

NEGATIVE

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INT. PENNHURST - NIGHT

An asylum, abandoned for decades. Inside, rooms and hallways are littered with dust and graffiti from teenagers past. There's a stillness to everything, but in dark corners, maybe movement? Or our imagination?

INT. PENNHURST - HALLWAY 3 - NIGHT

In this corridor, paint peels away from the walls as we move through the space.

INT. ROOM 24B - NIGHT

On the floor lies a FOLDER, and scattered about are PRINTED PHOTOGRAPHS. As we glide over we get glimpses of the photographs. One is overexposed. Another slightly clearer, still blurry. Another, a desert landscape.

Closer. Mountains.

An audible CLICK.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. AFGHANISTAN - DAY

Mountains off in the distance. CHRISTOPHER DAVIS, 30's, less rugged than his surroundings, takes a photo. There's a light in his eyes, an inspiration. Another photo before a VOICE calls to him.

BRIGGS (O.S.)

Chris!

He turns left.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. PHOTO STUDIO - DAY

He finishes the turn, but this seems a different Chris. He's bearded, tired, the light in his eyes long gone. In front of him A LARGE CYC WALL is lit. There's a LUXURY CAR and a MODEL waiting to be photographed as well as several CREW MEMBERS. He looks off screen to see who called him, his ASSISTANT.

ASSISTANT (O.S.)

Phone for you.

CHRISTOPHER

Take a message.

ASSISTANT (O.S.)  
It's your sister.

This changes something for Christopher, a concerned crease developing in his brow.

BRIGGS #1 (V.O.)  
Chris Davis!

Chris turns back.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. AFGHANISTAN - DAY

Back in Afghanistan. Chris finishes the turn to look to the Marine. BRIGGS, military man carved from wood.

BRIGGS #1  
5 minutes.

Christopher nods to the Marine and takes in his surroundings. Something catches his eye, another subject for his photography. As he raises the camera, a new voice.

DR. REED (V.O.)  
Would it be correct to suggest you were already in an emotional state after what happened during your tour?

The camera shutter SNAPS.

INT. DR. REED'S OFFICE - DAY

Christopher, scruffy, sits on a couch. His eyes focused far from DR. REED, 50's. The doctor sits across from him and looks over his glasses while Christopher fumbles with something in his hands, a BROKEN NECKLACE.

AND A PEEK INTO HIS MIND, THE PAST, A WOMAN (30's) WEARING THE NECKLACE SMILES TO HIM, LAUGHS.

DR. REED  
Are you with me, Chris?

Christopher's eyes barely meet Reed's, he offers a distant nod. Reed continues.

DR. REED (CONT'D)  
When you got the call...

BACK TO:

INT. PHOTO STUDIO - DAY

Christopher, his brow creased with worry, hesitates.

ASSISTANT (O.S.)  
Should I tell her to call back?

Christopher shakes his head. He turns back to the studio.

CHRISTOPHER  
5 minutes, everyone.

He heads to his office.

INT. PHOTO STUDIO - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Christopher closes the door behind him. He makes for his desk where a phone waits. Christopher's hands tremble, he hesitates before picking it up.

From the other end we hear a *shaky breathing and finally a voice.*

ELLE (O.S.)  
Chris?

ELLE DAVIS, mid-20's, his sister.

CHRISTOPHER  
Elle.

ELLE (O.S.)  
They... I got a call from the police. Someone found a body in the river. Some kid out fishing or something and... they think it might be dad.

Something in Chris is alerted.

CHRISTOPHER  
They're sure?

ELLE (O.S.)  
It's... um... it's hard to say, they say, cause of how long he's been there, but... they want me to come in and see it.

She's trailed off. Her voice is thick with tears.

ELLE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
I don't think I can do it on my own.

*Suddenly, something catches Christopher's eye. Something in the corner of his office. He stares at it, wide-eyed. We see nothing. He's trembling.*

ELLE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Please come back home? Chris?

A new voice.

DISTEPHANO #2 (V.O.)  
Chris?

SMASH TO:

INT. HUMVEE - AFGHANISTAN - DAY

Christopher looks up from his camera. In front of him are 5 MARINES. DISTEPHANO, BRIGGS, MILLER, HICKS, and CLARKE.

DISTEPHANO  
Chris?

Distephano pulls a folded paper out of his pocket.

DISTEPHANO (CONT'D)  
I wanted to wait until you were,  
y'know, more comfortable before  
asking anything like this, but, uh,  
don't suppose you could give a  
quick autograph?

Distephano holds out the paper, a BLACK & WHITE PHOTOGRAPH. The other Marines roll their eyes.

BRIGGS  
C'mon, man...

DISTEPHANO  
My mom loves that photo, when am I  
gonna get this chance again?

Back to Christopher.

DISTEPHANO (CONT'D)  
I didn't wanna make it weird.

Christopher gestures to the photo.

CHRISTOPHER  
It's fine.

Reserved, but polite. He takes the photograph.

*It's an AFRICAN GIRL, her limbs seem too skinny to carry her. She struggles to lift a bucket up to a well, a look of morbid defeat in her eyes. Eyes like glass, empty and massive.*

Christopher takes it in for a second before finding a marker.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Your mom's name?

DISTEPHANO

Cassandra.

Christopher writes the name, making sure not to cover the subject of the photo. He signs it: "Christopher Davis." He gives it back to the Marine.

DISTEPHANO (CONT'D)

Thanks, man.

(overjoyed)

Damn, damn!

He looks at the thing proudly.

CLARKE

Hey I don't got a photo, how's about signing my ass for me? Distephano's mom would love that too.

They laugh, Christopher welcomes the joke, though it's short lived when he catches a cold look from Miller, set apart from the others by his harsh frown.

HICKS

You here to get another shot like that? Loads of tragic kids out here.

CHRISTOPHER

Not looking for anything in particular.

DISTEPHANO

Damn, though, man! I remember when this came out, my mom emailed it to just about everyone in the family. Y'know, like one of those chain emails with comic sans and shit? Sayin 'forward this to 10 people yadda yadda' or whatever. Hey you know whatever happened to her?

He gestures to the girl in the photo. Christopher looks a little uneasy.

CHRISTOPHER  
We left the village that day.

MILLER  
(icy)  
You help her, then?

All eyes on Miller.

MILLER (CONT'D)  
With the bucket. You help her?

It's a loaded question, an accusing one. Christopher gives him a cold look back. He repeats.

CHRISTOPHER  
We left the village that day.

Miller scoffs.

MILLER  
So you're famous and she starves to death.

CHRISTOPHER  
My job's to document.

MILLER  
And that excludes you from basic empathy.

Christopher's done with the conversation.

BRIGGS  
(diffusing)  
Dude, there are people in charge of shit like that, just like us, each person has a respons--

MILLER  
(to Christopher)  
You think any of us are getting famous? You think when we get home we're gonna get stopped on the street for an autograph? Best case scenario is we get a video on youtube showing how much our dogs missed us when we come home.

CLARKE  
Those videos are dope.

MILLER

Meanwhile you're just aching for one of us to take a bullet so you can get a few more clicks.

Any air that's left is sucked out of the room.

HICKS

C'mon, Miller, chill.

MILLER

So you gonna keep hanging back until we find someone with a suicide vest--?

CHRISTOPHER

(interrupts)

I took that photo almost a decade ago. Since then it's been named one of the Top Most Influential Photos of All Time by virtually every piece of literature that matters and developmental aid to impoverished countries has increased by 10.5 billion in the US alone, so don't misinterpret my lack of a gun as my lack of a purpose.

MILLER

Oh please, I've seen you, camera always ready the moment we talk to anyone, I bet you're aching to get a shot of one of us with our guts hanging out.

*Christopher whips up his camera and takes a photo.*

CHRISTOPHER

There, 'Last Known Photo,' better?

Miller LUNGES at Christopher, but the others hold him back.

HICKS

Enough! Miller, fucking cool it, dude.

It takes a moment, but soon everyone is seated again. There's a horrible silence in the humvee.

DISTEPHANO

Well I don't care what anyone else thinks, I'm glad you're here, bro.

He looks at Christopher and holds up the signed photo.

DISTEPHANO (CONT'D)

I promise you won't see this on  
 ebay. This shit is getting framed  
 and going right on the--

**BOOM!** A BRIGHT FLASH OF WHITE AND A DEAFENING ROAR fills the humvee.

WE SIT IN THIS SILENCE FOR A HARD BEAT. WHITE NOISE SLOWLY FADES IN.

EXT. AFGHANISTAN DESERT - DAY

Christopher comes to. He's lying on the sand, the world around him blindingly white, a ringing in his ears, shrapnel falling around him. BEHIND HIM IS THE HUMVEE, COMPLETELY SPLIT IN TWO, BILLOWING SMOKE.

Christopher blinks hard, realizes he's bleeding heavily from his forehead. Something catches his eye, something falling to the ground, drifting. His signed photo. Burnt. It dances through the air, spins, glides against the sand, and as he watches it pass...

... HE SEES THE WOMAN FROM HIS EARLIER FLASHBACK. SHE LIES ON THE DESERT SAND IN A HOSPITAL BED, MOUTH OPEN, YELLOW SKIN WRAPPED TIGHTLY AROUND THE BONES OF HER FACE...

... Christopher blinks as blood drips on his eyes...

... the woman is gone, but in her place lies Miller. The Marine is missing a leg, lifeless, bleeding into the sand. Christopher watches him in horror.

DR. REED (V.O.)

And you were the only survivor?

Christopher watches Miller bleed out.

CHRISTOPHER (V.O.)

Yes.

ELLE (V.O.)

Chris?

CUT TO:

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S STUDIO - OFFICE - NIGHT

Chris stares in horror at the corner of his office. The phone to his ear.

ELLE (O.S.)  
Are you there?

His shaking hand sets the phone down and opens the drawer to his desk.

CUT TO:

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Christopher sits on his bed, a rough stubble across his face and a bandage above his left eye, just back from Afghanistan. There's a knock at the door.

LATER

Christopher opens a suitcase and takes out his belongings. He pauses, frantically searches, there's something missing.

LATER

Christopher is on the phone.

CHRISTOPHER  
My camera. There was a camera. Yes,  
in its own bag. No, I'm sure.

LATER

Christopher is still on the phone. He listens to the voice on the other end. Bad news. *He HURLS the phone across the room.* He sits back down on his bed, breathlessly angry.

DR. REED (V.O.)  
And how long after that did you buy  
the gun?

CUT TO:

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S STUDIO - OFFICE - NIGHT

Christopher opens the desk drawer and pulls something out.

CHRISTOPHER (V.O.)  
That month.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S STUDIO - NIGHT

Christopher walks out, half a ghost. Though we don't see what he's doing, *we see everyone's reactions. One by one they notice him and PANIC.*

CUT TO:

INT. DR. REED'S OFFICE - DAY

Reed watches Christopher over his glasses.

DR. REED

What were you going to do with it?

Christopher shakes his head.

CHRISTOPHER

I don't know. I don't... after I heard Elle, after the call...

A MEMORY: A YOUNG GIRL LIES ON THE GROUND AND GASPS FOR BREATH, EYES BULGING. IT MIMICS THE LOOK OF THE WOMAN FROM THE HOSPITAL BED.

Christopher blinks hard, shaking the memory from him.

DR. REED

But now, what do you think you may have done?

Christopher thinks.

CHRISTOPHER

I took that photo almost a decade ago. "Girl with Bucket." Since then developmental aid to impoverished countries...

He trails off when he notices the corner of the office. We don't see what he sees. We can almost hear it. Burning. Cicadas. Crackling scorched flesh. Whatever it is, it's shaken him to his core. His practiced speech crumbles in his mouth.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

I... I've helped people. I have. I try not to get involved, not anymore. But there are people alive today who wouldn't be if that photo didn't exist. It was ten years ago and not a day goes by I haven't gotten an email, a letter, a phone call, telling me I should burn in hell for not helping that little girl. But it's not as simple as just stepping in and stopping it. You can't...you can't just do that without consequences.

He wrestles with something inside him, loses.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

I don't know what I was doing with  
that gun, Doctor, *but I've got a  
fucking idea.*

The words burn through the room.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S STUDIO - DAY

As everyone reacts, Christopher raises the gun to his head.

INT. PHILADELPHIA AIRPORT - DAY

A bustling airport terminal. Families reunite, lovers leap into each other's arms, and Christopher walks with his head down, still unshaven, worlds away from anyone else.

DR. REED (V.O.)

It's in my professional opinion,  
Mr. Davis, that you confront what  
you left behind, perhaps the  
closure on your father's  
disappearance will bring you to a  
better place. I'm recommending that  
you be put under the care of your  
sister for a minimum of 30 days, at  
which point we'll reconvene to  
discuss your progress.

EXT. PHILADELPHIA AIRPORT - DAY

As Christopher walks outside, a young woman hops out of a pickup truck.

This is Elle, a younger and fairer complexion than Christopher. She stares at him, the weight of his presence keeping her planted to the ground until it becomes too much. Without a word, she runs up and wraps him in a big hug.

EXT. PHILLY TURNPIKE - DAY

Elle's truck zooms along the turnpike, exiting the city and entering the suburbs.

INT. ELLE'S TRUCK - DAY

Christopher watches the scenery go by. Elle steals a few glances. They don't say a word. Christopher steals a glance back.

THE WOMAN FROM EARLIER IS NOW IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT, LOOKS STRIKINGLY SIMILAR TO ELLE. CARE FREE, SMILING. THE NECKLACE GLINTING IN THE SUN.

Back in reality, Elle catches him staring at her. She offers a polite smile. He turns back to watch the world whip by them.

EXT. SOUDERTON, PA - DAY

Elle's truck pulls onto a road and comes to a stop in front of a house. Their family home. Christopher looks out...

... WATCHES AS HIS CHILDHOOD SELF (10) TO THE PORCH WITH ELLE (5) PAST A DOUER POLICEMAN (40's). THE POLICEMAN GRUFFLY TAKES YOUNG CHRISTOPHER BY THE NECK AND LEADS HIM INSIDE.

A car drives by and we see the porch is empty.

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - DAY

Elle opens the door and sets down one of Christopher's bags as he makes his way to the house. He stops and stares at the interior a few feet from the door. Elle notices Christopher's hesitation.

WE SEE FROM CHRISTOPHER'S POV THAT THE HOUSE IS FILLED WITH MOURNERS, A FUNERAL.

Back in the present, Christopher stands at the entryway and takes in the sight of the house. Elle gives him an affectionate squeeze on the arm.

ELLE

Got your room ready.

She leaves him to the memory.

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - CHRISTOPHER'S ROOM - DAY

Christopher opens the door to his room, revealing a banner saying "Welcome home, Chris!" On a wall is a little collage put together of his work, including "Girl with Bucket." There's some of Christopher's old photography equipment out, including a film camera.

Christopher sets his bags down and unceremoniously takes down the banner.

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Christopher wanders from room to room. *From downstairs he hears a voice.* Elle, hushed, speaking to someone on the phone. He peeks down the stairs to watch her.

ELLE

(to phone)

Seems alright.

(MORE)

ELLE (CONT'D)

I don't know, he's not saying much.  
Yeah. Stop, no, I'm fine. We'll be  
fine.

Christopher turns away and back to his room, visibly guilty  
for eavesdropping.

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - CHRISTOPHER'S ROOM - LATER

Christopher unpacks as Elle walks into the room.

ELLE

Settling in okay?

Chris nods.

CHRISTOPHER

Fine.

ELLE

I didn't have much of your stuff  
left. I can't remember if we put it  
in storage somewhere or... Well  
anyway I hope this is good enough.

CHRISTOPHER

Thanks.

ELLE

Do you want a coffee or anything?  
I've been working at a cafe on  
weekends, can make a mean  
cappuccino nowadays.

CHRISTOPHER

I'm stepping out to rent a car.

ELLE

Oh. Y'know you can always borrow  
mom's truck.

CHRISTOPHER

You've already given plenty.

ELLE

Okay. Should I... uh... shouldn't I  
come with you?

The implication of the question stings him a little.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Sorry, I don't really know what the  
rules are.

CHRISTOPHER

I'll be fine. I could use the walk.

ELLE

Cool. Cool, yeah, for sure. Anyway, make yourself at home, yeah?

She turns to leave but hesitates at the door.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Hey also, y'know, I don't know how to do any of this, but... If you need to talk...

That was it, her speech goes nowhere.

It's a moment of levity, Christopher understands.

CHRISTOPHER

Thanks, Elle.

He means it. She leaves him to unpack.

EXT. SOUDERTON - DAY

Christopher makes his way through the town where he grew up. He passes by little mom-and-pop shops next to the occasional 7-Eleven and Wawa, Philly suburb staples. This is the type of town that has an equal number of businesses which have been there forever as those which seem to transition on a weekly basis. Far too many banks. Each PEDESTRIAN he passes steals a quick look at him. An out-of-towner, poorly dressed for the autumn.

EXT. CAR RENTAL - DAY

Christopher comes to the rental office.

INT. CAR RENTAL - DAY

Christopher waits at the front desk while the RENTAL MANAGER, 60's, eyes him up and down while he goes through his paperwork. Something catches the manager's eye, something from the paperwork.

RENTAL MANAGER

Christopher...Davis? Officer Davis' kid?

It's a question Christopher was clearly avoiding. He offers a tight-lipped nod.

CHRISTOPHER

Hmm.

RENTAL MANAGER

Well I'll be. You woulda not been about... jeez would you've still been a kid last time I saw ya?

CHRISTOPHER

About, yeah.

RENTAL MANAGER

You know me and your mom went a ways back, she was always good to me and my sister when she was still around, before she got mixed up with...

The Manager checks himself a moment, lowers his voice.

RENTAL MANAGER (CONT'D)

I'll tell you what, and I don't mind sayin' so, but your daddy got what he deserved, you ask me. Way I figure's drowning's too good for em.

CHRISTOPHER

You know he drowned?

RENTAL MANAGER

They been posting it all over the paper all week, that's why you're here, right?

Christopher considers the question.

EXT. SOUDERTON - EVENING

Christopher drives back to the house in a SEDAN.

EXT. ELLE'S HOUSE - EVENING

He parks outside the house, turns off the ignition, and eyes the house warily, toying with the broken necklace.

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Christopher walks into the house.

CHRISTOPHER

Hello?

He waits for a response, gets none.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Elle, you home?

Nothing.

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - ELLE'S ROOM - EVENING

Christopher opens the door, looks inside. Elle's room is well decorated; photo collages, the occasional string light. He walks up to a wall of photos, landing on an OLD PHOTO of the two of them when they were kids. They sit on a woman's lap, THEIR MOM.

THE MEMORY OF THEIR MOM DRIVING THE TRUCK, WEARING THE NECKLACE WE'VE SEEN BEFORE. AN 18-YEAR-OLD CHRISTOPHER SITS IN THE PASSENGER SEAT, A 13-YEAR-OLD ELLE LAUGHS FROM THE BACK SEAT.

O.C. the sound of a door closing.

Christopher, in Elle's room, breaks from the memory.

ELLE (O.S.)

Chris?

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

The two unpack some groceries. It feels like there's been a long silence.

ELLE

Hey, so, I was thinking it'd be nice to go out and see the old crew tonight.

CHRISTOPHER

Who's that?

ELLE

Oh y'know, like, Mike and Andy and Kate and all them. Joan, too, though I guess you wouldn't know Joan. She's nice, she's new, really pretty. I don't know if you're, like, dating anybody or anything. Are you dating anybody?

CHRISTOPHER

No.

ELLE

Oh. Oh well anyway I just thought it'd be nice for you to go out and see some old friends.

CHRISTOPHER

I'm pretty tired.

The conversation isn't going as planned.

ELLE

Cool. Yeah, that's cool.

(reconsiders)

It's just, sorry, your doctor sent me some stuff I was reading about what you're going through and--

CHRISTOPHER

(interrupts)

Oh for fuck's sake would you stop treating me like a *fucking bomb*.

His words pierce the room. They catch Elle off guard. He takes a moment to collect himself.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Sorry.

ELLE

Me too. Honestly, if it seems like I'm trying too hard or not enough or whatever it's cool to say so.

Christopher nods, there's still an awkwardness between them. Elle closes the gap with a forced hug.

CHRISTOPHER

Elle...

ELLE

Shut up. Accept it.

He gives in and hugs her back.

ELLE (CONT'D)

We'll have a code word if I'm trying too hard or being weird.

CHRISTOPHER

I don't think--

ELLE

"Pumpernickel."

Christopher considers the word, visibly grateful for the humor.

ELLE (CONT'D)

The safe word is "pumpernickel."

CHRISTOPHER

Okay.

The siblings enjoy the moment.

EXT. PUB - NIGHT

A crowded night at the local pub, easy when it's the only pub for miles.

INT. PUB - NIGHT

Christopher and Elle make their way inside the lively place. Inside is filled with Eagles and Phillies memorabilia, loads of 20-SOMETHINGS who never left their hometown. Elle is greeted almost immediately with an instant and joyful recognition by everyone. Hugs, kisses; she's the best friend of everyone she encounters. Christopher, on the other hand, seems almost invisible in comparison. Elle makes her way through the crowd with Christopher following behind, catching the occasional half-familiar glance from the patrons.

At a table towards the back of the bar sits MIKE BERGER, early 30's, and JOAN CALLAHAN, late 20's. At first glance it may be easy to pin both. Mike is soft spoken, cool, his glasses paint the picture of someone who actually spends real money on his glasses. Joan stands out in all black, her clothing higher-end than those around her. Joan catches the sight of them first.

JOAN

Heeeyyy!

ELLE

Hiii!

They hug enthusiastically while Christopher floats behind. He catches eyes from Mike. There's a familiarity, a careful warmth.

MIKE

Welcome back.

They shake hands.

CHRISTOPHER

Mike.

ELLE

Joan, this is my big brother,  
Chris.

JOAN

It is, hey!

She hugs a little over eagerly. When she lets him go she composes herself.

JOAN (CONT'D)  
I know your work.

CHRISTOPHER  
Oh?

JOAN  
Yeah, I've actually been to one of  
your shows ages ago. It was great.

CHRISTOPHER  
Thanks, nice of you to say.

As they're talking a SERVER approaches.

SERVER  
Hey hun! Water for ya?

ELLE  
Please. Actually a coke would be  
great.

SERVER  
Sure. And you?

Christopher realizes she's talking to him.

CHRISTOPHER  
Oh. Same.

SERVER  
Great. You's good on your beers?

MIKE  
Great, thanks.

She leaves as Christopher and Elle get seated.

JOAN  
You're living in L.A., right?

CHRISTOPHER  
Yeah.

JOAN  
So you're just visiting?

MIKE  
Joan.

Joan remembers.

JOAN  
Ohhh. Shit, right, sorry.

She "zips" her mouth.

ELLE

It's fine, all good, really it's something we're gonna have to get used to talking about, not like everyone doesn't already know.

MIKE

Sucks you're dealing with that.

ELLE

It's just nice to have some closure.

JOAN

(to Christopher)  
What about you?

CHRISTOPHER

Closure's good, yeah.

JOAN

Do they know... like, how long it was--?

MIKE

Jesus, Joan.

ELLE

Ten years.

CHRISTOPHER

Twelve.

ELLE

Twelve. Wow.

JOAN

And you shot "Girl with Bucket" only like two years after that. Whould've known you'd leave and go do something like that?

MIKE

Hard to say since we didn't know he left.

It's a cold comment.

JOAN

Hm?

Mike's not answering.

CHRISTOPHER  
I left... quickly.

MIKE  
"Unannounced" is what you mean.

ELLE  
Mike? C'mon.

MIKE  
Natalie and I were worried sick,  
you know that?

ELLE  
Don't drag Natalie into this.

MIKE (CONT'D)  
Did you ever think about  
that?

ELLE (CONT'D)  
Chris needed his space. It's fine,  
everyone's cool. Yeah?

Everyone takes a second to let the air clear. Christopher leans to Elle and whispers.

CHRISTOPHER  
I forgot the code word.

ELLE  
"Pumpernickel."

CHRISTOPHER  
Right.

Elle takes a second before she realizes the implication. She lets him lead.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
(to Mike)  
I didn't know how to say goodbye.

MIKE  
Just sucked, is all.

They're given a breath when the server returns with the sodas. Elle gives a smile and raises her glass.

ELLE  
(over-eager)  
Well, the important thing is we're  
all together again and everything's  
great.

JOAN  
Cheers to that.

They all cheers. Elle turns to Christopher.

ELLE

And I just wanna say, cause I haven't had a chance to say it to your stupid face, that I'm just so stinkin' proud of you. It's great something like you came out of a town like this.

She clinks his glass. Christopher's supposed to make a toast.

CHRISTOPHER

Oh shit, um...

He clears his throat.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Well, of course it's great to see so many old faces, and some new, and, um, I'm still getting used to seeing you as a grown-up, Elle. You too, Mike. And, well I feel bad I don't really know what you're doing here these days...

JOAN

Wait, does he not know?

MIKE

Shhh.

Mike's serious.

JOAN

What? He's not a cop. Chris, you an undercover cop or something?

CHRISTOPHER

Sorry?

ELLE

We have a... not entirely legal pastime.

MIKE

Elle, seriously.

ELLE

Oh c'mon, it's fine.

CHRISTOPHER

What's fine?

JOAN  
They're thieves.

MIKE  
We're not thieves, we're Freelance  
Local Historians.

Joan bursts into "are you kidding me?" laughter.

JOAN  
"Freelance Local Historians,"  
what?? You steal shit from  
abandoned buildings.

CHRISTOPHER  
Sorry, what's happening?

Elle gets a wry look.

ELLE  
Well I was gonna wait until you  
were more settled, but, since the  
cat's out of the bag...  
(to Joan and Mike)  
... tonight? Maybe?

JOAN  
Oh I wouldn't miss this for the  
world.

Elle gives Mike a look. He rolls his eyes, uncomfortable.

ELLE  
It's fine, Mike.

CHRISTOPHER  
What's fine, Mike?

Elle side-eyes Christopher.

ELLE  
You wanna come on an adventure?

Before he can answer, Christopher's phone *rings*.

CHRISTOPHER  
Sorry.

He looks at it. "Tyrone"

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
I gotta take this. Just a sec.

Christopher hops out of his seat and makes his way through the crowd.

EXT. PUB - NIGHT

Outside, Christopher creates some distance between him and a few SMOKERS.

CHRISTOPHER  
(to his phone)  
Hey, Ty, sorry.

Christopher is speaking with TYRONE ANDERSON, his agent.

TYRONE  
(from Christopher's phone)  
No problem, man. How you settling in?

CHRISTOPHER  
Not bad. It's cold, hopefully not something I have to get used to.

There's a pause, too long.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
What's up?

TYRONE  
It's, uh, it's not good news, man. Word got out about the incident at the studio.

CHRISTOPHER  
Fucking kidding.

A little too loud, he notices the smokers are looking at him. He walks further away.

TYRONE  
It's not out on social media or the news or anything, with the NDA from the shoot we won't be seeing it printed anywhere, but I got friends around town saying they heard shit happened. And if they know then the agencies know.

CHRISTOPHER  
So, what, I'm a liability?

TYRONE  
More like blacklisted.

It hits Christopher hard.

TYRONE (CONT'D)

Chris?

CHRISTOPHER

Well we gotta turn it around. I'll do an event, a fundraiser or something. "Girl with Bucket" is turning 10, we can do an anniversary gala and--

TYRONE

Uh-uh. Chris, you gotta lay low. Last thing you need is more attention. Sure, a fundraiser isn't bad and lord knows you could use the good publicity, but right now you gotta keep to yourself. Have a quiet 30 days, I'll see what I can do.

Christopher is just about in shock.

INT. PUB - NIGHT

As Mike, Joan, and Elle chat, Christopher returns and grabs his coat.

CHRISTOPHER

I can't go out. Was good seeing everyone.

ELLE

You alright?

But he's already gone.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Chris!

He's out the door.

EXT. PUB - NIGHT

Christopher makes his way to his car, climbs inside, slams the door shut, and *screams his fucking head off*.

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - CHRISTOPHER'S ROOM - NIGHT

Later on, Christopher finishes unpacking his things. He lies down on his bed and takes a deep sigh.

From downstairs. *Thump*.

Christopher opens his eyes. Listens. Something stirs again.

CHRISTOPHER

Elle?

Nothing. He listens again, hears something move, a floorboard creaks. He gets up.

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Christopher looks down the stairs from the hallway.

CHRISTOPHER

Elle, you home?

He waits, gets no response.

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

He turns a corner and freezes.

*Someone is sitting in the living room chair. A DEAD MAN, bloated, rotted, dripping wet, nude.* We aren't shown much, but we see his hand gripping the arm rest. Nails black. Water everywhere. Christopher looks on in horror.

O.S., a phone rings.

CUT TO:

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S CAR - NIGHT

Outside Elle's house, Christopher sits in his car with his phone to his ear. He waits and stares at the house, white as a sheet.

CHRISTOPHER

(to phone)

Hey, Elle. Is that invitation still open?

From his POV, we can see a silhouette of the Rotted Man sitting in the living room. It turns to look at him.

EXT. BACK ROAD - NIGHT

Christopher drives through a near pitch-black night.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S CAR - NIGHT

Christopher peers through the night. Something may be ahead.

He notices Elle's truck pulled over on the side of the road. Elle is outside waiting, she waves him down and runs up to his window.

ELLE  
Don't park here, follow me.

CHRISTOPHER  
Sure.

She gives him a look.

ELLE  
Things okay?

He nods. She offers his hand a squeeze.

She drives off and he follows her.

EXT. SECRET ROAD - NIGHT

Into a secluded and covered path in the woods by the Asylum. Christopher steps out with a CAMERA BAG and lets his eyes get used to the dark. In the distance, like a dark behemoth, stands PENNHURST ASYLUM, abandoned since the 50's. Elle gives him a look, eyebrow raised. "Whadya think?"

EXT. FENCE OUTSIDE PENNHURST - NIGHT

Elle, Christopher, and Joan wait outside the fence, low to the ground.

ELLE  
They don't do tours at Pennhurst so there's no cameras or guards or whatever, but that doesn't mean the cops don't do the occasional drive-by, hence the undercover park job. If you see a car or someone with a flashlight, you just give the signal and we'll all get outta there.

CHRISTOPHER  
What's the signal?

ELLE  
You yell "cops."

JOAN  
It's a complicated system.

CHRISTOPHER  
Clearly.

Mike comes running low to the ground from Pennhurst, he approaches the others.

MIKE

All clear. Everyone ready?

ELLE

Let's do this.

MIKE

Chris knows the signal?

CHRISTOPHER

I yell "cops."

JOAN

Fast learner.

Mike pulls the gate up, allowing them to sneak under.

MIKE

Alright, go. Stay down.

They slip under one-by-one and run to the asylum.

INT. PENNHURST - HALLWAY 1 - NIGHT

The group climbs in through an open window and orients themselves to the space. Inside the asylum is full of shadows, dark cavernous hallways stretch out before them. One by one the group turns on flashlights, Mike hands one to Christopher.

ELLE

Alright, we're gonna get to work. Joan, Mike, why don't you head down to the lab and find the globe and the text books, you remember where they were?

JOAN

Sure.

ELLE

Cool, and I'll head out to find the patient photos and the nurse's log.

MIKE

Sounds good.

Mike turns, Elle notices something about him, almost ignores it...

ELLE  
Meet back here in an hour,  
everybody--

She completes the double-take.

ELLE (CONT'D)  
Fuck's sake, Mike, you did not  
bring that with you.

MIKE  
What?

Joan notices too.

JOAN  
Mike you didn't...

And finally Christopher notices. Tucked in the back of Mike's waistband is a PISTOL. They all stare at him.

MIKE  
Oh don't look at me like that, it's  
just in case.

ELLE  
Just in case what, one of us scares  
you and you accidentally shoot us?

MIKE  
No, in case we run into anyone  
dangerous. You know we're not the  
only ones who come here.

ELLE  
Seriously leave it at home next  
time. If I see that in your hand  
you're gonna have some shit to deal  
with.

MIKE  
Sorry, jeez.

Elle gestures to Christopher to come with her, they separate from Joan and Mike. Joan gives Mike a look.

JOAN  
Really?

MIKE  
What? You're gonna thank me when  
some dude on PCP tries to eat your  
face.

JOAN

You're not allowed to watch the news anymore.

They head off down another hallway.

INT. PENNHURST - HALLWAY 2 - NIGHT

Christopher peers through the asylum, flashlight pointing to rotten walls and holes in the floor. Elle is visibly frustrated. She shakes it off.

ELLE

Ugh. Fucking Mike. He got that thing last month and it's been weird ever since.

CHRISTOPHER

Did something happen?

ELLE

No. Well yeah, he got mugged, but it wasn't a big deal. You know how he can be... Mike.

CHRISTOPHER

Definitely knows how to hold a grudge.

ELLE

Ignore him, sometimes you just have to accept some resentment. It's his problem now. Besides, we gotta focus on the task at hand.

CHRISTOPHER

Right. And... what is that, exactly?

ELLE

Treasure hunting. Couple years back we stopped in here to just mess around. Smoke pot, whatever. We took a few souvenirs that ended up being worth something. Places like this, there's a lot of history, lots of people who don't know a thing about family members who were admitted here; if they died here, if they escaped, what they were admitted for. Anyway, we get commissioned now and then to find information.

They come to a T-intersection, Elle looks at a map.

ELLE (CONT'D)  
Hmmm, I think we're this way.

CHRISTOPHER  
It'd be nice to explore on my own a bit.

ELLE  
Don't you--?

Elle catches herself, overprotective.

ELLE (CONT'D)  
"Pumpernickel." Cool, yeah, meet back where we came in, yeah? Shout if you get lost.

CHRISTOPHER  
Will do.

Christopher goes off in the opposite direction.

INT. PENNHURST - LECTURE ROOM - NIGHT

Christopher enters a room filled with desks and chairs, papers are scattered about as moonlight streams through the windows. He pulls his film camera out from his bag, sets it up on a desk, and takes a long exposure.

INT. PENNHURST - HALLWAY 3 - NIGHT

Another photogenic hallway. Christopher sets up his camera.

INT. PENNHURST - NURSE'S STATION - NIGHT

Some sort of lounge. Couches, tables, a shelf full of documents. Christopher sets down his bag and inspects the shelf, pulls a FOLDER at random.

He sifts through PATIENT RECORDS, notices illnesses, diagnoses, names. Hysteria, Madness, Manic Depression. Dates of admittance, release, the word ESCAPED. MISSING. He focuses on the word. MISSING.

Off in the distance...

CLATTER. The sound causes Christopher to jump and drop the folder. He listens, *maybe hears the sound of footsteps.*

CHRISTOPHER  
Elle?

He listens for a response, gets only the sound of shuffling. It's coming from somewhere down the hallway in front of him.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Mike? Joan?

He walks toward the sound and turns a corner.

INT. PENNHURST - ROOM 24B HALLWAY - NIGHT

He comes around the corner and sees something lying on the ground, a PHOTOGRAPH. He approaches it, it's overexposed. He notices more are lying in the room next to him, Room 24B. He stumbles for a moment as a floorboard creaks and almost snaps!

A weak spot on the floor outside the room. He reorients himself, carefully steps over the rotted wood.

INT. PENNHURST - ROOM 24B - NIGHT

Inside he finds printed photos scattered on the ground. There's a folder with them, a familiar image sticks out from it. He picks it up, hands shaking, looks at the first photo.

"Girl with Bucket."

The hair stands up on the back of his neck. He looks at the second photo and drops the folder. The photos spill on the ground. He stares at one of them, body shivering. We see the photo.

It's of the Marines.

*The photos are from his lost camera.*

INT. PUB - NIGHT

Back at the bar, the friends share a laugh and chat happily while going over their findings. Christopher is there, but his mind is far away. He feigns interest in whatever they are talking about, but he glances around suspiciously.

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - CHRISTOPHER'S ROOM - NIGHT

Christopher sits up in his bed. Staring at the photo.

A MEMORY, THE DEAD MARINES SCATTERED AROUND CHRISTOPHER IN AFGHANISTAN.

THE YOUNG GIRL, TEENAGE ELLE, GASPING FOR BREATH.

Christopher stares at the photo. He's unaware that in the corner of his room...

... in the shadows...

... *is Miller, the marine. Bloodied. His leg missing.*

Christopher hears a floorboard creak from where Miller watches him.

He lowers the photo and looks...

... at the empty room.

Christopher stares at that corner.

ELLE (V.O.)

Chris?

CHRISTOPHER'S MOTHER DRIVING THE TRUCK.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. ELLE'S TRUCK - MORGUE PARKING LOT - DAY

Elle sits in the driver's seat looking at Christopher as he stares out the window. They're parked in a lot. We can see the building at the other end, MONTGOMERY COUNTY MORGUE.

ELLE

You ready?

Christopher almost answers, doesn't.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Me neither.

INT. PHILADELPHIA MORGUE - EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY

Christopher and Elle stand close together in front of a covered gurney. In the room is a MORTICIAN and a POLICE OFFICER. Christopher nods to the mortician, who gently pulls back the covering.

We're only shown the siblings' reactions. It's a sickening sight. Elle grips Christopher's hand. Christopher glances at the corner of the office and sees something horrible. *It's The Rotted Man, his Father, standing in the corner.* He glares back at Christopher with dead, hateful eyes.

ELLE (V.O.)

You're sure it's him?

INT. PHILADELPHIA MORGUE - HALLWAY - LATER

The siblings talk with the mortician and the officer.

MORTICIAN  
Dental records match.

CHRISTOPHER  
What do you think happened?

POLICE OFFICER  
It's difficult to say considering  
how long it's been and the body's  
state, but considering your  
father's...

He catches himself.

CHRISTOPHER  
His history.

The Officer nods.

POLICE OFFICER  
... and the trauma on the skull, I  
don't think it's a stretch to say  
he had too many and hit his head,  
probably didn't even know he was  
drowning.

The siblings listen to the grim news.

INT. ELLE'S TRUCK - DAY

Elle drives the two of them back home.

ELLE  
Is it fucked up to say that this is  
probably the first good news I've  
had in a while?

Christopher takes a moment.

CHRISTOPHER  
Drowning suits him.

The two ride in silence for a moment.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
Hey has anyone been asking about  
me? Anyone you don't know or  
anything like that?

ELLE  
No?

CHRISTOPHER

No? No one, like, calling the house  
or maybe anybody snooping around?

ELLE

Fuck, no. Not at all. Why?

CHRISTOPHER

Ah, just cause I'm trying to lay  
low. It's nothing, forget I asked.

Another moment.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

You all going back to Pennhurst  
anytime soon?

Elle gives him a look.

EXT. PENNHURST - NIGHT

Joan, Mike, Elle, and Christopher all climb in through the  
window.

INT. PENNHURST - HALLWAY 1 - NIGHT

They separate and Christopher goes off on his own.

INT. PENNHURST - HALLWAY 2 - NIGHT

Christopher slowly makes his way through the asylum, glancing  
behind him occasionally, checking if he's followed,  
flashlight on the floor, watching his steps.

INT. PENNHURST - ROOM 24B HALLWAY - NIGHT

He rounds a corner and stops short. In the middle of the  
hallway something lies on the ground, a little too center to  
be an accident. He picks it up, another photo, only black.

INT. PENNHURST - ROOM 24B - NIGHT

Christopher walks in. This time, several photos are nailed to  
a wall. He takes out the nail and looks through them. A  
landscape.

A MEMORY OF CHRISTOPHER SNAPPING A PHOTO IN AFGHANISTAN.

Christopher flips through the pages. Another landscape from  
Afghanistan. The photos of the Marines, all looking tough.  
The same photo, but all of the faces have been scratched out.

He flips to the next.

It takes a moment for Christopher to understand what he's seeing.

IT'S HIM.

In the Room 24B.

From behind. Looking at the folder from yesterday.

Christopher WHIRLS around, points his flashlight at the entrance. No one. Breathing rapidly, he collects the photos and stuffs them in his bag.

THUD. A sound down the hallway. Christopher freezes.

INT. PENNHURST - ROOM 24B HALLWAY - NIGHT

He peers out of the room, points his flashlight down each end of the hallway. Something catches his eye. Down the hallway, deep in the dark, *there's a SILHOUETTE*. Christopher squints to see better. Sure enough, it's a PERSON. Their eyes shine in the dark.

CHRISTOPHER

Who's there?

The person ducks down and disappears.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Hey!

He hurries down the hallway.

INT. PENNHURST - HALLWAY 4 - NIGHT

He turns the corner but doesn't see anyone. He picks up speed but slows as he comes to another intersection. He hears someone walking toward him from the left. He turns off his light and quiets himself. Someone's coming closer.

Closer.

Just as they reach Christopher--

--he GRABS them. There's a moment of confusion before he realizes *it's Mike*.

MIKE

Jesus Christ, dude!

Christopher lets him go.

CHRISTOPHER

'The fuck are you doing, huh?

MIKE

What are you talking about?

CHRISTOPHER

You trying to scare me, creeping around like that?

MIKE

Like what? I came here to find you, we were supposed to meet up 15 minutes ago.

CHRISTOPHER

That wasn't you back there?

MIKE

Back where? I've been with the others.

CHRISTOPHER

Well someone's back there!

MIKE

It's dark, dude, you're just freaking yourself out. Come on, the others are--

Mike does a double-take out a nearby window facing the back road.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Oh fuck.

CHRISTOPHER

What is it?

Christopher looks outside as well.

MIKE

Who's car is that?

Sure enough, behind their cars sits a GREY, BOXY SUV. They stare at it for a moment.

MIKE (CONT'D)

We're leaving.

Mike leads the way as Christopher follows hesitantly.

INT. PENNHURST - HALLWAY 5 - NIGHT

Mike and Christopher continue on their way. Christopher glances behind, when suddenly--

--*the silhouette*, passing by in the moonlight.

CHRISTOPHER

Look!

Mike turns.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Look there's someone out there.

Mike calls out to the darkness.

MIKE

Hey fuck off, I have a gun! We're leaving now, alright?

CHRISTOPHER

(whispers)

You brought the fucking gun?

MIKE

(whispers back)

No, Joan wouldn't let me.

Mike picks up speed.

MIKE (CONT'D)

C'mon man, it's probably just a squatter.

Christopher hurries with him, glancing back.

CHRISTOPHER

Fuck, he's still there.

MIKE

He's just trying to scare you.

CHRISTOPHER

Well it's fucking working.

They're running by now.

MIKE

Just stop looking, we're almost--

SNAP! The floorboard underneath Mike gives way sending him down. *He catches himself just in time.*

MIKE (CONT'D)

Ah FUCK!

He struggles to pull himself up. Christopher slows and turns to help him.

MIKE (CONT'D)  
Chris! Help me up!

Christopher approaches and extends a hand, but then it recedes. His demeanor changes.

CHRISTOPHER  
Did you find the camera?

MIKE  
What? I can't hold on!

CHRISTOPHER  
Just tell me if it's you, tell me what you know.

Mike stares back in confusion. In the distance...

ELLE (O.S.)  
Mike?

Christopher hears it too. He reaches down for Mike to help him up just as Elle and Joan come around the corner. Christopher pulls Mike out as they approach.

ELLE (CONT'D)  
Christ, you scared us, where've you been?

Mike looks shocked, he's holding his hurt chest from the fall.

JOAN  
You alright?

CHRISTOPHER  
Just an accident, floor gave in.

ELLE  
You gotta be careful with this place, it'll swallow you whole.

Elle gives Mike a pat on the back as Joan helps him walk. Mike glances back at Christopher, suspicious. Christopher gives him a nod, then turns back to look where they came from. No one's back there.

EXT. SECRET ROAD - NIGHT

The group loads up in their respective cars, the SUV is gone. Christopher catches a cold look from Mike as he gets in his car.

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - CHRISTOPHER'S ROOM - NIGHT

Christopher unloads the photos out on his desk. He looks over them one-by-one, landing on the Marines with their faces scratched out.

THE MEMORY OF ARGUING WITH MILLER.

THE EXPLOSION.

WATCHING MILLER AND THE OTHERS DIE IN THE SAND.

TEENAGE ELLE GASPING FOR AIR. WHISPERS.

TEENAGE ELLE  
(breathless)  
Chris!

THE "S" in "CHRIS" MORPHS TO A HISSING SOUND, HEAT, CICADAS.

EXT. FIELD - DREAM - DAY

The hiss follows Christopher as he stands in a lush field, before him is a hilly countryside filled with beautiful green trees. He holds up his camera and snaps a photo. When he reviews the image, he's shocked to see that the *photo is of a barren wasteland*. He looks back up. Sure enough, the field is dead, the trees are old and rotten, and standing at the edge of the field is a GIRL.

We hear a familiar sound. Cicadas. Burning. Crackling flesh.

She's a waif, her skin black and burned, her eyes reflecting the light around her. Glass, empty. "Girl with Bucket." She seems too skinny to be alive, a heat emanates from her.

Christopher looks at her in horror.

She stares back, takes a step forward. The bones in her legs creak, brittle, weak.

Christopher cries, mouths the word "STOP." No sound, no voice.

She takes another step. Her leg snaps into dust, breaking under her weight. She falls, embers flicker from her wounds.

Christopher, voiceless, screams.

The girl tries to pull herself toward him, but her arms break as well. When she crumples, *her entire body falls to dust*.

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - CHRISTOPHER'S ROOM - NIGHT

Christopher jolts awake, covered in sweat...

*... but reels away when he suddenly sees THE GIRL IN THE CORNER OF HIS ROOM.*

He gasps and switches on the light. She's gone. He slows his breathing and calms himself.

INT. PHOTO STUDIO - DAY

The next day, Christopher enters a local photo studio. The STUDIO MANAGER is hardly older than 18. Christopher shows him a few of the photos.

CHRISTOPHER

I was wondering if anyone came in here to have these made?

The kid looks over the photos and shakes his head.

EXT. SOUDERTON - DAY

Christopher makes his way through the town, glancing over his shoulder.

INT. PHOTO STUDIO 2 - DAY

Another studio, the MANAGER looks over the photos, head shaking.

EXT. SOUDERTON - DAY

Christopher continues on his way when he passes a Cafe. From the window he recognizes a face. NATALIE CARTWRIGHT, Chris' age, working at the cafe. She recognizes him as well, a hand over her mouth and a smile on her face. He hops inside and they give each other a big hug.

NATALIE (V.O.)

I can't believe it.

INT. CAFE - DAY

Natalie's seated with Christopher.

NATALIE

Look at you! You're so old!

CHRISTOPHER

Can't say the same for you.

NATALIE

You can tell me I look old! Look, see?

She shows off her smile lines.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

I got grey hairs and everything.

CHRISTOPHER

You look great.

NATALIE

Shut it. Hey sorry I didn't get to see you the other night, I heard you were back but this place has me working the early bird special and that typically means I'm in bed by like 8.

CHRISTOPHER

Safe to assume you're not into the whole "breaking into asylums" thing?

NATALIE

Oh god, they told you about that?

CHRISTOPHER

I went with them.

NATALIE

You what?? Ugh, no thank you. I mean, I get it, there's some legit work there and all but, c'mon, in the end they're just breaking into creepy places and stealing shit.

CHRISTOPHER

Good-Girl Natalie can't have that.

Natalie's eyes go wide.

NATALIE

Shut up. No one calls me that.

CHRISTOPHER

You've changed?

NATALIE

Good Girl Natalie is long gone. You see all this?

(gesturing to herself)

All this is the New Natalie.

CHRISTOPHER

Yeah, yeah I can see that.

NATALIE

New Natalie doesn't give a fuck.

(whispers)

*Though I shouldn't swear in here  
that much cause it's mostly old  
people.*

CHRISTOPHER

New Natalie goes to bed at 8pm.

NATALIE

Staying up late is for squares.

There's a moment between them, a look that lasts a little too long.

CHRISTOPHER

So what does Natalie do now that she doesn't give a fuck?

NATALIE

Cause trouble, obviously.

CHRISTOPHER

Just you?

Natalie takes a second.

NATALIE

You're asking if I'm seeing anyone.

CHRISTOPHER

Are you?

Another moment.

NATALIE

I am.

CHRISTOPHER

Do I know him?

They're interrupted by Elle as she enters the cafe.

ELLE

Oh hey!

She skips up to their table. Natalie's face beams as Elle gives her a warm kiss.

The kiss changes everything for Christopher.

Elle sits down with them.

ELLE (CONT'D)

I was hoping you two would  
reconnect. Natalie's too cool to  
come out with us.

NATALIE

I was just telling Chris about New  
Natalie.

ELLE

What's the difference between New  
Natalie and Old Natalie?

NATALIE

Old Natalie didn't used to be so  
rebellious.

ELLE

(sarcastic)

Ah, yes, I'm sure *so much* has  
changed. Oh hey I was gonna grab a  
coffee, either of you want  
anything?

NATALIE

All good, thanks.

ELLE

Chris?

CHRISTOPHER

No.

ELLE

Great, 'right back.

Another kiss on Natalie's head and she's gone.

Christopher and Natalie sit in silence for a moment. Whatever  
excitement that was between them is long gone.

CHRISTOPHER

So you two...?

NATALIE

Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER

Huh.

Another moment.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
Is that a new thing, or...?

NATALIE  
Two years.

CHRISTOPHER  
Two years. Okay.

He's clearly in shock.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
It's just... sorry it's just,  
y'know, Elle's pretty open about  
things and... well she would've  
mentioned it to me.

NATALIE  
She doesn't know.

CHRISTOPHER  
Doesn't-?

Christopher puts this together, a state of disbelief.

Elle comes gliding back to the table with two coffees and  
plops down next to Natalie.

ELLE  
(to Natalie)  
Oh I just remembered you said you  
didn't want anything.

NATALIE  
Oh look at you! No this is good, I  
think you read my mind.

ELLE  
This one's oatmilk, I got them to  
start ordering it even though I'm  
probably the only one who cares...

They continue to chat but Christopher has drifted off. As  
they continue, it's clear he's not listening. A half smile,  
maybe an agreement or two, but he's miles away. He watches  
the lines around Elle's smile.

AS HE REMEMBERS HER AS A TEENAGER, ON THE GROUND, THERE ARE  
HANDS AROUND HER THROAT. SHE GASPS

TEENAGE ELLE  
CHRIS!

ELLE (V.O.)  
Chris?

He's back at the cafe.

ELLE  
Does that sound good?

He wasn't listening, not sure what he's agreeing to.

CHRISTOPHER  
Sure. Yeah.

Still stuck on Natalie. Their words are drowned out in the background.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
Excuse me, sorry.

He stands up.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
Bathroom's that way?

He points behind them.

ELLE  
Yup, straight back and hang a left,  
it's the one with a toilet in it.

Christopher leaves them. We follow him through the cafe, turns left, past the bathroom, keeps going to a back exit.

EXT. SOUDERTON - CAFE - CONTINUOUS

We follow him out, he walks without purpose or direction. Keeps walking across the street. Mind racing. Unaware of how close he's come to getting hit by a CAR. It blares its horn as he keeps going.

Across the street, to the sidewalk. To an alley...

EXT. SOUDERTON - ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

... where he finally settles. He rests his head against the wall of a building. Breathes.

Maybe he'll punch the wall. Maybe he'll cry. Maybe he'll shout.

But he doesn't do any of it. Only still.

When, suddenly...

**Beep CLICK.**

The sound of a camera at the other end of the alley. Christopher whips his head toward the sound.

A PHOTOGRAPHER, 40's male, looks up from his camera.

CHRISTOPHER

Hey!

The photographer bolts. Christopher races after him.

EXT. SOUDERTON - SIDE STREET - CONTINUOUS

Down a street. The Photographer runs as fast as he can. Makes a left. Christopher knows these roads. He ducks into another alley on the left.

EXT. SOUDERTON - SIDE STREET 2 - CONTINUOUS

The Photographer races to his car when...

... BAM! Christopher comes plowing out from the alley and tackles him.

Christopher's on top of him in an instant, pinning him down.

CHRISTOPHER

Who the fuck are you??

PHOTOGRAPHER

Get off me, man!

Christopher picks him up and hoists him against a wall, the man's now broken camera dangling from his neck.

CHRISTOPHER

Where did you find it, huh?

PHOTOGRAPHER

The fuck you talking about, man?

CHRISTOPHER

Where's the camera!?

PHOTOGRAPHER

What camera? Get your hands off me, man, I got a right to be here!

Christopher puts it together.

CHRISTOPHER

You're paparazzi?

PHOTOGRAPHER

You better believe I'm suin' the shit outta you.

CHRISTOPHER  
How the hell did you find me?

PHOTOGRAPHER  
I got a tip. Chris Davis lost his  
shit in L.A. and he's layin' low in  
his hometown. I got a source paying  
for this.

CHRISTOPHER  
Who?

PHOTOGRAPHER  
Don't got a name. My editor's got  
me out here, says we gotta keep it  
quiet, whoever's selling your info  
needs to be anonymous.

Christopher takes this all in.

CHRISTOPHER  
I want you gone. Now.

PHOTOGRAPHER  
Dude you're so fucked, you know  
that?

CHRISTOPHER  
Sue all you like, won't help you  
for shit when they find you out  
here in the woods. Understand?

Christopher grabs a wallet from the photographer's pocket and  
hurls him to the ground. Christopher pulls out the  
photographer's ID and a hotel key card and throws the wallet  
to him. He reads the ID.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
Barry Blanchard. That's a shit  
name, you know that? 1135 N.  
Kingsley Dr, Los Angeles, CA.  
Any of this reaches the press,  
social media, anything, and you're  
a dead man, you get me?

BARRY BLANCHARD stands up and collects his broken camera.

BARRY  
You're fuckin' crazy.

CHRISTOPHER

It's been a rough week. If I found out you're still in town tomorrow I will gladly turn your world to fuck.

Barry races off. Christopher pockets the ID's. A moment to breathe before he heads back to the cafe.

INT. SOUDERTON - CAFE - DAY

Christopher comes back to the table and sits down across from Elle and Natalie.

ELLE

Dude, where've you been?

CHRISTOPHER

Lost track of time.

ELLE

In the bathroom?

Good point, the insinuation is clear.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Gross.

Humbled again, better than explaining what really happened.

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - CHRISTOPHER'S ROOM - NIGHT

Christopher tosses Barry's ID's into his desk drawer.

LATER

Christopher writes up a proposal for a fund raiser. Through the text we see that it's for "Girl with Bucket Turns 10," it's a an event to raise funds to send to developing countries and spread awareness for the suffering of others. "Girl with Bucket turns 10, but the Girl never will."

His phone rings, it's Tyrone. He picks it up.

CHRISTOPHER

Ty.

TYRONE

You aren't answering my emails.

CHRISTOPHER

Things have been hectic.

TYRONE

I don't like that tone, man. I didn't blacklist you, I'm on your side.

CHRISTOPHER

I know.

TYRONE

Do you?

CHRISTOPHER

Yes.

TYRONE

Then answer my emails, we can't keep the government waiting.

CHRISTOPHER

What about them?

As Tyrone answers, Elle can be heard coming up the stairs.

ELLE (O.S.)

Chris?

CHRISTOPHER

Up here!

TYRONE

The Marines, there were some more questions about the accident, some legal shit they gotta figure out about you and the --

CHRISTOPHER

K, I'll look at it, gotta go, man.

TYRONE

Don't hang up on--

Christopher hands up as Elle enters his room.

ELLE

We're ready!

Christopher gives her a look.

ELLE (CONT'D)

The club in Philly? You said you'd go with us.

Oh right, he wasn't listening back at the cafe.

CHRISTOPHER

Oh, sorry. I don't know, I've got a lot of work to do with the proposal.

ELLE

Noooo no no c'mon, please? Please? I've barely gotten to hang out with you. Don't you want to blow off some steam? Y'know, cut loose?

Christopher sighs, he doesn't want to. Clear as day.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Natalie would love it if you came, y'know. She wouldn't say it cause she's all... Natalie about it. But it would mean the world to her. To both of us. Don't say "pumpernickel."

Christopher reluctantly takes the bait.

CHRISTOPHER

Sure.

ELLE

Yes!

She hugs him.

ELLE (CONT'D)

I promise it's nothing too crazy. It's a weeknight, not even themed or anything. Probably just us on the dance floor.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

A **PACKED** DANCE CLUB, full of 20-SOMETHINGS. Deep EDM beats reverberate through the cramped venue. Christopher, Natalie, and Elle all take it in. Christopher's in hell. He looks to Natalie who wears the biggest "sorry but I had to" smile. She hugs him.

ELLE

Don't be mad, don't be mad. You don't have to do anything. C'mon.

Christopher gives Natalie a look as Elle leads him into the sea of bodies. Natalie smiles back, she knows he hates this.

She grabs hold of his arm as they makes their way to the back of the club.

LATER

Natalie, Elle, and Christopher sit in a booth and speak in raised voices above the loud music.

ELLE (CONT'D)

You two ever come here back in the day?

NATALIE

This wasn't around back in the day.

CHRISTOPHER

This was the record store.

ELLE

No way, really?

CHRISTOPHER

Yeah honestly I don't recognize much around here now.

NATALIE

Not that you'd ever go somewhere like this.

ELLE

What, even when you were kids?

NATALIE

Chris never liked going out cause he couldn't dance.

ELLE

No way.

CHRISTOPHER

I could dance.

NATALIE

Not in a million years.

CHRISTOPHER

I just didn't like to.

NATALIE

(to Elle)

We would go to this record store all the time and he'd tell me all about these super obscure bands.

ELLE

Oh like the ones you have at your place?

(to Christopher)

Natalie's got, like, a wall of records.

CHRISTOPHER

No shit?

They're interrupted by a bro, LUKE (20s) carrying drinks.

LUKE

(to Elle)

Hey, sorry, I didn't wanna be rude or anything but I've seen you here before, right?

ELLE

Yeah, probably! I'm usually here on Thursdays when Brody's DJ-ing.

LUKE

That's it! Brody's a buddy of mine, I thought you looked familiar. I got a few shots for y'all.

He sets the shots down.

ELLE

Oh, no I'm good. Thank you though!

LUKE

Oh no way, a friend of Brody's is a friend of mine.

He puts the drinks in front of Elle, Natalie, and Christopher.

ELLE

No, really, thanks but you can give them to someone else--

LUKE

Not taking no for an answer!

CHRISTOPHER

She said no, man.

Christopher's cold as ice.

LUKE

Hey sorry, I just--

CHRISTOPHER

So give them to someone else.

It's weirdly defensive, sucks the air out of the room. Elle has a hand on Christopher's arm.

ELLE

It's fine.

Natalie quick takes **all three shots**. She coughs as the other's stare. She notices their looks.

NATALIE

Well, if you two weren't.

Elle cracks a smile. She looks to Luke.

ELLE

This is my girlfriend. I don't drink, but I do dance. You cool with all that?

Luke laughs.

LUKE

Fine by me.

ELLE

Let's go, then.

Elle scoots out of the booth. Natalie starts after her.

NATALIE

Want me to--?

ELLE

We're good. Go on, catch up.

Elle pecks a kiss on Natalie's cheek before losing herself in the crowd.

There's a beat as Natalie and Christopher watch her. She's joyful, fun, care free, chatty. She's already making friends.

NATALIE

It took me a while to get used to that.

CHRISTOPHER

Guys buying her drinks?

NATALIE

No, like, she just walks in and suddenly she's best friends with everyone, and it's somehow fine.

CHRISTOPHER

She was always like that, got it from our mom.

Another beat between them.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

I did dance.

NATALIE

I meant with other people.

CHRISTOPHER

It was.

NATALIE

I don't count.

A moment, the two of them unsure of how to talk to each other.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry I didn't tell her about us.

Christopher nods.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

I meant to. A couple of times. There are things I can't explain sometimes--

CHRISTOPHER

Like the records?

Guilty, yes.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

She thinks you bought them on your own?

NATALIE

I had to do tons of research just to sound like I knew all the bands. She called me out that I never play them so I have to and pretend like I like them.

CHRISTOPHER  
You still don't like them?

NATALIE  
Not at all.

CHRISTOPHER  
Then why do you have them?

We know the answer to this question. They're too close to each other, Natalie she scoots away.

NATALIE  
I'm gonna dance.

She stands up.

NATALIE (CONT'D)  
You coming?

He doesn't answer, hesitates too long. Natalie shrugs.

NATALIE (CONT'D)  
Told you so.

She's off. Christopher watches as she finds Elle. They hug, dance, get closer, kiss, smile.

A MEMORY OF TEENAGE ELLE IN THEIR HOME, TRYING ON THEIR MOTHER'S NECKLACE IN HER ROOM.

SHE CATCHES TEENAGE CHRISTOPHER WATCHING HER IN THE REFLECTION OF HER MIRROR.

SHE TURNS TO HIM AS HE STEPS IN HER ROOM.

At the club, Christopher watches until he can't do it any longer. He's up. Makes his way through the crowd, finds them.

CHRISTOPHER  
Hey I'm gonna head out.

ELLE  
Aw no, we just got here!

Elle notices a squeeze on her arm from Natalie, a knowing \*ahem\* look.

She looks to Christopher.

ELLE (CONT'D)  
Pumpernickel, yeah?

Christopher nods, she hugs him.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Thanks for hanging out. Baby steps.

He offers a smile and makes for the exit. Natalie turns to Elle as the music gets louder.

NATALIE

Did you say "pumpernickel?"

EXT. CLUB - NIGHT

Christopher makes his way past the BOUNCER and starts down the street.

JOAN (O.S.)

Chris! Hey!

He turns back to the club, out comes Joan, out-of-breath.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I thought that was you in there!  
You leaving?

CHRISTOPHER

Hey, Joan. Yeah just taking off.

JOAN

Oh, wanna grab a coffee or something? I haven't really had a chance to pick your brain much.

CHRISTOPHER

It's a bit late for me.

JOAN

Or just to hang out.

Christopher shifts his weight, uncomfortable.

CHRISTOPHER

I was in the middle of some work,  
maybe another time--

JOAN

(interrupts)

I lost my dad.

It stops Christopher.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Last year. It sucked. It still sucks. Elle's been kind about it, but... I don't know...

(MORE)

JOAN (CONT'D)

she's so optimistic that I feel like she can't be telling the truth.

CHRISTOPHER

(careful)

The truth about what?

JOAN

(shrugs)

What it's gonna feel like in 10 years.

Christopher considers this, his option to turn her down.

CHRISTOPHER (V.O.)

It's gonna feel different.

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Christopher and Joan sit across from each other on a couch, seems they've been here a while.

CHRISTOPHER

Like sometimes there'll be days where you've forgotten that anything's happened, that there was a time before you were changed. And you're gonna feel guilty about that. The days where it takes a second to remember someone's face. Or the days where you realize you haven't thought about them yet, or it didn't hurt, and you feel guilty because you think it's your job now to feel as much pain as possible without them. Like that's what they'd want you to do. And in a fucked up way it really does feel like that's how you're keeping them alive, keeping them relevant. And then you realize it's been a few days. And you want to apologize but you're not sure how. So you feel guilty and promise you'll do better. Then you realize it's been years and you're doing nothing important at all...

CHRISTOPHER WANDERS THROUGH HIS HOMETOWN, NOTICING A RED BOOK STORE, AND STOPS AS HE SPOTS THE FAMILY PICKUP TRUCK DRIVE BY. THE TRUCK SLOWS QUICKLY AND PULLS OVER, KICKING DUST IN THE AIR. THERE'S A PAUSE AS ONLOOKERS PEEK OVER BEFORE 13-YEAR-OLD ELLE RACES OUT OF THE BACKSEAT SHOUTING FOR HELP.

Christopher blinks the memory away.

JOAN  
And it all comes back?

Christopher nods.

JOAN (CONT'D)  
Elle doesn't talk about your dad  
much.

CHRISTOPHER  
He was complicated.

Christopher clocks her expression, "worse than that."

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
You already know.

JOAN  
Being nosey is my nature. Not like  
people around here won't offer it  
up without being asked.

CHRISTOPHER  
Sounds right.

JOAN  
She won't shut up about your mom,  
though.

TEENAGE CHRISTOPHER SMILES AS TEENAGE ELLE TRIES ON HER  
MOTHER'S NECKLACE.

CHRISTOPHER  
Yeah they were twins.

JOAN  
She mentioned a car accident,  
but...?

CHRISTOPHER  
She was driving and she had a  
stroke. Even in the middle of it  
she managed to pull to the side of  
the road and park, I think she  
didn't want anyone else to get  
hurt. Anyway, she survived it but  
it was just a symptom of something  
worse.

JOAN  
That's horrible.

CHRISTOPHER

What about your dad? What was he like?

Joan thinks, nods.

JOAN

Also complicated.

TEENAGE CHRISTOPHER LOOKS ON AS HIS DAD SLAPS TEENAGE ELLE FOR WEARING THE NECKLACE.

CHRISTOPHER

Sometimes forgetting isn't so bad.

Joan offers a tight smile, not ready to say much more. She perks up a bit, takes out her phone.

JOAN

Can I show you something cool?

He nods. She moves closer to show a photo.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Check it out.

She taps her phone, pulls up a photo of her, dressed to impress, next to a massive print of "Girl with Bucket." She looks ecstatic.

CHRISTOPHER

Oh wow, this was New York.

JOAN

Mmhmm, I told you I was a fan.

CHRISTOPHER

What was this, like, 5 years back?

JOAN

Next month, yeah. Elle says you've got something else coming up?

CHRISTOPHER

Oh, I mean, maybe. Trying to put together a fundraiser. Have to see how all of this goes here, though.

JOAN

Well I'd love to go. Look, we actually met.

She swipes through a few photos before landing on one of Christopher signing a print for her.

Christopher's a bit stunned.

JOAN (CONT'D)  
Aw, you don't remember.

CHRISTOPHER  
I'm so sorry.

JOAN  
It gets worse.

She swipes a few more. One of her shaking his hand. Another selfie with him. She swipes again, it's of her and Mike. They're kissing.

Joan blushes a bit, swipes to the next photo.

CHRISTOPHER  
You and Mike--?

JOAN  
A bit.

She shifts, much more to say...

JOAN (CONT'D)  
He's a nice guy. Taking me to the Poconos this weekend.

CHRISTOPHER  
And what about you?

There's another moment.

JOAN  
He's a nice guy.

Christopher understands.

JOAN (CONT'D)  
I don't mean to pry but I've gotten a bit of the lowdown from him about when you were all, well, closer I guess. You and Natalie were--

CHRISTOPHER  
That was a long time ago.

JOAN  
Long enough ago?

CHRISTOPHER  
Nosey is your nature.

JOAN

You can't say I'm not honest.

Christopher eases, maybe the wall is down a little.

CHRISTOPHER

Yeah. Well. Anyway, it was a long time ago.

JOAN

It must be weird for you, being back here after so much time.

CHRISTOPHER

Mmm.

JOAN

I know we don't exactly know each other very well... but, if things are weird between your friends and Elle, maybe consider me a new stranger you can open up to? Like, if you want to talk about what made you leave or what you've been up to or anything, I'm open to that.

Christopher is a little wary.

CHRISTOPHER

Thanks.

A moment.

JOAN

It's just Elle doesn't really talk about it and she's usually really open about stuff.

CHRISTOPHER

Yeah.

Another moment. Joan seems to be reaching for something.

JOAN

And, y'know, if anything happened while you were gone. Or what it's like being the only one who made it back.

**Everything changes.**

Christopher gives her a look. She sighs, some facade is taken down.

JOAN (CONT'D)

You really don't remember me at all, do you?

Christopher is confused.

JOAN (CONT'D)

'Bout a year ago? I interviewed you? It was a "Where Are They Now" piece.

Christopher sits upright.

CHRISTOPHER

You're a journalist.

JOAN

Up and coming.

CHRISTOPHER

You're the anonymous source.

JOAN

And my photographer who, thanks to me, isn't pressing charges. That was an expensive camera.

Christopher is already off the bed.

CHRISTOPHER

You followed me here?

JOAN

Oh stop, calm down. Me being here was a happy accident. I was visiting Mike, you showed up, people have been asking about you so I thought I'd do a little digging.

CHRISTOPHER

I want you out.

She stands.

JOAN

Oh c'mon, Chris, you've got a chance to clear the air about some stuff, alright? Just a few questions about where you've been, maybe what went down in Afghanistan.

He grabs her.

CHRISTOPHER

What the fuck do you know, huh??  
How do you know about that? Do you  
have the camera?

JOAN

What the shit are you talking  
about? Jesus, you really did lose  
your mind. Did something happen  
back there? Is that why you lost  
your shit in L.A.?

A BIG beat lands.

Christopher backs off, stunned.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I've got a lot of friends, NDA or  
not, you knew someone would find  
out sooner or later.

Christopher doesn't know what to say.

JOAN (CONT'D)

C'mon, I'm on your side, this could  
be good for you. Dredge up some  
sympathy--

CHRISTOPHER

Out, now.

She rolls her eyes at him and makes to leave.

JOAN

The story's getting leaked, Chris,  
whether you like it or not, it's an  
eventuality. You ever want to make  
sure it leaks in your favor, you've  
got my number.

With that she leaves Christopher alone. He's fuming, almost  
beside himself.

INT. PUB - NIGHT

Joan enjoys a drink with FRIENDS. Mike is there, he's clearly  
more reserved than she is.

LATER

Joan says goodbye to people and gives Mike a kiss on the  
cheek.

EXT. PUB - NIGHT

Joan exits the pub and waves at a few people. She walks across the street and goes down about half a block to her car. She reaches her car and enters the driver's seat. There's a pause.

*The car shakes back and forth.*

*A struggle.*

The car stops. Calm.

A HOODED PERSON steps out from the back seat. They come around, open the driver's side door, pulls Joan out, drops her in the trunk, closes it, gets in the driver's seat, and drives away.

MICAH (V.O.)

I know who did it.

INT. PHOTO STUDIO 3 - DAY

Christopher shows one of the photos to a print manager, MICAH. He takes a moment.

CHRISTOPHER

You do? They had these done here?

MICAH

Yeah I remember. Nothing like this has come through here before, wouldn't forget it.

CHRISTOPHER

Do you remember their name?

Micah gives him a look.

MICAH

Not sure if I can just give that out.

CHRISTOPHER

There's a copyright infringement involved, someone making these prints is claiming them as their own, I'm putting some information together to make a court case.

MICAH

Oh, oh well... well I didn't mean to cause any harm or nothing.

(MORE)

MICAH (CONT'D)

Don't want to get involved in any legal trouble.

CHRISTOPHER

Just let me know the name of whoever made these, you won't be any trouble, I promise.

Micah finds the ledger and flips it open in front of Christopher. He scans through a few names.

MICAH

Here we go. A few days ago, came in here asking for all sorts of weird stuff.

Christopher looks at the ledger to where Micah is pointing. He reads the name.

"Chris Davis."

Christopher stares at the name.

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

That night, Christopher peers out the window while he cleans some dishes. Elle notices as she's helping clear the table.

ELLE

What are you looking at?

CHRISTOPHER

Nothing. Just...

He trails off.

ELLE

Didn't you ask if I saw anyone snooping around? What was up with that?

CHRISTOPHER

It's nothing, really.

ELLE

I don't...

She sighs, takes a moment.

ELLE (CONT'D)

I think I've been really patient, yeah? I was cool with you leaving the club, I don't think I made it weird.

(MORE)

ELLE (CONT'D)

But, c'mon, it's just strange to see you slinking around like this.

Christopher takes a moment and stammers.

CHRISTOPHER

I feel... there's something about me that.. some compromising things that I think someone knows about, something someone might've dug up.

ELLE

What, like about your photograph? The girl?

CHRISTOPHER

No, no it's nothing like that.

Elle chooses her next words carefully.

ELLE

About... you leaving?

There's a big beat between them.

CHRISTOPHER

Maybe. They know a lot, they might know about that.

ELLE

I've not... I've never told anyone. I never would.

CHRISTOPHER

I know.

ELLE

I promise I haven't said a word, not even to Natalie.

CHRISTOPHER

Stop, I believe you.

Elle thinks over her words. There's a hurt inside her.

ELLE

Do you hate me?

CHRISTOPHER

Elle...

ELLE

Just tell me.

CHRISTOPHER

Why? What good will any of this do now?

The calm, caring Elle is gone.

ELLE

Just... just tell me if you hate me, cause if you do then I can accept it and just live my life that way. But if I'm wrong and you don't then I need to know cause then maybe I can...

She trails off. Whatever this is has been growing inside her for years. Christopher has no easier time with it.

CHRISTOPHER

It wasn't your fault. I've... I've owned what I did, it's not--

A KNOCK at the door stops him. A moment for the two of them to consider how to continue, but Elle backs off to answer the door.

Christopher stands in his own silence for a moment. O.S. we hear Elle answer the front door.

ELLE (O.S.)

Hey, what a surprise!

MIKE (O.S.)

Hi Elle. Sorry I was just driving by, is Chris in?

Christopher sighs a little at the sound of Mike's voice, it's not a good time for that kind of company.

ELLE (O.S.)

Oh, sure, hold up.  
(to Christopher)  
Hey, Chris?

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Christopher peeks around the corner to find Mike waiting at the door.

CHRISTOPHER

Hey, man.

MIKE

Hey. Sorry, I was just saying I was driving by and thought I'd stop in.

(MORE)

MIKE (CONT'D)

You wanna take a quick ride or something?

Elle shrugs to Christopher.

ELLE

I've got some time, I was gonna see if Natalie--

MIKE

Oh, I mean Chris and me.

Weird.

MIKE (CONT'D)

It's just been a while, you know?

Christopher looks to Elle, maybe for help. But there's nothing she can do.

CHRISTOPHER

Sure, yeah.

MIKE

Cool, I'm parked just out front.

Christopher follows him out, sharing a look with Elle. "What the hell is this about?"

EXT. ELLE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mike and Christopher make their way to Mike's car.

MIKE

Sorry to be weird. I just feel like, y'know, things weren't ideal the other day, I just wanted to give us a chance to start things off better.

CHRISTOPHER

Oh, sure, man. What were you thinking?

MIKE

Just a drive around like old times. Maybe smoke a little, clear the air?

CHRISTOPHER

Cool.

MIKE

Cool.

They hop in his car and drive off.

EXT. SOUDERTON - NIGHT

Mike's car cruises along the quiet streets.

INT. MIKE'S CAR - NIGHT

A silence has settled between Mike and Christopher.

CHRISTOPHER  
So no Joan tonight?

Mike gives him a look.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
She mentioned something.

Mike shrugs.

MIKE  
Actually no, no Joan tonight. Kinda weird, we're doing a Pocono trip this weekend and I haven't heard from her. But you know Joan, she can disappear.

CHRISTOPHER  
Hmm.

They continue on their way.

EXT. BACK ROADS - NIGHT

Mike's car gets further from the suburbs.

INT. MIKE'S CAR - NIGHT

Christopher looks behind at the city lights fading in the distance.

CHRISTOPHER  
How far out there were you thinking of driving?

MIKE  
I actually wanted to show you something, it's not far. Thought it'd be nice, just relive some memories.

CHRISTOPHER  
Like what?

Mike seems to ignore him, reaches for the stereo.

MIKE

How about some music?

He blasts ROCK MUSIC, drowning out any possible conversation. They drive on, Christopher looking more uncomfortable.

EXT. BACK ROAD - NIGHT

A bumpy road, Christopher starts to recognize...

EXT. ROAD OUTSIDE PENNHURST - NIGHT

... as Pennhurst Asylum comes into view. Mike pulls the car over.

INT. MIKE'S CAR - NIGHT

Mike switches off the music and gives Christopher a look.

MIKE

Here we are.

CHRISTOPHER

Mike, what are we doing here?

MIKE

Can I see your phone?

A weird question.

CHRISTOPHER

I don't get it.

MIKE

Just let me see it.

A tense moment. Christopher hesitantly gives his phone to Mike.

Mike eyes him up and down a moment. He leans to the backseat where he grabs a manilla envelope, then opens the door to leave.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Come on.

Christopher clocks the pistol in Mike's waistband. Considers what to do, but he doesn't have any options. Mike walks around and opens the passenger door.

They both wait. This is becoming stomach-droppingly tense. Finally, Christopher gets out. Mike walks with him to the Asylum.

INT. PENNHURST - HALLWAY 1 - NIGHT

Christopher and Mike silently make their way through the building.

INT. PENNHURST - HALLWAY 2 - NIGHT

They continue through the darkness.

INT. PENNHURST - ROOM 24B HALLWAY - NIGHT

Christopher slows as he realizes where they are going. Mike stops in front of the Room 24B. He motions to Christopher.

MIKE

In.

Christopher glances around, feeling a trap. He approaches the room and looks inside...

INT. ROOM 24B - NIGHT

...and gasps at the sight of...

**Joan.** Her feet and arms duct-taped together, duct tape over her mouth, slouched on the ground. Blood pooled by her nose.

CHRISTOPHER

Jesus Christ.

He whips around to Mike, who CRACKS him on the side of the head with his pistol. Christopher falls to the floor as Mike stands over him.

MIKE

What did you do to her?

He kicks Christopher hard.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Huh?? What the fuck did she do to deserve this?

Christopher tries to answer through the kicks.

CHRISTOPHER

The fuck are you talking about?

Mike throws the contents of the manilla envelope on the ground. They're photos.

MIKE

Yeah? Not a clue? So you have no  
idea what this is about?

He holds one of the photos to Christopher's face. It's from  
outside Elle's house, looking into the living room, as  
Christopher and Joan sit inches from each other on the couch.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Or this?

Another photo, it's of Christopher screaming at Joan to  
leave. Christopher stares in astonishment as Mike tosses the  
photos to the ground.

MIKE (CONT'D)

I went to pick her up at her place  
when she wasn't answering her  
phone, and I find these everywhere.  
This shit, and on the back,  
"Pennhurst. Room 24B. Joan."

CHRISTOPHER

Mike, I swear to god, I didn't do  
anything. There's someone out there  
who's fucking with me, all of us--

MIKE

Someone's fucking with you alright.  
What happened, you try to shut her  
up? She was asking too many  
questions--?

CHRISTOPHER

For fuck's sake, Mike, stop! Stop,  
just listen to me. I don't know  
what's happening but whoever did  
this wanted you to find her here.

MIKE

And why wouldn't they?

CHRISTOPHER

Think about it, why wouldn't they  
go to the police? If they knew  
something happened, why would they  
bring you into it like this?

MIKE

So I can see your face, to ask you  
why. To take care of it myself.

He holds the gun out and points it at Christopher's head.

CHRISTOPHER

Fucking Christ, Mike, please, stop.  
Stop, just wait.

MIKE

I knew it, the moment you came back  
I knew you were bringing shit with  
you. You think I don't know about  
you? Who you are? Why you really  
left? Well everyone's gonna know  
now, you hear me? You're gonna  
fucking burn for this!

He gets out his phone and dials 9-1-1. Christopher slowly  
stands up.

CHRISTOPHER

Mike, I know you won't do it.

MIKE

Just watch me.

Christopher slowly backs away.

CHRISTOPHER

You're not gonna shoot me. I know  
it.

MIKE

You think I fucking can't?

CHRISTOPHER

I know you won't.

As the 911 OPERATOR speaks on the other end, Mike's hand  
shakes as it grips the pistol. He tears up, watches  
Christopher back away into the shadows.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

I didn't hurt Joan.

Mike screams and squeezes a shot out as Christopher bolts  
down the hallway. The bullet misses by a longshot. Mike huffs  
and puffs, forgetting he's on the phone.

INT. PENNHURST - HALLWAY 1 - NIGHT

Christopher hustles out the Asylum.

EXT. PENNHURST - NIGHT

Christopher jogs out the door, then into the grounds, when  
suddenly--

WHAM.

Something thuds hard on the ground behind him.

Christopher whips around, realizing...

... *it's Mike*. He's been thrown from several stories up.

Christopher slowly approaches him, it's a gruesome sight. On his back there's a paper, a note. 'I'M NOT DONE YET.'

Christopher fumes.

INT. PENNHURST - HALLWAY 2 - NIGHT

Christopher rushes through the Asylum.

CHRISTOPHER  
Where are you??

INT. PENNHURST - ROOM 24B HALLWAY - NIGHT

Christopher whips around the corner, looking everywhere.

CHRISTOPHER  
What the fuck do you want??

He scans the area around Room 24B, slips a little on the broken floorboard outside of it, hardly paying attention.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
Just leave me alone!!

His voice carries into the building, dissipates, and makes way for a new sound...

... sirens, far off in the distance.

Christopher looks out the window where Mike was thrown. Miles away, he can see the faint red and blue lights flashing against the hills.

He looks at Mike's body on the ground. Turns, to Joan's in Room 24B.

A decision.

EXT. ROAD OUTSIDE THE ASYLUM - NIGHT

Christopher heaves Mike's body into the trunk of the car as the sirens get closer. Then Joan's. He slams the trunk closed, rushes to the driver's seat.

The keys.

Back to the trunk, checks Mike's jacket for the keys. Finds them.

Back to the driver's seat.

He hits the ignition and keeps the headlights off, turning hurrying to the secret road.

EXT. SECRET ROAD - NIGHT

As he rolls to a stop, there's hardly a beat before TWO POLICE CARS zip by, sirens blaring. They make their way to Pennhurst, break hard, and the POLICE OFFICERS step out, chatting, walking to the Asylum. As they get closer, Christopher puts Mike's car in reverse, backs up slowly, and eases away onto the road.

EXT. BACK ROAD - NIGHT

Christopher drives through the night.

INT. MIKE'S CAR - NIGHT

Christopher grips the wheel. Every bump he goes over reminds him of the bodies in the trunk. Ahead of him, he may see something. Out in the dark, there are blue and red lights flashing. He peers out.

It's a COP CAR.

He slows, hands at 10 and 2. The cop car is racing, sirens blaring, Christopher's pulse is racing with it.

It feels like it takes forever to get to him.

To pass him.

To continue on its way up the road.

Christopher pulls over as it goes by.

He takes deep breaths, squeezes his eyes tight.

TEENAGE CHRISTOPHER SITS IN THE DRIVER'S SIDE OF HIS MOTHER'S TRUCK. HE'S BEEN CRYING, THE NECKLACE GRIPPED IN HIS HAND, HE SQUEEZES HIS EYES TIGHT.

Christopher opens his eyes, settles his nerves, and continues on his way.

EXT. SCHUYLKILL RIVERBANK - NIGHT

The Schuylkill is a fairly large body of water, the bank is surrounded by dark trees.

Christopher pulls up to the bank and turns his lights off. He checks to make sure the coast is clear before getting out of the car. He pulls Mike's body out of the trunk and drags it into the driver's seat. Just as he finishes repositioning it, he sees THE LIGHT OF A FLASHLIGHT IN THE DISTANCE.

He gasps and ducks down. Voices of 3 TEENAGERS pick up a few yards down the bank.

TEENAGER 1  
Oh shit, dude, someone else is here.

TEENAGER 2  
Fuck.

Christopher waits, pinned behind the car, holding his breath. The teens mutter to themselves.

TEENAGER 3  
Is he asleep?

TEENAGER 2  
I don't know.

Christopher glances up, realizing they can see Mike in the car.

TEENAGER 3  
Hey mister!

TEENAGER 1  
Shhhh!!! Shut the fuck up!

TEENAGER 3  
Maybe he's cool?

They wait for a response.

TEENAGER 1  
Yo, dude!

Another moment.

TEENAGER 2  
Is he okay?

Christopher listens as their footsteps get closer.

TEENAGER 3  
Dude in the car, you alright?

They're just a few feet away. They turn the corner. Christopher isn't there.

Underneath the car, Christopher holds a hand over his mouth, stifling his breath. One of the teens knocks on the car window.

TEENAGER 3 (CONT'D)  
You smoke weed?

The teens giggle and wait for a response.

TEENAGER 1  
What's up with him?

TEENAGER 3  
Maybe he's wasted.

TEENAGER 2  
Whatever, dude, let's just go  
somewhere else.

One of them drops a bowl of weed on the ground. *Right next to Christopher.*

TEENAGER 3  
Dickhole, be careful with that!

TEENAGER 2  
Sorry, god, my hands are fuckin'  
freezing.

Teenager 2 bends over to pick up the bowl. He's inches from Christopher, but misses him. The teens banter and leave.

After what feels like ages, Christopher breathes. He waits a few more moments before shuffling out from under the car.

He checks to make sure the coast is clear before opening the trunk.

And...

... is met by **Joan's open fucking eyes.**

She's not dead.

She stares, wide-eyed, unblinking, shocked, breathing rapidly.

He stares back. Maybe a sound from her, muffled from under the duct tape.

He almost makes a move to help her out.

A MEMORY OF JOAN LEAVING THE APARTMENT.

THE LOOK ON HER FACE AS SHE SAYS...

JOAN

The story's getting leaked, Chris,  
whether you like it or not, it's an  
eventuality...

Christopher glares at her.

She stares back, a pleading look.

LATER

Christopher, breathless, watches something bubble under the  
water. He toys with the necklace in his hand.

TEENAGE CHRISTOPHER STANDS ON A BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER AT  
NIGHT. HE LOOKS AWFUL. HE HOLDS OUT THE NECKLACE OVER THE  
WATER.

Christopher pockets the necklace and takes a beat. He glances  
behind him.

EXT. BACK ROAD - NIGHT

A long walk back, Christopher is still soaking.

EXT. FENCE OUTSIDE PENNHURST - DAWN

As the sun starts to kiss the sky, Christopher passes  
Pennhurst.

EXT. PHILLY TURNPIKE - MORNING

Christopher hitchhikes until A CAR pulls over. He gets  
inside.

EXT. ELLE'S HOUSE - MORNING

The sun's rising brightly as Christopher is dropped off.

Christopher makes it only a few feet before a voice catches  
him.

NATALIE (O.S.)

Chris?

Christopher turns to find Natalie behind him, stepping out of  
her car.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Hey, I was just leaving for work,  
Elle didn't know where you were.

CHRISTOPHER  
 (caught off guard)  
 I...

Natalie takes in the sight of him.

NATALIE  
 Are you alright?

CHRISTOPHER  
 There was an accident.

NATALIE  
 Jesus, are you hurt?

CHRISTOPHER  
 No, no not really, just... just  
 been a long night.

NATALIE  
 Oh, okay. You sure?

CHRISTOPHER  
 Yeah, I just need a shower and some  
 sleep.

NATALIE  
 Right.

She starts back to her car but turns around.

NATALIE (CONT'D)  
 Hey, Chris? Can we talk tonight?  
 Just us? It's just... I don't know.  
 It was weird at the club and it--

CHRISTOPHER  
 I don't--

NATALIE (CONT'D)  
 It would mean a lot to me.

A beat while he thinks.

NATALIE (CONT'D)  
 Please.

He considers it.

CHRISTOPHER  
 Come by after 8.

NATALIE  
 Yeah?

CHRISTOPHER  
 Yeah.

She seems relieved.

NATALIE

Thanks.

Christopher gives her a nod and she returns to her car. He continues on his way to the house.

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - SHOWER - MORNING

Christopher cries heavily in the shower.

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - CHRISTOPHER'S ROOM - DAY

Christopher looks up plane tickets on his computer. He hovers over one back to L.A., leaving by 8. A guilty look, he clicks it.

EXT. AFGHANISTAN DESERT - DAY - DREAM

Christopher lies in the sand as shrapnel showers over him. Miller lies a few yards away from him, bleeding out. The marine coughs some blood, still alive? He's lost a leg, what remains lies scattered behind him. Miller catches Christopher's eye, gestures to something between them. A medkit, it could save his life.

Christopher crawls towards it, every inch he moves is a struggle. Miller watches him get closer and closer. Christopher reaches the medkit and opens it, but it's full of water. Christopher stares at it, confused.

MILLER

Please.

Christopher reaches in, tries to find anything to help, but the water goes deeper than it should. From his wrist to his elbow to his shoulder.

INT. WATER - DAY - DREAM

Christopher's arm reaches further and further into the abyss, when suddenly a BLOATED, ROTTEN ARM reaches back and grabs him.

EXT. AFGHANISTAN DESERT - DAY - DREAM

Christopher shrieks as he's pulled in.

INT. WATER - DAY - DREAM

A massive, dark ocean, Christopher struggles to get back to the surface, but The Rotted Man, his father, pulls him further down.

His father is expressionless, holding Christopher with a terrible grip. Before long, he's deep in the darkness, the sun finally blocked from his vision.

INT. ELLE'S HOUSE - CHRISTOPHER'S ROOM - NIGHT

Christopher jolts awake. Another nightmare, another sweaty bed. He kicks his sheets away and holds his knees to his chest. He breathes, in and out, in and out. He checks the clock. 6:30pm.

CHRISTOPHER

Shit.

He springs to, packing. Everything's haphazardly stuffed into a single bag. He glances out the window, makes sure no one's there. A few more things into the bag, his film camera, his mother's necklace, his--

NATALIE (O.S.)

Leaving again?

He jumps and turns around. Natalie's hanging out in the doorway.

CHRISTOPHER

You're early.

She takes in the sight.

NATALIE

What's all this?

CHRISTOPHER

Something came up, I need to make a flight.

NATALIE

Tonight!?

CHRISTOPHER

It's... for work.

NATALIE

You're kidding.

She lets that hang in the air, waits for him to prove her wrong. He takes too long.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Tell me you're fucking kidding.

Another pause, too long.

CHRISTOPHER  
Natalie, I--

NATALIE  
Fuck you.

It stings him.

NATALIE (CONT'D)  
Fuck you. Fuck you. You can't do  
this again.

CHRISTOPHER  
There's shit going on you don't  
understand. I'm not leaving you,  
I'm just leaving.

NATALIE  
Again.

CHRISTOPHER  
If it bothers you so much, you can  
talk to Elle about it.

This sucks the air out of the room. Natalie's words are  
careful.

NATALIE  
You know... you knew I liked girls  
too. I told you--

CHRISTOPHER  
Out of all the people--

NATALIE  
It wasn't on purpose.

CHRISTOPHER  
(scoffs)  
Right.

NATALIE  
Excuse me?

Christopher's stopped packing. He can't look her in the eye.

NATALIE (CONT'D)  
Go ahead, I fucking dare you.

CHRISTOPHER  
It's just a little convenient,  
isn't it?

NATALIE  
 "Convenient??"

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
 Awful good way to get back at  
 me.

Natalie can't believe what she's hearing.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
 And, yeah, I wasn't perfect, but  
 Christ, Natalie, that's low.

NATALIE  
 You've got some fucking nerve.  
 "Convenient." Chris I was  
 heartbroken and you were gone and  
 she was here and a fucking decade  
 later she kissed me at a party and  
 you call that "convenient?"

CHRISTOPHER  
 So it's her fault, then.

NATALIE  
 (sarcastic)  
 Cause it obviously can't be your's,  
 right?

CHRISTOPHER  
 So we're back to me now. Good.  
 Good.

NATALIE  
 Christ, dude...

Wrapping her head around this.

NATALIE (CONT'D)  
 You realize you haven't asked me  
 anything about my life? As far as  
 you know I work and live at a diner  
 and otherwise come crawling to you  
 for validation. Well that's not me.  
 That's not me at all and if you  
 ever bothered to ask you'd know.  
 You wouldn't have to be blindsided  
 by my relationship with Elle, we  
 wouldn't have to tip-toe around it  
 where the slightest, *the slightest*  
 wrong word will fuck everything up.

CHRISTOPHER  
 Then why bother coming here?

NATALIE

Oh my god, to reach out, to heal, I don't know, to get an honest answer about why you left.

CHRISTOPHER

I didn't leave because of you.

NATALIE

Then why? Your dad? Cause I'm calling bullshit on that now. If Elle could handle it then you have no excuse.

CHRISTOPHER

You don't know what you're saying.

NATALIE

Then tell me.

CHRISTOPHER

I can't.

NATALIE

Why??

Christopher zips his bag, finished packing.

CHRISTOPHER

Because...

TEENAGE ELLE TRIES ON HER MOTHER'S NECKLACE AS CHRISTOPHER WATCHES. SHE TURNS AND SEES HIM AS HE RUNS IN. HE STRUGGLES TO TAKE IT OFF OF HER. THEY BOTH FREEZE WHEN THEY SEE SOMETHING FROM ELLE'S DOORWAY.

Christopher struggles with the memory.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Because I promised.

Natalie doesn't have anything left, completely drained. Christopher picks up his bags and passes by her, heads down the stairs.

EXT. ELLE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

And only a few feet out the door before he slows...

... because Elle is stepping out of her truck and clocks him. Her smile fades when she notices the bag. She stares at him.

Christopher takes a moment, ready to lie.

CHRISTOPHER  
Something came up.

Elle continues staring, piercing through him.

Natalie tip-toes down the stairs, hangs in the doorway. Christopher can't come up with anything, continues to his rental car. He opens the back door and tosses his bag in.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
I'll be back someday but I need to  
take care of something I left  
behind.

ELLE  
You were never gonna stay, where  
you?

CHRISTOPHER  
I don't know what that means.

ELLE  
I mean you wouldn't ever stay on  
your own, you would never do it if  
no one forced you.

CHRISTOPHER  
You mean if I didn't get a fucking  
court order to be looked after by  
my barista baby sister in  
Fucksville, PA, I wouldn't have  
come here? No, no I wouldn't.

He slams the door and moves to the driver's seat. Elle thinks over her words.

ELLE  
Then it was for nothing.

Christopher slows.

CHRISTOPHER  
The hell does that mean?

Elle looks to him, a hurt bubbling up inside, hurt and fear.

ELLE  
I needed you. I couldn't live with  
what I did. Not alone.  
(MORE)

ELLE (CONT'D)

And I know, I know it wasn't my fault, I kept telling myself over and over that it was okay. But it wasn't okay. I wasn't okay. I needed you back.

It's dawning on him.

CHRISTOPHER

Elle...

ELLE

I needed you back so bad I would do anything. And I didn't know how. You wouldn't answer your phone, your email, I did everything I could except... except the one thing that I knew you couldn't ignore.

Christopher steps closer, a threatening look.

Elle swallows hard, the words caught in her throat.

ELLE (CONT'D)

I... I made sure I knew where he was before I called the cops. I looked in the river, it took days to find him but when I did I called them anonymously...

Christopher has already taken a step away. Faint. Furious.

ELLE (CONT'D)

I didn't mean for anything to happen, I just wanted you back.

CHRISTOPHER

Do you have ANY idea what you've done? To me? To my fucking career?

ELLE

I'm sorry.

CHRISTOPHER

Do you have any clue how close I got to blowing my fucking brains out? Huh? Let alone what they could've found out. What would've happened to you? To me?

ELLE

I'm so sorry. I--

He almost hits her, maybe. His body language is so close to it. We can see his father in him. Maybe he does to. Maybe they both do. He steps away, and with an exasperated yell gets into his car, slams the door, and speeds away.

Elle crumples to the ground as Natalie rushes over to comfort her.

TEENAGE ELLE AND CHRISTOPHER STOP WHEN THEY SEE SOMETHING AT ELLE'S DOORWAY.

A POLICEMAN, DRUNK. THEIR FATHER.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S CAR - NIGHT

Christopher speeds through the streets.

THEIR FATHER GLARES, SHOCKED, FROM THE DOORWAY.

TEENAGE ELLE TOUCHES THE NECKLACE.

Christopher grips the wheel.

THEIR FATHER APPROACHES TEENAGE ELLE AND HITS HER HARD ENOUGH TO SEND HER TO THE FLOOR.

Christopher's hands shake against the wheel.

THEIR FATHER IS ON TEENAGE ELLE IN AN INSTANT, TRYING TO TAKE THE NECKLACE OFF. SHE WON'T LET HIM.

SO HIS HANDS FIND HER THROAT.

Christopher slows the car.

THEIR FATHER SCREAMS AND CHOKES THE LIFE FROM TEENAGE ELLE. TEENAGE CHRISTOPHER TRIES TO PULL HIM OFF BUT CAN'T. TEENAGE ELLE LOOKS TO CHRISTOPHER.

TEENAGE ELLE

Chris!

Christopher pulls over, overwhelmed with the memory.

TEENAGE CHRISTOPHER FINDS A BAT. HE SWINGS IT AND IT CRACKS AGAINST THEIR FATHER'S HEAD.

Christopher takes a moment, consumed with the memory.

In time, he composes himself, at least enough to drive. The car slowly picks up speed, his family home fading in the distance.

INT. AIRPORT - CAR RENTAL RETURN - NIGHT

Christopher finishes returning his car and heads toward the departure terminals. As he does, he hears the low rumble of a TRUCK. He glances over, notices the worn SUV idling in the lot. As he leaves, the SUV's engine clicks off.

INT. PHILADELPHIA AIRPORT - CHECK-IN TERMINAL - NIGHT

Christopher is next in line to check in. The CHECK-IN ATTENDANT calls him forward.

CHECK-IN ATTENDANT  
Boarding pass?

Christopher reaches into his pocket, something's missing. Then another, before he remembers.

CHRISTOPHER  
I lost my phone. Can you look me  
up?

CHECK-IN ATTENDANT  
ID?

He hands her the ID.

INT. PHILADELPHIA AIRPORT - NIGHT

In the bustling airport, FAMILIES and FRIENDS wait for their flights, say goodbye, and mill about. Christopher sits at his terminal, his gaze focused miles away.

MOTHER (O.S.)  
Christopher!!

Christopher looks, alert, to A MOTHER in the terminal, calling after her young SON. He returns to her, scolded for running off. Christopher relaxes a little, but notices the occasional glance towards him from other AIRPORT PATRONS. A PILOT, a PASSENGER, a KIOSK WORKER, it feels like he's being watched. He shifts uncomfortably, *until the crowds reveal The Rotted Man.*

Naked, dripping, eyes like fire, standing far away in the terminal, staring Christopher down.

Christopher stands, blinks, it's not real. The sound has been sucked out of the terminal, only Christopher's thumping heart. Until...

TERMINAL WORKER

Passengers with zone 2 printed on their boarding pass are now free to board flight 726 to Los Angeles.

The world comes back into focus. He stands up, takes his time. He approaches the boarding kiosk, looks around, his turn to scan his ticket, scans it. He starts down the walkway, when...

TERMINAL WORKER (CONT'D)

Mr. Davis?

He turns.

TERMINAL WORKER (CONT'D)

Sir, there's a call for you at the front.

He makes his way back and to the phone. He picks it up.

CHRISTOPHER

It's Chris.

The voice at the other end is augmented.

AUGMENTED VOICE

If you board the plane, I'll kill them all.

Christopher freezes. Cycles through a response.

CHRISTOPHER

Who--

AUGMENTED VOICE

You know who I am.

Christopher struggles to comprehend.

CHRISTOPHER

What do you want?

AUGMENTED VOICE

Do you understand?

CHRISTOPHER

Leave them out of this.

AUGMENTED VOICE

So you understand.

CHRISTOPHER

I do.

AUGMENTED VOICE

Then this is what I want, I want  
you to go back home and wait--

CHRISTOPHER

No, this is what I want. I'm going  
to Pennhurst. Room 24B, you know  
the one. And we're going to finish  
this. Understand?

A harsh silence.

AUGMENTED VOICE

You have one hour. Any longer and  
they start dying.

The line disconnects. Christopher hangs up and swiftly makes  
his way out the airport.

INT. PHILADELPHIA AIRPORT - NIGHT

Christopher races through the terminal.

INT. AIRPORT PICKUP AREA - NIGHT

Christopher hails a cab.

INT. CAB - NIGHT

Christopher hops in the cab.

CHRISTOPHER

You know where Pennhurst is?

CABBIE

Where what is?

CHRISTOPHER

I'll direct you, just get on 76.

Christopher checks his watch, 8:05

EXT. PHILLY TURNPIKE - NIGHT

Few cars on the road as the cab heads away from the city.

EXT. BACK ROAD - NIGHT

The Cab makes its way along the bumpy road.

INT. CAB - NIGHT

The CABBIE turns back to Christopher.

CABBIE

Hey man, you sure you know where  
you going?

CHRISTOPHER

Just keep going, up here.

He checks his watch, 8:59.

EXT. ROAD OUTSIDE THE ASYLUM - NIGHT

Finally, the cab pulls up and Christopher hands the cabbie  
the fair before jumping out.

CABBIE

Hey you forgot your change!

Christopher hustles to the Asylum, 9:04.

INT. PENNHURST - NIGHT

Christopher bursts in.

CHRISTOPHER

I'm here! I'm here!

He gets no response.

INT. PENNHURST - HALLWAY 3 - NIGHT

Christopher makes his way through the asylum, slowing as he  
reaches...

INT. PENNHURST - ROOM 24B HALLWAY - NIGHT

...the hallway before the Room 24B.

Cautiously, he approaches.

INT. PENNHURST - ROOM 24B - NIGHT

Empty. He checks his watch. 9:10. He looks around, picks up a  
piece of wood, maybe a good weapon?

He stops at the sound of the front door thudding open  
downstairs.

He freezes, listens.

Hears the sound of someone moving around. Feet on stairs.  
Padding, floor creaking, closer.

Christopher raises the bit of wood, ready to strike.

The feet pad closer.

Christopher holds his breath...

... as in walks--

Elle! She leaps back from Christopher, scared half to death.

ELLE

Chris what the fuck??

CHRISTOPHER

Elle?? What the shit are you doing here??

ELLE

What are you talking about? You told me to meet you here.

CHRISTOPHER

What?

ELLE

You texted me saying it was an emergency.

CHRISTOPHER

I...

Christopher realizes.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

I don't have my phone.

ELLE

Well who...?

They're both interrupted by headlights outside the Asylum. The boxy SUV pulls up, shuts off its engine.

Christopher stares in horror.

CHRISTOPHER

Fuck.

ELLE

What's going on?

CHRISTOPHER

You have to hide.

ELLE

What?

CHRISTOPHER

He wanted you here, wanted me to see him hurt you.

ELLE

You're scaring me.

CHRISTOPHER

(distracted, searching for a hiding spot)  
You should be.

ELLE

If this is about what I did, I said I was sorry--

CHRISTOPHER

Elle shut the fuck up for a second. This has nothing to do with that. I need you to hide.

He takes her by the arm as they make their way down the hallway.

INT. PENNHURST - ROOM 24B HALLWAY - NIGHT

Christopher leads Elle gruffly down the hall.

ELLE

Seriously, Chris, what's going on? Are you in trouble?

CHRISTOPHER

We both are if we don't find somewhere for you to hide.

He clocks a closet.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Here.

ELLE

No, no, stop. I'm not going anywhere until you tell me what's going on. Please let me help you.

He takes her by the arms. Thinks.

ELLE (CONT'D)

What happened?

A MEMORY, CHRISTOPHER LANDS HARD ON THE GROUND IN AFGHANISTAN.

Christopher takes a breath.

CHRISTOPHER

Listen, I don't have time to tell you everything, but... I did something and it's come back. I don't know how, but it has. And I can't let it get to you now, okay? Please, I can't lose you now.

She can hardly wrap her head around it, but nods.

ELLE

Okay.

He shuffles her into the closet and closes the door as we hear the front door of the Asylum open and close.

Christopher rushes back to Room 24B.

INT. PENNHURST - ROOM 24B - NIGHT.

Christopher plants himself in the room, stares at the doorway, listens to the labored steps making their way to the room. Christopher takes some deep breaths, readies himself.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. AFGHANISTAN DESERT - DAY

Christopher looks ahead of him as shrapnel falls from the sky. Miller lies a few yards ahead. He coughs some blood, gestures to the medkit between them. Christopher crawls to the kit, Miller watches, eyes pleading. Christopher gets to the medkit...

...and crawls past it. He reaches out.

MILLER'S eyes go wide as Christopher reaches for...

...his camera. He positions himself in front of Miller as the marine bleeds out. Miller's eyes shift from shock to fury. He struggles, tries to move, can't, and soon he's still.

BACK TO:

INT. PENNHURST - ROOM 24B - NIGHT

A MAN walks into the room, we see he has a prosthetic leg. He wears the coat we saw when Joan was attacked. He reaches into his pocket and drops something on the ground. Christopher clocks it.

The true "Last Known Photo." *Miller lying in the sand, his expression one of pure tragedy.*

Christopher looks up, finally meeting the eyes of...

...Miller. He's scarred, shaken, hardly the same man we saw at the beginning. He has a pistol. Behind his eyes burn a rage. Christopher chooses his words carefully.

CHRISTOPHER  
You were going to die.

Miller gives him nothing.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
No way anything I could do would help you. You were gonna die.

MILLER  
That what you told her? The girl who made you famous?

Christopher doesn't know what to say. He's on the verge of vomiting.

CHRISTOPHER  
Leave them out of it. Please.

MILLER  
That's up to you.

Christopher's close to tears.

CHRISTOPHER  
Please. Please, Elle has nothing to do with this. Neither of them do.

Miller is silent, his eyes speaking volumes.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
For fuck's sake, what do you want!?

Miller takes a long beat. It may seem like he's planned this for ages, but now that the time has come it's all spilling out.

MILLER  
It was a month before they even knew who I was. A month before my family knew I was alive. Then another two weeks before I woke up. So that's a month and then two weeks and then the time it takes to learn to walk again.  
(MORE)

MILLER (CONT'D)

And then the time it takes to come home, then the time it takes for someone you love to stop flinching when you touch them. Suffice to say after that time things had changed. People had changed. And they never stopped flinching. And they never stopped looking at you like you were a thing, *like you were a bomb*.

We've heard this before, Christopher's guilt could be cut with a knife.

MILLER (CONT'D)

What do I want? I want you to have what I have. I want each moment you spend with the people you love to rot in your heart until there's nothing left--

... Creeeeeeaaaak of floorboards behind them. Miller turns.

And they both notice Elle, staring in horror.

Giving Christopher just enough time to hit the gun out of Miller's hand! Miller drops the gun with a grunt as Christopher tackles him.

They struggle, banging against walls, out into...

INT. PENNHURST - ROOM 24B HALLWAY - NIGHT

... the hallway as Elle screams. Christopher takes a second, gripped in Miller's arms, the air getting crushed out of him, before he notices the *loose boards he slipped on earlier*. He braces himself against an opposing wall and kicks hard, sending both him and Miller onto the weak floorboards--

--which CRASH AND BREAK below them! They go hurtling down through the floor, crashing further into the dilapidated building.

BLACK.

INT. PENNHURST - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Christopher coughs, the air knocked out of him. He blinks hard and orients himself in the space. Boilers and old medical instruments lie strewn about. Most of the light coming from the massive hole in the ceiling where he and Miller just fell through.

Miller! Christopher looks around, but he isn't there.

ELLE (O.S.)

Chris!??

Elle's voice echoes from floors above. Christopher tries to call back but winces. He turns to see he's landed on some shrapnel, a large sharp chunk is lodged in his side. He tries to touch it but reels back at the pain. He takes several deep breaths.

ELLE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Chris are you alright?

He takes a second, wincing though the pain.

CHRISTOPHER

I'm here!

ELLE (O.S.)

Chris??

CHRISTOPHER

Here!

We finally see her, hardly visible through all the damage from Christopher and Miller.

ELLE

Where are you?

CHRISTOPHER

I... I don't know. Elle, you gotta go, run. I don't know where he is.

ELLE

I'm not leaving without you!

CHRISTOPHER

Elle fucking run! He's here for you. Go get help, go!

ELLE

I'll--

She stops as they both hear something shuffle about somewhere in the Asylum. It reverberates through the halls.

CHRISTOPHER

Elle fucking go!!

ELLE

I'm getting help. Don't move!

She leaves his view. Christopher grits his teeth as he gets his leg under him, then finally pushes himself up.

He gets a decent look at the debris lodged in his side. Tries again to pull it out. It's no use, far too painful. He limps forward, orients himself to the space some more, looks for an exit.

THE MEMORY OF TACKLING MILLER. MILLER DROPPING THE GUN.

Christopher looks up. The gun. He could beat Miller to it.

He struggles to a doorway and makes his way up a dusty stairwell.

INT. PENNHURST - LOWER HALLWAY - NIGHT

Christopher pulls his way up and stops to take a breath. A long hallway stretches before him, intersected by many more. He takes a moment, gripping his wound, lets his eyes adjust to the darkness before him...

... sees a vague shape, a silhouette at the other end.

It looks back, eyes shining in the night.

**Miller.**

Miller dashes down one end. Christopher dashes down another, both toward Room 24B. Toward Elle.

INT. PENNHURST - HALLWAY 2 - NIGHT

Elle sprints down the hallway and down a flight of stairs.

INT. PENNHURST - HALLWAY 1 - NIGHT

Closer to the exit--

-- but sees Miller clamber up another hallway towards her!

She doubles back and books it, making her way through the labyrinth of hallways.

INT. PENNHURST - NURSE'S STATION - NIGHT

Finally Elle slides into the Nurse's Station long enough to catch her breath, make a plan. She holds her breath as she hears footsteps creep by.

She waits, back pressed against the wall.

A shape hobbles by. Miller? Hard to be sure. Elle plays it safe, waits for a moment before whoever it was is out of view.

She quietly pads out of the room, back down the hallway.

INT. PENNHURST - HALLWAY 1 - NIGHT

Elle watches behind her as she gets closer to the entrance.

A floorboard creaks in front of her.

She stops and whips around.

A shocked expression as she stares at someone OS.

INT. PENNHURST - HALLWAY 2 - NIGHT

Christopher moves as quickly as possible through the Asylum.

INT. PENNHURST - ROOM 24B HALLWAY - NIGHT

Until he makes it to the hallway. Sure enough, right in front of the hole in the ground, lies Miller's gun.

And at the opposite end of the hallway, Miller comes lumbering into view.

They catch each other's eyes for a moment, before they both break into a run!

Each gets closer to the gun. Closer. Closer.

Christopher makes it first, but Miller leaps directly on top of him. They struggle together, Miller quickly maneuvering into a chokehold, Christopher trying everything to get out of it, to hold on to the gun.

Miller gets a grip on Christopher's trigger hand and whips him around, attempting to wrestle it from him.

BLAM!

A shot goes off in the floor.

BLAM!

Another in the ceiling.

BLAM!

Another almost hitting Christopher in the leg. Miller finally gets a decent grip, the other hand finding the shrapnel in Christopher's side. He squeezes and twists the shrapnel hard, Christopher SCREAMS in pain, giving Miller the chance to rip the pistol out of his hand and point it at his head.

Just as Elle reappears!

ELLE  
Stop!! Please!

Miller pauses, gun trained on Christopher.

MILLER  
Tell her to get back.

Christopher coughs through his pain.

CHRISTOPHER  
Elle, go!

ELLE  
I'm not leaving you. The police are  
on their way.

MILLER  
They're too late.

ELLE  
Get away from him!

MILLER  
You're braver than your brother,  
little girl, but bravery's not  
enough here, not with just the two  
of you.

From she shadows behind him, we hear the hammer of a gun draw back.

JOAN (O.S.)  
How about the three of us?

From the shadows steps **FUCKING JOAN**. She holds Mike's gun,  
trains it on Miller.

Miller turns, a look of disbelief.

THE MEMORY OF CHRISTOPHER LOOKING AT JOAN IN THE TRUNK.

THE TEMPTATION TO CLOSE IT.

CHRISTOPHER WATCHING THE BUBBLING OF THE LAKE, TURNING  
AROUND.

WE REALIZE JOAN SITS ON THE SHORE BEHIND HIM, CRADLING MIKE'S  
BODY.

Miller eyes her up and down.

MILLER  
Fuck off.

JOAN  
Put the gun down.

MILLER  
Go to hell.

JOAN  
You wish. You wanna bet I'm better  
at finishing the job than you?

Miller takes a moment, gun still on Christopher. He almost laughs, but it becomes a menacing anger.

MILLER  
You fucking idiots!

JOAN  
I said put it down!

MILLER  
You don't know what you're doing.  
Any of you. You don't have a  
fucking clue.

He looks to Joan.

MILLER (CONT'D)  
Your friend here is a murderer. May  
as well be. He left me to die so he  
could make a fucking dollar.

Back to Christopher.

MILLER (CONT'D)  
You hear that, you fucking scab?  
You couldn't even do me the mercy  
of finishing the job yourself.  
Until what? Until I took care of it  
myself? You think I haven't tried?  
You think I haven't written the  
fucking note?? But then they sent  
me that camera by mistake, and I  
saw myself clearly for the first  
time in my life.

Back to Joan.

MILLER (CONT'D)  
This is what I'm here for now. This  
is who I am. Your friend deserves  
to die.

Joan glares at him, then to Christopher.

JOAN

Maybe. Maybe everything you said is true. Maybe he's is a huge fucking asshole and he deserves all of this. Maybe he's fucked up and has deserved this for a long time. But you killed Mike, *and he was a nice fucking guy*. So no, this is not how this is gonna go. Not like this. Killing him won't fix anything.

Miller stares daggers through her for a moment. But he softens. He lowers his gun from Christopher.

MILLER

You know what, on that, I think we can agree.

He gives her a look...

... before raising it--

--and **SHOTS ELLE IN THE STOMACH.**

CHRISTOPHER

Noo!!!!

It's chaos. Christopher rushes to her as she drops hard. Joan's eyes go wide as she struggles to even understand what's just happened. Miller watches as Christopher cradles Elle. Sirens can be heard in the distance, blue and red lights bouncing off the Asylum. Miller looks to Joan, a smile. They lock eyes. The smile drops as he raises his gun.

Joan has no choice.

She squeezes the trigger, the bullet SMACKING Miller in the head.

He drops as Joan looks on. Christopher cries and lifts up Elle.

INT. PENNHURST - ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Christopher and Joan carry Elle out as the place becomes surrounded by POLICE. An AMBULANCE pulls up, EMTs racing out to collect Elle.

INT. PHILADELPHIA HOSPITAL - ELLE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Christopher sits on a chair and waits as Elle lies on a bed. A NURSE is chatting with him.

NURSE

She's in critical condition, the bullet missed her spine but it's still inside her, the doctors need to be careful with the extraction...

Christopher doesn't take his eyes off of his sister.

LATER

Christopher watches his sister intently.

THE MEMORY OF HIS MOTHER IN THE HOSPITAL BED.

He struggles with it.

NURSE (O.S.) (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Mr. Davis?

He looks up. The Nurse stands with several police officers. He nods. Gives Elle another long look.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT

From behind a window, we watch as a DETECTIVE questions Christopher. He glances over as Joan is led by another DETECTIVE. They catch each other's eyes.

CHRISTOPHER (V.O.)

I have an idea of who it is.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. SCHUYLKILL RIVERBANK - NIGHT

Christopher sits on the ground across from Joan, who holds Mike's body tight.

CHRISTOPHER

It's a guess, but...

He watches as Joan caresses Mike's hair.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

I'm going to buy a plane ticket.

She looks at him.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

I'm not going anywhere. But he needs to know I might.

(MORE)

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
He's watching everything, he'll see  
that I bought it. It'll force him  
out, to show himself.

JOAN  
And if he doesn't take the bait?

Christopher considers this.

CHRISTOPHER  
I have to try.

JOAN  
We.

He looks to her.

JOAN (CONT'D)  
We have to try. It's not just you  
now.

She's right.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT

Christopher watches Joan get taken away.

INT. PHILADELPHIA HOSPITAL - ELLE'S ROOM - DAY

Christopher approaches the room to see Natalie with Elle.  
Elle's still unconscious. Natalie gives Christopher a harsh  
look. "You did this." Christopher avoids it. He sits at the  
opposite chair with the rest of his stuff.

Natalie and Christopher both sit in silence. He toys with his  
mother's broken necklace.

INT. PHILADELPHIA HOSPITAL - ELLE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Natalie's asleep in her chair. Christopher shakes her  
lightly.

CHRISTOPHER  
Hey, I can take over.

Natalie straightens up, orients herself. A look back to Elle.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
It's alright, I've got it. She'll  
be fine.

A cold look to Christopher, but she concedes. She stands up,  
grabs her jacket, and heads towards the door.

She stops, takes a moment, turns to Christopher.

NATALIE

She'd do it again in a heartbeat.

Christopher takes it in, he knows it's true. Natalie leaves them.

He takes a moment with Elle, thoughts racing.

THE MEMORY OF STANDING OVER THE SCHUYLKILL RIVER AS TEENAGERS. WATCHING SOMETHING BUBBLE UNDER THE WATER. TEENAGE CHRISTOPHER HOLDS THE NECKLACE OVER THE WATER, BUT HESITATES. WE SEE TEENAGE ELLE IS NEXT TO HIM. HE OFFERS THE NECKLACE, BUT SHE TURNS AWAY AND WALKS QUICKLY BACK INTO THE DARKNESS.

Christopher reaches into his pocket and pulls out the necklace. He considers it for a moment, then places it on Elle's neck. He leans back and takes in the sight.

THEIR MOTHER WEARING THE NECKLACE, LAUGHING IN THE TRUCK, MOMENTS BEFORE HER STROKE.

Christopher leans forward, exhausted, he sees his film camera is here with the rest of his stuff.

He fiddles with it for a moment.

Before he hears a cough.

He looks up. Elle's coughing.

He glances out the door, a few NURSES chatting far away.

Back to Elle, the coughing sounds bad, difficult. Not loud, but a struggle. Another glance to the nurses, who have now walked away.

Back to Elle, he scoots his chair forward, puts his hand on hers.

CHRISTOPHER

Hey. Hey, Elle, it's alright.

She eases a little, but still straining.

THE MEMORY OF HIS MOTHER IN THE HOSPITAL BED.

Christopher watches his sister.

THE HOSPITAL BED IN THE AFGHANISTAN DESERT.

Elle's breathing is labored.

MILLER BLEEDING OUT, STRUGGLING IN THE SAND.

Christopher lets go of his sister's hand.

He looks down, considers his camera.

Picks it up. Cradles it.

Eyes up to his sister.

The question heavy in the air.

A floorboard creaks behind him.

He slowly turns to see...

... The Rotted Man, Girl with Bucket, and Miller all standing in the shadows, staring at him.

He stares back.

**THE END.**