

APEX

Written by
Stephen Vitale

Among whom we all once lived in the passions of
our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body
and the mind, and were by nature children of
wrath, like the rest of mankind

EPHESIANS 2:3

FADE IN:

CREDITS

MUSIC UP: FREDERIC CHOPIN - NOCTURNE IN E-FLAT MAJOR OP. 9
No. 2 (*No sound under music - images float with dreamlike weight*)

POROUS TEXTURE. LIGHT BEIGE. TAUT.

HANDS IN BLUE LATEX GLOVES swipe over it in a blur - leaving behind a layer of rich, dark paste.

POROUS TEXTURE. LIGHT BEIGE. MORE CONTOURED.

Hands apply paste again - it smooths and blends to find its balance and unique color like paint mixing on a palette.

POROUS TEXTURE. LIGHT BEIGE. SINEWY.

It is clear now. This is skin. These are MUSCLES.

Hands applying BRONZER. Evenly painting the canvas - ensuring nothing is left of its natural pale complexion.

PULL BACK ON TRAPEZIUS - broad back of a man. Expands and contracts with sharp breaths. Hands work with purpose and attention. Not a massage. This is sport. War paint.

A TRAINER removes gloves. Steps back. Admires. Masterpiece.

Head to toe: BODYBUILDER. SPEEDO CLAD BRONZE BEHEMOTH.

Crammed inside...

INT. AUDITORIUM - BACKSTAGE - DRESSING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sweaty. Drab. Mirrors line the room. Bodybuilders drift in and out. Pose. Get in a last minute pump. Trainers fan them with towels. One bodybuilder smooths out a final layer of bronzer with a small paint roller. Another applies oil. A room brimming with TESTOSTERONE. NARCISSISM.

A STAGEHAND leans in the doorway - gives the go sign. Bodybuilders shake out their muscles. Stride into...

INT. AUDITORIUM - BACKSTAGE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Bodybuilders walk in lockstep. A factory line of All American Muscle. The narrow hall making the men appear even larger.

FLUORESCENT LIGHTS above scan muscles like a copy machine. Illuminating each before they dip back into the shadows.

INT. AUDITORIUM - STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Packed house. Raucous. Fans on their feet. Envy. Cheering. Banner above the stage: "MR. VENICE BEACH 1985"

PHOTOGRAPHERS climb over each other - camera flashes strobe. JUDGES take note of the marble sculptures strutting out. ROWDY TEENS hang from a light fixture. Human zoo enclosure.

The bodybuilders line up - strike poses. Each stretch and condense new muscles - exposing hidden striations.

INT. AUDITORIUM - ENTRANCE TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

The tunnel doorway swings open - light spills into the hall. Dust motes float hypnotically around a messy head of hair. A silhouetted man steps in close enough to start sizing him up.

CALEB COLE. 28. Five ten. Hundred sixty pounds. Handsome with hibernating inner demons. Short life of hard days stripping the treads of youth. Wiry physique. Hair an untamed mullet. Fading shiner under one of his hungry eyes. Unblinking. Paranoid. Intense. He wears all denim. Very worn. Not a fashion statement. Neglect. Duffle bag in hand. Rucksack on shoulder. Just off a bus or just homeless. Hard to tell.

Caleb hands a ticket stub to the TICKET RIPPER. Never takes his eyes off the end of the tunnel - primal energy in the auditorium. He glides down the tunnel - a man possessed. Finally, he can see it. Stage. Lights. Muscle. Glory.

CALEB'S EYES full of worship. Loneliness. A self-aware, caged animal ready to break free. Alchemy for a blunt reaction.

TITLE: APEX

The final note of Chopin's Nocturne pings gently on the piano. Then, like an extra note attacking...

SMASH CUT:

ROARING WAVE crashes on wet sand. Frothing on impact.

END CREDITS

EXT. VENICE BEACH - MORNING

ANGLE. Back of Caleb's head. Motionless. Asleep on a nasty blanket covered with sand. Items from his rucksack out and scattered. Food wrappers. Muscle magazines. A seagull squawks as it picks around the blanket. A shadow casts over Caleb.

A sneaker presses into Caleb's shoulder. Caleb stirs. He rolls over. Eyelids dry and crusted. Rubs them. Looks up.

Sun glares over an LAPD BIKE COP. Beach patrol. Fitted navy blue shorts. Nike sneakers. High white socks. Smug attitude.

LAPD BIKE COP #1
Get up. Come on, let's go!

CALEB
Uh-huh... give me a second.

Caleb sits up. Leaning on one arm. Fuzzy.

LAPD BIKE COP #1
Check out this spread. You out here all night? Must have been.

CALEB
No, sir. Uh, no, I--

LAPD BIKE COP #1
You can't sleep on the beach. Venice Beach Park regulations.

CALEB
I wasn't. I was laying out.

LAPD BIKE COP #1
(scoffs)
Laying out?

CALEB
(stubbornly)
Yes, sir. I was getting some sun. Is getting sun a crime, officer?

The cop kicks and prods at Caleb's items on the blanket.

LAPD BIKE COP #1
Not gonna prick my foot, am I?

Caleb adjusts his posture. Insulted. Keeping cool.

CALEB
You... think I'm a junkie? You think I'm a bum? I'm not a bum.

Nothing shakes loose. The officer backs off.

LAPD BIKE COP #1
Find a fucking box. Pieces of shit always ruining the view.

CALEB
I'm not a bum!

He mounts his bicycle. Pedals away. Caleb lowers his mask. A visible disdain. A cold stare. Then, at a safe distance...

CALEB (CONT'D)
(sotto)
... sand pig.

Caleb stands to reveal the VENICE BOARDWALK. Already decent foot traffic. Caleb stretches his back, watches people go by.

SUPER: VENICE BEACH, CALIFORNIA. 1985.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - BOARDWALK - MOMENTS LATER

*STREET ARTISTS arrange items for sale on folding tables.

*BREAK DANCERS lay out flattened boxes to set their stage.

*ROLLER SKATERS weave around like a traveling party.

*SUNGLASS WEARING PIT BULL waddles by with his owner.

A constantly evolving circus - can drive a certain mind mad.

Caleb walks through the crowd. His gait far less free in comparison. Same clothes as last night. Except now a pair of cheap gas station sunglasses shield his eyes. Looking like an alien trying to fit in. Hard to do along this strip.

He carries a muscle magazine, rolled to a specific page. Guiding him. TWO PUNKS walk through Caleb. Shoulder him. He stumbles. Drops his magazine. Caleb controls his balance. Then his temper. Picks up the magazine and turns onto...

EXT. VENICE BOULEVARD - MOMENTS LATER

Ocean views quickly turn to concrete walls. Smell of sea salt tainted by exhaust pipe fumes. Caleb slows as he approaches an inconspicuous building. A sign in rusty bold typeface hangs above tinted glass doors:

FLEXION FITNESS

Caleb unrolls the magazine to look at the creased page. An article features this exact building. That sign. An image he has looked at countless times now becoming real. Caleb lowers his sunglasses. He has arrived. He is about to step toward the door when he hears a woman SCREAM.

Caleb rears his head. Cars wipe by. More screams. Less frightened this time. Not frightened at all actually...

EXT. GRASS LOT - CONTINUOUS

Across the street. A woman screams and laughs as an enormous bodybuilder lifts and twirls her mid-air. He wears a fat gold chain that compliments his gold muscles and yellow speedo. Pure confidence. He is Ukrainian NAZAR KOZEL. 20.

He commands our attention. He'll get more of it later. Bodybuilders and bikini models lay out on the grass. Grazing land between workouts. Caleb absorbs how they socialize.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - CONTINUOUS

Caleb enters. A cowboy in a new saloon. Gets a good look. A few bodybuilders shoot a glance but really no one gives a shit. Everyone busy pumping and checking themselves out.

Shafts of natural light blast in from high windows. Chalk, dust and sweat swirl in the air. Flecking off bodies. Modest space. Relic of the sixties bodybuilding era. For devoted lifters. Caleb notes the images of legendary bodybuilders hanging on the wall before he heads to the front desk.

DONNA. 30. Receptionist. Strong presence. Big hair. Bigger muscles. Headphones on. Cassette player out. Reads a physiology book. Never looks up. Never impressed.

CALEB

Excuse me, I'd like to lift.

DONNA

(taps headphones)
Speak up.

CALEB

(firmly)
I'd like to lift. Workout.

DONNA

Ten to join. Five for the first month. Cash for iron.

CALEB

I, uh, don't have much money at the moment. I will soon. Can I start lifting and pay later?

DONNA

Muscle ain't free.

Ugly pause. Caleb stares at Donna. Thinking.

CALEB

If... uh, if you work at the gym do you get to lift, no fees?

DONNA

You do, yeah.

CALEB

I'd like to apply for a job.

DONNA

No openings.

CALEB

Are you in charge of hiring?

Donna finally raises her eyes to see this buzzing pest.

DONNA

Incline bench. Tell him I told you.

Caleb walks through the labyrinth of workout equipment. He finds a man mid-set on incline: BARRY YATES. 62.

Sturdy. Hardened. Skin like rhino hide from a lifetime of California sun and a stubborn opposition to sunscreen.

BARRY

(motivational exhaling)

Up. Again. Up. You. Mother. Fuck.

Barry racks the bar and sits forward to see the much less muscular Caleb blocking the mirror. Caleb recognizes him.

CALEB

You're Barry 'Iron Gate' Yates.

BARRY

Move.

Caleb steps aside. Barry checks his pecs in the mirror between sets. Caleb eyes the gear in the gym. Impressed.

CALEB

You built most this gear, right?

BARRY

This is my gym.

CALEB

My name is Caleb Cole, sir. It is great to meet you. Really.

Caleb extends his hand. Barry looks down. Nope. Busy. He lays back on the bench and starts another set.

CALEB (CONT'D)

I want to lift here but I can't afford a membership.

BARRY

Tough break. Used to cut slack for new guys but between rising rent and these mega gyms cropping up you're fuck outta luck, bud.

CALEB

I'm interested in a job at the gym.

BARRY

Good for you. Donna, at the desk, she tell you--

(to Donna; shouting)

Yo, Donna! Did you--

CALEB

(quickly)

She did. No openings. Yes. But you don't need to pay me. I'll work to lift. Free labor. Great for you. Great for the gym. I can make ends meet other ways but this is the only place I'll train.

BARRY

Why?

CALEB

I read Flexion Fitness in Venice Beach, California is where beasts are built. I want that. I want to build myself into something else.

Barry laughs. Racks the bar. Sits up.

BARRY

You want to be a bodybuilder?

CALEB

Yes, sir. I think I'm meant to be.

BARRY

Meant to? The fuck does that even-- You're small. You know that, right?

CALEB

I'm lean. I have a good frame.

BARRY

Anyone-- Almost anyone can join Flexion but I build the beasts. I built the gear. I build the beasts and I don't train every fool who walks through the front door and asks nice. I decide. *Iron Gate*.

CALEB

I'll do whatever it takes, sir. I've been reading every muscle magazine I can get my hands on. Studying poses. All the greats. Reg. Arnold. Zane. Luca.

BARRY

Who's your guy? Your favorite?

CALEB

Luca Leone. No question.

Caleb holds up the old beaten muscle magazine he has and turns to an image of LUCA LEONE - perfect, classic body.

CALEB (CONT'D)

Love all his movies too.

(desperately)

I don't do well doing nothing and right now that's all I've got so I'll do anything for this.

Barry admires the passion. Stands. Sizes Caleb. Analyzing.

BARRY

You trouble, Caleb?

CALEB

No, sir.

BARRY

You been in any trouble?

CALEB

Not real trouble, sir.

BARRY

You say sir a whole goddamn lot. Army brat? Serve or something?

CALEB

Oh, I wish. Tried to join up but got turned away. I have nystagmus.

BARRY

Sounds contagious. What do ya have to fuck to get that?

Caleb forces a smile. A polite response.

CALEB

Neurological. Means my eyes shake when I look left and right and up and down. Had it my whole life. Don't really notice it except, of course, when I close one eye to look through a rifle sight.

BARRY

Last job?

CALEB

Feedlot in Nebraska.

BARRY

That where you from?

CALEB

No. I, uh, just spent some time there but people always think I sound like I'm from the Midwest.

Caleb proud of this weird fact. Unable to be pinned down.

BARRY

Feedlot, you said?

CALEB

Yeah, you know, for livestock. Make sure all them gets fed. Stays put. Cattle. Pigs. Sheep. Also cleaned. Took care of repairs. I'll get my hands dirty. No problem.

Barry locks eyes with Caleb. Caleb doesn't look away. Barry scratches the scruff on his chin. Considering.

BARRY

You're small.

CALEB

Well... isn't that the point, sir? To get big?

Barry smirks. He recognizes that fire burning in Caleb.

BARRY

Come back tomorrow morning and make sure you fucking smell better. Just cause you worked with animals don't mean you get to stink like one. At least not until after you train.

Barry walks away. Bad hip. Bad knees. Still has swagger. Caleb brings his shirt toward his nose to take a whiff.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - PULL UP BARS - LATER

Caleb and other men do pull ups on a long metal bar on the beach. Sun bounces off it. The metal even sweats. Men bob up and down on both sides at varying speeds like firing pistons.

Caleb struggles. Arms give out. Falls to the sand. Spent.

He plops down next to his rucksack. Pulls out a pack of smokes and a fifth of whiskey. Removes a single cigarette. Takes a goodbye sip of whiskey and pours the rest out on the other cigarettes. Booze pools and curdles in the hot sand. He enjoys one last drag of the only cigarette left before he puts it out in the sand. Caleb gets up and back on the bar.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - BOARDWALK - MOMENTS LATER

ENERGY HEALERS in white jumpsuits hold their palms out on tourists' foreheads. Their eyes closed. At ease. Healing.

Caleb watches. Trying not to sneer. Not buying it. One of the healers offers him a seat to experience it rather than judge it. Caleb, amused, sits and lets the healer try to work her magic. Caleb closes his eyes. His expression slowly drops. Long tense beat. Caleb disappears into himself.

The healer is bullshit but the situation having an effect. Caleb smirks again. Pulls his head back and opens his eyes. In need of healing but not prepared to accept any.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - BOARDWALK - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb steps up to a hot dog stand. He counts change. Signals for one hot dog. Caleb's attention shifts while he waits.

MUSIC UP: RUN DMC - DARRYL AND JOE (KRUSH-GROOVE 3)

Skaters whirl in circles - roller dancing to music blasting from their BOOMBOX. They go by faster and faster and like viewing an image in a zoetrope, Caleb notices something through the flickering, dancing bodies...

A JUNKIE hunched over under a palm tree. His skin blistered. He shoots up. Overdoses. The music bumping. Louder. His body curls into itself. Louder. Twitching. Drooling. Louder.

Caleb disgusted. No one looking but him. The hot dog vendor hands him his hot dog. Caleb snaps out of it and leaves.

EXT. MUSCLE BEACH - WEIGHT PEN - DUSK

Caleb scarfs down his hot dog. He approaches a crowd watching bodybuilders clang and bang just off the beach in the famous lifting destination. The pen enclosed by a chain link fence.

Caleb stalks along the fence like a tiger in tall grass. He finds a vantage point on the far side. Alone. Caleb stares at the bodybuilders - how the crowd reacts. All of it reflecting in the soulless black lenses of his sunglasses. The beach a hallucinatory orange from the setting fireball sun as we...

FADE TO BLACK.

HOLD IN BLACK.

CUT TO:

EXT. VENICE BEACH - BOARDWALK - MORNING

*HAND PUSHING DOWN A METAL HANDLE.

*WATER SPUTTERING FROM A SHOWER HEAD.

Caleb in white briefs, showers in public. Stragglers pass, garbage men empty trash. Boardwalk waking with the sun.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - LATER

Caleb wipes down machines and watches bodybuilders lift. He focuses on their grips - spacing and position of hands as they wrap the bar. Breathing rhythms as they push through a difficult rep. More technical and delicate than brutish.

A bodybuilder scribbles in a NOTEBOOK. He tosses it down near Caleb. A training log: exercises, weights, reps, sets, diet. Even motivational phrases. Caleb processing it all until...

BANG! Weights crash to the ground. Caleb whips to find one massive man stumbling as another approaches fast. Foreheads press together like elk locking horns. Muscles flare. They grunt insults. Fellow bodybuilders step in and pry them apart, including the lifter with the training log.

Caleb uses the diversion to snatch the notebook. He quickly tucks it into his waistband and pulls his shirt over it. His notebook now. Not done studying its contents.

Barry strolls up behind Caleb. Ignores the scuffle.

BARRY

Runt. Follow me.

Caleb recalibrates. Tosses the rag in a bucket and hustles after Barry as he weaves through machines toward the back.

BARRY (CONT'D)

I'm not gonna tell you when to work and when to workout. Long as you keep up with wiping down machines, mopping floors and making sure the showers and sauna don't get swampy then your schedule is your own.

CALEB

Got it.

BARRY

Grand. Because if I don't see you lifting weights or cleaning 'em I'll assume you don't give a shit and I'll head over to Home Depot like I usually do and throw a no fuss Mexican fella a few bucks. Don't ask Donna to help you out with those chores either.

Donna at her post. Barry blows a kiss. Donna flips him off.

BARRY (CONT'D)

Anything this side of that desk and Donna won't do it. Donna don't do shit. Not unless Donna is supposed to. She's earned it. She keeps this place running. The only time she comes out from back there is when someone crosses the line.

CALEB

What's the line?

BARRY

Well, we're a bodybuilder gym, not Bel-Air Country Club so it takes a special kind of asshole and--

DONNA

I decide when they're special!

Barry and Caleb turn into...

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

BARRY

Too many guys for me to train ya right out the gate. So don't bug me, alright? Prove you deserve the attention, you'll fucking get it. Don't and you fucking won't.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - STORAGE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Barry flicks on a light to reveal a back room full of old weight lifting gear and supplies. A mess of stuff that has been accumulating over the years.

BARRY

Last but not least. This shit pile. Building your body takes time. So will cleaning out this disaster. Start chipping away at both.

Barry claps Caleb on the shoulder and lumbers away. Caleb makes sure Barry is gone. He goes to the hatch window in the back of the room. Climbs up. Pushes it open. Sticks his head out to see where it leads. Grabs a loose bolt from the ledge and places it between the window and the latch to keep it slightly propped open. He hops back down.

Caleb goes to move a broken piece of gear and more iron shrapnel falls around him. This fucking blows.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - LATER

SLOW MOTION - TRACKING ALONG

Dumbbell rack - a long strip of iron. Heavy end with massive weights over a hundred pounds each. Bodybuilders grab weights - curl, row, shoulder press in the mirror. Dumbbell weights rack and drop repeatedly. Men grunt.

CLICK-CLANK. CLICK-CLANK. ARRRRGH. CLICK-CLANK. CLICK-CLANK.

As weight sizes diminish, so do the men. Smaller weights. Smaller muscles. Caleb at the light end performing seated dumbbell curls. Beginning of the musclehead evolutionary chart. He stares in the mirror with determination and frustration as he lifts over and over and over.

CLICK-CLANK. CLICK-CLANK. CLICK...

EXT. FLEXION FITNESS/GRASS LOT - NIGHT

CLANK. Barry locks up and leaves for the night. Caleb watches Barry go from across the street. Out of view.

EXT. FLEXION FITNESS - ALLEY - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb walks down a back alley - he gets to the dumpsters and finds a small window - the hatch window for the storage room. He pulls over a crate to stand on and props open the window.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - STORAGE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Caleb lowers himself into the room and closes the window slowly to avoid making any loud sounds - just in case.

The glow of street lights throw enough for him to see. Caleb pulls an old gym mat under the window - lays a blanket over it. Sleeping quarters. Caleb finds a bin - lost and found items. Shorts. T-shirts. Hand wraps. Useful gear. Claimed.

Caleb sits in his new sleeping area. He takes out the notebook he stole earlier. Flips through it. Fascinated. Pages full of gym rat details. Some function more as journal entries - recording mental state before and after workouts.

Caleb turns to a clean page. No one else to talk to. Writes.

CALEB (V.O.)

Day 1. I will keep a training log.
A journal. Hold myself accountable
for once. Mind and body.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - LATER

Caleb walks through the now empty, closed gym. The moonlight spills in - the space a light blue haze.

CALEB (V.O.)

I have always felt stuck out of
place. Defined as little as my
muscles are now.

Caleb slowly slides his hands along the machines. Getting familiar with them. Taming them.

CALEB (V.O.)

Lifting weights and welcoming pain
so in return I can grow makes sense
to me. More than anything else has.

Caleb poses in the mirror. He strikes various bodybuilder poses. Side chest. Biceps. He raises his shirt. Flexes.

CALEB (V.O.)
An honest exchange.

Caleb's eyes well up. An almost religious moment for him. He stares at himself with critical appraisal of what he must do to become more than his reflection.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - NIGHT

GOD'S EYE VIEW high above the sleeping beach community. Deliberate flight. Ominous. Rows of apartments and bungalows like veins leading to the boardwalk. Boardwalk connecting to the sand. Sand into the dark ocean. During flight...

CALEB (V.O.)
Seated Dumbbell Curl. Weight:
Twenty-Five Pounds. Sets: Three.
Reps: Twelve each. Barbell Curl.
Sixty Pounds. Sets: Three. Reps:
Eight, Six, Six. Close-Grip Chins.
Sets: Three. Reps: Ten, Nine, Six.
Triceps Bar Extension. Weight:
Thirty Pounds. Sets: Three. Reps:
Twelve, Twelve, Ten. Dips. Sets:
Three. Reps: Twelve, Ten, Ten. Sit-
ups. Sets: Five. Reps: Twenty each.

Lingering over the ocean from above. Black. Silent. Lonely.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - STORAGE ROOM - LATER

Still dark. Caleb half asleep. Balled up T-shirt under his head as a pillow. A light in the hall flicks on. Caleb turns when he hears footsteps. A shadow passes the opaque glass slat on the door - deep voice sings out of key: Barry.

Caleb checks the clock on the wall: 4am. Barry opens early. Caleb hides his belongings. Undoes the sleeping quarters. Throws on sneakers and stealthily climbs out the window.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb jogs the streets. Each streetlight and neon sign in a storefront window gives a brief reprieve from the consuming darkness. He passes a nocturnal lunatic ranting at ghosts...

LUNATIC

The ground shakes angry like a rattlesnake! We have been warned!

Caleb dodges drunks as they stumble aimlessly...

DRUNK

M-- My man! You got change, my man?

A prostitute fishes for headlights floating down the street with no luck. She tosses Caleb a line...

PROSTITUTE

Slow down, honey...

Caleb jogs past - eyes forward.

PROSTITUTE (CONT'D)

Oh, really!? Cocksucker!

Caleb turns onto the boardwalk. Shadows in dark corners dig into overflowing trash cans. Lost souls. The daytime oasis a bleak purgatory at night. Caleb's feet churn faster.

He sprints on the sand. Caleb stares emotionless into the middle distance. His body working separate from his mind.

Caleb slows to a stop - resting up against a palm tree. His breathing heavy but he won't let himself pant like a dog. He stands upright and wrestles his lungs into submission.

He looks at the row of BEACH HOUSES lining a portion of the boardwalk like tropical snow globes.

All are quiet until his eyes dart - a light turns on in the second story of the house at the end. Bodies stumble toward the window. Undressing in plain sight. They strip off their clothes and press against the glass as they fuck - not concerned with the outside world. Caleb watches.

The woman faces the window - staring at the ocean. Her eyes lower and meet Caleb's. Not clear if she sees him. Caleb does not look away. Unflinching. The most intimate moment he has shared with someone and he is not directly involved. His eyes drift to the man. He too staring at Caleb. Or through him.

Caleb steps out from the palm tree to make himself more visible. They don't look away. He takes another step and stands hauntingly in plain sight. He wants to be seen. They still don't look away. They might not care he is there or simply can't see him in the dark. Caleb tilts his head curiously. Either way, he is invisible to them.

PRE-LAP. STATIC. DIAL TONE. DIALING. RINGING...

EXT. VENICE BEACH - BOARDWALK - PHONE BOOTH - LATER

Caleb secure inside the metal and glass phone booth on a side street off the boardwalk. Ocean waves crash in the distance.

RINGING-- CLICK.

SEX HOTLINE OPERATOR (V.O.)
Hey, stud. Having trouble sleeping?

CALEB
I don't want to talk... if you
could just... say everything...

SEX HOTLINE OPERATOR (V.O.)
Whatever you want...

She begins talking. Moaning. Crackling sensual breaths. Caleb listens. Nothing else. Not allowing himself that pleasure.

Caleb sees himself in the reflection of the metal housing of the phone. Deformed from the imperfections of the metal and the seedy glow of the flickering street lamp above.

Caleb removes the phone from his ear as the breathing gets more intense. Ashamed. Suddenly, he hits himself over the head with the phone receiver.

THWACK. CRACK. CRACK. Lesson learned. Caleb hangs up.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - DAY

Caleb bench presses - eyes looking up at a faint WATER STAIN in the ceiling near the fluorescent lights like a target. He strains and fights but it seems euphoric for him. Improving.

CALEB (V.O.)
The gym opens early. Earlier than I
realized. Can't risk Barry finding
me. I will get up beforehand and
run. It is only temporary.

CUT TO:

Caleb does back rows - he's in a rhythm. Dripping sweat.

CALEB (V.O.)
I have trouble sleeping anyway.
Never good sleep. Not without help.

CUT TO:

Caleb lays on a mat doing leg raises - face clenched.

CALEB (V.O.)
 Workouts will be twice daily.
 Necessary for me to catch up.

CUT TO:

Caleb mops. Head down. Eyes up. Watches lifter do a superset.

CALEB (V.O.)
 Time spent cleaning the gym is a
 chance for me to observe...

CUT TO:

Caleb now performs the exact workout he was just studying.

CALEB (V.O.)
 Adopt...

CUT TO:

- *CALEB'S HANDS grip iron - knuckles turn white.
- *CALEB'S JAWLINE beneath ear - subtly throbbing.
- *CALEB'S PUPILS dilating - adrenaline release.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - LOCKER ROOM - LATER

Caleb ties off a garbage bag in the corner. JUICEHEADS enter on the other side of the locker room. Caleb can see them around the lockers but they don't realize he's there.

JUICEHEAD #1
 Cycling?

JUICEHEAD #2
 Shot four hundred mill of deca last
 week. Feelin' mighty. Got any dbol,
 though? I'd pop a couple of those.

Juicehead #1 reaches into his locker. Grabs a pill container and tosses it to his friend. He opens it and shakes out a few pink, pentagonal pills. Downs them dry. Juicehead #1 grabs a small vile and a syringe. Preps it.

JUICEHEAD #1
 Help me out, brother - hate doing
 this shit myself.

Juicehead #2 takes the syringe. Juicehead #1 pulls down his shorts, exposing his ass cheek. Casual.

JUICEHEAD #2
Big cat afraid of a tiny mouse.

JUICEHEAD #1
Shut up and shoot.

Juicehead #2 struggles to pierce the skin - pushing the needle into solid muscle with no success.

JUICEHEAD #2
Jesus, your ass is a rock. Needle's gonna snap in half.

Needle bends and gives. Wince inducing. It finally pierces the skin and injects the liquid. Juicehead #2 removes the needle and tosses it back into the locker.

JUICEHEAD #1
Let's get it!

The two men exit - medicated and excited for their workout.

Caleb walks over to the bench where the juicehead's locker is and reaches down to collect the empty vile he left behind. He holds it up to the light - the liquid trails on the side of the container and collects at the bottom. Caleb looks revolted by it before tossing it in the trash bag.

EXT. MALIBU - CONSTRUCTION SITE - MORNING

A beach house being gutted and rebuilt. Workers buzz around the property removing trash. Loading in supplies.

CALEB (V.O.)
The rich love spending money near the ocean. New houses go up fast as old ones get torn down. Not hard to get work on short notice.

Caleb in demolition mode. He takes a sledge hammer to a rotting wall. He wails on it. Hard. Again. Harder. Again.

CALEB (V.O.)
The heat is relentless but I get a nice natural tan. The job a decent workout. Helps callus weak thoughts that creep in away from the gym.

MIGRANT WORKERS eat bagged lunches. Caleb sits near them but not with them. Eating alone.

CALEB (V.O.)

The workers are illegals. Don't speak English. Don't matter. They work hard for what they get. For simple... real things.

YUPPIE DOUCHEBAG and TROPHY WIFE stumble through the property in their ill-advised, Rodeo Drive bought clothing. He shows off the lot - explaining the views. The migrant workers laugh and ridicule them in Spanish.

CALEB (V.O.)

They see the muck. The sick vanity. We all just want to get paid. Take some of their money.

CONTRACTOR counts off bills - pays workers. Caleb last, collects his cut. Counts it back distrustfully.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - DAY

Caleb sits in the hot sand in his small gym shorts. His body slumped over his knees. His posture petulant - he lets sand trickle through his hands. People swing and flip on the beach gymnastic rings. A crowd sunbathes. Two women in bikinis walk by. Caleb smiles meekly. They giggle. Ignore. Keep moving.

CALEB (V.O.)

When the sun is out this place is like a postcard. Everything shines at the edges. Vibrates in the heat.

Caleb walks into the dense layer of sunbathing families, girls, couples, umbrellas, coolers and beach balls.

CALEB (V.O.)

Only the artificially thirsty can keep seeing this mirage as fact.

Caleb high steps into the break. Dives under a wave.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - OCEAN - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb wades in the ocean - head half above water.

CALEB'S POV - people relax on the beach. Blissfully ignorant.

CALEB (V.O.)

I have a pure goal. I do not want to taint it.

(MORE)

CALEB (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It would be easy to fall prey to the tight, smooth skin that wraps around and disguises the ugliness here. It is convincing.

A wave rolls up behind Caleb. Deep breath. Submerges.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - DAY

Caleb's head rises into frame like he has emerged from the wave. He exhales. Raising dumbbells onto each thigh. He jolts his legs and pulls each weight up. He stabilizes and starts getting in some serious military press reps. Caleb goes to failure. Drops weights. Good set.

CHAUNCEY ATLAS. 38. A bodybuilder with muscle development that tells the story of his experience. He loads weights on the flat chest press bar. Not a young gun but still in it. About to lift enough to make you cry.

CHAUNCEY

Rotate 'em inward toward your chest on the way down.

Caleb nods - reluctant to listen or interact. He hoists the weights up and on the way down turns them inward. Unsure.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

Start turning gradually on the way down until your wrists invert right at the end. Squeeze. There you go.

Caleb gets the motion down - performs a few reps and his shoulders quit on him. Difficult.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

Gives the chest something to do. Mixes it up. Let me get a spot.

Chauncey mounts the bench and lays back. Caleb gets behind the bar at the ready. He raises his hands to the bar.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

All set going up. You'll know.

Chauncey inhales big. Exhales hard. He shoots the bar off the rack. In a smooth rhythm he does eight reps. On nine the bar gets a little unsteady. He stalls and Caleb helps lift the bar. Chauncey finishes the final rep successfully. Racks.

Chauncey reaches his hand up for a fist bump. Caleb reciprocates awkwardly. He keeps to himself too much.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
Chauncey.

CALEB
Caleb.

CHAUNCEY
New?

Defensive pause. Caleb processing.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
Best part is right where you are.

CALEB
How so?

CHAUNCEY
Gaining beats the hell out of
maintaining. What you got left?

CALEB
Two sets on press. Abs. Not much.

CHAUNCEY
Find me when you're done. Lunch on
me. I'll tell you the mistakes I
made coming up so you can avoid the
same empty reps and I can redeem
some of my wasted sweat.

Chauncey walks off. Caleb does his new shoulder workout.

EXT. RAE'S RESTAURANT - LATER

1950s diner with 1980s cars out front. The bold aqua-marine paint vibrant. The neon sign off but still shines. Chauncey and Caleb pull up in Chauncey's WHITE PONTIAC FIERO.

INT. RAE'S RESTAURANT - MOMENTS LATER

LINE COOKS flip steaks and crack eggs. A WAITRESS walks down the row of booths toward Caleb and Chauncey with food.

CHAUNCEY
Gyms. Training methods. Nutrition.
Drugs. Musculature. Nothing's like
it was even a year ago. Not since
American muscle became such an
enterprise. Inject it with greed
and it'll transform quick. Size is
king. More is more is more.

Chauncey polishes off his first steak in time to swap it out for a second. Another steak at the table for Caleb as well.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

What do you do other than weights?
What else to shock the muscles?

CALEB

I run at night. On the beach.

CHAUNCEY

Good. Lengthens your calves. What about muscle control? Posing?

CALEB

I... I guess I practice posing--

CHAUNCEY

No. Finish a set. Hit a pose. All day. Visualize your goal. Mold each muscle precisely. Competitions can be close. Every pose, every micro-adjustment is crucial. Ah, here. Wish I'd done this early on...

Chauncey grabs a napkin - leans across to the other booth and takes the pen off a paid check. He scribbles on the napkin. Slides it to Caleb. An address.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

Ballet studio. Beginner classes. Cheap. No sign up. Just show up.

CALEB

I'm not a little girl or like, uh... a fag--

CHAUNCEY

Don't be stupid. Former Mr. Olympia winners took ballet. Trust me. Your body is all fucking dried out for competition. You're flexing for minutes on end. You want to be a champ or chump that can't hold a pose? Gut hanging. Back all soft.

Caleb still working on his first portion. He tepidly looks at the second plate. Chauncey is quick to pick up on that.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

You're falling behind...

CALEB

Oh, I'm pretty full.

CHAUNCEY

What do you weigh? One fifty five?

CALEB

(quickly correcting)

One sixty.

CHAUNCEY

Fine. One sixty. You need to take down twice that number in grams of protein each day to bulk. Plan on giving yourself a boost?

Chauncey stabs his steak with his fork and presses the top like an injection needle.

CALEB

Can't cheat.

CHAUNCEY

No rule against. A lot of guys do. Not saying you should. It's a tool. If you can control it and use in moderation. Helps ratchet up the muscle and give people a show. After all, that's what everyone wants. Shock and awe. A body so ripped first thing they think is wow not how.

(beat; reinforcing)

Been to a magic show? If a magician literally sawed someone in half, crowd would still cheer first before they knew to scream.

CALEB

Can't cheat. I need to know.

CHAUNCEY

What do you mean?

CALEB

I need to know what I'm capable of. That I earn it.

CHAUNCEY

Well, eat up, eat often and eat clean then. Fuck your appetite.

Chauncey pushes Caleb's second steak in front of him and then rips into his new steak. Blood dripping from it.

CALEB

Did you used to compete?

CHAUNCEY

I was on the stage from time to time but never in the spotlight.

CALEB

What happened? If you don't mind...

Chauncey smiles. Not stung. A healthy outlook.

CHAUNCEY

Had the body. Never had the edge. Winners. The real elite. They got something special bubbling beneath the muscles that sweats through. Can't see it but you feel it. They unlock a part of themselves. An attitude. A mind-set. Their bones carry the muscle differently and when they present it, audiences and judges have a primal reaction.

On cue the door to Rae's JINGLES and in walks Nazar Kozel. The gold chained behemoth from outside Flexion. A few friends following. Caleb clocks him instantly. Stares.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

I still go hard but I'm not trying to kill myself. Not anymore. I'm a personal trainer at Iron Max Gym. Figuring out the business side. Helping people get the body they want. Quit obsessing over my own.

Chauncey feels Caleb's attention has shifted. He turns.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

Nazar Kozel. Next decade of bodybuilding. The evolution.

CALEB

I saw him once... outside Flexion.

CHAUNCEY

Yeah, he drops by all the gyms in Venice and Santa Monica. Trains at each one. Never enough for anyone to see his full regimen. All in service of his legend, I guess.

CALEB

Legend?

CHAUNCEY

Nazar Kozel: The Ukrainian demigod
orphan of Kachalka.

Caleb looks at Chauncey blankly. Chauncey surprised he hasn't been briefed on Nazar Kozel. Caleb's eyes fix back on Nazar.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

There is a gym, middle of the woods
in the Ukraine called Kachalka.
Eastern European muscle beach. Sort
of. Depends on the time of year...

SMASH CUT:

EXT. UKRAINE - VENETSIANSKY ISLAND - DUSK (FLASHBACK)

Winter. Snow dusted field. Pale blue and yellow scrap metal scattered amongst dead trees. Weight lifting machines.

SUPER: KACHALKA GYM - VENETSIANSKY ISLAND, UKRAINE

The gym empty aside from SERGIY. 68. Silver-haired old man. He lifts. His MUTT at his side. Patiently supportive.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)

That's where he was found. Alone.
Abandoned. No one knows where he
came from. How long he was there.

The car part yellow weight plates smash into snow. Sergiy bundles up. Workout complete. His dog turns. Sergiy whistles to get his attention. No luck. He's investigating a scent.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)

Should've froze to death.

Sergiy hears metal on metal. He follows the dog. They move past a cluster of scrap metal machines. A child. In tattered clothes not fit for the cold. Six years old. Young Nazar.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)

Instead, the little bastard was
doing chain curls to keep warm.

Sergiy looks in all directions. He must be with someone. There is no one else. Sergiy watches the boy lift heavy chains easily. Ripped. Tough. Development years ahead.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)

The man that took him in was Sergiy
Kozel. Former Ukrainian gymnast.
Accomplished athlete in his time.

Sergiy offers a thermos of hot stew. Nazar hesitant at first. Then hunger takes over. Survival. He grabs the thermos. Eats.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)
Neither of them had anyone else.
They had Kachalka and they never
missed a training day.

EXT. KACHALKA GYM - DAWN (FLASHBACK)

Spring. Snow melted. Trees blossom. Weeds grow through the machines. More people lift. No shirts. No shoes. Resembling a more rugged muscle beach. Nazar trains. Does strength tricks. Sergiy coaches. Nazar stronger. Already turning heads.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)
His strength was freakish. His body
generated muscle tissue faster than
gluttons gain fat.

EXT. KACHALKA GYM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Nazar. Fifteen. Benching. A grown man next to him benches the same weight. A bet. Men huddle - wave money - count the reps in Ukrainian. Cheering. Waiting to see who will win.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)
Nazar loved to hurt. Converted pain
into fuel when other guys were
emptying the tank.

The other man folds. Bar drops to his chest - so heavy three men help lift it off him. Nazar keeps pumping. Not slowing. Grimacing and smiling all at once. Incredible. Sergiy proud.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)
And the pain he felt when Sergiy
died all went into the weights.

INT. COMPETITION STAGES (FLASHBACK)

Nazar competing. Bestowed medals. Holding trophies.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)
Such a heavy past sitting on his
shoulders and he'd walk on stage
light as a feather. No stress in
his flex. Unstoppable.

EXT. KACHALKA GYM - DUSK (FLASHBACK)

Winter. The empty gym. Like before. The sound of metal. Nazar now looks exactly the age we know him. Lifting in solitude in the woods. We drift away until it's a sea of dead trees.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)
A force of nature.

BACK TO:

INT. RAE'S RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS (PRESENT)

Caleb still staring at Nazar. Legend in the flesh.

CALEB
That all true?

CHAUNCEY
Shit, I don't know. Sounds good though, don't it?

EXT. VENICE BOULEVARD - LATER

Palm trees whiz past. Car engine shouts. Chauncey races his fiero down the block. Stops outside...

EXT. FLEXION FITNESS - CONTINUOUS

Caleb gets out - walks around the front of the car. Chauncey rolls down his window. Stops him.

CHAUNCEY
Caleb. Swing by Iron Max. I'll hook you up with a free pass. Change of scenery helps breaks up the grind. If Flexion is a temple... Iron Max is a social club.

Chauncey speeds off. Caleb idle. Flexion looming over him.

INT./EXT. STAIRWELL - DAY

ANGLE. Mouth of stairwell reaching down to the sidewalk. Pedestrians pass. Caleb appears. Stops at the bottom of the stairs. Checks for an address. Caleb heads upstairs. Girls in ballet outfits playfully run down the stairs past him.

INT. BALLET STUDIO - REHEARSAL SPACE - LATER

BALLET INSTRUCTOR. 40s. She's taught this so many times. No enthusiasm left. Children plie, releve and saute. The instructor goes down the line. Gets to Caleb.

BALLET INSTRUCTOR
 Feel the music. Respond to it.
 Arch. No rounded shoulders.

Caleb struggles to follow instruction at the end of the row of dancers. The teacher adjusts his stance.

BALLET INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)
 Chin up. Create nice long lines
 with your arms. Reach. Not bad.

Her tone the same as she would use with a child. Caleb strains to focus on the pose. Not her tone.

BALLET INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)
 Again...

INT. BALLET STUDIO - WAITING AREA - LATER

Caleb sips from the water fountain. He sees a ballerina. IRENE. 24. She dances alone - untouched - in a rehearsal space. He cannot hear the music. Her flowing dance alone fills the void. There is a glow about her. A perceived one, perhaps. He moves closer to the viewing glass. Infatuated.

INT. BALLET STUDIO - REHEARSAL SPACE - CONTINUOUS

Music audible now. Irene lost in the song. Hangs on each step and every pointed toe. Spins repeatedly. Each rotation she notices more clearly a blurred figure watching her from outside the window. Constant. Caleb.

Irene does not stop until the song ends. When it does she turns to get a look at her admirer. Caleb already leaving - only his back visible as he exits. Irene restarts the song.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - DAY

Caleb raises a barbell from behind his head and straight up with his triceps. Soaked in sweat. Pushing.

CALEB (V.O.)
 French Press. Barbell. 60 pounds.

CLOSE ON pages flipping between fingers. Workout stats. Block letters. His thoughts scribbled around them. Caleb turns to a new page. Writes. Lead crumbles off the pencil's tip...

CALEB (V.O.)
 3 sets of 10 reps. 2 sets of 8
 reps. Up ten pounds...
 (beat; writes with care)
 I can't stop thinking about her...

Caleb stares at himself in the mirror between sets. Flashes of Irene's day intercut with his workout:

TELEPHOTO LENS. Voyeuristic. Irene leaves the ballet studio. Gets coffee and reads at a local cafe. Enters her apartment. At night she dances in the window. Sealed inside. A jewelry box ballerina. Away from the seediness of the boardwalk.

CALEB (V.O.)
 She moves free of small problems
 that drag on most. Clean. Better.

Caleb stretches next to a bench between sets. A much bigger guy slides in on his bench. BUCK STEWART. 32. Seizes it. Poor etiquette. Caleb seething at the transgression.

CALEB
 Excuse me...
 (beat; ignored)
 Hey, man...
 (beat; ignored)
 I'm... I'm on this.

BUCK
 You're done. Fuck off.

CALEB
 If you want to work in--

Buck begins his set. Caleb shuffles in place. Considering moving on. He doesn't. He can't let it go. Moves in.

CALEB (CONT'D)
 Get up.

No response. Caleb pushes the weight mid-rep. Buck loses balance. Drops the weights. Shoots to his feet. Caleb does not back down. Buck grins.

BUCK
 (derisively)
 All yours.

Buck concedes. Caleb moves past him. Buck spins and shoves Caleb. He falls over the bench. Lands on his ass. Table-topped. His head bounces off a machine. Blood trickles from his forehead. Buck snickers and pushes Caleb's legs off the bench and sits back down to continue the workout.

BUCK (CONT'D)

What you gonna do!? Nothing. 'Cause you're nothing. Little bitch.

Caleb fuming. Rises. Takes a charging step. Buck picks up a dumbbell and hurls it at Caleb's head. Caleb ducks it. The weight smashes into the wall. Punches a hole in the plaster. Hangs in place. Donna rips off her headphones. Rolls her eyes. Buck about to swing. Donna steps in. Grabs Buck by the balls. Long nails like a spiked jail cell. He freezes.

DONNA

Time out, motherfucker.

She walks Buck to the door by the nuts. Not much he can do.

DONNA (CONT'D)

You're pale. Go pump that up and think about what you did.

She shoves Buck out the door. Nobody fucks with Donna. Donna back to her desk. Points at Caleb. Then the wall.

DONNA (CONT'D)

Fix it. Tell him I told you.

A bodybuilder looks for a second dumbbell to make a matching set. Spots it lodged in the wall. No reaction. Simply pulls it out and starts curling.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb sweeps debris from the broken wall. He preps a bucket with spackle. Barry is going off on people, having gotten wind of what happened and running the floor like a general.

Caleb applies spackle to the hole in the wall with a joint knife. Smoothing it. Scraping it. Unnerving. Akin to nails on a chalk board. Continuing over...

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - SAUNA - LATER

Caleb. Towel covering lower half. Still. Full body sweats. Skin red from the heat. Thoughts festering behind his eyes. The sound of scraping spackle onto plaster never leaves.

Hold on Caleb. An uncomfortably long time. Until we feel hot. Until we need out. Caleb like a burning coal. Taking in the heat. Retaining it. He will burst. A matter of time.

INT. BALLET STUDIO - MORNING

Caleb enters for another class. He looks for Irene in her practice space. Empty. He turns and enters...

INT. BALLET STUDIO - REHEARSAL SPACE - CONTINUOUS

And there she is. Talking in front of the class. Caleb stops. Surprised. Irene looks. Their eyes meet. Caleb smiles. She waits. Awkward beat.

IRENE

Can... I help you?

CALEB

Uh, I think... this-- Beginners?

IRENE

Oh, yes. Come in. You're in the right place.

Irene waves him in. He puts down his bag. Runs to his spot. Irene leads stretches. Caleb tries not to stare. The effort ultimately makes it more obvious. She notices. Doesn't mind.

CUT TO:

Class over. Students gather their things near the door. Irene says goodbye to some of the students. Caleb waits.

CALEB

(eagerly)

Hi, I'm Caleb Cole.

IRENE

Nice to meet you, Caleb Cole.

CALEB

I didn't catch yours. Your, uh, name. I was late coming in.

IRENE

Irene.

CALEB

Will you be teaching more of these?

IRENE

Oh, no. I was covering to help. I don't normally teach--

Pause. Students file out between them.

CALEB

Irene. Pretty name. Well, Irene, that's too bad.

IRENE

What is?

CALEB

You not teaching. I feel like I learned a lot today with you. I'm no dancer and it... I-- I hope I'm not being too forward when I say this... I saw you dancing the other day and it said a lot about you. It gave me a good sense of the type of person you are and the way you taught class reinforced that.

IRENE

What kind of person am I? From the dancing, what did it tell you?

CALEB

You made it look very easy and now that I've taken a couple classes I know it's not. Not at all. It is hard to do even the basic moves well and so I figure someone that can make something that hard look special must be a special kind of person. Real. No fake.

IRENE

Thanks but I'm not that good. There are people much more talented.

CALEB

Not to me.

She smirks. His immaturity cute. Endearing.

IRENE

Are you trying to ask me out?

CALEB

Would you want me to?

IRENE
Maybe I would.

CALEB
What are you doing?

IRENE
You mean-- Right now? Oh, I can't.
I have an assignment due, I really
need to work on.

CALEB
Assignment? For... dance?

IRENE
Oh, no. No, dance is a hobby. Art
history major. I have to go to the
Getty Villa to finish a paper.

CALEB
What's that?

IRENE
Getty Villa? It's an art museum.
You've never been?

CALEB
Show me. I'll come with you. Keep
you company while you finish your
assignment, learn about some art.

She hesitates. Caught off guard. Caleb nudges.

CALEB (CONT'D)
I'll keep quiet. Promise. Won't
know I'm there unless you want to
know and if you need a break then
you got someone to spend it with.
Better than going all by yourself.

Irene considers. His charm working slowly.

CALEB (CONT'D)
What do you say?

IRENE
Sure... okay.

CALEB
Yeah?

IRENE

Yes! Yeah, I have to go home to change and get my books. See you there, let's say... two hours?

CALEB

Two hours. Getty Villa.

Irene nods. Caleb smiles. Exits.

IRENE

Shoes are required!

Caleb scurries back in - so entranced he left without his sneakers. He grabs them and forces them on as he leaves. Irene laughs. Shakes her head.

INT. VENICE BEACH - BOARDWALK - CLOTHING STORE - LATER

Caleb shops for new clothes. A nicer shirt. Not gym attire. He holds up options, none match particularly well but he looks satisfied in the mirror. To him, an upgrade.

INT. CITY BUS - LATER

Bus half full with tired passengers. Zombies en route. Except Caleb. A change in his mood. He wears his new outfit. A well-intentioned, misguided improvement. Resembles a tourist more than a local. He sits alone in the back. Head resting on the glass window - ocean scrolling past. Childish anticipation.

EXT. GETTY VILLA - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb paces nervously outside the entrance. Patrons pass. Couples. Families. Anxiety building. Irene comes running up. Caleb stops. Straightens posture. Puts on a new face. Soft.

IRENE

Sorry! Neighbor blocked me in. You weren't waiting long, were you?

CALEB

(not a problem)
You're here... You're here.

IRENE

(smiling)
Yeah, come on...

INT./EXT. GETTY VILLA - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC UP: ENNIO MORRICONE - LA BAMBOLA (VERSION THREE)

ANGLE. Foyer. Glass windows. Sunlight reflecting on the floor. Ethereal. Irene enters frame. Caleb following.

Irene walks the halls in an almost ceremonial pace. She analyzes the many ancient Greek and Roman busts. Pristine marble. Faces and bodies frozen in time. She takes notes. Ideas as they come to her. An excitement. An empathy. A sophisticated, thoughtful being.

Caleb strolls behind. He does his best not to distract Irene but still near enough to feel part of the experience. Caleb mostly admires her. Not the art. A discomfort with how the busts stare back at him after looking too deeply.

The two walk along the symmetric garden exhibit. Lined with perfectly manicured bushes. A long opal blue fountain pool. Their reflections look back at them, a quick smile shared.

They stand closer now. Opposite a towering marble statue. A body of its time to be marveled. A DEER appears in the garden past the statue. Stops. Its ears twitch up. Irene grabs Caleb's arm to show him. Everything serene. Peaceful.

EXT. GETTY VILLA - GARDEN COURTYARD - LATER

Caleb and Irene sit on a bench in the center of a square courtyard. Dense pillars surround the courtyard. Enclose them. Alone together. Irene puts down her pen. A reprieve.

IRENE

Sometimes I'll sit out here and pretend I'm on extended travel abroad. No plans to return...

(beat; curiously)

Anything jump out at you?

CALEB

Don't know what to look for like you. But I like this place. It's nice. Real nice.

IRENE

You don't have to know for it to say something to you. Hmm...

Irene points to one of the statues in the garden - small man hunched over. Walking carefully. Eyes wide.

IRENE (CONT'D)

There. That one. Instinct. First thing that strikes you...

Caleb smiles nervously - not enjoying being put on the spot. A thought crosses his mind but he shakes it off. Stupid.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Can't be wrong. It's yours to feel.

CALEB

(if I have to)

Uh, he... looks like he's... looking for something.

Irene waits for more. Caleb shrugs. Nothing. She can't get a read on him. A strong feeling but an opaque one.

IRENE

Could be. He does look determined. Maybe looking. Maybe... hiding in plain sight... ?

EXT. GETTY VILLA - PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb walks Irene to her car. Awkward pause. She gets in. Drives away. Caleb chases down the car and knocks on her window. She stops, a bit startled. Rolls down her window.

CALEB

Come out with me tonight? Let's go out and do something fun. Not that this wasn't-- This was great.

IRENE

Haven't had enough of me yet?

CALEB

I haven't had a day like this with someone in a long time. Have you?
(doesn't matter; quickly)
Come out with me.

Caleb opens up enough that it surprises Irene. Holds her interest. She writes out her number on his hand. Smiles and drives down the hill. Caleb looks at his hand. Thrilled.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - LATER

Caleb trains. His mind elsewhere. Thinking of her.

PRE-LAP. DIALING. RINGING...

EXT. VENICE BEACH - BOARDWALK - PHONE BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

Same booth as before. In the daylight. Caleb talks excitedly. We don't hear him over the sounds of the boardwalk. The call goes well to his surprise. He smiles.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - TACO STAND - NIGHT

Caleb and Irene sit next to each other eating tacos.

IRENE

Like...
(exaggerated flex)
RRRRRRR!

CALEB

Exactly like that. Dance class is to help with the posing.

Irene laughs. Then realizes Caleb is serious.

IRENE

Wow. Okay. I would not have guessed that. You don't look like one.

CALEB

At the moment, no. Takes a lot of days in the gym before you look like what people expect. Doesn't mean I'm not a bodybuilder.

IRENE

Was that rude, I didn't mean--

CALEB

You're fine.

Awkward beat.

IRENE

Serious question. Should you... be eating tacos? Am I a bad influence?

CALEB

Not the worst. I'm bulking.

Caleb acts like he's stealing one of Irene's tacos. She laughs. Swats him away.

IRENE

How much bigger do you plan on building yourself, if I might ask?

CALEB

I guess, depends on how it looks. Different muscles need different amounts to find a balance. Not as simple as get big everywhere. For some guys it is. Not me.

IRENE

Sculptor and the block of stone.

They share a sweet smile. She's not letting him off the hook.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Come on, pick a number. How much bigger? How many pounds?

CALEB

Long term... Forty. Fifty. Muscle.

IRENE

That's... a lot. You'll be like a different person entirely.

CALEB

That's the goal.

INT. VENICE BEACH - ARCADE - LATER

Caleb and Irene play pinball. Caleb gets tense when the guys next to them get excited playing their game and bump into him. Paranoid - thinking it is on purpose.

INT. VENICE BEACH - BAR - LATER

Irene dances with Caleb. He's stiff and self-conscious.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - BOARDWALK - LATER

Caleb and Irene walk. A bum panhandles at them. Caleb keeps moving. Recoils. He doesn't realize Irene stopped to give money. She is better. She rejoins Caleb. He abruptly kisses her. Irene initially pulls away but then kisses him back.

IRENE

Do you live close?

CALEB

Uh, yeah... well, I'm in between places. Moving in with a friend soon. So... I have a room at a motel. Up that way a few blocks.

She nods. They keep walking. Caleb will figure this out as he goes. Not about to bail on whatever this is.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - MOTEL - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb leads Irene up to the second floor. Stops outside of a room. Pats down his pants. Selling it.

IRENE
Key?

CALEB
Yeah, let me run down and get another one. Right back...

Caleb heads downstairs to the front desk.

INT. VENICE BEACH - MOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Caleb approaches the MOTEL CLERK.

CALEB
I need a room. Tonight only.

MOTEL CLERK
Eight bucks.

Caleb turns out his pockets. This day stretching him thin. He picks out some money. Counts it up.

CALEB
I can give you six. That's all I have on me, man. Six and change.

MOTEL CLERK
It's eight.

CALEB
Almost midnight. You're passing on six? Take the six. Take the change.

The clerk reluctantly slides a key to a first floor unit.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Any on the second floor?

Caleb leans back - checks the room number Irene waits by.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Like... 204?

The clerk slides him a different key for 206. That will do.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - MOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Caleb hustles back up to Irene. Walks past her to 206.

CALEB

This one...

INT. VENICE BEACH - MOTEL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The door opens to the room. Basic. An eight dollar room. Irene realizes it's empty. No belongings.

IRENE

Where's your stuff?

CALEB

I keep it all at the gym. Shower and change there. Use this to sleep. That's about it--

Irene kisses him. Escalates. Moves to the bed. They strip off their clothes. Irene at a level of intimacy impossible for Caleb. Making him uncomfortable. The ease that this is happening conflicting. He can't get hard. He keeps trying. Nothing. She tries to help. Kissing him. Staying close.

CALEB (CONT'D)

Can you-- stop touching me for a second, okay? Give me...

She keeps going. He keeps trying. Nothing. Pulls away.

IRENE

It's okay. Let's sleep.

She reassures him. Holds him. It only makes it worse.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Really, it's okay.

CUT TO:

Caleb and Irene lay next to each other. Irene asleep. Cuddling. Caleb awake. Ashamed of himself. He gets up.

INT. VENICE BEACH - MOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Caleb stands in the dark at the sink and mirror. He can't let it go. He continues to try to get hard. Angrily. Even though the moment has long passed. Doesn't matter. He still can't.

He stops. Rests his head against the mirror. RAMS it. Cracks. Jabs. Elbows. Shatters. Caleb grabs the frame of the mirror. Rips it clear off the wall and throws it into the bathtub.

INT. VENICE BEACH - MOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Irene awake. Sitting up. Concerned.

IRENE

Caleb...

He comes out of the bathroom. He looks down at his hand where her number used to be - now it is smeared in blood.

IRENE (CONT'D)

What happened? Are you--

CALEB

Leave.

IRENE

What?

CALEB

This should have-- This was supposed to-- You're not... you don't know me. Why are you here?

IRENE

Because I want to--

CALEB

You don't know me.

IRENE

I decide how much I know or need to know someone. If this is about--

CALEB

What do you know then!? Huh!?

IRENE

I know this isn't actually where you're staying. I also don't care.

CALEB

Leave.

IRENE

It's the middle of the night.

Caleb grabs her clothes and tosses them at her. She doesn't move. He won't look at her. Eyes something awful. Unhinged. Now she's scared. She gets dressed. Slips past him. No need to say anything. She wants to leave. We follow her out...

EXT. VENICE BEACH - MOTEL - CONTINUOUS

She hurries along the outdoor hall and downstairs. Things crash and break from inside the motel room. Caleb really letting it fly. She passes the motel clerk, visibly upset. The clerk already on the move to check on the noise.

INT. VENICE BEACH - MOTEL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb sits on the bed. Room trashed. He stares out the window. Neon glow leaking in. Despondent.

The clerk enters. Sees the mess.

MOTEL CLERK

Trashing the place costs extra.

Caleb begins putting on his clothes to leave.

MOTEL CLERK (CONT'D)

You're not going anywhere. Already know you don't have more money.

The clerk picks up the phone. Dials the police.

Caleb rushes him. Pins him. Rips the phone out of the wall. Caleb gut punches the clerk to give himself time to run.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - STORAGE ROOM - LATER

Caleb lays in his corner. Tossing. Turning. Replaying every moment with Irene. A resentment for trying - for tricking himself into thinking it could be something that went his way. Never. He tries hard to sleep. There is a rustling coming from the locker room. Caleb listens closely. Not Barry. Not that time yet. Weird.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Caleb enters the locker room. He hears flapping. Cooing. He turns past a row of lockers and sees the source of the noise.

PIGEON. Confused. Flying around the locker room or trying. Struggling. It looks injured. In a state of disarray.

Caleb checks the ceiling - trying to find how it came in. Doesn't matter. It's here. Caleb kneels next to the bird and cradles it in his hands. The pigeon flaps nervously.

A disgusting street bird. Some of its feathers loose on what was the clean floor. Caleb looks at it, deciding what to do. He feels its tiny heart beating in his palm. BA-DUM. BA-DUM.

In an extremely easy manner, like opening a soda can, he SNAPS the bird's neck. Flapping and cooing stop. Caleb stands. The bird hanging limp in his hand. Caleb tosses it out in the trash. Goes back to bed.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - DAY

MUSIC FADES IN - PLODDING - UNEASY

Caleb does curls furiously. He gasses out. Disappointed with the effort. He tosses the weights to the ground. Reeling.

CALEB (V.O.)
My gains are slow. Too slow.

Caleb does squats. Wobbly on the first set. Instead of taking a break he loads it with more weight. Looks like a mistake even before he attempts it. Barry sees this from across the gym. Doesn't interfere. Needs to learn.

CALEB (V.O.)
No more fool's errands. No more distractions.

Caleb's legs buckle under the weight. Pushing it too hard. Being stupid and wild. Hurting himself. Caleb crashes down. Bar drops. Weights slide off and slam to the ground unevenly. One lands on Caleb's ankle. It gets the gym's attention. Barry approaches. Caleb on the ground.

BARRY
What in the fuck kind of kamikaze rep did I just witness? Lifting to fail is different than lifting to failure. Your mind tells your body how to lift the weight and if it can. That bar had you beat up top before you took it off the rack. Find a new approach or you'll get buried again and again. Stand up. Don't want 'em smelling blood.

Barry flicks his head toward the other lifters. A point to not look weak. Barry moves on. Does not help Caleb up. Not how he teaches. Caleb kicks the weight plate off his foot in frustration. He stands and cleans up the rest of his mess.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - DAY

A lifter sweats buckets. Caleb sops it up with a rag. Another lifter racks weights. Blood on the grips from open blisters. Caleb lines up the blood stained weights. Sprays and wipes.

CALEB (V.O.)

Not a bodily fluid I don't clean up regularly in the gym. That and all the dead skin, hair, nails...

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - SHOWERS - DAY

Caleb mops - getting rid of the grime. He exits the showers as a bodybuilder shows in a woman. Caleb watches as they undress, disappearing into the showers he just cleaned.

CALEB (V.O.)

Makes you really appreciate how destructible people are. Always trying to hold themselves together. Even the well kept ones. The fitness freaks.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - BOARDWALK - DAY

Caleb comes out of a grocery store and turns the corner. A strung out HOMELESS SURFER DUDE takes a piss on the side of a building. He almost falls in it. He chases tourists with his pants down laughing. Caleb veers around him.

CALEB (V.O.)

Especially the lowlifes.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - STORAGE ROOM - DAY

MUSIC BUILDS - STACCATO - PECKING

Caleb on a mission to clear out the old gear. Hauls broken parts away. Cuts his arm on one of the jagged edges. Nothing serious. Another annoyance that eats at him. Works him up.

CALEB (V.O.)

I need my own place. Some privacy.

INT./EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

An OLD LANDLORD shows Caleb the grounds. The lush palm trees outside deceptive. Street traffic obnoxious.

The pool at the center full but not with water any human should jump into. Cockroaches skitter everywhere.

CALEB (V.O.)

Rent is not the problem now that I have some cash. Problem is never enough room to breathe. Hell is other people too close.

Caleb walks a tight circle inside a jail cell sized studio. Paint with mold patches. Stained carpet. Makeshift kitchen.

FOOTSTEPS trample above. Caleb looks up. ARGUMENTS travel through walls next-door. SIRENS pass outside. Neighbors already being nosey, looking in. A nightmare.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - DAY/NIGHT

MUSIC BUILDS - SYNCOPATED - BUZZING

TIME-LAPSE. Days in the gym go by hyper-fast. Exhausting. Caleb moving a tick slower than the rest.

CALEB (V.O.)

I can only tell what day of the week it is based on the muscle group I exercise.

EXT. SANTA MONICA - CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Construction workers gut a large bathroom with an ocean view. Caleb smashes a cast iron tub. He takes pleasure in each piece he shatters. Rejuvenating him but not enough.

CALEB (V.O.)

Can't get stuck. Always get stuck.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - DAY

MUSIC RISES - THRASHING - DISSONANT CRESCENDO

Caleb lifts in the mirror. His head looks like it could pop off from the weight. Arms tremble. Each rep the plates on either side rotate little by little. Grinding. Slipping.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - STORAGE ROOM - NIGHT

Caleb closes his notebook. Sits for a moment. Trapped.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - MOMENTS LATER

Another night run. Caleb's stride haggard. Lack of sleep chipping at him insidiously. He runs past a woman walking her dog. The dog BARKS at Caleb. Sensing something off. The woman looks nervous and keeps walking.

Caleb runs the beach. A discarded SYRINGE sticks out of the sand. Caleb in a trance. Never sees it. With his full weight he steps on the needle. It punches through his sneaker.

MUSIC CEASES - SHARP CUTOFF

He crumbles. Screams. Only briefly. He grabs his foot. Needle clear through. He carefully removes it and as he does...

CLOSE ON top of sneaker - dirty white mesh becomes flush with blood - like a gauss pad on a cut.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - FISHING PIER - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb limps down the beach. Syringe in hand. Looking for a punching bag. He sees the homeless surfer under the condemned pier. It stands fractured. Reminder of 1983 El Nino storm. A small dystopia. The man sets up camp. Rambles incoherently.

Caleb grabs him and pushes him to the ground. Puts the syringe up to his eyeball. The man is plugged into a different reality. Mumbling. Eyes rolling. Not home.

CALEB

This yours!? Open your eyes! Open them! You hear me!? Is this yours!?

The man laughs. Caleb covers his mouth.

CALEB (CONT'D)

Shut up. Shut. Up.

He bites Caleb. Struggles. Caleb takes the syringe and stabs it into the man's thigh. Normally, a needle sends this man on a high but this time it is sobering. The intent with which Caleb thrusts it into him making him lucid. Scared.

The man screams - Caleb muffles it. Caleb removes the syringe and stabs him again. The man rolls - pushes - tries to fight Caleb off. Caleb keeps stabbing.

CALEB (CONT'D)

You fucking pockmark! You shit caked parasite! You waste!

Caleb kneels on the man's chest. Presses his face into the wet sand. Waves roll in. The man gags. Caleb starts punching wildly into the water as a wave submerges the man's face. The smack of the water more startling than seeing punches land.

Each time his face surfaces it's worse. Closer to death. For a moment, Caleb sees his own bloody face on the man's body until another wave washes over it and reveals the man is dead. Water spills from his lifeless mouth. Shock creeps in. Blood speckles Caleb's face - clothes soaked, blood-stained. The man's body floats out in the wake under the pier.

Caleb hears someone. He's fucked. He looks. More junkies and homeless scavenge the dead man's camp. Vultures. They don't care about Caleb. Caleb about to flee. Wait. The syringe. Finds it and hurls it out into the ocean. Staggeres away.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - STORAGE ROOM/HALLWAY - LATER

Caleb's wet clothes clumped across the floor like a trail. Socks. Shirt. Shorts. Shoes. Then wet footsteps. Into the hall. Then the weight room...

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - CONTINUOUS

Caleb stands in the mirror. Completely naked. Still dripping wet. Mind in overdrive. He looks at the blood spread on his face like freckles. His fingernails clogged with sand and dried blood. Arms red from the struggle.

Caleb breathes quick breaths. Puts his hand on his heart. Pounding. He lowers his arms to his side and makes a fist. Caleb feels this rush coursing through his veins.

CUT TO:

Caleb's bloody, cold face rising and lowering into frame. He's doing... pushups. Chest coming within an inch of the floor. The muscles in his arms and back ripple as he does push up after push up. He starts going faster.

CUT TO:

Caleb does lateral pull downs. Weights crashing down with every rep. He pulls ferociously on the metal bar.

CUT TO:

Caleb deadlifts. He uses everything in him to lift it. Impressive stack. His eyes something terrifying.

CUT TO:

Empty gym. Quiet until Caleb prowls into frame. Then out of frame. He paces back and forth in the mirror. Each time he exits and reappears an uneasiness grows. Until, finally...

Caleb stops. Collapses. Worked to muscle failure. He crawls up to the mirror and rests his head against it. Looks into his own eyes for a beat. Blank.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - SHOWERS - MOMENTS LATER

Red water spirals down the drain. Going against stream we follow the trail of blood along Caleb's foot. Then up his leg. The water less red as we continue up until there's no blood at all. Caleb clean again.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - LATER

Caleb sprays every machine and spot he touched with cleaner. He scrubs meticulously. He mops the floor. He gathers his wet clothes. Bags them with other trash. The gym spotless.

Caleb takes a final look before he turns off the lights and exits. The empty gym rests easy in the dark. The hum of an air conditioner soothing. Rage gone. Long beat.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - STORAGE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb lays in his makeshift quarters in the storage room. His eyes close and he falls asleep. Drifts off. This is the most at rest we have seen him.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - STORAGE ROOM - LATER

Caleb wakes. Hears flapping again. Another pigeon? Damn. Caleb gets up to take care of it.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - CONTINUOUS

Caleb enters the main lifting area. It falls silent. No more flapping. Not a pigeon. His mind playing tricks. He thinks he sees someone in the back corner behind a machine. A shadow.

CALEB

Hello... ?

Caleb flicks on the lights. No one back there. He flicks the lights off. Walks further into the gym. Suddenly, the whole gym shakes. Earthquake. Caleb's reflection in the mirror goes out of focus from the vibration. He braces. Shaking stops.

The mirror stops vibrating. As the reflection comes back into focus we also see someone creepily standing behind Caleb in the center of the room. A giant, posed, muscular figure. Ten feet tall. Caleb spots it in the mirror and spins around.

Not a person but a STATUE. Marble. Unmoving. It towers over Caleb. Strong pose. Grimacing face. Caleb hears scratching. He puts his ear up against its stomach. The statue begins to crack. Little pieces chip off and fall to the floor. Hitting the ground and turning to dust.

Caleb steps back. Something is burrowing out from the inside of the statue. The cracks turn to holes and through the holes fingers claw. Blood red fingers. Hands. More than from a single person. The thigh. The biceps. The torso. The calves. The head. Bloody hands rip through each part of the statue like birds hatching from eggs.

Then, over the heart, a mouth bites through the surface. Teeth bloody. Jagged. The mouth gasps for air. Caleb can't look away. Suddenly, Caleb's skin crawls. Quite literally. Hands pushing out from inside him. Fingerprints. Skin stretching from the pressure. Whole body flexing and twitching. He is not alarmed. An enlightening visage.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - STORAGE ROOM - MORNING

The sun shines through the hatch window. For the first time this room feels vibrant, not like a dungeon. A new day. A soft glow. Caleb wakes. Not startled or in a sweat.

The suppressed sound of weights hitting the floor vibrates into the storage room. Caleb looks rested. His eyes clear.

Then he realizes he slept in and jolts up. His body moving before his brain even knows what to do. No one must have noticed he was there since... he is still in there. Caleb carefully opens the door to the storage room.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Hall clear. Caleb steps out. He walks into the gym area, not sure if he will be greeted by cops or an enraged Barry. Instead, he gets out there and it's like any other day.

The gym in full swing. Donna at her desk. Was last night just a twisted nightmare? He goes to exit with his head down. Barry spots him as he passes...

BARRY
When did you get in?

CALEB

After you.

BARRY

Caleb.

Caleb stops. He turns, afraid Barry knows something.

BARRY (CONT'D)

Gym looks great. Keep it up.

Caleb nods. Slides out the front entrance. As he exits a bodybuilder enters in a NEON PINK AND BLACK STRIPE SPANDEX UNITARD. The front low cut. Below his belly button. Barry sees this and can't ignore it. Not in his gym.

BARRY (CONT'D)

Nope. The fuck out.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - FISHING PIER - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb turns a corner onto the boardwalk when he sees it full view... a bustling crime scene. His crime scene.

Detectives comb the beach beneath the pier. Area taped off. The body being photographed and bagged. People in bathing suits look on. Not a hundred yards away there's families enjoying the sun. Not stopping their beach day.

Caleb keeps a steady pace as he walks by. He disappears into an alleyway between bungalows.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - DAY

Caleb does a set of cleans - hoisting the bar weight from the ground up to his chest in one quick motion. His form improved. His lifts tight and sharp.

CALEB (V.O.)

Male. Name... unknown. Five feet.
Seven inches. One hundred thirty--
forty pounds. Approximately. He was
weak. I should feel bad. I don't.

He finishes the set. Writes the results in the journal.

CALEB (V.O.)

I feel... good.

CUT TO:

Caleb on bench press. Rips through the set - focused on the ceiling stain as he has done before. The stain POP FLASHING to bloody images of the man he killed. It propels Caleb.

CALEB (V.O.)
My muscles do not tire as fast. My
appetite has improved.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - BOARDWALK - DAY

Caleb sits perched atop a cement wall along the bike path. Cyclists and runners float past below. Skateboarders do tricks across the way next to the boardwalk. Caleb appreciates the boardwalk for a change.

CALEB (V.O.)
A noticeable effect. Like I have
shed old skin.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - SUBURBS - DAY

A classic California bungalow on a sleepy street tucked in the suburbs, off the beach. Paint faded. Aged but lyrically. Detached garage in the back. Safe.

Caleb approaches the front door. He knocks. Beat. No answer. He walks off the deck and gets a better look at the detached garage. Scopes it out.

A pale yellow 1977 CHEVETTE SANDPIPER pulls off the street and into the driveway. Caleb steps off to the side and lets the car pull in. The car comes to a stop. The door opens and AUBREY exits. 45. Long dark hair. No makeup. Serene. Not easily intimidated.

She sees Caleb standing there awkwardly - goes to her trunk and pops it open. Grabs groceries. In no rush.

AUBREY
Yes?

CALEB
Hello, ma'am--

AUBREY
Aubrey.

CALEB
I'm here to look at the room for
rent. Uh, this address was in the
paper, advertising an apartment.
(MORE)

CALEB (CONT'D)

I was hoping to take a look. If this is... this is the right address?

Aubrey letting him go on to see when he shuts up. She slowly makes her way up her front steps and onto her deck.

AUBREY

It's around back. Above the garage. Meet you there...

She enters the front door and closes it. Beat. Caleb heads along the house toward the garage. He looks in the windows as he goes to try and get a feel for the house. Can't see much. Very minimal. Very functional. Unassuming. He sees Aubrey passing a window doing the same - an eye on Caleb.

Caleb stands in driveway near the garage. She exits the back of the house. Lights a joint. Offers to Caleb. He declines.

CALEB

The paper didn't say how much?

AUBREY

I decide the price based on the person asking.

(beat)

A hand, please...

INT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Caleb and Aubrey lift the garage door. The first level is a standard garage. Boxes. Some tools. Some paint cans. Caleb follows Aubrey up the stairwell to the second floor.

INT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - GARAGE APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

A small tube television. A folding table and chair - Aubrey sits down and puffs her joint out the small window framing a single palm tree. Caleb makes a pass through the place. A bathroom no bigger than one on an airplane. No kitchen. No other amenities. A place to sleep and shit in.

But it's quiet. It is nice and quiet. Caleb looks out the window. Walks through the space. Comfortable.

AUBREY

How long have you lived in California?

CALEB

Couple months.

AUBREY
Like it?

CALEB
Yes, ma'am. Can't complain.

AUBREY
(correcting)
Aubrey.
(then)
Don't do that with me.

Beat. Caleb can't tell if she means call her ma'am or lie.

AUBREY (CONT'D)
So... ?

CALEB
I don't have much.

AUBREY
What do you do?

CALEB
Bodybuilder.

AUBREY
What do you do to make money?

CALEB
Construction. Whatever I can find.

Aubrey takes a nice long drag. Feels a kinship.

AUBREY
If you don't have a bed, you can use that air mattress rolled up in the corner. Hot plate, mini-fridge. I don't use either. They're boxed up in the garage. You're also welcome to use the kitchen in the house. I leave the door off the porch open. Pay me what you can once a month. What's fair relative to what you make. How's that?

CALEB
That... will work.

AUBREY
Move in when it's convenient.

She walks back down the stairs. Caleb isn't used to being in this position. Controlled. She has him on his heels.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - STORAGE ROOM - NIGHT

Caleb packs up his rucksack. Wasting no time to move into his new place. Takes a look at the storage room. Clean. A neat pile of parts that can be reused.

INT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - GARAGE APARTMENT - DAY

ANGLE. Tube television. An old peplum - sword-and-sandals film. Battle scene. The muscular hero - MILIUS THE MIGHTY - played by a young LUCA LEONE. He fights his enemies with a sword in one hand and a torch in the other.

Caleb watches as he tears pages from muscle magazines and tapes them to the walls like a teenager would. Overlapping. Crooked. He unrolls a bigger poster and centers it among the rest on the wall. A print of Luca Leone. His idol.

Aside from the window, mirror and tube television every inch is covered in images of muscular bodies. Caleb poses in the center of the room. Another body in the collage.

The film continues on the television - Luca's character defeats his foe. Raises its head. His enemies retreat.

LUCA LEONE
(as Milius the Mighty)
Send your most wicked creature.
Send ten! It would not matter. No
man! No abomination! Can strike me
down! For the gods owe me a debt!

His soldiers cheer and chant. Big heroic score builds. Caleb raises the volume. Smiles and checks his pose in the mirror. Relishing the cheers and fervor as if it were his own.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - MORNING

Caleb does pull ups. Then push ups in the sand. Caleb hangs upside down and does crunches. He goes to failure. Collapses. Sweating. Tries to go for more but he can't. Body gives out. He looks at the other men circuit training on the beach.

CALEB (V.O.)
It started fading this past week.
Lasted almost a month. Chewed the
memory to the bone.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - DAY

Buck crosses in front of Caleb. Caleb's eyes follow him in the mirror. Buck posts up with weights spread at his feet.

CALEB (V.O.)

He does not remember picking a fight with me. Why would he?

Buck works his arms. Biceps and triceps.

CALEB (V.O.)

Too focused on his arms. His pride lives there. Everything else about him underdeveloped.

Buck chats with another bodybuilder. Caleb trains close by.

CALEB (V.O.)

Can learn more than a person's workout habits when they don't think anyone is listening. Where they live. What drugs they take. Who they fuck. Where they party.

DEEP FOCUS Buck's face in the foreground - lifting. Caleb in the background - does cable pull-downs while watching Buck.

CALEB (V.O.)

Buck Stewart. Six foot one. One hundred eighty pounds plus. His muscles are big. So is his ego. I want to know how hard they are to break. What they feel like when they finally do...

Eyes devilish. Craving the kill. Soon. This helps Caleb's workout. Thought of a hunt floods his muscles with blood.

EXT. FLEXION FITNESS - LATER

Caleb tanning at the grass lot across the street. He watches the gym closely. Buck exits. Walks up the block and gets in his car. Pulls away. Caleb lays back. Eerily calm.

EXT. TECHNO LUDOVICO - DANCE CLUB - NIGHT

Buck parks across the street from the club. Walks up with a gorgeous blonde under his arm. Caleb staked out nearby. He approaches the bar after a cautious pause.

INT. TECHNO LUDOVICO - DANCE CLUB - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb enters the night club. Brightly dressed, sweaty bodies bop around to BLONDIE - ATOMIC playing on the club speakers. Caleb walks through the club. No sign of Buck. Caleb finds a good corner to wait and hunt from.

CUT TO:

MUSIC UP: SIMONETTI-PIGNATELLI-MORANTE - TENEBRE

Dancing. Twisting and turning bodies. Lights. Legs. Hair. Caleb still in his corner. Eyes fixed through the crowd.

Buck brings his girl a drink. Caleb's view gets blocked.

He gets up and circles. Watching. Buck is belligerent. In the girl's face. He chugs his drink and heads to the bathroom. Caleb moves through the dance floor in pursuit.

INT. TECHNO LUDOVICO - DANCE CLUB - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Caleb enters. Music still audible. A couple drunks at the urinals. Caleb washes his hands. Looks in the mirror. Sees feet in one of the stalls. Buck. His pants down around his ankles. The men at the urinals leave. Caleb uses a mop to jam the door shut. He goes into the stall next to Buck. Climbs and looks over the divider to make sure it's him.

FROM ABOVE. Buck snorts coke off his hand while he takes a shit. Caleb climbs down. Squares off in front of the stall door. Breathing heavier. Heavier. Then...

THOOM. Kicks in the stall door. Buck looks up. Sees Caleb.

Caleb pounces before Buck can register it all. Fists flying everywhere. Caleb headbutts him. Buck already in trouble. But he's a big guy, coked up. Hello, second wind. He grabs Caleb. Smashes him against the stall walls. Caleb ribs him. Catches him with an elbow to the mouth. Caleb gets behind him. Attacks the point of weakness he assessed earlier. He puts Buck in a choke hold. Buck flails. Mobility limited.

CALEB

(sotto; belabored)

All. You had... to do. Was... ask to work in with me.

He swings at Caleb trying to get him loose. Caleb takes each scrappy shot in stride. Buck kicks his feet. The door to the stall swinging open and closed.

Caleb sees himself strangling Buck in the mirror. His choke hold angled and squeezing like a side biceps pose. He admires it. It makes him pull even harder, the muscle engorged. Just about to break Buck. Not until...

BUCK
(raspy; helpless)
P-- Please. Please.

He begs. The satisfaction. Now Caleb finishes him. Buck goes limp. Caleb takes a blissful breath. Drops the body. He looks at himself in the mirror. Hits that side biceps pose without Buck's head now. Good form. Beat.

Caleb jerks Buck up and carries his body to the window. He fishes Buck's car keys from his pocket. Caleb looks out the window. Clear. Tosses the body outside. There's knocking on the bathroom door. Caleb goes to the sink and fixes his hair and shirt in the mirror. Knocking grows. Caleb washes his face. Dabs it calmly with a paper towel. Only then does he head for the door.

CALEB
Coming.

He removes the mop. Places it back in the corner and opens the door. He exits past the waiting patrons with no sign of the violence that just occurred.

EXT. TECHNO LUDOVICO - DANCE CLUB - ALLEY - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb drives down the back alley in Buck's car. He stops next to the body, lumped in with trash bags. Caleb checks, no one around. He lifts the body into the trunk. Drives away.

INT. BUCK'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb drives along the pacific coast highway. Hair blowing in the wind. Body stiff in the trunk. Feeling good. Ah, summer.

He cranks the radio: QUEEN - BODY LANGUAGE.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Buck's car races south down the pacific coast highway. The car enters a tunnel as the lyrics of the song echo eerily:

GIVE ME.

YOUR BODY.

GIVE ME.

YOUR BODY.

EXT. DOCKWEILER BEACH - MOMENTS LATER

The car stops on the side of the road - above the beach. Caleb turns off the engine - radio cuts out on beat.

Not a soul around. He gets out. Opens the trunk, pulls the body out. Rolls it down the hill and follows after it. He drags the body by the feet all the way onto the beach.

He gets it to one of the fire pits. Tosses it in. Covers the body with a blanket. There's some left over wood. He stacks it on top. Lights it. A big bonfire.

The smoke black at first. The smell off-putting. But soon it burns and burns cleaner. Orange glow now. The body charred. You wouldn't be able to tell through the wood what it was.

Caleb stands over it. Long beat as he watches the fire burn. A group of teenagers come walking up the beach toward Caleb. Blankets. Guitar. Beers. Marshmallows.

TEENAGER #1

Mind if we join?

Caleb breathes in the smell of the fire, enjoying it like a barbecue. Savoring the aroma. So he can remember.

CALEB

All yours.

TEENAGER #2

You sure, dude? Have a beer.

CALEB

(politely declining)
Strict diet.

TEENAGER #1

(re: fire smell)
Oh, man. That's harsh.

Caleb walks back to his car. In the background the teens enjoy his bonfire. Playing music. Roasting marshmallows. Oblivious to the human sack of meat for fire starter.

EXT. TECHNO LUDOVICO - DANCE CLUB - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb parks Buck's car in the same spot Buck left it. Tosses the keys into someone's yard and heads back inside the club.

INT. TECHNO LUDOVICO - DANCE CLUB - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb finds Buck's blonde date. She sits at the bar. Disinterested in advances coming her way in Buck's absence. Caleb goes right for her. Still on his kill high. Gets nose to nose. Says nothing. Intense pause. She stares back. Feels the energy coming off him. They dance. Shortly--

CUT TO:

INT. TECHNO LUDOVICO - DANCE CLUB - BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb and the woman fuck in the same stall he murdered Buck. This is purely animal for Caleb. Not registering the blonde. While fucking he notices a couple of Buck's teeth on the ground. Must have knocked out during the brawl. Caleb smiles. Fixated on the teeth. Speeding up his tempo...

Finishes. The blonde pulls down her dress. Exits. Caleb picks up the teeth. Wipes away the small amount of blood on the ground with toilet paper and then flushes it all.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - LATER

Place closed. Caleb trains in the dark. Had his fun - now he is using it all in the gym. Pre-workout boost helping him lift. He is crushing it.

EXT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - LATER

Streets empty. Caleb walks up the driveway to Aubrey's house. He gets halfway up when a motion detector light flicks on. Caleb stops. Reflex. Holds his arm out to block the light. Arm shaking and heavy from all the work it put in.

Caleb takes in the night air. He feels something on his ear - swipes at it with his finger. Blood. His from a hit he took or some of Buck's. He rubs it between his hands like dirt and heads into the garage apartment.

When the motion light flicks off and the glare leaves the windows of the house we can see Aubrey. She watches at the window from inside. In the dark. A deep curiosity.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - BOARDWALK - DAY

Sly smile fixed on Caleb as he stands in the center of the boardwalk. People move around him to keep with the flow of traffic. Passing him like always.

The food chain shifted. Caleb knows he has done something these people have not and likely could not do. Above them. More definably not them. This feeds Caleb. He leans his head back and soaks in the sun. A new kick. A new strength.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - BOARDWALK - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb walks up to a couple LAPD BIKE COPS. The cops busy flirting with a couple girls. Grossly checking them out through their aviator glasses. Caleb stops and looks at the cops instead. They notice him lingering. Side eye him.

CALEB

Officers.

The cops don't respond. Figure it would only provoke. They must deal with weirdos all the time on the boardwalk. Caleb amused. They don't suspect him at all.

CALEB (CONT'D)

Should I be concerned?

The cop goes to say something to one of the girls and Caleb cuts in - stepping all over them.

CALEB (CONT'D)

I heard about the man killed by the pier a few weeks ago and now this other body they found down the coast. I run at night...

Eyes on the girls. They barely glance at Caleb.

LAPD BIKE COP #2

Be careful and if you see something suspicious let us know.

CALEB

I will. Oh, one more thing... how many speeds does your bicycle have? I might add riding to my cardio--

LAPD BIKE COP #2

Get the fuck out of here, this isn't a bike shop.

Caleb throws on his sunglasses and raises his hands. He gets it. Time to move along.

CALEB
Stay vigilant.

He backs away and disappears into the crowd. The cops back to their uninterrupted flirting.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - NIGHT

Last of the gym rats finish up before closing. Caleb lifts something nuts. More than usual. Smile still there. Losing track of time. Buck's body going limp in his hands fresh on his mind. He channels it. Barry watches and drifts closer. Impressed with Caleb's intensity. An eye on him now - what could be a trainable new beast. Caleb nears the end of a set.

BARRY
How many more you got?

Barry almost taunting him. Caleb completes a rep.

BARRY (CONT'D)
How many? Three?

Caleb does another rep. That one was a lot harder.

BARRY (CONT'D)
Oh, wow, maybe not. Maybe one? Good form if we're lucky? Elbows tucked. Back straight. Do it right.

Caleb's arms shake. He focuses to steady them.

BARRY (CONT'D)
Here we go. UP!

Caleb fights through. Completes the rep.

BARRY (CONT'D)
One more. UP!

Caleb digs in. Completes the rep.

BARRY (CONT'D)
I lied. UP!

Caleb is about to give out - looks Barry right in the eyes and pushes through the rep and finishes strong.

CALEB
One more...

To prove his hunger he decides to get in an extra rep. Drops the weights. Doesn't hunch. Fights all signs of weakness. Barry pumps his fist. Encouragement.

EXT. IRON MAX GYM - MORNING

A giant glass and steel building. A fairly new construction. The mega gym. Muscle hopped up on capitalist gain. Based on the beautiful people coming and going, business is good.

INT. IRON MAX GYM - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC UP: ENNIO MORRICONE - GUERRA E PACE, POLLO E BRACE

SLOW MOTION as Caleb explores Iron Max and the capitalist eighties boom of fitness for the first time. Twenty foot high ceilings. Mirrors lining every wall. A second floor with cardio machines. A workout room full of women in spandex doing aerobics. Spa in the back. Juice bar.

Buff guys and girls roaming everywhere. Three times as many as Flexion. He navigates the floor. Sensory overload. Prowls the gym. Watches people lift. Honing in on the finer muscle details. It can't help but feel like pigs to the slaughter.

As he scans the floor some of the gym members skin is gone. Only bleeding muscle and bones. Still working out. Then more of them skinned. Until Caleb looks around and every body is without skin - their inner workings on full display.

All the tempting bodies. Cuts of meat at a butcher shop. Different physical attributes make certain bodies appealing targets. The bigger and more built the better.

CHAUNCEY (O.S.)
Caleb! You made it.

Caleb's vision gone. The gym back to normal. Chauncey helps a client finish their set - gives them instructions for the next and jogs over to Caleb.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
You look good, man. You're doing something right.

CALEB
I think I, uh, recently found that edge you told me about.

CHAUNCEY
What's your secret?

CALEB

Hard to explain. Added a new sort of exercise into my routine that jump-starts my system. Keeps me fresh for weeks.

CHAUNCEY

Alright, well, hey if it's working. You're gonna tell me what it is at some point though. Gotta finish a client session. Get in a pump.

(checks watch)

Got time before it starts.

CALEB

Time before... ?

CHAUNCEY

Special surprise. You'll see.

(to front desk attendant)

He's good, let him do his thing.

Chauncey heads back to his client. Caleb finds a machine and drops his bag. Sits down and starts lifting.

CUT TO:

Caleb sips water from a fountain between sets. Suddenly, there's a commotion at the entrance. Chauncey waves Caleb down excitedly. The surprise.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

Here we go!

Nazar Kozel and his crew enter - people in the gym immediately freak. He's a bonafide rock star here.

Nazar prepares to lift. There are a number of photographers and a videographer. Managers and agents. A full team. A full moneymaking machine. An electricity in the place. Chauncey and Caleb find a prime spot to watch from.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

Full press workout. First time he's doing this. Front row, baby.

Nazar takes off his shirt - puts on his back support belt. Chalks his hands and gets to it. Flash bulbs go off. People clap when he finishes a set. When he strikes a pose. Nazar lets a couple ladies grab on his chest and arms. Caleb feet away. Equally awestruck. Envious. He knows he has a lot of work to do. Caleb notices the suits with Nazar.

CALEB

What's with these guys?

CHAUNCEY

The money. They set stuff like this up for exposure. Paid the way for him to come over. Put him up in a house in Topanga Canyon. Outdoor gym in the yard to make it feel like home. Keep him cozy. Hard for those brand deals and movie roles. He climbs to the top, so do they. Big gains for everyone involved.

The management guys lean over to the photographers to make sure the proper shots get taken. One gives Nazar a look and he knows to move on to another setup. Caleb looks on like he feels a higher force that keeps driving the two men together. A test. Fate in some way. A trophy he wants to possess.

INT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - GARAGE APARTMENT - NIGHT

Television on a nature channel. Caleb does pushups. There's a stinging WHISTLE that cuts through. Caleb goes to the window. Aubrey is down in the yard. She's looking up at Caleb.

AUBREY

I made dinner. Come down.

INT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb sits as Aubrey puts food out on the table. He is nervous. Something already extremely intimate about the casual meal. An energy fills the space in her presence. Aubrey pours him milk without asking. He accepts.

AUBREY

(checking the table)

Alright...

Looks good. Aubrey takes a seat opposite Caleb.

AUBREY (CONT'D)

Are you religious?

CALEB

Why?

AUBREY

(obviously)

Your name.

(MORE)

AUBREY (CONT'D)

(and)

Not sure if you like saying grace.

Caleb embarrassed - clearly not thinking about the origin of his name. Clearly not all that religious. Shakes his head no.

CALEB

I was raised to be.

Caleb starts to eat. So does Aubrey.

AUBREY

Didn't take?

CALEB

Mostly, no. Never felt like I needed that sort of thing.

AUBREY

What do you mean?

CALEB

Religious people aren't better for it. They don't act good all the time. They just feel more guilt. So they need a mechanism for forgiveness.

AUBREY

Don't we all, in different ways?

Caleb silent. Unwilling to play along.

AUBREY (CONT'D)

Any family out here?

CALEB

No family.

AUBREY

No one... at all? Father? Mother?

CALEB

I don't have a mother. A woman gave birth to me. I don't have a mother. Why are you being so nice to me? The apartment? The food?

AUBREY

A good feeling. Like we were always going to meet at this time and have this conversation.

(beat; leaning in)

(MORE)

AUBREY (CONT'D)

Because you came looking for a place to stay but you could use a home. Doesn't hurt to know more about the person living on my property too. Not the version he likes to show people.

Caleb defensive. He tries not to respond rudely or at all. Tries to eat. He can't. Her last comment invasive.

CALEB

Who are you? You religious? Where is your family? Why are you alone?

Aubrey grins.

AUBREY

My full legal name is Ethel Aubrey Hayes. Ethel as in Merman. She was a famous singer and actress. Mom adored her voice. Gusto and poise, she would say. Fine traits for a young girl. Only child. Red diaper baby. Do you know what this is?

(beat; no response)

My parents were part of the United States Communist Party. I'm not religious. Fatalist, if anything. But I know what it is to be born into a family with faith in what they view as righteous. I was an offspring and a new party member. When I was old enough I thought I would also find my purpose in activism. Spent my twenties blindly passionate. Angry. Early thirties confused. Curious. Until I figured out what it was that fulfilled me. Made me feel secure. Wasn't being a pawn in a greater chess match I had no control over. It was having control. A small corner of the board I knew was mine. Quiet. Tucked away. To be myself. So here I am. In my corner. Alone. Far from lonely. Now, you could have enjoyed learning all this over the course of the meal in conversation but you don't like pacing yourself.

CALEB

I don't like talking about myself. I don't see the point.

AUBREY

I might.

Caleb stuffs a few bites of food into his mouth and stands.

CALEB

Thank you for dinner.

He exits. Aubrey sits back. Watches him go to the garage.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - MORNING

A vacant machine - pads ripped from usage. Sweat stains on the floor. Caleb throws one leg over and sits down. Grabs hold of the metal handles and gets to work.

INT./EXT. VENICE - DAY/NIGHT

MUSIC UP: GLORIA GAYNOR - I AM WHAT I AM

CLASSIC EIGHTIES TRAINING MONTAGE. Bodybuilding and serial killing edition. Imagery that of a nightmarish giallo film mixed with a sports drama. Get pumped. Feel inspired. Then feel disturbed you ever felt inspired. Morbidly satisfying.

*FLEXION FITNESS: Caleb works chest fly machine unendingly.

*BOARDWALK: Caleb stalks new prey. Eyes passing bodies.

*GARAGE APARTMENT: Overhead - steak cooks on hot plate.

*AUBREY'S HOUSE: Caleb sees strange men walk up the driveway and enter the back door to the house.

*FLEXION FITNESS: Caleb slides weight plates onto a bar.

*FLEXION FITNESS SAUNA: Caleb's evil stare. Locked on a male and female bodybuilder fucking in the sauna.

*FLEXION FITNESS: Caleb trains with Barry. Gets posing tips.

*VENICE BEACH: Caleb does pull-ups. Smooth. Fast. Easier.

*AUBREY'S HOUSE: Caleb sees another strange man on another night going in the back of the house.

*GARAGE APARTMENT: Overhead - eggs fry on hot plate.

*FLEXION FITNESS: Close on - weight marker on scale ticks up.

*BOARDWALK: Caleb on a night run. Creepily tails a jogger.

*FLEXION FITNESS: Caleb does shoulder shrugs. Deep squeeze.

*GARAGE APARTMENT: Overhead - chicken grills on hot plate.

*TECHNO LUDOVICO: Caleb in a dim corner. Notices a couple very fit men checking him out across the bar. Approaches.

*AUBREY'S HOUSE: Caleb sees Aubrey lead the strange men out on different nights. Each disheveled. Tired. Fulfilled.

*FLEXION FITNESS SAUNA: Female bodybuilder exits. Caleb stares down postcoital male. Rage building. He attacks.

*VENICE BEACH: Caleb does muscle-ups instead of pull-ups. He lifts his chin over and then his whole body above the bar.

*BOARDWALK: Jogger turns on a quiet street. Caleb tracks him down. Knocks him out. Drags him away.

*HOT TUB: Caleb with the men from the club. One of them goes to kiss Caleb. The man screams. Pulls back. His tongue torn. Caleb bit him. Both have bloody mouths. The other man in shock. Caleb grabs him. Hits him. Water thrashing.

*FLEXION FITNESS: Caleb's face during reps. Possessed.

*GARAGE APARTMENT: Caleb eating. Teeth gnashing.

*FLEXION FITNESS: Close on - weight marker on scale ticks up.

*IRON MAX GYM: Caleb has protein shakes with Chauncey. Lifts.

*FLEXION FITNESS: Close on - weights swinging in and out of frame. Impressionistic. Blurred from speed. Numbers on side of the weights legible. Rising and rising as they enter and leave frame... 40... 45... 50... 55...

*PATRIOT FITNESS: Caleb explores a new gym. New prey. He hones in on a future victim - well developed leg muscles. Always attributes he wants to break and build on himself.

*FLEXION FITNESS: 60... 65... 70... 75...

*GARAGE APARTMENT: Caleb eating. Stabs at more food.

*FLEXION FITNESS: Caleb does leg extensions. Quads tense.

*ALLEYWAY: Caleb's face as he wails on someone. Possessed.

*FLEXION FITNESS SAUNA: Caleb closes off the entrance to the sauna. Out of Order. So no one enters. He mops up blood inside. Heaves the body into a laundry cart.

*IRON MAX GYM: Caleb tans. Wears a small bright colored eye protectors and speedo. He glows in the neon tanning bed.

*BLUFF: Caleb breathes heavy. A run? A murder? Fireworks go off in the distance. They flash and glow on his sweaty face in a haunting manner. His body silhouetted by the fireworks.

The music fades away. All that is left is Caleb's breathing. Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale. Accompanied by the friction of metal weights in motion. All of which continue over...

*TWO MUSCULAR BODIES FLOAT FACE DOWN IN A HOT TUB.

*DEAD MAN'S FACE AND BROKEN FINGERS WITH A RING STICKING OUT OF THE SAND. MAN WITH A METAL DETECTOR SICK AT HIS FIND.

*CALEB TOSSES GARBAGE BAGS IN THE DUMPSTER BEHIND FLEXION.

*BULLDOZERS PUSH SAND ON THE BEACH. BUILDING BERMS TO PROTECT AGAINST STORMS. DUMPING SAND. THE OPERATOR SEES A DEAD BODY MIXED IN AS IT GOES TUMBLING OUT.

*BLUFF: Back to Caleb and the fireworks. He focuses as he would before another set at the gym. Then he reaches toward the ground. Grabs hold of something. Someone. Limp arms raise into frame. He drags a body. Tosses it into a ditch. The falling body eclipsing frame sending it to BLACK.

Inhale. Exhale. Metal grinding. Colliding.

Then the darkness rises up. Light seeps in. Sunny. Blurry. Then the black lowers again. Blinking? No. The metal sounds match the movement of the plunging darkness. It rises again. A blurred figure lifts in the background. We are behind a WEIGHT STACK on a BACK ROW MACHINE.

ONE CONTINUOUS SHOT tracking from behind the weight stack around it as the dark metal weight block goes up and down - along a tight cable attached to metal hand grips - calloused hands strangle them - along these hands to the arms - big, ripped arms - along the shoulders - wide, defined muscles - up to the face... Caleb? It takes a second. Caleb.

Bigger. All muscle. Twenty pounds plus. No scruff on his face. Clean shaven. Hair cut in a neat crew cut. The fade and length creates appealing, clean lines like his muscles do. He is tanned to a crisp perfection. His workout clothes more fashionable. Every part of him is refined. Months of hard work and multiple murders later, he is unrecognizable.

He is also lifting outside in the famous...

EXT. MUSCLE BEACH - WEIGHT PEN - DAY

He finishes the last, to failure, rep and drops the grips. The metal block shoots down and clangs loud. The breathing that carried us over the results of his violence stops.

Caleb stands. A nice sweat going. His posture different. A fresh swagger as he walks off the last set. People watch at the perimeter fence. Not the biggest guy out there but he exudes an intensity that shows he belongs.

INT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - GARAGE APARTMENT - NIGHT

NIGHTLY NEWS plays on Caleb's television. Half static. He adjusts the antenna and finds the image. Caleb eats. The field reporter is out reporting from the boardwalk.

FIELD REPORTER

Authorities are actively searching for the serial killer residents of this colorful coastal community are calling the Venice Beach Butcher. Over several months this individual is responsible for four murders...

CALEB

(insulted)

Four?

The field reporter interviews LOCALS. Local #1 is a bartender at a restaurant on the boardwalk.

FIELD REPORTER

Are you concerned with what is going on? Do you feel safe?

Caleb finishes off a hunk of meat and some veggies.

VENICE LOCAL #1

I'm concerned. I also feel safe. Always something going down.

Caleb cleans his dish. Local #2 is a spacey street artist.

FIELD REPORTER

Do you stay off the boardwalk at night because of the murders?

VENICE LOCAL #2

Murders?

Caleb goes to the mini-fridge for milk. Local #3 is a wacky old man in a suit jacket and bathing suit holding up a cardboard cutout of RONALD REAGAN.

VENICE LOCAL #3

Uncle Ronnie and I think it's a symptom of trickle down genetics.

FIELD REPORTER

Trickle down... genetics?

VENICE LOCAL #3

He got psycho DNA.

ON SCREEN: Police sketch of a suspect. It looks a lot like Caleb back from one of his first kills.

FIELD REPORTER

This is a new rendering made after an eye witness came forward with information about a man they saw the night of the first murder...

Caleb looks nothing like the sketch now. His upgraded body and attitude reflecting in the screen over the sketch.

FIELD REPORTER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

White male. Five foot nine. Thin. One hundred sixty five pounds.

Caleb doesn't recognize himself. He shakes his head then the carton. All out. He drinks the last couple drops on the unfolded lip of the carton.

INT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb enters the kitchen quietly through the back door. He goes to the fridge. Finds a glass jug of milk. He gulps down some of it. Wipes his mouth. Places the milk back in the fridge. As he closes the door he hears something.

Beat. A muffled moan. Maybe a scream. Coming from... above him? Caleb follows the muffled outbursts of pain.

INT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - STAIRWELL/UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

He walks up the dark stairwell and to the second floor. A door at the end of the landing is cracked open just barely.

A sharp line of light escaping the opening. Caleb approaches. With each step the moans and screams grow. Aubrey in trouble?

No. It is the sound of a MAN in pain. Caleb gets to the door and looks through the slim opening.

INT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - SPARE BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The room looks empty. He adjusts his vantage point and then he sees it. A man BALL GAGGED in the middle of the room. His arms and feet bound with ROPE. He looks like he is in pain but excited by this. Fear and lack of control arousing him.

Aubrey crosses the frame. She circles the man. She is wearing a BLACK LEATHER OUTFIT. Not revealing though. Not in the way you would expect. Not meant to be. That would be too easy for her submissive counterpart. Caleb backs off the door slightly so he is not seen. Staying in the shadows. From behind, Aubrey grabs the man by his throat. Grip tightening at a calculated rate. Caleb watches. Rapt.

AUBREY

Pathetic.

The man shakes his head. Grunts. Aubrey leans in.

AUBREY (CONT'D)

Shut up. You pitiful fuck. Not a sound. Not... a... sound.

The man huffs - struggling to breathe under her tight hold. Eyes watering. Face red. Loving it. Aubrey releases her grip. Circles him. Caleb leans in - never having seen anything like this. Not expecting this was how she spent her time with the men he saw coming in and out of the house at night.

Aubrey stops again. Her hand lowers slowly between his legs - grabs hold. The man reels. This really hurts. Caleb realizes Aubrey is looking at him. She feels him there. Caleb knows. The bound man climaxes.

EXT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - GARAGE APARTMENT - MORNING

ANGLE. Caleb asleep from foot of the bed. A hand holding a burning joint lowers into frame in the foreground. It raises out of frame and we hear the drag. Caleb stirs. He looks. Aubrey sits there staring at him, smoking her joint.

AUBREY

Good morning.

Long pause. Caleb caught off guard. She definitely saw him last night. She doesn't seem to mind. Maybe even a little glad. Anticipating it.

AUBREY (CONT'D)
Enjoy yourself, darling?

CALEB

...

AUBREY
I'd have told you all about it but you seemed preferential to privacy over knowledge. Men that see me... you'd be surprised the positions of power and respect some hold, since you've seen the positions they pay to be put in. Strip away that man, whatever he is at work, at home, with friends. Provider. Punisher. Protector. Tied down. Gagged. They become helpless, little perverts. I try on their power and make sure they hurt the right way. Not one the same. I get off. They get off. Everyone gets a spoonful of sugar.

Aubrey slides closer on the bed - entering Caleb's space.

AUBREY (CONT'D)
Since you know what I do at night, do I get to hear how you spend some of yours? No? I see it. Resting their in the back of your sad blue eyes. Rage. All of it. Waiting to lash out. I know you.

She takes a drag. Playing with him. Does she know? Caleb gives her nothing. Blank. Aubrey grins. Enough for now.

AUBREY (CONT'D)
Okay. It's early. You're still waking up...

Nothing with her means only what is said on face value. She stands and leaves. Caleb flustered. A match. A superior.

EXT. PACIFIC OCEAN - DAY

1984 FORMULA THUNDERBIRD 272 cuts through the ocean chop.

EXT. CHAUNCEY'S BOAT - CONTINUOUS

ANGLE. Back of Caleb's head as it jostles about. Caleb deep in thought. His interaction with Aubrey affecting him. Chauncey at the wheel. Oblivious. Having a blast.

EXT. PACIFIC OCEAN - MOMENTS LATER

They drop anchor. Chauncey dives off the back of the boat. Caleb follows in. The shore way off in the distance.

CALEB

Why do they bulldoze the sand into mounds on the beach in the winter?

CHAUNCEY

The berms? Since El Nino in '83 almost sunk the place. They make barriers in case of a surge.

CALEB

Stacking sand... Maybe it should go under. Flush out the excess.

Chauncey changes the subject. Something brighter.

CHAUNCEY

Got some news. I'm opening up my own spot. Gonna run my own gym. Saved up. Found a partner. Already scouting buildings in Santa Monica.

Chauncey expecting a warm reaction. Caleb staring off - not listening to Chauncey. His eyes dark. Distant.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

You hear me? Gonna have my own gym.

Caleb looks. Switches moods and appears more engaged. It's a little unsettling and Chauncey can see it.

CALEB

That's amazing. Congratulations.

Chauncey can't ignore Caleb's demeanor. Something he has noticed before and needs to speak on.

CHAUNCEY

You know, you never told me what you've been doing. What you added to the routine. I know you wanted to do it clean...

(beat; leading)

You could tell me if you were on something. You know that, right? Shit's dangerous if you don't know what you're doing. You don't seem like yourself and as a friend I want to make sure you're being smart. Thinking the long run.

Caleb drinks in his surroundings. No one close. No one to hear him or see his actions. Another chance to confess his sins. An environment without risk.

CALEB

You ever killed anything?

CHAUNCEY

Fine, you don't want to tell me.

CALEB

I used to work with animals. At a feedlot. Had to get them real big. Big as we could. Fed them non-stop. Even kept them from moving so they would grow faster. Ripe for the slaughterhouse. With that many crammed in cages some would get sick, you know? Hurt real bad. Had to put them down. Never felt a thing when it came to the animals. Killing a person... now that fills me. Each one makes me stronger. More able. I've been doing that.

Chauncey disturbed but thinks Caleb is puffing his chest.

CHAUNCEY

Yeah, alright.

CALEB

I could kill you in this very moment. Wouldn't stand a chance. Pull you under. Maul you. Leave you as chum while I fish off the side of your stupid fucking boat.

Chauncey takes pause. Gives Caleb a good hard stare. He sees something raging inside Caleb but refuses to believe what he is saying. Thinking it hyperbolic Neanderthal shit.

CHAUNCEY

(pushing back)

Whoa, *big* man. A *real* killer, huh? Feel tough? You done?

(beat; concerned)

Whatever macho bullshit you're on. Whatever you're taking to keep you pushing this hard for results. I get it. I'm sure it feels good. I'm not gonna tell you to stop. But you better keep it in check. It'll ruin you.

(MORE)

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
 Seen plenty of guys go way too far
 and before they even knew they
 cracked, they crumbled.

Chauncey turns his back on Caleb as he treads water. He lays his head back and floats. Eyes closed. Caleb looking down at him. How easy it would be to crush him from here.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHAUNCEY'S BOAT - LATER

Caleb sits on the edge of the boat. Alone. A fishing rod in hand. He stares out at the ocean. Long beat. Long enough for us to think he did crush Chauncey.

Then, Chauncey emerges from the cabin beneath the front of the boat with a cigar. Safe and sound. He grabs his fishing rod and sits down next to Caleb.

CALEB (V.O.)
 He was lucky I didn't have the
 urge. For that... I was rewarded.

EXT. NAZAR KOZEL'S HOUSE - DUSK

HEADLIGHTS guide our path as we roll up a long dirt driveway to an amazing rustic house in the hills of Topanga Canyon. Chauncey parks his car. Caleb and Chauncey get out - both dressed nicer than usual. Eager for different reasons.

CALEB
 He lives here?

CHAUNCEY
 Ukrainian bastard's doing alright.

Some of the most amazing bodies - male and female - enter and exit the house. The fitness scene. After hours.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
 Damn. Doing everything right.

INT. NAZAR KOZEL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The house an open floor plan. Late seventies decor. Not updated yet to fit its year. Filled with people partying.

ROGER (O.S.)
 Chauncey fucking Atlas!

ROGER. 50. The least fit there but dressed the sharpest. Somehow, the nice clothes still hang cheaply off his body. Holding on tight as he can to looking young. Clear he has money and spends it. Coke energy to spare.

ROGER (CONT'D)
There he is!

CHAUNCEY
Roger, how we doing?

Roger gives him an enthusiastic hug and kiss on the cheek. Chauncey takes in the house and party.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
(impressed)
This is...

ROGER
I know. I know. I want to fucking kill myself. Immigrant story. Boy from nothing. Now he's got this house and those muscles. Inspiring stuff. Kill me. Try not to think about it. That's clearly what I'm not doing though.

CHAUNCEY
Rog, meet Caleb. Young bodybuilder. Close to hitting the circuit.

ROGER
Good to meet you, man.

CHAUNCEY
(to Caleb)
He's the partner I mentioned going in on the gym with me.

ROGER
Gym? It's not just a gym. This guy, he has ideas. We're doing more than a fucking gym I hope.

CHAUNCEY
One step at a time. Roger is good friends with Kozel's team.

ROGER
I wear many hats. Friend. Investor. Parasite. *Whatever snorts your coke*. I'm here to be part of the muscle revolution and barely move a muscle.

(MORE)

ROGER (CONT'D)

Have you guys been out back yet?
This way. You gotta see this. C'mon
you'll love it. I sound like his
fucking real estate agent.

EXT. NAZAR KOZEL'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

They head through super wide glass doors into the backyard. A kidney shaped pool - lit up in the night. Filled with people. His outdoor gym behind it. The yard full with big badass weight lifting machines. His own Kachalka in California.

CHAUNCEY

Holy. Shit.

ROGER

Not the fucking pool. Look...

He steers Chauncey and Caleb toward a JAGUAR. Not the car. The big, scary cat. The actual predator feline in a cage in the yard. It walks in a circle - staring out at the party guests. Someone throws in a raw steak for it to chew on.

CHAUNCEY

He's got a... cheetah?

CALEB

Jaguar.

ROGER

Bingo.

Caleb looks around the palatial yard while Roger and Chauncey get sucked into another conversation. Caleb here for Nazar. This could be Caleb's chance to kill him but with this many people it will be next to impossible to strike and get away with it. Caleb wanders off. Observes party. Drugs everywhere.

Caleb hears a burst of energy in the yard. He goes to take a look. Nazar is in the middle of a STONE LIFTING contest. He and another man stand on platforms lifting enormous stones. People place bets. Many beers are involved. Nazar wins. Puts down a mug of beer to hydrate. So many people all around him. Caleb won't have a shot at him now.

INT. NAZAR KOZEL'S HOUSE - HALLWAY/BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb gets away from the party and the noise. He goes down different halls of the house. He finds Nazar's room. A wall of trophies. He checks out each one. Envious.

He takes a piss in Nazar's toilet. He lays in Nazar's bed. Getting a feel for what his life is like in basic ways.

Caleb feels increasingly like a pariah at this party when he should want to fit in. Incapable. Too far gone into his obsession. Not belonging.

EXT. NAZAR KOZEL'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb finds Chauncey drinking with Roger.

CALEB
Hey, I'm leaving.

CHAUNCEY
Already? No. Stay. You gotta--

CALEB
I'm tired. Getting up early to train anyway. I called a cab.

CHAUNCEY
Have some fun. Lighten up.

CALEB
No, I--

CHAUNCEY
You could use some--

CALEB
I-- I'm going. I'm good.

Caleb peels off. Not letting Chauncey try to convince him.

EXT. NAZAR KOZEL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Caleb exits the front and walks down the driveway until no one can see him. He does not leave the property - he slips into the woods at the perimeter and heads towards the back.

EXT. NAZAR KOZEL'S HOUSE - WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Caleb finds a spot to settle. Where he can see the yard but not be seen. As the party goes on and fades in the night so does Caleb. He begins to doze off. Huddled in the woods.

EXT. NAZAR KOZEL'S HOUSE - WOODS - MORNING

Caleb asleep. Sitting up. Back against a tree. Birds sparsely chirp. It is early. The sun rising. Soft. A low fog in the woods and outdoor gym in the backyard.

Caleb's eyes slowly open. He looks at the house and yard. Empty. No more party guests. He watches. Waits.

EXT. NAZAR KOZEL'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Patio doors open. Nazar steps out. Shirtless. No shoes. Only shorts. Finishes a glass of orange juice. Places it on the table outside - still covered in empty bottles of booze.

Nazar always working. No time for hangovers like the rest of his guests likely have today. Nazar fixes a WALKMAN to his shorts and places the headphones on his ears as he sets out into the low fog to his outdoor gym. Ready to go to work.

EXT. NAZAR KOZEL'S HOUSE - WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Caleb watches through the leaves as Nazar lays on a bench and raises the dumbbells onto each thigh. Start position. Caleb removes his shoes, shirt and pants. Ready to move and not wanting to get snagged on something and make noise. Caleb moves through the trees. Closer.

EXT. NAZAR KOZEL'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

ANGLE. Caleb's feet reach the trimmed grass of the yard. Each step made with intense purpose. His stride incrementally picking up speed as he gets closer to Nazar.

Nazar lays back and starts doing dumbbell chest press. His music blasting from his earphones. Caleb picks up a big 45lb weight plate laying in the grass. Dragging it before swinging it overhead. He gets right behind Nazar. Starts to bring the weight down to smash Nazar's head in. Nazar just barely sees the weight as it lowers toward his head. He reacts. Rolls. Drops the dumbbells. Falls off the bench. One of the dumbbells knocks him on the back of the head.

Caleb's effort a glancing blow. Still, it does damage. Nazar knocked wobbly. Caleb's balance taken with the weight as he misses - giving Nazar time to defend himself. He trips up Caleb's legs. The two wrestle on the ground. Nazar getting in punches. Caleb taking serious hits to the face - to the ribs.

Caleb bites into Nazar's shoulder. Nazar grunts. Throws Caleb off him. They reposition. Grapple. Caleb attacks - looking to open up the gash on Nazar's head from the weights.

Nazar grips Caleb's arm and twists it. There's an audible rip. Tear in his shoulder. Nazar gets hold of the wire from his headphones and wraps it around Caleb's neck. Caleb gets a few fingers between the wire and his neck. Nazar pulls tight. Caleb's finger tips look like they are going to get sliced off from the pressure. Most would concede. This drives Caleb. He swings furiously. Throws his head back into Nazar's jaw. The wire loosens. Caleb breaks free. They get to their feet.

Caleb tackles Nazar over the bench and onto the ground. Nazar lands on the dumbbells below. He inhales aggressively like he's sucking in all his pain with the air and burying it.

Caleb moves on him thinking he would be weaker. Instead Nazar grabs hold and tosses Caleb to the ground. Gets on top of him. More punches. Caleb is dazed. Nazar grabs the weight plate and raises it to strike Caleb down.

Nazar hesitates. Drops the weight. Face turns red. Stumbles. Falls. Gasping. Body clenched. Caleb confused but thankful to be alive. He realizes Nazar is having a massive HEART ATTACK.

Nazar clutches his chest as he lays stiff in the grass. Caleb crawls up next to him. Nazar locks eyes with Caleb. He looks scared. Eyes pleading.

NAZAR

Why?

This question landing harder than any punch could. Caleb in shock. Unable to answer. Nazar grabs Caleb's hand. Squeezes it tight in his last moments. Forcing Caleb to feel his death in a real way. In a human way. Nazar's head falls back. Caleb lays his head on Nazar's chest. Barely a heartbeat... ba.....dum. Gone.

Caleb robbed of killing the man destined to be the most celebrated male body of the next decade in the sport and beyond. His trophy kill. Caleb stands. He looks out at the yard. At the caged jaguar. An animal never meant to be kept in a cage. Caleb goes to the jaguar. Stares into the cage with a deep sadness. He breaks open the lock with a weight and backs away. Caleb walks to the trees. The jaguar pushes the cage door open. Saunters over to Nazar's body. Sniffs it.

Later, a figure enters the yard. Stops. A WOMAN. She just rolled out of bed, having stayed from the party with Nazar. She sees the jaguar laying on top of his body. Paws extended. Picking at his flesh. Noshing on its snack.

With its blood soaked snout the jaguar looks at the woman. Some of Nazar's flesh still in its mouth. She goes to SCREAM--

JAGUAR ROARS.

CUT TO:

EXT. SANTA MONICA BEACH - LATER

Waves roll in and out. Caleb staggers into frame. His face swollen. One eye shut. He cradles his shoulder and holds his ribs. He walks along the beach. Slow and delirious like a parched man wandering the desert. He slows. Vomits.

SIRENS BLASTING. COP CARS. They speed past Caleb on the Pacific Coast Highway going back toward Topanga Canyon.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - BOARDWALK - LATER

Caleb makes his way along the boardwalk. He has been walking for miles. All the way from the house. He is visibly shaken. Each step growing more emotional.

EXT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - LATER

Caleb limps up to the house in the driveway. Aubrey in the yard gardening. Caleb collapses. Aubrey hears him drop and turns. She rushes over to him on the ground.

AUBREY
Caleb? Caleb!?

INT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - DUSK

Caleb in the bath tub. Aubrey soaks a hand towel. Affectionately places it on his forehead. She looks at his hand resting on the side of the tub. Knuckles bruised. Dry blood wedged deep under his fingernails. She scrubs them.

AUBREY
You have to say it. It won't scare me. If you say it I will help you. If you can't... you have to go.

Caleb looks his most vulnerable. Scared. A hurt little boy.

AUBREY (CONT'D)
How many?

He breaks down as she tends to him. Confession.

CALEB

One today but... it was different.
At least... eight in all? Not sure.
Lately, my dreams have been so real
it's hard separating memory from
fantasy. I wrote down every detail.
Reading it back helps to remind me.
It was never easy.

(trailing off)

The amount of pressure it takes to
crush life out of someone...

Aubrey listens closely. She has power over him. As disturbing and sobering an account as it is, she likes it. She knows how dangerous he is. She feeds off of this as he fed off killing.

CALEB (CONT'D)

They became part of me. Destroying
those bodies helped give me mine. I
believe that. I do.

Caleb presses his knuckles against his head like he's trying to alleviate the terrible thoughts that bombard him.

CALEB (CONT'D)

I thought someone would catch me.
Force me to stop. No one ever came.
No one. Natural order, I guess. I
should stop. I know I need to stop.
What I want is more. Always one
more. One more rep. One more body.
One more until I find out I can't.
That I went to failure.

Caleb desperate. Unsure of what to do next. Unsure of how Aubrey will ultimately respond. She strokes his hair. As compassionate as she is, she is exacting her power. She is pouncing like Caleb but in her own way.

She cares for him but has her own cravings and like killing for Caleb, being able to dominate and control a maniac is at the top of her list and makes everything else feel like a light breeze instead of a hurricane.

AUBREY

You're sick. You need someone to
care for you. Someone to hurt you.

Caleb looks into her eyes and does not see any judgement. He cries. She has her own madness and it might perfectly manage his ghastly impulses. Aubrey climbs into the tub. She holds Caleb as she gently sings a lullaby version of JOAN BAEZ - THERE BUT FOR FORTUNE.

AUBREY (CONT'D)

(singing)

Show me the prison. Show me the
jail. Show me the prisoner whose
life has gone stale. And I'll show
you a young man with so many
reasons why. There but for
fortune... go you or I...

FADE TO BLACK.

AUBREY (V.O.)

There... but for fortune... go
you... or I...

HOLD IN BLACK.

FADE IN:

ANGLE. Caleb's face. Subdued. His wounds have healed. No sign of the brutal death match with Nazar. Weeks later. Months. He stands in front of a black backdrop.

CLICK-CLICK. FLASH.

PHOTOGRAPHER (O.S.)

Look straight ahead.

CLICK-CLICK. FLASH.

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

Turn to your side.

Mug shots? Finally brought to justice? Caleb turns. Pull back. Caleb is not wearing a shirt. He is oiled up. Arms flexed. He is posing. Not in a police station...

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

Great, that's great. Lean forward.

INT. PHOTO STUDIO - DAY

A FITNESS PHOTOGRAPHER takes photos. Body shots. He is in competition trunks. Nothing else. Caleb does as instructed. He is big. Even slightly bigger. More toned. Each photo makes him more and more uncomfortable. The lens piercing.

FIELD REPORTER (V.O.)

Three months ago a grizzly discover
at the Topanga Canyon residence of
professional bodybuilder Nazar
Kozel left the police and the
public in shock.

(MORE)

FIELD REPORTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 A rising star in a sport of rising
 popularity. He was poised for
 greatness. Instead...

CUT TO:

ON SCREEN - NEWS BROADCAST - FIELD REPORTER AT BOARDWALK

People pass behind her on the bike path. The boardwalk and
 beach vibrant as ever. Like a postcard.

FIELD REPORTER
 His body was found lifeless in his
 backyard. Being eaten by a jaguar
 illegally owned by Mr. Kozel. An
 autopsy later determined the actual
 cause of death to be a massive
 heart attack suffered minutes
 earlier. Toxicology reports show an
 incredibly high amount of steroids
 in his system. Doctors say the
 drugs paired with his strenuous
 lifting ironically weakened the
 most important muscle: his heart.
 It is still unclear how the jaguar
 got free from its cage...

A familiar looking man goes jogging behind the reporter
 during the newscast. Blink and you miss it. Caleb...

EXT. VENICE BEACH - BOARDWALK - CONTINUOUS

Panning off the reporter and camera team and staying with
 Caleb as he runs down the beach. The sound of the reporter
 fading as he leaves her behind. He looks healthy and bored.

CALEB (V.O.)
 Chauncey was right. Gaining sure
 beats the hell out of maintaining.

INT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - GARAGE APARTMENT - DAY

ANGLE. Wall covered in bodybuilder images. Pushing in until
 we land on the ones Caleb got taken of himself. Now part of
 the collage. A massive man like the rest.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Caleb injects a small dose of steroids very carefully. He
 ties his sneakers and readies to go lift.

CALEB (V.O.)

I take a minor dosage of steroids.
Helped me heal and also reverses
catabolic effect. A temporary fix.
Until I can manage on my own again.

CUT TO:

Caleb leans on a cable machine between sets. He stares despondently. We realize this is not at Flexion now. Suddenly, we are in a different gym.

PULL BACK to see lockers randomly in the middle of the room. The other men on lifting machines wearing identical outfits to Caleb. White tank tops with a lame logo in the center and either red or blue shorts. BELL RINGS.

PULL BACK further to reveal CREW MEMBERS. An AD and PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS move around the gym. A FAKE GYM.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - FITNESS SET - DAY

A set for an aerobics/exercise video. The gym portion only part of a bigger set. The randomly placed lockers fake.

A giant wall of neon lights and patterns. A stage in the center. Multiple camera setup.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

My background bodies, listen up!
Doing this one for real so as soon
as you hear playback start working
out. Don't stop lifting. Don't stop
smiling. Remember, we fucking love
working out! It's the best!

(to production assistant)

Aerobics team in place?

(beat)

Clear the floor. Everyone settle!

(beat)

Playback...

Insanely catchy eighties pop music echoes from the speakers. Its rhythm so upbeat it's hard not to move to it. Caleb starts to lift. So do the other men on the gym set.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

Cameras...

The cameras start their movements. Focusing in on different parts of the set. Slow pulling zooms.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

Action!

Out from behind the set runs a team of primary color spandex wearing AEROBICS PERFORMERS. They come dancing out to the rhythm of the music. Huge fake smiles on their faces. Bouncing around like idiots. Caleb and the other men on machines behind them. Nothing more than set dressing. Background muscle to fill the space.

The aerobics team performs choreographed dances - sometimes coming up near Caleb. He looks sick to his stomach as they dance and flex and smile. So sugar sweet. So obnoxious. The bouncy music distorting as Caleb grows more sickened by the whole production. Lights whirl. Strobe.

Caleb doing everything he can to hold it together. He would love to jump off his machine and pound on every one of them. He is a reformed man though. Enduring this hellscape a test.

ANGLE. Monitor. Push in past all the dancers and extremely tight on Caleb as he works out on his fake machine.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - BATHROOM - LATER

Caleb hunched in a stall. He looks ill. Fighting off terrible thoughts. Feeling weak. Sweaty. Pale. He hears a few of the male aerobics performers pass the stall doors. Watches their sneakers and calf muscles go by. Longing to snap one in half.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT pays Caleb for his work. His body making him money in a different way than grueling manual labor. A much less honest way in Caleb's mind. Better pay.

INT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Aubrey fills a glass with water at the sink. Caleb enters. He looks drained. Languishing from the experience.

AUBREY

How was it?

No answer. Aubrey looks - sees he is on edge. Aubrey puts down her glass. Walks to Caleb. Gets close. A proposition.

AUBREY (CONT'D)

My worst? So long as I don't scar.

CALEB

Please.

ANGLE. Aubrey's hand grabs hold of Caleb's with care.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - SPARE BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

ANGLE. Caleb's hands contorted. Bound. Extremely tight.

Caleb naked. On his knees. Arms yanked behind his ankles. Ankles tied and connected to wrist restraints. Moving one limb hurts the other. Aubrey forces his head back. Covers it with a clear plastic hood. Suffocating.

Caleb's restraints and positioning make it more excruciating, or wonderful, depending on your outlook. His breathing desperate. His efforts for air weakening. Barely there. Consciousness drifting. Drifting...

Aubrey rips the hood off his head. He gasps. Chokes on air. In so much pain. In love with it. Medicine. Aubrey plants her foot on his head. Compressing it into the ground. The best pain. Cathartic. Atonement and ecstasy all at once. Helplessness is dizzying for Caleb.

AUBREY

You think you're a monster? You're a boy throwing a fit. Looking for attention. A boy throwing a fit!

She pushes off his head with her foot. Caleb finally catching his breath. WHACK. She inflicts more pain in a different part of his body. Both enjoying this. Both getting their fix. Getting adjusted. Gaining some sort of balance. Deriving pleasure as well. Mutually beneficial.

CALEB (V.O.)

She is able to sense my foul self plotting carnage before I even can.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - DAY

Caleb lifts. More robotic. He seems laser focused but in a different way. A less violent intensity. Tame.

INT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - SPARE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Caleb's arms tied up from above. He hangs their uncomfortably and satisfied. Body splotched red from long sessions of hurt.

CALEB (V.O.)
 Hours. Sometimes days at a time.
 She keeps me away until it is safe.

Aubrey comes in with food. Feeds him. Leaves him there.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - DAY

Caleb and Aubrey sunbathe. Aubrey applies sunscreen to Caleb's back. They are surrounded by people. Blending in.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - DAY

Caleb gives someone a spot on bench. Hands following the bar as the man gets through his set. Caleb zones out as he stares at the bar moving up and down. Suddenly, he is holding the bar down on the man's neck. Not letting up. Choking him. Throat crushing. Eyes about to pop out of his fucking face.

CUT TO:

Caleb blinks - back to reality. His mind succumbing to his desires. Caleb is not crushing the man to death but he does need help finishing the last rep. Caleb lifts the bar.

INT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING

Caleb and Aubrey naked in bed. Aubrey on top of Caleb. He tells her something - we don't hear it. By the look on his face it is emotionally draining. Intense. Scary.

CALEB (V.O.)
 I tell her all my ugly thoughts.

INT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - SPARE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Aubrey dominating another man. Not Caleb. She blindfolds the restrained man. Then Aubrey walks to the door and quietly opens it. Caleb enters. She slowly walks him over to the man. Looks at Caleb. *Go ahead.* Caleb puts his hand around the man's throat. Squeezes. Aubrey allowing it. Man unaware.

CALEB (V.O.)
 She finds ways to relieve them.

Caleb keeps squeezing. Not letting go. A taste of killing again. For a moment it is there. He should let go. Holding on a little too long. Aubrey steps in front of him and locks eyes. Caleb loosens his grip.

INT. FLEXION FITNESS - DAY

Caleb does triceps rope pull downs. Each hand squeezing the rope tight. Caleb's face angry. He yanks down on the rope. Strangling it. Thinking of the man's neck. Seems to help. System working. Great set. Caleb steps in front of the mirror. Flexes. Hits poses. Barry behind him. Proud.

BARRY

About time to show it off.

Barry gives him a pat on the back. The blessing to compete.

INT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A fire flickers on Caleb's face. Aubrey sitting nearby - she reads from his journal. Every detail.

CALEB (V.O.)

Only she knows what I really am. To everyone else, I'm everyone else.

She finishes reading - places it in the fire. The pages burn. The document of his evil gone. Proof in his own words gone.

INT. AUBREY'S HOUSE - GARAGE APARTMENT - BATHROOM - MORNING

Caleb shaves his entire body with a razor. A sheering before the show. He makes sure his skin is clean and smooth. Muscles exposed as much as possible. Aubrey enters and helps shave areas he can't. She wipes away leftover shaving cream. Kisses him on the shoulder. They stare at each other in the mirror.

INT. AUDITORIUM - STAGING ROOM - DAY

BEAM SCALE - centered in the room. An EVENT OFFICIAL stands behind it with a clipboard. The room feels very clinical and procedural like cattle being herded.

EVENT OFFICIAL

Step forward.

A bodybuilder steps up and shakes out as he places one foot after the other onto the scale. The judge nudges the weight marker until it levels. Writes down the weight.

EVENT OFFICIAL (CONT'D)

197.

He hands the bodybuilder a number to be affixed to his competition trunks. The bodybuilder steps off. Next.

EVENT OFFICIAL (CONT'D)
 Step forward.
 (weighing)
 200.

The bodybuilder get his number. Steps off.

EVENT OFFICIAL (CONT'D)
 Step forward.

Caleb steps up. Weight marker moves.

EVENT OFFICIAL (CONT'D)
 190.

INT. AUDITORIUM - STAGE - LATER

PRE-JUDGING. Bodybuilders on stage. House lights on. Not dramatic like it would be for the main event. Auditorium empty except for the judges. Silence in the room casts a strange air of soullessness. Judges inspect bodies. Poses held for an awkward amount of time. Judges request the bodybuilders move on to a new pose.

Caleb off. His body looks great. His confidence and ferocity hampered. Very self-aware. Only presenting part of himself. Feels inauthentic. Chips at him. Stirs volatile emotions.

EVENT OFFICIAL #2
 That completes the pre-judging stage. Main judging for tonight's show will begin in four hours. Make sure you check-in when you return. Thank you all. Good luck.

The bodybuilders walk off stage. Some socialize. Take in the auditorium. Caleb heads over to Barry in the wings. He puts on his shirt and sweatpants to keep the muscles warm.

BARRY
 If you're not gonna use any tanner for main judging then go get in a last minute sunbake. I'll meet you back here in a couple hours. Get you oiled and stretched.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - LATER

Caleb tans. Tiny bright colored tanning goggles protecting his eyes. He rotates carefully. Giving every inch its time. A frisbee skitters up to Caleb in the sand. He removes the small goggles - sees the frisbee. Picks it up.

IRENE (O.S.)

Ah, sorry!

Caleb knows that voice. He looks up as a woman jogs over to retrieve the frisbee. Irene. Caleb hides his surprise well. Waiting for her to see him. She grabs the frisbee. Looks Caleb right in the eyes. She does not recognize him.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Thanks.

No acknowledgement of who he is. Caleb transformed in ways she can't imagine. His eyes not the same as when they met. She just sees a stranger on the beach lending a hand.

Irene jogs back to her friends. Tosses the frisbee back to a guy. He looks similar to Caleb's old self. Average. Not some enormous specimen. Irene runs up to the guy and kisses him. Cooler full of drinks. Towels out. Music playing. Perfect beach day. Normal. Something Caleb can't have. Something he doesn't want. Caleb goes back to tanning. No lingering affect. She is from another life. As real as a dream.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DRESSING ROOM - LATER

Bodybuilders get in a pump before the show. Posing in the mirrored wall. Oiling up. Re-applying bronzer. Images that remind us of the very beginning of this story. However, this is not accompanied by Chopin's Nocturne. No music. Far less romantic and big feeling. Barry applies oil. Caleb lifts light weights to get the blood pumping.

INT. AUDITORIUM - BACKSTAGE - WINGS - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb stands lined up with all the other men. Each one trying to get a look at the crowd and ANNOUNCER on stage. The crowd cheering already. The bodybuilders can sniff the buzz of the room and competition that awaits.

ANNOUNCER

A lot of exciting athletes and physiques to see tonight. Some making their official debut. We also have a very special guest here to present the winner his award. An all-time great. Got his start at muscle beach...

(beat)

Luca... Leone!

The crowd gets loud. Caleb angles to get a better look of the stage - excited to see if Luca is out there. Or going out there. He looks over his shoulder - where is he?

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

First, let's meet our competitors!

The bodybuilders start filing onto the stage.

INT. AUDITORIUM - STAGE - NIGHT

The men line up. Caleb mixed into the middle of the row of eight men. They all strike unique poses - showing off their personality. Jockeying for space.

JUDGE

Please stand facing judges. Hands
at your sides.

They square up. Get serious. Ready position. SYMMETRY ROUND. The men flex the entirety of the round. Judges take notes - eyeing very specific details of the symmetry of the muscles.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Quarter turn to the right.

The bodybuilders turn to the right until their sides now face the judges. Still flexed. Judges write.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Quarter turn to the right.

Bodybuilders again turn. Now their backs to the judges. The men all intensely focused. Flexing this long and being aware of every little muscle you display and in as perfect symmetry as possible is grueling.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Quarter turn to the right.

Other side of the body. Beat.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Quarter turn to the right.

The men face the judges again. Holding tight.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Two and three. Step forward.

Bodybuilders with numbers two and three affixed to their trunks step up. Prepare to pose. COMPULSORY ROUND. Competitors will strike seven poses.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Front Double Biceps.
 (beat; posing; judging)
 Front Lat Spread.
 (beat; posing; judging)
 Side Chest.
 (beat; posing; judging)
 Side Triceps.
 (beat; posing; judging)
 Back Double Biceps.
 (beat; posing; judging)
 Back Lat Spread.
 (beat; posing; judging)
 Abdominal and Thighs.

The two men strike their poses. Caleb watches from behind them. He takes in the judges. How they examine the men.

Caleb looks into the crowd. He sees Aubrey. He sees Chauncey. He sees Barry. All seated separately. Then the rest of the crowd. So many eyes. He feels them all. A barrage of intense thoughts start to attack Caleb.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Four and six. Step forward.

Two and three step back. Number six steps forward. Caleb realizes he is number four. He picks up his step to get even with the other bodybuilder. They take their marks. Ready. The judges again go through the seven poses. Caleb hitting them strong and methodically. His competitor acts macho and overdoes each pose. Distracting Caleb.

Caleb's stoic face winces. Beat. Next pose. Winces again. Muscles under his pectoral - over his ribs - twitch. CRAMP. Then his calf muscles cramp. Caleb in serious pain. His pose shaky. Abs loosen as he tries to manage his cramping.

He goes to adjust his footing and his toes curl painfully from cramping. He can barely hit the next pose. Falling apart - craving what has always kept him feeling strong. The phase ends. Bodybuilders walk off stage. Caleb's legs lock up as he walks. Toes curling in terrible directions. Head lowered.

INT. AUDITORIUM - BACKSTAGE - DRESSING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb sits on a stool. Barry rubs out his calf muscle. Caleb stretches his mid-section to extend the rib cage.

CALEB

Fuck. I can't stop cramping. I can barely move without ceasing up.

BARRY

Relax. If you stress so do the muscles. Stay loose up there.

Barry taps his temple. Signaling to Caleb to keep his head on straight. Barry flattens Caleb's cramped toes. Excruciating. His body rejecting him. In withdrawal. Contest assaulting his senses. Body built on broken backs of men he murdered.

BARRY (CONT'D)

You're the tail end of individual posing. You got some time. Hit the showers. Keep the hot water running on you as long as you can.

Barry helps Caleb to his feet.

INT. AUDITORIUM - STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

First bodybuilder for individual posing does his routine. Good but stilted performance. Practiced. Predictable.

INT. AUDITORIUM - BACKSTAGE - SHOWERS - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb naked on the floor of the showers - water runs over his body. He looks weak. Legs tangled - limp like a newborn fawn. Similar to our introduction to Caleb on the beach. Now weak in a new body. Caleb not able to carry the form he has created without the proper sustenance.

INT. AUDITORIUM - STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Another competitor on stage. More energy. More rhythm and dance elements. Nothing exciting or dangerous. Nothing that makes the jaw drop. Big. Defined. Rehearsed.

INT. AUDITORIUM - BACKSTAGE - BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Caleb dries off gingerly to avoid cramping. He puts on his competition trunks and takes a deep breath.

INT. AUDITORIUM - BACKSTAGE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Caleb exits the bathroom. Head down. Lost. He can hear the crowd cheering. He can feel his heart beating. His body weak and suppressed. Then, suddenly he hears his idol Luca Leone down the hall in the opposite direction of the stage. Luca signs an autograph for a fan. Caleb watches. Adoration and hunger in his eyes. Luca enters his dressing room.

Caleb looks back toward the stage. A couple minutes before he is due to go on. Caleb fighting an urge. He should go to the staging area. Instead, he turns his attention back toward Luca Leone's dressing room. Evil in his eyes again.

INT. AUDITORIUM - STAGE - CONTINUOUS

One competitor leaves stage as another comes on - judges write vigorously. Final notes for one performer. First impressions for the next. New posing routine begins.

INT. AUDITORIUM - BACKSTAGE - DRESSING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

KNOCK - KNOCK - KNOCK.

 LUCA LEONE (O.S.)
Yeah, come in.

The door opens. Caleb sticks his head in. Luca relaxing, seated in a chair. Waiting to announce final results.

 CALEB
Excuse me, sir. I wanted to, uh, introduce myself. I'm Caleb. I'm competing tonight.

 LUCA LEONE
I can tell.

Luca gestures to his trunks and number. He stands.

 CALEB
It's my first time on stage and I gotta say you are the reason I got into lifting. A true legend.

 LUCA LEONE
Oh, well, thank you. That's nice to hear. Much appreciated.

Long uncomfortable pause.

 LUCA LEONE (CONT'D)
Nervous?

 CALEB
I... don't feel like myself.

 LUCA LEONE
Want some advice? Don't hold anything back. Show them who you really are. All of you.
(MORE)

LUCA LEONE (CONT'D)

Let 'em really see you. What you're made of. Not just your muscles.

This triggers something in Caleb. He knows now what he must do. Luca extends his hand. Caleb shakes. The firm clasp like a conduit for Luca Leone's strength. Caleb can't resist it now. He will take Luca's advice. Luca goes to remove his hand. Caleb won't let go. His grip tight and unrelenting. Luca gives him a look to let up.

LUCA LEONE (CONT'D)

Alright now... Hey...

Caleb's eyes like a shark. Cold. Dead. He squeezes harder. Luca's hand going pale as the blood leaves the fingers.

LUCA LEONE (CONT'D)

Let go. Come on. Let go.

Luca pulls back. Caleb puts his other hand on the back of Luca's neck. Holding him in place. Nowhere for him to go.

LUCA LEONE (CONT'D)

What are you--

Caleb brings Luca in close. His hold on his neck and hand impossible to break from. Luca pushing back. Concerned now.

CALEB

(sincerely; calmly)

Thank you.

Caleb releases the handshake and elbows Luca in the eye. Crushing his orbital bone. A cut opens immediately. Luca's blood flows. Caleb sees the red and his fury grows. Excited. Luca tries to defend himself but the shock of the situation overwhelming. He is stunned and Caleb is a monster.

Caleb strays his efforts and slams him into the mirror. Part of the glass breaks - pieces of glass go flying onto the counter below. In the shards of glass we see them fight. Caleb is rabid. Each unique piece of shattered glass providing a different angle and perspective.

Caleb's hand reaches for the piece of glass our eyes are most focused on - a somewhat clear view of the brawl - a sharp weapon. Caleb swiftly grabs it and thrusts it at Luca.

ANGLE. Pieces of glass on the counter. Too obscure for us to see - not letting us drink in the result of this violent act. Light refractions - muscles - blurred animalistic figures entangles. A fatal blow heard but barely seen.

BLOOD SPRAYS ONTO THE COUNTER AND THE BROKEN GLASS.

Gurgling breaths. Blood filling Luca's throat and leaving it all at once. Flowing. Lasting. A horrifying sound.

INT. AUDITORIUM - BACKSTAGE - STAGING AREA - CONTINUOUS

A STAGEHAND watches in the wings as the bodybuilder on stage nears the end of his routine. She looks at her clipboard and then her surroundings. Someone missing. She searches through the other bodybuilders and spectators backstage.

STAGEHAND

Contestant four. Cole. Caleb. Up next. Contestant four. Cole...

INT. AUDITORIUM - BACKSTAGE - DRESSING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Caleb is drenched in blood. Face covered. He looks relaxed. At peace. He sees himself in the broken mirror. The cracks distorting his face and body. He steps to the side to look at himself in an unbroken piece. There he is. A blood soaked killer. He stares for a beat.

He starts to massage the blood into his skin like bronzer. A different kind of rich paste. Smooth. Skin a shade darker. The blood drying as he rubs it in. Taking on a rusty hue. In certain lighting and from a distance you would not think he drained a human and lathered himself in it.

You would think it was in fact bronzer. The idea of it being blood so unnatural your mind not allowing itself to consider it a reality. His muscles look better than they ever have. Blood in all the grooves. Caleb's stare unimaginable. Sick.

INT. AUDITORIUM - BACKSTAGE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The stagehand pokes her head into rooms as she goes down the hall. Caleb opens the door to the dressing room. Steps out. She spots him down the long hall. The lighting dim enough that all she sees and cares about is that she found him.

STAGEHAND

Contestant four? Caleb Cole? You're up next. You good to go?

Caleb does not respond or move for a beat. The stagehand waits. Caleb looks up. Suddenly present. Lucid. Smiles.

CALEB

Ready.

The stagehand walks back toward the staging area. Caleb follows down the hall. In a state of bliss. Free from himself. From his torment. Ready for his debut.

INT. AUDITORIUM - BACKSTAGE - STAGING AREA - CONTINUOUS

The bodybuilder before Caleb walks off stage to decent applause. The stagehand looks to the platform behind the stage where Caleb stands in the dark. Waiting.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Your final competitor: Caleb Cole!

The stagehand gives Caleb a thumbs up.

INT. AUDITORIUM - STAGE - CONTINUOUS

The lights low - backlit in RED. Caleb rises on a platform to stage level. It comes to a stop. Body silhouetted. Shoulders raise and lower with each breath. The lights behind him lower to black and the front lights brighten. He steps out from the shadows. It is quiet. Do they know? Do they all know he is covered in the blood of a slaughtered man?

MUSIC UP - AUDITORIUM SPEAKERS: ORCHESTRAL. BOLD. SWEEPING.

Sharp ears will notice this music is the score in the Luca Leone film Caleb had playing on his television. A heroic theme he does not deserve but one he claims. This all feels surreal. Caleb looks out at the crowd. The judges. A sea of mostly undefinable human shapes in shadows from his vantage.

His muscles pumped. His killer instinct firing. It is as if he has grown three inches and put on another ten pounds of muscle from the walk to the stage. He begins his routine. Hits his poses with fluidity unmatched by his competitors. With an intensity that is captivating. Caleb plays to the crowd. Calling on them to cheer - feast their eyes. His tongue out. He hollers. Guttural.

The audience feels his energy. Exactly what Chauncey explained. That primal reaction. The people don't know what exactly it is but he is presenting them with what they came for: a show. Caleb finally seen. True self unveiled. A beast.

Aubrey watches - eyes glassy - proud and afraid for Caleb. She recognizes what everyone else does not yet. Barry coaches from near the stage. Oblivious. Only focused on the muscles. The sport. Chauncey claps. Then... a hesitation. Recalling what Caleb said to him in the water. Grappling with it as he witnesses Caleb on stage. New pose. Cheering. New pose. Screams of excitement. Momentous. Acceptance. Praise.

The blood on Caleb begins to run under the hot lights but the crowd continues to cheer. Not focused on what Caleb has done to give them this body. Not aware they rally support for a killer. Not aware they should be screaming in horror. Caleb strikes his final pose. Muscles and veins blast like they are trying to escape from under the skin. He smiles ear to ear.

MUSIC SOARS. Camera floats up over Caleb transcendently. Leaves only a view of the audience staring back at us. Uproarious applause and flashing lights.

Suddenly, during his bravado moment there is a faint SHRILL SCREAM. Rooted in terror. It quickly blends back in with the cheers as though it never happened. As though no one cares.

THE END.