

A M E R I C A N G O D S

"The Bone Orchard"

written by

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&  
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based on the novel by

Neil Gaiman

"This is the story of how we begin to remember..."  
— Paul Simon

A TITLE CARD, PLEASE: "SOMEWHERE IN AMERICA"

AND WE FADE IN ON:

QUEENS NY, SEEN FROM ABOVE. A GOD'S EYE VIEW. DOESN'T MATTER WHICH. PICK YOUR FAVORITE. FLOAT DOWN TO...

AN OLD BRICK BUILDING... PUSH IN PAST THE FIRE ESCAPE... TO PEAK INSIDE THE WINDOW... INTO...

INT. MRS. FADIL'S APARTMENT. EVENING.

CLOSE ON: A POT. BUBBLING ON THE STOVE.

CLOSE ON: AN OLD HAIRLESS CAT. MEWING AT...

CLOSE ON: A RICKETY OLD WOODEN STOOL, TIPPING PRECARIOUSLY.

We are in a fusty grandmother's apartment. Faded rugs, ethnic smells. Old world Egyptian food on the stove and near ready.

MRS. FADIL is 68, squat and exacting. And right now standing on the creaky, teetering stool... reaching way up a top shelf to get a JAR of preserved lemons. We fear for an awful fall.

The cat HISSES. The stool RIGHTS. She gets what she needs just fine and steps down. She chides the cat, accent thick:

MRS. FADIL  
Mind your own.

The cat keeps fixed on the stool. She returns to the stew simmering on the stove. Slices and stirs. Tastes.

MRS. FADIL  
Perfect. Too good for them, eight grandchildren, each smart as a table. Assaf with his music... Sounds like you.

The cat mews again tunelessly.

MRS. FADIL  
No, it's too early to fry the onions. Assaf likes them crisp.  
(tastes again, frowns)  
Not perfect. More cinnamon.

She steps to the CREAKY stool -- about to teeter when -- A KNOCK at the door stops her from climbing again.

MRS. FADIL  
Assaf? I tell you no come before 5! And no bring me more laundry! I tell you I am done being your maid --

She opens the door, surprised to find not her grandson but... a large, severe, gorgeous DARK MAN. He speaks as one accustomed to having his words carved in stone. And if in his eyes you should see your ancestors waving do not be surprised.

This is ANUBIS.

MRS. FADIL

You are in wrong floor. The black people family is upstairs.

ANUBIS

No mistake. You are to come with me.  
Mrs. Fadil. You have died, Mrs. Fadil.  
And it is time for you to come with me.

A beat as she studies him. First skeptical. Then annoyed.

MRS. FADIL

I not going anywhere. I have company soon, if you are here to rob then rob and go. There is a television and I have a phone my grandson says is also a camera.

Anubis steps in, weary. Used to this. Firm and sympathetic:

ANUBIS

I wish I was but a thief. I am not. I am of Death. You are dead, Mrs. Fadil.

He points. On the kitchen floor -- *by the overturned stool* --

IS HER BODY. Unmoving. Left eye blood-specked. Neck bent at an impossible angle. Death has little dignity.

MRS. FADIL

That is me.

ANUBIS

That is you.  
(goes distant)  
Your family will come soon and find you. They will do right by your body and bury you as is proper. They will be sad for a time and then they will find happiness again. Your Assaf will marry in a year and name is first daughter for you.

Mrs. Fadil takes her time taking this in.

MRS. FADIL

A bullshit middle name?

He smiles. It is beautiful.

ANUBIS  
A bullshit middle name.

Not much choice, she accepts this. Leans to inspect her body.

MRS. FADIL  
This is how they will find me?

She adjusts her skirt. Straightens a leg. Suddenly -- she turns on him. Studies him.

MRS. FADIL  
This is a Muslim home. Why does Anubis hold out his hand for me?

ANUBIS  
It is my thanks.

*He stares out. His eyes go shimmery, reflective and in them we catch glimpses of the IMAGES he describes.*

ANUBIS  
You were once a girl with your own *Tita*. Who taught you the ways of Egypt old, of when the Nile was full and flooding. She told you the stories... Of the Wolf and the Jackal... The Red Wind and the Nine Broken Seals... Of the Child of Bast...

MRS. FADIL  
I remember.

ANUBIS  
You do.

He opens a closet. Secreted away, wrapped in satin, is a thin but well-kept STUFFED CATSKIN on a pole. AN ANUBIS FETISH.

ANUBIS  
You kept this for me. Now you are the *Tita* and you have taught your Assaf to keep it when you fall. For that -- I bring you to the Scales. Come.

She does not come. But lowers the heat on the stove to a simmer. Puts a spoon in her stew, holds it out for him.

MRS. FADIL  
My family will find me, they will not try it. You taste.

Beat. Anubis takes the smallest sip. Enough to mean it:

ANUBIS  
It is perfect.

MRS. FADIL  
 (she knows it)  
 68 years. Not much for America, but more  
 than my *Tita* ever prayed for.

ANUBIS  
Come.

He is of a sudden by the fire escape. Hand outstretched. It is not a question. Mrs. Fadil swallows and...

EXT. FIRE ESCAPE. MRS. FADIL'S BUILDING. EVENING.

...She climbs behind Anubis. Nimble and dauntless.

One flight... Another... They climb... And climb...

And goddammit if the cat doesn't follow leaping behind them.

Another flight. They should have reached the roof by now.

MRS. FADIL  
 How many stairs?

She looks up at Anubis. He peers back down at her. *His head briefly that of A JACKAL.*

WIDE ON THE BUILDING. The wall goes up for MILES. No end in sight. Mrs. Fadil and Anubis tiny against it. With each floor they climb reality and physics become less consistent or important. The world less like the world... Until finally...

CLOSE ON: THE TOP OF A LADDER. Anubis climbs off. Mrs. Fadil after. She looks up, eyes instantly filled with wonder.

MRS. FADIL  
 This is not Queens.

ANUBIS  
 This is not Queens.

EXT. DESERT OASIS. EVENING.

Tawny sand under a burnished sunset. Date palms slow dancing with the khamsin. Pyramids in the distance. Stars above.

Anubis offers Mrs. Fadil a seat on a BLANKET. The cat leaps onto her lap. He offers dates and tea from a tray. She declines. He removes the tray, REVEALING: A SET OF SCALES.

ANUBIS  
 You are comfortable.

*Meh.* Anubis produces A LONG FEATHER. Reaches out...

HIS HAND DISAPPEARS INTO HER CHEST. WITHDRAWS HOLDING...

HER HEART. It beats two final times. Goes still in his hand.

MRS. FADIL

I was using that -- !

ANUBIS

We shall see if you used it well.

MRS. FADIL

I -- was unkind to the first boy who loved me. I stole a doll once from my cousin. I tried my best.

Each takes their place on the scale. Heart weighed against feather. The scales dip first one way... then the other...

*As they teeter... the sky changes, sunset to darkest midnight. Stars rotating, shifting, constellations forming, reforming... back to ancient configurations, the sky at Egypt's dawn...*

Until the scales finally settle. AT EVEN.

ANUBIS

Your best is good.

Mrs. Fadil puffs her chest. Anubis gestures. Before them now -- perhaps always -- are several DOORS set in the sand.

ANUBIS

Each will take you to the Du'at. The Du'at has many worlds. Choose.

MRS. FADIL

Which has my father? He beat me and I would like not to see his world.

ANUBIS

Choose.

MRS. FADIL

You are a kind boy. You choose for me.

Anubis accepts the charge with solemnity. Considers the options. Selects and opens A DOOR. We do not see inside, though much watery light glimmers from within. Mrs. Fadil walks to it. Eyes clear and young reflecting the light.

But she hesitates at the door. At the end suddenly scared.

MRS. FADIL

You're sure I do this with you? Follow the wrong god and I do not see my *Tita* again.

He gestures -- AND THE CAT LEAPS AT MRS. FADIL. PUSHING HER THROUGH THE DOOR. INTO THE LIGHT. THE DOOR SLAMS.

ON ANUBIS. Framed by a shifting sky. The moon sets.

The cat lands on the sand. Licks herself absently. And we...

BEGIN PULL BACK... OVER THE DESERT...

EXT. DESERT. DAY.

CAMERA GLIDES OVER SAND and ROCK as the FANTASTICAL DESERT of ANCIENT EGYPT slowly becomes more and more banal and FANTASY gives way to the ugly REALITY of MIDDLE AMERICA flatlands.

A VOICE COMES, raspy and rich with the gravel of hindsight:

*SHADOW (V.O.)  
Best thing, only good thing, about being  
in prison is the relief...*

EXT. PRISON. DAY.

GLIDING OVER a grey cinder block made of grey cinder blocks...

*SHADOW (V.O.)  
You don't worry if they're gonna get you  
when they already got you. Tomorrow  
can't do anything today hasn't already  
managed.*

EXT. PRISON YARD. DAY.

DOZENS OF PRISONER work out in the exterior gym. CAMERA FINDS "LOW KEY" LYESMITH, a wiry man with a scarred smile and mile a minute mouth. He is, as usual, mid theory:

*"LOW KEY" LYESMITH  
...Even better with a death sentence.  
Bang. The worst has happened. You get a  
few days for it to sink in, then you're  
riding the cart on your way to do the  
dance on nothing.*

A ROW OF WEIGHTS are repeatedly pumped into FRAME in a bench press emanating from JUST BELOW FRAME.

*"LOW KEY" LYESMITH  
This country went to hell when they  
stopped hanging folks. No gallows dirt.  
No gallows deals.*

MEET SHADOW MOON

A lithe, powerful frame that makes some assume his mind isn't as keen as it is or his words as carefully chosen. Hard to pin for age or ethnicity but if you had to guess you'd say 30 and black.

SHADOW (O.S.)  
(pushing)  
No gallows humor.

"LOW KEY" LYESMITH  
Funniest fucking shit in the world.

A GROUP OF WHITE SUPREMACISTS exercise in a gaggle and across from them, eyes locked on Shadow. "Low Key" continues talking M.O.S. as Shadow sits up after the last strained press. CAMERA PUSHES IN as Shadow looks up to the sky.

SHADOW (V.O.)  
*I'm not superstitious. And I believe in plenty. When there is reason and evidence to believe. I don't believe in anything I can't see.*

SHADOW'S P.O.V. -- THE SKY. Beyond the pumping bar that rises and falls, away and toward CAMERA, STORM CLOUDS start to brew.

SHADOW (V.O.)  
*But in the last days of my three years of incarceration, I feel disaster hovering above me.*

Shadow takes a deep breath.

SHADOW (V.O.)  
*I can't see it. But I believe it.*

SHADOW  
I smell snow.

He glances across the yard and sees the WHITE SUPREMACISTS staring at him as they dangle the jump rope noose.

ANGLE -- THROUGH THE NOOSE

Shadow stares back at the White Supremacists.

CLOSE ON: A COIN. IT RISES AND FALLS IN FRAME LIKE AN WAVE.

INT. PRISON CELL. DAY.

Shadow leans against his prison cell door, looking out at the other PRISONERS in the common area below. The COIN is rolling along the knuckles of Shadow's hand.

*SHADOW (V.O.)*  
*I keep looking for signs of the bad thing*  
*that's going to happen.*

A SUDDEN, VIOLENT BRAWL ERUPTS in the cell next to theirs.

Shadow watches as two MASSIVE PRISONERS crash into the bannister outside the cells, one of them TUMBLING OVER and falling to the floor below, violently breaking his neck.

"Low Key" Lyesmith lays on his bed reading a battered paperback copy of Herotodus's *Histories*. There's a STACK of books on the floor.

"LOW KEY" LYESMITH  
 It is the age of outrage. Everyone is  
 aggrieved about something.

GUARDS descend on the remaining Massive Prisoner, who claims:

MASSIVE PRISONER  
 It wasn't me!

Shadow watches the Massive Prisoner dragged into his cell.

SHADOW  
 Nothing's ever anybody's fault. They say  
 you did when you didn't. Or you didn't  
 do quite like they said you did.  
 Everybody's wearing false dignity pants.  
 And they lie.

"LOW KEY" LYESMITH  
 I lie all the time. It should be  
 expected. More narrative freedom when  
 you lie. I'm surprised when people tell  
 the truth, honestly.

SHADOW  
 I am a seeker of truth who has not yet  
 arrived at conviction.

Shadow flips the coin. Catches it.

"LOW KEY" LYESMITH  
 You're as easy to read as that coin.  
 Tails.

Shadow shows him. It's HEADS. And --

CLOSE ON: A NORTH AMERICAN SONGBIRD PERCHED ON A BRANCH.

INT. PRISON WOOD SHOP. DAY.

THE BIRD is the model for the month of SEPTEMBER in the SONGBIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA CALENDAR. Five unchecked boxes before a circled date: September 19.

*SHADOW (V.O.)*

*Five boxes to cross below a White-Cheeked  
Bulbuls then I'll be home.*

INMATES work at tables assembling DOZENS OF ELABORATE BIRD FEEDERS. "Low Key" slots in the sides of a bird feeder, passes it to Shadow who bolts and screws it tight. Too tight. A piece CRACKS off. "Low Key" grabs the glue to fix it.

"LOW KEY" LYESMITH

Calm the fuck down. You're making me nervous.

SHADOW

I got a feeling deep in my stomach something is entirely wrong. The last week was worse than the whole three years put together.

"LOW KEY" LYESMITH

That hollow in the pit of your stomach is just you afraid of going back to the real world. You've honed survival skills in here -- be careful in their application outside. Take a lesson from Johnnie Larch.

SHADOW

I don't know Joh--

"LOW KEY" LYESMITH

Johnnie Larch got out after five years. Gets to the airport. Hands his ticket to the woman at the counter, who asks for his driver's license. He gives it to her. She says, "It's expired." He says, "It might not be valid as a drivers license but it is a damn fine identification. There's my picture, my height, and my weight. Who the fuck do you think it is?" She says "I'll thank you not to use that kind of language, 'sir.'" He says, "Give me my fucking boarding pass right fucking now."

"Low Key" takes the slotted sides of the bird feeder and fixes them to a base.

"LOW KEY" LYESMITH (CONT'D)

Now he was right to take that tone. She was disrespecting him. He's not going to be disrespected. You don't let people disrespect you in prison, why the fuck would he let her disrespect him as a free man? She pushes a button. Security shows up. He's back in prison. Do you understand what I'm saying here?

SHADOW

One of those 'behaviors that work in a specialized environment, such as a prison, can often fail to work, and in fact become harmful, when used outside such an environment' sort of situations.

"LOW KEY" LYESMITH

No, dummy. I'm saying: "Do not piss off those bitches in airports."

(off Shadow's look)

Listen to me. This is sacred knowledge I am passing down. Do not. Piss off. Those bitches. In airports. When you're out in the world getting your first blow job as a free man, remember this face, because you will have me to thank.

He gives a big shit eating grin, and --

INT. PRISON. PHONE BANK. NIGHT.

ON A TELEPHONE

PULL BACK TO REVEAL A ROW OF TELEPHONES as if they were dancers in a Busby Berkeley. CAMERA CONTINUES PULLING BACK past an 70 year old black man named SAM FETISHER (speaking in hushed tones to his own phone) TO REVEAL... SHADOW leaning against the wall, curled against a phone:

SHADOW

Something feels weird.

*SHADOW (V.O.)*

*That wasn't the first thing I said to her. First thing I said was:*

SHADOW

I love you.

(then)

Something feels weird.

LAURA'S VOICE

I love you, too. What feels weird?

SHADOW

I don't know. The weather. Air feels constipated like if it'd just push out a storm, it'd be okay.

LAURA'S VOICE

There's a special word for the kind of dread caused by constipated air.

(then)

It's nice here. Leaves haven't all fallen. If we don't get a storm, you'll see them when you get home.

SHADOW

Five days.

LAURA'S VOICE

A hundred and twenty hours and you're home.

Sam Fetishier finishes his call, hangs up. As he passes:

SAM FETISHER

Storm's on the way.

SHADOW

Maybe it'll snow.

Sam stops, glancing back at Shadow.

SAM FETISHER

Not that kind of storm. Bigger storms than that coming. Better off in here than out on the street when the big storm comes.

SHADOW

I'm on the phone.

SAM FETISHER

Keep your head down, boy. It's like -- what do they call those things continents ride around on?

LAURA'S VOICE

Tectonic plates.

SHADOW

Tectonic plates.

SAM FETISHER

Tectonic plates. When they go riding, when North America goes skidding into South America, you don't want to be in the middle.

Shadow watches Sam go, a stab of dread, back to the phone.

SHADOW  
Everything's okay there, right?

LAURA'S VOICE  
Waiting for the sky to fall is gonna  
cause more bother than the sky actually  
falling, which it isn't.

SHADOW  
Nothing's wrong?

LAURA'S VOICE  
Everything's fine. Robbie's coming by.  
We're planning your surprise party.  
Welcome home.

SHADOW  
A surprise party?

LAURA'S VOICE  
Which you know nothing about.

SHADOW  
Not a thing.

LAURA'S VOICE  
I love you, puppy.

SHADOW  
I love you, too.

Shadow hangs up the phone and dread mounts and --

INT. PRISON LIBRARY. DAY.

THE GROUP OF SKINHEADS pile on Shadow, POUNDING HIM. Trying to bait him into a fight. To get him to hit back.

**SHADOW (V.O.)**  
***Prison has a way of trying to keep you in  
prison. They'll do anything to keep you  
inside. With them.***

ON SHADOW. Severe as he takes the hits. Doesn't fight back.

INT. PRISON CELL. NIGHT.

PAN OVER Low Key in the top bunk, sleeping without trouble... over to... THE WINDOW. A WILD STORM rages outside.

CAMERA FLOATS DOWN TO... SHADOW. Bruised. Sleep fighting him. He stares at the cinder block ceiling.

A CRACK SPREADS LIKE A SPIDERWEB ACROSS THE CEMENT CEILING -- which FLIES away in CHUNKS -- giving way to...

LAURA'S FACE. FRAMED ON A PILLOW IN MORNING LIGHT. AN IDEALIZED, HYPER-REAL MEMORY ENHANCED BY LONGING AND FEAR.

LAURA

*I love you, puppy.*

**SHADOW (V.O.)**

**I love you, too.**

BACK ON SHADOW. He rolls over. Finally able to rest.

**SHADOW (V.O.)**

**That was the first time I dreamt the Bone Orchard. The Tree.**

EXT. THE BONE ORCHARD. NIGHT.

SHADOW'S P.O.V. -- MOVING THROUGH A CEMETARY UNDER MOONLIGHT.

**SHADOW (V.O.)**

**I'm no stranger to nightmare. This was new. This was angry. This was old.**

BRIGHT MOONLIGHT ILLUMINATES... ROWS OF SKELETAL WHITE TREES.

The TREES increase in size as he moves deeper into the Orchard. Roots going deep down into the graves. Branches ending in bony HANDS. GRASPING at him as he walks.

A HAND CUTS his cheek. Retracts with the BLOOD. All the other HANDS retreat, crowding it like a sacred prize. Clearing a swath for Shadow to see...

THE GREAT BONY TREE IN THE CENTER

A massive, leafless ASH. Its branches end in grasping, half flesh hands. The fingers of one who died trying to claw the coffin lid. All the other trees bow to it.

Large, strange fruit swings from its branches like drupes. Size and shape of HEADLESS MEN. The Tree's bony hand/branches reach out to Shadow... drawing him closer...

Something swings down. HITS him in the face.

A NOOSE

INT. PRISON CELL. NIGHT. RESUME.

Shadow SHOCKS AWAKE in his bed.

**SHADOW (V.O.)**  
**48 hours left to daylight...**

INT. PRISON FOOD HALL. DAY.

Shadow over oatmeal and prison coffee, doesn't touch either. Revelation hitting with migraine force. He can feel it:

**SHADOW (V.O.)**  
**...And then -- I taste metal in my mouth.**  
**Tin foil in the teeth. Burnt hair.**  
**(beat)**  
**Whatever it is... now was. Something**  
**happened.**

GUARD calls out to the hall:

GUARD  
Shadow Moon.

All eyes land on Shadow. Shadow sits up. Breath held. *Fear.*

GUARD  
This way.

INT. HALLWAY. PRISON.

SHADOW'S P.O.V. -- FOLLOWING GUARD down the long hall. His walk reminiscent of his walk through the Bone Orchard.

Guard gives him a look. Sees the bruises on his face.

They pass the group of SKINHEADS. One mimes a HANGING.

INT. OUTSIDE WARDEN'S OFFICE.

Guard presses a button under a MINIATURE TRAFFIC LIGHT at the Warden's door. He waits in silence.

The TRAFFIC LIGHT BUZZES. Turns GREEN.

INT. WARDEN'S OFFICE.

The WARDEN wears an old suit he'll wear for another decade. His fidgets with a hearing aid, not new either. Shadow's heart races audibly.

**SHADOW (V.O.)**  
**By the time I get there I'm ready for**  
**anything. Except polite.**

Warden is waiting for Shadow. Has a chair set out for him.

WARDEN  
Thank you for coming. Sit down. Please.

Shadow sits. Worries even more.

**SHADOW (V.O.)**  
*Nothing good comes after polite.*

WARDEN  
 Says here you were sentenced to six years  
 for aggravated assault and battery.

SHADOW  
 Yes, Sir.

WARDEN  
 You served three -- and were due to be  
 released on Friday.  
 (off his look)  
 Shadow, we're going to be releasing you  
 later this afternoon. You'll be getting  
 out a couple of days early.  
 (beat)  
 There's no good way to say this so I'll  
 put it plain. This came from Johnson  
 Memorial Hospital in Eagle Point... Your  
 wife. She died in the early hours of  
 this morning. It was an automobile  
 accident. I'm sorry.

He slides a piece of paper across his desk for Shadow to read.  
 Shadow doesn't. Doesn't say a word.

*A RINGING BUILDS... PAINFUL... LIKE A BOMB WENT OFF TOO  
 CLOSE AND WON'T STOP EXPLODING OUR EARS...*

INT. PRISON HALLWAY. DAY.

The Guard walks Shadow back to his cell.

GUARD  
 It's like one of them good-news, bad-news  
 jokes, isn't it? Good news, we're  
 letting you out early, bad news, your  
 wife is dead.

He LAUGHS. The cell door SLAMS shut on Shadow.

INT. PRISON CELL. DAY.

A RAZOR scrapes over Shadow's neck...

A BUTTON stretches to contain his chest...

A plain clothes Shadow steps out of his cell...

*The door SLAMS behind him. We hear nothing but the RING.*

EXT. PRISON. DAY.

Shadow emerges from prison into gray sky and freezing rain. Ice pellets sting his face as he follows the dotted line to...

INT. YELLOW SCHOOL BUS. DAY.

The OTHER RELEASED INMATES whoop and cheer. Shadow stares out the window, hears none of it.

EXT. BUS STATION. DAY.

Shadow slides into a cab, not bothering to shake off the rain.

INT. AIRPORT TICKET COUNTER. DAY.

THE RINGING STOPS. Shadow's tries, patient and polite. But the AIRPORT LADY is congenitally unkind.

AIRPORT LADY

I'm sorry, it's our policy, I can't change a ticket for two days from now for today. If you change your departure date from Friday you have to pay the difference and a \$200 change fee.

SHADOW

\$200.

AIRPORT LADY

Plus the difference in fare. Do you have to fly today?

SHADOW

I need to get to Eagle Point. It's -- for a funeral.

AIRPORT LADY

(heard it all before)  
Not without an original death certificate. No emails, no copies.

A neck-snapping rage builds in Shadow. He GRIPS the desk...

*Then catches the briefest GLIMPSE of LOW KEY in the crowd. Gone in an blink, not really there, but enough to remind him:*

**SHADOW (V.O.)**

***"Sacred knowledge. Do not piss off those bitches in airports."***

SHADOW

How much is the flight tomorrow?

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL. NIGHT.

A SERIES OF DISSOLVES, AS: Shadow tries to sleep in an airport chair. Sitting up...

Stretched across... Legs up for the floor waxer...

Sleep fails.

INT. AIRPORT KIOSK. THE NEXT MORNING.

Shadow, unslept, suit ruffled, pulls together a breakfast of whatever's not candy. The register asks for \$18.50.

SHADOW

That's a four dollar apple. I went to jail for stealing.

CASHIER shrugs, moves off to help another CUSTOMER. At which Shadow notices she just left A \$20 BILL ON THE COUNTER. He quickly palms the 20. Vanished in his hand. Cashier comes back, smiling. No clue. Beat.

Shadow "notices" the 20 on the floor. Hands it back.

SHADOW

You dropped this.

He opens up his wallet to pay honestly and...

INT. GATE. AIRPORT. DAY.

Shadow is at a electronics kiosk, a new CELL PHONE unwrapped. He dials. A VOICE MAIL picks up.

SHADOW

Hey, Robbie. They tell me Laura's dead. They let me out early. I'm coming home.

He hangs up. A beat. A thought. He dials another number.

Another VOICE MAIL picks up:

LAURA'S VOICE MAIL MESSAGE

*Hi, you've reached Laura -- or I guess you didn't. I probably won't hear this, I never check these. But hey, do what you want.*

BEEP. Shadow hangs up. It good to hear her voice, it's horrible to hear her voice. His attention shifts hearing --

A fuss going on at THE COUNTER. A stooped OLD MAN mumble-SHOUTS at the same Airport Lady Shadow dealt with yesterday. Growing increasingly agitated. People notice.

OLD MAN

I bought it -- I did I did! -- I have to get to my son -- his christening. Bought a First Class ticket --

AIRPORT LADY

This isn't a First Class --

OLD MAN

I sent the check! Look here's my name -- I need to get back, he was just born two days ago. We named him... named him...

The Old Man trails off. Can't remember. Alzheimer confusion. Making an uncomfortable, cringing scene.

AIRPORT LADY

Are you sure you're supposed to be flying alone, Sir.

OLD MAN

No no no! Alone? My son's supposed to fly with me -- he takes care of everything, the bills -- I just have to get to his christening and everything'll be fine. He'll take care of...

He SOBS. Everyone is horrified...

**SHADOW (V.O.)**

***Every sport has its pros. Watching the best reminds you why you quit. Better to be a fan in the stands and cheer.***

...Everyone except Shadow. He smiles. Watches Airport Lady crumble, turning to a FLIGHT ATTENDANT.

AIRPORT LADY

Just get him on and stick him in First.

She hands the Old Man a new ticket, and...

INT. PLANE. DAY.

CLOSE ON: A TICKET. A FLIGHT ATTENDANT reads it dumbly.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Okay, but can you take your seat?

SHADOW

This lady is sitting in it. 17-D times two. Perhaps you now see the problem.

Shadow stands in the aisle over a WOMAN already seated. The plane is FULL. RAIN smacks the windows.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT  
I'll need you to take another seat.

SHADOW  
Just point to one and I'll take it.

INT. FIRST CLASS. PLANE. MOMENTS LATER.

Attendant offers Shadow a First Class chair.

SHADOW  
Really?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT  
You want it or not?

*Fuck yeah.* Shadow sits. Looks around the roomy cabin. A FIRST CLASS FLIGHT ATTENDANT brings a cup of nuts to the passenger beside him: The OLD MAN from the gate.

Only now, sitting in first class, drink in hand, he seems far younger. Whatever was decrepit about him shucked off to reveal a vibrant, chummy, chatty man of, say, 60 underneath. A glimmer and gut evinces a love of food and sex and sand in his toes, though better all three while drunk. As charismatic as they come. Just try not to stare at the glass eye.

Meet MISTER WEDNESDAY.

MISTER WEDNESDAY  
Guess this is your lucky day. Cashews.  
Love 'em. Native of Brazil but grow like  
motherfuckers in Florida.

He crunches a handful. A lovely FLIGHT ATTENDANT COMES.

FIRST CLASS FLIGHT ATTENDANT  
I'm supposed to take your glass, Sir.

MISTER WEDNESDAY  
But you're not going to, otherwise you  
would have said I need to take your drink  
or I'm gonna take your drink, neither of  
which happened. Don't worry, I'll hold  
her tight.

(off Shadow)  
Give my friend here a Jack and Coke while  
you pour me another, please.

Shadow stiffens as the plane begins to takes off.

MISTER WEDNESDAY  
Nervous?

SHADOW  
Never flown before.

MISTER WEDNESDAY  
Nothing to it. Just sit in a chair and  
be a bird. Drink up --

He hands Shadow his drink to finish off. Shadow hesitates.

MISTER WEDNESDAY  
I give you the worm from my beak and you  
look at me like I fucked your mom.

SHADOW  
Sorry. You're just the first person I've  
talked to who wasn't an asshole.

MISTER WEDNESDAY  
Gimme time.

Shadow drinks. Savors it. *God, that's good.*

SHADOW  
Nice work on the upgrade. Straight up  
sympathy play. Risky.

An eyebrow cocks. Someone who speaks the language.

MISTER WEDNESDAY  
Airlines are the ultimate Clip Joint.  
Promise of sex in exotic locals, lucky if  
you get a bag of pretzels. They deserve  
that and worse. What might you have  
tried, my boy?

Shadow decides in this moment to like this guy, and so to let  
a lot of inane shit slide.

SHADOW  
The Good Samaritan. Maybe Gentleman's  
Curve. If I was a traveling man.

MISTER WEDNESDAY  
Which you are not?

SHADOW  
No, Sir, not me.

MISTER WEDNESDAY  
Sounds like a firm decision made for good  
reasons. I can respect that. A man gets  
out of prison, he should be focused above  
all on not going back.

Beat. *How the fuck did you know that?*

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Don't mind me. Got an eye for these things. Just the one.

(studies Shadow)

You're new to the fresh air, I can see that much. Not seeing the joy though, the first steak and lay halo they all got. You look the sort who's lost something vital, and not just time...

He lets that sit. For a moment Shadow even considers telling.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

So what should I call you if I was inclined to do so?

SHADOW

Shadow Moon.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

That, my boy, is one outstandingly improbable name. Shadow Moon. Moonshadow. Goddamn hippy parents.

SHADOW

Hippy parent.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Momma had a giant afro I bet. Dancing queen.

SHADOW

The whole kit. And if I was inclined, what should I call you?

MISTER WEDNESDAY

What's today?

SHADOW

Wednesday.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Today's my day. Let's go with that.

Their drinks come, Mister Wednesday hands Shadow his. Cheers.

Shadow tries not to spill as the plane RATTLES. Turbulence picks up with the now whipping RAIN.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Always good to meet a fellow traveller, Shadow.

SHADOW

I'm not --

MISTER WEDNESDAY

-- Of course. My mistake. When you were then, what was your speciality.

SHADOW

Banks.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Bang bang. Big time.

SHADOW

And some small time.

Shadow takes out a dime, performs a smooth Spellbound. Poof... It a quarter.

SHADOW

Better at the small than big.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

You got more gifts than me. I've got two. Number one, I can sleep anywhere, anytime. Number two is I tend to get what I want. On average, over time. It's all about making people believe in you. Not their cash, their faith. Hell, look at this plane. By all rights this 80 ton chub of metal and seat cushion and Bloody Mary mix has no business soaring through the sky...

As if to punctuate his point LIGHTNING FIRES outside the window. The plane quakes. Mister Wednesday never flinches.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Then along came Newton to explain air flow over the wing creating lift or some shit... and though it makes not a lick of sense here are 282 passengers believing it so hard the plane continues on its journey safely. Is it their faith that keeps us aloft? Or is it Newton? They give you a free shit kit in first class. Little toothbrush, little socks. You might not have known that.

LIGHTNING AGAIN. CLOSER now. Passengers grow nervous. Shadow kills his drink. The CAPTAIN warbles some nonsense on the PA that Wednesday ignores, busy putting on the little socks from his free shit kit and signaling the Attendant.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Another couple'a Jack and Cokes, my dear.  
(to Shadow)  
How're you fixed for work?

SHADOW

Who needs work when you're rich?

MISTER WEDNESDAY

As it happens I'm in a hiring position. I could be Mister Wednesday with a shake of a hand. All perfectly legal work more or less, good money, open roads, bit of risk by and by, then again I'm one of the few who'd without hesitation hire an ex-con. Don't rush into it, take your time.

SHADOW

No, thank you. Already have a job at my buddy's gym waiting for me.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

No you don't. I could use a fellow like you. There's always work for a big guy who's smart enough to know he's better off letting folks think he's dumb. Did I mention the bonuses? Remarkable benefits. I'll throw in a pension if you'd like and can explain what the fuck a pension is. Hell by the end of your tenure you could be the next king of America.

SHADOW

I told you, I have a job --

MISTER WEDNESDAY

-- I can see your reluctance, my boy, all's fair there. A wise man once said, "A man gets out of prison, he should be focused above all on not going back." Again, don't rush into it.

He winks his good eye. Shadow is uncomfortable with everything about his offer. Finishes his drink. Finishes Wednesday's for good measure.

SHADOW

Been a rough day.

He tilts his chair back all the way. Closes his eyes to shut out Wednesday and the world. Tries to sleep.

ON SHADOW, EYES SHUT AS: LIGHTNING FIRES. THE PLANE LURCHES.

INSERT CUT: LAURA'S FACE. A RICTUS OF HORROR AS HEADLIGHTS COME CRASHING INTO HER.

Shadow starts. Puts on the sleep mask from his kit.

SHADOW'S P.O.V. -- INSIDE HIS MASK: BLACK with cabin fluorescent peaking in at the penumbra. His breathing evens. The turbulence becomes a gentle ROCK. The lullaby of storm and engine. The world recedes.

SHOCK TO:

INT. DARK CAVERN. DREAMSPACE.

SHADOW'S P.O.V. -- MOVING THROUGH A CAVE. Primal deep. The Earth under the Earth. Lit by heat. Dirt rain.

Shadow makes his way through the narrow space. Feeling the walls for direction. He is lost. Stumbles. Lands hard on a sharp tangle of ROOTS. He grips on that runs the length of the wall. Uses it as a guide.

The root grows THORNS under his hand. Shredding his palm. If he wants to hold it and move on, it will hurt. He grips it all the same. The pain is quick. The blood red.

A flicker of FIRELIGHT ahead. He rushes toward the faint glow to find... TWO GREAT FLAMES flanking and illuminating...

THE GREAT BONY TREE. Raised above ground. Grand ROOTS exposed now, full as its branches.

A ROPE hangs from a branch. A NOOSE SWINGING. Wispy fibers.

Shadow squeezes his hand into a FIST. Blood from his cuts DRIPS. The ROOTS grow around the blood to DRINK it.

The two FLAMES begin to MOVE. Coming together. Until they are two flaming EYES. On a perfect -- WHITE BUFFALO.

The White Buffalo lopes toward Shadow. Then STANDS UP on two legs. Back straightening. A giant chimera. Towering over Shadow like a desert mesa.

Shadow backs away. Under the tree. The haunting NOOSE sways in front of him. Coming CLOSER with each pass.

The White Buffalo STAMPS its foot. The ground QUAKES. The cave COLLAPSING. A mountain's voice:

THE WHITE BUFFALO

Believe.

Rock and dirt fall around Shadow, burying him alive -- and --

INT. AIRPLANE. DAY.

Shadow shocks awake. Flight Attendant gently nudging him. They have landed, the plane empty. Mister Wednesday is gone.

Shadow checks his hand. No blood.

SHADOW  
I slept through First Class. Already at  
Eagle Point?

Flight Attendant hesitates and --

INT. LAMBERT AIRPORT, ST. LOUIS. DAY.

-- Shadow is at yet another counter and another airport  
listening to ANOTHER AIRPORT LADY.

ANOTHER AIRPORT LADY  
Nope. Can't blame us for the weather. I  
can get you on a flight tomorrow that'll  
get you to Eagle Point by 6.

SHADOW  
(beat, had it)  
How many miles is it from here?

CUT TO:

A CREDIT CARD SLAPPED ON A TABLE

CUT TO:

A KEY SLAMMED INTO THE IGNITION

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY. DAY.

A crap red rental raspberrys down the open road toward  
clearing skies. America unfolds ahead forever.

**SHADOW (V.O.)**  
***The sky clears ahead, unzipping on a  
winking sun. I don't buy it. I'm  
driving to see the dead.***

INT. RENTAL CAR.

Shadow looks up at the clearing sky. For a moment allows the  
sun's warmth to feel good. Warming up himself.

He opens the window. Feels the wind on his face.

DISSOLVE TO:

Shadow drives. Sleeves rolled up now. Buttons undone. RADIO  
ON. A happy old timey murder ballad plays -- say "Eggs and  
Marrowbone". Shadow taps along. Sings the refrain.

But the moment he starts to lose himself... the signal breaks. STATIC takes it away. He tries another station. No signal anywhere.

He turns it off. Drives on. Hand out the window.

He spies a distant HILL. A thought occurs.

EXT. SIDE OF THE ROAD. DAY.

Shadow pulls off the highway near the hill. Steps out.

EXT. HILL. SUNSET.

Shadow climbs the last steps to the top. From here he can see out for miles America's fat, flat planes. He breathes.

HE SHOUTS. TOP OF HIS LUNGS. FREE.

A three count. His voice ECHOES back. Hollow.

EXT. HIGHWAY. NIGHT.

Shadow's car passes a roadside attraction sign for: "JACK'S CROCODILE BAR." *Why not?*

INT. JACK'S CROCODILE BAR. NIGHT.

Reptile festooned. Parts and whole. Bones, teeth and skin. Stools capped with skulls, no regard for taxonomy -- everything that had scales is a croc. Bayou rococo. A fun shitty BAND finishes a set. Shadow is at the bar with a menu in hand and an ALLIGATOR'S OPEN MOUTH between his legs.

SHADOW

What's good on a tight budget?

BARTENDER

Buffalo burger's great. Chili's better. Both together will make a happy man.

SHADOW

Can't afford both and gas money.

BARTENDER

Sure you can, just stiff me on the tip. Permission granted.

Shadow nods thanks. He forgot people are nice in America.

INT. MEN'S ROOM. JACK'S CROCODILE BAR. NIGHT.

Shadow is taking a leak. Looks at a creepy smiling stuffed salamander at eye level to the urinal when A VOICE comes from a urinal over, as if continuing his sentence after a hiccup:

VOICE

-- Not that rushing into things can't be a good thing.

Pissing beside him in a thick, seemingly endless stream is MISTER WEDNESDAY -- continuing his thought as though their conversation on the plane had never been interrupted:

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Sex rushed into tends to work out best for all involved. Marriages I'll grant want for a moment's extra consideration.  
(realizes)

Apologies, my boy. Insensitive of me to bring up marriage. I was hoping on your behalf your vital loss wasn't too dear. That hope did not pan out -- I am truly sorry about your wife. Nice obituary I thought.

Shadow's surprise at seeing him shifts fast to anger. He doesn't like being followed.

SHADOW

I tried to say "fuck off" politely as many ways as I'm going to. Now I'm fixing to be direct. I don't want your fucking job --

MISTER WEDNESDAY

I thought you'd have reconsidered on account of your friend Robbie's condition. And on account of your being broke.

SHADOW

What about his condition? The fuck do you know about Robbie?

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Shit. It seems more than you. Which doesn't alter the sad facts but does make me the unfortunate bearer of them. Robbie Burton's dead.

Wednesday zips up. Hands Shadow a folded up LOCAL NEWSPAPER from his side pocket.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Page seven.

As Mister Wednesday steps out Shadow opens to page seven. Begins to read. OFF Shadow, face sinking, we...

CUT TO:

TITLE CARD: "SOMEWHERE IN AMERICA"

INT. HOTEL BAR. LOS ANGELES. NIGHT.

A calm scene for Los Angeles. A LOUNGE SINGER on piano. Light crowd. A 50ish WOMAN (any race or concoction but white) is at the bar awkward in her nice clothes not too often worn. This is BILQUIS. And she is waiting for her date.

She checks her PHONE. Swipes through profile PHOTOS until she lands on the one expected. Testing the image against the PAUNCHY MAN who just entered. Late 50s. He could be your lawyer and probably is. He does not look nearly as handsome as his profile photo.

TIME CUT:

BILQUIS AND PAUNCH

At the bar. Both shy and unused to this. Both interested.

PAUNCH

I've only been on three other dates from the computer. Not sure I've got the talent for it.

(musters his courage)

But meeting you... I'm glad my kids forced me on that stupid thing.

Bilquis eyes light up like drawn cigarettes.

BILQUIS

You -- like me?

He nods. He does. She smiles brightly. Already looks better. The new confidence of being desired.

INT. BILQUIS' APARTMENT. NIGHT.

A well maintained one bedroom, lived in for a long time. A lifetime of Levantine ornaments collected, kept. The walls textured, with a high sheen, the color of raw liver.

Wine and good lighting already deployed. Bilquis and Paunch kiss. She leads him to the very large bed. Disproportionate to the size of the apartment. A large mirror beside it.

PAUNCH

Are you sure? I want to see you again.

BILQUIS

I know.

PAUNCH

We can wait and do it then.

BILQUIS

We will.

She reaches to pour them more wine. They share a glass.

BILQUIS

Light that for me, would you?

She means the CANDLE. On a solid table beside a stone figure of a wide-hipped woman. He strikes the match, which plumes with undue smoke. Lights it. As he stares at the flame...

Bilquis reaches around him from behind. Reaches over his pants. He shudders. Can't believe his luck.

She looks over his shoulder at the two of them in the mirror. Her arms snaking around him, hands probing. Paunch turns around to face her. Moves to lift her top. She stops him.

BILQUIS

I'm not what I once was.

PAUNCH

You're perfect.

BILQUIS

You don't think I'm old? You don't think I'm spent?

PAUNCH

I think you're the sexiest goddamn thing I ever got to touch for free.

Meant to be sweet and taken as so.

CLOSE ON: THE BED... as they fall onto it. Bilquis pulls him on top of her. He tries to get started. Mostly fumbles.

PAUNCH

I'm not so...

(admitting)

I have no idea what I'm doing. Not sure I ever have.

BILQUIS

What man is? Let me.

She grabs him. Fits him inside her.

A momentary shock to both of them at how good it feels. They'd forgotten. He laughs at the intensity. She smiles.

BILQUIS

Don't let go. Not yet.

He doesn't. The continue. Slowly at first, then following her lead they find a rhythm together. She kisses him deeply. A man who thinks an awful lot about everything loses himself in a moment -- when -- she hesitates. He worries.

BILQUIS  
Do something for me.

*Anything.*

She whispers. Her words textured now, honeyed and lingering:

BILQUIS  
*Worship me.*

She touches his lips. He starts to move down on her. She stops him. Locks eyes with him, hips never ceasing to move.

BILQUIS  
Stay here... With your words... With your body. Worship me. Pray to me. Like I was your god. Your goddess.

PAUNCH  
I don't know how.  
(embarrassed, clumsy)  
You feel so good... Your tits are amazing-- I want to keep fucking you forever.

BILQUIS  
(correcting, a hint of scold)  
Worship me. Say my name.

PAUNCH  
Bilquis.

BILQUIS  
Again...

PAUNCH  
Bilquis.

She gives him a SLAP. He stops. Responds with a hard THRUST. Says it again -- this time, without meaning to, accented... like a snake might say it...

PAUNCH  
*Beeeyl quisssss.* Beloved.

Bilquis moans. *That's it.*

PAUNCH

I worship your breasts and your eyes and  
your cunt. I worship your thighs and  
your eyes and your cherry-red lips.

Bilquis MOANS gorgeously. Gets on top of him. The sex  
surging in time with the words unspooling --

PAUNCH

Daughter of the South, Storm Queen on  
throne of honey, secret owner of all  
gold. I am yours, my beloved. Bilquis.  
You are the All Wife who gives color to  
cloud and knows the song of thought. All  
winds blow to fill your hair and make it  
wild.

Something has kindled inside him he cannot control. His words  
unconscious, passionate, ancient. They pour out of him as she  
rides him... HER LEGS LOCK AROUND HIS. He fucks her with  
confidence... worshipping her with his body as --

PAUNCH

Queens and concubines and maidens hide  
their faces in shame for you are Mother  
of beauty. Trees bow. Warriors fall.  
Give me your blessing. I bury my face  
before you and I worship you -- that  
feels incredible -- what are you doing?

She tips up his chin to face her and keep him from looking  
down. Though he seems to be slipping lower.

BILQUIS

Don't stop, Honey.

PAUNCH

I -- I offer you everything. My money,  
my blood, my life. I pray you bring me  
your gift, your one true gift and make me  
always so -- so --

He surges with sensation, beyond any experience he has known.  
Beyond word or thought.

BILQUIS

Go on. Let go.

He pumps into her with everything he has.

BILQUIS

Give me everything.

PAUNCH

All that I have. Everythi--

He shudders with orgasm. Tidal waves of pleasure. Pulsing. Ongoing. The paroxysms only waxing. Obliterating thought. Time. Space.

ANGLE ON PAUNCH. THE WORLD LURCHES. TURNS. So it seems he is sinking down, down, down below frame. Something CRUNCHES.

BILQUIS

Gift me your body.

REVEAL: Bilquis' knees are spread wide. Her lover is half inside her vulva. Up to his waist and sinking deeper.

A birth in reverse. She is euphoric. Orgasmic. She pulls him into her even deeper.

His neck is engulfed. The pleasure overwhelms him. He looks up into her face from between her legs. An infant seeing his mother at birth. Eyes tearing with tenderness and trust.

PAUNCH

I love you.

The last of him disappears inside her vagina.

The candle goes out.

ON BILQUIS. ON THE BED. Naked and alone.

The thin line of candle smoke circles around her.

She rolls over. Stretches out. Runs a hand over her body.

She studies at herself in the mirror. She looks 20 years younger. Body taut. Skin flawless. Curves perfect.

A goddess. Worshipped. Pleased.

CUT TO:

INSIDE A JUKE BOX. CLOSE ON: A 45 RPM RECORD

Labeled "Iko Iko" by the Dixie Cups. The 45 is grabbed by an AUTOMATIC ARM, swung, flipped and placed before a needle. The RECORD NEEDLE connects with vinyl. The Dixie Cups chant:

*"My grandma and your grandma sitting by the fire/My grandma told your grandma 'I'm going to set your flag on fire...'"*

CLOSE ON: A GAPING CROCODILE'S MAW

CAMERA CONTINUES PULLS BACK TO REVEAL the gaping maw is coming from between Mister Wednesday's legs. The barstool on which he is sitting is a taxidermied crocodile head. We are --

INT. JACK'S CROCODILE BAR. NIGHT.

Wednesday sits with his back to the bar, watching Shadow read the newspaper.

*"Look at my King all dressed in Red/Iko Iko all day/I bet you five dollars he'll kill you dead/Jockamo-feena-nay."*

Shadow folds the newspaper and places it on the table next to his half-eaten chili. He looks down at his hands.

ON SHADOW'S FINGERTIPS. STAINED WITH NEWSPRINT INK.

OVER A SERIES OF NEWSPRINT PHOTOS:

*SHADOW (V.O.)*

*Laura Moon, age twenty-seven, and Robert Burton, thirty-nine, were in Burton's car on the interstate, when they swerved into the path of a thirty-two wheeler.*

-- LAURA MOON'S OBITUARY PHOTO

-- ROBBIE BURTON'S OBITUARY PHOTO

-- TWISTED WRECKAGE OF THE CAR

-- THEIR BODIES LAID NEATLY BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD.

ON SHADOW. Staring at his newsprint stained fingertips. CAMERA REVEALS Mister Wednesday now sitting opposite him.

SHADOW

You're right. I'm broke. I don't have a job.

Shadow takes a quarter from his pocket, tails up. He flicks it up in the air, knocking it against his finger to give it a wobble and the appearance of turning.

CLOSE ON: THE COIN. It TEETERS MID-AIR... until it's caught and slapped down on the back of Shadow's hand, TAIL SIDE UP.

SHADOW (CONT'D)

I'm not working for anyone with worse luck than me. Call it.

Wednesday stares at Shadow, then:

MISTER WEDNESDAY

If I win, you work for me?

SHADOW

Yes, sir.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Heads.

SHADOW

(without uncovering his hand)  
It's tails. I rigged the toss.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Rigged games are the easiest to beat.

SHADOW

It's always going to be tails because I don't want to work for you. You're a little creepy and forward and familiar and I don't like it. And I don't like you.

Shadow begins to lift his hand and Wednesday stops him by laying a hand gently on top of his.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

It's not always going to be tails.

Shadow glances at the coin. IT IS HEADS UP. A confused beat.

SHADOW

I fumbled the toss.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Or I'm just a lucky, lucky guy. Let's negotiate the terms of your employment over a drink. Shall we?

Wednesday stands up and makes his way to the bar, ordering. Shadow studies the coin in his hand, flipping it over on his palm. He FLIPS it into the air. Catches and calls it.

SHADOW

Tails.

It's TAILS. He FLIPS the coin again and...

...It is snatched mid-air by a very tall man with a short ginger-colored beard named MAD SWEENEY.

MAD SWEENEY

Coin tricks, is it?

He sits at the table next to Shadow, putting his feet up as he spins the coin around his fingers, knuckles, thumb and palm before flicking it up into the air, where it DISAPPEARS.

MAD SWEENEY (CONT'D)

You working for our man then?

Shadow is still looking into the air above them for the coin.

SHADOW

Who are you?

MAD SWEENEY

I'm a leprechaun.

SHADOW

Little tall for a leprechaun.

MAD SWEENEY

That is a stereotype and represents a very narrow view of the world.

SHADOW

You don't have an Irish accent.

MAD SWEENEY

Been over here too fucken long.

SHADOW

So you're originally from Ireland?

MAD SWEENEY

I told you. I'm a leprechaun. We don't come from Moscow, Russia. Or Moscow, Idaho for that matter.

PLINK. The coin finally falls from the air above them. Wednesday returns to the table with a tray of drinks, feigns dead-eyed surprise at seeing Mad Sweeney at the table.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Well I never. Mad Sweeney as I live and breath. What a surprise.

(handing him drink)

Southern Comfort and coke for you.

(taking a sip)

Jack Daniels for me.

(to Shadow)

And these are for you, Shadow Moon.

Wednesday places a line of three tawny golden colored drinks in front of Shadow. He pushes the first one forward.

SHADOW

What is it?

Wednesday just pushes one forward. Shadow takes a sip, tastes it, then guzzles the drink. Set the empty glass on the table.

SHADOW

Tastes like prison hooch, brewed in a garbage bag from rotten fruit. But smoother. Sweeter. Stranger.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

It's mead. Honey wine. The drink of heroes. The drink of the gods.

MAD SWEENEY

Tastes like a drunken diabetic's piss.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

It's tradition. Seals our bargain.

Wednesday pushes the second glass of mead toward Shadow.

SHADOW

We don't have a bargain.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Sure we do. I called heads. You work for me now. You're my majordomo. My castellan. Protect and serve. You drive where needs driving to. And generally take charge on my behalf. You also run errands. In an emergency, and only in an emergency, you'll be expected to kindly kick the asses of those whose asses require kicking. And in the unlikely event of my death, you will hold my vigil.

MAD SWEENEY

He's hustling you. He's a hustler.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Damn straight I'm a hustler. Swindler. Cheater. And a liar. Which is why I require assistance.

SHADOW

You've told me what you want. Would you like to know what I want?

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Nothing would make me happier. Name your price.

SHADOW

I want to go to my wife's funeral. I want to say goodbye. After that, if you still need me, I will start at two thousand dollars a week. You say you want me to hurt people, I will hurt people if they try to hurt you, but I will not hurt anyone for fun or profit. I will work for you up until which point you piss me off and then I'm gone.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Very good. We have a compact and are agreed. One last glass of mead to seal our deal. Third time is the charm and we are done.

Shadow swallows the mead in two large gulps.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

There. You're my man now.

Wednesday spits in his hand and extends it. Shadow shrugs and spits in his own palm. They clasp hands and squeeze. Wednesday picks up the quarter on the table that dropped out of thin air and flips it back to Shadow.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

It'll be heads.

Shadow looks at the coin on his palm and it is heads.

MAD SWEENEY

Why if it's coin tricks we're doing, watch this.

Mad Sweeney takes an empty glass. Then reaches out and takes a large coin from the air, drops it into the glass. He takes another coin from the air and tosses it into the glass. He takes a coin from the flame of a candle, another from his beard, another from Shadow's empty hand, and drops them, one by one, into the glass. Then he curls his fingers over the glass and blows hard, and several more coins drop in. He tips the glass into his pocket and taps the pocket to show that it is empty. Shadow goes quiet. He's never seen anything like it. Mad Sweeney has him baffled and loves it.

MAD SWEENEY (CONT'D)

Now that's a coin trick for you.

SHADOW

How'd you do that?

MAD SWEENEY

With panache.

SHADOW

Do you load coins in your sleeve?

MAD SWEENEY

Sounds like a lot of work to me. Easier to pick them out of the air. Simplest trick in the world.

SHADOW

How'd you do it?

MAD SWEENEY  
I'll fight you for it.

SHADOW  
I'm not fighting you.

Mad Sweeney fiddles with his baseball cap, pulling one of his coins out of the air, and placing it on the table.

MAD SWEENEY  
Real gold, if you're wondering. Win or lose -- and you'll lose -- it's yours if you fight me.

MISTER WEDNESDAY  
He said he's not fighting you.

MAD SWEENEY  
A big fellow like you, who'd a thought you'd be a fucken coward.

Mad Sweeney slouches back into his chair, notices the newspaper on the table, tries another tactic.

MAD SWEENEY (CONT'D)  
A whiff of death on the page. Laura Moon. This your old lady's obituary? She was a fine piece of --

CLOSE ON: MISTER WEDNESDAY -- SLOW MOTION. His hair and jacket lapel billow slightly as if struck by a sudden breeze. The breeze is, of course, created by the swing of Shadow's arm as his fist connects with Mad Sweeney's chin, sending him sliding back across the floor into crocodile barstools.

The crowd stops and stares. Mad Sweeney gets to his feet.

MAD SWEENEY (CONT'D)  
Hey, everybody. There's going to be a lesson learned. Watch this.

He swings a huge fist at Shadow's face in SLOW MOTION, catching him beneath the right eye. BLOTCHES OF LIGHT flare the lens around the impact as Shadow's vision blurs.

ON MISTER WEDNESDAY

He watches them fight with a humorless grin. Picks a guitar off a stand on the stage. Begins to pick out a TUNE as --

SHADOW AND SWEENEY

Go at it. Sweeney fights with enthusiasm for the fight itself -- huge, barreling roundhouse blows that miss as often as they connect. Shadow takes a HIT on his neck meant for his face.

Shadow unleashes on Sweeney, pounding him expertly, forcing him back into a table; empty glasses and ashtrays crash to the floor. Shadow continues to punch him soundly.

MAD SWEENEY

Atta boy! Now you're fighting for the joy of it. For the sheer unholy fucken delight of it.

Shadow stops and Sweeney taunts him through bloody teeth:

MAD SWEENEY

Can you feel the joy in your veins, rising like the sap in springtime?

Shadow releases Sweeney and stands.

SHADOW

We're done.

Shadow turns and walks away. Puts his hand atop the COIN when -- MAD SWEENEY GRABS HIS WRIST like a vise. He sways and sweats, but still manages:

MAD SWEENEY

It ain't over til I say it is.

OFF Sweeney spitting a wad of blood and teeth on the floor... DIVING at Shadow...

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON: A SWEATY MAN'S BACK

CAMERA PUSHES IN as the SWEATY MAN works furiously over something unseen. On the table next to him is a tape dispenser. A DIN OF CONVERSATION and CLAMOR fill the air. He reaches for the tape and pulls off a small piece. <snap>.

CLOSE ON: THE HEELS OF RUNNING SHOES

PADDLING over pavement and sidewalk PULLING CAMERA. We are...

EXT. NEW YORK CITY. FINANCIAL DISTRICT. DAY.

REVEAL: A DELIVERY BOY on foot navigating a CROWD of people, swerving violently into the main doors of...

INT. NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE. TRADING FLOOR.

CONTINUE TO FOLLOW Delivery Boy as he slows his mad dash to a power walk through the modern trading floor. It is SPARSELY POPULATED with PIT TRADERS clustered around MONITORS reviewing the Electronic market.

As the Delivery Boy makes his way across the trading floor,  
CAMERA CRANES UP to find...

INT. OBSERVATION BOOTH.

An unremarkable MAN who's clearly given his health to his job looks out on the trading floor. 40s but looks 50s. What hair he has combed over. If he's not on a statin he should be.

This is THE STOCK TICKER.

The Stock Ticker watches the floor. As CAMERA MOVES through the glass of the observation window, the MODERN TRADING FLOOR below TRANSFORMS now seen through a filter that REVEALS a 1980's ERA TRADING FLOOR complete with frothing PIT TRADERS shouting and gesturing.

THIS IS THE STOCK TICKER'S P.O.V. OF THE TRADING FLOOR. The HUNDREDS OF 80's ERA PIT TRADERS in a TRADING FRENZY are a representation of the ELECTRONIC TRADING taking place outside the range of the human eye.

HOVERING LIKE A HOLOGRAPHIC OVERLAY in front of the existing BOARDS is a SECONDARY BOARD. Even though it appears HIGH TECH, the style of the projection is that of the FLIPPING SPLIT-FLAP NUMBERS of the Stock Market past.

The Stock Ticker watches the SECONDARY BOARD carefully with ever-worried, always exhausted eyes as the PIT TRADERS FROTH.

CLOSE ON: A STOCK LABELED "ODN"

NUMBER TILES read 35:88 then begin to SPIN.

ON THE STOCK TICKER. He holds his breath.

STOCK TICKER'S P.O.V. OF THE TRADING FLOOR

There is an audible inhalation of breath as the HUNDREDS OF PIT TRADER (representations) collectively hold their breath.

CLOSE ON: THE ODN STOCK. The TILES SPIN AND SPIN... finally locking onto a number: 58.99

The PIT TRADERS react in a frenzy. The Stock Ticker cringes.

STOCK TICKER

This isn't going to go well.

He heaves an annoyed, exhausted sigh as the sweating, panting Delivery Boy ENTERS in the BACKGROUND with his order.

DELIVERY BOY

You order a sandwich?

STOCK TICKER  
Not just a sandwich.

DELIVERY BOY'S P.O.V. OF THE TRADING FLOOR

The modern, less vibrant/vibrating version than the 80's representation the Stock Ticker sees. Flatscreens and headsets. Quiet notation and email.

DELIVERY BOY  
You're paying cash?

The Stock Ticker fishes through his wallet and pulls out a twenty, noting the quote on the back:

STOCK TICKER  
"In God we trust."

He hands the Delivery Boy the twenty and takes his pastrami.

STOCK TICKER (CONT'D)  
This sandwich is a god. I pray to it for satisfaction in the same way one would pray to Ascieplus for healing, or Mars for Victory.

DELIVERY BOY  
It's a good sandwich.

STOCK TICKER  
It's a god sandwich.  
(then)  
I'm not simply tasting generous portions of tender peppery garlic meat that doesn't-know-the-meaning-of-lean. I'm tasting history. The fine people of New York have been eating this sandwich for a over hundred years. A century of gnashing teeth. That deserves a little praise and a little worship.  
(re: sandwich)  
Reverse transubstantiation. If the body of Christ tasted this good, even the Jews would take communion.  
(then)  
You look Jewish. Are you Jewish?

Delivery Boy nods.

STOCK TICKER (CONT'D)  
Do you have any antacid?

Delivery Boy nods and hands the Stock Ticker a roll of TUMS.

DELIVERY BOY  
 (re: \$20 bill)  
 Do you need change back?

STOCK TICKER  
 Of course I do.

OFF the Stock Ticker chewing TUMS we...

CUT TO:

INT. MISTER WEDNESDAY'S CADILLAC. MORNING.

Shadow wakes up a mess. Tries to get his bearings but can't.

**SHADOW (V.O.)**  
*I know I'm moving. I know I recently  
 said yes to something stupid. I know I  
 am in pain.*

He looks around. He is in a backseat. In a moving car. Mister Wednesday at the wheel of his big boat of a Cadillac. Something Elvis would love in one of his classier moods. The pain hits Shadow. Hangover and bruises.

He checks a pocket. Pulls out THE GOLD COIN. Shadow tries to remember, but it's gone in the fog of drunk.

SHADOW  
 Don't suppose you heard him tell me how  
 it was done?

MISTER WEDNESDAY  
 No such luck.

SHADOW  
 Where's my car?

MISTER WEDNESDAY  
 Dumped it. Red's not your color. Don't  
 get used to this, as part of your job  
 you'll be the one driving Betty here.  
 Figured you could use the sleep. It's  
 not every day a man gets to bury his  
 wife.

INT. GAS STATION. DAY.

Wednesday, suddenly Southern, is at the counter effortlessly pulling a classic Change Raise on an ATTENDANT. He gets progressively more enfeebled as he goes, and sucks on his finger like it was bleeding throughout.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Dangit, all I got's a 10. You sure that's the only band-aids you've got, not the gauze, the strips? Damn thing won't stop bleeding --

(takes his change)

Oh wait -- now I've got more singles than I thought, here...

(hands over the singles, gets back his 10)

No, that's too many.

He gives the 10 back to Attendant, who is now lost.

ATTENDANT

That's your 10.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

("embarrassed")

Must've forgotten to take my pill this morning, here's one more, just give me a 20 back and we're even.

He YAWNS enormously to cover any joy at success. ATTENDANT reaches to the register and...

INT. GAS STATION BATHROOM. THAT MOMENT.

Shadow uses his free shit kit from the plane to clean his beat up self in the grimy bathroom.

Teeth. Face. Shave. Handy wipe the pits. Spot wash the suit. Button it all up and get right the tie.

He checks the finished product in a mirror SCRATCHED with the words "FUCK GOD AND CUM HARD". Best he can do.

EXT. HIGHWAY. DAY.

The Cadillac passes a SIGN for EAGLE POINT, INDIANA.

INT. MISTER WEDNESDAY'S CADILLAC.

Shadow sees the small town fast approaching. A flood of anticipation, dammed by loss.

SHADOW

This was home. For a good while.

INT. MOTEL. DAY.

The LEAST INTERESTED GIRL IN THE WORLD, with a lip ring, could give a shit eyes and an obvious hickey, takes Wednesday's cash and gives him two keys, checking him in. He holds her gaze.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

Thank you for your prompt and efficient service. Any thoughts on breakfast options within walking distance.

LEAST INTERESTED GIRL IN THE WORLD

There's a Safeway has cereal.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

You are most helpful.

Mister Wednesday hands Shadow his room key and the car keys.

MISTER WEDNESDAY

I will only say this to you once ever:  
Take all the time you need.

EXT. SAINT MONICA'S CHURCH. DAY.

Shadow parks the Cadillac. Does not get out.

INT. MISTER WEDNESDAY'S CADILLAC.

Shadow stares at the cross atop the steeple. Sits there a good long while. He finds his reserve strength. Gets out of the car. Throws his shoulders back. His prison walk, into...

INT. SAINT MONICA'S CHURCH. DAY.

Old school drab cavernous Catholic. A place picked to please Grandma. The large nave is half full: Laura was loved fiercely, not widely. Shadow enters. Holds against the wall, keeping out of sight. The service is already begun. A PRIEST, one of the good ones, is mid-service, is moved:

PRIEST

God never intended a kind woman to die young. God doesn't want Laura's parents to live with her gone, or for those who loved her to go on without her.

VOICE IN THE CROWD (O.S.)

*A-men.*

PRIEST

And though we are secure in the knowledge that she is far happier in her new form and home in Heaven, we are jealous of God, for He can enjoy her conversation. Please rise, turn to page 16 in your hymn book.

The organ starts PLAYING. All stand and begin to sing "Nearer My God to Thee."

Priest looks out and sees Shadow. Recognizes him.

PRIEST

Please. You belong with the family.

A hush spreads, lyrics stumbled then recovered as Shadow takes the long walk down the aisle. Eyes front. Where lies...

An open CASKET. Where lies LAURA. The wax doll copy of the idealized visage we saw. The kind of face that makes us wish we got to meet her when she was still alive.

The hymn ends. Priest asks privately:

PRIEST

Would you like to say a few words?

Shadow hadn't even thought of this. He steps to the altar. Looks down at the many faces uncomfortable to see him. Fidgeting and judgemental. He has to lean down to the mic.

SHADOW

I'm Laura's husband. Most of you know where I'm coming from and judge me for it. Fair enough. I just came from --  
(clear into the mic)

Prison.

The mic spikes FEEDBACK. SHORTS OUT. Dead. Technology hates Shadow. He goes with his own voice, never mind the back row.

SHADOW

Whatever good there is in me I borrowed from Laura. She had it to spare. She waited for me three years. Hard years. Not many would.

A small MURMUR from the crowd. Shadow grows even quieter:

SHADOW

I don't know what happens now. We say things at these things to make us feel better. There is no better. Not for me.

(to Laura)

I really missed you.

CLOSE ON: LAURA. She doesn't answer. And never will.

Shadow steps down. Another hymn begins. "Hail, Holy Queen, Enthroned Above." Words confident of Heaven and Laura's place in it.

Shadow sits next to A WOMAN IN BLACK, 30s. AUDREY. Cried out. Blunted by grief or pills. At the giggle stage of grief, which is a thing.

AUDREY

Hello, Sir. That was nice. Nice job.  
Good for you. How was jail?

SHADOW

Audrey.

Audrey looks to Laura, comments absently:

AUDREY

Not the reunion you were hoping for. She looks pretty. They did a hell of job reconstructing her face and neck. I think that and the coffin killed your savings. All so you could have that nice open casket and get one last look at her pretty face.

SHADOW

I'm sorry about Robbie. He was a good friend. He loved you like crazy. So did Laura.

Audrey does a slow turn to Shadow. Sees him stare at Laura. Aching with love and loss. Audrey can't tell if she should laugh or cry.

AUDREY

Shit, Shadow, no one told you?  
(leans in, matter of fact)  
*She died with my husband's cock in her mouth.*

ON SHADOW. The world melts. The RINGING starts again... bomb blast tinnitus... as we...

EXT. CEMETERY. DAY.

The coffin suspended by thick bands over the freshly dug grave. MOURNERS gathered. Shadow is front and center and numb. Someone offers him a red BUTTON. He presses it... and the coffin begins to lower into the Earth...

THUNK. The motor crunches. The coffin STOPS. Swings. Tips. Nearly turning over before it catches on its bands.

A GROUNDSKEEPER comes, prods the motor. Pops it in reverse. The coffin rises. Lowers. JAMS AGAIN. Bounces on its bands. Groundskeeper BANGS on the motor. Hits the button. The coffin rights. Sinks down into the ground.

STAY ON SHADOW. Standing at the foot of the grave as we...

BEGIN TIME LAPSE:

-- The Priest reads from his Bible...

-- Groundskeeper fills the grave with dirt...

-- MOURNERS begin to filter out... one by one... until...

-- Shadow stands alone...

-- Another burial takes place a few rows behind him... a whole cycle of prayers and dirt and tears... NEW MOURNERS say their goodbyes... then gone...

-- The sun sets. THE RINGING STOPS SUDDENLY --

EXT. CEMETERY. NIGHT.

-- Shadow remains. Leans against a headstone. Staring at Laura's fresh grave.

SHADOW

What'd you do, Laura? What was it? A one time thing? On the night before I come back... No... That's a we're-in-this-together. That's... is that love. If you were gonna go, you could've said so. I could've taken it... I could...

(and then)

I had a surprise for you. I read when I was in. I wanted to come back better than I went in for you. Six books a week. For three years. 813 books. 8 and 13, Fibonacci numbers. I know this because four of them were about math. I like math. Who knew.

(and then)

Goddamn it, Laura.

Whatever's in him comes out.

He looks down. Sees his hand balled in a FIST. Opens his hand. He's been gripping the GOLD COIN this whole time. So tight it's imprinted on his palm.

A flick of the thumb.

THE GOLD COIN

Flips end over end... onto Laura's grave. Gold in the dirt.

FOOTSTEPS come. Audrey stumble-walks over. Pulling up her underwear and tights. Stoned and/or drunk. It's all too raw for anything like censorship.

AUDREY

Two funerals in a day. Husband and best friend. You skipped Robbie's. That's fair.

SHADOW

Audrey.

AUDREY

I was yelling at mine too.

She points to the nearby fresh grave where the other funeral took place. Robbie's.

AUDREY

Doesn't do any good. Anger makes you feel like you can change the outcome. There's no arguing with dead, no debate. Dead wins ten out of ten. So I pissed on him.

She checks her skirt, wipes a dot.

SHADOW

How long were they...

AUDREY

Not sure. Long time now that I put things together. Late nights, daytime showers. Dickless piece of shit. That is not an epithet, that is a literal description. Severed at the root in the crash. Coroner had the nerve to ask me what I wanted him to do with it. Told him to leave it where he found it. Relax -- they didn't bury her with it in her mouth. Don't think anyway. Don't listen to me, Shadow, I lost count on the Ativan. I'm interrupting, you were saying your peace.

SHADOW

People did enough talking today. I think someone might've actually said "She's in a better place."

AUDREY

She's in Parkview Cemetery, Target would be more interesting than here. If there isn't some kind of life after death I'm going to be so pissed.

(off Shadow)

Kicked fucking puppy. I hated you guys as a couple because of the way you looked at her.

(MORE)

AUDREY (cont'd)

Robbie did his best to avoid looking at me. Get used to the boot, Puppy, there is no closure from the dead. Maybe three years from now some therapist is going to tell you to write her a letter saying everything you wish you could say to her then drop it in the ocean -- maybe it'll help. It won't help.

Shadow looks back to Laura's grave.

AUDREY

I'm sorry for your loss, Shadow. I really am. Anyone tell you that yet?

SHADOW

Not sure.

AUDREY

Has anyone even hugged you? Shit -- you just got out of prison. You haven't been hugged in -- how long? I read that was a thing with cons, forgetting what it's like just to feel someone.

Audrey hugs him gently... Holds him... A nice moment -- for a moment. Then... Audrey's hands squeeze his shoulders a little too tight. Testing, appreciating his body.

AUDREY

Jesus. You worked out in prison.

She squeezes him a beat longer. A sparkle of a bad idea.

AUDREY

I have a proposal for closure for us both.

SHADOW

Audrey.

AUDREY

Hear me out. This is a good one. *Lex talionis*. An eye for an eye, blow job for blow job. Right here where they can see us.

She moves in on him, mind made up. Shadow moves back. Not into this.

SHADOW

I appreciate the offer, but --

AUDREY

You stood in front of a church full of people and said she waited for you. Your wife -- my best friend --

She pushes him against a crypt aggressively. Grabs his belt. Looks over her shoulder.

AUDREY

I want them to see it. I want Robbie to watch while I take this gorgeous man's cock in my mouth -- pissing on him wasn't enough -- I want you to cum in my mouth and I want to spit it on his grave, Jesus who knew I could be so angry --

Before Shadow knows it she's on her knees.

ON SHADOW. Looking out at the graves.

*A FLASH OF: LOW KEY'S SHIT EATING GRIN FACE.*

*LOW KEY*

*When you're out in the world getting your first blow job as a free man, remember this face.*

Shadow shakes off the memory. *Asshole.*

He pulls away from Audrey. She hikes up her skirt.

AUDREY

You're right -- fuck me already.

She pushes him against a raised crypt. Climbs on top of him.

SHADOW

Don't -- I can't do this --

AUDREY

I am trying to get my dignity back here --

Shadow grabs Audrey. Stands up. Pushes her back gently. She shoves him down, forceful, angry. He holds Audrey back, firm.

SHADOW

Audrey.

Audrey HITS him. PUNCHES him.

Then cries. Breaks down. Against him.

As it all comes tumbling out... CAMERA FLOATS UP OVER SHADOW'S SHOULDER... THEN DOWN... DOWN... TO...

LAURA'S GRAVE. To the GOLD COIN in the dirt.

*The coin begins to SINK. Into the Earth.*

FOLLOW THE COIN. AS IT FALLS THROUGH DIRT AND ROCK. UNTIL WE LOSE IT IN THE BLACK. A BEAT -- THEN -- A HOLLOW THUMP.

EXT. ROAD. NIGHT.

Shadow walks. Cars passing him. Maybe time too.

A STREET LAMP in the distance behind Shadow BLINKS OUT.

*SHADOW (V.O.)*

*Where do you walk when there are no  
sidewalks? Against the traffic.*

A STREET LAMP FLICKERS OUT, plunging the immediate space around him into darkness. Shadow trips on something unseen.

He SPRAWLS into the ditch on the side of the road, hands sinking into several inches of MUD.

He climbs to his feet and wipes his hands on his pants, leaving a streak of handprints running up his thighs. He awkwardly watches as two more STREET LAMPS go dark on either side of the already dark one he's standing under.

He listens to the night as CAMERA REVEALS THE BLURRED SHAPE OF A MAN IN WHITE standing near Shadow a moment before he sees someone is there. A HAND materializes out of the dark, a WAD OF SOMETHING WET in its palm. It LATCHES onto Shadow's skull.

ON SHADOW: CAMERA FOLLOWS HIM back down to the muddy ditch, ground rushing toward us. He falls and -- upon impact --

SLOW-MO BURSTS INTO COLORFUL, OILY SMOKE.

A MIASMIC BLUR

The atmosphere of the blur slowly COALESCES into Shadow as he slowly opens his eyes.

*SHADOW (V.O.)*

*I taste harsh, chemical fumes. The  
plates of my skull feel like they're re-  
attached with roofing nails.*

PULL BACK TO REVEAL: Shadow flanked by TWO BRAWNY SHOULDERS DRESSED IN WHITE. The rest of their BRAWNY BODIES disappear into the thick darkness around Shadow, only their shoulders in view. (NOTE: The shoulders VIBRATE ever so slightly from the corners of the FRAME.)

CAMERA CONTINUES TO PULL BACK TO REVEAL we are --

INT. STRETCH LIMOUSINE. NIGHT.

Shadow sits at one end of the car while CAMERA CONTINUES PULLING BACK abnormally far to REVEAL his host sitting at the opposite end of the limousine: THE TECHNICAL BOY. A young punk with an entitled attitude in clothes he is sure look good on him but don't. A Silicon Valley entrepreneur trying his best to act the cool he's seen on TV.

TECHNICAL BOY

Hello, Shadow. Don't fuck with me.

SHADOW

Okay. I won't. Can you drop me off at the Motel America by the interstate?

TECHNICAL BOY

Hit him.

There's a VIBRATION out of the corner of Shadow's eye and *WHOMP!* A PUNCH is delivered to Shadow's solar plexus.

TECHNICAL BOY (CONT'D)

I said don't fuck with me. That was fucking with me. Keep your answers short and to the point or I'll fucking kill you. Or maybe I won't kill you. Maybe I'll have the Droogs break every bone in your fucking body. So don't fuck with me.

SHADOW

Got it.

TECHNICAL BOY

You're working for Wednesday.

SHADOW

Yes.

The Technical Boy opens his jacket and takes out an a E-CIG VAPORIZER from inside his pocket. Offers it to Shadow.

TECHNICAL BOY

Smoke?

SHADOW

No, thank you.

The Technical Boy inhales deeply, holds his breath and then blows a series of THICK SMOKE RINGS. CAMERA FOLLOWS the FAT OILY SMOKE RINGS as they drift the strange length of the limousine until they break like waves over Shadow's face. Forcing their way into his lungs. He offers a small cough.

SHADOW

It's not tobacco and it's not weed.  
Smells like an appliance fire.

TECHNICAL BOY

Synthetic toad skins.

Another drag and he French inhales, then exhales the meaty smoke in two distinct chutes unfurling out of each nostril.

*SHADOW (V.O.)*

*He practices smoke tricks in front of a mirror for moments like these.*

TECHNICAL BOY

What the fuck is Wednesday after? What's he doing here. He must have a plan. What's the game plan, man?

SHADOW

I started working for Mister Wednesday this morning. I'm an errand boy.

Technical Boy takes another long draw on his vape, he exhales a long, writhing cloud of smoke in which -- IN SHADOW'S P.O.V. -- his two eyes glinted, copper-colored, like the eyes of a toad. The smoke must be hitting him. Shadow shakes his head clear. Trying to shake the effects.

TECHNICAL BOY

Wednesday is history. Forgotten. And old. He should just let it happen. We are the future and we don't give a fuck about him or anyone like him anymore. They've been consigned to the dumpster.

(then)

We have reprogrammed reality. Language is a virus. Religion is an operating system. Prayers are just so much fucking spam.

SHADOW

You say that like I know what you're talking about.

TECHNICAL BOY

It's all about the dominant fucking paradigm, Shadow. Nothing else is important. And hey, sorry to hear about your wife. Tough break.

SHADOW

Thanks.

TECHNICAL BOY

I'll ask you again: What is Wednesday up to?

SHADOW

We barely exchanged a dozen words. You can let me out here. I'll walk the rest of the way.

TECHNICAL BOY

You're saying you don't know.

SHADOW

I'm saying I don't know.

TECHNICAL BOY

Would you tell me if you did?

SHADOW

Probably not. As you say, I'm working for Mister Wednesday.

TECHNICAL BOY

Then why the fuck am I sitting here wasting my time talking to you?

SHADOW

I was curious myself how long you would go on sucking your own dick.

Technical Boy takes another drag, then:

TECHNICAL BOY

Kill him.

A moment, then Shadow and those flanking him MOVE AT ONCE.

SHADOW'S DISTORTED P.O.V.

Through the smoky haze of the limousine cabin, we get GLIMPSES of his foes and they look EXACTLY like the DROOGS from "Clockwork Orange." White pants, shirts, suspenders and cod pieces, topped off with matching black bowler hats.

A SURREAL BRAWL

Knees, elbows and fists are swung. Shadow THROWS AN ELBOW and it connects with a DROOG'S FACE as if it were comprised of a MAGNETIC FIELD -- not entirely solid, bucked by the hit. There is a very subtle, heightened brightness to the DROOGS' appearance -- almost pixilated, but not quite -- something else altogether. As if they were shot at 48 frames per second while the rest of reality languished at 24.

Shadow proves as slippery in the fight as the DROOGS, but finds it difficult to land a good hit as the DROOGS are strangely fluid in movements, as in not physically solid.

TECHNICAL BOY

We're not just going to kill you, Shadow.  
We're going to delete you. One click and  
you're overwritten. Undelete is not an  
option.

Shadow and the DROOGS tumble down the length of the abnormally long stretch limousine toward the Technical Boy. Just as Shadow rolls under the MOON ROOF, the Technical Boy pushes a button on the console and the MOON ROOF POPS OFF as if torn free from a violent decompression.

The cabin quickly clears of SMOKE and SHADOW IS SUCKED OUT THE MOON ROOF as if sucked out of an airplane.

CAMERA FOLLOWS SHADOW -- SOARING and TWISTING through the night, finally landing in a heap in a gutter. We are --

EXT. ROAD. NIGHT.

Before Shadow can react, the DROOGS are on him, ONE after ANOTHER after ANOTHER after ANOTHER. Dog Pile on Shadow. He is pulled under a wave of suspenders, cod pieces and bowler hats as they pin him to the muddy earth.

ON SHADOW

Lost beneath the wave.

ON A NOOSE

Placed around his neck -- and he is suddenly, viciously YANKED. STAY ON SHADOW -- pulled up a steep embankment by the neck. His eyes BULGE as they pinball around his sockets.

EXT. FIELD. NIGHT.

DOZENS OF DROOGS race around Shadow as he's dragged toward a TREE reminiscent of The Great Tree of his nightmare. He digs at the noose around his neck with one hand while the other lessens the tension of the choke by pulling up on the rope.

SHADOW SLAMS HARD against the trunk of his hanging tree, losing his grip on noose and rope as

HE IS HOISTED INTO THE AIR

Shadow dangles. Droogs CACKLE. As his consciousness begin drift... The CORRIDOR OF CONSCIOUSNESS NARROWS, dark clouds expand like fireworks in his vision transforming the world around him into...

EXT. THE BONE ORCHARD. TWILIGHT.

*Amongst the swaying, rattling, skeletal white trees... Shadow hangs from a tree branch. The strange fruit of the orchard.*

*He dangles alone in the breeze... past fight... legs turning gently... life leaving his bulging, squeezed eyes. Then --*

AN INHUMAN BELLOW -- AND -- SNAP! THE ROPE IS CUT.

*Shadow falls -- landing in the STARK REALITY of --*

EXT. FIELD. NIGHT.

He HITS the ground hard. Gasping. Able to take in what's happening around him in streaming eyed-GLIMPSES and SOUNDS:

A WET CRUNCH. AN INHUMAN SCREAM.

A VIOLENT BATTLE is raging around him. Shadow tries to focus, lift his head, but oxygen is his number one priority. Out of the corner of his delirious perspective, the Droogs who lynched him are fighting SOMETHING MONSTROUS and UNSEEN.

A SPRAY OF SOMETHING HOT

Hits Shadow in the face. Then -- SILENCE.

Shadow pulls the NOOSE off his neck. His vision clears. He looks around him. His attackers are GONE. Shadow wipes his face, sees he was sprayed with BLOOD.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL: The Droogs are not gone. THEIR BODIES HAVE BEEN TORN TO PIECES. Heads far from necks. A torso impaled on the tree. Not a battle, A SLAUGHTER.

OFF Shadow under his hanging tree... SURROUNDED BY DROOG CORPSES...

SMASH TO:

THE STOCK BOARD.

CLOSE IN ON ONE STOCK: SHDW. SELLING AT 2:18

A SUDDEN SNAP. THE FLAPS DROP LIKE THUNDER.

SHDW IS AT 4:36. DOUBLED IN VALUE.

TO BLACK.

END OF EPISODE