The office name: S.A.H. (Suicide Assistance Hotline) is printed on the pebble glass frame of the door.

INT. BREAK ROOM - NIGHT

AVERY LANG, an out of shape and tired looking 38 year old is pouring some stale coffee into a Styrofoam cup. He tastes it and winces while looking at the neon street signs.

The other people there are stern zombies, robotically drinking and eating.

INT. S.A.H. OFFICE - NIGHT

The hub is a cramped work space of cubicles with desks and phones. A couple of people are working the lines, talking to their callers.

Avery is one of those people. He talks while occasionally sipping on his bad coffee. Beside him is his boss, CARL TURNER, with a new EMPLOYEE who is holding a phone.

CARL
 Now just listen to this guy work.
 You'll get a feel for how to handle
 the callers...

The Employee puts the phone to his ear and listens:

AVERY
 Do you believe in the bible?

CALLER (V.O.)
Yeah... Well, my parents raised me
Catholic. Does that count?

AVERY
I just want to get to know you. You
don't have to be religious. I'm not
judging you, Vernon.

VERNON/CALLER (V.O.)
I was never a good Christian. I
skipped a lot of pages.

AVERY
We all have, too. But what brings
you to this point? Why are you
calling?

VERNON (V.O.)
I'm on my last nerve, man. My wife
left me.

AVERY
How long ago?

VERNON (V.O.)
Four mouths.

AVERY
What happened?

VERNON (V.O.)
I made her get an abortion.

AVERY
You feel guilty?

VERNON (V.O.)
Yeah, man. Fuck. She just... She
couldn't take it after she did it.
She felt sick...

AVERY
What do you mean?

VERNON (V.O.)
She felt sick. I don't know what it
was. But she would throw up for no
reason. It drove her nuts...

AVERY
Why did you tell her to have the
abortion?

VERNON (V.O.)
We didn't have time for a family.
We barely got by on our own. We
weren't ready.

AVERY
Have you tried talking to her? You
know, patch things up?

VERNON (V.O.)
I can't talk to her.

AVERY
She won't return your phone calls?

VERNON (V.O.)
She's dead.
(beat)
It is my fault. I told her -- Fuck,
if only I didn't make her feel bad.
I shouldn't have told her.

AVERY
There's nothing you can do, Vernon.
That's the first thing you have to
realize.

VERNON (V.O.)
My head won't stop. I haven't been
able to go to work in the past
couple of days. Man, I've got
nothing to live for.

AVERY
You have people that care for you.

VERNON (V.O.)
Bullshit! My mother doesn't even
wanna talk to me. I've got nobody.
Everybody fuckin' knows.

AVERY
It'll go away. People forgive. You
have to start by forgiving
yourself.

VERNON (V.O.)
She's dead cause of me.

AVERY
We're human. We're guaranteed only
one thing: mistakes.
(MORE)

AVERY (cont'd)

If we are not allowed to learn from them, then there's no reason for any of us to go on.

VERNON (V.O.)

What am I going to learn from this? I'm alone. I can't even leave my apartment. I can barely talk to you.

AVERY

Do you have a picture of your wife?

VERNON (V.O.)

Yeah.

AVERY

Get it.

Avery waits for a moment.

AVERY

You got it?

VERNON (V.O.)

Yes.

AVERY

I want you to look at it and say I'm sorry. I want you tell her why.

VERNON (V.O.)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry I didn't hug you when you told me about the baby... When I told you I didn't want to have a child. How we never talked until I told you to get rid of it. I called you a bitch...

Vernon starts crying over the phone.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

SHERYL LEHANE, 32, is sitting on a bed with her naked back to a sleeping unshaven pig. She puts on her clothes and then gets up to look down at the guy. She can count the rolls on his soft belly.

She gets her things and leaves.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Fully dressed, she makes it to the entrance without a hitch, until her cell phone rings.

SHERYL

Shit.

She quickly opens the door and gets out.

GUY ON BED (O.S.)

Honey?

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Sheryl rushes to her car.

SHERYL

Hello?

(beat)

Hello?

INT. SHERYL'S CAR - NIGHT

Sheryl gets in and answers one last time.

SHERYL

Who is it?

Prince Charming opens the front door of the house, so Sheryl drives off immediately.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

DANIEL LEE HATCHET, 34, is on the phone, strung out from a binge in coke heaven that is still on-going. He's dressed in a pink robe.

DANIEL

I was watching one of mom's home videos. You remember those?

INTERCUT THE PHONE CONVERSATION -- SHERYL AND DANIEL.

Sheryl drives through the empty streets.

SHERYL

Daniel?

DANIEL

You couldn't sleep, either?

SHERYL

I was.

DANIEL

Don't lie. I know when you lie.

SHERYL
Fine, I wasn't sleeping.

DANIEL
You need to be more honest.

SHERYL
Why are you calling so late?

DANIEL
I don't know. My face went numb, so
I got a million impulses. I'm
watching that video where we play
by ourselves in the snow.

On the TV screen, there is a home video playing of two young kids: a girl and an older boy. They are the only kids in the snow who aren't building a snow man. They watch other kids trying to assemble one.

DANIEL
We looked so cute together.

SHERYL
Are you wasted?

DANIEL
No. Do I sound like I am?

SHERYL
Why do you call me like this?

DANIEL
Can't I talk to my baby sister?

SHERYL
Not when you keep on doing this.
Why don't you ever call mom when
you're like this?

DANIEL
Because mom doesn't understand.
Nobody does. Except you.

SHERYL
I don't even know you.

On the TV, the boy wrecks one of the other kid's snowman. The girl joins in. Some parent rushes over to them and tries pulling them away from the destroyed snowman.

DANIEL
Ah, we just fucked up the other
kid's snowman. You remember that?

SHERYL

I was four.

DANIEL

You have to see these tapes.

SHERYL

Not interested.

DANIEL

I want to see you some time.

SHERYL

The only way I'll see you is with a shrink or some bullshit family gathering.

DANIEL

Don't say that.

SHERYL

Please, stop calling.

She hangs up. Daniel does, too. He goes back to the TV, watching the boy get away from his father's grasp and going up to snowman, stomping on it again.

INT. COUNTY MORGUE, EXAMINING ROOM - NIGHT

Will Dahl stands above an examining table that holds a fresh dead body. He looks at two detectives, RAY CARTER and EDMUND KEEL.

WILL

Would you like me to go on?

Carter, the older of the two, points to the body's neck.

CARTER

Could you turn it over?

Will lifts the body's head and turns it over. There's a bullet entrance at the base of the man's skull. The wound is small, with minor fractures.

WILL

Nice work. Execution style.

CARTER

What was that?

WILL

Who are you kidding, Eddie?

KEEL

Will, the guy had a --

WILL

The guy's mark on his wrist show that he was handcuffed before he was shot. The dirt scratched into his knees was probably from you guys pushing him to the ground. And look at the wound. It's too perfect. Nobody would buy that in court.

As Will dictates all the signs, Carter and Keel look at the body's hands, knees, and neck. Carter is having a heart attack, Will's comments are precise.

CARTER

I thought you said he was cool.

Keel looks uneasy.

WILL

Of course, this is all speculation. It doesn't have to go on record.

Will smiles at the guys. Keel chuckles.

KEEL

We got you.

CARTER

You sons of bitches.

WILL

What can I say? I love to mess with you guys.

CARTER

You got me fuckin' worried.

WILL

I know. Looked like you wanted to shoot me.

Carter chuckles and reaches in his coat.

CARTER

Maybe I will.

He snatches out an envelope, handing it to Will. He puts it in his pocket.

WILL

Thanks.

CARTER

Aren't you gonna count it?

WILL

I trust you.

CARTER

I'm curious, but nobody checks your findings, makes sure they're accurate?

WILL

Ray, I'm the county coroner. The head of staff. I am the last word.

CARTER

My savior.

Carter pats Will on the back.

KEEL

Don't have too much fun on the job, Will. After all, you've got a wife.

Keel laughs.

WILL

Try being a real cop for once, skid-mark.

The Detectives leave. Will looks down at the body. His smile fades.

WILL

Sorry.

EXT. STREET - DAY

It's morning now and Avery is just getting off of his shift. He exits the building where he works, taking a stroll through the dilapidated city.

Avery stops when he sees a young couple across the street. They are laughing, but there sound is in audible. Eventually, the sound of the street, the cars, drowns out... Until Avery focuses completely on the couple. A sound comes out of them, but it's clearly not their voices.

GIRLFRIEND

Look at that freak.

BOYFRIEND
What a fucking weirdo.

GIRLFRIEND
He's following us.

Avery snaps out of it, able to hear the rest of the street sounds. A THIRD MAN walks right past Avery, brushing him, and then jaywalking to the couple.

BOYFRIEND
(his real voice)
Hey, Mitch, how's it going?

The three people chit-chat and leave. Avery watches them.

INT. SHERYL'S BEDROOM - DAY

Sheryl is sleeping when her phone rings. After the fourth ring, she reaches over for the phone and answers.

SHERYL
Stop calling. I'm sleeping!

ANNE (V.O.)
Sheryl, it's your mother.

SHERYL
Hi, Mom. What's up?

ANNE (V.O.)
It's Sunday.

SHERYL
So it is.

ANNE (V.O.)
We were supposed to have breakfast.
You remember?

Sheryl moans.

INT. BUS - DAY

The door opens and people file in with Avery coming in last place. He shows his Metro pass and finds an empty seat. He sits down and takes out a book from his coat pocket.

He looks down at the text. It's a straight-forward Ernest Hemmingway paragraph.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
Freak.

He looks up. Everyone is looking away from each other, minding their own business. He goes back to the book.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
Look at him.

BOY'S VOICE (V.O.)
Let's get him.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
Not yet, he'll see...

Avery looks up again. He's nervous, trying to find who is talking about him. He studies the other people, but it's no use.

BOY'S VOICE (V.O.)
A-ver-y.

Avery clenches his fists and breathes slowly. He looks back at his book but it's a scramble of words and phrases, making no sense whatsoever. He flips through the pages, until he finds in big block letters in the middle of the page:

"FREAK, DADDY'S BOY, PSYCHO"

Avery closes the book. He starts whispering in a hush voice.

AVERY
Calm down. Breathe. Breathe.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Will eats a garden salad while Roger chows down on some steak and eggs. He puts extra ketchup on the meat. Will looks like he's about to gag.

ROGER
How about if I stick the plate in your face?

WILL
I've been off of it four years.

Roger chews on some meat with his mouth open.

ROGER
I wouldn't be able to do that. I can barely go a couple of days without it. I love it.

WILL
I used to. Till I got this job. It
just --

ROGER
Made you think you were eating your
patients.

WILL
Yeah.

ROGER
Every time I see somebody's ribs, I
get a craving for some meat. I
can't explain it.

Will goes back to his salad.

INT. LEHANE DINING ROOM - DAY

Sheryl is sitting with her mother, ANNE LEHANE, a 57 year old
woman giddily overlooking the contents of a photo album.
Sheryl is eating a plate of french toast.

ANNE
Oh, this is when you turned five.
I've got your hair strand right
next to the photo.

SHERYL
Could you pass the syrup?

ANNE
Huh?

Sheryl stretches and gets the syrup herself.

ANNE
When are you going to make an
album?

SHERYL
Come on, Mom, you know I never
liked that stuff.

ANNE
What *stuff*?

SHERYL
Making an album. Trying out makeup.
Wearing high heels.

ANNE
You never want to have fun with me.

SHERYL

We have a different definition of fun.

ANNE

Why do you act so vain with me? You can't spend at least half a day with me without ever complaining.

SHERYL

What kind of album do you want me to make, Mom? How about the many boyfriends I never take photos of. Oh, I got it... What about the late night cramming sessions at college? That could be real cool.

ANNE

Fine. I get it. Marnie?!

After a moment, Anne's other daughter, MARNIE, age 6, runs up to Anne.

MARNIE

Yes, Mommy?

ANNE

How would you like to help Mommy with a photo album?

MARNIE

Yeah!

Anne kisses Marnie on the forehead. Marnie sits at the table.

ANNE

I'll be right back.

Anne gets up and leaves. Sheryl looks at her sister.

SHERYL

Do you actually like her?

Marnie doesn't even know how to answer.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Avery enters his building, going to the mail slots. He grabs his stuff and goes to an elevator.

INT. HALL - DAY

Avery comes out of the elevator, walking down his hall, passing every closed door. A door behind him opens. He walks on.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Excuse me.

Avery turns around. He finds a young woman, JOEY TELLER, peaking through the crack the open door.

AVERY

Yes?

JOEY

I just moved in.

AVERY

Oh, hi.

JOEY

I have a bit of a problem.

AVERY

Can I help?

JOEY

I was taking a shower and the water just stopped running.

AVERY

Oh. Do you want me to talk to the landlord? I know him pretty well.

JOEY

No, I did that. I was wondering... Could I use your shower?

AVERY

Sure.

Joey opens the door, holding some items of clothes. She has a towel wrapped around her body. Her hair is soaking.

AVERY

Sure.

INT. AVERY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Avery walks into his neat home. Everything is organized to perfection: the records, books, movies are in alphabetical order; his trinkets look shiny and new. Filth doesn't exist here. Joey walks in behind him.

AVERY

Bathroom's in that hall, first door
on the right.

JOEY

Thanks. I'm Joey by the way.

AVERY

Avery.

She walks past him, and he can't help but stare at her. She gets in the bathroom and closes the door.

AVERY

Wow.

EXT. WILL'S HOUSE - DAY

Will walks up a two-story old fashioned house sitting on top of a prairie.

INT. WILL'S HOUSE - DAY

He walks past the foyer, looking in a doorway to find his uncle BERNIE, sitting on a couch, watching TV in the living room.

BERNIE

Hey, what's happening, Will?

WILL

I need some sleep.

BERNIE

You hungry? I've got some eggs and weenies that I just cooked -- Oh, right.

WILL

Thanks for asking.

INT. WILL'S ROOM - DAY

Will walks into his room which hasn't changed since his teenage days in the 1980's. There's a poster of Mr. T saying, "I pity the fool who does drugs!" A Guns N Roses 1989 Tour shirt pinned up. Will opens the curtains, taking in the view of his backyard: a cemetery. He stretches and yawns.

INT. AVERY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Joey comes out of the bathroom, fully dressed. She walks into the main room, finding two served plates of food. Avery walks in with a pitcher of orange juice.

JOEY
What's this?

AVERY
I was already making breakfast. I
thought you might be hungry.

JOEY
Oh, I couldn't. I already used your
shower.

AVERY
No, it's fine. Really.

JOEY
I don't know.

AVERY
Think of it as a welcoming dinner.
I mean breakfast.

Joey can't refuse, so she sits down.

INT. SHERYL'S PLACE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sheryl is drinking a glass of wine, circling an empty photo album that lies in the middle of a coffee table. She looks around the room, at various photos of her. One at a theme park. Another with some guy around her in a park. Another with a couple of friends.

She rounds them up, one by one, then sits on her couch, taking each photo out of its frame.

INT. AVERY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Avery and Joey are just about finished with their meal.

JOEY
It was really good.

AVERY
Thanks. It's nothing, really.

JOEY
I can't even cook a TV dinner.

Avery laughs.

AVERY
Come on, you're a girl. I thought
all girls knew how to cook.

JOEY

I know. It's embarrassing. I just never got around to it.

AVERY

So what do you get around to?

JOEY

I'm an office clerk. I organize, and I file things for sloppy people.

AVERY

Really? I might need your help.

JOEY

What do you mean? Everything's organized.

She looks at his records and books.

AVERY

That's just to show off.

JOEY

It's unusual.

AVERY

Why?

JOEY

I haven't seen anybody do that. None of my friends are...

AVERY

Weird?

JOEY

Organized.

Avery's phone rings.

AVERY

Will you excuse me?

He gets up and gets the phone.

AVERY

Hello?

MEYER (V.O.)

Avery it's John.

AVERY

Hi, John.

MEYER (V.O.)

I'm just calling to confirm your appointment.

AVERY

Yeah, about that --

MEYER (V.O.)

Don't cancel. You're already booked.

Avery looks at Joey. He turns away from her.

AVERY

(whispering)

I don't want to take the bus.

MEYER (V.O.)

Did you hear the voices?

AVERY

No. I just don't feel so good.

MEYER (V.O.)

I'll call you a cab. Don't say no.

AVERY

Yeah. Thanks. Bye.

He turns back to Joey.

AVERY

Sorry about that.

JOEY

I actually have to leave.

INT. HALL - DAY

Joey walks out while Avery remains at the open doorway.

JOEY

It was nice meeting you, Avery.

AVERY

Yeah. We should... ummm... do something some time. I mean, that's if you want to.

JOEY

Sounds great. I'll bring my beau
around. He'd like to meet you. Bye.

She goes to her apartment down the hall. Avery grimaces as soon as she can't see him.

AVERY

My beau?

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - DAY

Will comes out with a paper sack. He walks down the street, going into a park.

EXT. POND - DAY

Will finds a bench and sits next to the pond. He yanks out some oranges from the bag and eats them. He also has some bread crumbs, which he throws in the lake despite the absent ducks.

He watches two little kids run up to the pond, splashing the cold water with their hands.

BOY

Oh... That's cold.

GIRL

There's no ducks, liar.

BOY

Ugh-huh. There is.

He points his finger up.

BOY

There!

Will even looks up at only a tree. The Boy smacks the Girl's head as she searches for the duck.

BOY

Gotcha, you're it!

The Girl cries as the Boy runs away back into the meadows. Will can't help but look at her. He walks up to her, but she backs away.

GIRL

Stranger! Stranger!

WILL

Relax, I'm a doctor.

GIRL
Oh yeah? You got like... a doctor
card or something?

WILL
Sorry. But I've got an orange.

He takes out an orange from the bag.

GIRL
Mom says not to take candy from a
stranger.

WILL
It's not candy. It's fruit. It's
good for you. It's got vitamins.
Know what those are?

GIRL
No.

WILL
They make you strong, so you can
eventually smack your brother
around.

The Girl giggles.

WILL
But if you don't want your
vitamins...

Will is putting the orange back in the bag. The Girl sticks
her hand out.

GIRL
Gimme!

WILL
I can't give you this. Your mom
will throw it away. Just ask for an
orange when you see her.

GIRL
Ah... Okay. Mom!

Will watches the Girl run back to her mother who was watching
in the distance, concerned. Will leaves before any questions
are asked.

INT. SHERYL'S PLACE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sheryl is on her couch, talking on the phone.

SHERYL

I know I haven't talked to you since graduation Rita, but I was wondering... Do you have any old photos of us?

(beat)

Thrown away?

(beat)

No, I was just wondering.

(beat)

Yeah, I'd love to get together some time. You still have my number?

(beat)

Sure, it works. It was probably messed up. Oh, I have to go. Somebody's at the door. Bye.

She hangs up, repulsed. She looks down at the photo album. She opens it, flipping through four pages of photos. The rest of the album is empty. She grabs her glass of wine and finishes it.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Sheryl puts her glass in the sink. She notices 1 New Message on her answering machine. She presses.

DANIEL (V.O.)

I know you don't want me to call...

She rolls her eyes.

DANIEL (V.O.)

But I wanted to say goodbye. I'm finally leaving town. I'm tired of waiting. Tell mom I love her and the rest the same. I'm sorry for whatever I did. I lo-- I'll miss you. Bye.

INT. STORAGE ROOM - NIGHT

Avery is sitting on a box in a room full of other boxes. He watches the STOCK BOY grab a box, opens it with an exacto-blade and takes out the contents: books. He puts them on a cart, and one of them falls. He bends over, seeing the back cover of a book. It has a picture of Avery.

The Stock Boy looks at Avery. Avery looks away. The MANAGER walks in.

MANAGER

Mr. Lang.

AVERY

Hi.

MANAGER

Yeah, the place just got more full.
So if you wouldn't mind...

AVERY

Of course, not.

MANAGER

Great, let me make sure it's all
ready. Just wait till I come back.

(to Stock Boy)

Freddy, make sure the new copies
are placed right in front of the
signing table.

The Stock Boy, nods his head. The Manager leaves. The Stock
Boy looks at Avery.

AVERY

What?

FREDDY

Do you smoke a lot of weed to write
your stories?

INT. BOOK STORE - NIGHT

The store is crowded with readers. A good number of them
carry books bearing Avery's name. The Manager stands in front
of the crowd with a microphone.

MANAGER

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to
introduce Mr. Avery Lang, author of
Placebo Effect and *Lies My Father
Told Me!*

They applaud. Avery tucks his head in his shoulders, trying
not to be the spotlight. He sheepishly waves. He finds a
chair in front of everyone where there is a microphone.

AVERY

Hello. First I'd like to thank all
of you for coming. I still never
get used to these...

The audience laughs.

AVERY

So anyway, I would like to read a
passage from *Placebo Effect*.

INT. WILL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Will is laying in his bed with his eyes open.

AVERY (V.O.)
I'm lying awake in my death bed,
wondering where the whole world
went.

Will gets up and leaves.

INT. WILL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Will is heating food in the microwave. He watches it bubble and boil. The microwave stops and Will takes it out.

AVERY (V.O.)
I knocked on people's doors,
looking for anybody, but they
claimed that they were not home.

SPLIT SCREEN:

INT. SHERYL'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sheryl is cooking some fish on a pan. It looks about ready. She puts it on plate that already has rice and vegetables.

AVERY (V.O.)
Now, I see their eyes behind their
curtains, begging to God that I go
away, so I stumble off to the next
lonely soul.

SPLIT SCREEN:

INT. WILL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Will walks out of the kitchen with his food, a plastic spork, and a can of beer. He walks up the stairs, going to his room.

AVERY (V.O.)
They deny me knock after knock, and
I slide idly by, until the door
opens and they let me inside.

SPLIT SCREEN:

INT. SHERYL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Sheryl puts her plate of food on a tray with a bottle of wine standing beside it. She carries out into the halls, going to her room.

AVERY (V.O.)

I was strapped at death's shoulder,
aching from every corner in my
body. They knew everything: my
birth, my life, and the rest.

SPLIT SCREEN:

INT. WILL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Will lays down in bed, scarfing down whatever was inside the container. He doesn't look too happy, but the beer washes out the flavor. He puts on the TV, but he flips through an endless parade of loud news, reality TV, and MTV. He finally comes to *The Wizard of Oz*. It's barely starting. He turns over, quickly looks for a CD and puts on Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* on his CD player. He tries timing the music to the movie.

AVERY (V.O.)

They knew my future and said I was
a freak.

SPLIT SCREEN:

INT. SHERYL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sheryl sits on her bed (the opposite side of Will), eating the tender slices of meat, while reading through The Noam Chomsky Reader. She grabs a remote and plays classical music on her CD player.

Together, in their beds, Will and Sheryl seem to almost touch each other. Eventually they both turn to look at each other.

AVERY (V.O.)

So I shut my eyes and I imagined
the rest...

INT. BOOK STORE - LATER

Avery is seated in front of a table as the fans go one after the other with their books to their chests. Avery finishes signing up a book for somebody. A TEENAGER approaches him.

AVERY

Hi.

The Teenager hands over a book that is not by Avery.

AVERY

Who do you want this --
(noticing the title)
This isn't mine.

Avery opens it, finding the book to be school property.

TEENAGER

I know. I just had to show up to this for a class. Extra credit, man.

AVERY

What?

TEENAGER

You mind if I take a photo?

AVERY

Okay...

The Teenager goes right up to Avery and puts his arm around him. His FRIEND takes a photo of them.

TEENAGER

Thanks a lot. You helped me in English.

AVERY

You really want me to sign it?

TEENAGER

Why not.

Avery does it.

TEENAGER

You know, I read a chapter by you.

AVERY

Oh yeah?

TEENAGER

Was all that true... About the hospital?

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE ROOM - FLASHBACK

Avery, bound to a chair, is secured tightly in a straight-jacket. On top of that, there's a strap holding him to the metal chair, which is bolted to the floor.

In front of him, DR. BEN ABSTAIN, a balding man in his late-40's, watches Avery's every flinch. He writes something in his journal.

BACK TO:

INT. BOOK STORE - NIGHT

Avery nods his head.

AVERY
Every word.

Avery gives back the book.

TEENAGER
Crazy shit, man.

AVERY
Thanks.

INT. COUNTY MORGUE, STORAGE - NIGHT

Will puts a body onto a tray, sliding it back in the freezer.
A HELPER walks up to Will.

HELPER
We got one in from some detectives.

WILL
Give it to somebody else.

HELPER
They specifically requested you.

INT. COUNTY MORGUE - NIGHT

Will walks over to a table where Carter and Keel are standing. Will sees a bruised and bloated body of a young, twenty-something year old

WILL
You guys going for a marathon?

KEEL
This was an accident. We swear.

WILL
Yeah, right. Just fill me in.

KEEL
Truth or cover?

WILL
Does it matter?

Keel flashes Carter a look.

CARTER

We dropped by a crime scene. Very routine. We tried finding some evidence when he notice somebody.

WILL

Inside the place?

KEEL

Yeah, so we saw this guy. He tried to run. We caught up, he tried to use a piece of glass to slice me, so I shot him.

Will looks at the body's hands. They are cut and bloodied. He sees the bullet entrances, judging the credibility.

WILL

Sounds reasonable.

Carter takes out an envelope.

CARTER

We'll call you later.

They leave. Will looks blankly at the body, until he focuses on the face. He studies it. There's something familiar.

EXT. BOOK STORE - NIGHT

Avery comes out of the back entrance of the book store. The Manager waves goodbye and goes back inside. Avery carries his satchel. He walks through an alley to get to the street. He makes it and looks around for a taxi, but there's nothing.

He watches the store lights turn off.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Freak!

Avery turns around and faces the street. There's nothing, but it makes him walk back, heading for the entrance of the alley. A hand moves through the dark.

WHACK! Avery's hit over the head. He drops to his knees.

On the street, a MUGGER, dressed in black in a ski mask, stands over Avery. He snatches the satchel out of his hand.

AVERY

Give that back! I have money!

Avery takes out his wallet. The Mugger recoils with the satchel.

AVERY
Take my money!

The Mugger looks at the satchel. It has some weight to it, so it has to be worth something. He runs off. Avery gets to his knees and chases after the Mugger, but it's no use, Avery's in no shape to chase anybody. He pants and coughs after a block, watching the Mugger get away.

AVERY
Come back... Come back.

He stops, defeated, staring at the Mugger get away. His eyes water.

AVERY
Come back...

INT. SUPER MARKET - NIGHT

Sheryl walks through a store with HERMAN, an ex-boyfriend turned friend.

HERMAN
You called me to give you photos?

SHERYL
Well, I just remembered all the good times we had and I thought... Why not keep them?

Herman reaches in his pockets, pulling out a small cannister of film.

HERMAN
I found this one.

SHERYL
Oh, what is it?

HERMAN
Fuck if I know.

They come to the photo hut counter.

SHERYL
What about when we went back packing?

HERMAN
Burned.

SHERYL
Oh.

The CLERK comes up to them. She reaches in her jacket, taking out three other cannisters of film. Herman looks at them.

HERMAN

Who else did you pimp tonight?

SHERYL

I found these at home.

HERMAN

Yeah, sure.

INT. S.A.H. OFFICE - NIGHT

Avery is sitting at his desk. His eyes are puffy and red. He does nothing, except stare at the phone. There is a blinking light on it. He takes the call.

AVERY

Suicide Assistance Hotline.

SOME GUY (V.O.)

I think I'm gonna blow my brains out.

AVERY

What's wrong?

SOME GUY (V.O.)

I've been staying up without sleep for a few weeks and I've been drinking every night, but I won't go to sleep.

AVERY

What have you been drinking? Strong liquor?

SOME GUY (V.O.)

Nyquil.

AVERY

I think that has only ten percent alcohol. It's not dangerous.

SOME GUY (V.O.)

Really?

AVERY

Yeah.

SOME GUY (V.O.)

I feel like I'm dying from what I'm doing, but I can't stop.

AVERY

You've got nothing to worry about,
Nyquil isn't addicting.

SOME GUY (V.O.)

But what about the sleep? It's not
coming... I lay in my bed, trying
to shut off my brain, but nothing
works. I've exercised, jerked off,
shit man, I'm running out of ideas.

AVERY

Could you hold on a second. I'm
just gonna transfer you to another
operator.

SOME GUY (V.O.)

Oh, okay.

Avery puts him on hold. He looks over at a co-worker, AMY,
who isn't doing anything at the moment.

AVERY

Amy, could you take this caller?

AMY

What?

AVERY

Please.

AMY

Forget it.

AVERY

I can't talk right now. Please,
Amy.

AMY

Fine. But you owe me.

INT. COUNTY MORGUE, BREAK ROOM - NIGHT

Will is sitting at a table, drinking coffee and eating a
pastry. Roger eventually sits next to him with a fat ham
sandwich. He eats away and talks at the same time.

ROGER

How's it going, Will?

WILL

Not too good.

ROGER
What's wrong?

WILL
I just saw somebody.

ROGER
Who?

WILL
This person I took care of when I
was a doctor.

ROGER
That's nice. What did they say?

WILL
He didn't say anything. He's dead.

Beat.

ROGER
Oh. I guess that's kind of a
bummer. So how did you know him?

WILL
He was this kid that robbed a
liquor store. He was shot by the
clerk, right in the abdomen. It
ruptured his liver. I was lucky
enough to save him.

ROGER
I thought he was dead.

WILL
No, this was years ago. I just saw
him right now.

ROGER
Oh, that body those cops brought
in?

Will nods his head.

ROGER
Looked like another jail bird.

WILL
His name was Roberto Salazar.

INT. S.A.H. OFFICE - NIGHT

Avery is on the phone, talking to Meyer.

AVERY
I can't send you what I have.

 MEYER (V.O.)
What?! You were raving about it.

 AVERY
I know.

 MEYER (V.O.)
What's wrong?

 AVERY
It's just...

 MEYER (V.O.)
You got a virus, didn't you? I told
you to get a virus scanner -- it
saves lives.

 AVERY
Somebody stole my laptop.

 MEYER (V.O.)
When?!

 AVERY
After the signing. I left, went to
wait for my cab --

 MEYER (V.O.)
Did you see him? We can get it
back. And press charges.

 AVERY
He was a mugger. He had a ski mask.

Beat.

 MEYER (V.O.)
Fuck, Avery. This is really great
timing.

 AVERY
I'm sorry.

 MEYER (V.O.)
It's not your fault.

EXT. SHERYL'S PLACE - NIGHT

Sheryl and Herman are waiting at the front door. She seems
trapped between the closed door and a imposing Herman.

HERMAN
So I had a good time.

SHERYL
Yeah.

HERMAN
I mean, it was nice seeing you
again.

SHERYL
Yeah.

HERMAN
It's too bad you're tired.

She nods her head, adding a yawn to seal the deal.

HERMAN
We did have a good time, right?

She puts her hand on his arm.

SHERYL
Yeah.

Beat.

SHERYL
Well, have a --

Herman moves in and kisses Sheryl. She stands still for a moment, then backs away.

SHERYL
Good night, Herman.

HERMAN
So I'll call you some time?

SHERYL
Whatever.

Sheryl opens the door and gets in. Herman clenches his fist and struts triumphantly.

HERMAN
Sweet.

INT. BREAK ROOM - NIGHT

Avery is gulping down a cup of coffee. He finishes and gets a refill. He drinks that down with a leftover donut.

He notices Amy, who stares at him from a table. Carl is behind them, reading his paper.

AVERY

What?

AMY

Are you okay?

AVERY

Yeah, fine. Why?

AMY

You don't look so hot. You gave me the call, who was a real pervert by the way -- but... you never do that.

AVERY

I'm just a little under the weather, Amy.

AMY

Yeah, I figured you were writing another crazy story...

(beat)

I mean page turner.

AVERY

Yeah. I have to pee.

Avery puts down the junk food and leaves. Carl eyes Avery suspiciously.

CARL

Something wrong with him?

INT. S.A.H. OFFICE - NIGHT

Avery walks past his desk, then he stops, noticing a blinking light. He looks around and sees that everyone is talking, so he sits down and takes the phone call.

AVERY

Suicide Assistance Hotline.

DANIEL (V.O.)

Who is this?

AVERY

You called the --

DANIEL (V.O.)
I know who I called. Who am I
talking to?

AVERY
I'm Avery.

DANIEL (V.O.)
Listen, man, I've got a lot of
problems. I need somebody to talk
to.

AVERY
I'm your guy.

DANIEL (V.O.)
I'm extremely depressed. I've been
thinking about doing myself in.
I've got nothing to go on.

AVERY
What's really bothering you?

Beat.

DANIEL (V.O.)
The person I love hates me.

AVERY
Why does he or she hate you?

DANIEL (V.O.)
I'm not gay, man --

AVERY
I didn't mean to imply, I'm sorry.
So why does *she* hate you?

DANIEL (V.O.)
I may have... come off too strong.

AVERY
Okay. Go on...

DANIEL (V.O.)
I grabbed her.

AVERY
What do you mean?

DANIEL (V.O.)
Why do you need to know?

AVERY

I want to hear the truth. It's the only way you can --

DANIEL (V.O.)

Okay. I'll be honest, man, I'm not the nicest guy in the park. I've been hooked on pharmies and meds for a while... and when I saw her, I wasn't in the right state of mind. So I... She hugged me. I suppose I thought it meant more.

AVERY

What did you do?

DANIEL (V.O.)

I reached in her shirt and I kissed her. You happy, pervert?

AVERY

Hey, there's no need for that.

DANIEL (V.O.)

You're the one making me feel guilty.

AVERY

Guilt is a natural emotion. You need it to get over --

DANIEL (V.O.)

Yeah. So now what do I do? She won't talk to me. She was the last person I ever knew.

AVERY

What about your family?

DANIEL (V.O.)

Now you wanna bring up my family? Look, I've got nobody, man. They hate me. I'm a bastard in their eyes.

AVERY

There has to be one person.

DANIEL (V.O.)

Are you listening? I've got no one. No one. Christ. You're doing a horrible job, you know that?

AVERY

Please, sir. Resentment is a natural reaction to --

DANIEL (V.O.)

I got it. The whole natural thing. You know, why don't you transfer me to somebody with a pulse?

AVERY

Excuse me?

DANIEL (V.O.)

I want to talk with somebody who knows what they're saying. I need a person, not some robot.

AVERY

You know what, I don't need this. I work here day and night, hour after hour --

DANIEL (V.O.)

Why don't you shut up and transfer me?

AVERY

Why don't you shut up?!

He notices other people's stares, so he crouches down and whispers, but in a harsh tone.

AVERY

I've had enough of you. I know you. You may not think so, but I know. You call here every day, crying... *I hate my life, I was fired, she doesn't love me...* but you know what? Get some balls.

DANIEL (V.O.)

Easy for you to say, you're probably some fat fuck with no life.

AVERY

At least I don't waste my time pretending to be suicidal. Why don't you shut up and do it?

DANIEL (V.O.)

Don't push me, man. I'm serious.

AVERY

What the hell are you doing talking
to me then?

INT. DANIEL'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Daniel is standing with red eyes. He furiously paces with the phone in one hand and a gun in the other. He still adorns the pink robe.

AVERY (V.O.)

Take whatever you have, your pills,
a razor, a gun, a noose, and just
do it.

DANIEL

Fuck you!

AVERY (V.O.)

No, fuck you!

Daniel tightens his grip on the gun. He raises it up to his head.

DANIEL

Don't test me.

AVERY (V.O.)

I'm already getting tired of you.
You're boring.

INT. S.A.H. OFFICE - NIGHT

Avery is fuming as he holds the phone tightly.

AVERY

I'm hanging up now.

BLAM! He hears the muffled sound of a gun shot. Avery's grasp loosens. He drops the phone and then quickly picks it up.

AVERY

Hello?

(beat)

Hello?

INT. DANIEL'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Daniel's is lying on the floor. A pool of blood spreads around his head.

INT. S.A.H. OFFICE - NIGHT

Avery hangs up. He looks down at his desk, at his prescription bottle. He slaps it off his desk and he gets up. He grabs his coat and leaves.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Two paramedics take the body bagged body of Daniel Lee Hatchet out to their van. The place has a couple of cops and cruisers laying about, investigating.

EXT. CORONER'S VAN - NIGHT

The van soars off into the night and a police cruiser follow it.

INT. COUNTY MORGUE, FRONT LOBBY - NIGHT

Will is sitting at a chair, reading through a book as the Coroner's Van arrives at the front doors. The paramedics get the body out of the back and bring it in the building. Will watches them.

WILL

What do you got?

PARAMEDIC

Some guy blew his head off.
Neighbors called it in.

WILL

No ID? Who was this guy?

A uniformed COP approaches Will.

COP

Daniel Lee Hatchet.

INT. SHERYL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sheryl is woken up by the ringing phone. After the fourth try, she reaches over for the phone.

SHERYL

Herman, don't call.

COP (V.O.)

Is this Sheryl Lehane?

SHERYL

Speaking.

COP (V.O.)
Are you related to a Daniel Lee Hatchet?

SHERYL
That's correct. Has he done something, officer?

COP (V.O.)
What the -- how did you --

SHERYL
I'm used to this kind of thing. What's the problem this time.

COP (V.O.)
I'm sorry, Ms. Lehane. Your brother committed suicide.

She doesn't know how to react.

COP (V.O.)
Hello? Ms. Lehane?

She tries speaking, but it comes out in short whispers as if she's catching her breath.

SHERYL
Are you... Are you sure it's him?

COP (V.O.)
Reasonably sure. But we need someone to make a formal identification.

SHERYL
Where do I go?

COP (V.O.)
The County Morgue. Motor and Veranda. Do you know how to --

She hangs up.

INT. COUNTY MORGUE, FRONT LOBBY - NIGHT

Sheryl walks in the morgue, seeing the receptionist watch a late night infomercial on her mini-TV.

INT. COUNTY MORGUE - NIGHT

The Cop leads Sheryl in through the rows of dead bodies.

COP
We got the call after ten-thirteen.
That's when he... We found the
body.

Sheryl walks up to the table where Will stands next to it,
drinking a cup of coffee.

COP
This is the coroner.

WILL
Medical examiner.

Will looks at Sheryl, reading her face. She doesn't seem
ready for any of this.

WILL
Before I go. Could you tell me
about your brother? What he looked
like.

SHERYL
He... He's six feet tall. Slim.
Brown hair. Brown eyes. I don't
know what else...

WILL
It's just a little hard to ID him.
It would have been easier through
dental records, but under the
circumstances... Does your brother
have any distinguishing marks?

SHERYL
He has a scar on his right arm.
Near the pit of his elbow.

Will peels off a portion of the sheet, revealing Daniel's
right arm. He checks for the mark. It's there. She nods her
head.

SHERYL
Do I have to see the rest?

WILL
It's unnecessary, and we don't
recommend it most of the time. Is
there anything else you can --

SHERYL
That robe.

WILL
Excuse me?

Sheryl points to Daniel's robe, which hangs from the table.

SHERYL
He always wore it.

INT. COUNTY MORGUE, LOBBY - NIGHT

Sheryl is sitting on a chair, having a cigarette. The Cop waits by her side.

COP
Do you need me to take you home?

SHERYL
No. I'll be fine. Thank you.

COP
We'll call you in case anything comes up.

SHERYL
Actually, I don't know if this would help... But he left a message.

COP
He did?

SHERYL
It didn't make sense to me. But now...

COP
We can send someone over to pick it up.

SHERYL
That would be fine.

COP
Thank you. And I'm sorry.

She walks away. She looks down, noticing another pair of shoes approaching quickly. She looks up at Will.

WILL
I'm sorry about your brother. I wanted to give you something.

Will gives her a card:

(MORE)

WILL (cont'd)
"Smith's Grove Cemetery
Caretaker - Bernard Winfield
(323) 555-3220"

WILL
My uncle owns it. He's a good guy,
he won't rip you off.

SHERYL
Thank you.

They part in opposite ways.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

Bernie has two bodies placed on his examining table. Will is sitting on the counter, watching his uncle try to "fix" up the bodies.

BERNIE
I like this one, Will. It's easy to do.

Bernie refers to the body of Roberto Salazar.

BERNIE
This other one's gonna have to be a closed casket funeral.

WILL
Yeah, I told them that.

BERNIE
They're so young. What is it with people these days? I see more young bodies than old...

WILL
I don't know, uncle Bernie. Maybe there's a plague.

BERNIE
Hogwash. It's the new generation. You guys don't know squat. You'd rather live seventy five years in twenty five.

WILL
Live fast, die young, and leave a good looking corpse. That's what I say.

BERNIE
Tell that to these two.

INT. AVERY'S APARTMENT - DAY

A beam of light forces its way through the crack of a curtain, into Avery's eyes. He remains seated, wrapped in a cover, with the phone next to him.

Someone is knocking on his door.

MEYER (O.S.)
Avery?! Open up...

Avery never moves, so JOHN MEYER eventually opens the door. He's 41, but he still tries to act like he's twenty. He puts his spare keys away and walks up to Avery.

MEYER
Avery?

Avery never answers or moves.

MEYER
You haven't returned my calls. And you left your job in the middle of a shift.
(beat)
I called you for three days.
(beat)
Hello?

AVERY
I've killed a man.

MEYER
Not again. Avery, did you stop taking your medication --

AVERY
It's not the pills, John. I really killed somebody.

Meyer scoffs at the notion.

MEYER
Oh yeah? And how did you get away with it? You don't know shit about disposing a body, crime-fiction ain't your genre, pal. I know you got robbed, so that probably --

AVERY
I was at my job.

Meyer sits on the floor, down to Avery's level.

MEYER
You're serious?

AVERY
I lost it. I lost control.

MEYER
Who's dead, Avery?

AVERY
I don't know. Some guy named Daniel
Lee Hatchet...

Avery reaches for a newspaper on the floor. Avery shows him
to the opened page: the obituaries. Meyer reads through it.

MEYER
He committed suicide.

AVERY
I know.

MEYER
How could you --

AVERY
I told him to.

Beat.

MEYER
What?

AVERY
I told him to kill himself.

MEYER
Shit.
(beat)
I'm going to call Dr. Abstain.

AVERY
What?

MEYER
I want to know -- I want you to be
safe.

AVERY
Did you hear what I said, I killed
somebody.

MEYER
Who knows about this?

Avery shrugs. He doesn't know.

MEYER

We'll talk to Abstain. He'll help you clear your head. You're just imagining things...

AVERY

Listen to me, I --

MEYER

You listen. As your friend, I suggest that you don't tell anybody about what happened. Just let me do the talking.

Meyer gets up and goes to Avery's phone. He grabs his wallet, fishes out the number, and makes a phone call.

MEYER

I knew I shouldn't have let you live on your own...

(beat)

Hello, may I speak to Dr. Abstain?

(beat)

This is John Meyer. I'm calling about his patient, Avery Lang.

(beat)

Yes, that's him.

(beat)

Yes, I'll hold.

(to Avery)

I'm responsible for you. You ever think of that? If anything happens, it doesn't only affect you.

Avery keeps his head buried in his knees.

INT. LEHANE RESIDENCE, DINING ROOM - DAY

Sheryl is at the table with Anne and AUNT BEA. Marnie and a cousin are running around the house, coming in and out of the room. Sheryl is looking through a phone book.

SHERYL

Who do you want me to call?

ANNE

I'll handle all the relatives.

SHERYL

You sure?

ANNE
Yes.

AUNT BEA
And me?

ANNE
Flower arrangements? Please.

AUNT BEA
Of course.

Anne grabs the phone book from Sheryl's hand.

SHERYL
What about me?

ANNE
You already got us the deal at the cemetery.

SHERYL
Well, what else --

ANNE
Why don't you try and round up some of Daniel's friends?

SHERYL
Did he ever have any?

Anne drops the phone book. Her eyes tear up and she clutches onto Aunt Bea.

ANNE
Why did she say that?

Aunt Bea consoles Anne. Bea gives Sheryl a look, mouthing something along the lines of "Stupid Bitch."

INT. WILL'S ROOM - DAY

Will is putting on a white shirt and tie. He fixes his hair and then he puts on a coat.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Bernie's eating some cereal when Will walks in.

BERNIE
Where you off to, looking all snazzy?

WILL
Going to a funeral.

Bernie stops eating.

BERNIE
It's your day off.

WILL
I know.

Bernie looks at Will, dissatisfied.

WILL
What?

BERNIE
Get a girl, or a friend, have a
beer, relax... Laugh for God's
sake.

WILL
What's there to laugh about?

BERNIE
I don't know, but you can't always
visit the people you bring in.

WILL
Why not?

BERNIE
You're not obligated to.

Will looks down. He fixes a loose button.

WILL
I have to go.

He leaves.

EXT. FUNERAL - DAY

Will walks from his house all the way to a funeral in
progress.

A Catholic PRIEST delivers a sermon in Spanish to a mostly
Latin American group of mourners.

PRIEST
...y recordamos de nos hijos y
hermanos quien se callen del cielo
de dios.
(MORE)

PRIEST (cont'd)
Ellos lloravan, y sacrefician la
vida por la familia...

In subtitles: And let us remember our sons and brothers who have fallen from God's sky, who wept and sacrificed for their families.

CUT TO:

LATER

The Priest is through, the flowers are being dropped, along with the coffin and Will stands at the back, watching the people drift away.

One mourner, JUANITA SALAZAR, is seated at the front. Her head is bowed down. Will drops a rose for Roberto. He looks at Juanita until she raises her head to him.

JUANITA
Wait. Who are you?

WILL
Just a well-wisher.

JUANITA
How did you know my son? He didn't like gaba -- he didn't know people like you.

WILL
This *gabacho* knew your son. I'm a doctor. Well, not anymore... I'm the county coroner.

JUANITA
Doctor Dahl?

WILL
You remember me?

JUANITA
You saved my boy's life.

WILL
What a good job I did.

JUANITA
It's not your fault. Wait, you're the one who got us a deal here?

WILL
Yeah.

JUANITA

Thank you.

WILL

It was really no problem.

Will notices that everyone is already leaving.

WILL

Do you need a ride?

INT. WILL'S CAR - DAY

Will drives while Juanita fixes her smeared eye makeup.

WILL

I want you to know that I know
Roberto is innocent.

Juanita smirks.

JUANITA

Nobody's innocent, Dr. Dahl.

WILL

He didn't deserve to die.

JUANITA

I know. He was getting through
community college. He stopped
hanging around his *pinche amigos*.

WILL

Do you think he was guilty of what
the cops are accusing him of?

JUANITA

My son might have been a gangster.
He might have killed people in his
time, that I don't know of... but a
rapist? Roberto was not that. *No
fue un monstrro.*

WILL

I know. But on record, he is. And
that's all that matters.

JUANITA

He's not!

WILL

I know, Mrs. Salazar.

JUANITA
It's Ms. I divorced my bastard
husband a long time ago.

WILL
Where am I taking you?

JUANITA
My house. I have to entertain some
guests.

INT. TAXI CAB - NIGHT

Avery is in the back of a taxi, asleep. The car eventually
pulls up to the sidewalk. The CABBIE turns around.

CABBIE
Hey, buddy.

Avery doesn't move. The Cabbie throws a discarded wrapper at
Avery. He starts waking up.

CABBIE
Wake up. Get out.

AVERY
Where am I?

CABBIE
You're home.

Avery looks out of the window, seeing his apartment building.
He looks down at his shoes, then at the Cabbie.

AVERY
I don't remem --

CABBIE
This is it. You're off.

AVERY
What do I owe you?

CABBIE
You already paid me.

Avery gets out of the car. He goes up to the Cabbie's window.

AVERY
Where did I come from?

CABBIE
I picked you up at Main and
Eleventh.

The Cabbie drives off. Avery tries holding onto his window, but the cab drives back into the street.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Will and Juanita are having sex, mounted on her shaky sink. Will has a hand towel stuffed in Juanita's mouth as she pants and moans. Will breathes heavily, trying to keep the rhythm going.

INT. JUANITA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

A dozen guests are seated around, eating leftovers and drinking hard liquor and beer. Juanita eventually comes down the stairs. One of the relatives, ALFREDO, looks at up at her.

ALFREDO
Donde estavas?

Subtitled: Where did you go?

JUANITA
Estuve hablando con dios.

Subtitled: I was speaking to God

ALFREDO
Y ese gaba?

Subtitled: And that white guy?

JUANITA
Ya se fue. Por que me preguntas?

Subtitled: He left. Why do you ask?

ALFREDO
No mas quiero saber.

Suntitled: I just wanted to know.

INT. AVERY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Avery walks in, finding everything in order. Everything is clean: the cover is made. And there's a laptop on his desk.

He finds a note on top:

*"Here's a peace of mind.
Meyer."*

Avery opens it and turns it on.

EXT. APARTMENT - DAY

Sheryl knocks on the door of an apartment. It eventually opens. FRED DOWD squints his eyes from the sunlight. He's unshaven, in a tank top, still half-asleep.

DOWD
It's you. What do you want?

SHERYL
I came here on behalf of my
parents.

DOWD
Oh yeah? It's about Hatch?

SHERYL
Yes.

DOWD
So spill it.

SHERYL
Please don't come to the funeral.

Dowd just shakes his head.

DOWD
Is it cause I haven't shaved?

SHERYL
My parents want this to be a family
thing.

DOWD
Family. You guys abandoned him. Why
else would he come around with us
so much? Family, you guys don't
know what the it means.

SHERYL
Could you just do this out of
respect for my brother?

DOWD
You mean, for your family? Your
brother wouldn't even want you
people around...

SHERYL
You know I never judged you or the
others. I'm here to keep peace.

DOWD
Fine. We won't show up.

SHERYL
Thank you.

She leaves.

DOWD
We all knew this was gonna happen.

She stops and turns around.

DOWD
We knew he'd eventually do it.

SHERYL
Then why didn't you help him?

DOWD
He didn't need *our* help.

She turns and goes.

INT. AVERY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Avery is on the phone.

AVERY
What do you mean, I passed out?

MEYER (V.O.)
You were at my apartment all weekend. Abstain gave you some medication... You don't remember?

AVERY
I...

MEYER (V.O.)
Check your pocket.

Avery searches in his coat, finding a new prescription bottle.

AVERY
Oh, right. Sorry about that.

MEYER (V.O.)
You don't have to worry about the book. You'll have plenty of time now.

EVERY

What about... you know?

MEYER (V.O.)

Forget about that, Avery. The cops
dropped by your work, asked
questions, and nothing happened.

EVERY

Are you sure?

MEYER (V.O.)

Yes.

EVERY

Thanks.

MEYER (V.O.)

All I ask is that you don't forget
to take your medication. All right?

EVERY

Yeah.

MEYER (V.O.)

I'll talk to you later. Chow.

EVERY

Bye.

He hangs up.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Avery follows a group of people who go to Daniel's funeral.
His immediate family sit together at the front. Avery goes to
the back, where Will is also standing.

CUT TO:

ANNE

Standing in front of the crowd, in tears, in black, with a
kleenex at her side.

ANNE

Daniel was a good son.

Sheryl, along with a few other people in the crowd roll their
eyes.

ANNE

He might be dead now, but he is
still my first son.

(MORE)

ANNE (cont'd)

He would always ask if I was doing good. He would always run home after school. He would take care of his mother.

(beat, holding back tears)

He never hurt anybody. My son was immaculate. He lit up the room like nobody else. He was the smartest in his class...

Sheryl's COUSIN taps her.

COUSIN

What the fuck is this?

She shrugs.

SHERYL

How should I know?

COUSIN

He sounds like Mother Teresa now. Do something.

ANNE

He... Always did things for me without question. He was beautiful...

She starts crying, breaking down in front of the audience. Sheryl takes a moment and then goes up to Anne, stopping her speech. Anne finally sits down. Sheryl looks at the crowd of people.

Avery sees her. He's dumbfounded. Everyone else waits for her to speak.

SHERYL

My brother was a fuck up. I'm not gonna lie now because he's dead.

People gasp and whisper, "Did she just say that?" Anne stares at Sheryl, fuming.

SHERYL

You know, I'm tired of everybody glorifying people who died just because they're not around. My brother wasn't perfect. He used to beat up my cousin Rick over there all the time... Aunt Bea, you remember when he shot your dog with the BB gun? How about the time he was caught selling coke?

(MORE)

SHERYL (cont'd)

Or the times he screamed at us for not giving him anymore money... Does anybody remember when he was high? Fuck, nobody remembers these things. Am I fucking crazy? Was my brother some saint behind my back? He shouldn't be remembered this way, it's a lie. A fucking lie.

Everyone is silent. They stare at Sheryl in complete shock.

CUT TO:

REALITY...

The crowd waits for Sheryl to say something. She sighs.

SHERYL

Let's just get on with it.

She sits down. People wait for the next speaker, but it's dead air. Somebody puts their rose on the casket, so everybody else follows suit. The undertakers begin to lower the casket on a winch. Music ensues and everyone goes back with the ceremony.

Sheryl gets up, ready to go. She notices Will. Avery is behind them, watching. She walks up to Will.

SHERYL

Doctor.

WILL

It's Will when I'm not on duty.

SHERYL

I didn't think you would have come.

WILL

I live right around the corner. I thought I'd pay my respects.

SHERYL

Thank you for coming. Are you gonna come to the reception?

WILL

No, I'm okay.

SHERYL

Oh.

WILL

But I mean, I can go if you want.
I've got nothing else to do.

SHERYL

Just follow us.

They walk away. Avery follows them.

INT. LEHANE RESIDENCE, DINING ROOM - DAY

The house is crowded with mourners. Everyone is either with a plate of food, a beer, or is standing at a line to get to the casseroles and side dishes.

Will is at the staircase, drinking a beer with some food. He notices Avery, sitting by him on a fold-in chair.

WILL

You don't know anybody here?

Avery looks at Will.

AVERY

Excuse me?

WILL

I haven't heard you say anything to anybody. You've just been quiet, like me.

AVERY

I don't know anybody here.

WILL

That's odd.

AVERY

Well, just Daniel. I only knew him.

WILL

He was your friend?

AVERY

Yeah.

Avery looks down at the floor.

WILL

How long did you know him?

AVERY

Oh, a couple of years. We wouldn't meet up too often. Just small get togethers. You know.

WILL

What kind of get-togethers?

AVERY

Nothing unusual. We would just hang out.

WILL

He was loaded on cocaine when he died. What kind of get togethers did you have?

AVERY

Look, I haven't touch a non-prescription drug in my life. Please, don't accuse me --

WILL

I'm sorry. I was just... Never mind.

AVERY

What are you anyway, a lawyer?

WILL

Medical examiner, actually.

AVERY

A doctor?

WILL

No, more like the county coroner.

AVERY

Oh.

Will finishes his beer. Sheryl walks up to him.

SHERYL

I'm sorry about you having to be alone, here.

WILL

It's all right, I met a friend.

Will points his beer to Avery.

SHERYL

I'm sorry... I don't believe I know you. Are we related?

AVERY

No, I was a friend of your brother's.

Beat.

SHERYL

Oh. How did you know my brother?

AVERY

It's a little strange. I don't know how it happened, but --

INT. ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS ROOM - DAY

Avery, standing in the back of a session-in-progress watches the people/addicts open their wounds to each other. On the podium, is an ex-actor-gone-druggy.

EX-ACTOR-GONE-DRUGGY

...I was practically brushing my teeth with Vodka. I kept little viles of coke left and right. I was coughing up bloody mucus balls...

Avery drinks his coffee.

AVERY (V.O.)

I was going to AA meetings to research for my book when your brother came late to a meeting.

Avery notices Daniel walk into the loft-like room. He sneaks around back, going straight for the coffee and donuts.

DANIEL

What did I miss?

AVERY

This guy... I forgot his name... He came out in that one movie with that guy in it...

DANIEL

Yeah, he's a regular.

AVERY

He's just been talking.

Daniel takes out a flask from his coat. He starts pouring it in his coffee. He notices Avery's stare.

DANIEL
What? I'm not a drunk.

AVERY
Yeah, right.

DANIEL
I only do this so the other guys won't see me. They're all a bunch of fiends.

AVERY
Why are you here?

DANIEL
Free food, it's warm, and I get benefits if I show up. What's your excuse?

AVERY
Research.

DANIEL
You take surveys or something?

AVERY
I write books.

Daniel raises his cup.

DANIEL
You need some inspiration?

AVERY
I don't drink. I don't touch anything besides my prescribed medicine.

BACK TO:

INT. LEHANE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Sheryl is closer to Avery, with Will beside the two.

SHERYL
That's funny, I'd never picture Daniel going to AA.

AVERY
He was a strange character. Unique in a weird way.

SHERYL
You can say that again.

AVERY
What's your name?

SHERYL
Sheryl.

He shakes her hand.

AVERY
I'm Avery.

SHERYL
Nice meeting you.
(beat)
So what did you write?

AVERY
It was just an exercise. I go to
all kinds of places to get a feel
for new things.

SHERYL
Oh. I thought it was a book.

ANNE (O.S.)
Sheryl.

SHERYL
Excuse me.

She leaves.

EXT. LEHANE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Everyone is leaving. Will and Avery are part of the flock.

WILL
Where are you parked?

AVERY
No where, I take the bus.

WILL
You want a lift?

INT. WILL'S CAR - NIGHT

Will drives Avery to his house.

WILL
So where are you from?

AVERY

I'm a native. Born and raised in
Brucksen.

WILL

That's funny, I never heard of you.
Avery Lang. Avery Lang.

AVERY

I hate that name.

Will smirks.

WILL

You hate your own name?

AVERY

Yeah, I thought about changing it
all the time. I was never
comfortable with it.

WILL

Mine's not exactly award winning
either. Will Dahl.

AVERY

That's nothing. I knew a kid named
Benjamin Dover. People called him
Ben Dover.

WILL

That must have scarred him through
school.

AVERY

School?

WILL

Yeah, school. You know, that prison
where kids are sent off to.

AVERY

Oh, I... am not used to going to
school. I was home schooled,
actually.

WILL

Is that why you're a writer? Your
pops taught you a few tricks?

AVERY

I'm terrible. I don't know how I
get away with it.

WILL
Yeah, I got away with being a
doctor for five years.

AVERY
You were bad at it?

WILL
The worst.

AVERY
Looks like we got something in
common.

INT. HALL - NIGHT

Avery is walking down the hall to his apartment. He gets to
the door, opens it with his keys...

JOEY (O.S.)
Avery?

He turns, seeing Joey sticking out her head from the doorway.

AVERY
Yeah.

JOEY
What are you doing?

AVERY
Coming home.

JOEY
I just made dinner. And I never
paid you back for the other day.

Avery thinks about.

AVERY
Sure.

INT. JOEY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

There are cardboard boxes laying around the apartment. Joey
leads Avery to a table with food already served.

AVERY
Where's your *beau*?

JOEY
He works late.

They sit down. Avery smells the food and enjoys the aroma.

AVERY
I love Italian.

JOEY
Bon appetite.

INT. WILL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Will comes home, putting his coat up on a rack. He sees the blue-hue coming from the living room, so he goes in.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bernie's at the couch, watching TV.

BERNIE
How was it?

WILL
This one was nice.

BERNIE
Did you actually talk to anybody?

WILL
Yeah, the guy's sister.

BERNIE
Was she cute?

WILL
What the hell kind of question is that?

BERNIE
An honest one.

WILL
She was nice. That's all I have to say about it.

BERNIE
What crawled up your ass?

Will pays attention to the TV which is showing a highly explosive, violent film. He gets up and leaves.

BERNIE
You're missing the best part.

INT. SHERYL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sheryl is on her bed, reading through one of her books. As she reads, she eyes her bookshelves. After the third look, she drops her book and heads straight for it.

She searches each section (her shelves are categorized by genre). Finally, she stops at a particular author: Avery Lang. She grabs it and looks at the title: Placebo Effect. She flips to the back of the book, finding a picture of Avery.

SHERYL

Holy shit.

INT. JOEY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Avery is slouched on his chair, smiling at Joey with a lazy stare.

AVERY

This was really... good.

JOEY

Thanks. I had nothing else to do.

AVERY

I've never felt so... heavy.

JOEY

Want to sit on the couch?

AVERY

Yes!

She laughs at his candor. They walk to the couch. Avery stumbles.

AVERY

I feel different.

They sit down. Joey looks at Avery's eyes. He occasionally looks away from time to time.

AVERY

So how's life?

JOEY

Very lonely. I just sit around or I take walks or I shop.

AVERY

You got a job?

JOEY
Martin brings home the bacon.

AVERY
Martin? Oh, your beau. Right.

JOEY
But he's away all the time.

She twirls her hair with her finger. Avery looks down, shaking his head.

AVERY
I don't... I don't feel so good.

JOEY
What about you?

AVERY
What?

JOEY
You have a girlfriend?

AVERY
I wish.

JOEY
What's wrong?

AVERY
I can't meet people.

She laughs.

AVERY
What?

JOEY
You met me.

AVERY
Yeah, but you're married.

JOEY
I don't have to be.

AVERY
You don't?

She moves in and starts kissing Avery. The position is awkward for him, but he lets her do whatever she wants. She moves in and sits on him.

INT. SHERYL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sheryl is reading through Placebo Effect.

AVERY (V.O.)

...They filed slowly through the hall. The Good Doctor had pumped me full of Thorazine. So I couldn't break my nails by scratching the walls anymore...

INT. HOSPITAL, AVERY'S ROOM - FLASHBACK

Avery is sitting on his bed, looking at the wall, where there are hundreds of scratch marks. He notices a fingernail embedded into the wall. He looks at his own hands which are bandaged.

AVERY (V.O.)

The door opened. The Good Doctor spoke.

Dr. Abstain opens the door. He walks up to Avery.

ABSTAIN

There will be a change in your treatment, Avery. It will actually give you some freedom.

AVERY

No more therapy.

ABSTAIN

It's not therapy. It's something else.

Abstain moves out of the way, revealing a nurse in a white uniform, holding an archaic typewriter.

AVERY (V.O.)

The Angel had brought me a machine from the Gods. They said it would help me clear my mind from all the thoughts I couldn't control....

INT. AVERY'S ROOM - LATER - FLASHBACK

Avery is alone, sitting on his bed. Across from him, on a cheap fold-out desk is the typewriter, holding a blank piece of paper. Behind him, through the looking glass of the door, Abstain watches, unbeknownst to Avery.

AVERY (V.O.)

The maniac couldn't deny himself that urge in his heart to slay the beast... Maybe it was his willful contempt for anything that was pure. *Pure white*. He wanted to slander the page with black blocks of hate, so the rest of the world would know.

INT. JOEY'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joey and Avery are having sex. They kiss, then break away. Avery closes his eyes, in pure ecstasy.

CUT TO:

A NEEDLE, SHOVING INTO AN ARM.

BACK TO:

INT. JOEY'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - NIGHT

In mid-coitus, Avery winces. He looks at his arm. There's a pock mark where the needle was shoved. He ignores it. He closes his eyes.

CUT TO:

AVERY

Bound to a straightjacket, tries escaping from it. He can't even get up from the wooden chair he's bound to.

BACK TO:

INT. JOEY'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Avery looks at himself. He is wearing the straightjacket. He tries getting out of it.

AVERY

What the fuck?!

Joey looks up, scared.

JOEY

You all right?

Avery throws the covers that were over him. There is no jacket. He looks at his arms, calms down, and breathes.

AVERY
My head. It's killing me. I'm
sorry.

JOEY
It's okay. Could you slide out now?

Avery lies next to her. There's a moment of silence.

JOEY
You've never done drugs?

AVERY
Depends on what kind.

JOEY
How about weed?

AVERY
Never.

JOEY
You just did.

AVERY
What?

JOEY
I don't like to smoke, so I just
cook it with my food. I thought you
wouldn't mind.

AVERY
Why didn't you tell me?

JOEY
It was a surprise.

Avery sits up. He finds his clothes and puts them on.

JOEY
Where are you going?

AVERY
Home. You're married, remember?

JOEY
That didn't stop you before.

AVERY
I'm going.

JOEY

Don't be mad. I'm sorry. I didn't think you'd make a big deal out of it.

AVERY

I can't take drugs. I can't handle them.

JOEY

Let me make it up to you.

AVERY

I'll be around.

He leaves. She hears the front door shut.

INT. AVERY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Avery walks in. He turns on the light and goes to the kitchen to get himself a soda. He notices a new message on his machine. He presses play.

MACHINE (V.O.)

You have one new message. September 2, 2004. Eleven-twenty p.m.

SHERYL (V.O.)

Hello, this is Sheryl Lehane. I met you today at my brother's funeral. I just wanted to call you to ask if you wanted to have a cup of coffee. Call me at (310) 555-6349. Thank you.

Avery checks his watch. It's eleven-forty-five. He looks at the phone.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Avery and Sheryl, who is wearing pajamas, are seated at a booth. The waitress brings them their coffee. They drink and sit in silence for a moment.

AVERY

I'm curious... How did you get my number?

SHERYL

You're in the phone book.

AVERY

I am? I mean, yeah, I know.

SHERYL
I'm glad you called. I couldn't
sleep.

AVERY
Me either. It was perfect timing.

Beat.

SHERYL
I need to know something.

AVERY
What?

She opens her purse and slides Avery's book over to him. He
stares at it, then back at her.

AVERY
Yeah, that's me.

SHERYL
Why didn't you say anything?

AVERY
I don't like to talk about it much.

SHERYL
It? This is great shit -- great
work. I failed a midterm reading
your book.

He laughs nervously.

AVERY
Thanks and sorry.

SHERYL
Didn't matter, it was math. Never
been my subject.

AVERY
Me too.

He sips on his coffee. There's a long silence.

INT. JUANITA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Will and Juanita lie in bed, naked under covers, staring up
at the cracked ceiling.

JUANITA
Who killed my son?

WILL

Two cops.

JUANITA

Do you know how?

WILL

No. They just tell me what sounds good on paper.

(beat)

I'm sorry.

JUANITA

It's not your fault... How did you know?

WILL

They tell me things. Those cops... They trust me. They pay me to keep my mouth shut.

JUANITA

Don't you hate it?

WILL

I didn't care for a while. I would just get extra money here and there. I'd go out and buy something nice. But then one night I looked at all the shit I had and I burned it. I wasn't worth any of it.

JUANITA

What was my son worth?

WILL

A thousand dollars.

Her eyes tear up, but she doesn't cry. She grabs Will's hand and puts it on her chest.

JUANITA

Do you remember when you took care of him?

WILL

Of course.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - FLASHBACK

A younger Will comes in. He wears the white coat with his Staff ID on his pocket.

He looks down at a particular patient: a seventeen year old Roberto Salazar. He's strapped to his bed. Will goes up to it and grabbing Roberto's clipboard. He checks his status. He's in for a *GUN SHOT WOUND... LIVER RUPTURE... HIS STATUS: STABLE...*

Will pays attention to the patient's face, in a state of serene sleep. Then he looks at the teenager's hand, it's handcuffed to the rail of the bed.

CUT TO:

INT. JUANITA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Will, staring at Juanita's hand as he holds it.

WILL

What would you do, Juanita, to those men who killed your son?

She looks at him. He already knows the answer.

EXT. ROOF TOP - NIGHT

Avery and Sheryl are standing on the roof of his apartment building. They stare at the entire city.

SHERYL

This is nice.

AVERY

I had to pay the landlord to get the key.

SHERYL

You're so nice, Avery, for taking me here.

AVERY

It's really no problem.

Beat.

SHERYL

I have a confession.

AVERY

Oh yeah?

SHERYL

I had a bit of a school girl crush when I read that book. It was years ago.

AVERY

Oh.

She smiles nervously.

 SHERYL

I was a little overweight. I was lonely. I was studying all night at the library when I just saw your book, sitting on a table.

 (beat)

I don't know what made me pick it up, but I blew off my finals. Could you believe that? For a book. Just to read it.

 AVERY

That's funny.

 SHERYL

No, it's not.

 AVERY

Sorry.

 SHERYL

The book meant something. I don't care if you know it or you don't. It just helped me put things in perspective.

INT. AVERY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sheryl is asleep on Avery's bed, her clothes still on. He watches her breathe. He looks at himself in the mirror, disgusted.

 AVERY

What have I done?

INT. AVERY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

He closes his bedroom door and walks to his desk. He stares at his laptop and puts it away, opting instead for his archaic typewriter (the same one from before). He puts in a fresh sheet of paper. He begins typing.

INT. S.A.H. OFFICE - DAY

Avery walks in. He looks disheveled. He makes his way to his desk and sits down. After only a brief moment, Carl comes up behind him.

CARL
Avery, glad to see you're back.

AVERY
Hi, Carl.

CARL
I heard the accident made you feel bad.

AVERY
Yeah. That's why I was off for --

CARL
Yeah, John told me.

AVERY
Did the cops ask you any questions?

CARL
Oh yeah, pretty standard stuff. They came and went. But I've got something I want to talk to you about... Why don't you come to my office?

INT. CARL'S OFFICE - DAY

Carl sits behind his desk with Avery across from him. Between them lies a tape recorder that is playing:

AVERY (V.O.)
...You call here every day, crying... *I hate my life, I was fired, she doesn't love me...* but you know what? Get some balls.

DANIEL (V.O.)
Easy for you to say, you're probably some fat fuck with no life.

AVERY (V.O.)
At least I don't waste my time pretending to be suicidal.

DANIEL (V.O.)
Don't push me, man. I'm serious.

Carl stops the tape. Avery is crushed. He can't argue against this.

AVERY
Carl, just let me say, I --

CARL
I didn't let the cops hear this. If
you're wondering.

AVERY
I had a rough day. I lost it. I
know I did, but --

CARL
I don't give a shit about what *you*
went through. You're only still
here because I said yes to John. A
man died because of you.

AVERY
I know. I'm sorry.

CARL
I'm gonna have to you to leave.

AVERY
Please, don't do this.

CARL
You did it to yourself.

AVERY
I'll do anything. Please.

CARL
I expect a resignation letter on my
desk by the end of the day.

Avery looks down. Carl ejects the tape.

CARL
And I'm going to have to show this
to the police.

AVERY
What?!

CARL
This is evidence. I can get in
trouble for holding back this kind
of --

AVERY
You conniving fuck.

CARL
What?!

AVERY

Come on, don't lie to me. I know you never liked me. I don't care about that. But you can't do this.

CARL

It's my job.

Avery looks like he wants to jump out of his seat and rip out Carl's throat. Carl smiles.

CARL

But I'm curious... How much is that tape worth? A few lousy dollars... Your whole career?

Avery looks at the tape in Carl's hand.

INT. COUNTY MORGUE, WILL'S OFFICE - DAY

Will is in his office which is decorated with a few photos. He sits behind his desk, talking on the phone.

WILL

I know it's better not to know, but I'm curious is all... Just what happened... I can't write the report without some kind of background... I need some truth to make up the bullshit.

INT. AVERY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Avery walks in. He walks to his room, finding Sheryl, laying in his bed, reading the pages. She drops them on her lap, surprised.

SHERYL

Hi.

Avery stares at the pages, then at her.

AVERY

Hi.

(beat)

What are you reading?

SHERYL

I just took a peak.

AVERY

Oh yeah?

SHERYL

It was just laying there on your table. I didn't think you'd get mad.

AVERY

Mad? Who said I'm mad?
(beat)
So you took a peak?

SHERYL

Yeah. Just a glance at the first page.

AVERY

Was it any good?

Sheryl nods her head. Avery scratches his head.

AVERY

Are you hungry?

SHERYL

Yeah.

AVERY

I'll go cook something.

SHERYL

Sounds good.

Avery turns to leave, but then he comes over to Sheryl and grabs the pages.

AVERY

Would you mind? Sorry. It's just... not finished.

He leaves. She stares at the doorway, abashed.

EXT. DILAPIDATED HOUSE - DAY

Will stands at the extinct front lawn of a worn down house. The house is barricaded with a "Do Not Cross" caution tape. He walks around to the side of the house, going through to...

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Where Will walks up to the back door. He slices open the sealed door with a penknife.

KEEL (O.S.)

Pulling a B and E on my crime scene?

Will turns around, seeing Keel.

WILL
I was waiting for an hour.

KEEL
Sorry about that. I had some errand
to run.

WILL
Did you kill him right here?

KEEL
No. Over behind this fence.

He points to the backyard fence. Will walks with Keel over to the fence. They open a door, going out to an alley. Will sees a tape outline (already half-peeled off) near a dumpster.

WILL
You shot him while running.

KEEL
That's right. He ran, I tried
getting a safe shot... Fucker
slipped right there, caught the
bullet in the head.

WILL
If I remember right, the bullet
entered through his forehead.

CUT TO:

A SHOT OF ROBERTO'S HEAD. THE BULLET HOLE IS IN THE HEAD.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Will demonstrates for Keel, by retracing Roberto's steps.

WILL
You're telling me he ran. Tripped
here, and that you shot him at the
same time?

KEEL
That's right.

He says it almost smiling.

KEEL
Well, he turned as he fell. It was
a weird fall.
(MORE)

KEEL (cont'd)

He slipped, I told you, like he twisted his foot or something...

WILL

There were no bruises on his ankles.

KEEL

No, man. Like this.

Keel shows Will how Roberto would have fallen.

WILL

And you were right there? About five feet away?

KEEL

That's right.

INT. AVERY'S KITCHEN - DAY

Avery is finished cooking some fish on the pan. Sheryl walks in, holding her purse.

SHERYL

I have to go.

AVERY

I just finished cooking.

SHERYL

Sorry, but I have to get home.

AVERY

Oh, okay. Thanks for coming.

SHERYL

I'll call you later. Or you call me.

AVERY

Sure.

SHERYL

Bye.

She goes up to Avery and kisses him on the cheek.

INT. HALL - DAY

Sheryl leaves with Avery showing her out. He stands outside his doorway, watching her walk away. Down the hall, Joey is coming home. She sees Avery looking at Sheryl.

JOEY

Avery.

Sheryl turns around. Avery is already back inside, without a word. Sheryl and Joey exchange a brief glance, and then Joey goes inside.

INT. AVERY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Avery is eating dinner alone. His phone rings. He gets up and picks it up.

AVERY

Hello?

WILL (V.O.)

Is this Avery?

AVERY

Yeah, who's speaking?

WILL (V.O.)

It's Will Dahl. I met you at the funeral.

AVERY

I remember you. How's it going?

WILL (V.O.)

Okay. I just bought some beers, and I'm not doing anything, so...

AVERY

I don't drink alcohol.

WILL (V.O.)

It's just a beer.

AVERY

Sorry.

WILL (V.O.)

We don't have to drink.

AVERY

Okay. Maybe some other --

WILL (V.O.)

So where do you want to meet?

EXT. ROOF - DAY

Will and Avery are at the roof of Avery's apartment, sitting on lawn chairs. Will has a stack of seven beers beside him while he tends to number eight.

AVERY
How does it feel?

WILL
Like having a weight on your mind
and body.

AVERY
What's the point in doing that?

Will shrugs.

WILL
It makes things go by a little
easier.

Avery reaches over and grabs a beer from the pack. He pops it open and drinks it.

WILL
What's this?

AVERY
You gotta live a little.

Will smirks. They toast and drink.

AVERY
This tastes like shoe polish.

WILL
I know. Isn't it great?

Avery puts the can down, wincing at the taste. Will doesn't notice.

WILL
So you don't talk much?

Avery shrugs.

WILL
I know a lot of people who just
hate people who don't talk, but
me... I enjoy it.

Avery nods his head.

WILL

I actually hate people who talk on and on. Never shut up. They're the biggest liars. They make me remember that phrase, silence is golden... You know?

Avery nods his head. He grabs the beer. Goes for a second sip.

WILL

You ever just felt like killing somebody, Avery?

Avery coughs on the beer as it goes down.

AVERY

What did you say?

WILL

You ever felt like *hitting* somebody?

AVERY

No. Why? Have you..?

WILL

It just popped in my head.

INT. AVERY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Avery is sitting at his dining table, eating his leftovers while Will is looking through Avery's categorized belongings, sipping on his beer.

WILL

I like your stuff. You've got good taste. That's funny... You've got a copy of your own book.

AVERY

They're handouts. You want one?

WILL

I'm not much of a reader.

Will sits at the table with Avery.

AVERY

You don't know a lot of people, do you?

WILL

What makes you say that?

AVERY

It's just an educated guess.

WILL

In what way?

AVERY

For one, you're drinking in front of a complete stranger.

WILL

So I'm not the most sociable guy on the block.

AVERY

I'm practically a recluse.

Beat.

WILL

I like your arrangement here. It's totally organized. It's weird.

AVERY

Thanks.

WILL

You know, I did ask if you felt like killing somebody.

AVERY

What?

WILL

Earlier when I asked if you wanted to hit somebody... I lied. I really did ask if you wanted to kill someone. I got nervous after I said it. I felt like you noticed.

AVERY

I thought I was hearing things.

WILL

Really?

AVERY

What's on your mind?

WILL

Well, I --

Avery's phone rings. He goes to pick it up.

AVERY

Excuse me.
(answers the phone)
Hello?

CARL (V.O.)

Hey, Avery. Just calling to make sure you're doing okay.

AVERY

What do you want?

CARL (V.O.)

How's it looking?

AVERY

I have to wait till tomorrow to go to the bank.

CARL (V.O.)

I'll be waiting at my office. Give me a call.

AVERY

Fine.

CARL (V.O.)

Bye.

Avery hangs up. He goes back to the table.

AVERY

Sorry. Go on.

WILL

I'm a reasonable guy. I've seen more tragedies than people see in their whole lives. But to be truthful... It's dulled me over the years.

AVERY

How?

WILL

I can't even feel sad for the people who come in through my door. I look at my life, and I think... What's the point? There is no point. The only thing that is real, or tangible is that we're all going to die someday. I don't know... That just makes me feel... Never mind.

He drinks his beer. He goes back to the shelves.

AVERY

You know, I have thought about it.
I mean, I *am* thinking about it.

Will looks back at Avery.

WILL

Thinking about what?

AVERY

You know.

WILL

Oh. Oh... Wait, a second. You? What
do you have to go through? You want
to kill your editor?

Will smirks. Avery walks up to the shelf, grabbing a copy of
one of his books (he has several).

AVERY

Take a look at the back.

Will reads, mouthing along with some words.

WILL

Bullshit. You're not crazy.

AVERY

It's true.

WILL

You? You look and act... Normal.

AVERY

I'm barely holding onto my sanity
with a pinky.

WILL

This isn't some publicity stunt?

AVERY

A shit load of journalists tried to
prove that once, but it's all true.

WILL

So when you said home school, you
really meant... Oh, I get it. I'm
sorry, man. I guess you've had a
rough life.

AVERY

It's okay. It's not like I'm a complete nut. I do live here.

WILL

So what's your problem?

AVERY

I shouldn't say.

WILL

Get it off your chest. It can't be any worse than my problem.

AVERY

Oh yeah, what do you got?

CUT TO:

LATER...

Will and Avery are listening to a record of his, sitting on the floor. There's another case of beer by them, with a few empty cans at its side.

AVERY

I don't know what I was thinking. I wanted somebody to like me. That's all. Am I asking too much?

WILL

No. Times are getting worse for people like us. Everybody else is trying to live up to a poster image.

AVERY

I didn't mean for any of this to happen, but it did. Now I'm stuck in a corner. Should I pay this guy?

WILL

What if he has another copy of the tape? How will you be sure that he's not gonna ask for more money?

AVERY

Shit. You're right.

WILL

You can't let people run your life. You gotta have control. Some times using force is necessary.

AVERY

Yeah.

WILL

I'm sick and tired. Let's just do it. You and me. Together.

AVERY

You're serious?

WILL

Why not? We both just confessed to each other. We're already on the first degree just by talking about it.

AVERY

But it's talk, though. I mean, I could always get the money.

WILL

It's not about the money! Don't you see? Stop giving in!

Avery finishes his beer.

AVERY

All right. Let's do it. But first, I need to do one thing.

INT. MEYERS' HOME - NIGHT

Meyers comes home, checking his mail. He walks into...

THE STUDY

Where he puts down his bags, and he finally looks up, noticing Avery. He screams, dropping his mail.

MEYER

Shit! Avery, what the hell are you doing here?

AVERY

Hi, John.

MEYER

How did you get it in?

AVERY

I have your key. Remember? *In case anything happens...*

MEYER

Yeah, sorry about that. What's wrong?

AVERY

I want to know what happened.

MEYER

What do you mean?

AVERY

Where was I for those three days?

MEYER

Right here.

AVERY

Was I really?

MEYER

Yeah. Give Abstain a call.

AVERY

What's this?

Avery rolls up his sleeve. He shows Meyer the small mark on the pit of his arm.

MEYER

Looks like you got pecked.

AVERY

You know what it is.

MEYER

No, what?

AVERY

It's a shot. What did you give me?

Avery walks up to Meyer, who steps back, afraid.

MEYER

So it's a shot, big deal. You had to calm down. You weren't making any sense.

AVERY

Neither are you. Where was I, John?

MEYER

You were in my guest room.

EVERY

Bullshit.

MEYER

What do you want me to say, Avery?

EVERY

Some truth.

MEYER

How long have we been friends?

EVERY

You mean how long have you been pinging me around?

MEYER

What?!

EVERY

You think that I don't remember?
That I don't have some vague idea
of why I can't remember certain
moments... Why I have blackouts?

MEYER

What?!

EVERY

You say that word one more time, I
swear to God, John...

Avery reaches in his coat.

MEYER

You're really losing it. You don't
even know who the hell's on your
side.

EVERY

And I suppose you are.

MEYER

Remember who got you out of the
fucking hospital. Who got you your
success. Your fucking reviews.

EVERY

At what cost? I'm a walking baby. I
can't go anywhere without
consulting you. I can't even
breathe without asking you if it's
okay.

MEYER

What is this about?

AVERY

I want to know about what you and
Abstain are doing to me.

MEYER

Nothing! It's all in your head!

Avery grabs Meyers' shirt. He pushes him against the wall.

AVERY

You've been relying on that excuse
for too long.

MEYER

You've been relying on me for too
long! I'm sick of it, it's over! Let's
see who else will look after you,
you fucking baby!

AVERY

I don't care if I ever write
another word. I just want to know
what happened.

MEYER

The truth?

Avery waits for Meyers' answer.

INT. WILL'S CAR - NIGHT

Will is parked across the street from Meyers' house. Avery
walks out of the front door with a large manila envelope. He
gets in the car.

WILL

Did you get what you needed?

AVERY

Yeah. Let's go.

EXT. AVERY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Will's car stops in front of Avery's building. Sheryl is
sitting by the steps of his building.

INT. WILL'S CAR - NIGHT

Avery looks at Will.

AVERY
Tomorrow then?

WILL
Yeah.

AVERY
Are you sure?

WILL
Are you?

They stare at each other and nod their heads. Avery gets out.

EXT. AVERY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Avery sees Sheryl sitting at the steps. She looks up. She notices Will, but he already drives down the street.

AVERY
Hi.

SHERYL
Were you with Will?

AVERY
Yeah. We just... Hung out.

SHERYL
(the manila folder)
What do you got there? Your story?

AVERY
This? No. It's just some stuff I
had to pick up.

SHERYL
I'm sorry if I left before.

AVERY
You read what I wrote? The whole
thing?

There's a pause before she finally nods her head.

AVERY
You think I'm a nut job and you
never want to talk to me again,
right?

SHERYL
No.

AVERY

What then?

SHERYL

There's something you should know.

INT. AVERY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Avery lets Sheryl in. She notices the beer cans. They find a seat.

SHERYL

You've been drinking?

AVERY

A little. Will drank most of them.

SHERYL

Oh.

AVERY

About what I wrote -- I'm sorry. I should have never have written it. I was mad at myself for not helping your brother... I was mad at him. I just wrote it on a whim.

SHERYL

It's okay. It's just a story. There's no harm done.

AVERY

But I know it must have hurt when you read it.

SHERYL

It didn't.

AVERY

I'm sorry.

SHERYL

Stop apologizing, okay?

AVERY

Okay.

SHERYL

I want you to know this. I already know so much about you.

He waits for her to answer.

SHERYL

I never liked my brother. In fact,
I hated him.

(beat)

When we were kids, he used to
always take me away. Away from
everybody else. He said we belonged
together. It's supposed to be
innocent, right? We were just kids.

(beat)

But my brother, he wasn't right in
the head. He grabbed me a few times
when I was a kid. I tried not to
remember... I even forgot for a
while. But then... a couple of
years ago, he tried -- He grabbed
under my shirt and kissed me.

AVERY

I'm sorry.

SHERYL

Don't be. It was my fault. I was so
stupid! I didn't see it and it was
in front of my face!

AVERY

That kind of abuse is always hard
to face. It's nobody's fault.

SHERYL

It's just hard now, to open up, and
actually meet guys. I haven't had a
boyfriend in years.

AVERY

I never had a steady relationship.

SHERYL

When I read your story...

AVERY

What?

SHERYL

I wanted to kiss you.

They eagerly stare at each other, waiting to pounce like wild
beasts.

AVERY

Do it now before you change your
mind.

They kiss, fully embracing each other.

INT. AVERY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Avery and Sheryl lay in bed, naked, wrapped under the covers. The sunlight seeps through the curtains. Avery is awake while Sheryl is sleeping. He kisses her on her forehead, but it doesn't wake her. He slips out of bed and gets dressed.

INT. WILL'S CAR - DAY

Will waits in front of Avery's apartment. Avery walks out and gets in. They drive off. There's a smile on Avery's face.

WILL

What are you so happy about?

AVERY

I actually feel good.

WILL

You look like a guy who's gotten laid.

Avery smiles even more.

WILL

You dog. That's good. Nothing like a little thrust to get the edge off. Open the glove box.

Avery opens it. A paper bag is inside.

WILL

Get it.

Avery gets the bag. He looks inside. There's a gun, and a small black kit.

WILL

I've got poison or a gun. You take your pick.

Avery looks at both. He can't decide.

WILL

How about you take the gun? It's a lot easier to handle, and you don't have to get up close.

AVERY

Okay.

WILL

Take it.

Avery reaches in the bag. He takes the gun and looks at it.

WILL

It's loaded. All you need to do is take off the safety -- that's the red button by the chamber -- and then you pull the trigger.

AVERY

That's it?

WILL

That's it.

Avery pushes the safety button. Then he tries giving the trigger a little squeeze.

WILL

Whoa! Stop!

AVERY

What?

WILL

It's loaded, man! Don't shoot up my car.

AVERY

I didn't mean to. I was just testing it out.

WILL

Don't test it here. Christ, you scared me. You sure you want the gun?

AVERY

Yes.

WILL

Okay, fine. Just keep the safety on. Please?

Avery puts on the safety. He shows it to Will, right in his face.

AVERY

See?

WILL
Put that thing down! We're on a
major street.

Avery puts it down. He looks down, embarrassed. Will notices.

WILL
I'm sorry I yelled. It's just this
is serious business. We can't fuck
around.

AVERY
Could we stop by Sonic's? I haven't
eaten anything.

INT. WILL'S CAR - LATER

Will's parked at the sidewalk. They're across the street from
the S.A.H. Building. Avery is in the backseat, eating his
breakfast meal.

AVERY
What are we looking for?

WILL
Your boss takes a lunch break,
right?

AVERY
Yeah.

WILL
We'll follow him to wherever he
goes. Then once he's alone, we'll
get him. We'll find out where the
tape is at, and --

AVERY
Why don't I call him and setup a
fake lunch meeting?

WILL
Hmmm... Would he tell anybody?

AVERY
He thinks I'm just gonna give him
the money. He doesn't think I'm a
threat.

WILL
Okay. Let's do that then.

INT. CARL'S OFFICE - DAY

Carl is waiting at his desk. The tape sits in the middle. His phone rings.

CARL
Hello?

AVERY (V.O.)
It's me.

CARL
Avery, it's about time.

AVERY (V.O.)
Yeah. I got the money.

CARL
Good boy.

AVERY (V.O.)
You got the tape?

CARL
It's right here. Why don't you come over and --

AVERY (V.O.)
I can't come right now. I'm on the other side of town. I don't have a ride.

CARL
Well, I can wait.

AVERY (V.O.)
Take your lunch break. I'm right by Tiff's.

CARL
I don't know about that.

AVERY (V.O.)
I made the trip to get the money just for you. At least you can meet me somewhere.

CARL
Fine. What time?

AVERY (V.O.)
Whenever you can go on lunch.

CARL
Give me an hour.

INT. AVERY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sheryl wakes up, noticing that she is alone. She sees a note on the desk and she reads it.

SHERYL
Great.

She gets up and sees her cell phone. She has a message on it. She plays it.

ANNE (V.O.)
Eli, honey, I have to ask you for a favor. Could you go to Daniel's apartment and take out the rest of his stuff? I need someone to do it and nobody has been able to. Could you, please? Give me a call. I love you.

Sheryl shakes her head.

INT. TIFFANY'S CAFE - DAY

Avery is sitting at a booth, waiting. He looks across the diner, seeing Will sitting at the counter, having a coffee.

INT. ANNE'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sheryl is seated with Anne on a couch, who is looking through some boxes that belonged to Daniel.

ANNE
I found the leftover scraps of drugs. Cocaine, needles, I don't even want to know what he did.

SHERYL
It must have been hard finding out.

ANNE
You knew. Didn't you?

Sheryl looks away from her mother.

ANNE
You knew.

SHERYL
I didn't know that he did it so much.

ANNE

Forget it. There's more stuff at his place. If somebody doesn't pick it up soon, it'll get thrown out.

SHERYL

I'll go.

Sheryl gets up, ready to leave.

ANNE

I still can't believe my angel is up in heaven. He was so young.

SHERYL

You never really knew Daniel. Did you?

ANNE

What?

SHERYL

Just like you never knew me.

ANNE

He was my son. Of course I knew him!

SHERYL

He was crazy, mom. You don't remember what he did to me as a kid?

Anne gets up. She SLAPS Sheryl.

ANNE

Don't you ever say that!

SHERYL

Fuck you! You always defended him, but why didn't you defend me? Why?! Cause I was never perfect? Cause I hated makeup, cause I was never *mommy's angel*? I'm sick of your shit, you old hag!

Anne is speechless, but her face is red. She tries lifting her hand, another slap possibly, but Sheryl grabs her arm tightly.

SHERYL

You slap me again and I'll break your arm.

She pushes Anne down on the couch.

SHERYL

I don't want to see you again. Keep
your life, your precious memories.
I don't want any of it.

Sheryl leaves. She passes Marnie, who watched the scene from
the doorway.

MARNIE

Mommy?

Anne cries on the couch, while Marnie runs up to her. She
hugs her mother and Anne cries over her shoulder.

INT. TIFFANY'S CAFE - DAY

Carl walks in. The Hostess approaches him, but he points to
Avery.

CARL

I'm with him.

Carl walks to the table and sits in front of Avery.

CARL

How's my favorite employee?

AVERY

You have the tape?

CARL

You have my money?

Avery takes out an envelope. He slides it over to Carl. Carl
opens it.

CARL

That's it? I asked for --

AVERY

The rest of it is in the bathroom.

CARL

What?

AVERY

I didn't feel safe. What you got
there's an incentive. Now let me
see the tape.

Carl takes it out of his pocket.

AVERY
That the only copy?

CARL
You bet your ass. Now give me the
rest of the money.

AVERY
It's in the second stall. You get
it.

CARL
What?

AVERY
Give me the tape once you get the
money.

Carl looks suspiciously at Avery. He doesn't trust him, but he takes a look around the diner, which convinces him. Avery scratches his head. Will gets up from the counter and goes to the bathroom.

CARL
Okay.

AVERY
It's in the sink of the toilet.

Carl gets up and goes to the bathroom. Avery watches him.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Carl walks in. He takes a glance, and sees that no one is inside. He goes to the second stall, which is open.

IN THE STALL...

Carl closes the door, locking it. He sees the toilet. He removes the lid of the sink. There's nothing inside.

CARL
What the fuck?

A noose drops on his head in an instant. It pulls, choking Carl... He tries getting free from the nylon rope.

IN THE NEXT STALL...

Will is pulling at the noose. He keeps his feet pressed against the walls of the stall, using all his force to choke Carl.

AVERY

Walks in the bathroom, locking the door. He hears Carl struggle in the stall. Eventually, he stops.

WILL

Avery?

AVERY

I'm here.

WILL

He stopped moving.

Avery walks up to the second stall. He looks under and sees Carl, sitting on the toilet now, his eyes rolled up, and his tongue sticking out. He's dead.

Avery squeezes under the stall and gets in. He unlocks it and opens the door to give himself more room. Will eventually takes a look, too.

WILL

Get the tape.

Avery reaches in Carl's pocket and takes the tape. He removes the noose from Carl's throat and hands it back to Will.

WILL

Pull down his pants and leave him there. Nobody will bother him till this place closes.

Avery closes the door and locks it. He pulls down Carl's pants. He slides out under the stall door again.

INT. DANIEL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sheryl walks in the apartment. Things have already been taken, except for a few cardboard boxes. She walks past a hall, into...

THE BEDROOM

Where she sees some photo albums and journals in an open box. She grabs an album and sits down. She sees an Altoids box at the bedside and opens it, finding a cigarette and a lighter. She decides to light it up and takes a drag, as her cellular phone rings.

SHERYL

Hello?

AVERY (V.O.)
Hey, it's Avery.

SHERYL
Oh, hi. How are you doing?

AVERY (V.O.)
I'm okay. I'm sorry I just took off
in the morning. I had some
important business.

SHERYL
It's okay.

AVERY (V.O.)
Good. I was wondering if I could
take you out tonight.

SHERYL
Yeah, sure. Sounds great.

AVERY (V.O.)
Great. I can't wait. So what are
you up to?

SHERYL
Nothing, just at my brother's
apartment. Cleaning out some
things.

AVERY (V.O.)
Okay. Well, I better let you go.
I'll call you later.

SHERYL
Okay, bye.

She hangs up. She smiles, putting the cigarette out on a picture of Daniel from the album. She grabs the lighter and burns the corner of the book. It catches flame and she lets it burn on the floor of his apartment.

EXT. DILAPIDATED HOUSE - NIGHT

The ruined house stands out against the quiet street. Cars pass by every now and then.

INT. DILAPIDATED HOUSE - NIGHT

The empty house is completely dark except for the few car headlights that shine through the windows. Eventually, the lights reach Will and Avery, who stand on opposite corners of the living room.

AVERY
You sure about this?

WILL
I just need you to point and shoot
in case anything happens.

The back door creaks open. Avery hides into the shadows.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Carter walks in the house. He closes the door behind him. He walks around the place, eventually coming to...

A HALLWAY

He stops at the entrance.

CARTER
Will?

WILL (V.O.)
In here.

Carter follows the sound to the living room. He looks around, unable to see anything since it's so dark. A light SHINES on Will again, startling Carter. Avery is not in the room.

CARTER
Christ. You scared the shit outta
me.

Will walks over to Carter.

WILL
Where's Keel?

CARTER
On his way. You mind telling me
what this is about?

Will reaches in his coat, taking out an envelope.

WILL
A Christmas gift.

CARTER
I know you've been bugging Keel for
info... What gives?

WILL
That's my business.

CARTER
What's the money for?

WILL
Payoff.

Carter smirks.

CARTER
You got it backwards. *We* give you
the money.

WILL
This one's for you.

CARTER
What for?

WILL
A job well done.

Will sticks his arm out, holding the envelope right in front of Carter.

CARTER
You're acting strange.

Carter reaches for it and Will PULLS CARTER IN.

CARTER
What are you --

There's a faint POP sound as Will hugs Carter. Carter steps back into the dark, making a gargling, wheezing noise...

CARTER
(his voice is weak;
brittle)
Son of a... Son of a...

Carter drops to his knees, eventually slumping back, leaning against the wall. Another headlight flashes the room and we see that Carter has a hypodermic needle stuck in his throat. Blood trickles from the wound. He tries taking the needle out, but it's too much of a struggle. Avery peaks through the doorway.

Will watches Carter struggle to live, then calmly walks to the window, seeing who the headlights belong to: Keel's car, which is barely parking in front of the house.

INT. DANIEL'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sheryl is in the closet, on top of a step ladder, trying to get boxes out from the top shelf. As she pulls harder, the box finally budes lose, sending Sheryl down on the floor with the contents spilling all over her.

She looks down, seeing RED STAINS all over her shirt. Is it blood? No, just a couple of opened containers of cough syrup has spilled all over her.

SHERYL

Shit.

She gets up, takes off her shirt. She checks her skin, seeing the blotches of pasty red goo.

SHERYL

Just great.

She reaches in the closet, pulling out one of Daniel's T-Shirts.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Keel enters the house. Will stands there to greet him.

KEEL

Hey, where's Carter?

WILL

He's in the living room.

Will and Keel quickly glide through the kitchen, through the hall to...

THE LIVING ROOM

Keel enters first, seeing Carter all the way across to the other side, sitting against the corner.

KEEL

Carter, you okay?

Keel walks closer.

KEEL

Why's he not talking?

He comes in closer, seeing the needle sticking out of Carter's throat.

KEEL

What the --

He hears the CLICK of a gun. He turns around. Avery has the gun pointed at him from the doorway. Will stands with a tape recorder in hand.

KEEL
What the fuck's going?

WILL
This is your confession, Eddie.

KEEL
What?!

WILL
Remove your gun from your holster.
Do it slowly. If you make any
sudden movements, my friend will
shoot you.

KEEL
Are you fucking crazy?!

WILL
It's my friend who's crazy, so you
better not make any sudden
movements.

KEEL
What is this?

WILL
Justice.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sheryl is in the shower. The room is filling with steam, fogging up the mirrors.

INT. DANIEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The front door begins to jiggle. It slowly twists open. A figure steps inside, but we only see his midsection.

From behind, the figure observes the apartment. He hears the shower running and Sheryl as she sings to herself.

The figure follows the sound.

INT. DILAPIDATED HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Keel slides the gun with his foot over to Will, who picks up the gun. He puts it in his pocket.

WILL

I want you to tell me what happened
the night you killed Roberto
Salazar.

KEEL

You're fucking dead, you know that?

WILL

Please, cut the *machismo* crap.

KEEL

Fuck you!

WILL

If you confess, we'll let you go.

KEEL

That's a damn lie!

WILL

There's only one way to find out.

Will holds up the tape recorder. His finger is on the record
button.

KEEL

What does it fucking matter, Will?
He was some stupid spick!

WILL

His name was Roberto. Tell me what
you did to him.

KEEL

You really want to know?

Will presses the record button. The tape rolls.

KEEL

This is fucking stupid...

WILL

Just shoot him.

KEEL

All right! You fucking prick.
(beat)
Me and Carter were up here,
checking this crime scene.

WILL

Why?

KEEL
We wanted to check some evidence --

WILL
Don't lie.

Beat.

KEEL
We were coming to get some money
and drugs that we lifted from a
drug dealer. We were taking the
stuff from the house.

WILL
And?

KEEL
We took it out of the house, going
to the alley, when somebody was
looking at us.

WILL
Roberto?

KEEL
Yeah, that fucking spick. He looked
at us.

WILL
And?

KEEL
Nothing. I thought it was nothing
at first. But then, when we went
back to the house to get the rest
of the stuff, I noticed from the
upstairs window...

WILL
What?

INT. DILAPIDATED HOUSE, SECOND FLOOR ROOM - FLASHBACK

Keel is standing by the window, looking down at the backyard. He sees Roberto staring at the car they drove in. He specifically looks at the license plates -- they're Brucksen County Police Department plates.

KEEL (V.O.)
He was looking at our car. I got
paranoid. I told Carter to get the
fuck out and scare the kid.

Keel says something. He and Carter run out of the room.

EXT. DILAPIDATED HOUSE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Keel runs through the backyard, his gun drawn and ready. He runs quietly, coming closer to the door of the fence.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

ROBERTO is standing by the car. He sees some of the money in the backseat, along with some bricks of sealed heroine. Keel sneaks up from the gate, pointing the gun at Roberto.

KEEL

Fucko.

ROBERTO

Shit, don't shoot!

KEEL

What are you doing?

ROBERTO

Nothing. I just saw you coming from the house.

KEEL

And?

ROBERTO

Nothing. I knew people who lived here. That's all.

KEEL

You sure?

ROBERTO

Honest. I thought maybe you were them.

KEEL

You didn't know this was a crime scene?

ROBERTO

It is?

KEEL

Don't play stupid.

ROBERTO

I swear, I was just walking from a friend's house. I didn't mean any trouble.

KEEL

What did you see?

ROBERTO

Nothing. I just noticed your plates
is all. You're cops, right?

KEEL

That's right.

Carter comes out from the other side of the alley, behind
Roberto.

CARTER

What's going on here?

ROBERTO

Nothing, officer.

CARTER

Really? Doesn't look like nothing.

ROBERTO

I was just walking to the bus stop.

CARTER

Through the alley?

ROBERTO

It's a short cut.

KEEL

Yeah, right, amigo.

CARTER

You a peddler?

ROBERTO

Hey, I'm clean. I was just walking
through. How about I leave you guys
to your business and you leave me
to mine?

CARTER

Our *business*? Looks like this guy's
got some lip, huh, Keel?

KEEL

Looks like.

ROBERTO

Please, officer.

CARTER
Please? What does that mean?

ROBERTO
I just want to go home.

CARTER
You know what a key is, son?

ROBERTO
I don't need to hear this.

CARTER
I'm sure you took a peak in the
back seat, ese. You ain't no
dumbass, are you?

ROBERTO
Please, just let me --

CARTER
Get on the ground, fuck.

Roberto gets to his knees.

CARTER
By the dumpster, shithead!

Roberto gets up and walks to the dumpster. He turns and looks
at Keel.

CARTER
I'll show you how we do it in the
thirteenth precinct!

He points his gun at Roberto. Roberto is crying.

CARTER
Ah, what's the matter? I'm just
playing...

Carter laughs and looks back at Keel. He pulls the trigger.
BLAM!

INT. DILAPIDATED HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Will stops the tape recorder. He puts it away. Keel stands
nervously at the corner.

KEEL
So that's it? You'll let me go?

He looks at Avery, nodding his head. Avery doesn't put the
gun down. Keel tries rushing Will.

KEEL

You mother fucker, I'll --

BLAM! Avery shoots. Keel's hit in the chest, hitting the wall. He falls down. Avery lowers his arm. He looks at Will.

WILL

Let's go.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sheryl stops the water. She opens the curtains and reaches for a towel. She wraps it around herself and gets out, stepping onto the cold tile. She winces. She goes up to the mirror, about to wipe the steam away...

Someone is BREATHING behind her. Her hand falls down on instinct, smudging off the steam, revealing...

DANIEL. Standing before her very eyes, looking at her through the mirror.

DANIEL

I missed you.

Sheryl tries to scream, but Daniel grabs her mouth and pulls her away.

INT. WILL'S CAR - NIGHT

Will drives with Avery next to him.

WILL

Where you going?

AVERY

I have to make a phone call.

Will reaches in his pocket, taking out a cellular phone.

WILL

I hardly use it.

Avery dials a number. He waits.

INT. DANIEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sheryl is on the bed, tied down from her ankles and wrists. Daniel walks up to the bed. Tears flow from Sheryl's face.

SHERYL

This isn't real.

DANIEL
You look like you've seen a ghost.

Daniel walks up to Sheryl and caresses her face. She twinges at the touch of his finger tips.

SHERYL
You're dead.

DANIEL
I'm not.

He kisses her neck.

SHERYL
You killed yourself. This isn't real. This isn't happening...

DANIEL
But it is.

SHERYL
YOU'RE DEAD! I know you are, I paid him to do it! I fucking paid him!

DANIEL
Are you sure it was me?

He smiles at Sheryl. She is in total shock.

CUT TO:

INT. DANIEL'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Daniel is at his couch, in front of the mess at the table. He is high while watching a home video. The volume is loud. Behind him, there is a window leading from the emergency escape ladder. It is unlocked.

A FIGURE appears behind the window. He pushes it open slowly, without any noise that could interrupt Daniel. He sneaks in the apartment, walking over to the couch, with a gun in his hand.

DANIEL

Is focused on the TV screen. There's a part in the video where there is a lot of black space (from a hand covering the camcorder's lens). In the black space, Daniel sees the reflection of the apartment. He sees the man behind him.

Daniel reaches for the table. He pretends to do a line of cocaine, with the snorting sound and all, but he really grabs a razor from the table.

The Man is a few inches away from Daniel. Daniel leans back, then twists around quickly, stabbing the Man's wrist. He drops the gun and screams. Daniel pushes the man and grabs the gun from the floor. He points it at the Man.

INT. DANIEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - PRESENT

Daniel smiles at Sheryl.

DANIEL
You never talked to him afterwards,
did you?

SHERYL
You son of a bitch!

He smiles.

DANIEL
Now, I'm going to have what I
always wanted.

SHERYL
Fuck you! I hate you! I'll kill
you!

Daniel cuts off a piece of tape from a roll. He puts it over Sheryl's mouth. Tears flow from her eyes. She SCREAMS under the tape. He begins kissing her face, then her neck, then he moves down further, out of our view. She tries to break free with every ounce of strength.

INT. WILL'S CAR - NIGHT

Avery hangs up the phone.

AVERY
It's here answering machine.

WILL
That's too bad.

AVERY
You know where Daniel Lee Hatchet
lived?

WILL
I think so. Probably have it
somewhere in here. Take a look
around. There's some files.

Avery looks in Will's backseat, where there is are some work papers laying about.

INT. DANIEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The place is completely empty. The living room, bedroom, bathroom. It's empty.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Will's car parks at the sidewalk. Avery gets out.

WILL

You want me to wait?

AVERY

Yeah, she might not be here.

Avery goes to the apartment building.

INT. HALL - NIGHT

Avery walks up to Daniel's apartment. He knocks on the door. He eventually tries the door knob.

AVERY

Sheryl?

INT. DANIEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The door opens. Avery walks in.

AVERY

Sheryl?

Nobody answers. He walks around the place. Through living room, kitchen, bathroom, finally...

THE BEDROOM

Where he stops when he sees nothing.

AVERY

Great.

He starts leaving when he hears something coming from the closet. A SCREECH. He walks over to it, staring at the door. He opens it.

AVERY

Sheryl --

A FIGURE JUMPS OUT. Avery is pushed. He stumbles back. He sees Sheryl, her arms sticking out in front of her, holding... A broken shard of a mirror. It has blood.

Avery looks at his body. Blood is coming from out of his shirt.

AVERY

Sheryl...

He falls to the floor. The blood pours out profusely.

SHERYL

No... No...

She runs up to him, grabbing his face.

SHERYL

Avery!

He sighs.

AVERY

Shit...

Sheryl cries. Avery takes out a phone from his pocket. Sheryl takes it and calls 911.

SHERYL

Hello?

(beat)

Yes, this is an emergency, I just stabbed somebody!

(beat)

It was an accident! Get over here, now! I'm at 1536 Camden Drive, Apartment 29.

(beat)

Hurry!

Sheryl grabs Avery and puts his head on her lap. There is a faint smile on his face as he lays there, dying.

FADE TO:

INT. COUNTY MORGUE, EXAMINING ROOM - NIGHT

Will is standing above the bodies of Carl, Keel, Carter, Avery, and Meyer. He looks at them all with a grieved face, specifically Avery.

WILL (V.O.)

"Where does the line of reality and insanity meet? What do they share to each other? How well do they know one another? One side keeping this world together, the other tearing it apart.

(MORE)

WILL (V.O.) (cont'd)
 But what can a man like me say, who
 knows only fantasy and dismay? It
 is here where I belong, with the
 rest of them, tied in a cage, left
 alone without a dream."

Roger approaches Will.

ROGER
 Who do you want me to look at?

Will points to Carter and Keel. Roger pushes them onto a
 moveable table and pulls the cart elsewhere.

INT. HALL - DAY

Will is walking through a placid hall with Dr. Abstain.

ABSTAIN
 You're writing a book on Avery
 Lang?

WILL
 I owe it to him.

ABSTAIN
 How did you know him?

WILL
 He was my friend.

ABSTAIN
 I don't know what you expect to get
 out of me.

WILL
 I'd like to know about his
 treatment. What you did to him.

ABSTAIN
 I helped him, Dr. Dahl.

WILL
 He killed his editor, Dr. Abstain.
 I would hardly say that you
 "helped" him.

ABSTAIN
 It's all in the transcripts.

WILL
 What about these?

Will takes out the large manila envelope. He pulls out a tape marked: TREATMENT #37. There are several more tapes in the envelope. The hairs on Abstain's neck tingle.

ABSTAIN

Where did you get those?

WILL

Nevermind that. I want the truth.

ABSTAIN

The truth?

(beat)

How about we talk about this somewhere more privately?

WILL

Fine by me. But I have somebody else I must see at the moment.

Will and Dr. Abstain stop at a door to Room 101. Will looks through the looking glass, seeing Sheryl. She is sitting in a chair, staring out a window.

ABSTAIN

Now that is somebody I can't help. She's believes that her dead brother raped her. Her dead brother. Can you believe that? She won't even give an explanation.

(beat)

She just stares at the window for hours, not saying a word.

WILL

She can recover though. Right?

Abstain looks at Will. He can't even give a straight answer.

ABSTAIN

Do you want to see her?

INT. SHERYL'S ROOM - DAY

Sheryl remains seated in her chair, staring out the window. Will walks up behind her, putting his hands on her shoulder. She doesn't react.

WILL

Hi, Sheryl. It's Will. I'm back.

She doesn't say anything.

WILL

I'll be visiting you as often as I can. I want you to talk to me. Get whatever is off your chest. I'll listen. No matter what the doctors say, I know you're not crazy. I believe you. I'll get the truth.

He waits for a reply, but she doesn't answer. He lets go of her.

WILL

I'll be back tomorrow. When you feel like talking.

He walks to the door and knocks on it. Sheryl mumbles something. Her words are too faint to make out, but they're enough to make Will walk back to her.

WILL

What did you say?

Sheryl stares out the window, never acknowledging Will.

SHERYL

I'm pregnant.

Will gets up, slowly walking back to the door. He knocks faster, calling Abstain. Sheryl continues looking out the window. She sees the dead leaves of Autumn as they blow in the wind.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Dead leaves blow through the graves. They eventually roll and glide past a grave: Daniel Lee Hatchet's. A hand drops flowers onto the grave, belonging to the living Daniel. He smirks at the sight of his grave and then takes a stroll through the rest of the cemetery.

"A Beloved Son,

May He Rest In Peace."

FADE OUT.