



The Moral Male & Fatal Female: Dynamics of Morality & Gender in Film Noir an Introductory Essay and an Original Feature-Length Screenplay, Stalker Benjamin Sunday

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The Moral Male & Fatal Female:
Dynamics of Morality & Gender in Film Noir
An Introductory Essay
And an Original Feature-Length Screenplay, *Stalker*

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Abstract

This creative project combines an essay with an original screenplay to further a critical analysis of the femme fatale, a seductive and villainous female archetype found within the film noir and neo-noir film genres. Upon examining the development of the femme fatale through the film noir classics of *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Double Indemnity* (1944), and *Out of the Past* (1947), as well as the neo-noir film *Blue Velvet* (1986), the essay exposes the genres' preoccupation with internal moral conflict as a narrative focal point, as well as the genres' tendency to deny the moral complexity of female characters. It is that tendency to portray female characters as one-dimensional femme fatales that ultimately prevents them from developing their own complete narrative contexts, separate from those of male protagonists.

In response, the original neo-noir screenplay *Stalker* reverses the typical gender dynamics of film noir by using a female main character. While the screenplay employs the basic plot structure of a film noir story by following a morally conflicted protagonist in the midst of a criminal investigation, the protagonist's gender also makes the story a deliberate subversion of film noir's genre conventions. As such, *Stalker* stands as both an homage to and critique of film noir as a whole.

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Chapter I

Introduction

At the introductory meeting between Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) and Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck) in Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity*, during which Dietrichson is already plotting the murder of her husband, the camera follows Neff's gaze as it lingers on her leg and the glimmering anklet above her foot. Later, as the film heads towards a climax that will result in both characters' deaths, Neff meets Dietrichson one last time and recalls their first encounter by saying, "Just like the first time I came here, isn't it? We were talking about auto insurance. Only you were thinking about murder. I was thinking about that anklet." By linking the moment before his death with his first sight of Dietrichson, the film identifies Neff's early temptation by the murderous woman as the catalyst of his corruption and demise. According to James F. Maxfield's *The Fatal Woman*, the question of if a man can resist such temptation dictates the course of a typical film noir, for "whether the male succumbs to this temptation, resists it, or succumbs and then resists largely determines his fate-whether he perishes or not only survives but triumphs" (15). The narratives of films noir therefore tend to act as moral evaluations of male protagonists that are determined by their relationships with the femme fatale, "an extremely attractive woman who deliberately tries to lead men to their destruction" (Maxfield 1). Beginning with his initial response to her, the male protagonist's moral character is tested until he meets a fate that reflects his choice to

embrace or reject the wicked woman, along with the darkness within himself that she embodies.

However, in *Rethinking the Femme Fatale in Film Noir*, author Julie Grossman responds to the very idea of the femme fatale by attempting to “show the striking extent to which ‘femmes fatales’ –seductresses whose desires and malevolence are seemingly unmotivated- don’t in fact exist in the noir movies” (21). Grossman objects to the term on the grounds that it limits readings of female characters, encouraging critics to simplify complex women until they fit within a too narrowly described role.

“The mystification of women as ‘poisonous honeypot[s],” she says, “is one example of why we don’t tend to engage a more detailed and nuanced reading not only of female characters but of the narrative contexts (reflecting social realities) that inform and in some cases determine their choices” (7).

Grossman thereby suggests that film noir often contains additional narrative contexts built around these so-called femme fatales, which in turn show the true depths of their motivations. It is through these separate narratives that the female leads of film noir may show themselves to be not merely femme fatales in stories of male protagonists, but rather the protagonists of their own tales.

Yet in definitive examples of film noir such as *Double Indemnity*, along with John Huston’s *The Maltese Falcon* and Jacques Tourneur’s *Out of the Past*, the alternate narrative of the femme fatale never emerges. Whereas the narratives of male protagonists unfold through internal, moral conflicts that are resolved by climactic character-defining choices, the femme fatale lacks the depth of character and capacity for inner conflict required to sustain a narrative of her own. Despite possible signs of goodness, normally

glimpsed through the love she professes for the man in her life, each woman maintains a commitment to vice that is unmitigated by any counterbalancing virtues. The resulting extremity of personality makes for characters who are forceful and magnetic to those around them, but ultimately one-dimensional in nature. Without competing dimensions of vice and virtue both operating inside of her, or the possibility of evolving beyond her static position of corruption, the femme fatale cannot be subjected to the kind of moral evaluation that is fundamental to the narrative arcs of film noir. Consequently, she is denied a whole narrative of her own.

In contrast, a neo-noir film like David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* is able to produce a more complex femme fatale by adopting a more morally flexible approach to characterization. Additionally, by refusing to cast *Blue Velvet*'s femme fatale as the source of its male protagonist's corruption, she is able to establish additional identities separate from her femme fatale role. Nonetheless, the supporting role of the femme fatale within neo-noir denies her the opportunity to make the climactic, character-defining choice required to give her a complete narrative. Thus, while her motivations may be alluded to and speculated upon in the manner encouraged by Grossman, those motivations still remain unrevealed by action.

My original neo-noir screenplay, *Stalker*, responds to the lack of women-oriented stories in film noir by presenting a true female protagonist, whose morally complicated personality is repeatedly tested by the script's film noir plot. The eponymous stalker, Marcy, is a reckless young woman whose unhealthy fixation upon an artist named Dean nods to the dangerous, criminal aura of the femme fatale. However, after Dean is kidnapped because of his own criminal connections, Marcy's decision to search for him

thrusts her into the nobler role of a self-styled detective. Yet while her relentless devotion to Dean and obsessive knowledge of his life become assets in this heroic quest, the darker impulses driving Marcy's actions are still clear. The ongoing question of the script is whether a deeply flawed person doing a good thing can be redeemed when her motives remain suspect, or if following those corrupt desires will inevitably lead to her destruction. As such, the plot of *Stalker* becomes a vehicle for the moral evaluation of its female protagonist, allowing her to own its film noir narrative in a way that the femme fatale never could.

Chapter II

The Maltese Falcon

The foundation of film noir's narrative structure can be found in *The Maltese Falcon*, which Maxfield says "establishes a mythic pattern that has been reused with variations since shortly after that film's release and up until the present time" (15). The model of a male protagonist being morally appraised through his relationship with a femme fatale is plainly represented in Huston's film, as the detective Sam Spade (Humphrey Bogart) decides whether to punish or release his lover Brigid O'Shaughnessy (Mary Astor) after her killing of Miles Archer (Jerome Cowan), Spade's former associate. Though the scenario could be framed as a test of conflicting loyalties towards a romantic partner and a professional one, that interpretation is discouraged by Spade's low opinion of Archer, which is expressed most bluntly in the novel. "Miles," Spade says, "was a son of a bitch... [but] when a man's partner is killed he's supposed to do something about it. It doesn't make any difference what you thought of him" (Hammett 213). Spade's dilemma therefore isn't a matter of allegiance to one person or another, but rather of Spade's higher-minded ideals versus his romantic and sexual desire for O'Shaughnessy, the femme fatale.

Ironically, that very desire is what most compels Spade to give O'Shaughnessy up to the authorities. Speaking of the choice not to let her go, Spade says, "I won't because all of me wants to, regardless of consequences." For him, what matters more than her

murder of Archer is how she makes him want to forgive that murder, how his attraction to her is so profound that it unsettles his moral code. As Stanley J. Solomon writes in *Beyond Formula*, Spade is understood to be “the most intense preoccupied moralist in all of cinema,” and so the temptation to compromise his morality strikes him at his core (214). The femme fatale is accordingly cast as something more than a threat to life, as an existential threat to the unchanging principles that comprise Spade’s character.

Accordingly, Solomon says,

“The affirmation of his code requires the sacrifice of personal ambition, that is, his love for a woman. Were he to put aside his code at this particular moment of great temptation and choose her, he would really be abandoning his integrity... thus becoming as corrupt as the villains...” (220).

That sacrifice is the climactic moment of *The Maltese Falcon*, not a gunfight or brawl but the resolution of a moral dilemma as a man chooses to betray a woman to avoid betraying himself.

Spade’s choice of abstract principles over a human life may cast O’Shaughnessy in a more sympathetic light, especially as she pleads for mercy on the basis of love. “You know down deep in your heart,” she says, “that in spite of anything I’ve done, I love you.” However, Maxfield points out that “sexual allure is Brigid’s currency,” and that characterization reflects upon her appeal to Spade and portrays it as just the latest in a series of calculated, self-serving romantic transactions (24). A parallel is thereby drawn between Spade and Floyd Thursby, a hired gun who was “quite determinedly loyal to Miss O’Shaughnessy” before she orchestrated his death. When O’Shaughnessy then asks Spade to “fill Thursby’s boots,” as Spade puts it, he recognizes that being loved by

O'Shaughnessy means being used in the same manner that she has used others before. He accordingly rejects her by saying, "I won't play the sap for you. I won't walk in Thursby's and I don't know how many others' footsteps." By using love to gain advantages over others and further her ends, O'Shaughnessy robs the emotion of its virtue and its ability to redeem her. She shows herself to be not a lover, but rather the first of many "spidery women... ambitious exploiters, whose misdeeds merit punishment" in film noir (*Dangerous Dames* 80-81). Instead of morally complicating her character with a glimmer of virtue, her hollow pleas of love only make her more the femme fatale.

Chapter III

Double Indemnity

In contrast to Spade's noble rejection of O'Shaughnessy, whom he recognizes as corrupt, *Double Indemnity's* protagonist embraces his femme fatale because of her obvious corruption. "Although he can perceive Phyllis's evil nature as clearly as any viewer of the film," Maxfield writes, "Neff still wants her—apparently from the first moment he sees the gold anklet on her bare leg" (30). This immediate interest in Dietrichson, which only grows as she makes her first intimations of fraud and murder, bares Neff's true character. Says film historian Richard Schickel in his commentary,

"She has him hooked, and she has him hooked not just sexually. There's something in this where she's appealing to what you might call his intellectual side, the side that has been brooding about how you might just possibly be able to crook the wheel, to cheat the company."

Neff confesses that the murder plot he develops with her is "all tied up with something [he]'d been thinking about for years, since long before [he] ever ran into Phyllis Dietrichson," though he never would have carried it out without her. His meeting with Dietrichson therefore represents another moral test within film noir, one Neff fails as she draws his dormant vices to the surface of his personality.

However, Neff's guilt surfaces as well through his relationship with Lola Dietrichson (Jean Heather), Dietrichson's stepdaughter and moral opposite.

Remembering the evening that he tricked Mr. Dietrichson into signing an insurance policy that would be his death warrant, Neff says he felt “a little queer in the belly to have [Lola] sitting right there in the room playing Chinese checkers as if nothing were going to happen.” Lola’s innocent presence in the home distinguishes her as a “femme attrapee,” described in Jans B. Wager’s *Dames in the Driver’s Seat* as “the passive, domestic antithesis to the femme fatale” (4). Over several more meetings with Lola, Neff develops an affection for her that corresponds with a mounting sense of remorse that, in the novel, “hang[s] over [him] all time” along with “how awful it would be if she ever found out” (Cain 79). Whereas Dietrichson draws out Neff’s worst qualities and thrusts him into a world of paranoia and treachery, Lola’s role as the femme attrapee nurtures his conscience. The protagonist’s internal, moral conflict therefore plays out through his competing relationships with those two women, until he’s forced to choose one along with the path represented by her. Neff knows that he can never be with Lola, but he nonetheless chooses her by killing Dietrichson before the femme fatale can trick Lola’s boyfriend, Nino Zachetti (Byron Barr) into killing Lola. Neff then urges Zachetti to reconcile with Lola, “giving Zachetti the sort of chance he wishes he could have availed himself of, to find the antidote to destructive obsessions in the arms of a good woman,” and also helping Lola return to the secure domestic life spoiled by her father’s demise (Maxfield 35). Neff still dies after being shot by Dietrichson, paying the price of beginning a relationship with her, but through a relationship with Lola his integrity is restored and he is at least partly redeemed.

Similarly, Dietrichson experiences what might also be interpreted as a redemptive moment prior to her own death, though it is more fleeting and ambiguous in nature. After

mortally wounding Neff with a gunshot, she is unable to shoot him again as he approaches her and takes her firearm. With the gun now pressed to her side, she says,

“No, I never loved you, Walter, not you or anybody else. I’m rotten to the heart. I used you just as you said. That’s all you ever meant to me until a minute ago, when I couldn’t fire that second shot.”

In “*Double Indemnity*: Billy Wilder’s *Crime and Punishment*,” Ruth Prigozy interprets this scene as Dietrichson “recogniz[ing] her own buried life,” as though the pathological and murderous selfishness that defined her before has receded to reveal a repressed humanity (168). However, Dietrichson’s words also expose the workings of her mind beforehand, proving that she was driven all along by single-minded greed rather than the more complex motivations shown by Neff. For his part, Neff disbelieves Dietrichson’s sudden change of heart and shoots her dead. Regardless of whether or not she truly developed a love for Neff in the end, what’s most important is that the story doesn’t allow that love to come to fruition. Since the narrative doesn’t offer Dietrichson’s character the space to demonstrate behavior that would defy her immoral character, she dies as nothing more than a femme fatale.

Chapter IV

Out of the Past

In *Out of the Past*, a prolonged romance between the fugitive Kathie Moffat (Jane Greer) and the detective hired to find her, Jeff Markham (Robert Mitchum), finally lets a femme fatale express a love unmarred by hidden agendas. Markham's locating of Moffat in Acapulco sets off what critic James Ursini's film commentary calls "sort of their honeymoon period... indicating that their relationship is a strong relationship, that she is in love with him and he's obviously in love with her, and that she isn't just using him." By introducing Moffat in a bright tourist locale, rather than the dark urban environment where she shot and robbed her boyfriend Whit Sterling (Kirk Douglas), the film is able to give her a luminous and girlish presence that undercuts the cold-bloodedness of the femme fatale role. As Ursini says,

"What's interesting about this femme fatale is that the director and writer try very hard not to make her inhuman. There's a quality of perverseness and evil in her...but they've also tried to make her human, to make her actually... in love with Jeff."

While Moffat lies about stealing forty thousand dollars from Sterling, she readily admits to shooting the man, and yet she remains sympathetic in her portrayal. When she asks Markham if he believes that she didn't steal the money, he affectionately replies, "Baby, I

don't care." Her history is clearly that of a femme fatale, but the fact that she isn't treated as one implies that, at least to Markham, she is something more.

Yet when Markham and Moffat are found and blackmailed by Jack Fisher (Steve Brodie), Markham's opportunistic partner, Moffat's gentle demeanor slips and unveils her violent side. "Why don't you break his head, Jeff," she asks before Markham and Fisher even come to blows, instinctively demanding a fatal outcome to the confrontation. As the two men fight, Ursini makes the following observation about Moffat's presence:

"There's a strange shot here of her face, where she's actually smiling as she watches them fight, again which shows the sort of perverse quality to her. And then of course she shoots him, which adds to the perversity, all indicating that she's a much stronger character than Mitchum is."

Markham's revulsion at Moffat's words are mirrored by her own disappointment in him as she says, "You wouldn't have killed him. You would've beaten him up and thrown him out." The traumatic event has not only revealed a vast distance between Moffat and Markham, but also the distance between their actual identities and the identities that have been imposed upon them by each other.

This theme of identity informs nearly every aspect of the story, especially the second life that Markham subsequently builds in Bridgeport, California for himself under the name of Jeff Bailey, after Moffat leaves. The identities of Markham and Bailey diverge along multiple lines including those of urban and rural life, past and present, and, most of all, the personalities of the women they romance. In Bridgeport, Markham becomes involved with Ann Miller (Virginia Huston), a gentle girl whose upstanding character and ambition for nothing more than marriage mark her as a femme attrapee like

Lola. “She’s a symbol for [Markham’s] redemption,” Ursini says, “for him being able to get away from all the corruption and the complexities of life, of the city, of Kathie, of Whitt.” However, Markham’s redemption is disrupted as his decision to help Moffat escape Whitt, and then to cover up Fisher’s murder, comes back to haunt him. Just as Neff’s destruction is assured after his first meeting with Dietrichson, Maxfield says, “It is of course Jeff’s error in becoming involved with Kathie that ultimately dooms him” (55). Markham cannot elude his moral evaluation, or his punishment for succumbing to a femme fatale, simply by changing his name.

Moffat is herself drastically changed when Markham sees her again, having become an unambiguous femme fatale who no longer resembles the tender girl he met in Acapulco. Whereas Markham is equally himself and Bailey, Moffat explains that her former self was an illusion created from Markham’s own wishful thinking. “I never told you I was anything but what I am,” she says, “You just wanted to imagine I was. That’s why I left you.” However, Moffat’s continuing love for Markham is no illusion, though it begins to reflect her femme fatale identity more clearly than before. As Maxfield explains,

“Despite her villainy Kathie shares the dream of most normal women (and men): she wants to be loved for what she truly is. If Jeff finds that hard to do, she’ll give him further incentive by threatening that if he doesn’t go off with her, she’ll pin all of the murders on him” (62).

Here the characteristically ruthless and single-minded approach of the femme fatale is evident, although it is directed at the pursuit of a person rather than wealth. Moffat loves Markham, but her love is so corrupt that it compels her to confine and destroy him, in contrast to the selfless love Markham shows for Miller. When Miller asks Markham’s

friend, The Kid (Dickie Moore) if Markham was going to marry her, “[The Kid] lies, because he knows it’s what Jeff would want. And he knows that by lying, it frees her, that she won’t be attached to him anymore” (Ursini). The difference between the love that frees Miller and the love that kills Markham speaks to the difference between the fully developed character and the femme fatale. While Markham is a morally complex figure, such that he can occupy two lives and sustain an entire narrative designed simply to test him, Moffat is much less complicated. Whether she hates a man like Whitt or loves a man like Markham, the outcome either way is death because, in the end, death is all the femme fatale can offer.

Consequently, the femme fatale is perhaps best summarized by Markham as he tells Moffat, “You can’t help anything you do, even murder.” The femme fatale is a character who kills and commits other heinous acts because she is simply incapable of anything else. Whereas the male protagonists of film noir vacillate between moral extremes, flirting with both corruption and redemption, she is firmly wicked. This makes the femme fatale a captivating supporting character, but also one who is incapable of sustaining a film noir narrative of her own as a morally conflicted protagonist. The femme fatale therefore exists only as someone to test the male protagonist, an attractive and terrible force that is both greater and less than the men who succumb to her.

Chapter V

Blue Velvet

Yet while the femme fatale's moral deficiency and accompanying flatness of character may be encoded into film noir, creative reinterpretations of the noir model can provide her with a depth of character absent from her classic form. In her essay "From Irony to Narrative Crisis: Reconsidering the Femme Fatale in the Films of David Lynch," Frida Beckman writes that "the film noir can offer a productive site for revealing the progressive potential of the femme fatale for the representation of women in cinema" (25). Such revisionist approaches are possible within the context of neo-noir, films made after the classic noir period of the '40s and '50s that feature modernized takes on the genre's narrative and aesthetic styles. Whereas film noir tends to define its main characters and their actions along strict lines of good and evil, neo-noir may reject moral absolutes altogether. "Neo-noir," Beckman writes, "adds a moral confusion not absent, of course, from classic noir film, but which makes it increasingly difficult to tell the good guys from the bad guys and right from wrong" (29). In the midst of that moral confusion, the protagonists and femmes fatale of neo-noir transcend the binary ethical categories of right and wrong, thereby developing personalities that are more nuanced than those of their film noir predecessors.

Among other works by David Lynch, Beckman cites *Blue Velvet* as an example of a neo-noir that escapes film noir's stark moralism by complicating its archetypal

characters. In the process of investigating a violent crime involving the nightclub singer Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini), college student Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle MacLachlan) finds himself breaking into the older woman's apartment and hiding in her closet while she disrobes. Though Beaumont's investigative purpose casts him as a hero akin to Sam Spade, darker motives are also suggested as he gazes upon Vallens' nude body through the shutters of the closet door. Commenting on his own performance in the *Blue Velvet* documentary entitled *Mysteries of Love*, MacLachlan says, "Jeffrey is a voyeur and does not remain clean. He's certainly exploring his perversions... and I think it's a mixture of both wanting to take care of as well as desecrate [Vallens]." Whereas Spade's moral ambiguity comes from conflicting ethical and sexual impulses, each motivating a separate course of action, Beaumont's dual nature is presented through a single action that is simultaneously ethical and perverse in nature. Unlike Spade, that internal conflict cannot be resolved by a definitive moral choice, but rather lingers throughout the film as a lasting note of moral ambiguity. Later, when his other love interest Sandy (Laura Dern) tells Beaumont, "I don't know if you're a detective or a pervert," he avoids a concrete answer and instead replies, "That's for me to know and you to find out." As *Blue Velvet* shows, the noble detective and the corrupt pervert may not be separate from each other at all, but rather one in the same.

Yet while Beaumont's dark desires are directed at Vallens, she does not symbolize them in the usual manner of a femme fatale. Rather, Beaumont's fantasies are more directly embodied by Vallens' captor, Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper). After Beaumont is discovered and held at knifepoint by Vallens, who leads him through a fearful sexual encounter that he is unable to complete, he is promptly forced back into the

closet by Booth's arrival. Contrasting Beaumont's prior impotence, the unhinged Booth insults and punches Vallens before sexually assaulting her on the floor, as Beaumont looks on with both horror and awe. In doing so, Booth acts out what Janey Place's "Women in Film Noir" describes as film noir's "need to control women's sexuality in order not to be destroyed by it" (49). Booth is therefore presented as a violent remedy to Beaumont's emasculation, a physical manifestation of the urge to reassert his masculinity by degrading the femme fatale. Later, Booth even describes himself as part of Beaumont's fantasy life by telling the protagonist, "In dreams I walk with you. In dreams I talk to you. In dreams, you're mine. Forever in dreams." Whereas the redemption of film noir protagonists normally requires them to resist a femme fatale, Beaumont's quest to save Vallens from Booth requires him to resist a more unbalanced version of himself, in whom the urge to desecrate the femme fatale is unrestrained by any counterbalancing virtues. As Place locates that same violent urge within the narrative structure of film noir itself, Beaumont's opposition to it transforms *Blue Velvet* into a critique of the misogyny that underpins the genre of film noir as a whole.

Furthermore, because *Blue Velvet*'s neo-noir narrative doesn't require its femme fatale to be a one-dimensional representation of a man's dark side, Vallens is not entirely limited to the femme fatale role. While watching Vallens undress, Beaumont realizes that her femme fatale behavior is indeed partly a performance, an extension of her sultry nightclub act. As she removes not only her slinky dress but also her dark and voluminous wig, Vallens is noticeably reduced from the larger than life figure she portrays on-stage to a more vulnerable and anguished form. Also speaking of her performance in *Mysteries of Love*, Rossellini says, "I wanted to hide behind my makeup, behind my clothing,

behind my hair. Dorothy wanted to pretend everything was alright [and that] she was in control, almost like a façade that would hide the tempest and the torment.” That sense of a façade remains even after Vallens puts the wig back on and arms herself before forcing Beaumont out of hiding. In a moment she is the dangerously seductive femme fatale again, undressing Beaumont while saying, “Don’t touch me, or I’ll kill you,” but then the façade slips as she asks, “Do you like talk like that?” Unlike the ruthless and single-minded femmes fatale of classic film noir, the violence that Vallens promises is undercut by an obvious submissiveness, along with an understanding that even her threats against men are meant for their pleasure. That desire to please Beaumont and Booth furthers *Blue Velvet*’s critique of film noir by revealing the ultimate subservience of the femme fatale character, who exists to tantalize the male character even as she threatens his life. However, Vallens’ self-conscious performance of the femme fatale role also suggests her possession of an identity separate from it, unlike earlier characters such as O’Shaughnessy, Dietrichson, and Moffat who were each a femme fatale by nature and to the exclusion of anything else.

In contrast to those three women, it’s found that Vallens has been forced to adopt the appearance and mannerisms of the femme fatale by Booth, who is holding her toddler son hostage. The revelation of Vallens’ motherhood exposes a side to her that pointedly clashes with her femme fatale status. As Mary Ann Donne explains in *Femmes Fatales* “the femme fatale is represented as the antithesis of the maternal—sterile or barren, she produces nothing in a society which fetishizes production” (2). By standing as both a femme fatale and its moral antithesis, Vallens is imbued with a duality of character to match that of Beaumont, the perverted detective. For her part, Beckman argues that those

two dimensions of the character cannot co-exist indefinitely, and that Vallens is eventually proven to be “much more a mother and a victim than a dangerous and powerful woman” (30). However, that conclusion is contradicted by the final shot of *Blue Velvet*, which shows a freed Vallens sitting in an idyllic park and embracing her young son. Despite the maternal overtones of the scene, Vallens continues to wear the make-up and the gaudy wig that symbolize her aggressive sexual power. Since echoes of her seductress past permeate the otherwise chaste and parental scene, it’s implied that Vallens remains, in some way, a femme fatale. Rather than following film noir conventions and firmly becoming either the mother or the fatale, she instead embraces a moral ambiguity like Beaumont’s through which she can simultaneously live as two contradictory selves.

Yet while Vallens’ personality is afforded the same complexity as Beaumont’s, total parity between the femme fatale and the protagonist is still not attained. As Beckman writes, “Although *Blue Velvet* complicates the role of the femme fatale by making her a dangerous sexual threat and a caring mother at the same time, the film lacks subversive potential in terms of the femme fatale on the level of empowerment” (30). Whereas Beaumont achieves equilibrium by heroically killing Booth, an unbalanced version of himself, the peace that Vallens receives is handed to her off-screen as a byproduct of Beaumont’s actions. By excluding her from the climax of the film, the femme fatale is denied the most essential part of her narrative, in which her actions would both test her morality and determine her fate. Though her internal and external conflicts are given attention within *Blue Velvet*’s story, to a greater degree than any classic femme fatale, they are still not the point of the story. It is therefore not only the femme fatale’s

status as a woman within a male-dominated genre, but also her default status as supporting character to a male protagonist, that denies her a complete narrative.

Chapter VI

Stalker: A Brief Description and Self-Analysis

Stalker's most significant departure from its film noir and neo-noir predecessors is its use of a female protagonist within the conventional noir structure. Throughout the first act of *Stalker*, the main character of Marcy exhibits the threatening presence of a femme fatale as she stalks a washed up artist named Dean. When she discovers that he has become involved in a romantic relationship with another woman named Nadia, Marcy evokes the furious affection of Kathie Moffat by arming herself with a knife before moving to confront Dean, either to harm him or herself. However, it is at that point that Marcy discovers Dean has been kidnapped and murdered, thereby ending her career as a stalker. Marcy is then thrust out of the dependent roles of stalker and femme fatale, through which her path would necessarily be dictated by the actions of her male victim. Instead, Marcy must learn to forge a new path for herself, one that is uniquely her own.

In keeping with noir's genre conventions, Marcy chooses to become a self-styled detective by investigating and punishing the criminals responsible for Dean's death. Rather than mirroring the uncompromising nobility of Sam Spade, though, Marcy's investigation suggests the same mix of heroism and perversion found in a neo-noir protagonist like Jeffrey Beaumont. Much like Beaumont's voyeurism, Marcy's urge to stalk retains its invasive overtones even as it's redirected towards the heroic end of

stopping a group of killers. Later, Marcy's actions only become more morally questionable as she begins taking violent revenge against her prey. When she murders a hitman named Svinya, smashing his skull open with the butt of a gun, her friend Brian is so horrified that he decides to hand her over to the police for her own protection. Rather than surrendering, Marcy escapes after saying, "Maybe being myself is more important than being safe" (78). Instead of choosing a course that is definitively right or wrong, Marcy is content to take a path that seems both right and wrong, as long as it is true to herself.

In contrast, the character of Dean is denied any such agency when, after being killed, he returns as a figment of Marcy's imagination. Though this new version of Dean initially appears as a vengeful monster, he gradually reveals himself to be a benign hallucination that becomes Marcy's main source of support. In that sense he is a figure akin to Lola Dietrichson or Ann Miller, a gender-reversed example of the femme fatale that "gives love, understanding (or at least forgiveness), asks very little in return (just that he come back to her) and is generally visually passive and static" (Place 60). As an insubstantial illusion, however, this fake Dean's passivity is taken to such an extreme that he's transformed into a critique of film noir's fantasy that redemption may be obtained through love. This is illustrated when Marcy, who is resting her head on Dean's shoulder, moves an inch too far and falls through his empty form to hit her head on a window. While she finds a degree of comfort through her relationship with the fake Dean, that comfort proves to be insufficient. Ultimately, the lasting peace that Marcy seeks must come from herself, not from another.

Having established the fake Dean as the male equivalent of a femme attrapee, the eventual return of the real Dean as a preening and megalomaniacal murderer casts him as Marcy's version of a femme fatale. By seducing her into a self-destructive path, albeit without his knowledge, Dean's role within the story is functionally equivalent to that of O'Shaughnessy, Dietrichson, or Moffat in theirs. However, that role is contrasted with Dean's own understanding of events, which establishes him as the protagonist of his own personal narrative. While chasing Marcy through the halls of Nadia's apartment, Dean muses, "But make no mistake. This was always my dream. All of you were just living in it" (84). From Dean's statement, it's possible to imagine an alternate version of *Stalker's* plot told from his perspective, within which he is a cunning antihero like Walter Neff and everyone else, including Marcy, is merely a supporting character. Thus, even while Dean functions as a femme fatale, his words establish a separate narrative context through which his motivations can be understood as more than the fulfillment of a one-dimensional, archetypal role.

In addition to Dean, though, a more classic example of the femme fatale is found in his seductive lover, Nadia. As the organizer of the criminal conspiracy to fake Dean's death and profit from posthumous sales of his art, she appears to be no less calculating and ruthless than the greedy and murderous Phyllis Dietrichson. Furthermore, Nadia's cool and competent demeanor sharply contrasts with the wild and haphazard behavior of Marcy, a neo-noir criminal heroine. As the two are placed at odds with each other, their dispute therefore becomes not only a conflict between two women, but also a symbolic conflict between neo-noir and film noir in its most classic form.

However, that initial portrayal of Nadia as a classic femme fatale merely lays groundwork for a subsequent critique of the femme fatale role. In a latter scene that draws upon the disrobing of Dorothy Vallens, Nadia is shown removing her carefully applied makeup and, with it, the veneer of impenetrable and dangerous beauty that defines her. Though Nadia's varnished appearance is still attractive, the attention she gives to her wrinkles reveals the hidden vulnerability of the femme fatale, whose seductive power comes with an expiration date. That foreshadowed end is immediately reached when Dean spontaneously decides to betray her, shooting her in the chest. Nadia lashes back and eventually kills Dean, but despite that victory she nonetheless comes to the unavoidable end of the femme fatale. The character type exists solely to serve the story of the male protagonist. Without him, her reason for existing disappears, and so his ending is necessarily hers as well.

Since Marcy is not merely a supporting character in Dean's story, though, she is able to endure even after Dean is gone. Yet despite the death of Nadia, a femme fatale in the most classic sense, *Stalker* is not meant to be a simple condemnation of the femme fatale or the film noir genre. Rather, the script strives to modernize a narrative structure first established in *The Maltese Falcon* by inverting its gender dynamics, so that the female lead is no longer relegated to a secondary role. Instead, with Marcy as the protagonist, the film noir structure becomes a vehicle for exploring her own morally complicated psyche and letting its conflicting desires play out in a story of justice and crime, and of good and evil. In doing so, noir can overcome the tendency to reduce female characters to seducers of men and instead allow them to seize the narrative for themselves, finally becoming the heroes of their own stories.

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STALKER

Written by

Ben Sunday

FADE IN:

EXT. DEAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A modest but well-maintained house in a middle-class community. MARCY, a girl in her early twenties wearing a black hoodie and a bandana over her lower face, stands over a flashlight and a pair of garbage bags that have been pulled from two trash cans. She is peering into an illuminated window that is just above her head.

INT. DEAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A sleek, modern living room with prints of street art and body horror on the walls, as well as a dog sleeping on the floor. DEAN, a handsome man in his early thirties wearing a blazer, stands by a portable bar dropping an olive into a drink. NADIA, a stylish and severe woman in her early fifties, smokes a cigarette. The two are having a conversation, but neither is audible through the glass.

MARCY (O.S.)
(speaking as DEAN)
I don't usually have women over.
But I suppose the odd bitch is
bound to come through the doggy
door now and then.

Dean begins to fix a second drink. His hand is scarred, and its movement is stiff and awkward.

MARCY (O.S.)(CONT'D)
Drinks, to help me stand the sight
of you.
(speaking as NADIA)
Naturally. Even a tortured artist
like you can only endure so much.
(beat)
I hope you don't mind if I smoke.
(speaking as Dean)
That's fine. Anything to make you
die faster.

Dean walks over to Nadia with both drinks before giving one to her.

MARCY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(speaking as NADIA)
Thanks, handsome.
(speaking as DEAN)
You're welcome, ugly.

Nadia leans over to Dean, as if to kiss him.

EXT. DEAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Marcy stumbles in shock and knocks over one of the trash cans.

INT. DEAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dean turns his head towards the window as a muffled crash is heard outside. Nadia ignores the sound as she takes another drag of her cigarette.

EXT. DEAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Marcy starts to pick up the fallen trash can, then changes her mind and grabs the flashlight instead. She points it at the contents of one trash bag and then the other, trying to pick one. The sound of a door opening and a dog barking is heard off-screen.

DEAN (O.S.)
Who's there?

Marcy grabs one of the trash bags, then dashes off towards a banged up car across the street. Dean and Nadia watch from the doorway as Marcy throws the trash bag into her passenger seat before sliding into the driver's seat and peeling out.

NADIA
(disinterested)
Who was that bitch?

INT. MARCY'S CAR - NIGHT

Marcy pulls off her bandana with one hand while steering with the other. She is breathing heavily.

MARCY
(shrieking)
Who was that bitch?

EXT. SPEEDY-MART CONVENIENCE STORE PARKING LOT - DAY

A small parking lot adjacent to a convenience store. The lot is occupied by three cars, one of them Marcy's. Marcy remains in her car's front seat.

INT. MARCY'S CAR - DAY

Marcy, now wearing a polo shirt and name tag, holds a trash bag between her legs as she digs through assorted papers, containers, and other garbage with her bare hands. She finds a half-filled pot of daisies, which she reverently removes from the refuse. She plucks a single daisy from the plant and lifts it up to the car's interior light, letting it shine on the flower as she rotates the stem between her thumb and index finger.

INT. FRONT OF SPEEDY-MART CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

A well-stocked convenience store, small enough to be overseen by just a few people. Marcy, with a daisy tucked behind her ear, stands at a sales counter lined with candy and other impulse purchase items. EUGENE, a man in his mid-forties wearing a name tag that says ASST. MANAGER, roams the aisles taking inventory with a pen and clipboard. A bell rings as the sliding doors open and a CUSTOMER, a disheveled male in his fifties, enters and walks up to Marcy.

CUSTOMER

You guys sell Halloween candy?

MARCY

(RE: rows of candy lining
the sales counter)

Sure, we have candy.

CUSTOMER

No, I want Halloween candy.

MARCY

You... you can eat these on
Halloween.

EUGENE

(contritely)

Sir, are you looking for the fun
size candy bars?

CUSTOMER

I want Halloween candy!

EUGENE

Marcy, show him where they are.

MARCY

I-

EUGENE

They're by the Halloween costumes.

INT. BACK OF SPEEDY-MART CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

Marcy leads the Customer to the back of the store, where a cardboard cutout of Frankenstein's monster stands beside a display of Halloween costumes including a sexy witch, a sexy cop, and a sexy grim reaper. Underneath the costumes are several bags containing various tiny candy bars. Marcy picks one up and hands it to the the Customer.

MARCY

Here you go.

The Customer takes the bag and carefully reads its labels.

THE CUSTOMER

This bag says one hundred fifty pieces inside. I only wanted one!

The doorbell rings again as the Customer throws the bag at Frankenstein's monster, knocking it down. He walks away, and Marcy bends down to pick up the bag of candy. When she gets up, she sees the monster cutout upright in front of her.

DEAN (O.S.)

Does the sexy cop come with a badge and 'cuffs?

Dean has entered the store and is now holding up the cutout, adjusting its base so that it can stand upright again.

MARCY

(stunned)

I don't know.

DEAN

(with a hint of arrogance)

I used the badge from a costume like that to get on the roof of a Bank of America. Got to paint scabs all over the building's logo before the real cops got me.

MARCY

What did you did with the handcuffs?

DEAN

(slyly)

That's another story.

(RE: the unoccupied sales counter)

Could you ring me up? I'm kind of in a hurry.

MARCY
Of course, sir.

INT. FRONT OF SPEEDY-MART CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

Marcy and Dean walk back to the sales counter. Dean browses the impulse items as Marcy gets behind the register. Eugene is observing them both.

DEAN
I just want a pack of slims.

MARCY
(matter of factly)
But you don't smoke.
(hiding sudden
embarrassment)
Do you?

DEAN
Uh, no. They're for my girlfriend.

Marcy's face slightly twitches.

MARCY
Oh. Lucky her. That'll be eight
dollars.

Dean hands Marcy a credit card. She glances at the numbers on the card, then rings up the purchase and slides both the card and the cigarettes back to Dean.

DEAN
Thanks, Marcy.
(beat)
That's your name, right? On your
shirt?

MARCY
(flustered)
Yeah.

DEAN
I'm Dean Danvers. Flyboy. Maybe
you've heard of me?

MARCY
No.
(beat)
Have a nice day, sir.

Dean looks like he might say something, but instead he pockets the cigarettes and gives a courteous nod before walking away.

EUGENE

I think we should watch that video on customer service again.

MARCY

In a second. Can I use your pen?

INT. MARCY'S CAR - NIGHT

Marcy sits in the driver's seat holding a cell phone in one hand while looking at the palm of her other hand, where she's written Dean's credit card information. There is also a series of thin scars across her wrist.

MARCY

(into phone)
-four, two, one, eight.

AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)

(filtered)
Thank you. Now please say your birthdate as a two digit month, a two digit day, and a four d-

MARCY

(into phone)
Zero, four, two, seven, one, nine, eight, one.

AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)

(filtered)
Thank you. Your credit card activity for today, October twentieth, is as follows: Speedy-Mart, eight dollars. Lou's Dry-Cleaning, thirty-five dollars and twenty-three cents. Second Chances Homeless Charities, twenty dollars-

MARCY

Aw!

AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)

(filtered)
Forager Café, forty-eight dollars and twelve cents.

MARCY drops the phone and drives out of the parking lot.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - NIGHT

An affluent section of town with fancy restaurants, boutiques, and galleries. Marcy drives past Forager Café, then slowly continues down the road while observing the pedestrians.

EXT. THE BLACK DOOR BAR - NIGHT

Several blocks down she spots Dean and Nadia, who are heading into a trendy bar called The Black Door.

INT. THE BLACK DOOR BAR - NIGHT

A dark but casual bar with a jazz quartet playing on a stage. Dean and Nadia sit at a polished table, so absorbed in conversation that they don't notice their drinks being delivered. Marcy enters and heads for a stool by the bar, close to the pair. She closes her eyes and concentrates on overhearing them.

DEAN

Look, I agreed to have the exhibition at Fabian's gallery, but not like this. A Halloween party? This is supposed to be a retrospective, not a school dance.

NADIA

The buyer won't come unless he can blend in, and he doesn't blend so well.

DEAN

The exhibition isn't even on Halloween!

NADIA

What does it matter? You know this whole show is a sham.

DEAN

But my career isn't a sham!

NADIA

You don't have a career anymore. That's what happens when you shatter your hand fighting a security guard, and when your most valuable work was drawn on surfaces that DIDN'T BELONG TO YOU. Now all you have are old paintings you couldn't give away, until I-

A BARTENDER, musclebound and tattooed, distracts Marcy with a tap on the shoulder.

BARTENDER
Can I see some ID?

MARCY
(annoyed, but still trying
to concentrate)
No.

BARTENDER
Are you serious?

MARCY
Yes.

BARTENDER
If you don't show me some ID, I'm
gonna throw you outta here.

MARCY
(grabbing an empty bottle
from the counter)
If you don't shut the fuck up for
five seconds, I'm going to break
this bottle over your head and then
feed you the pieces.

BARTENDER
(shocked)
I'm getting the manager.

The bartender walks away, and Marcy resumes listening to Dean and Nadia.

NADIA
This show is only the first step.
You know that.

Nadia caresses Dean's cheek, and he seems to relent.

NADIA (CONT'D)
Let's make you rich first. Then you
can worry about your legacy.

DEAN
Fine.

The Bartender returns with the MANAGER by his side.

MANAGER
Get out.

Marcy looks back to the table, but all that remains there are two glasses and a twenty dollar bill. Marcy rises from her bar stool and walks past Dean's table, pocketing his empty glass along the way.

MANAGER (CONT'D)
Hey, you can't take that.

Marcy gives the Manager the finger as she exits the bar.

INT. MARCY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A small bedroom with walls covered in peeling paint and printouts of artwork, identical to the pieces from Dean's house. Dean's trash bag lies on the floor next to a mattress and blanket. A framed photo of Dean picking up a newspaper in his bathrobe decorates a desk, where Marcy types on her laptop and drinks orange juice from Dean's cup.

INSERT - THE COMPUTER SCREEN

The screen shows the words "FABIAN'S GALLERY," pictures of a sizable space with paintings adorning the walls, and an address.

BACK TO SCENE

Marcy's ROOMMATE, a woman in her early twenties, is knocking on Marcy's door from the outside.

ROOMMATE
Marcy, have you been drinking my
orange juice?

MARCY
No.

ROOMMATE
Well I measured it this morning,
and there's less in the carton now.

MARCY
(under her breath)
Pfft, weirdo.

Marcy drinks more orange juice from Dean's cup.

INSERT - THE COMPUTER SCREEN

"EVENT: FLYBOY HALLOWEEN EXHIBITION"

The screen scrolls past photos of Dean's work, hyper-realistic drawings of flesh and exposed organs plastered over public buildings to seem like part of their architecture. The photos are also surrounded by clip-art ghosts and jack o'lanterns.

"COSTUMES REQUIRED FOR ENTRY."

BACK TO SCENE

INT. BACK OF SPEEDY-MART CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

The back of the store is empty except for Marcy and BRIAN, a bespectacled man in his early twenties. They are both wearing the same polo shirt and name tag combination. Together, they are looking at the display of sexy costumes.

BRIAN

Those costumes are totally degrading, right?

(beat)

I mean, the male gaze, it has to turn every woman it sees into a sex object. Like you can't be a witch, or a cop, or... grim reaper... without also being sexy.

MARCY

It's not the worst thing in the world.

BRIAN

Oh, yeah!

(beat)

I mean, my women's studies professor said it can also be kind of empowering, you know? Like you're taking ownership of your sexuality.

MARCY

It's just nice to pretend sometimes.

BRIAN

Sure, sure.

(beat)

If you're looking for a place to wear a costume, the campus feminists and male allies are holding a Take Back Halloween Night rally.

(MORE)

BRIAN (CONT'D)
 We're all going to dress up like
 monsters to, you know, scare the
 patriarchy.
 (beat)
 Maybe we could go together?

MARCY
 I'll think about it.

INT. FABIAN'S GALLERY - NIGHT

An elegant art space marred by fake cobwebs, rubber skeletons, and artificial fog, with so many paintings on display that they obscure the walls. Costumed attendees are drinking cocktails and mingling, including THE PIRATE and THE DOCTOR who are staring at one particular painting. Marcy enters dressed as the sexy witch, but with her hoodie covering the costume's low-cut top.

INSERT - THE PAINTING

The sidewalk of a city street, smashed open in the center to reveal a realistic human heart alive underneath, like part of an underground circulatory system. The imprint of a boot is visible on the heart, and a trail of blood leads away from it to the horizon. Instead of a signature, a single fly is drawn in the lower right corner of the canvas.

There is a label underneath:

TRUE LOVE

Flyboy (Dean Danvers)

Oil on Canvas

53 1/2 x 65 1/2 inches

\$15,000

BACK TO SCENE

PIRATE
 How shallow.

DOCTOR
 How jejune.

PIRATE
 What does jejune mean?

DOCTOR
 It means shallow. VERY shallow.

MARCY

Actually, this painting recalls the anthropophagic mode of Adriana Varejão and her amalgams of flesh and architecture. But of course, what made Flyboy's later work so daring was the superimposition of such imagery on actual buildings and streets. This painting was merely a prelude to a later piece painted over a real sidewalk.

DOCTOR

(appraising Marcy)

Who are you?

MARCY

Nobody.

DOCTOR

Exactly.

A figure carrying a black briefcase pushes the Doctor and the Pirate aside as he walks past. The Pirate grabs the figure's arm.

PIRATE

(irate)

Excuse me! Who do you think you are?

SVINYA, a heavysset man in a grinning pig mask, turns around. He looms over the Pirate and snorts.

NADIA (O.S.)

Svinya, stop playing with the rabble. The meeting's back here.

Nadia, wearing a nun's habit, stands at a door in the crowded back of the gallery. Svinya leaves the stunned Pirate and Doctor, making his way past Nadia and into the doorway. Nadia then approaches FABIAN, a dapper, middle-aged man with a recently broken nose who is chatting up a crowd of art enthusiasts.

NADIA (CONT'D)

Fabian, make sure nobody disturbs us.

FABIAN

Of course, of course.

Fabian watches Nadia disappear into the door, then immediately turns back to the crowd.

FABIAN (CONT'D)

Now as I was saying, I've always believed in helping the so-called starving artist, but frankly some of these artists deserve to starve...

Marcy walks to the door as Fabian, with his back to her, continues to charm the crowd. When there is a sudden burst of laughter, she swiftly enters the door.

INT. FABIAN'S GALLERY BACK HALLWAY - NIGHT

The hallway is dark, except for a dimly-lit room at the far end and around a corner. Nadia enters the room with Svinya as Marcy quietly follows, sticking to the wall and then stopping at the corner to listen.

INT. FABIAN'S GALLERY BACK ROOM - NIGHT

A plain white room with a mini-fridge and small sink. Dean, wearing a pair of cheap plastic devil horns, is seated at a table with Nadia. Svinya joins them, but remains standing.

DEAN

Who's the pig?

NADIA

This is Svinya, the designated buyer.

DEAN

Svinya?

NADIA

It's Russian for pig.

DEAN

(to Svinya)

Hey, what do they call you when you aren't wearing the mask?

SVINYA

I am always wearing the mask.

NADIA

Enough about Svinya's personal life.

(to SVINYA)

Open the briefcase.

Svinya opens the briefcase on the table, revealing neatly organized and labeled stacks of checks.

DEAN

Checks? Russian mobsters on TV
always pay in cash.

SVINYA

This is stereotype. Svinya is
Russian, and he is mob, but he is
not "Russian mob."

NADIA

Dean, he's not buying a kilo of
crack. He's legitimately purchasing
your body of work, with funds from
various accounts, to be legally
resold after it... accrues value.
That requires a paper trail.

DEAN

And when does that paper trail lead
back to me?

NADIA

In time. The funds can't flow
directly to you, for obvious
reasons, but once we set up the
Hawthorne accounts-

INT. FABIAN'S GALLERY BACK HALLWAY - NIGHT

A hand covers Marcy's mouth and pulls into a utility closet.

INT. FABIAN'S GALLERY CLOSET - NIGHT

An overhead light turns on to reveal a cramped utility
closet. Fabian is inside, still covering Marcy's mouth.

FABIAN

(whispering)

Don't scream. There's no telling
what they'll do to us if they hear
you.

Marcy stops struggling. Fabian abruptly lets go of her mouth.

FABIAN (CONT'D)

(whispering, disgusted)

Did you just lick my hand?

MARCY
 (whispering)
 Well you didn't want me to scream.

FABIAN
 (whispering)
 What are you doing back here?

MARCY
 (whispering)
 I got lost.

FABIAN
 (whispering)
 On the way to your coven? Just shut
 up until they leave.

MARCY
 (whispering)
 Who are they?

FABIAN
 (whispering)
 They're what passes for art
 collectors in this town. Jesus
 Christ, I should've opened a Bed,
 Bath, and Beyond.
 (beat)
 Shh!

Fabian opens the closet door a crack, and both he and Marcy
 peer outside.

INT. FABIAN'S GALLERY BACK HALLWAY - NIGHT

Nadia, who's now holding the briefcase, steps out alongside
 Dean and Svinya.

NADIA
 Where's Fabian? I told him to watch
 the door.

SVINYA
 I'll look.

DEAN
 Wait. The people who'll end up with
 my art. Will they appreciate it?

SVINYA
 Who's to say? All art is
 subjective. Even some of the best
 art, nobody likes.

Svinya leaves.

DEAN

(to Nadia)

I'm having second thoughts about these guys. I don't want to leave my work in their hands.

Nadia caresses Dean's chest.

NADIA

What about my hands?

(beat)

And Svinya may not look like much, but he has an artist's touch. He'll give your work the respect it deserves.

DEAN

I just want to be clear that this isn't only about the money. I want to make sure I'm remembered, and for the right reasons.

NADIA

Being remembered at all is a privilege. One that only I can give you.

Nadia pulls Dean towards herself.

NADIA (CONT'D)

Or would you rather be forgotten?

DEAN

No.

NADIA

Good.

Nadia kisses Dean passionately, running her hand through his hair while holding onto Svinya's briefcase with the other. She roughly tugs on his hair when she's had enough, pulling his head back and breaking the kiss. He smiles as he winces, then leads Nadia back to the gallery.

NADIA (CONT'D)

By the way, I moved your dentist's appointment from five to four. That'll give us time to ask him about those veneers...

INT. FABIAN'S GALLERY CLOSET - NIGHT

Relieved, Fabian closes the door. Marcy's head is hanging down, with her face blocked by the brim of her witch's hat.

FABIAN

Okay, they're gone. I'll meet them outside; you go right to the fire exit. And then I never want to see you again, you tacky, creepy little-
(beat)
Are you *crying*?

INT. SPEEDY-MART CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

Brian reads a magazine behind the sales counter as Eugene inspects a hot dog cooker. Meanwhile, Marcy drags herself from aisle to aisle while using a label maker to add product names and prices to the shelves. She stops at a shelf stocked with children's cereal, including Frosted Flakes.

INSERT - BOX OF FROSTED FLAKES

Tony the Tiger is on the front of the box next to a speech balloon that says, "They're Gr-r-reat!" Marcy's label maker rolls over the words, leaving behind a sticker that says, "KILL ME."

RETURN TO SCENE

Eugene appears behind Marcy with a concerned look.

EUGENE

How are you feeling, Marcy?

MARCY

I'm feeling fine.

BRIAN

You seem sad.

MARCY

Sad is a feeling.

EUGENE

As manager, positive morale is my top priority. That's why I put those Cathy comics in the break room.

MARCY

I don't like those comics. The perspective is always off.

EUGENE

I think she has a great
perspective. When life gives you
lemons, give yourself chocolate!

Brian steps out from behind the sales counter and joins
Marcy.

BRIAN

I think Marcy needs some fresh air.
Could we both get lunch outside,
just for an hour?

EUGENE

Sure, sure. Whatever you need.

Brian and Marcy exit the store together, leaving Eugene
behind. He takes a candy bar off of a shelf.

EUGENE (CONT'D)

Time to give Eugene some chocolate.

EXT. SOKOLOV FAMILY DELI - DAY

A deli with handwritten signs in the window advertising fresh
cuts of meat. A cartoon pig, whose face resembles Svinya's
mask, is next to the logo. Marcy and Brian drive up in
Marcy's car, then step out.

BRIAN

I like this place because
everything they sell is ethical.
Grass-fed beef, non-GMO lettuce,
cruelty free mayonnaise.

MARCY

Mayonnaise can be cruel?

BRIAN

So cruel.

INT. SOKOLOV FAMILY DELI - DAY

Counters and stools line the perimeter of the deli, and in
the middle is a display case of meats with a cash register on
top. Behind the register is PAPA, a tall, elderly Russian
man. He takes Marcy and Brian's orders.

BRIAN

The usual, for both of us.

Brian and Marcy sit down at a counter. Two sandwiches and drinks are soon placed in front of them.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
So, can I ask what's wrong?

MARCY
There's this guy named Dean.

BRIAN
Your boyfriend?

MARCY
Well, he wouldn't call himself that.

BRIAN
Asshole.

MARCY
I feel like I'm losing him, but I guess I never had him to begin with.

BRIAN
If he can't tell how special you are, it's his loss.

MARCY
I just want him to know what *he's* losing, you know? To feel it.

Marcy scans the deli. Her eyes stop at a painting on the wall. It's Dean's painting, True Love.

BRIAN
You'll figure something out. And then, maybe, you can move on.

MARCY
Maybe.

Marcy gets up to throw out her garbage, then stops at Papa's counter.

MARCY (CONT'D)
Where did you get that painting?

PAPA
A gift. It looks so real, yes?

MARCY
 Yeah, it does.
 (beat)
 Hey, do you sell beef hearts?

PAPA
 Two-fifty per pound.

BRIAN
 You're still hungry?

MARCY
 It's for later.

EXT. DEAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Marcy, again dressed in her hoodie and bandana, walks to Dean's front door with a brown paper bag in her hand. She pulls something out of the bag, drops it on Dean's doorstep, and stomps on it. She then rings his doorbell before running to the side of his house.

Dean opens the door, holding a cell phone in one hand. He scans the street, then looks down.

INSERT - BEEF HEART

An uncooked heart squashed against concrete, bearing the imprint of a dirty boot.

RETURN TO SCENE

DEAN
 (into phone)
 Hold on.

Dean puts his phone in the pocket of his robe, then goes back into his house. He returns with a spatula, which he uses to scrape the heart off of the concrete before bringing it inside.

INT. DEAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

An open suitcase lies on the floor, with some clothes already in it. Still holding the spatula, Dean walks to a trash bin and disposes of the heart. He then looks at the spatula for a second before dropping that into the bin as well.

DEAN
 (pulling out phone, then
 speaking into it)
 Just a fan letter.
 (MORE)

DEAN (CONT'D)

(beat)

Yeah, I used to get fifty of them a week.

EXT. DEAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Marcy creeps towards the window to see Dean. The window is open, so she can hear him inside.

INT. DEAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dean kicks his suitcase closed with his foot.

DEAN

(into phone)

I already bought the ticket for tomorrow.

(beat)

Look, we never said we loved each other before. Let's not start now.

(beat)

Okay, goodbye.

Dean hangs up the phone.

INT. MARCY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Marcy sits at her laptop with the trash bag at her feet and many crumpled pieces of paper spread across the floor. She examines a bright blue envelope, which contains a birthday card that's signed "Best Wishes, Mom." The envelope is addressed to Dean Danvers, and the name on the return address is Carole Hawthorne.

INSERT - LAPTOP SCREEN

The computer is logged into a security page for an e-mail account. The security questions is, "What is your mother's maiden name?" In the window below, Marcy types HAWTHORNE and then clicks SUBMIT.

An e-mail inbox for FLYBOY1 opens. Marcy clicks on the newest e-mail, a receipt for a train ticket.

BACK TO SCENE

ROOMMATE (O.S.)

Marcy, have you seen my good knife?

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY

A sparsely populated train platform in the early morning, where just a few people are waiting with their suitcases. Marcy enters, looking visibly agitated. She is concealing a long knife in her sleeve, with her hand gripping the handle.

A train pulls into the station and a boarding announcement plays on an intercom. As people begin to board, Marcy looks around for Dean, but he is nowhere to be seen.

Marcy bumps into a TRAIN EMPLOYEE.

TRAIN EMPLOYEE
Boarding, ma'am?

MARCY
No. I was waiting for someone.

The Train Employee nods, then turns away.

TRAIN EMPLOYEE
(to the front of the
train)
ALL ABOARD!

The train departs the station, leaving Marcy behind.

EXT. DEAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Marcy's car races down the street and parks in front of Dean's house. With the knife still in her hand, Marcy runs out to the entrance of the house and finds the door already swinging open. It's been kicked in.

INT. DEAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Marcy finds the interior of the house in disarray, with furniture broken, art knocked off of the walls, and the portable bar's contents shattered on the ground. Dean's suitcase is still there on the floor, but it's been busted open. From beyond the corner of the room, Marcy hears growling. Dean's dog has overturned the garbage can and is gnawing on the beef heart.

Marcy looks at her knife and sees herself reflected in the blade.

EXT. PAYPHONE - DAY

At a cracked phone booth in a decrepit part of town, Marcy holds the receiver of a payphone to her ear with one hand and dials with the other. The knife sits on top of the phone, stained with a streak of blood. A faint ringing comes through the earpiece.

911 DISPATCHER (V.O.)
(filtered)
911, what is your emergency?

Marcy opens her mouth as if to speak, but then she stops. A trickle of blood drips out of a thin cut on her right arm.

DEAN (O.S.)
Hang up.

Startled, Marcy looks around to see where the voice came from. There is nobody there.

911 DISPATCHER (V.O.)
(filtered)
911, what is your emergency?

Marcy hangs up the phone.

INT. MARCY'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

A narrow apartment kitchen with a small sink. Marcy is running the knife under the tap, washing dried blood off of it. Her right forearm is freshly bandaged. She puts the clean knife away into a drawer, then closes it.

MARCY
Hey, I found your fucking knife!

INT. SPEEDY-MART CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

The convenience store still has a CLOSED sign hanging from its door, and only a few of its lights are on. Marcy is dressed in street clothes and talking to Eugene.

MARCY
I need to take some time off. Maybe a week.

EUGENE
I can ask someone from the night shift to do doubles for a couple days, but that's it.

MARCY

Thanks. I really appreciate it.

EUGENE

I have to say, Marcy, I've been disappointed in your work lately. Even when you're here, it's like your head is somewhere else.

MARCY

Maybe I just need some time to find it again.

EUGENE

See that you do.

(beat)

When you come back *next week*, I want you at 100%.

MARCY

(smiling)

I'll try.

(holding up sexy cop costume)

Hey, can I use my employee discount on this?

INT. FABIAN'S GALLERY - NIGHT

The gallery's walls are bare, and it is totally empty except for Fabian. He is standing on a stool with a broom in his hand, trying to sweep a fake cobweb out of a corner of the ceiling.

Marcy enters dressed in the sexy cop costume, except with a leather jacket zipped up over the low-cut top. She is wearing mirrored sunglasses, and a plastic badge is clipped to her breast pocket. She marches over to Fabian and knocks the stool out from under his feet, causing him to stumble.

FABIAN

Hey!

MARCY

Tell me where Dean Danvers is.

FABIAN

Ugh, you again. You're pretending to be a cop now?

MARCY

(taking out a revolver)

Does this look like I'm pretending?

Fabian falls to the ground and attempts to back away, but he's trapped in the corner.

MARCY (CONT'D)
(pointing the gun at
Fabian)
Now, I asked you a question.

FABIAN
I don't know! I only met him once!

Marcy pulls back the hammer of her gun.

FABIAN (CONT'D)
Please, I have a family! Parents!
Cousins! A cat, with feline
diabetes!

MARCY
How about Nadia?

FABIAN
(cowering)
Nadia forced me to organize Dean's
show. Then she had me write
receipts for that psychopath
Svinya.

MARCY
Who?

FABIAN
The man in the pig mask!

MARCY
What can you tell me about him?

FABIAN
Only that he took all of Dean's
worthless art with him, back to
whatever dump he came from.

Marcy uncocks her gun and lowers it, then offers Fabian a hand up. He rejects it and stands on his own.

MARCY
Thanks, that was helpful.

FABIAN
That's why I started renting
gallery space in the most expensive
part of town, to help psychos in
Halloween costumes.

MARCY
Don't call me a psycho!

Marcy points her gun and fires at Fabian, who ducks and covers his face. A paint ball hits him in the chest, leaving a large red mark. By the time he realizes he's okay, Marcy is gone.

INT. SOKOLOV FAMILY DELI - DAY

Papa is behind the counter as Marcy enters the empty deli, still in her cop costume. She nods to Papa as she walks up to Dean's True Love painting, which is on the wall nearby.

PAPA
(congenially)
Another beef heart, young lady? Or should I say officer?

MARCY
I'm here to ask about the painting again. Who gave it to you?

Papa's face hardens a bit, but he retains a smile.

PAPA
I'm afraid I cannot recall.

MARCY
Come on-

Marcy walks up to the counter with a confident swagger and leans over it, bringing her face close to Papa's. Papa is close enough to read Marcy's badge, which says PARTY POLICE.

PAPA
Your badge-

Marcy notices what's written on her badge and hastily takes it off.

MARCY
That's not your concern. Now I'll ask you again, politely.

PAPA
You should leave, *officer*.

MARCY
You can't-

Papa rises from his stool behind the counter, revealing his true height. He is a few heads taller than Marcy and looks down at her with a scowl.

PAPA

The things I can do would very much surprise you.

Marcy backs away from the counter.

MARCY

Okay, but I'll be back. With back-up.

PAPA

Yes, we will see you again. I'm sure of it.

Marcy starts to leave, then rushes back to the painting and pulls it off the wall.

MARCY

This is evidence!

Marcy rushes out of the deli with the painting in her hands, but Papa does not follow her. He watches her leave, then pulls out an old flip phone to make a call.

INT. MARCY'S CAR - Day

Marcy puts the painting in the passenger seat of her car before slamming the door closed. She pulls at her hair and yells in frustration, then stops when she hears someone tapping on the window. Brian is standing at the door, smiling and shyly waving. Marcy rolls down the window to hear him.

BRIAN

Hi. Uh, how's it going?

EXT. PARK - DAY

An idyllic park with scattered trees and a nearby pond. Joggers run by, and a couple plays with a frisbee in the distance. Brian and Marcy are seated together on a bench.

BRIAN

So, Eugene said you're taking the week off.

MARCY

Yeah. That guy I told you about, he needed some help, but...

BRIAN

But what?

MARCY

But I'm not sure I can help him.

BRIAN

Maybe you shouldn't. I mean, losing your head over some guy who barely notices you-

MARCY

He's not just some guy. He's an *artist*.

BRIAN

You could be an artist. Eugene told me you went to school for it and everything.

MARCY

I dropped out after a month.

(beat)

I realized that I couldn't make art, that I belonged in the audience.

BRIAN

Don't sell yourself short.

MARCY

No, you don't get it.

(beat)

There is no art without an audience. There is no artist unless there's someone watching his work.

BRIAN

I'm not really following you.

MARCY

It's just, sometimes I look at his art and I feel so much... I can't even say it.

(beat)

Maybe that's why I'm so fucked up.

BRIAN

I don't think you're fucked up. And even if you were, I'd like you anyway.

Marcy shoots a bewildered look at Brian, like she isn't sure what kind of conversation they're having anymore.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Sorry, I know that was a little forward.

MARCY

That's fine.

(getting up)

Listen, it's getting late. I'll see you around, alright?

BRIAN

(smiling weakly)

Right.

Marcy walks off, leaving Brian on the bench by himself.

INT. MARCY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The garbage that was scattered around Marcy's room is gone, and the trash bag from Dean's house is tied up. Marcy sits on the floor intensely staring at the True Love painting, which is propped against her wall.

The color of the painting is brighter now, and the heart is rendered so vividly that it could be alive. After a moment, Marcy hears the sound of dripping and notices a fresh streak of red paint running down the canvas to the floor. She dips a finger in the red puddle forming on her floor, then looks at the fluid more closely. It's not paint, but blood.

The sound of dripping then becomes the sound of a heartbeat. Marcy looks at the drawing of the heart again, which has become three-dimensional and glistens in the light. She lifts a trembling hand up to the canvas and lightly grabs the heart, which throbs in her grip.

Marcy pulls her hand back in shock, and it is covered in blood. The sound of the heartbeat becomes a boom, then abruptly stops. Marcy looks at her hand again and sees that it's clean.

EXT. DEAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Marcy quickly exits her car with the garbage bag and True Love, which she drops near the trash cans by Dean's house.

Nearby, TUCKER emerges from a black pick-up truck clad in leather gloves and a ski mask. Marcy sees him and starts to move towards her own car, but he catches her in his arms and lifts her off her feet. Marcy twists in Tucker's grip until he loses his footing, causing both of them to fall into the trash cans.

Marcy tears open the trash bag and pulls out a drinking glass, which she smashes against Tucker's face. He screams and covers one of his eyes.

Marcy tries to lift herself up, but then she yelps and collapses in pain. She sees that the wound on her right arm has reopened, soaking the bandage in blood.

A shadow falls over her. It is Svinya, still in his pig mask. He punches Marcy, knocking her out.

INT. THE MEAT LOCKER - NIGHT

Marcy awakens to see pink shapes hanging in front of her. She slowly recognizes them as slabs of meat suspended from the grey ceiling of a meat locker. Turning her head, she finds she is seated in a folding chair with her hands cuffed behind her. It is cold enough that she can see her own breath.

Svinya is seated across from her, and Tucker is standing by his side. Tucker's ski mask is off, revealing a thuggish man in his early twenties. He is pressing a steak to his right eye.

TUCKER

Nice of you to bring your own
handcuffs, bitch.

SVINYA

Tucker, do not be rude. This is a
woman of culture. A woman of art.

Svinya stands up and approaches Marcy, bringing his mask close to her.

SVINYA (CONT'D)

This is why you are curious about
artists, yes? Because you are a
lover of art?

MARCY

(drowsy)
Sure, love or art.

SVINYA

I do not know much of art. In my
home, I was taught only of meat,
and so meat is the only art I know.

Svinya removes a knife from his pocket.

SVINYA (CONT'D)
 (waving around his knife)
 They say the sculptor sees the
 beast hidden in the stone, and then
 he carves away the stone until the
 beast is free.
 (pointing the knife's tip
 at Marcy)
 Meat is like that, but different.

Svinya walks over to one of the hanging slabs, then rubs the
 edge of his knife against it.

SVINYA (CONT'D)
 My family, we look at the beast,
 but we see only meat.
 (slicing a chunk from the
 slab)
 Then, we carve, carve away at the
 beast. On and on, piece by piece.
 And each new piece we take is meat.

Svinya throws the piece he has carved off at Marcy, hitting
 her leg. It leaves a pink trail as it slides down her thigh.

SVINYA (CONT'D)
 Soon, like magic, the beast is
 gone. And all that remains is *meat*.
 That is my profession. That is my
 art. That is how I see.

Svinya walks back to Marcy and kneels in front of her. She is
 nodding off again, so he lifts her head up at the chin. They
 are now close enough that she can see through the slits in
 his mask to his eyes.

SVINYA (CONT'D)
 (to Marcy)
 Now that you know who I am, you
 must tell me of you.

MARCY
 I wanted to find Dean.

SVINYA
 Why?

MARCY
 I don't know why. Love, or art.
 (beat)
 Or maybe I'm just crazy.

TUCKER
 She's lying.

SVINYA
No, this is her truth.

Svinya lifts Marcy out of the chair, then motions to Tucker.

SVINYA (CONT'D)
She is done.

MARCY
Where are you taking me?

SVINYA
To see a masterpiece.

INT. TUCKER'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Marcy, with her hands still cuffed behind her, sits in the cabin of the pick-up truck. The window is open, and outside Tucker can be heard talking to Svinya.

EXT. SOKOLOV'S DELI - NIGHT

Tucker and Svinya stand outside the closed deli in the parking lot, where Tucker's truck is parked near a luxury car.

SVINYA
Bring the girl to the farm. I will speak to Nadia.

TUCKER
You want me to take care of her by myself?

SVINYA
Yes. If you wish to continue with me, you must show you are capable.
(gesturing to Marcy)
This is how you show it.

Tucker nods, then moves towards the truck. Svinya gets into the luxury car and drives off.

INT. TUCKER'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Tucker starts the truck and drives to the parking lot exit, where he waits to merge with traffic. Meanwhile, Marcy quietly fiddles with her handcuffs. Her fingers trace a faintly embossed logo on the right cuff, which says Party Police.

TUCKER
You want the radio on?

MARCY
Your call.

TUCKER
Off it is.
(beat)
I'm not a bad guy, you know. But
jobs like this pay too well to pass
up. And student loans, am I right?

MARCY
Uh huh.

Marcy examines each of the metal links holding her cuffs together. She finds one in the center that is not completely closed, then begins to pry it open with her fingers.

TUCKER
And I don't want to kill you, per
se.
(beat)
I mean, I will. But I'm not gonna
get off on it.

Marcy continues to pry at the link, opening it further. The opening is now wide enough that she could separate the cuffs.

TUCKER (CONT'D)
Hold on.
(reaching towards Marcy)
I'm going to buckle your seatbelt.
Don't want a ticket or anything.

Tucker leans over to fasten Marcy's seatbelt as she remains still. The traffic then opens up, allowing Tucker to leave the lot.

MARCY
Hey.
(beat)
What's the deal with the pig mask?

TUCKER
Fuck if I know.

EXT. THE BARN - NIGHT

Tucker drives past a sign saying MARIGOLD FARMS, which has a foreclosure notice pinned to it.

He then turns towards an isolated and abandoned barn surrounded by vacant pens and grazing land. After parking, Tucker steps out of the truck and pulls Marcy out.

INT. THE BARN - NIGHT

Marcy, still handcuffed, steps onto the barn's dirt floor. Electric lanterns hang overhead, and some old farm machinery lies on the ground alongside a few open containers of gasoline. Tucker follows her in with his gun tucked into the back of his pants.

TUCKER

Keep walking. I'm right behind you.

MARCY

I don't know where you want me to go.

TUCKER

It's straight ahead. You'll know it when you see it.

(beat)

And thanks again for the handcuffs. You sure know how to make a boy's first time easy.

MARCY

The 'cuffs are fake, you idiot.

Marcy pulls her arms apart, breaking the handcuffs in two. As Tucker begins to reach for his gun, Marcy dives for the gas cannisters. She throws one at Tucker, dowsing him and his gun in gasoline.

Tucker seems alarmed, but then he smirks. He pulls out his gun and aims it at Marcy.

TUCKER

You don't have a light, do you?

(beat)

Idiot.

As Tucker fires the gun, Marcy dives towards the ground. The muzzle of the gun flashes and a bullet whizzes over her head. At the same time, the gunshot ignites the gasoline on Tucker's gun and arm, setting him aflame.

Tucker drops his gun and takes off his flaming jacket, but the fire has already spread to the rest of his body. He runs out of the barn while screaming.

Marcy hesitates, then looks around the barn and sees a wool blanket. She picks it up and chases after Tucker.

EXT. THE BARN - NIGHT

Tucker, still screaming, runs out of the barn towards a trough filled with stagnant water. Marcy dashes after him with the blanket, which she wraps around Tucker as she tackles him into the trough. She submerges him completely to douse the fire, then brings him back up.

Tucker is horrible burned across his body. He is coughing up water and seems to be in shock.

MARCY

Can you talk?

TUCKER

I can't feel anything.

MARCY

Don't worry about that now. Where's Dean?

TUCKER

Ambulance. My phone's in the truck. Please, call an ambulance.

MARCY

Where's Dean?

TUCKER

Please.

MARCY

I'll call when you tell me where Dean is.

TUCKER

He's in the back. Past the rear door. Now. Please-

MARCY

I'll be right back.

Marcy heads back into the barn, leaving Tucker behind.

TUCKER

Don't go!

INT. THE BARN - NIGHT

Marcy makes her way back into the barn. She stops to try and pick up Tucker's gun, but the hot metal scalds her hand.

Marcy resumes walking towards the rear of the building, coming to a large set of doors. A chain and padlock hangs from one of the handles, but it's not closed. Marcy opens the door and walks in.

INT. SVINYA'S GALLERY - NIGHT

Entering a dark room, Marcy fumbles around for a moment before locating a switch. The switch activates a sound system that plays soft classical music as lights flicker on, revealing a makeshift gallery.

The gallery is filled with plain white canvases covered in Pollockesque splashes of blood, along with sculptures of organs and bones rearranged into the shapes of impossible creatures.

At the center of the room is another canvas, tanned like leather with stitches all across its face. It is already drawing flies. Underneath it is a label.

INSERT - THE LABEL

De(con)struction of an Artist

Flyboy (Dean Danvers)

Flesh on Canvas

53 1/2 x 65 1/2 inches

BACK TO SCENE

Marcy extends a trembling hand and, with great hesitation, touches the canvas. She closes her eyes, and a man's anguished scream rings through her ears.

Marcy leaves, and behind her the canvas begins to rumble.

EXT. THE BARN

Tucker, more lucid now than before, screams as he thrashes around in the trough.

INT. THE BARN - NIGHT

Marcy slowly but purposefully walks through the barn, with Tucker's screams growing louder as she moves closer to him. She stops at Tucker's gun, which she picks up.

INT. SVINYA'S GALLERY

The canvas continues to quake before suddenly expanding, then sucking each of the other works of art into itself. It wraps around them all, forming a massive cocoon of skin.

EXT. THE BARN - NIGHT

As Marcy exits the barn, Tucker pulls himself over the edge of the trough. The trough spills over, and Tucker rolls out onto the dirt.

INT. THE BARN - NIGHT

The cocoon of skin crawls out of the gallery like a SLUG as it violently pulsates, rearranging itself from within.

EXT. THE BARN - NIGHT

Tucker whimpers as he crawls through the mud, looking over his shoulder to see Marcy approaching him with his gun.

Meanwhile, the Slug approaches both of them from behind. It has sprouted human arms and uses them to pull itself forward, and the dome of a human skull can be seen protruding from its front end.

Marcy catches up to Tucker. As Tucker rolls over to see her, the Slug stands tall behind her with its arms outstretched. Tucker casts a horrified look in the direction of the Slug, but his eyes are fixed on the gun.

TUCKER

Please. Have a heart.

MARCY

It's broken.

Marcy cocks the gun.

The Slug's arms wrap around her, and the Slug's skin contracts over the human skeleton that has been assembled within.

Facial features rise to the surface of the Slug's head, which then become Dean's face. A nude Dean is now hugging Marcy from behind and pressing his lips to her ear.

DEAN
(whispering)
Do it.

Marcy shoots Tucker in the head.

INT. TUCKER'S TRUCK - NIGHT

A cellphone rings and vibrates on the dashboard. Marcy is visible through the windshield, standing by herself. She notices the ringing.

INT. NADIA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A large office, minimally decorated with urban photography from the 1940's. Nadia, dressed in a stylish but professional suit, sits at a vast and mostly empty desk. Svinya sits across from her in a chair that is slightly too small for his frame. He is holding a ringing cellphone to his ear. After another moment of waiting, he terminates the call.

SVINYA
Tucker must be disposing of the
body.

NADIA
Did you find out who she was?

SVINYA
A silly girl. Beyond that, it
doesn't matter.

NADIA
Don't tell me what doesn't matter.
I'm not the boss's son. I'm not
allowed to make mistakes.

SVINYA
Perhaps I should show you what's
underneath this mask. Then you will
see the price of mistakes.
(beat)
But it is no matter. Tucker is a
good boy. He will do his job.

NADIA
Try him again.

Svinya unlocks the screen of his phone and taps on a picture of Tucker holding a handgun in a sidegrip. The phone rings once before the call is picked up.

SVINYA
Tucker? Are you done?

MARCY (V.O.)
Tucker's done.

Svinya is startled by Marcy's voice, but collects himself after seeing Nadia raise an eyebrow.

SVINYA
Explain.

MARCY (V.O.)
Tucker's gun has five bullets left.
Now what am I supposed to do with
five whole bullets?

Over the phone, the sound of three gunshots rings out.

MARCY (V.O.)
I only need two. One for you. One
for Nadia.

SVINYA
Very good. I'll be in touch.

MARCY (V.O.)
Say hi to Nadia for me.

Svinya terminates the call and puts his phone in his pocket.

SVINYA
Tucker is finished. Now he will lie
low for a while.

NADIA
What about the... display?

SVINYA
I will check on it again, make sure
it is perfect.

NADIA
Fine. But we're spreading the news
tomorrow. The sooner they report
Dean's death, the sooner we can
start selling his work off at a
profit.

SVINYA

And the sooner you can profit.

NADIA

(smirking)

Please. I already have what I wanted.

EXT. THE BARN - NIGHT

As Dean strips off Tucker's charred pants and puts them on himself, Marcy presses Tucker's burnt thumb onto his cellphone's fingerprint lock. The screen reads "Try Again." Marcy brushes Tucker's dirty thumb off with her shirt and tries again. The phone still won't unlock.

DEAN

(buttoning his pants)

We have to go.

Marcy shrieks and throws the cell phone at Dean.

MARCY

(screaming)

Why did you tell me to say that stuff? I'm not a killer!

DEAN

I *just* saw you kill someone.

MARCY

That is a very recent development!

(beat)

What are you anyway?

DEAN

(taking off Tucker's shirt)

You already know.

MARCY

I'm crazy. I'm crazy.

DEAN

In the most beautiful way.

MARCY

They're going to find me.

DEAN

(putting on Tucker's shirt)

You'll find them first.

MARCY
They're going to kill me.

DEAN
They'll have to try. Nothing less
than death can stop you.

MARCY
Stop me from what?

DEAN
From showing them what true love
is.

Dean offers Marcy a hand up, and she takes it.

DEAN (CONT'D)
But now's not the time. Now we have
to go.

Marcy pulls a set of keys out of Dean's shirt pocket, then picks the gun up from the ground and tucks it into her pants. She drives off in Tucker's truck with Dean, leaving Tucker's underwear-clad body behind.

EXT. THE BARN - DAY

At the crack of dawn, Svinya drives up in a car that is blaring Russian pop from its stereo. The music stops as the car pulls over next to Tucker. Svinya exits the vehicle and lets out a long sigh as he looks down at the body. There is then a short chime as he receives a text message.

INSERT - SVINYA'S PHONE

Next to the message is a picture of a woman in lingerie and a pig mask. The message reads:

ROXY: Whatcha doin'?

There is a typing sound as Svinya writes his reply.

SVINYA: Tidying up.

BACK TO SCENE

Tucker's body is splayed out over an open tarp. Using a massive cleaver, Svinya hacks at and separates the limbs. He then places them in a group of wax paper parcels, each wrapped like packages from a butcher's shop.

Svinya loads the parcels into his truck, then rolls the now reddened tarp into a plastic bag before putting that into his trunk as well.

Next, he picks up the burnt blanket and fixes the overturned trough.

INT. SVINYA'S BARN - DAY

Svinya picks up Tucker's burnt jacket and puts the overturned gas cannister back in its place.

INT. SVINYA'S GALLERY

Svinya uses a feather duster on one of the canvases, then moves another canvas so that it more favorably reflects the light from a window. When he is done, he takes out his cellphone and makes a call.

SVINYA
(into phone)
I'm done. Spread the word.

INT. DEAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Dean's dog is sleeping in Dean's suitcase, on top of a pile of his clothes. The faint glow of headlights in early morning sunlight hits the living room. Dean's dog perks up.

EXT. DEAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Tucker's truck pulls into Dean's driveway, and both Marcy and Dean step out. Marcy spends a moment carving something into the hood of Tucker's truck, then throws the keys as far as she can.

DEAN
You remember that the owner's dead,
right?

MARCY
Yeah, but he's also an asshole.

Marcy goes over to her car, which has remained by Dean's house. She peers into the window and sees her keys still in the ignition. Marcy is then tackled from behind by Dean's dog, which begins slobbering over her face.

MARCY (CONT'D)
 (laughing)
 Ugh, sick.
 (to Dean)
 What's her name?

DEAN
 What do you think her name is?

MARCY
 (rubbing dog's head)
 Cindy Sherman. How are you doing,
 Cindy Sherman?
 (to Dean)
 Were you going to take her with
 you? There was nothing on the train
 reservation about a pet.

DEAN
 Maybe someone was supposed to feed
 her while I was gone.

MARCY
 (concerned)
 Look at her, she hasn't eaten in
 days. I should've fed her last time
 I was here.

DEAN
 Well there's no time now. They know
 where your car is. They could come
 back at any moment.

MARCY
 Okay, but I'm taking her with us.

Marcy puts Cindy into her car along with True Love and all of
 Dean's trash bags. She then pulls out of Dean's parking lot.

Moments later, Svinya's car arrives. Svinya gets out to
 examine Tucker's truck, walking around it and then stopping
 at the hood.

INSERT - HOOD OF TUCKER'S TRUCK

Scratched into the hood of Tucker's truck, Marcy has written
 WHO'S THE BITCH NOW?

BACK

INT. SPEEDY-MART CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

Marcy, still in the same clothes as before and looking very unkempt, walks into the convenience store with Cindy. Brian immediately approaches them both.

BRIAN

Good, you're finally here. Eugene said he'd fire you if you didn't show up.

MARCY

What? I just came to pick up some dog food.

Eugene steps out of the back of the store looking irate.

EUGENE

Where have you been? Your shift started an hour ago!
(looking at Cindy)
And why do you have a dog?

MARCY

She's, uhm, my therapy dog.

EUGENE

Please, you don't need therapy. Leave it in your car and get to work.

BRIAN

You can't leave a dog in a car. That's animal cruelty.

Eugene starts to say something, but then he feels Cindy licking his hand. He looks down at her, and she looks up at him with loving eyes.

INT. SPEEDY-MART STORAGE ROOM - DAY

A room with extra inventory, a table, and a portable TV. Cindy is burying her face in a bowl of brown meat, and Marcy is standing by as Eugene throws an empty dog food can in the trash.

EUGENE

(irritated, but suppressing it)
I'll take the dog food out of your pay, along with the hour you missed.

MARCY

I actually forgot I was supposed to come back today. I have some stuff going on right now.

EUGENE

(incensed)

What the heck, Marcy! You said you were taking time off to sort things out, but then you show up looking like heck! Heck!

MARCY

Sorry, but maybe some things are more important than my minimum wage job.

EUGENE

Marcy, if you want more than the minimum out of life, then you have to give more than the minimum back. You have to give your all.

MARCY

I am ready to give my all. Just not here.

Eugene rubs his temples in frustration, slowly calming down in the process.

EUGENE

Look, since you're here, you might as well finish out the day. Then I'll cut you a final check, and you can do whatever you want.

CUT TO:

INT. SPEEDY-MART STORAGE ROOM - LATER

The portable TV shows a morning news program with a MALE NEWS ANCHOR and a FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR.

As Cindy sleeps under the table and Marcy unpacks cardboard boxes, the morning news continues to play in the background.

FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)

Returning to our top story, local artist Dean Danvers is presumed dead.

(MORE)

FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Authorities say that forensic testing is required to verify the identity of remains found in an abandoned barn in Penelope County, but that preliminary evidence points to Danvers as the victim.

On the TV, there is a clip of a POLICE SPOKESPERSON standing in front of a podium and addressing a group of reporters.

Brian walks into the storage room and pretends to look busy.

POLICE SPOKESPERSON (V.O.)
 Details of the crime scene, as well as a second scene at Mr. Danvers' residence, strongly suggest that he was the victim of homicide. Given the severity of the crime in question, we are asking anyone with information relating to these events to contact us immediately.

BRIAN
 Have you been following this story?

MARCY
 No, not really.

BRIAN
 Photos from the crime scene leaked online. It's pretty fucked up.

MARCY
 (feigning disinterest)
 Huh.

MALE NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)
 Dean Danvers was best known as Flyboy, the alter ego he employed as a member of the city's local street art movement. After becoming notorious for painting anatomical images in public spaces, Danver made headlines when a violent encounter with a private security guard left both men hospitalized. While the unnamed guard suffered severe retinal injuries, Danvers was left with permanent damage to his right hand, reportedly ending his career. WYGB news spoke to a close acquaintance of Danvers, local gallery owner Fabian Arturo, about his legacy.

FABIAN (V.O.)

The loss of the artist Dean Danvers, Flyboy, was felt throughout our community. However, the loss of Dean Danvers, the man and my own close friend, is simply incalculable. He will be dearly missed.

BRIAN

(hesitant)

This isn't the same Dean you were talking about before, right?

MARCY

No, of course not. Can you imagine me being involved with someone famous?

BRIAN

I guess not. But still, two guys named Dean, and both of them artists.

MARCY

Guys named Dean have a 99% chance of becoming artists.

BRIAN

Ha, I guess.

(beat)

What about guys named Brian?

MARCY

Brians are nice too.

BRIAN

Nice... Hey, have you thought about going to that rally I mentioned before?

MARCY

I was planning to spend the night with my boyfriend.

BRIAN

Boyfriend? So it's getting serious?

MARCY

You wouldn't believe how serious.

EXT. SPEEDY-MART CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

Marcy walks to her car with Cindy, where Dean waits in the passenger seat. Marcy lets Cindy into the backseat, then gets into the driver's side.

DEAN
(smirking)
So I'm your boyfriend now?

MARCY
(trying to suppress a
smile)
Shut up.

Brian stands at the entrance of the store watching Marcy. From his vantage point, the passenger seat is clearly empty. He sees Marcy talk and laugh to herself as she drives off.

INT. MARCY'S CAR - NIGHT

Marcy is sitting in the driver's seat, peering through a set of binoculars. Dean is in the passenger's seat watching her, and Cindy is in the backseat biting a hole in one of the trash bags.

INSERT - BINOCULAR LENSES

The binoculars focus on the exterior of Sokolov Family Deli. The lights are off, and the door is covered by a handwritten sign that says CLOSED.

BACK TO SCENE

DEAN
I don't think anyone's coming.

Marcy ignores Dean and continues to stare through her binoculars.

DEAN (CONT'D)
And what'll you do if someone goes
inside? Just follow them through
the front door, with your two
bullets?
(beat)
You're going on two nights without
sleep now. And you smell like it's
been twice as long since your last
shower.

MARCY
 (sarcastically)
 Oh yeah, because dead people smell
 sooooo great.

DEAN
 (sniffing his own armpit)
 I smell fine.

Marcy opens her car door and steps out.

DEAN (CONT'D)
 Where are you going?

MARCY
 (rubbing the small of her
 back)
 To stretch my legs.

Marcy takes a few steps out of the lot before glimpsing a white, circular painting on a nearby street. After checking for approaching cars, Marcy walks towards the design until she is standing on it. The painting is a giant eye with a manhole cover for a pupil and inflamed blood vessels all over its face, like roads on a map. Marcy then spots a black mark on the iris and drops to her hands and knees to see it better. The mark is a drawing of a fly. On closer inspection, the Marcy sees the fly's wings move.

Suddenly, Marcy's hands and legs begin sinking into the ground. Her hands have now plunged through the moist and trembling iris of the eye, which has come to life. Marcy stands and yanks both of her hands out, leaving red gashes in the eye that then spew geysers of blood. The eye blinks under Marcy's feet before bulging out, emitting a brilliant white light as a terrible whine fills the air.

Dean grabs Marcy's arm and pulls her away. She is now lying by the side of the road with him as a honking car with beaming headlights drives past.

MARCY (CONT'D)
 (to Dean)
 Okay, maybe I could use some sleep.

Marcy looks back to the street. The eye is gone.

INT. NADIA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

A SECURITY GUARD is seated at a front desk in the lobby of a luxury apartment complex. His attention is divided between a revolving door and rubbing the grip of a gun in a hip holster. There is a radio on his desk as well.

Nadia enters the building with a designer purse under her arm and two bags of takeout, one in each hand. As one of the bags starts to slip from her hand, the Guard rises from his desk.

GUARD

Can I help you with those, Ms. Sullivan?

NADIA

That won't be necessary. I can manage on my own.

While passing by the desk, Nadia stops by the radio.

RADIO (V.O.)

In related news, authorities continue their search for Tucker Anderson in connection with the murder of Dean Danvers. Anderson was identified as the owner of a vehicle abandoned at the victim's residence. He is also wanted for unrelated charges of larceny and assault.

NADIA

(setting down her bags)
Could you watch these for a moment, Jerry? I need to make a quick call.

GUARD

Sure thing, ma'am.

EXT. NADIA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Nadia steps out of the revolving door into the front of the towering building, where she steps aside to remove her phone from her purse.

INT. PIG PEN - NIGHT

In a small, indoor livestock pen, Svinya leans over the railing surrounding a group of grunting pigs. His phone rings, and he answers.

SVINYA

Nadia...

NADIA (V.O.)

(enraged)
He left his truck at Dean's house?

SVINYA
There was... a complication.

NADIA
What?!

SVINYA
Tucker's keys were lost.

INT. NADIA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

A loud thud is heard from outside, startling the Guard at his desk. He looks towards the entrance and sees Nadia, still outside and holding her phone.

EXT. NADIA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Nadia is looking at the screen of her phone, which is now cracked. She takes a deep breath, then brings the phone back to her ear.

SVINYA (V.O.)
Hello?

NADIA
Where is Tucker now?

INT. PIG PEN - NIGHT

Svinya unwraps a wax paper package containing a human arm.

SVINYA
He's with me.

NADIA (V.O.)
Take care of him. He'll do as a scapegoat, but only if the police never find him.

SVINYA
Don't worry. There won't be anything left to find. I'll make sure of it.

EXT. NADIA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Nadia continues speaking into her phone.

NADIA

You better. Or there won't be
anything left of you to find
either.

Nadia hangs up.

INT. PIG PEN - NIGHT

Svinya shouts as he throws Tucker's arm into the pen.

SVINYA

Cyka blyat!

The arm lands, and the ravenous pigs pile onto it.

INT. MARCY'S APARTMENT - DAY

All of the trash bags have been torn open, and their contents
are scattered around Marcy's room. Cindy is resting on
Marcy's lap as Marcy, freshly showered and in a bathrobe,
goes through a pile of garbage.

DEAN

Why wash up if you're just going to
get yourself dirty again?

MARCY

(flirtatiously)

You didn't mind how dirty I got
last night.

DEAN

That must have been a dream.

MARCY

And this isn't?

Marcy picks up a crumpled piece of notebook paper, then
unfolds it.

INSERT - NOTEBOOK PAPER

A torn piece of paper covered in rough doodles of anatomical
drawings and the name Hawthorne, written over and over again
in cursive.

BACK TO SCENE

MARCY (CONT'D)

Who's Hawthorne?

DEAN
Nadia mentioned a Hawthorne account
at the gallery.

MARCY
(disgusted)
Nadia. How did you become involved
with someone like her anyway?

DEAN
Maybe I wasn't as good as you
think.

MARCY
I'd know if you weren't.

DEAN
You didn't even know my dog's name.

MARCY
(to Cindy)
Your name isn't Hawthorne, is it?
(beat)
Wait.

Marcy's face lights up, and she goes to another pile of trash
across the room to retrieve the birthday card envelope from
Dean's mother, Carole Hawthorne. She looks at the address.

EXT. MARCY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Marcy, now fully dressed in jeans and her leather jacket,
exits her front door with Dean. Before closing it, she pokes
her head back in.

MARCY
Don't forget to feed the dog!

ROOMMATE (O.S.)
What dog?!

EXT. CAROLE'S HOUSE - DAY

Marcy stands outside an upper-middle class suburban home
surrounded by bushes and a porch swing. The name Carole
Hawthorne appears on the mailbox. She rings the doorbell and
CAROLE HAWTHORNE, a stern looking woman in her early sixties,
answers the door.

CAROLE
Can I help you?

MARCY
 (discreetly flashing her
 badge so it can't be
 read)
 Just a moment of your time, ma'am.

CAROLE
 (exasperated)
 By all means, then. Come in.

Carole disappears into her house, leaving Marcy at her
 doorstep. Marcy starts to follow her, then stops. She
 addresses Dean, who is standing next to her. He looks pale.

MARCY
 (whispering)
 You're not coming?

DEAN
 (rasping)
 I can't be near her. She knows me
 too well.

MARCY
 (surprised)
 Oh. Okay.

Marcy goes into the house and closes the door behind her,
 leaving Dean alone.

INT. CAROLE'S HOUSE - DAY

An orderly household furnished with antiques and
 impressionist landscapes. Marcy sits in a dining room near
 some bay windows as Carole arrives with a tray of tea and
 scones, which she sets down on a table.

CAROLE
 I thought you people were done with
 your questions. Not that I mind.
 Dean always saw me as a supporting
 character in his story. The least I
 can do now is honor that wish.

MARCY
 This is more of a review. Repeating
 what you've already told us to see
 if there's something we overlooked.

CAROLE
 (sipping her tea)
 Splendid. Where shall I begin?

MARCY

When did you last hear from Dean?

CAROLE

Over a week ago. He'd gotten into some form of trouble, and he wanted to stay with me until it blew over. He'd already bought a ticket.

MARCY

Did he say what kind of trouble he was in?

CAROLE

No. He was always, what's the euphemism? Distant.

Marcy looks through the bay windows to the front of the house, where she can see Dean from behind as he sits on the porch swing.

MARCY

I'm sure his artwork kept him very busy.

CAROLE

His artwork? Please. My son was a vandal.

MARCY

(abruptly)

No he wasn't.

(embarrassed, but
regaining her cover)

That is to say that he was, but only in the *legal* sense. In the artistic community, though, street art is now widely accepted.

CAROLE

Ah, a detective with a dash of culture. How novel. I have a doctorate in art history myself. However, it wasn't the "street" element that bothered me. It was the adolescent morbidity of it.

MARCY

But by integrating biological imagery into urban structures, Dean revealed an organic link between ourselves and our environments.

(MORE)

MARCY (CONT'D)

He showed that each building, each street, was alive.

CAROLE

(amused)

Alive? Tell me, Officer Art School, do you know why Dean added a fly to everything he made?

MARCY

It was his signature.

CAROLE

No, it was an emblem of decay. His so-called living buildings and streets were all about to rot, becoming food for flies.

(beat)

And the fly was him. He saw everything and everyone as food for him, and his art.

MARCY

I- I suppose all interesting work is open to interpretation.

CAROLE

Speaking of my son's work, when can I expect the piece you so aggressively borrowed to be returned?

MARCY

Pardon?

CAROLE

The officers before you wanted something for a DNA comparison. I gave them a childhood sketch Dean made with drops of blood, after skinning his knee.

MARCY

I'd heard that Dean experimented with using real blood as a medium, though it never appeared in any of his major works. Still, I wonder what he could've done with it, if he'd had the chance.

CAROLE

Well, as it is, that sketch is one of the few mementos I have of his art.

(MORE)

CAROLE (CONT'D)
Some opportunistic collector
snatched up all the rest, and he
won't sell for less than a fortune.

MARCY
You tried to buy some of your son's
pieces?

CAROLE
Purely for its sentimental value, I
assure you. But the dealer was-
(wiping a tear away)
Not open to sentiment. No wonder
someone broke his nose.

EXT. CAROLE'S HOUSE - DAY

Carole leads Marcy to the front door of her house, then
remains by the doorway as Marcy exits.

CAROLE
I hope you can understand. Dean and
I had a difficult relationship, and
perhaps I wouldn't have cared for
him at all if he hadn't been my
son. But he was my son.

Marcy offers a conciliatory smile.

MARCY
You have my number. Call me if
anything else comes to mind.

CAROLE
Of course.

Marcy walks down the steps to her car. Carole, seemingly
seeing it for the first time, is put off by its appearance.

CAROLE (CONT'D)
That's what they make you drive?

MARCY
Only when I'm undercover.

INT. MARCY'S CAR - DAY

Marcy is driving down a stretch of highway with Dean in the
passenger seat.

DEAN
So, do you think she was involved?

MARCY

No. If she'd been involved, she wouldn't be trying to buy your art. But you should've seen her. She really loved you, even if she had trouble saying it.

DEAN

You know I'm not him, right?

Marcy continues looking forward, not acknowledging the question.

MARCY

I always used to think that, no matter how much you love someone, you can never be with them as much as you want. There's always something like work or school keeping you apart. And even when you're together, you're still separate.

Marcy takes Dean's hand, then puts her palm flat against his.

MARCY (CONT'D)

You can be close enough to touch, but still separate. Where their skin begins, your skin ends. And as close as they come to each other, they never really meet.

DEAN

I don't even have skin. I'm all in your head.

Marcy looks in the rearview mirror and sees herself holding her hand in the air, touching nothing.

MARCY

That's what I mean. There's no distance between us now. There's nothing keeping us apart. We're as close as anyone could ever be.

DEAN

(shaking his head,
smiling)
You are crazy.

MARCY

I know. But I'm learning to live with it.

DEAN

So where are we going now?

MARCY

To meet a man with a broken nose.

INT. FABIAN'S GALLERY BATHROOM - DAY

Fabian is standing in front of a bathroom mirror, located in a small restroom. He splashes water on his face, then looks up to see the bandage over his broken nose peeling off on the right. Touching the bandage makes him wince, but he presses down on it anyway to smooth it out.

INT. FABIAN'S GALLERY - DAY

Fabian paces around his empty gallery while speaking into a cordless phone, which is being held between his shoulders and his head. His hands are struggling to open a container of prescription pills.

FABIAN

If you're looking for one of his more political pieces, I have just the thing.

(beat)

He drew the Washington Monument with genital warts. No prizes for decoding that metaphor.

(beat)

And it's sure to accrue value. After all, it's not like Dean Danvers is around to make more.

Fabian finally opens the bottle of pills and swallows one.

FABIAN (CONT'D)

Yes, I realize the seller's terms are... unique. But perhaps you can overlook that for an opportunity like this.

(beat)

Uh huh.

(beat)

Okay, well call me back if you change your mind.

Fabian ends the call, then swallows an additional painkiller.

INT. FABIAN'S GALLERY BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Svinya, Nadia, Papa, and Fabian are all seated around the table in the back room. Nadia is wearing glasses as she reads from a handful of papers she has brought with her, while Fabian begins to nod off.

NADIA

Now, if interest in Dean's work starts to slip, limiting further sales to create a sense of scarcity could keep collectors engaged. However, as long as demand remains robust, liquidating the entire catalogue remains our top priority.

(to Fabian)

Fabian, how is the market looking for us now?

(beat)

Fabian?

(beat)

Fabian!

Fabian is jolted awake.

FABIAN

Sorry. My doctor prescribed me some new painkillers.

PAPA

Pitiful.

FABIAN

Pardon?

PAPA

A man who hides from his pain is a coward. He is not to be trusted.

FABIAN

Well, I generally don't trust people after they've broken my nose, but we all have to compromise once in a while.

PAPA

Your wound was a gift. Now you will have the face of a man.

Svinya slumps down in his chair.

NADIA
 (dismissive)
 Riveting. Now, Fabian, where are we
 on buyers?

FABIAN
 There are more than enough
 prospects, even at our price
 points. It's just...

SVINYA
 What?

FABIAN
 They're used to gallery sales
 taking place in a gallery. When I
 tell them to meet you in a
 disreputable part of town, like
 they're making some kind of drug
 deal, it raises a red flag.

PAPA
 But still, they come. And they pay.

FABIAN
 Only half of them come. And it
 raises questions. If you just
 brought the paintings back to the
 gallery to sell, I could-

PAPA
 No. The paintings stay with me.

NADIA
 I think you should hear Fabian out.

PAPA
 (pointing a finger at
 Nadia)
 Quiet. You forget yourself.

SVINYA
 The paintings stay in our hands.

PAPA
 (still pointing at Nadia,
 finger now shaking)
 And perhaps you forget who you
 speak to. Perhaps you think I am
 only an old wolf.

SVINYA
 (to Fabian)
 And you should remember your place.

PAPA
But an old wolf is still a wolf!

Papa is still pointing at Nadia, but his finger is limp and his whole hand is now shaking involuntarily. Nadia, however, is unshaken.

SVINYA
(to Nadia)
Both of you should remember your place.

PAPA
(slapping Svinya)
Quiet!
(beat)
If the buyers are afraid, this is good. They will not cheat a man they fear.

INT. FABIAN'S GALLERY BACK HALLWAY - NIGHT

As Svinya, Nadia, Fabian, and Papa leave the back room, Svinya pulls Fabian aside.

SVINYA
Fabian, I would have a word.

FABIAN
Yes?

SVINYA
(whispering)
The young woman who came to you as a cop. Have you seen her again?

FABIAN
No. Why?

SVINYA
It's not important. But let me know if you do.
(sternly)
And don't say a word to Papa, or Nadia.

FABIAN
(slyly)
Bump up my commission, and I'll do anything you ask.

Svinya suddenly grabs Fabian by the collar.

SVINYA

You are a weakling! And you do what
I ask because I ask! That is what
it means to be strong.

PAPA

Svinya! Po bih-STREY-ye!

Svinya releases Fabian and leaves with Papa. Meanwhile, as Fabian straightens out his collar, he notices Nadia looking at him.

NADIA

Problem?

FABIAN

You know, the Chinese words for
crisis and opportunity are the
same. So, when a pair of Russian
murderers beat me into a business
partnership, I really tried to see
it as an opportunity. But it's just
not working out.

NADIA

(mocking)

Aw, Fabian. You have to make your
own opportunities. Otherwise you'll
never live on your own terms.

FABIAN

(disdainful)

Is that what Dean was to you? An
opportunity?

Nadia's mocking expression turns cold. She approaches Fabian now, backing him up against a wall. As Nadia gets closer, he flinches like he's expecting to be harmed, but instead Nadia leans close to him and whispers in his ear.

NADIA

Svinya and the old man will never
kill you. Do you know why?

FABIAN

Why?

NADIA

Because they need you. But remember
this about me.

(menacing)

I don't need anyone.

Nadia leaves.

EXT. FABIAN'S GALLERY - NIGHT

Fabian turns the lights off in his gallery before stepping out and locking the door. He then fumbles with his keys while walking to his car. Marcy is sitting on the hood, waiting for him.

FABIAN

Shit.

(beat)

I had nothing to do with it.

MARCY

I figured.

FABIAN

Then what do you want?

MARCY

To make some trouble.

INT. SVINYA'S APARTMENT - DAY

A high rise studio, sparingly decorated with white and black furniture. Svinya, clad in boxer shorts and his mask, is sleeping in a king-sized bed. Lying next to him is ROXY, a pretty but disheveled young woman wearing lingerie. She also has her own pig mask, which she's pulled up to the top of her head.

As Svinya remains perfectly still, Roxy carefully moves her hand towards his mask. Before she can touch it, Svinya snatches her wrist. As Svinya flicks her hand away, Roxy looks unapologetic.

ROXY

Let me see your face.

SVINYA

No.

Svinya sits upright in bed, then begins to get dressed while sitting on the mattress's edge.

ROXY

You know, whenever I go out, I pay attention to every face I see. And I ask myself, "Is that one him? Is that my favorite customer?"

SVINYA

(scoffing)

If you saw me, you would know.

ROXY

At least tell me why. Tell me why,
or maybe I won't come over next
time you call.

SVINYA

This is not our arrangement.

Roxy crawls over to Svinya and hugs him from behind.

ROXY

Please.

SVINYA

When I was a boy, my nyanya would
make paintings of me, each one
beautiful. And I would ask, "Is
that boy me? Could I be that
beautiful?"

(beat)

But Papa did not approve. He did
not find it manly.

ROXY

What did he do?

SVINYA

He gave me a less beautiful face, a
face my nyanya could not bear to
paint.

Roxy reaches for Svinya's mask again, as slowly as before.
When she touches it, Svinya does not stop her. She removes
the mask, and she is disgusted.

ROXY

I'm... I'm sorry. I have to go.

Svinya remains seated in place as Roxy leaves the bed and
quickly puts on a wrinkled sundress.

ROXY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

Roxy grabs an envelope full of cash from on top of a dresser,
then leaves.

As Svinya puts his mask back on, his phone rings. He answers
it.

SVINYA

Hello?

FABIAN (V.O.)
It's Fabian. I found the girl.

EXT. WAREHOUSE DISTRICT - DAY

Svinya's luxury car drives by a series of warehouses.

FABIAN (V.O.)
She wanted to know where you were
keeping Dean's art, so I gave her a
random address in the warehouse
district. It won't take long for
her to get there, but if you hurry
you can catch up.

INT. SVINYA'S CAR - DAY

Svinya is driving with both hands clenching the steering wheel. He takes one hand off of the wheel to make a call through his car's dashboard console.

SVINYA
Papa, I cannot go to today's
exchange.

PAPA (V.O.)
What?!

SVINYA
I... I have private business. I am
sorry. I will have one of my men
join you.

PAPA (V.O.)
Another man like Tucker? Your men
are disappointments!

SVINYA
Papa...

PAPA (V.O.)
You are a disappointment! You tend
to your business, and leave my
business to me.

The call terminates. Svinya is about to make another call when he glimpses Marcy's car at an intersection. He turns towards it.

EXT. SECLUDED LOT - DAY

Papa drives a BMW into a secluded lot surrounded by dilapidated buildings. A wrapped canvas is visible in his backseat as he steps out of the car. He tries to light a cigarette, but he has difficulty putting the flame near the tip. Eventually, he succeeds.

EXT. WAREHOUSE DISTRICT - DAY

Svinya continues to follow Marcy's car. The traffic between them thins until Svinya is right on the other car's tail as they near a red light. Marcy's car runs the light, narrowly missing a car, and Svinya is forced to a stop.

SVINYA

Pizda!

Svinya waits for an opening, then guns it through the red light himself.

EXT. SECLUDED LOT - DAY

While continuing to wait, Papa's phone rings.

FABIAN (V.O.)

I'm sorry, but the deal's off. The buyer got cold feet.

PAPA

They got scared?

FABIAN (V.O.)

Yes, they got scared.

A smile crosses Papa's face.

PAPA

Never waste my time again.

Papa throws his cigarette to the ground, then gets back into his car.

EXT. WAREHOUSE DISTRICT - DAY

Svinya's car screams towards Marcy's car as they turn a corner into a deserted part of town. Svinya passes Marcy's car, then cuts it off to force it down a side street. The side street leads to a dead end, and Svinya spins his car sideways to block the exit.

Svinya leaves his vehicle with a baseball bat in his hands. He goes over to the driver's side of Marcy's car and recognizes a figure in a hoodie. He smashes the driver's side window with a bat, then reaches in to grab the hood, pulling with enough force to tear it halfway off. Under the hood is a STREET KID.

STREET KID
(panicking)
Fuck's your problem!?

Svinya yanks on the hood again, pulling the Kid's head through the open window.

SVINYA
Where's the girl?

STREET KID
Fuck if I know! She just gave me
her keys and told me to drive until
I got bored.

Svinya screams in frustration, then swings the baseball bat at the windshield of Marcy's car, cracking it.

EXT. STORAGE SHED - DAY

Papa drives up to a secluded storage shed on an empty side street. After stepping out of his car, he senses something and turns his head. He sees Marcy, who is holding Cindy on a leash as the dog snarls at Papa. Marcy releases the leash, and the dog rushes towards Papa before pouncing on him.

Papa lands on his hip and cries out. He is helpless, pinned to the ground by Cindy as Marcy approaches him.

PAPA
Ah, the officer. My son said he'd
had you killed, but I see he is not
even capable of that.
(beat)
Well, go ahead. Take your revenge.
If you dare.

MARCY
Revenge? Against you?

Marcy begins picking through Papa's pockets.

MARCY (CONT'D)
Fabian says Svinya killed Dean, and
that Nadia planned it.
(MORE)

MARCY (CONT'D)
 You just wrote some checks and
 played art collector.

Marcy pulls a flip phone and a set of keys out of Papa's pocket.

MARCY (CONT'D)
 So why would I waste a bullet on
 you?

PAPA
 (incensed)
 Fabian... told you this.

Papa punches Cindy in the snout, freeing him to pounce on Marcy. Marcy easily escapes, but not before Papa manages to steal the gun tucked into her pants. He then tries to aim the gun at her, but his hand is shaking too much. He can't keep her in his sights, even though Marcy is standing still and staring him down.

PAPA (CONT'D)
 (spitting)
 Run, child. Run!

MARCY
 Why would I run? I'm not afraid of
 you.

Papa tries to aim the gun again, but his arm is still shaking too much. Nearly sobbing with frustration, he turns the gun back on himself and presses the muzzle to his temple. He pulls the trigger, blowing a hole in his head before his body slumps to the floor.

MARCY (CONT'D)
 (to Cindy)
 Can you believe this?

Cindy is whimpering as Marcy pets her. Marcy then looks up and sees Dean entering the shed. She gets up and follows him in.

INT. STORAGE SHED - DAY

A storage shed filled with canvases covered in cheesecloth, lit only by the sunlight that enters through the door. Marcy walks among the canvases, grazing their cloth covers with her fingertips. A breeze whistles through the room, and the cloth covers shake as it passes over them.

As if animated by the wind, each of the canvases start to inhale and exhale shallow breaths.

Marcy walks up to one and observes it closely, seeing the cloth expand and then pull tight over its surface like a bag covering a human mouth. Marcy pulls the cover off of that canvas, and then another, seeing the following images: a brick wall in which several bricks have been replaced by cubes of meat, a wood floor with distended panels revealing bones and musculature beneath, a security camera with the lens removed to reveal a human eye.

Finally, Marcy sees Dean standing in front of a large canvas in the very rear of the room. The painting is of a life-sized door that is open just an inch, showing a sliver of some skinless organism within. Marcy walks towards the canvas and touches the knob of a now three-dimensional door. She pulls the door open, revealing a massive anatomical structure. Marcy and Dean look at each other, clasp their hands together, and then walk in.

They are immediately absorbed into the raw and grotesque architecture of the life form, moving within veins, organs, and bones, and passing through the stomach, the throat, and the mouth until they enter the head and the eye. Gazing through the windows of those eyes, they see the door of the shed. The eyes they're looking through then become Marcy's eyes, and Marcy again finds herself standing outside of the shed.

EXT. STORAGE SHED - DAY

A U-Haul truck arrives at the shed with an ecstatic Fabian in the driver's seat. He honks the horn twice before exiting the vehicle and walking up to Marcy.

FABIAN

Hey, creep! It looked like you had everything wrapped up, so I thought I'd come on down.

(RE: Papa)

What did you do, knock him out?

Fabian notices a splash of blood on the shed wall, along with a trail of brain matter near Papa's skull. Before Fabian can react, Marcy covers his mouth.

MARCY

Don't scream. And remember, this was your idea. You told me where to find him. You told me to follow him here.

Marcy uncovers Fabian's mouth.

FABIAN

I thought you were just going to tie him up!

MARCY

Well, next time be more specific.

Fabian is then distracted by the open shed. He sticks his head inside the door and looks around.

FABIAN

It's all here!

Marcy is fiddling with Papa's flip phone now. All of the entries are in Russian characters. She gives up and drops the phone down a sewer grate.

FABIAN (CONT'D)

I'm going to be rich!

MARCY

You're not the only one.

Marcy pulls out the envelope with Carole's address on it, then hands it to Fabian.

MARCY (CONT'D)

Let her keep anything she wants, then give her half of what you make selling the rest. Or else.

Fabian shoots a look at Papa's corpse.

FABIAN

Whatever you say.

(handing Marcy a slip of paper)

Here's Svinya's number too. I'm sorry I couldn't get Nadia's, but it changes each time she calls.

MARCY

That's fine. I was saving her for last anyway.

FABIAN

Look, far be it from me to question a young woman's quest for revenge, but maybe you shouldn't call Svinya.

MARCY

Why not?

FABIAN

Why not?!

(beat)

We're talking about a career killer
with more daddy issues than Jesus,
and you just sent his dad to
Russian hell. Aren't you afraid of
him?

MARCY

No.

FABIAN

Why not?

MARCY

Because he's the one who should be
afraid of me.

EXT. WAREHOUSE DISTRICT - DAY

Marcy's car is engulfed in flames. Svinya watches it burn as
the Street Kid runs away.

MARCY (V.O.)

Hello, Svinya. Do you remember when
we first met? You told me about your
art, meat. You told me about how
you would cut, cut away at the
beast, until there was nothing
more.

EXT. STORAGE SHED - DAY

Svinya kneels over Papa's corpse. The storage shed is empty,
and nobody else is around.

MARCY (V.O.)

Well, I wanted you to know that I
was listening. And that I've
learned to do what you do. Can you
feel it, Svinya? Can you feel me
cut, cut, cutting away at you?

EXT. FABIAN'S GALLERY - DAY

Svinya stands outside of Fabian's Gallery, which is now
abandoned.

MARCY (V.O.)

Well, now we've reached the end.
I'm going to give you an address,
and you're going to meet me there.
Not because of the art. And not
even because of your papa.

INT. SVINYA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Svinya sits on the edge of his bed in the dark, listening to his cell phone.

MARCY (V.O.)

But because you know it's time for
the final cut. And because pigs
don't get to choose how they die.
I'll see you soon.

INT. MARCY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Marcy, sitting at her desk, hangs up her phone. She puts it down, then turns around and sees Dean.

MARCY

How was that?

DEAN

Wonderful.

They kiss.

EXT. UNIVERSITY ROAD - NIGHT

An empty road outside a closed university building, beyond which lies a wooded area. Svinya is there, pacing back and forth while scanning both ends of the street for movement. The sound of chanting is soon heard in the distance, and as that sound grows louder a large group of ACTIVISTS becomes visible.

ACTIVISTS

Take back the night! Take back the
night!

Svinya allows the crowd to surround him as he observes each of the passersby. Suddenly he jolts backwards and clutches his hip. He has been stabbed, and the knife is still embedded in his abdomen.

Marcy has appeared in front of Svinya, now wearing grim reaper face paint under her hooded sweatshirt.

The crowd continues to flow past her and Svinya, acknowledging neither of them. With a grunt, Svinya pulls the knife from his abdomen. There is a quick spurt of blood, but Svinya seems unaffected. Holding the knife, he points the tip at Marcy.

SVINYA

Dead meat.

MARCY

God damnit.

Marcy starts running into the nearby woods, with Svinya slowly but intently following her. Brian steps out of the crowd as well, noticing Marcy as she disappears into the trees.

BRIAN

Marcy?

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

A secluded wooded area, where Cindy is tied to a tree. With Svinya right behind her, Marcy rushes towards Cindy and undoes her leash.

MARCY

(to Cindy)

Get him!

Svinya holds the knife out to defend himself, but Cindy completely ignores him as she runs past and runs into a bush.

MARCY (CONT'D)

(drawing her gun)

Mother fuck-

Svinya reaches Marcy before she can fire the gun, slashing her bandaged arm so that she drops the weapon. He then kicks her feet out from under her, making her fall.

Marcy is dazed, but she recovers quick enough to see the knife plunging down towards her face. Using both hands, she catches Svinya's forearm and stops the blade. Svinya continues forcing the knife down, though, until it is dangling in Marcy's open mouth. Gasping, Marcy's tongue accidentally licks the blade, drawing blood.

Svinya is then knocked off of Marcy, who now sees Brian standing in front of her with a large tree branch.

BRIAN

Marcy, what the hell?

Svinya punches Brian hard enough to knock him off of his feet. He then turns back to Marcy, only to see that she has picked up the gun. She fires, hitting Svinya in the neck. Svinya stumbles back in a daze. Svinya turns around, then lifts his mask off to reach the gushing wound and stop the bleeding with his hands.

Dean appears in front of Marcy and helps her up.

DEAN

Don't just let him die. KILL HIM.

Marcy tackles Svinya, bringing him to his knees. She then hits the back of his head with the gun, making him land face first in the dirt.

Marcy turns Svinya over, so that they're face to face. Svinya is missing most of his nose, and what remains is flattened cartilage resembling a snout. Marcy spits a mouthful of blood onto his face.

MARCY

This is for Dean.

SVINYA

(laughing deliriously)

Dean... Dean...

MARCY

What's so funny?

SVINYA

I gave Dean what he wanted.

Marcy begins beating Svinya's face with the muzzle of the gun. Meanwhile, Brian recovers nearby.

BRIAN

Marcy?

Marcy continues beating Svinya as Brian looks on in horror. Svinya is dead, but Marcy continues hitting him as his face becomes pulp. A chime then rings in his pocket.

INSERT - SVINYA'S PHONE

Next to Roxy's picture, a text message reads:

ROXY: Are you free?

BACK TO SCENE

INT. BRIAN'S CAR - NIGHT

A Prius, with Brian in the front seat and Marcy lounging in the back. Marcy is flipping through Svinya's phone.

MARCY

This guy had like five contacts...

INSERT - SVINYA'S PHONE

Marcy clicks on the name Nadia Sullivan, which pulls up an address.

BACK TO SCENE

MARCY (CONT'D)

(showing phone to Brian)

Take me here.

BRIAN

I'm taking you to a hospital!

Marcy points to her bandaged arm. The bandage has been cut open, revealing the wound underneath.

MARCY

What, for this? It was already like that. Mostly. It's fine. I'm fine.

BRIAN

What about the man you-

(beat)

Killed?

MARCY

That was self-defense.

BRIAN

You self-defended his skull open!

(beat)

Of course, when we talk to the police, I'll-

MARCY

Whoa, we can't talk to the police.

Marcy starts unbuckling her seatbelt, but Brian stops her.

BRIAN

Okay, okay!

(beat)

At least let me take you to the store.

(MORE)

BRIAN (CONT'D)
We can get you some fresh bandages,
and then we'll go wherever you
want.

Marcy looks at her filthy wound.

MARCY
Sure.

An awkward moment passes.

BRIAN
Are you okay leaving your leaving
your dog back there?

MARCY
She'll be fine.

BRIAN
She? That dog's a boy.

MARCY
No she isn't.

BRIAN
She has a dick.

MARCY
Well... nobody's perfect.

INT. SPEEDY-MART CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

Eugene is locking the front door to the store when Brian and Marcy arrive. Brian knocks on the door, and Eugene opens it.

EUGENE
What're you two-

Marcy walks past Eugene to a shelf with bandages and antiseptics.

MARCY
I'm going to use the sink real
quick.

EUGENE
(seeing Marcy's ragged
bandage)
Are you okay? Can I help?

MARCY
I'm fine. I know how to wrap a cut.

Marcy disappears into the store's break room.

EUGENE
(to Brian)
Brian-

Brian ignores Eugene and walks to the break room's doorway, peeking in on Marcy.

INT. SPEEDY-MART BREAK ROOM - NIGHT

Marcy is running tap water over her cut while preparing an antiseptic swab.

INT. SPEEDY-MART CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

Brian steps away from the doorway.

BRIAN
(whispering to Eugene)
Eugene, you'll need to hold the door while I call the cops.

EUGENE
The cops?!

BRIAN
Trust me, it's for Marcy's own good.

Marcy appears in the doorway, still wrapping up her arm in fresh gauze.

MARCY
For my own good?

BRIAN
Marcy, I'm just trying to protect you.

MARCY
From what?

BRIAN
Yourself!

MARCY
Myself?! Maybe I like being myself. And maybe being myself is more important than being safe.

Brian steps up to Marcy and blocks her path.

BRIAN

Either way, I can't let you go.

Eugene shoves Brian out of the way. Brian falls into a pyramid of paper towels.

EUGENE

(to Brian)

Yes, you will.

(to Marcy)

Get out of here, kid.

Marcy runs to the store's front door before turning around.

MARCY

(to Eugene)

Thanks. You were a great boss.

EUGENE

I know.

As Marcy leaves, Eugene helps Brian up off of the floor.

BRIAN

Eugene, what the fuck?

EUGENE

I'm sorry I had to do that, Brian,
Sometimes, though, you have to let
your friends make their mistakes.

BRIAN

But she killed a guy! Right in
front of me!

Eugene's expression of self-satisfaction slowly morphs into a look of horror.

EUGENE

(grabbing Brian by the
shoulders)

Next... time... you say that...
FIRST!

EXT. SPEEDY-MART CONVENIENCE STORE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Marcy runs through the parking lot to a bus stop. A bus approaches from the distance.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

A sparsely filled bus slowly moving down a street. Marcy and Dean sit next to each other in the back. They're holding hands, and Marcy is resting her head on Dean's shoulder as she begins to fall asleep.

Marcy's head leans over an inch further, and Dean disappears as Marcy falls over and bangs her head against a bus window. Jolted awake, she rubs her head in discomfort as she looks at the bus's next displayed stop. She pulls a cord, signalling to get off.

INT. NADIA'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

A spotless bathroom with marble counters, a jacuzzi tub, and a wide vanity beside a vast sink. Nadia sits at the vanity, looking at her immaculately made up face. She begins rubbing makeup remover on her skin, until the makeup smudges and the mascara around her eyes become two large, dark circles. She then covers her face in a steaming washcloth.

INT. NADIA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Marcy walks into the lobby towards the Guard's desk, with her hood pulled up.

GUARD

Good evening. Please sign in.

Marcy ignores the Guard as she begins to walk past his desk. The Guard gets up from his chair and tries to stop Marcy.

GUARD (CONT'D)

(reaching for Marcy's arm)

Hey, you can't just-

The guard stops as he notices the bandage peaking out of Marcy's sleeve. He then looks at her face under the hood, which is still wearing the Grim Reaper makeup and is now contorted into a wicked expression. He's horrified.

Marcy kicks the Guard in the shin, knocking him over. As the Guard reaches for the gun on his hip, Marcy grabs the desk phone and hits him over the head with it, knocking him unconscious. She then unholsters his gun while looking towards a bank of elevators.

INT. NADIA'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Nadia removes the soiled washcloth from her face. She looks in the mirror at her bare skin, which is bare and red from the friction of the towel. Using a fingertip, she traces the path of a wrinkle across her forehead. A sigh of resignation escapes her mouth.

From another room in the apartment, a doorbell rings.

EXT. NADIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Marcy steps out of an elevator into a long hallway of identical doors. She walks past a few before stopping at one, which bears two nametags: SULLIVAN and HAWTHORNE.

Marcy rings the doorbell to the apartment with one hand while holding the guard's gun in the other. As the door begins to open, Marcy lifts the gun and places her finger on the trigger. When she sees the person standing at the door, though, her finger falls from the trigger and she drops the gun. It's the REAL DEAN, unshaven and wearing a t-shirt.

Marcy turns her head to the right and sees FAKE DEAN, well-groomed and wearing Tucker's clothes like before. He looks flustered.

FAKE DEAN

Well, don't look at me.

The REAL DEAN grabs Marcy by her collar and hurls her into the apartment. He then picks up the gun before going inside and slamming the door shut.

INT. NADIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Marcy is sitting on the floor in a daze. Fake Dean is crouching by her side and breathing heavily, while the Real Dean points a gun at her. Nadia enters in a bathrobe, still patting her face dry.

NADIA

(tenderly draping herself
over the Real Dean)

Aren't you supposed to be dead?

REAL DEAN

Sure, as far as everyone else
knows.

NADIA
 (kissing the Real Dean on
 the cheek)
 I'm talking about her.

REAL DEAN
 (staring at Marcy)
 I think I recognize her...

NADIA
 (offended by the Real
 Dean's lack of interest)
 That little thing is your biggest
 fan. Svinya told us she was looking
 for you. He also said she was dead.

REAL DEAN
 (to Marcy)
 So, that was you.
 (congratulatory)
 You liked me before I killed
 myself.

NADIA
 (walking over to a
 landline)
 I'm giving that pig a call.

REAL DEAN
 (to Marcy)
 As a fan, you should appreciate
 what I've done more than anyone
 else.

MARCY
 (shrieking)
 Who are you?!

FAKE DEAN
 He isn't me.

REAL DEAN
 Baby, don't you know?

FAKE DEAN
 He's real.

REAL DEAN
 I'm Dean Danvers.

NADIA
 (holding phone)
 Dean Hawthorne.
 (MORE)

NADIA (CONT'D)

You picked the name. You should remember to use it.

REAL DEAN

(annoyed)

I'm talking about Dean DANVERS. The man who made art out of death, until even his death was art.

(to Marcy)

But do you know who you are?

MARCY

Who... who am I?

REAL DEAN

You're just the opportunity I've been waiting for.

The Real Dean turns around and shoots Nadia, who immediately collapses.

Marcy starts to scream, but then the Real Dean points the gun at her again.

REAL DEAN (CONT'D)

Shut up! And listen. An old femme fatale fakes a young artist's death, so she can have him as her boytoy while making a mint off his work. But then his stalker finds him, and soon the creep and the crone are dead at each other's hands. And only the artist lives to tell his story.

(beat)

That's pretty good, right?

MARCY

Why are you telling me this?

REAL DEAN

Because this idea could be my masterpiece, but it's not a masterpiece if it's secret. I need to share it with someone like you. Someone who'll appreciate it.

MARCY

There are just two things wrong with that story.

REAL DEAN

What?

MARCY

You're not as young as you think you are. And that old lady's not dead yet.

The Real Dean turns around and sees Nadia still lying on the floor. Marcy takes the opportunity to barrel past him down a hallway. The Real Dean points the gun at her, but he doesn't fire.

REAL DEAN

Ugh. If you make me shoot you in the back, it won't look like I was defending myself!

INT. NADIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Marcy steps through the bedroom door, where Fake Dean is sitting on the bed and hyperventilating. Marcy checks on him, but he waves her off. Real Dean's footsteps are audible outside of the room.

REAL DEAN (O.S.)

I've been planning this for a while, you know. Stockpiling my own blood for years. But a few key details eluded me. Finding the right location. Falsifying dental records. Butchering a homeless guy. It took Nadia and Svinya to make my dream come true.

The Fake Dean gestures for Marcy to hide under the bed. As she does, he stands at the doorway as if to block the way. The Real Dean appears at the door with his gun drawn. The closer the Real Dean gets, the sicker Fake Dean becomes until he is hunched over at the Real Dean's feet.

REAL DEAN (CONT'D)

But make no mistake. This was always *my* dream. All of you were just living in it.

From under the bed, Marcy sees the Fake Dean coughing on the floor as the Real Dean takes another step forward, planting his foot on the other Dean's back. The Fake Dean's back collapses under the Real Dean's foot, until the foot plunges through the Fake Dean's whole body. The Real Dean then takes another step forward, so that both his legs are inside of the Fake Dean. The Fake Dean cries out in agony.

Still lying on the floor, the Fake Dean's body liquefies and becomes a puddle of flesh at the Real Dean's feet. Fake Dean's face is still visible within it, screaming in pain.

REAL DEAN (CONT'D)

This is a four bedroom apartment.
How many hiding places do you think
there are?

The puddle of flesh sticks to the Real Dean's feet as he walks around the room. While he moves to the closet, the flesh crawls up the Real Dean's legs, hips, and chest, until it covers his whole body up to his neck.

REAL DEAN (CONT'D)

It's just a process of elimination.

The puddle of flesh completely wraps around the Real Dean, then expands around him. He now resembles the Slug, but this time the Slug has two mouths.

SLUG'S FIRST MOUTH

(speaking with two voices)

And it's your turn to be
eliminated.

The Slug turns away from the closet towards the bed. It licks its lips while sliding towards the mattress, before stopping to peer underneath.

SLUG'S SECOND MOUTH

Marcy, run!

Marcy bursts up from beneath the mattress and flips it onto the Slug.

As the Slug hurls the mattress off itself, Marcy escapes from the room.

INT. NADIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Marcy gets to the front door and begins opening its locks. Before she can open the door, the Slug crashes into her. As Marcy recovers from the blow, the Slug pins her to the wall. For a moment, it flickers out of existence as is replaced by Real Dean, who is using one arm to hold Marcy and the other to hold his gun to her head. Then Marcy blinks, and the Slug is back.

SLUG'S FIRST MOUTH

The artist who came back from the
dead.

(MORE)

SLUG'S FIRST MOUTH (CONT'D)

That's how they'll remember me. But
who's going to remember you?

SLUG'S SECOND MOUTH

I'm sorry.

MARCY

I'm not.

There's a bang, and then a loud howl from the Slug. It turns around to see Nadia pointing a small handgun at him. There is a bullet wound between her shoulder and her breast, which is turning her white bathrobe red.

NADIA

Why do they always drop you for
someone younger?

Nadia becomes woozy as the Slug, now enraged, moves towards her. Marcy looks back to the door for a second, but then decides to leap onto the Slug. They both fall into a glass table. Marcy then begins slamming the Slug's head into the floor.

MARCY

(as she smashes the Slug's
head into the floor)

You! Used! To! Be! So! Cool!

With the final smash, the flesh around the Slug bursts like a water balloon. Afterwards, only the Real Dean is left. He is bleeding profusely from his head.

REAL DEAN

Please. Don't kill me.

Marcy punches the Real Dean in the face, knocking him out.

MARCY

Why should I bother?

Marcy gets up, then looks at Nadia. Nadia is pointing her gun at Marcy.

NADIA

(woozy)

It always ends like this, doesn't
it? There's always less to them
than it seems.

MARCY

Artists?

NADIA
(smiling)
Sure.
(beat)
Now get out of here.

MARCY
You're letting me go?

NADIA
You've earned your second chance.

MARCY
What about you?

NADIA
(nodding off)
My chances are all used up.

Marcy gives Nadia a sympathetic nod, then walks out.

EXT. NADIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Marcy hears the ding of an approaching elevator, which makes her run towards a nearby stairwell. As she does so, policemen approach the door to Nadia's apartment and give it a hard knock. The Real Dean yells, and then a gunshot pierces the hall. The policeman closest to the door kicks it open.

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Marcy runs down the stairs.

EXT. NADIA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Marcy exits the building amidst the sound of approaching sirens. She ducks into a nearby alleyway, then walks through the alley before stopping at a set of trash cans. The Fake Dean is waiting there, leaning against a wall.

MARCY
I guess this is it, huh?

FAKE DEAN
I'm sorry that I couldn't be real
for you.

MARCY
It's okay. I loved the lie.

Marcy and Fake Dean almost kiss, but before they make contact he disappears. Marcy looks around for a moment, then flips up her hood and walks out of the alley into the night.

INT. MARCY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Marcy's Roommate hears doorbell ring. She runs to the front door of the building and begins to open it.

ROOMMATE

Marcy?

Marcy's Roommate opens the door to find Cindy Sherman, waiting patiently on the doorstep. The Roommate pokes her head outside to look around, but nobody else seems to be around.

INT. FABIAN'S NEW GALLERY - DAY

A large and luxurious gallery space filled with perplexing works of art. Fabian, who is wearing an impeccably tailored suit, is charming a wealthy looking crowd.

INT. CAROLE'S HOUSE - DAY

Carole is hanging True Love up on her wall, adjusting and readjusting it to her satisfaction. She finally stops, as if pleased with the placement. She then bursts into tears.

INT. SPEEDY-MART CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

Eugene is turning the store's lights on when Brian enters through the front door.

BRIAN

Eugene, you better see this.

EXT. SPEEDY-MART CONVENIENCE STORE

Across the back wall of the store, Eugene and Brian find a painting of a massive eye. It is exactly like the one Marcy saw in the road before. In the lower corner of the painting, there is a signature that simply reads STALKER.

EUGENE

Who's Stalker?

FADE OUT.