

UNTITLED SOCIOPATH "MERE | IMAGE" PROJECT

Written by

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FADE IN.

INT. A'LOURE RESTAURANT. SOHO. NIGHT.

The SoHo dining scene is constantly fluctuating and this is the "it" place of the moment. Absurdly overpriced and maybe too stodgy for its own good, but the reviews are killer and the reservations are murder. Honestly, who the fuck books a table *four* months in advance?!

READE

I know I have to stop trying to control everyone, it's a bad shade on me. If only I could just take a breath and evaluate what I really need from the situation.

READE MCCARTHY, 32, isn't one of those four-month-out types if you're wondering. He'd be humiliated if you even thought that. No, he *knows* a guy. Not the maitre d'. Nor the owner. He twice met the dude a married shareholder's fucking, and uses that as collateral for the best table in the house.

READE (CONT'D)

But it's difficult for me to just stand idly by and watch the drones I work with settle for less than what I would bargain for.

Reade is effortless. Glistening skin. Dark eyes. Sandy blonde hair lifted in a delicate wave. Strangers glancing twice over their shoulder to make sure he's not a celebrity.

READE (CONT'D)

And yes, maybe that's unfair to constantly appraise my colleagues next to me, but it's a standard. It's a standard, and though I've raised the bar, it can't be too high for them. Can it?

His fiancée, **TASHA CAMDEN**, 28, has the exotic looks most guys drop jaws for, coupled with a girl-next-door humility.

READE (CONT'D)

Anybody who is talented at everything must be truly fucked up in the head. And that's what makes us tragically unique.

Reade is suddenly aware he's been ignored most of the date.

READE (CONT'D)

What is this? You've barely touched your risotto.

TASHA

What a treat! The illustrious Reade McCarthy expressed interest in me. In what I'm *eating*.

READE

Can't I be curious? I'm allowed to be curious. I specifically brought you here because it's a Wednesday, which I know is your cheat day. If anything I should be insulted! That's incredibly thoughtful of me. And considerate, to track when you do and do not prefer to eat carbs.

TASHA

Why do you talk like that?

READE

Like what?

TASHA

(snapping)

Like that. Sometimes I feel like I'm engaged to a walking thesaurus.

READE

A walking thesaurus with an eight inch cock and investment portfolio the "married-you" could retire on.

Reade reaches for the Pinot Noir, obliging her with another hefty pour.

READE (CONT'D)

Let's get drunk and do something a little bad so we know what it's like to behave.

She smirks.

TASHA

What contest in Hell did I win to deserve all of you?

READE

Come on. Help me finish this wine.

TASHA

Thirty minutes. Again.

READE

Again?

TASHA

You left me waiting thirty minutes. Again, Reade. Again. That's why I'm angry with you. And that's why I've lost my appetite.

READE

Tasha, you know how I can get. All the campaigning for this promotion has me frazzled.

TASHA

If I hear this one more time--

READE

I'm sorry, I only wanted to look my best for you. I caught a glimpse of my reflection leaving the office, and just had to go home and shower. My hair hasn't been the same since my stylist moved to Bushwick, and, oh God, Brooklyn? It's not like I can just drop everything to commute to that shithole for a cut.

TASHA

God forbid you find a strand out of place.

READE

I apologize. Profusely. I wish I wasn't so weak. In lighter news, you have to try this day cream I found. Not yet FDA approved, and using salmon placenta to repair your tissue. Gives you the most astounding youthful glow.

TASHA

(beat)

Is this at your place?

READE

Yes of course, babe, it's the tiny green jar on my vanity.

TASHA

Let's go.

INT. READE'S SOHO LOFT. BEDROOM. NIGHT.

SLAP. SLAP. SLAP. Reade pulls tightly on Tasha's hair as he thrusts into her from behind. Sweat drips from his brow. He feels his moist forehead.

A JAZZ PIANO VINYL plays on a gramophone in the background.

Without missing a beat, he turns to face the mirrored walls on the opposite end of the bedroom and begins adjusting his hair, re-volumizing it.

LATER IN THE NIGHT:

Reade sleeps next to Tasha, both wearing satin night masks.

THE NEXT MORNING:

Reade saunters through his bedroom wearing a clay face mask with a bath towel wrapped around his lean, chiseled waist. Tasha is still curled up beneath the covers, fast asleep.

He throws open his closet to reveal racks of color-sorted suits and ties.

Reade carefully selects a charcoal gray suit and a sky blue skinny necktie.

IN HIS MASTER BATHROOM:

Reade puts the final touches on his hair, now the flawless wave we're used to. He takes a dab of eye cream and gently massages it on his lower eyelids.

Lastly, he dips his fingers into a TINY GREEN JAR, the day cream he prior mentioned, and methodically moisturizes his cheeks. He flashes a winning grin at himself.

INT. SUBWAY "Q" TRAIN. DAWN.

It's early morning. Earlier than most commuters even need to think about being awake for work. But that's Reade for you. A proud insomniac.

The station at this time of day is unsettling. Doesn't quite seem dangerous. Just empty. Lonely.

Reade, in his constant state of overdressed, looks fantastic in the suit he elected to wear. He glances down at his cell to check for any incoming e-mails, of course, to find none.

Far too early.

He drafts a motivational e-mail to himself:

FROM: READE MCCARTHY. **TO:** READE MCCARTHY.

SUBJECT: *EXCEED YOUR OWN EXPECTATIONS.*

He selects *DELAYED DELIVERY*. And then presses *SEND*.

Typing another e-mail for his future self:

SUBJECT: *BE STRONG. REMAIN VICTORIOUS.*

Again, *DELAYED DELIVERY*. *SEND*.

Someone SHUFFLES in the distance. Reade glances down to see a strange **MAN IN A TATTERED JACKET** also waiting for the local.

Something about this strikes him as peculiar. Having been on this routine for years, he's admittedly unnerved to encounter another person at this hour.

The LIGHT from the approaching train peeks into the station. Reade straightens, pocketing his phone.

Turning to **THE STRANGER**, Reade notices his atypical behavior: The man scoots to the lip of the platform. Facing an oncoming train, back to us, positioning his feet adjacent to the edge of the yellow tile. Just inches from the drop to the tracks.

READE
(suddenly concerned)
Hey, buddy--

The train is closer. The LIGHT further covers the platform.

READE (CONT'D)
Bro, you had one too many vodka
tonics, back away from the edge.
You don't want to be just another
New York statistic.

But he doesn't. Instead, he leans *further* over the side. Arm first, then neck, then head. Arching into the oncoming train.

He's fucking suicidal! Reade rushes towards him.

READE (CONT'D)
Sir? Hey-

The Train SQUEALS into the station. Just seconds away.

READE (CONT'D)
Don't. DON'T! Please. FOR THE LOVE
OF GOD. IT'S NOT WORTH IT!

The stranger loses his footing...

READE (CONT'D)
I'M BEGGING YOU!!

CLUNK. CLUNK. The train rounds the corner and its HEADLIGHTS temporarily blind Reade.

Almost afraid to open his eyes in the aftermath, he squints, yet finds this stranger... still standing on the platform.

The man's alive. One piece. Staring back at him?

Hard to tell. The flickering subway light shadows his face.

Reade tries to focus his gaze, study his features, but flash blindness has greatly compromised his sight.

Nervous, he slinks back into the vacant SUBWAY CAR in front of him. The doors close. He starts off.

That's a fucking weird start to the day.

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. READE'S CORNER. DAY.

Doing pushups with his necktie flung over his shoulder, Reade rises into, and drops from, frame. Again and again.

Pulling back, we see how impressive his corner office is. The sunrise snakes its way through floor-to-ceiling windows.

EXT. BRYANT PARK. DAY.

Like clockwork, Reade is the local coffee cart's very first customer of the day. The **VENDOR** hands him his beverage:

COFFEE VENDOR
Medium soy latte. Splenda on the
bottom. Extra shot. Upside-down.

Reade clasps his hands together and "bows."

READE
Arigato.

COFFEE VENDOR
The Asian schtick is getting tired.
I'm Puerto Rican.

READE
Did I ask for your life story?

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. DAY.

Later that morning, Reade tosses his empty latte cup in the trash. Strutting down the hallway, he passes a blonde woman with fake breasts pushed up to her neck.

This is **VALERIE HANK**, 38, a competing publicist at his firm.

VALERIE

Reade, those cups aren't compost,
you color blind cocksucker, they're
recyclable.

READE

You're the expert, Val. Your tits
are last month's Tupperware.

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. READE'S CORNER. DAY.

With dark eyes focused at the monitor, Reade pounds out words on his MacBook, further filling out a document.

BING. An e-mail pops up...

FROM: READE MCCARTHY.

EXCEED YOUR OWN EXPECTATIONS.

Reade smirks, absorbing the memo. Deletes the message.

BING. Another one from himself...

WE ALL STARTED DYING THE MINUTE WE WERE BORN.

Reade crooks an eyebrow.

The PHONE RINGS.

ASSISTANT (O.S.)

(answering)

Reade McCarthy's office.

BING. Another one...

YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN UNDER THAT TRAIN.

A mousy brunette, his well-dressed assistant, **DANIELLE**, pops through the door.

BING. Another one...

BE STRONG. REMAIN VICTORIOUS.

DANIELLE

I have...

READE

(don't give a shit)

No.

Reade deletes the unusual e-mails, and keeps typing. Danielle returns to her desk.

DANIELLE (O.S.)

Sorry, he's not available, may I have him return?

BING...

YOUR ASSISTANT IS EVEN UGLIER WHEN SHE LIES.

Can somebody be watching him? Concerned, he turns to briefly glance out his window at streets of people below him.

READE

Dani, who was that?

DANIELLE

(hurrying back)

Aras Harris.

READE

Get him back please.

She hastily exits. We hear her dialing.

DANIELLE (O.S.)

Aras, I have Reade for you.

(then...)

Aras is on one!

Reade activates his earpiece.

READE

Guten Tag! You caught me working on the talking points for the carpet tonight, pal.

An awkward beat of silence. Reade's icy exterior melts away.

READE (CONT'D)

Aras. Hey, buddy. Hey, it's OK to cry. It's me. Listen, I lost my dad when I was your age too. I did. And it ruined me for a while.

(MORE)

READE (CONT'D)

Every single day I couldn't help but think "I wish my dad was here." You know? I wanted him to see what I'd become so he'd be proud of me. So goddamn proud.

He removes himself from his desk, crossing to the window.

READE (CONT'D)

But you have to trust me when I say you'll learn to live for those moments. Those moments when you look out at the world you created for yourself, and think "I did this for him. Something inside of me wouldn't stop until I knew I'd made him happy." And you. You, Aras. You have the drive already, but fuck, I'm so excited to see what's next. You'll really blow him away.

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. READE'S CORNER. DAY. LATER.

Reade hurries out of his office, closing the door behind him.

READE

Danielle, do you have Twitter?

DANIELLE

I'm a 25 year old single girl from Astoria that loves food trucks. Of course I do. How else would I know where they park?

READE

A simple "yes" would have made that less embarrassing. Can you find out how to get one of those blue checks by my name?

DANIELLE

You want to be verified?

READE

Just look into it, please.

As he leaves, he calls out over his shoulder:

READE (CONT'D)

Early lunch. Hold my calls.

INT. SUBWAY "L" TRAIN. DAY.

Reade stands on the platform for an L train to BROOKLYN.

INT. "L" TRAINCAR. DAY.

Reade clutches the railing of the train with a handkerchief gripped tightly in his right hand.

EXT. SUBWAY "L" STATION. BROOKLYN. DAY.

Ascending the stairs, Reade extracts a small bottle of hand sanitizer from his pocket to lather his palms.

EXT. BEDFORD AVENUE. DAY.

Reade sneers at the **BEARDED MUSICIANS** and **THIN HIPSTERS**, who noticeably are not at work mid-afternoon on a weekday.

INT. BROOKLYN APARTMENT. DAY. LATER.

Reade, suit jacket off and tie undone, unpacks groceries into a barren refrigerator: almond milk, avocados, Pinot Grigio.

Behind him, a slim blonde woman appears, naked, likely seven years his junior, and absolutely stunning.

This is **NICOLETTE**: unapologetically impulsive, in a constant prescription drug-induced haze, and thus unpredictable.

Her green eyes are locked in front of her, staring out, as if she's searching for something she misplaced.

Reade turns toward her, enjoys gawking at her firm, flawless body, then rushes to close the blinds:

READE

Jesus. Nik, we're at street level.

NICOLETTE

I'm a good person.

READE

Nobody said you aren't.

NICOLETTE

Thousands of girls tear couples
apart for all the wrong reasons.
There isn't a right reason to ruin
a relationship, I know that.

(MORE)

NICOLETTE (CONT'D)

And I'm a good person. But I don't want to waste away here anymore.

READE

Then don't.

Reade yanks a blanket off the couch to cover her.

NICOLETTE

I think I still love you. I might. I'm obsessed with you, I have been ever since the first day you looked in my eyes. Everyone else has come and gone. And you? You left for a while. But then you came back, and I don't want you to leave again.

She brushes back his hair, hopeful.

NICOLETTE (CONT'D)

It's just a ring. And a promise.

READE

Give it some time.

NICOLETTE

You're lying to her. You're engaged and you're here with *me*. Everything is just a few whispered words, but I don't want that. I'm not afraid of people thinking less of us.

Reade moves away from her, grabs his jacket off the rack.

NICOLETTE (CONT'D)

No, you're right. Let's keep being dishonest. It's much more exciting.

READE

You have no idea how any of this works. All I am right now is my reputation. It's important to me.

NICOLETTE

You mean your life with Tasha?

READE

Among other things.

NICOLETTE

It's a lie.

READE

Nicolette, that's my job. My job is to maintain an image. It's the only one I've got.

NICOLETTE

You'll love the people we used to be, I promise you. You should be making love to me. Out *there* with me. Marrying me. I want that.

READE

I don't think you do.

INT. BLS LIMOUSINE. NIGHT.

A handsome (in a kind of ugly way) movie star fidgets in the side seats of a limousine.

This is **ARAS HARRIS**, 27, an "overnight sensation" (despite his nine year climb to the top) with dark flat-ironed hair, sporting a vest and the skinniest jeans.

Next to him, Reade sits, fervently consumed by his phone.

ARAS

How much longer?

His manager, **ESTELLE STEK**, 40, locks eyes with him across the car. She's a mildly attractive woman who substituted a family for a lucrative career and perfectly sculpted face.

ESTELLE

Five minutes. If that. We're only driving around the block until Camilla's limousine hits the area. Press needs you at the same time.

Aras subtly swigs his inhaler. Reade pats him on the knee.

READE

Settle down, champ, everything's under control. You need a line of Peruvian flake to loosen up?

ARAS

You know I can't if I have a show tomorrow, but I'll bet you a bill that's why Camilla's not here.

READE

(shrugging)
Usually makes her prompt.

Estelle's iPhone lights up. She checks the memo.

ESTELLE

They're pulling up to security,
let's head over.

Noticing Aras' tense demeanor, Reade slides closer.

READE

You OK?

ARAS

I just wish my Dad was here.

READE

Aras, this is hard for you, I know.
But those cheers are for you. Just
like we dreamed of. They're excited
for you. Take tonight to enjoy what
you deserve. All of that hard work.
Not to mention, there are dozens of
beautiful girls to enjoy here also.

Aras smiles. Throws on a large pair of black Diesel shades.

READE (CONT'D)

Don't wear the glasses.

ARAS

You're not my stylist.

EXT. ZIEGFELD THEATRE. NIGHT.

Their limousine pulls to the curb of the historic Ziegfeld Theatre. A pair of bright shoes step out onto the pavement. Girls SCREAM. Cameras FLASH.

Aras loves every minute of it.

Aras lulls for a second, just absorbing it. Breathing it all in. He struts to the press line where his leading lady, the ravishing, thin, brunette beauty **CAMILLA LAKE** stands.

Seeing him, Camilla throws her arms around his neck, kissing him deeply on the lips. The **CROWD** goes wild.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Are you two a thing?

CAMILLA

A true lady doesn't kiss and tell!

Camilla giggles, indiscreetly brushing Aras' arm.

ANOTHER PHOTOGRAPHER
Hey Aras, why don't you take off
your shades?

ARAS
Hey, why don't you fuck yourself?

The **PAPARAZZI** chuckle. As does Camilla, all flirt.

CAMILLA
Oh, Aras. You're so edgy.

Aras catches his manager's disapproving reaction.

FIELD REPORTER
Aras, is it true that your father
passed away last week?

ARAS
Someone did their homework.

Aras keeps at it, posing and smiling with Camilla. Seconds later, Reade approaches and whispers in his ear:

READE
We have to do some quick interviews
with Entertainment Tonight, MTV and
Buzzfeed. Then we head inside.

ARAS
You tell them if anyone mentions my
fucking Dad heads will roll.

SMASH CUT TO ...

INT. ELECTRIC ROOM - DREAM HOTEL. NIGHT.

The after party! Hollywood bigwigs flown in on private jets, routinely feigning to be as cultured as New Yorkers. Glamour. Gossip. Open bar. Pushing the food around on their plates instead of eating it.

Reade weaves his way through conversations with his fiancée, Tasha, in a remarkable cocktail dress, on his arm.

TASHA
I've noticed you're still having
trouble sleeping.

READE
You know me, Tasha, I'm an animal.
I'm a Neanderthal in tune with his
circadian rhythms.

TASHA

I just worry about you. It's my job now as your future wife. I need you to take better care of yourself.

READE

(truly touched)
Babe.

TASHA

I'd probably be marrying a stock broker if it wasn't for you.

READE

Don't thank me just yet. Least not until I'm partner.

Tasha releases her grip on his arm. Twirls to the MUSIC.

TASHA

Dance with me!

READE

I'd love to, but I'm technically supposed to be working right now, so no *visible* fun.

TASHA

Oh, come on, Reade. Please? For me? You're always so gloom-and-doom and every-party's-the-same, but these are so exciting to me. I never get to do this. And, as a guest here, I ask that you dance. With me.

Reade takes Tasha closer, and they sweetly slow dance to the JAZZ STANDARD echoing over the monitors.

The stuck-up **CROWD** around them barely parts to make room.

READE

One year from now, let's remember that this was the night we danced in the middle of a sea of strangers for the first time.

TASHA

How come?

READE

(spinning her)
Because I want every moment with you to be special.

(MORE)

READE (CONT'D)

And in a year, on our "waltz in a pocket of cranky strangers" anniversary, we'll both look back at this and it will all seem so goddamn gorgeous.

INT. TAXI. NIGHT.

Tasha stares out the window at the city lights passing her by as their cab speeds through Union Square. Reade, on the other hand, fumbles on his phone.

The middle-aged **CABDRIVER** notices Tasha's adoring expression.

CABBIE

New to the city?

She's pulled from her trance.

TASHA

Me? Oh, God, no. I've lived on this island my whole life.

CABBIE

You just have that wonder in your eyes. Like you've never seen any of this before.

TASHA

Everything keeps changing so much, it's like I haven't. It gives me something new to look at. Something new to fall in love with.

She pats Reade's leg, who still doesn't budge from his phone.

TASHA (CONT'D)

My fiancé here is from California, but he's rounding on year nine in the city. Just one more until he becomes official.

Tasha cracks up at her own joke, noticing he's ignoring her.

TASHA (CONT'D)

Reade, we had a lovely evening why are you ruining it?

ANGLE ON: Reade's cell phone, as he scrolls through a series of candid photos from a party on a social media site.

SCROLLING: Business suits drinking. Mingling. Laughing.

READE
I can't fucking believe it.

Rage burns behind his eyes.

ANOTHER PHOTO: we recognize ARAS among the nameless faces.

READE (CONT'D)
Sorry, it's not you, babe, I just.
I can't believe it.

The taxi slows to a stop at a red light.

Reade FLINGS OPEN the vehicle door.

TASHA
Reade!

He SLAMS it shut and leans in though the window.

READE
I'm really sorry. I'll see you back
at my loft. There are some people I
need to destroy.

EXT. UNION SQUARE. NEW YORK CITY. NIGHT.

Reade hails another cab. Hops in, and barks directions.

INT. UPPER WEST SIDE APARTMENT COMPLEX LOBBY. NIGHT.

Reade confidently approaches the overworked **DOORMAN** thumbing apathetically through an *Entertainment Weekly* at his desk.

READE
My name's Donovan Spire. I'm here
for the mixer at Valerie Hank's
condo, I was told to check in at
the front desk.

DOORMAN
Last name again?

READE
Spire. First name: Donovan.
Technically the third by blood in
my family, but I'm sure she doesn't
have that on your list.

INT. VALERIE'S UPPER WEST SIDE APARTMENT. MOMENTS LATER.

The apartment door gently opens, and Reade coolly pushes his way through the crowd of **INDUSTRY TYPES**. His vaguely panicked demeanor is replaced with an icy determination as he beelines directly to **VALERIE**, a colleague from his firm (the one with the stellar fake tits we remember from earlier).

Noticing him, Valerie excuses herself from the conversation she was having.

VALERIE

Don't cause a scene.

READE

Said the drama queen of the year.

VALERIE

I'm impressed you managed to find way through the crowd of **INDUSTRY TYPES**, considering I made quite the effort to not invite you.

READE

You think there's anything on this planet you can get away with that I won't find out about?

VALERIE

Well, practice makes perfect.

Reade pivots to catch eyes with Aras, in the corner, somberly drinking a beer and chatting with a small group.

READE

(motioning to Aras)
Do you know who that is?

VALERIE

Aras Harris.

READE

My client.

VALERIE

Our client.

READE

Spare me all the brainwash "we're a team" bullshit, Valerie. He's my client. So why the fuck is he in your apartment instead of his after party as the press schedule that *I fucking prepared* for him dictates?

VALERIE

My guess is that Aras was sick of being carted around like your show pony and wanted a more intimate event to celebrate in without being gawked at for not grieving.

Something changes in Reade. We see it in his eyes.

READE

As the bigger person here, I refuse to stoop to your level. Let's try something I like to call the "compliment sandwich."

He speaks articulately in a collected, but menacing, manner.

READE (CONT'D)

Compliment: Your view is gorgeous. Better than mine. You must be great at sucking your landlord's cock.
 Criticism: Don't fool yourself for a fucking second that I don't know you've been organizing this party for the past month for no reason other than Barbara's impending "retirement" and your misguided attempt to gain stake at the firm. That's about as likely as Donovan Spire having any desire to soberly fuck you, whose name I dropped at the door tonight, knowing he'd be as far away as possible from that dry, pathetic pussy of yours that is only further proof that God has an impeccable sense of humor. I'd be worried that Aras accepted the invitation if I didn't know for a fact that if *anything* like this happens again I will drag you by your hair onto 74th Street and slam your fucking teeth into the curb until your neck snaps.

Reade doesn't break his gaze with Valerie.

READE (CONT'D)

And compliment: I admire that a woman of your age still has the flexibility to take photographs bending over in the mirror.

(MORE)

READE (CONT'D)

It's funny how easy these things are to locate when we forget to lock our MacBooks. And it's that much easier to disseminate.

Beaming, Reade backs away, leaving Val stunned and violated.

Turning, he slugs a mixed-drink from a nearby serving tray, gulping it down. Then swigs a separate vodka shot.

EXT. UPPER WEST SIDE. NIGHT.

Reade paces on the street corner, impatiently waiting for a taxicab not already occupied.

He POPS SOME PILLS and routinely swallows them dry.

Across the boulevard, he notices a familiar, shadowy figure: THE STRANGER from the subway in his TATTERED LEATHER JACKET.

READE

You interested in me, fella?

Reade, on a confidence high, screams out at the man.

READE (CONT'D)

Who the hell are you?! If you're following me you should know by now I'm an over-communicator. I don't tolerate silence.

Sufficiently failing at flagging down a taxi, Reade gives up and starts stumbling toward the MTA station.

He lights a cigarette. Stares down at it.

It's blurry. He can't seem to focus.

READE (CONT'D)

I might be a little drunk.

THE STRANGER (O.S.)

Do you smoke because it's classless or because it kills you faster than life can?

Reade turns around to retort, just in time to see the strange man step forward into the streetlight...

And finds HIMSELF STARING BACK AT HIM wearing that beat-up leather jacket.

A carbon copy.

Reade is stunned.

There's a beat between the two. It's awkward and unnerving.

Frightened, Reade hurries away down the sidewalk.

But his doppelganger slowly pursues.

Reade pops another pill to calm his nerves. Looks behind him.

The mysterious man continues stalking, following closely just as Reade descends stairs onto the subway platform.

INT. SUBWAY "C" TRAIN. NIGHT.

Reade pushes into a well-populated subway train mere seconds before the doors close. Startled, and trying to process what exactly he just experienced.

The train JOLTS forward.

Lights flicker as they speed through the underground.

Reade moves deeper inside, gripping the railing, and standing near the interior doors between cars. Still paranoid.

Through the grimy windows, in the neighboring car, we notice THE STRANGER standing, silently studying him.

Reade feels the man's eyes, but is too shaken to turn.

INT. SUBWAY "Q" TRAIN. DAY.

The next day: Reade sits on the train in his morning commute. Between stations, the graffitied walls pass by rapidly.

Exhaustion from a week's worth of forgetting to sleep starts taking a toll on him as he struggles to keep his eyes open.

In his insomniac state he gazes before himself, eyes crossed, at the paperwork in his lap. He doodles in big red letters:

R - E - A - D - E.

Over and over again. Blurring together: **READE. READE. READE. READE. READE. READE.**

The subway rolls to a stop. Reade looks up at the graffitied wall opposite him, and in large red letters the word **ERASE**.

EXT. BRYANT PARK. DAY.

Like clockwork, Reade approaches the local coffee cart first thing in the morning:

 READE
The usual, Rico.

 COFFEE VENDOR
(confused)
Another soy?

 READE
Have I ever not ordered my latte in
the time you've known me?

 COFFEE VENDOR
Was there something wrong with the
other ones?

 READE
Have you ever known me to complain?

 COFFEE VENDOR
About the latte you ordered from me
forty minutes ago?

 READE
This is my first time here this
morning.

 COFFEE VENDOR
Man, this is the third time you've
bothered me today.

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. READE'S CORNER. DAY.

Reade hangs his briefcase on the coat rack and examines his office. The blinds already pulled. The TV already turned to CNN for the morning news.

And a warm, half-empty latte perched on his desk to the left of his open MacBook.

Reade picks up the phone, and dials the operator.

 SECURITY GUARD (V.O.)
Extension 2-1-0-1. What can I do
for you, sir?

 READE
Matt, has anybody else checked in
at reception today?

SECURITY GUARD (V.O.)
No, sir, you're the only person
who's been in-office this morning.

READE
Alright.

SECURITY GUARD
Everything OK?

READE
I think I'm confusing myself. Just
running on fumes this week.

He hangs up the receiver.

LATER THAT MORNING, Reade completes his morning routine: wide grip pushups with skinny tie flung over his shoulder.

AN HOUR AFTER THAT, Reade finishes thumbing through this week's hardcopy of *Variety*.

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. MEN'S WASHROOM. DAY.

Reade washes his face, towels off, and applies a light layer of moisturizer. He smiles widely, checking his teeth, before adjusting the length of his necktie.

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. HALLWAY. DAY.

Reade saunters down his firm's hallway, noticing an unusually grim environment.

Some of the **ASSISTANTS** whisper to each other, gossiping over their computer screens.

Female **JUNIOR PUBLICISTS** whimper into tissues and dab their runny mascara.

Reade passes an indulgent, luxurious office where a **POLICEMAN** stands with an older woman bearing a stern, permanently sour disposition etched on her face.

This is the firm's CEO, **BARBARA TRAVERS**, 65. She notices him.

BARBARA
(to the officer)
Excuse me for five.

Barbara pounces on Reade, takes his arm in hers and leads him down the hallway into his own office.

READE
Welcome back, Barbara.

BARBARA
Quite the welcome wagon, McCarthy.

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. READE'S CORNER. DAY.

Barbara shuts the door behind them. Reade leans on his desk.

BARBARA
What do you know?

READE
(stumped)
About?

BARBARA
Middle Eastern politics. Developing
nanotechnology.
(beat)
About last night, you fuckhead.

READE
(lying)
Well, Barb, I think the company was
expertly represented and everyone
had a smashing time.

BARBARA
Valerie Hank was found dead this
morning. And as you might imagine,
I've already had quite the shitty
day because of it.

Reade smirks slightly.

READE
She cashed in her chips early?

BARBARA
Are you fucking smiling?

READE
(catching himself)
I'm sorry. That's -- that's
inappropriate, right?

BARBARA
This isn't funny, Reade. Least of
all for you. There are several
witnesses that claim you and Val
were in a heated argument.

READE
What else is new?

BARBARA
Did you threaten her?

READE
She's always been threatened by me professionally.

BARBARA
Physically.

READE
No.

BARBARA
She made it very clear to people that you threatened her.

READE
To who?

BARBARA
Do you know *anything* about this?

READE
No, I honestly know nothing.

BARBARA
Any alibi last night at all? Your fiancée? A friend? An Uber cabbie?

Reade pauses to reflect.

READE
Oddly enough there was--

Does he mention what he saw in the subway? That man. *Himself*?

READE (CONT'D)
No. No one.

BARBARA
You should remedy that.

READE
How am I being scrutinized here? Me. More so than any other person on this floor crying fake tears while side eyeing the available furniture in her office?

BARBARA

McCarthy, I can't sincerely believe you would ever do something this stupid. I know what we pay you, and it's not enough to buy your way out of it. As much as I valued Val, I value my retirement twice that amount. If I'm being polite. So get your story straight and let's sweep this all under the rug so life, or ours at least, can go on, shall we?

Barbara opens Reade's office door revealing the NYPD officer, **DETECTIVE ADAM STANLEY**, 50s, is not too far out of earshot.

As Barbara shuffles out, Detective Stanley peeks in:

DETECTIVE STANLEY

Mr. McCarthy, I'm Adam Stanley with the NYPD Detective Bureau. I'd love to borrow a moment of your time to collect your report of events last night. I understand you were at Ms. Hank's residence...

READE

(shaking his hand)
Sure, anything to help. I'm afraid I'm in a rush but let's step in my office for a bit of privacy. It's an image based industry, so I don't want to needlessly raise red flags.

SMASH CUT TO ...

EXT. SOHO STREETS. EVENING.

Reade practically skips down the sidewalk, dancing around, as if hearing music while he struts. Grinning wildly.

He pauses at a **BODEGA VENDOR**, eying his flower arrangements.

READE

I've got butterflies. Can you get me something romantic? Something vivid. Something lively.

INT. READE'S SOHO LOFT. NIGHT.

Reade tiptoes inside carrying a gorgeous bouquet, tossing his keys and wallet on the sofa before **SLAMMING** the door shut for Tasha's attention. She rushes in from his bedroom.

TASHA
Goddammit Reade, you gave me a...

But she can't finish. Reade takes her hand and spins her into a breathtaking waltz right there in the living room.

TASHA (CONT'D)
What has gotten into you?

READE
Everything, babe. And yet nothing at all. Just realizing that life is too short. But not for all of us.

TASHA
You're being awfully cute lately.

Reade lunges in, lips locked, passionately undressing her.

INT. READE'S SOHO LOFT. BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Reade lies in bed, naked, near Tasha. His eyes studying the ceiling tiles. His brow furrows, concerned suddenly.

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. MEN'S WASHROOM. DAY.

Reade applies a light layer of moisturizer. He smiles widely, checking his teeth, before adjusting the length of his tie.

Reade bends to lace his shoe. The washroom door OPENS gently.

UNFAMILIAR MAN (O.S.)
Reade McCarthy?

A pair of rustic brown Gucci Oxfords, identical to ones Reade currently ties, step into view.

Slowly, Reade rises to greet the UNFAMILIAR MAN, allowing his eyes to cascade over the fellow's outfit.

The man sports a slim-cut navy suit, similar in style to the one on Reade, but with a gorgeous thread pattern enhanced by a silver pocket square making quite the elegant combination.

His eyes flicker with envy at this newcomer's finely creased ivory shirt and cerulean accent tie, making Reade's off-white shirt pallid in comparison.

The tie clip. That stunning smile. His steel blue eyes.

And expertly coiffed walnut-colored hair lifted in a delicate wave, parted just opposite as Reade's.

UNFAMILIAR MAN (CONT'D)
 Fantastic style. Just fantastic. If I didn't know better, I'd say I was looking in a mirror.

Reade stiffens through competition as this charismatic, toned and charming man extends his hand:

SEBASTIAN
 I'm Sebastian Ryan.

Reade hesitates shaking it, but eventually obliges.

READE
 Shit, that's a good name.

The tension is palpable. But **SEBASTIAN RYAN**, 31, is at ease.

SEBASTIAN
 Pleasure to finally meet you, I've read and heard so many phenomenal things. I'm really looking forward to diving in and becoming part of the family. There's a lot we can learn from each other's practices, I'm sure.

Reade's heart sinks.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)
 I know nothing I do can replace Valerie Hanks, truly sorry about that loss, but working under the legendary Barbara Travers and beside you as an executive vice president, I'm positive we'll accomplish great things for this firm. And continue exceeding our own expectations. Congratulations on everything. Truly. Your career has been remarkable up to now.

READE
 (confused)
 I'm sorry, I don't mean to be caught so off guard.

SEBASTIAN
 Well, my first day is Monday, but I wanted to make sure I gave myself ample time to unpack everything and make the rounds before then.

Reade is stricken silent.

READE

Excuse me, I'm afraid I'm late for
a dial-in.

Reade shuffles past him.

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. READE'S CORNER. DAY.

Reade sits at his desk, eyes glued to his MacBook screen with anxiety, reading a lifestyles blog on: SEBASTIAN RYAN.

He reopens a search engine, types in his name, and clicks on Sebastian's TWITTER page. His eyes squint in fury.

ANGLE ON: the tiny blue check mark by his profile: *VERIFIED!*

The phone RINGS.

DANIELLE (O.S.)

Reade McCarthy's office.

Danielle pops her head in. Reade raises a finger.

READE

I'm not here.

Danielle nods and hurries back to her desk.

DANIELLE

I'm sorry, he's not in the office,
can I have him return?

Reade, hearing this, POUNDS his desk in fury.

READE

GOD DAMMIT. Danielle? DANIELLE!

Danielle, rushes back in.

READE (CONT'D)

Never say that I'm not in. Or that
I'm in a meeting. Or that I'm on a
call. What did I tell you about
being transparent? I *promise* I'll
fire you for it. Only unless it's
my fiancée. You understand?

DANIELLE

Yes.

READE

Do you?!

DANIELLE

Yes.

READE

Who was that?

DANIELLE

Your fiancée.

READE

Well, then, good work.

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. READE'S CORNER. DAY. LATER.

Reade sits reclined with his Macbook in his lap chatting on the phone with Tasha, the two giggling, gossiping.

READE

I feel like the Hardy Boys.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. TASHA'S HELL'S KITCHEN APARTMENT. DAY. CONTINUOUS.

Tasha sits in her breakfast nook, laptop open on her dining table, feasting on a bowl of berries.

TASHA

(snickering)

Well who puts their entire life on the internet like this for everyone to see? Oh God, Reade, check out this article on Huffington Post about his...

READE

Wedding. Two steps ahead.

TASHA

But his wife...

READE

Total troll.

TASHA

Be nice. She has some -- carefully selected Instagram filters, if you know what I mean.

READE

You could park a car between those front teeth.

TASHA

Reade!

READE

Are we horrible people?

TASHA

No, we're not. Well, at least *I'm* not. And you should get along with the other boys at school. He has nothing to do with the promotion. So march into his office and play the game.

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. SEBASTIAN'S CORNER. DAY.

Carrying two cups of coffee, Reade lingers in the doorway to find Sebastian settling into Valerie's, now-empty, office.

Sebastian kneels, sifting through the half-dozen boxes that are scattered across the floor.

Reade hesitates momentarily, but eventually steps inside.

READE

Careful, you don't want to ruin the crease in those trousers.

Sebastian looks up, noticing him, and smirks.

READE (CONT'D)

I brought you a latte from the vendor downstairs. The best in Bryant Park.

SEBASTIAN

Thank you, but I'm actually lactose intolerant...

READE

A little birdie told me that. Don't worry, made with almond milk.

SEBASTIAN

Very thoughtful.

READE

Of course. Need a hand?

SEBASTIAN

No, I'm fine. I'm just making sure everything's accounted for.

READE

I have to admit, when we first met, I wasn't thoroughly downloaded on your background. It's really quite impressive. I'd love to grab drinks once you're completely settled.

Sebastian, preoccupied, digs around in another box.

SEBASTIAN

That would be fantastic. I'd love to know your war stories and would be happy to hear myself talk about battle wounds as well.

READE

We have quite the roster here.

SEBASTIAN

Ah. "We." Yes, you do. *They* do. "We" don't. I don't think there's a word more damaging in the English language than "we." It gives the false comfort that group mentality is successful.

Sebastian notices Reade's curiosity, caught off guard:

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, I don't know where that came from. I respect the model you have here obviously...

READE

No, I don't disagree. It's just not often I meet someone else here with that opinion.

SEBASTIAN

Time is a luxury and life is short. I wouldn't want mine to be shared with somebody else. We all started dying the minute we were born. And we're the only species alive that knows it.

Suddenly Sebastian finds what he's been looking for:

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

Here she is! My baby girl.

Sebastian hoists from a box a CLEAR CYLINDRICAL TROPHY that he places delicately on the shelf beside his desk.

Reade salivates at the award.

His pupils narrow envious at the inscription...

BEST PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN, MOTION PICTURE, 2015.

Reade's mouth goes dry. It gets hard for him to swallow.

An awkward silence.

Suddenly, he thinks to himself: why aren't you talking, it's been a long time since you've said anything.

Say something!

Reade opens his mouth to mumble:

READE

It's been a long time since you've said anything.

Shit.

SEBASTIAN

I'm sorry?

READE

Oh. Sorry, I thought that was my inner monologue.

INT. SUBWAY "Q" TRAIN. DAY.

On the train, Reade sits in a mood, scribbling in a moleskine perched on his lap with big red letters. Over and over again. Blurring together: **ERASE. ERASE. ERASE. ERASE. ERASE. ERASE.**

The doors swing open and a **PLUMP SWEATY GIRL** boards, wearing booty shorts labeled "SOUL CYCLE" on her ass. Reade notices and mumbles to himself:

READE

Your shorts say "Soul Cycle" but your love handles say "failed my New Year Resolution."

The girl turns to him, jaw-dropped, offended.

SOUL CYCLE GIRL

Excuse me?

READE

Oh. Sorry, I thought that was my inner monologue.

INT. READE'S SOHO LOFT BUILDING. LOBBY. DAY.

Reade extracts letters from his mailbox, carefully sifting through the few parcels.

His iPhone RINGS, he glares at the home screen: OFFICE.

READE
(answering)
Yes, Dani?

DANIELLE (V.O.)
Sorry to bother you, but Detective Stanley is calling...

READE
Who?

DANIELLE (V.O.)
Detective Stanley. The man that was investigating Val's homicide.

READE
Tell him I just stepped away.

DANIELLE (V.O.)
But he's standing in front of me.

READE
Well then, you've reached Reade McCarthy's voice mail. We regret missing your call. Please leave your message after the beep.

Reade hangs up furious (as visibly furious as is possible by clenching the end call button with your thumb).

Turning around, he notices Nicolette perched in a chair near the security desk. She kindly waves. His heart skips a beat.

READE (CONT'D)
Nik, what are you doing here?!

NICOLETTE
You told me to meet you here.

READE
Nicolette. Why would I tell you to meet me here?

NICOLETTE
I don't know Reade - I didn't even know what HERE was when you called.

INT. SOHO COFFEE SHOP. DAY.

Reade sits opposite Nicolette in a booth, arms-folded across his chest, pouting, facing his latte on the table.

NICOLETTE

I want to go back to that resort upstate. Do you remember? We can get a couple of couples massages and have the taste of fermented grapes in our mouths dawn til dusk.

READE

That was a lavish weekend.

NICOLETTE

That entire summer was storybook. You came along and I told myself I wasn't about to fall for another nine-to-five. But those eyes of yours won me over.

Reade hardly engages with her.

NICOLETTE (CONT'D)

You're distracted. Why are you so nervous? It's embarrassing.

READE

I'm not nervous.

NICOLETTE

I know when you're lying. What did you do that's making you so upset?

READE

I'm upset with you. You can't show up on my doorstep, we established rules. A long time ago. And it makes me feel violated and angry.

NICOLETTE

You called me.

READE

I would remember if I picked up the phone to call you.

NICOLETTE

Let's just hang out and have some fun. It's you and I, remember? Reade and Nicolette. We're the ones to beat. Best dressed. Best jokes. Best looking.

Reade doesn't budge, just biding his time with her.

NICOLETTE (CONT'D)

Are you still seeing Dr. Norton?

READE

That's none of your business.

NICOLETTE

I just wanted to congratulate you if you are, that would be your longest relationship to date.

READE

Why are you behaving this way?

NICOLETTE

I love feeling sorry for myself. I think it's my favorite thing to do. Second is drinking coffee.

She takes a sip of hers.

NICOLETTE (CONT'D)

Still not talking with your family?

READE

Your parents abandoned you when you were fourteen, Nicolette, so please spare me the lecture on family.

NICOLETTE

Family is connection.

READE

And when people die you lose that connection. Sometimes fathers get throat pain and six months later they're in the ground. Sometimes mothers medicate so much they don't realize coping with a loss turns into a death sentence. Sometimes, and here's the real surprise, Nicolette, sometimes you have to know when it's time to tune out, shut it off, and move on. Because that's life. Right there. People die. People leave you. But you have to move on.

Nicolette fumes, hurt.

NICOLETTE

Your fangs are showing again.

She removes herself, pulling a MANILA ENVELOPE from her purse as she stands, showing it off:

NICOLETTE (CONT'D)

When you called, I thought it was because you knew about this. Maybe I was too scared to talk about it over the phone, but you are not a well-liked man. There are people out there that hate you. That are waiting to hurt you. And here I am, just asking for you to let me love me, and you *refuse* to.

Upset, she goes, but just before she storms out the door:

NICOLETTE (CONT'D)

Don't tell me I didn't try to help you, Reade.

Reade watches her through the window. She tosses the envelope in the trash. His curiosity is piqued.

He throws cash down and heads outside to the waste bin.

EXT. SOHO COFFEE SHOP. DAY.

At the bottom of the grimy trash receptacle sits the envelope Nicolette was carrying. Reade eyes it, anxious.

A **HIPSTER** tosses his protein shake atop the heap of garbage, splattering it everywhere. The envelope is filthy now.

Biting the bullet, Reade reaches to grab the envelope when...

DANIELLE

Reade?

READE

(seeing her)

DANIELLE!

DANIELLE

What are you doing?

READE

I thought I accidentally threw away my gym pass.

DANIELLE

You keep that at the office, I saw it before I left.

READE

No, my guest pass. For my fiancée's sister, coming into town next week.

DANIELLE

I thought Stacy lived Downtown.

READE

Her older sister.

(beat)

You've clearly never met her.

DANIELLE

I'll call to get another one.

READE

That'd be great if you could handle it. Anyway, I'm off to the bodega to pick up some -- manila...

DANIELLE

Manila?

READE

Vanilla. Soy. For baking, it seems.

DANIELLE

Funny seeing you out. Looks like we both have a life out of the office.

Reade bellows out a horrendous FAKE LAUGH.

READE

Alright, well, that's enough. See you at work then.

INT. READE'S SOHO LOFT BUILDING. LOBBY. NIGHT.

Reade pushes through the revolving doors, instantly noticing DETECTIVE ADAM STANLEY and his **PARTNER** exiting the elevator.

Reade turns away, shields his face, and immediately pops into the stairwell, avoiding them, allowing them to pass.

INT. READE'S SOHO LOFT. NIGHT.

Reade enters his loft, a bit out-of-breath from the upstairs climb, to find Tasha quiet on the sofa, clearly shaken.

READE

You look about as good as I feel.

TASHA

Reade, how could not tell me that Valerie was murdered?

READE

It's not really pillow talk.

TASHA

Two officers just came to your door asking for you.

READE

What did you say?

TASHA

I said you weren't home, and that I didn't know where you were.

READE

Why would you say that?

TASHA

OK. Where were you?

Reade backtracks, almost caught...

READE

A small Kappa Sigma alumni mixer in the East Village. But you're right, I should have called if I wasn't coming straight here.

TASHA

Val's family has a lot of money, I don't think they're going to stop until they find out what happened.

READE

Is that what they told you?

TASHA

I'm just worried they think you may be involved.

READE

That's absurd, I was with you the whole night.

TASHA

I can't vouch for that!

READE

But did you?

TASHA

Yes, of course, I lied to them. Oh God, am I allowed to lie to them?! I don't even know if you came home at *all* that night.

READE

I CAME HOME!

TASHA

How can I ever be sure? You sneak in once I'm asleep and you sneak out before I wake up. And you're so goddamn meticulous, I couldn't find anything out of place on your vanity. You shouldn't be so tidy!

READE

How was she found dead?

TASHA

What do you mean *how*?

READE

I think she's staged a suicide and is trying to take me out with her.

TASHA

That's a disgusting thing to say.

READE

Is it that preposterous?!

TASHA

Yes, people aren't going to shove a gun in their mouth just so they can punish you, that's psychotic.

Tasha maneuvers past him to the door.

READE

Let's just calm down, we shouldn't end this night on a fight.

TASHA

No, I can't. I don't-- I don't even know if I can trust you right now. I need to go home.

READE

The Metro is delayed.

TASHA

I'll take a cab.

READE

Babe--

TASHA

It terrifies me that you don't need anything. You might want something, but you don't need it anymore.

READE

I need you.

TASHA

I don't believe you.

EXT. SOHO COFFE SHOP. NIGHT. LATER.

Panicking and curious, Reade tears through the trash to get to the manila envelope Nicolette discarded.

He rips the envelope open and pulls out several photographs.

The top one is recognizably THE STRANGER IN THE JACKET, his doppelganger, standing on a street corner.

He squints to read the street signs, then hails a TAXI...

READE

73rd and Riverside.

EXT. UPPER WEST SIDE. NIGHT.

Reade wanders the streets near the Hudson River, inspecting the buildings around him, searching to identify the landing where the photographs might have been snapped from.

In the distance, he notices the familiar jacket. It cloaks a figure, slumped on a bench, face in palms.

Reade pursues.

READE

I need a word with you.

The figure sits up revealing that IT'S VALERIE, wearing the stranger's tattered jacket.

Reade freezes, face pale, seeing a ghost.

READE (CONT'D)

Val?

VALERIE

(fighting back tears)

The words that pour from your mouth before you die are the last energy you give to the world. And I didn't even get mine. I couldn't even see him coming. To beg for my life.

She lowers the leather hoodie, gruesomely displaying that the back of her skull has been bashed in, bloody and beaten.

VALERIE (CONT'D)

(breaking down)

The coward didn't have the balls to face me before he took that fucking brick to my brain.

Valerie turns, stripping herself of the jacket, and passing it off to Reade, who meekly grabs.

VALERIE (CONT'D)

Death can't erase things we've done that are unfair.

Blood leaks from her nose, mixing with tears.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. READE'S SOHO LOFT. BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Reade jolts himself awake from his nightmare in a cold sweat. He struggles to breathe, reaching next to him to seek comfort in Tasha, only to remember she left hours earlier.

He fumbles around in his nightstand, finding and extracting a few pills, and swallowing them dry.

EXT. SOHO COFFEE SHOP. THE NEXT MORNING. DAY.

The next morning: we find Reade standing on the corner eyeing the *now-empty* trash bin with grim disappointment. He'll never know what the contents of that folder contained.

Maybe, somehow, that will make things easier for him.

INT. DR. NORTON'S CHELSEA OFFICE. EVENING.

A handsome Irish man with side-parted salt-and-pepper hair, crooked nose and chiseled jaw, sits in his chicly furnished office opposite Reade on a leather couch.

This is **DR. PHILIP NORTON**, 45, who is indeed Reade's longest relationship, observing him ringing his hands together.

READE

Well, I'm certainly relieved you moved out of that filthy Gramercy space. The decor was ghastly.

DR. NORTON

It's a surprise to see you.

READE

So I missed a few sessions.

DR. NORTON

I haven't been in the Gramercy office since last spring.

READE

So I missed a *lot* of sessions. But I was always thinking about you on Thursday nights, Phil.

DR. NORTON

It's back, isn't it?

And, perhaps, for the first time, we see Reade vulnerable:

READE

What?

DR. NORTON

We only have fifty minutes together today, so I think we need to start there if it is.

READE

It feels like it is.

DR. NORTON

Although it's been a while, we can still revisit the work we've done. Tell me about your routine, do you find yourself under stress?

READE

Things have never been better.

DR. NORTON

How so?

READE

Becoming a partner at my firm had a barrier to entry. Her name was Val.

(MORE)

READE (CONT'D)

And that barrier no longer exists--
since Val left the company.

DR. NORTON

Why did she leave?

READE

Reasons beyond her control.

DR. NORTON

Have you been exercising your -

READE

I exercise every day.

DR. NORTON

- exercising your empathy. Like we
had discussed.

READE

Yes, and things were going so well.
I proposed to Tasha. We're finding
the right time for her to move in.

DR. NORTON

You still don't live together?

READE

Not so sure I should let her see
the real me yet. But my clients
love me, I've never been busier,
the industry envies me...

DR. NORTON

And yet, your symptoms are back.

Reade falters, truly lost for words.

READE

I just thought if I had everything
I wanted I could get past this.

DR. NORTON

And I'm sure you can, but there is
such a thing as self-handicapping.
People with your background, your
upbringing, tend to invent ways to
tear themselves apart. They make
deliberate, risky decisions, so if
they fail later they have somewhere
to place blame.

Reade scoffs, looks out the window.

DR. NORTON (CONT'D)

What do you think this could be stemming from?

READE

I haven't been sleeping. And I was overworked trying to prove myself over Val. And none of that seemed worth it to me.

(beat)

And I thought about throwing myself in front of the subway one morning.

EXT. DR. NORTON'S CHELSEA OFFICE. EVENING.

Reade shuffles through the gray revolving doors of the office building, happening onto a **HOMELESS WOMAN** begging for change. Sick, she COUGHS aggressively into her elbow.

Reade watches this woman, morbidly fascinated.

INT. DEATH + COMPANY. EAST VILLAGE. EVENING.

Sebastian slugs down a scotch neat, and raises two fingers to the nearby **COCKTAIL WAITRESS**, signaling for another round (we notice a few other empty glasses around his elbows).

He winks across the booth at Reade who has barely made a dent in the mixology cocktail he's ordered.

SEBASTIAN

I came from a family of drinkers. You didn't drink fast, you didn't get a drink at all.

Sebastian blows out the SMALL CANDLE on their table.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

Just to be safe.

(beat)

I'm incredibly flammable. I'm about 80% alcohol, and 20% hairspray.

Sebastian snickers. Reade even smiles at the joke.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

I'm glad we're doing this.

READE

I really am too. It's great to have some new company. I wasn't feeling too fresh for a while there.

SEBASTIAN

Try a douche.

READE

My point: I think I found him.

SEBASTIAN

Well played, Reade! Well played!

READE

So, work aside, what do you find yourself doing?

SEBASTIAN

I have a severe medical condition: wanderlust. Two bedrooms on Avenue A, and on weekends they sit empty. I pack a bag and put a thumb out. If I have the time of course.

READE

Where do you go?

SEBASTIAN

I spin a globe and point a finger. How about you?

READE

I let my fiancée have our weekends since my schedule monopolizes the week. She was a dancer when we met. Now she's an instructor at a ballet academy, so we usually spend time at the theatre or art exhibitions.

SEBASTIAN

You can tell a lot about a man how he spends his weekends.

READE

I'd certainly like to travel more.

SEBASTIAN

Reade, this holiday break, you have to visit Tulum. It's just stunning. The cenotes are a must-see and if you're in for adventure, find a cabdriver named Benzo and ask to see the jaguars.

(MORE)

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

I kid you not, he drove us fifteen minutes into the jungle at dusk, slaps a piece of fucking steak on the hood of his cab and within ten minutes a jaguar is there licking the juice off our windshield. I've never felt closer to death.

READE

I've always wanted to go to Mexico.

SEBASTIAN

You spent ten minutes monologuing about your white collar OC family, and you never vacationed there?

The subtle condescension stings Reade, but he keeps cool.

READE

Well-- like I said, I wish I could travel more.

SEBASTIAN

Last month I was in Italy, mind you I don't speak a lick of Italian, but in Italy I meet this gorgeous woman at a party. I think she was a hair stylist. Green eyes, legs for days, didn't know any English. We spent a week flirting, at least body language is universal, but I was getting frustrated. Only had a few days left, so I sit down on Google Translate and just spill everything, confessing my feelings, print the document-- that's when I had her. May as well have been a goddamn John Keats poem. My Tinder game may be sub-par but my Google Translate game is on point.

READE

How long have you been married?

Sebastian lulls, knowing Reade did a slight background check.

SEBASTIAN

Nothing gets past you, huh?

READE

Just curious.

SEBASTIAN

You have to be totally sure, Reade. I don't know anything about Tasha-- that's her name right, Tasha?

READE

Yes.

SEBASTIAN

It seems that I also know how to use a search engine. I don't know anything about your relationship with Tasha. But from my experience, we're not just marrying them now. We're marrying them in five years, ten years, thirty years-- when she changes jobs, copes with loss, regrets that she could have wound up with a better man. You know?

Sebastian, having finished his drink, flags for another.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

Things were rough, so Allison and I tried a bit of an arrangement. She traveled a lot too, and whatever we didn't tell each other never made us weaker. Until the day it did. We've separated. A little over two months now. God, that's strange to admit so candidly. Honestly, I was thrilled this job fell into my lap. It's been a welcome distraction.

Sebastian removes himself from the table.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

You smoke?

READE

Yes. You?

SEBASTIAN

Fuck off, cigarettes are welcoming a slow death. That Mexican jaguar was close enough. But two brunettes from the bar made a move to light up on the street, and it's about time for Sebastian Ryan to try his luck, wouldn't you say?

Sebastian tosses his iPhone to Reade.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

All I ask while I'm gone. There's a number in my phone: JAGGER. Text him you're at Death and Company, and request two "Olafs."

READE

Jagger?

SEBASTIAN

Same exact coke-guy as Sir Michael Philip. Mick gets his blow from those vials. It'll open your eyes.

READE

Tonight?

SEBASTIAN

It's Wednesday. What else gets you through the rest of the week?

Reade obliges him with a menthol.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

You really should quit, these will fucking kill you.

Sebastian pops the cigarette behind his ear and hurries off.

As requested, Reade scans through Sebastian's iPhone contacts and finds the JAGGER contact card.

And noticing, just above it: JACKSON, NICOLETTE.

His heart skips a beat. Reade whips out his own phone to pull up the same contact and compare the phone numbers.

Identical.

Reade nervously begins to type another name "T-A-S-H-A" and instantly CAMDEN, TASHA pops up.

His brow furrows in confusion. Then, he fills with rage.

He fumbles with his pill container. Dry swallows a pill.

EXT. DEATH + COMPANY. EAST VILLAGE STREETS. NIGHT.

Reade's dark eyes are locked in front of him in an apathetic, icy gaze as he strides slowly away from the bar.

Behind him, Sebastian quickly shoves his way through a sea of people. We fast get a sense there was a confrontation between the two of them that we may not have been privy to.

SEBASTIAN

You made a scene in front of those brunettes, Reade!

Reade's vacant eyes click back into focus at the sound of his voice. And his demeanor shifts. He turns around to Sebastian, now calm. Perhaps Reade wasn't completely privy to it either.

READE

How do you know Nicolette Jackson?

SEBASTIAN

I honestly have no idea who you're talking about.

READE

She's in your phone.

SEBASTIAN

You are out of your fucking mind.

READE

IT'S YOUR GOD DAMN PHONE.

SEBASTIAN

I'm working off Val's old cell. I.T. left me her contacts. Maybe you should take it up with her.

Sebastian snickers at his own tasteless joke.

READE

Impossible.

SEBASTIAN

Is it? Seems to me that Val was one tough, stealthy bitch. Wouldn't be surprised if she was in places she shouldn't have been.

READE

I don't believe you.

SEBASTIAN

Did Val find your Achilles heel? What a shame she died before she could exploit it.

Reade nearly loses his temper, lunges into Sebastian to grab him by his blazer lapels, but finds strength to refrain.

A **DRUNK SORORITY GIRL** stumbles by:

DRUNK CHICK

Take off your shirts and make out!

SEBASTIAN

Man, you West Coast gentlemen have a short fuse! Let's just fight on the sidewalk and be as boorish as possible. It's exciting people!

READE

I promise you, that these have been a very trying few weeks. And there are certain things I am *incredibly* sensitive to. So please, if any of this was intentional, stop it now.

Meanwhile, the wasted Alpha Phi found **TWO DRUNK FRIENDS:**

DRUNK GIRLS

Kiss! Kiss! Kiss!

SEBASTIAN

Reade, if you want to start a war, I'm happy to start one. If I wanted to fuck you, I would go deeper than a contact card. Your life's online. Everyone's is, and when we put it there, that gives anyone the right to extort it. Everyone wants to be a public figure, but nobody wants the repercussions.

Reade smirks, turns to walk away, tossing Sebastian's iPhone into the street traffic:

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

You're a fucking psychopath! I'm expensing that phone! And I'm fucking telling Barb!

EXT. EAST VILLAGE STREETS. NIGHT. MOMENTS LATER.

Reade storms aimlessly through the crowded streets, sneering at the rowdy college-aged crowd that inadvertently makes him feel out of place.

Across the street, Reade notices THE STRANGER, just parallel to him, taking almost identical paces.

Reade lulls, briefly contemplating what to do, then follows, darting across 1st Avenue.

Feeling his pursuit, the stranger begins sprinting, weaving expertly in-and-out of oncoming pedestrian traffic.

Reade chases his doppelganger, frantic now.

The two men charge down the slick, steep stairs of...

INT. A SEEDY ENGLISH ALE HOUSE. NIGHT.

One right after the other, they SLAM through the pub's door, startling a group of **TOURISTS** at a window table.

Reade tracks the stranger through the bar, watching him strut with that tattered leather hoodie concealing his face.

Just steps behind, Reade follows the stranger between young, **LOUD PATRONS** and directly through the door of...

THE FILTHY, PISS-STAINED MEN'S WASHROOM.

PITCH BLACK. Behind him, he CLOSES THE DOOR. And FLIPS ON the harsh, fluorescent lights.

Only to discover he's in there alone.

Reade catches his breath and tries to collect his thoughts.

He steals a long glimpse of himself in the grimy sink mirror, the man he's become, how old he suddenly looks, and his eyes well with tears that, soon enough, escape.

READE

(crying)

I'm broken. I'm fucking broken. I'm
fucking empty.

Reade wipes his cheeks. A shaky hand reaches inside his coat pocket to pull out the pills he needs as a crutch.

He unscrews the top, and looks back at his reflection.

Suddenly behind him: in the mirror, he sees THE STRANGER, the carbon copy of himself, smugly observing.

THE STRANGER

If they don't work, then what's the
point of taking them?

Reade nods and obediently spills the pill bottle's contents entirely down the sink drain.

READE

I'm a good person. I may have hated Val, but I didn't hurt her.

(searching)

Did I? You're the only one that can clear my name. You're my alibi. I'm not a violent man.

After the pills CLINK down the drain, Reade turns to face his familiar-faced counterpart, both noticeably uneasy.

READE (CONT'D)

How can this be possible?

THE STRANGER

I don't have that answer.

READE

You look exactly like me.

THE STRANGER

I can see that.

INT. READE'S SOHO LOFT. NIGHT.

The door of Reade's loft slowly opens and Reade shuffles into his living room, flipping the lights. Hauntingly SILENT.

Steps behind, THE STRANGER follows Reade inside, crossing the threshold of his loft, entering his life, invited in, though Reade is visibly apprehensive.

READE

Can I get you anything? Something to drink?

THE STRANGER

I don't.

The stranger closes the door behind him, absorbing this room and the environment he's entered.

THE STRANGER (CONT'D)

(admiring the loft)

This is incredible.

READE

It's nothing.

THE STRANGER

This is nothing like nothing.

Reade, still on edge, keeps his distance from the stranger.

THE STRANGER (CONT'D)
You're afraid.

READE
I have just invited a complete and potentially dangerous stranger into my home in the middle of the night and am not totally sure why.
(beat)
So, yes, I'm a little afraid.

THE STRANGER
I probably have more reason to be afraid of you.

READE
Where - how - do we begin?

THE STRANGER
Rip the bandage off.

READE
Why were you following me?

THE STRANGER
Wouldn't you have done the same?

READE
Yes.

THE STRANGER
Wouldn't you have been curious?

Reade gets intimately close to the stranger, lingering just inches from his face. Examining him, he smoothly traces his fingertips over a mole behind the stranger's ear.

He then gestures to the same mole behind his own:

READE
This is outrageous.

Reade rolls up his shirtsleeves revealing a HIDEOUS SCAR that traces the width of his INNER ARM.

READE (CONT'D)
I was twenty. Hopped a fence and came down on an exposed nail.

The stranger removes his jacket, boasting the IDENTICAL SCAR on his own arm. Reade suddenly floods with fear.

READE (CONT'D)
What's your name?

THE STRANGER

What's your name?

READE

Reade McCarthy. What's yours?

THE STRANGER

Does that really matter? Aren't you more curious where I came from?

READE

Where did you come from?

THE STRANGER

And how I found you.

READE

How did you find me?

THE STRANGER

Pure chance. I'm from a disgusting, east-of-nowhere, California suburb called Blythe. And one day I notice a man. A man that, I think, looks a little like me. A man who seems to have it all at his fingertips. I mean, he snaps his fingers: roof over his head. Snaps his fingers: beautiful girl. Snaps his fingers: perfect job. It was like a warped game God was playing: how someone so similar to me could have everything I craved.

A profound stillness, then:

THE STRANGER (CONT'D)

Some us aren't born the lucky ones. Some of us can only fantasize. And I came here in search of that man. To find the man that I deserved to be. Instead, he found me.

INT. READE'S SOHO LOFT. BATHROOM. DAY.

Reade stands in his mirror, naked, somberly staring at his own reflection. Considering his own mortality.

INT. NEDERLANDER THEATRE. NIGHT.

Reade sits in a sharp gray suit, well put-together as we're used to, beside Tasha in aisle seats of the packed theatre.

On the stage, Reade's client Aras is performing an emotional scene with a **BRITISH MOVIE STAR** taking her stab at Broadway, which will either prove to be Tony Awards bait or fodder for the critics to universally pan.

Time will tell. And as this is only the seventh preview, that has yet to be determined.

BRITISH STAR

I can't believe I let you do this to me, every single time, I let you treat me like I'm this second rate person in your life.

But Aras isn't fucking bad:

ARAS

You wanna know what you are? You're alone. And you're delusional. You have to be the most delusional person I have ever met. That's your fetish, you blur the lines between reality and fantasy, until none of this even exists to you anywhere. You say you love me, but you bend over for any man with power just because you think it gets you closer to the real life you want. Even though you know they're lying. Even though you know it makes you feel good to have the attention. And you come home, shrug, kiss our daughter, and tell me it was just a business dinner. So, yes, you're second rate to me.

INT. NEDERLANDER THEATRE. BACKSTAGE. NIGHT.

A bottle of champagne POPS, bringing us into a celebration in Aras' dingy, though still faded-glamorous, dressing room.

READE

Happy two weeks until opening! You are revolutionary in this, Aras. You've really got it. That work is genius. No more thinking small. You're gonna be huge. I think you can get a Tony nod.

Tasha gently caresses Reade's arm as he pours her a glass of bubbly, perhaps the first affection since their argument.

TASHA

Reade, bite your tongue. Don't jinx him. That's worse than saying "The Scottish Play" in the theatre.

ARAS

Thank you, Tasha.

TASHA

He's just a silly suit who knows nothing about superstition.
(under her breath:)
Although I don't disagree.

Aras notices his **DIRECTOR** meander by the open dressing room door, gesturing to him as he passes.

ARAS

Back in five. I have notes.

As Aras removes himself from the conversation, Tasha removes the shoes from her feet, arching them in a stretch.

TASHA

I miss my comfortable Pradas. How could we have left them in Miami?
(then laughing:)
I can't believe I'm lamenting the loss of my comfortable Pradas.
(off Reade's silence:)
You seem distracted. Everything OK?

A KNOCK on the doorframe catches Reade and Tasha's eyes.

SEBASTIAN

Oh, well, hello stranger.

Sebastian stands there with a shit-eating grin on his face.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

I thought I'd find Aras in here, he was quite spectacular tonight.

READE

He's in notes.

SEBASTIAN

Aren't you going to announce me to your fiancée?
(extending a hand)
Tasha is it?

TASHA
 (accepting it)
 It is.

READE
 This is Sebastian.

TASHA
 Ah, I've heard all about you...

SEBASTIAN
 Some might say I'm his new partner
 in crime.

READE
 Some might say it's a coincidence
 running into you tonight. I myself
 say it's like a knife in the back.

SEBASTIAN
 I thought I should support. Aras is
 technically *our* client.
 (aside to Tasha:)
We have a team vision at our firm.
 (back to Reade:)
 Just doing my due diligence to move
 that process along.

EXT. W HOTEL NEW YORK. NIGHT.

Sebastian, Aras and Aras' co-star hop out of a taxi and make their way through the revolving hotel doors. Sebastian keeps Aras close, an arm around his shoulder, engaged in a chat.

Behind them, Reade and Tasha exit a second cab. Reade takes a deep breath, soothing his anger as he watches the two getting chummy. He extracts the pill bottle from his blazer, opens it only to remember he has none left: *empty*.

Tasha links her arm in his. Smiles sweetly up at him, making Reade feel better briefly, and they follow everyone inside.

INT. WHISKEY BLUE. W HOTEL. NIGHT.

The sleek crimson overhead lights make all of the **SEXY LOCALS** and **ARTIST-TYPES** populating this bar seem far more desirable. Reade and Tasha also turn some heads in the crowd.

They approach a corner table where Sebastian stands near Aras and a few other **ACTORS** from his play. As they inch in, bodies part, revealing Nicolette among the seated pretty faces.

Reade stops in his tracks, his heart skipping at the sight of her. Tasha notices the drastic demeanor shift.

Nicolette catches Reade's eyes and waves, smiling. Sebastian smirks at the deed. A challenge accepted, and job well done.

Reade pulls Tasha away and closer to the bar.

READE

Let's grab a drink.

LATER THAT NIGHT: Tasha has taken the dance floor with other girls, cradling her uncomfortable heels in her hands as they groove and laugh.

Elsewhere, Reade sits at the bar sulking. Nicolette taps him.

NICOLETTE

Well, I guess we all have our nasty little secrets don't we?

READE

Why are you punishing me?

NICOLETTE

Relax, Reade. What, a cute guy asks me to join him at a bar, and I have to turn him down? You were the one that begged me to move on.

READE

Sebastian's still married.

She CHUCKLES under her breath, a low, hoarse laugh.

NICOLETTE

Never stopped any man before.

READE

Niki, I need to know what was in that folder. Back at the diner.

NICOLETTE

You never looked?

READE

I don't tend to humor people that threaten me.

NICOLETTE

What if I told you it was nothing, Reade? What if I told you I was paid, just to make you sweat that there might be *something*?

(MORE)

NICOLETTE (CONT'D)

But there was nothing. And I agreed because it made me laugh. There's nothing funnier to me than a good revenge joke.

She moves in closer to him.

NICOLETTE (CONT'D)

Would you believe me if that's what I told you? You think you're sweet now, and you're trustworthy, but even if you've changed, that won't change your past. And that's what really scares you.

READE

I'm sorry that I hurt you. But I've tried every day to make up for it. To take care of you.

NICOLETTE

I don't need you to take care of me anymore.

READE

Now who's joking?

NICOLETTE

It was something. In the envelope.

READE

STOP WITH YOUR FUCKING MIND GAMES.

A few people turn in their direction, including Tasha, on the dance floor, now uneasy.

NICOLETTE

Everyone can go back to their own miserable conversations now.

READE

Just promise me this stops here. I love Tasha and she doesn't deserve to be a casualty.

NICOLETTE

You didn't even fight for me.

READE

Promise me.

NICOLETTE

That's what love is.

READE

Promise me.

NICOLETTE

I promise.

Tasha, visibly unsettled, yet still feigning elegance, moves back to the bar. Nicolette returns to her dirty martini.

READE

You looked great out on the floor.

TASHA

We should get going.

READE

How come?

TASHA

I don't know the woman sitting next to you, but I feel as if she walked through that door like a hurricane set on destruction, and I don't want to be surrounded by your colleagues when I find out why.

Nicolette slowly pivots in her stool to Tasha, pulling on a different expression.

NICOLETTE

I'm so sorry! I must have given you the wrong impression but we're just old friends. We haven't seen each other in years and wanted to catch up. He was talking me through a guy problem. Hope you don't mind.

TASHA

Reade, it's getting late.

NICOLETTE

Problem Guy and I didn't end well. I carried his baby for four months, and, well, you probably don't know the toll it takes on a gal when you're asked to get rid of it. And then he got rid of me as soon as he realized that I didn't fit into the press release of his life he'd been writing for himself.

A rigid beat between the three.

NICOLETTE (CONT'D)

It was a girl. Problem Guy asked me never to tell him. But I guess I'm just not that big of a person.

Confused, misty-eyed, Tasha runs off, carrying heels in hand.

Reade turns to Nicolette, seething, hatred in his eyes.

NICOLETTE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, you know I've never been good at keeping promises.

INT. W HOTEL NEW YORK. LOBBY. NIGHT.

Reade pursues Tasha, who careens through the lobby failing to fight back her tears.

READE

Will you please, for a minute, stop and let me explain?

TASHA

OK. Explain.

Tasha turns as she absorbs a stray tear in the palm she wipes across her cheek. But he's speechless.

READE

We should do this at home. This has been a difficult few weeks for us. I don't want to be inarticulate.

TASHA

Oh my God. Reade, she's why you're so preoccupied all the time.

READE

No.

TASHA

Do you love her?

READE

Of course not, I love you!

TASHA

Do you fuck her?

READE

Tasha, that goddamn guy in there orchestrated this. He's involving himself in our lives to ruin them.

(MORE)

READE (CONT'D)

To pit us against each other, and we can't let him win!

TASHA

Do you fuck her?

READE

I promise you, I don't.

TASHA

Then who is she?

READE

She's before I met you. A friend introduced us at a mixer. We were in love, but it faded. She lost herself in drugs. I left her. I found you. Then she calls me one day telling me shes having a baby. I didn't believe her at first.

TASHA

Oh my God.

READE

By then she was poisoning herself with methamphetamines. Threatened me daily, but I swore I would take care of her if she'd let me. She lives in Bushwick, in an apartment I pay for.

TASHA

You keep her in Bushwick?

READE

It was meant to be temporary, but after the baby she never bounced back. And I felt bad.

TASHA

Oh, you felt bad?

READE

Yes. And I made sure she survived. That's empathy. And that's how I know I'm not psychotic.

TASHA

How could you ask that of a woman?

READE

That girl fucking scares me, Tasha! And what kind of story is that?

(MORE)

READE (CONT'D)

How would that make me look? To tie my life to a lunatic like her?

TASHA

That's sick. You're fucking sick. And it's horrifying to me that I don't think you realize just how sick you are.

She turns to leave, but he grips her hand.

TASHA (CONT'D)

Don't.

READE

Tasha, please, I love you.

TASHA

You love me? You can't even come to my apartment without hesitating. Every time I ask you have to weigh whether or not the commute is worth getting laid. You love me? I hear it in your voice. And you can kiss me like it's real. But then the next moment it's like nothing ever happened and I'm just Reade's plus-one again.

Tasha breaks free of his grasp.

TASHA (CONT'D)

I think you need a girl who treats you like the extraordinary person you want to be. And that's not me. I'm just a teacher. I'm suburban. But I love *that* about myself. I'm ordinary because you mean something to me. I settled down. I realized what I wanted to live for. And you don't know yet. You hate everything you can't control in your life, so you don't love anything. The uncontrollable things make you know you're alive. I like being unhappy. And I like being ordinary. I like being stressed. I like being heartbroken. It reminds me that everything changes.

READE

Tasha.

TASHA
Thirty minutes.

READE
What?

TASHA
Thirty minutes. Please just give me
thirty minutes this week to collect
my things from your place.

She smiles sweetly at Reade, perhaps the last time she ever
sees him:

TASHA (CONT'D)
Life can be cruel, but there should
be people in it who make you happy.
You need to find a way to live for
those people. And if not, then you
need to remember it's the only life
you've got. And those people can't
stand around and watch you do this
to yourself.

INT. SUBWAY "Q" TRAIN. NIGHT.

Reade rides the rails home. With tears in his eyes, he stares
blankly, studying text on graffitied walls through windows as
they pass: **ERASE. ERASE. ERASE.**

EXT. SOHO STREETS. NIGHT.

Reade stumbles by a local bodega. He lulls, leaning against a
wall, lowering his hands to support himself on his knees, and
begins to aggressively HYPERVENTILATE, crying.

READE
(heaving)
What do I do?

A **FRAT BOY** wanders out of the shop carrying a pack of beer.

FRAT BOY
You're really freaking me out, bro.

READE
(catching his breath)
I'm sorry -- I -- don't know what
has -- gotten into -- me.

Reade whips out his cell and dials a number. He tries to move at the same pace he was moments before, but his feet drag as if trudging through quicksand.

A **MALE VOICE** answers the other end:

CRAIG (V.O.)
Hello?

READE
Craig?!

CRAIG (V.O.)
Reade McCarthy?

READE
Yes. God, how are you?

CRAIG (V.O.)
I'm alright.

READE
I'm not. Can I swing by for a beer?

CRAIG (V.O.)
Uh -- no.

READE
I'm just a few stops away.

CRAIG (V.O.)
I live in Smithtown.

READE
You live on Long Island?

CRAIG (V.O.)
For a year now.

READE
That's absurd.

CRAIG (V.O.)
It's not. I've lived here since I married Ashleigh last spring.

READE
I don't remember that wedding.

CRAIG (V.O.)
You weren't invited, Reade. You and I haven't talked in two years.

READE

It's been two months, maybe.

CRAIG (V.O.)

No, it's been two years. You wrote me off at a business dinner when I wouldn't eat oysters because the texture freaked me out. You called me provincial.

READE

I'd remember something like that.

The line goes dead.

READE (CONT'D)

Hello?

Reade looks down at his now lifeless phone, livid, and turns to a **BAG LADY** on a blanket in a doorway near him.

READE (CONT'D)

Why is it so hard to maintain a long-term friendship in this God forsaken city?!

BAG LADY

You're really freaking me out, man.

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. ELEVATOR. DAY.

Reade rides the lift up to his office, his hair less perfect than we're accustomed.

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. HALLWAY. DAY.

Reade tromps down the hall, fiddling with his mobile.

READE

(incensed)

Danielle, I can't pull up any of my e-mails on this phone, it's saying my password expired.

DANIELLE

Barbara requested to see you.

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. READE'S CORNER. DAY.

Ignoring her, Reade slips into his office, hanging his jacket on the rack, and noticing his laptop *missing* off his desk.

READE
Where's my computer?

Danielle pokes her head in, meekly.

DANIELLE
I think that's why Barbara's asked
to see you.

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. BARBARA'S CORNER OFFICE. DAY.

Reade storms into Barbara's office, clearly in the process of rehearsing his grievances for Sebastian. But she's not alone, mid-conversation with Detective Adam Stanley.

BARBARA
McCarthy, come in. Take a seat.

Detective Stanley stands, all smiles, shaking Reade's hand, though a lingering suspicion behind his eyes:

DETECTIVE STANLEY
Mr. McCarthy, it's very nice to see
you again.

READE
Likewise, Detective...

DETECTIVE STANLEY
Stanley. Adam Stanley.

READE
I remember. I'm sorry that we kept
missing each other.

DETECTIVE STANLEY
And I'm sorry I had to surprise you
at the office like this, but well--
if you're being avoided you gotta
do what you can.

Barbara exits her office, shutting the door behind her.

Reade, nervously, sits as requested. The conversation almost happens as a blur to him.

QUICK CUT: a manila envelope is thrown on the table.

QUICK CUT: the envelope is opened and photographs extracted.

QUICK CUT: nude (selfie) photographs of Val lie on the table.

DETECTIVE STANLEY (CONT'D)
I trust you'll handle our chat with
full discretion.

Reade can hardly breathe.

DETECTIVE STANLEY (CONT'D)
By the look on your face, I'd guess
these photographs matter to you.

READE
Do I need an attorney?

DETECTIVE STANLEY
I'm not here to incriminate you.

READE
What are you looking for?

DETECTIVE STANLEY
We received these in an unmarked
envelope. Checking your company's
server, we verified the images are
identical to photographs on two
hard drives: Val's. And yours.

READE
Now why would that be?

DETECTIVE STANLEY
That's my question for you.

READE
Am I being detained?

DETECTIVE STANLEY
I just want to better understand
your relationship.

Reade glances down again at the photographs of Val, naked, in
compromising positions before her mirror.

DETECTIVE STANLEY (CONT'D)
We need to evaluate all scenarios
for this investigation. From what
I'm told, you two had no interest
in each other. But if you were, in
fact, an "item" one motive may be
'scorned lover seeks revenge.'

READE
If we were fucking, that would tie
me to her? That's reason?

DETECTIVE STANLEY
The easiest one.

READE
I stole these. Off of her laptop--
to leak, to humiliate her with.

Reade leans in, confiding in him.

READE (CONT'D)
I think I'm being extorted. They're
trying to force me into admitting
fault for a crime I didn't commit.

But Detective Stanley isn't sure how to answer.

READE (CONT'D)
Look, I'm cooperating with you. I'm
honest with you. And I can assure
you, there's nothing I'm guilty for
other than not respecting that
bitch professionally, and last I
checked that isn't a crime unless
you want to arrest thousands of
white collar New Yorkers every day.

DETECTIVE STANLEY
Regrettably, we can't arrest people
for being assholes. Though I admire
your candidness. In one breath
endorsing blackmail that benefits
you, the next, victimizing yourself
when it doesn't.

Stanley, almost morbidly amused, scribbles in the notepad on
his lap. Then SLAMS it shut.

DETECTIVE STANLEY (CONT'D)
I'd like full access to your files.
I find it polite to seek permission
rather than take by force. I'm sure
with your reputation we'll find no
connection to her strangling, so
you'll have to forgive us for this
temporary intrusion.

Reade hesitates, then nods slightly.

DETECTIVE STANLEY (CONT'D)
Is that a yes?

READE
Yes. Anything you want, I just need
this to be over with.

Detective Stanley crosses to the door, opening it to reveal Barbara in its frame (clearly eavesdropping).

DETECTIVE STANLEY

Until next time.

Stanley saunters down the hall as Barbara enters the office, closing the door behind her.

BARBARA

You were sexually harassing Val?!

READE

(defensive)

I only *intended* to.

BARBARA

I think we both know this is more than a blemish on your reputation. I can't have you representing the firm with this cloud over you.

READE

(realizing)

Sebastian.

BARBARA

McCarthy, I wanted you for this but it seems fate wants something else.

READE

If I have to report to Sebastian, then I quit.

BARBARA

You can't. You're under contract. Don't give me an excuse to take anything you have left.

INT. DR. NORTON'S CHELSEA OFFICE. EVENING.

Dr. Norton leans into his usual puffy, leather chair studying Reade as he angrily paces around the room.

DR. NORTON

Your no-show fees are really going to tally up.

Reade ignores him, continues pacing...

DR. NORTON (CONT'D)

When I said you didn't have to lie down, I didn't mean to suggest do the exact opposite.

READE

Do you think I'm losing my mind?

DR. NORTON

Let's sit and talk this through.

READE

Or could this guy ACTUALLY be smart enough to be doing this? Trying to drive me insane. Is anyone *that* expert at mind games? I mean, I thought I was good at mind games, but this is a fucking checkmate.

Reade points to a framed portrait leaning against the wall.

READE (CONT'D)

What is that?

DR. NORTON

A Banksy print.

READE

On the floor.

DR. NORTON

I haven't had time to hang it up.

READE

Phil, how can you respect my mental health when you don't even respect the feng shui of your own office?

DR. NORTON

I'm sorry...

READE

I met a man that looks EXACTLY like me, Phil, like, the resemblance is frightening. I'd see him around town, and maybe I was pretending he didn't exist at first, but we came face-to-face one night and-- God, that sounds crazy right? That there's an *exact* clone of yourself out there that you bump into on the street? In this city, nonetheless, where you can get mugged and nobody stops to help.

DR. NORTON

Are you taking your medications?

READE

(hesitant)

It wasn't working. I thought I'd be better off without pills, you know, get chemically imbalanced again to remember what balanced is like.

DR. NORTON

I really fear that your behavior is becoming dangerously antisocial. If you stopped taking them...

READE

BUT WHAT'S THE POINT?! Nothing has ever worked. Pills don't fucking erase shame: how worthless I feel. How lonely I am keeping this to myself, trying to spare the people I love agony that they can't fix me. How humiliating it is seeing disgust on the faces of people I do tell. We have tried everything, and it's failed. So why keep doing this to myself? I'm already reminded every day I'm not one of the normal ones, when it's all I want to be.

He quiets down, regretting his emotional outburst.

READE (CONT'D)

(lying)

I'm still on the drugs. I was just kidding. Thought you'd laugh.

EXT. CHELSEA STREETS. NIGHT.

Reade wanders through Chelsea to clear his noisy mind. Behind him, he hears an ENGINE PURRING.

Turning, he notices an UNMARKED CAR crawling down the street. Stalking him. Predatory. The car, a block away, pulls to the curb, turns off its headlights, and lulls.

Intimidated, Reade hurries away, but soon senses the vehicle BEHIND HIM, following. He scampers around the street corner.

Once out of sight he breaks into a sprint, notices a town car, flings open its door, and hops in the backseat...

INT. TOWNCAR. CHELSEA STREETS. NIGHT.

Reade startles the **YOUNG UBER DRIVER** at the wheel.

DRIVER

Woah. The fuck! Who are you?!

The **UNMARKED CAR** passes them, speeding down the street.

READE

Follow that car!

DRIVER

What?

READE

Follow that car!

DRIVER

I don't even fucking know you.

READE

Is that a "U" on your windshield? A pink mustache on the dashboard? I'm *hiring* you to FOLLOW THAT CAR.

DRIVER

It doesn't work like that, you have to request me on your --

Reade flings twenties at him.

READE

FOLLOW THE GODDAMN CAR!

EXT. TOWNCAR. CHELSEA STREETS. NIGHT. MOMENTS LATER.

On the sidewalk, having just been kicked out of the towncar, Reade grimaces at the driver:

READE

(daggers in his eyes)

I have never hated anyone as much as I hate you right now.

Reade SLAMS the door shut, and the driver zooms off.

INT. READE'S SOHO LOFT. NIGHT.

Reade stumbles into his loft, hits the lights and immediately sees the glimmer off a PAIR OF KEYS set on the counter.

He approaches, lingers his hand over them: TASHA'S SET, left behind for him. Reade struggles to swallow his emptiness.

IN HIS BEDROOM:

Though subtle, Reade tracks her items missing here and there. Arts magazines off the nightstand. Gillian Flynn novels from the bookshelf. Foreign films from the entertainment unit.

IN THE CLOSET:

Empty hangers on Tasha's side of their closet taunt him, the shell of a once lived-in domain.

On the closet floor, Reade notices an OLD CARDBOARD BOX.

BACK IN HIS BEDROOM:

Reade sits on his bed sifting through items from the BOX:

A FRAMED PICTURE of a YOUNGER READE with his **PARENTS**.

A beat-up billfold with his CALIFORNIA ID.

And a TATTERED LEATHER JACKET.

MINUTES LATER:

Reade storms around the room, on cell, talking with Tasha.

TASHA (V.O.)
Why are you panicking?

READE
Where did you find it?

TASHA (V.O.)
That box was in your closet, Reade,
just shoved in the back. I've never
seen it before, so I pulled it out
for you to look through.

Reade contemplates the tattered leather jacket, staring up at him from his bed next to the old family photograph.

TASHA (V.O.)
Reade?

He's quiet.

TASHA (V.O.)
Reade...

READE

Yes?

TASHA (V.O.)

Who are the people in that photo?

BANG. BANG. BANG. Three knocks at his front door.

READE

I gotta run.

INT. READE'S SOHO LOFT BUILDING. HALLWAY. NIGHT.

Reade peeks out his door, opening it slowly, finding nobody. Curious, he steps out into the shadowy hallway:

THE STRANGER (O.S.)

It's only me.

Reade JUMPS, startled at the sight of THE STRANGER dimly lit on the other end of the corridor.

READE

Christ, stop sneaking up on me like that. Lurking's weird, man.

THE STRANGER

I know how we can help each other.

EXT. READE'S SOHO LOFT. NIGHT. MOMENTS LATER.

The stranger pushes into the loft, directly into the kitchen. Pulling out a tumbler glass, filling it with scotch, offering the neat cocktail to Reade...

THE STRANGER

Drink.

Reade, frazzled, accepts.

THE STRANGER (CONT'D)

What's it like to be wanted?

READE

What?

THE STRANGER

To be wanted. How does it feel?

READE

I don't really remember.

THE STRANGER

And I never knew. My folks couldn't afford to have me. Hated me for it. Nasty. Verbally abusive. Raised me to be *elite*. I think they expected me to save them. They had absurd standards and punished me when I didn't live up to them. Starved me.
(motioning to his arm:)
Scarred me.

The stranger paces, excited.

THE STRANGER (CONT'D)

You see, Reade, you were created by wealth and power, and I created by poverty and despair. We'll never know that other half. Unless we switched places.

READE

What?

THE STRANGER

Maybe I'm fucking with you.
(motioning to his glass:)
Drink.

Reade obeys.

THE STRANGER (CONT'D)

I've been learning from you, Reade. Living vicariously through you. And that man is taking everything away. He's breaking you apart.
(mischievous)
Erase him.

READE

Sebastian?

THE STRANGER

Look at us. Fucking identical. It's a gift. Be your own alibi. You can use our likeness to *literally* get away with murder and erase him for good. Once he goes away this will all be over.

The stranger moves in closer, has it all thought out.

THE STRANGER (CONT'D)

You can be in two places at once.
 On one side of town: Reade McCarthy
 is spotted arguing with a loose
 cannon blonde in a well-populated
 restaurant. On the other: Sebastian
 has a careless, tragic accident.
 You can lure him in, he trusts you.
 Something clean. Slipped from the
 subway platform. Fell off his fire
 escape. Liquor tends to make even
 the best of men clumsy. Or maybe it
 was intentional? Leaving behind one
 simple note about how the emotional
 strain of his divorce was just too
 much for him to stomach.

READE

You're evil.

THE STRANGER

I'm a necessary evil. Sometimes you
 need to listen to the devil on your
 shoulder.

Reade doesn't match the stranger's eyes, just stares before
 him in serious concentration.

READE

And why put yourself at risk?

THE STRANGER

I've nothing to lose and everything
 to gain.

READE

Gain...?

THE STRANGER

The other piece of you.

(beat)

That double life you've lived and
 threw away. I can be the "you" with
 Nicolette. I get to know what it's
 like to feel wanted with things you
 no longer want. And you silence her
 by giving her what she won't get: a
 life with you. Think how successful
 you'll be with two of you. Working
 together to craft a perfect image.
 Your perfect life.

(hopeful)

Let me share that life with you.

INT. READE'S SOHO LOFT. BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Reade lies awake in bed, studying the ceiling tiles.

INT. READE'S SOHO LOFT. BATHROOM. DAY.

The next morning, Reade stands in his shower allowing water to cascade over him, lost in thought.

He lathers seaweed shampoo in his palms, and brings his hands to his thick, healthy locks.

Rinsing, he notices a few strands of *hair* in the water.

Concerned, he gently runs his hands across his scalp and more strands appear on his fingertips.

Panicking, Reade bolts out of the shower, naked and dripping wet, a puddle forming at his feet. He catches his reflection in the mirror and sees the hair falling out of his head.

Losing his mind infuriated, he punches the mirror. The vanity SHATTERS into a dozen pieces. His knuckles bleed.

Reade grabs a sharp shard of glass.

Punishing himself, he raises the shard to the HIDEOUS SCAR on his forearm and cuts it deeply along the tissue.

To feel something. Searching for a release.

Reade closes his eyes breathing through the pain, opens them, and finds the mirror back intact.

The glass unbroken.

His hair, damp, yet still attached to his head.

His hands clean and unwounded.

We see it in his eyes: nothing physically wrong.

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. READE'S CORNER. DAY.

Reade sits at his desk, numb, staring vapidly at his mobile.

His phone suddenly begins VIBRATING. Startled, he answers and speaks with the **HOSTESS** on the other end:

READE
This is Reade.

HOSTESS (V.O.)
 Good afternoon! May I please speak
 with Mr. McCarthy?

READE
 You already are.

HOSTESS (V.O.)
 Calling to confirm your reservation
 with us. Tonight at A'Loure. 9:30.

READE
 9:30?

HOSTESS (V.O.)
 9:30. Tonight.

READE
 Yes, that's correct. Actually, may
 I request a different table?

HOSTESS
 Certainly.

READE
 The busy one, by the window in the
 main dining room, please.

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. HALLWAY. DAY. MOMENTS LATER.

Reade slinks out of his office and toward Sebastian's end of
 the hall, swallowing his pride.

Sebastian, with adorable faux spectacles on, stares fervently
 at his computer, typing an e-mail. Reade pokes his head in:

READE
 Let's start over.

SEBASTIAN
 With...?

INT. HORNS NIGHTCLUB. MEATPACKING DISTRICT. NIGHT.

A POUNDING BASS provides the backbeat for hundreds of sweaty,
 pulsating bodies belonging to **YOUNG NEW YORKERS** thriving to a
 POP-TECHNO rhythm (and each other).

IN THE BATHROOM:

Reade and Sebastian stand cramped in a stall doing KEY-BUMPS.
 Inhaling the vile's powder, Reade's eyes widen.

SEBASTIAN
 Didn't I tell you?

READE
 (smiling)
 Fuck.

SEBASTIAN
 JAGGER!!

BACK AT THE BAR:

Moments later, our dynamic duo pound down two tequila shots, grimacing at the taste.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)
 Was that top shelf?

They take extra swigs of beer to offset the flavor.

READE
 I know I owe you an apology for how I've been treating you.

SEBASTIAN
 I'm not innocent either. I really regret inviting that woman to Aras' play. I should've left it alone, knowing it bothered you so much.

READE
 We're pretty terrible.

SEBASTIAN
 But think how powerful we will be once we combine our evil.

Sebastian ogles a gorgeous redheaded **BUSINESS SKIRT** strutting past them balancing three drinks.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)
 (shamelessly)
 For us? We don't need to be drunk to let you take advantage.

The redhead turns (at first disgusted) and GIGGLES to herself as she approaches a table with two **BANKER DOUCHEBAGS**.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)
 Oh, God, investment bankers.

READE
 Total sociopaths.

SEBASTIAN

These finance guys have all lost touch with reality.

The redhead sets the drinks down, quickly gossips about them, and all three pivot to size up our boys.

After a beat, the business skirt's male colleagues approach.

BANKER BRO

My girl just mentioned how much you were admiring her, so I figured I'd introduce myself since you clearly think I have great taste.

SEBASTIAN

Didn't know she was taken.

BANKER BRAH

What firm are you with?

SEBASTIAN

Duality PR.

The bankers look at one another, and BURST into laughter.

BANKER BRO

Public relations!

BANKER BRAH

Brah, these guys trying to mack on Amanda are publicists?!

BANKER BRO

I thought straight publicists were just a myth.

BANKER BRAH

Like the recession.

BANKER BRO

Those women got ya castrated?

BANKER BRAH

You piss sitting down?

READE

That's enough.

SEBASTIAN

Don't you have hookers to buy and illegitimate children to father?

BANKER BRO

Sorry, my girl's into men that make real cash. Not the spare change you peasants blow each other for in the Dust Bowl.

BANKER BRAH

Bush league.

Blood boiling and red faced, Sebastian launches his fist into the chiseled jaw of the redhead's boyfriend.

Sebastian recoils in pain, clenching his hand:

SEBASTIAN

Goddamn that hurts!

The banker retaliates, knocking Sebastian to the ground.

Reade swings at the second bro, getting a few hits in before taking a hard blow to his own face. Disoriented, he holds up his hands non-confrontational:

READE

I didn't even want to be here.

The second banker jabs him in the stomach, knocking the wind out of Reade. Then another, relentlessly wailing on him.

Nothing at all glamorous about this fight, our boys get their asses handed to them.

The MUSIC grinds to a halt as **SECURITY GUARDS** beeline through drunk spectators. Gaining footing, Reade yanks Sebastian to his feet and the two flee, scurrying through a side door.

EXT. MEATPACKING DISTRICT. NEW YORK CITY. NIGHT.

Reade and Sebastian dart through the streets, slowing as soon as they notice they've advanced a few blocks without a trail.

They lock into each other's eyes, leaning on knees, catching their breath, bruised faces, hurt egos, blood-stained noses. And they CRACK UP, defeated.

Something about the chaos bonded them inadvertently.

SEBASTIAN

I really thought we were gonna win.

READE

That was nothing like the movies.

Reade notices Sebastian is BAREFOOT.

READE (CONT'D)

What happened to your shoes?

SEBASTIAN

They slipped off.

READE

They slipped *off*?

SEBASTIAN

They were slip-ons.

READE

Why are you wearing slip-on loafers at all?

SEBASTIAN

Bloomies had a great sale.

READE

You're a grown man, wear laces.

Sebastian stumbles embarrassingly intoxicated along the edge of the sidewalk. Reade notices the lights of a SPEEDING TAXI barreling toward them. We notice his eyes, contemplating how easy it would be to bump him into traffic.

But Sebastian slips off the curb on his own...

SEBASTIAN

Woah.

...and lurches himself back to safety seconds before the cab blasts past, HONKING, enraged.

READE

I should get home.

SEBASTIAN

Don't let those douchebags ruin our night. My divorce is finalized in a few days, we're a few stops from my loft, and I need a nightcap.

(vulnerable)

Please?

INT. SEBASTIAN'S LES APARTMENT. NIGHT.

Reade follows Sebastian into his apartment, immediately taken by its sleek design and charming furniture, and breathing a sigh of relief at its modest size.

SEBASTIAN

I know it's a little tight, but it feels like all I need since I'm on the road so much.

Sebastian opens the balcony door, STREET NOISE flooding into the apartment, to show off the terrace.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

What a gorgeous view though, right?

Sebastian shuffles to the bar cart to fetch drinks as Reade sneaks out to admire the balcony.

Reade considers the scene: the low railings, a sharp drop to the street below, his bar cart's convenient proximity to the terrace. All plausible evidence for an accident.

Sebastian returns, handing him a beverage:

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

Tequila soda.

READE

(sipping)

This is just tequila.

SEBASTIAN

Tequila flavored soda.

Reade clocks Sebastian's hefty gulps. With each he grows more inebriated. Eyes red. Off balanced. Slurred words.

READE

I hear that congratulations are in order soon.

SEBASTIAN

For who?

READE

For you.

SEBASTIAN

For what?

READE

For partner?

SEBASTIAN

Are you serious?

READE

I wanted to be the bigger person
and commend you since...

SEBASTIAN

This is the first I'm hearing it.
PARTNER?! And you-- you're not.

READE

No, just you. Lucky me. Because of
the Val fiasco, the timing doesn't
feel quite right.

As Sebastian gloats Reade maintains composure, turning to the
living room bookshelf, distracting himself. He spies the time
on an analog clock: *10:45 PM*.

Amongst the paperbacks he notices a CLEAR CYLINDRICAL TROPHY.

The same award Sebastian unpacked in his office.

READE (CONT'D)

You took your award home from work?

SEBASTIAN

I have two.

Reade's eyes narrow envious at the inscription...

BEST PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN, MOTION PICTURE, 2013.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

Don't know why I keep them really.
Such a joke of a campaign. It's
like they give them away to anyone
remotely talented.

Reade fumes, clutching knuckles into a fist, but manages the
strength to refrain and decides to politely leave.

READE

Drink water, you're head's gonna be
pounding tomorrow. I'm taking off.

Sebastian leans on the arm of his sofa, beaming.

SEBASTIAN

Man, do you realize how unstoppable
I am? Reade McCarthy couldn't crack
the pressures at work and lost his
promotion to me.

And that's the last fucking straw.

READE SNAPS: grabbing the large trophy and hurling it across the room, expertly connecting it with Sebastian's head.

Sebastian's neck snaps back as he falls, dazed, to the floor.

Reade rushes to Sebastian's side, teeth clenched, eyes glazed over in rage, grabs the award off the hardwood, and pounds it furiously into his skull. Blood delicately mists his cheeks.

Sebastian SPUTTERS, gasping for air. His MUFFLED SCREAMS lost in ambient STREET NOISE drifting through still-open balcony doors. His nose SNAPS. Jaw CRUNCHES. CHOKING on fluid.

READE

You can take the things I love away
from me, but you can't have what I
spent my life to develop: my wants,
my desires, my tastes, my EMOTIONS,
my EXPERIENCES, MY NAME.

Reade stares down at a lifeless, unrecognizable face.

READE (CONT'D)

Imitation isn't the fucking same.

And suddenly snapping back into the moment, he discerns the crime he just committed was not, at all, clean.

READE (CONT'D)

Oh my God. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. This
is disgusting it's under my nails.

EXT. LOWER EAST SIDE STREETS. NEW YORK CITY. NIGHT.

Reade hurries down the sidewalk, failing miserably at looking casual as he hunts for a taxi. He spots the reflection of red and blue FLICKERING LIGHTS from a police car on the pavement before him, approaching from behind.

Reade removes himself from the street, to cut across...

TOMPKINS SQUARE PARK.

The familiar sound of a car door SLAMMING SHUT doesn't escape Reade. Glancing over his shoulder, Reade senses a FIGURE just a few yards behind, now shadowing him.

Unnerved, he breaks into a light jog. The figure seems to be mimicking his pace, jogging as well.

Startled, Reade breaks into a sprint through the shady park, pops out the other side, and dashes down the next street.

FOOTSTEPS scurry across pavement, CHASING HIM, audible in the distance as he flees. MEN begin SHOUTING, though Reade cannot hear them over the sound of his heart POUNDING in his chest.

Bright beams from their flashlights dance upon the ground.

Reade turns on a dime, careens between buildings down a dank alleyway. At the end of the alley: a locked gate. Trapped.

Reade ascends the fence and flings his body over, feeling the graze of a flashlight on his cheek as he falls.

He lands with a graceless THUD, knocking the wind out of him, but with no time to lose, Reade continues limping away.

Reade peeks over his shoulder once more, only to find nobody is actually there.

The alleyway is completely *empty*.

INT. READE'S SOHO LOFT. NIGHT.

Reade stumbles into his loft, hits the lights and immediately finds his apartment in shambles. Drawers are open, furniture overturned, items carelessly tossed aside.

Was he robbed? No. On closer inspection it looks like someone wanted something specific.

IN HIS BEDROOM:

Reade learns the same chaotic fate met his beloved belongings there. Clothes on the floor. Papers strewn about.

IN HIS MASTER BATHROOM:

Shattered glass on the tile. His prized products maliciously destroyed. Reade bends to find a TINY GREEN JAR in pieces, the day cream he was so fond of now a glob on the ground.

READE

What kind of savage...

Standing, taped to the mirror, he spots a BUSINESS CARD.

Very clearly, it advertises the W HOTEL in MIDTOWN, with the words "*COME FIND ME*" scribbled upon its white background.

INT. W HOTEL NEW YORK. LOBBY. NIGHT.

Reade marches through the lobby to the **FRONT DESK CLERK.**

DESK CLERK

Good evening sir, welcome back, how can I help tonight?

READE

I'm afraid I misplaced my room key.

DESK CLERK

Not a problem. Name on the room?

READE

(showing identification)

Reade McCarthy.

The desk clerk's fingers RATTLE along his keyboard.

DESK CLERK

(hushed now)

Yes. McCarthy. We've been trying to reach you. Your party was given its final warning before we're asked to evict you from the premises. All of the shouting from the room has been making our other guests here a bit uncomfortable.

READE

Party? Who has access to the room?

DESK CLERK

Ms. Tasha Camden is also listed on your reservation. Is that correct?

READE

Tasha Camden, that's--

DESK CLERK

She's been the point of contact for us. Is that correct?

READE

Yes, that's correct.

INT. W HOTEL NEW YORK. HALLWAY. NIGHT.

Reade hovers his hand over the door, about to insert the key.

A "PRIVACY PLEASE" sign hangs on the handle, and from inside, programs from the TELEVISION are blaring.

INT. W HOTEL NEW YORK. SUITE. NIGHT.

Reade quietly opens the door, stepping into what looks like a war zone that hasn't been cleaned in weeks. He kicks a REMOTE at his feet, which he grasps to power off the television.

Flipping the lights, Reade's eyes divert to a FEMALE FIGURE splayed across the bed. The white hotel sheets stained red, and a limp hand dangles over the mattress.

Reade's eyes moisten, cupping a hand to his mouth:

READE

Oh my God. Tasha?

He moves closer, saltwater stinging his cheeks, reaching for the lifeless hand. And, at his touch, the body stirs.

READE (CONT'D)

(startled)

Jesus Christ!

A sickening low, HOARSE LAUGH resonates, and the FIGURE perks up revealing Nicolette. Not dead, just deeply inebriated.

NICOLETTE

I spilled my damn Merlot.

Nicolette pulls a (now-empty) bottle from under the sheets.

NICOLETTE (CONT'D)

Took you long enough.

READE

What are you doing here?

NICOLETTE

You thought you'd cut me off and I would just let you? What am I gonna do, get a *job*? I have no skills!

READE

You can't stay here.

NICOLETTE

Yes I can. I have been. You haven't even noticed, self-absorbed prick.

Nicolette sits up, pulling wine stained sheets to conceal her half-naked body.

NICOLETTE (CONT'D)

I changed my mind tonight. Thought if I couldn't have you I didn't want anything anymore. And they'd find me here: bruised, bloody, and naked. In a hotel room, littered with your possessions.

Reade notices she collected his belongings, strewn around the suite as part of her setup.

NICOLETTE (CONT'D)

Surely, they'd lock up the man with prints everywhere and card on file. But why should I sacrifice myself just because you didn't want *me* the way I wanted *you*? So mark my words: I will always have that power over you. I know your dirtiest secrets. What those labels on your pill bottles mean. The real reason you visit that doctor. You think lying about having dead parents gets you sympathy? Makes you relatable? Untraceable? I know all things that break you down. I have everything. Privacy is just a myth you used to know. Your precious contacts, your passwords, the incriminating photos off your computer. Wasn't that a clever touch? One click, and I let everybody see the real you.

Nicolette begins HACKING, clears her throat.

NICOLETTE (CONT'D)

This was all just a game: to see if I could actually control the man who would never relinquish control.
(beaming)
And don't ever forget that I can.

Reade dumps the contents of his wallet onto the bed.

READE

Take it all. I have nothing left.

Reade flings his wallet aside and notices, in the doorway of the suite's bathroom: THE STRANGER.

READE (CONT'D)

You're in on this together? You're conspiring against me?!

The mysterious man doesn't respond.

READE (CONT'D)

I trusted you, and you abandoned me
in my GOD DAMN HOUR OF NEED?

Nicolette glances around, suddenly fearful.

NICOLETTE

Reade, who are you talking to?

READE

I KILLED THAT MAN BECAUSE OF YOU!

NICOLETTE

Stop, you're scaring me.

The hotel phone RINGS vigorously, likely due to the shouting.

READE

(to Nicolette)

I hope I never speak to you again.
I promise you, if I do, those will
be your last words.

INT. W HOTEL NEW YORK. HALLWAY. NIGHT.

Reade storms down the hallway to the elevator. Behind him, he sees THE STRANGER slowly walking, ominously pacing.

INT. W HOTEL NEW YORK. LOBBY. NIGHT.

Reade hurries out of the lift into the lobby and, even there, THE STRANGER appears, a few yards behind. Slowly approaching.

EXT. MIDTOWN STREETS. NIGHT.

Reade maneuvers through crowds, sprinting now, every so often glancing over his shoulder to see THE STRANGER walking at the same pace, still close behind, inescapable.

INT. SUBWAY "5" TRAIN. NIGHT.

Reade runs down the station stairs, out of breath, broken and alone. The shadow of THE STRANGER lurking as a distant trail. A train SQUEALS into the station, and Reade scoots to the lip of the platform: faces the incoming train, positions his feet at the edge, and bends his body into the train's trajectory.

THE STRANGER (O.S.)
You think this solves everything?

Hearing him, Reade recoils just as the train speeds in.

THE STRANGER (CONT'D)
Nothing can ever erase who you are.

READE
I am a strong person. I am stronger than you. I can overcome you.

THE STRANGER
You're a prisoner in your own body. How can you escape me when I'm that thing inside your head? Keeping you up at night. I'm all your twisted dreams. The ghost of you before you had anything. Once everything falls apart. Your broken past will always be a part of you.

READE
STOP IT!! ENOUGH!!

Reade SCREAMS at the top of his lungs, clenching fists to his ears, trying to tune him out, but the stranger just CACKLES.

THE STRANGER
THERE HE IS! Let Manhattan finally hear him. The real Reade McCarthy.

Reade grabs the stranger by the shoulders and flings his body against a subway pillar. The man GUFFAWS, amused.

THE STRANGER (CONT'D)
You'll only ever be that worthless loser from Blythe. Slobbering over venomous words. Smoking cigarettes like a filthy vagrant. You deserve nothing.

Reade throws him on the ground, bringing fists into the man's face repeatedly, who in turn LAUGHS, continuing to taunt him.

Reade squeezes his eyes shut trying to assuage his noisy mind and, upon opening them, finds THE STRANGER: again, vanished.

Left in his wake is nothing but the cracked platform concrete and Reade's swollen, purple, broken fist.

A group of **TOURISTS** form a circle around him, filming the odd commotion on their SMARTPHONES, whispering to each other.

Reade peels himself off the ground, trying to shield his face as he tears away from the scene.

INT. READE'S SOHO LOFT. BEDROOM. DAY.

We're unsure what day it is. Reade lays naked atop his covers staring blankly at the ceiling, numb to his ALARM blaring.

INT. BRYANT PARK OFFICE. HALLWAY. DAY.

Reade wanders down the hallway, suit disheveled, hair a total mess, eyes crimson, hand bandaged. His cheeks visibly bruised from the recent brawl with those mean investment bankers.

Barbara turns the corner, GASPING at the sight of him as she ambles out of her office:

BARBARA

Jesus. You look like shit, I didn't think that was possible.

Behind her, Sebastian peeks his head out of the office door.

His face is also still scratched from that bar fight.

Reade's eyes widen in horror.

READE

This is my fucking nightmare.

SEBASTIAN

Reade. You OK?

READE

You're, but...

SEBASTIAN

What?

READE

That night back at your place, and-- you're alive?

SEBASTIAN

Barely. I had a wicked hangover for days. But, wasn't anything a little coconut water couldn't fix. You did leave my balcony door open, though. Caught a bit of a cough...

A somber beat as Reade catches Barbara's concerned glance.

READE

I'm done.

BARBARA

McCarthy, I think it's time you and I discussed a brief sabbatical.

READE

No. I quit. Come after me. Sue me. I can't care anymore.

INT. MANHATTAN BALLET SCHOOL. DAY.

Reade peers through the pane windows on a door of a rehearsal room where Tasha works, studying a dozen **BALLET STUDENTS** in a glorious routine she's choreographed.

He's enamored by her: How her eyes moisten as she watches the inspired performance. How she gently taps her thighs in tempo with the music. How Tasha seems, almost, at the happiest he's remembered ever seeing her.

The dancers finish and Tasha stands, addressing them with, at first passionate APPLAUSE, then a few notes, before releasing them for the afternoon. The door opens and students file out, molding paths around Reade. He catches Tasha's eyes.

MOMENTS LATER:

The class has vacated, and our two estranged lovers connect.

TASHA

It's really great to see you.

(sadly)

It's been weeks, without a word. I know that I shouldn't have expected a call, but I guess I kind of hoped you were thinking about me...

READE

I was trying to figure out how to fix things with us. And-- myself.

Building the courage within himself:

READE (CONT'D)

I need you to know how much I love you. I wanted the world so I'd have something to give you. To deserve you, even with all the worst parts of me.

He nervously, genuinely, confesses...

READE (CONT'D)

I'm not pure. I'm not pedigree. I'm a product of dysfunction. I lied about who I am. About my parents. About that abusive piece of my past I hoped to never introduce you to. I thought shedding that old Reade, creating a better identity, would heal me. I thought if I could hide the truth, be larger-than-life, that nobody would ever notice. It was an obsession: moving forward so I never had to look back at this struggle I've fought my whole life.

He gestures to his temples, and it all makes sense to her.

READE (CONT'D)

I kept quiet about it because I was worried if I opened my mouth you'd scream so loud it would shatter the world we created. I thought I could overcome it myself: pretend I was well enough, go without medication. I wanted to give you the normal life you deserved. And I'm sorry I can't ever give you that.

Reade takes her hands in his.

READE (CONT'D)

I didn't tell you because I didn't want that to be the reason you left me. And I didn't tell you because I didn't want that to be the reason you stayed.

Tasha stands silently with him, in the moment.

SUPER: SOME TIME HAS PASSED...

INT. DR. NORTON'S CHELSEA OFFICE. DAY.

Reade sits on Dr. Norton's leather couch, exhibiting an air of confidence and relief about him.

DR. NORTON

But you're still on the regiment?

READE

New drugs. Same concerns.

DR. NORTON
And they're working?

READE
The first couple weeks it was still there. In slow motion. But, now, it seems like they are.

DR. NORTON
Good.

READE
Phil, will I ever get better?

DR. NORTON
There's a classic quote: that some people have a 2 AM personality and a 2 PM one.

READE
So, one is the monster and one is the man?

DR. NORTON
But only a few are brave enough to get treatment for it.

READE
Monsters under the bed aren't real. But monsters in your head convince you they're not real either.

DR. NORTON
Tell your story. Help someone else understand other people are living with this. Just like they are.

INT. READE'S SOHO LOFT. DAY.

A landline telephone RINGS (yes a landline, who thought those even still existed?), yet Reade answers proudly.

READE
McCarthy PR.

Pulling back, we notice heaps of boxes stacked throughout the loft, behind Reade's makeshift home office, and TASHA combing through them. She's finally moved in.

READE (CONT'D)
Aras! I've been calling you all day you talented fuck. Congratulations!
(proudly:)
(MORE)

READE (CONT'D)

Remember, I told you first! No more thinking small. You're a star. Tony Nominee, Aras Harris. I could get used to pitching you that way... Almost as used to pitching you as Tony Winner, Aras Harris.

TASHA

Reade, don't jinx him.

She bends to shout into the phone, Aras still on the line.

TASHA (CONT'D)

Don't listen! He's a silly suit who knows nothing about superstition.

READE

Love you, Aras. Go celebrate. We'll talk tomorrow.

Reade hangs up. Tasha kisses him on the cheek sweetly.

The PHONE RINGS again.

READE (CONT'D)

McCarthy PR

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. NYPD POLICE STATION. ADAM STANLEY'S OFFICE. DAY.

Detective Stanley sits behind his desk, brow furrowed.

DETECTIVE STANLEY

Reade McCarthy?

READE

Speaking.

DETECTIVE STANLEY

Detective Adam Stanley, with NYPD. Thrilled to say an eyewitness came forward in our investigation of Ms. Valerie Hanks' homicide. We'd like for you to come to the station for a quick lineup.

READE

A lineup?

DETECTIVE STANLEY

You've seen them on TV. Let's clear your name for good, make sure we're fingering the right guy, you know?

Reade's heart sinks in his chest, suddenly unsure.

DETECTIVE STANLEY (CONT'D)

You know?

READE

Yes... I know. When and where?

INT. NYPD POLICE STATION. 20TH PRECINCT. DAY.

Reade stands in the lineup among an array of different shaped and sized **POTENTIAL CRIMINALS**, bearing a #6 on his chest.

DETECTIVE STANLEY (O.S.)

Number four, please step forward.
Thank you. Number five, please step forward. Thank you. And number six, please step forward.

Regretting why he volunteered to come down to the station, he obeys, and steps closer to the one-way mirror.

DETECTIVE STANLEY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Thank you. And number seven...

EXT. NYPD POLICE STATION. 20TH PRECINCT. DAY. LATER.

Reade and Detective Stanley speak on the sidewalk. We aren't able to hear what they're talking about, but Stanley shaking Reade's hand may be all we need to know.

Reade wanders off from the police station and an overwhelming sensation of relief rushes over him. He tears up.

Half a block away, though, he notices a familiar, smug face.

READE

I thought you didn't smoke.

SEBASTIAN

Another example of one of the many lies I've told you.

It's Sebastian, flicking a cigarette into the gutter.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

I like you, Reade. I sincerely miss you around the office.

READE

Go fuck yourself.

SEBASTIAN

I do, and enjoy it quite regularly.

Suddenly realizing:

READE

You were the eyewitness?

SEBASTIAN

Of course not. I'm too close to the crime. But you can forever thank me and the blonde that was once yours.

(beat)

Have a nice life, you deserve it.

They part ways. Then...

READE

Wait. But did I do it?

SEBASTIAN

Life is cruel, and people die every day. It just happens.

READE

But did I do it?

SEBASTIAN

Well, I guess, now nobody will ever know who really did.

Sebastian separates, leaving Reade to linger alone collecting his thoughts. Stunned and confused, he decides to let him go, turning in the opposite direction.

Two similar men, their minds and bodies growing distant from one another for good.

Unleashed on New York City.

FADE OUT.