

25 / 8

by

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(working title BUG)

EXT. A RIVER, A ROAD, A WOODS - NIGHT

On the banks of a RIVER a CROWD OF TEENAGERS has a BONFIRE blazing. There must be twenty joined around it, and the mood is one of festive anticipation.

Behind them is a TWO-LANE BLACKTOP running along dark WOODS. But this is not where their attention lies.

Nor is it on the clearing where they've gathered, despite the odd presence of the burned hulk of a WRECKED AMBULANCE. Overgrown and rusted. It's COVERED WITH FLICKERING CANDLES, so it must mean something, but what the kids are looking at is across the river.

There the LIGHTS of RIVERTON, a small all-American town, shine. A TALL WHITE STEEPLE is most prominent there, brightly lit, its bells TOLLING the hour.

The teens count with it in mounting enthusiasm.

TEENS

NINE... TEN... ELEVEN... TWELVE!

The tolling stops. Everyone falls silent in this midnight hour.

There's only the SOUND of the river now.

The kids, players in a drama uniquely their own, wait, wait - until the most handsome boy there (BRIAN O'NEIL, 15) rolls back the curtain on our drama.

BRANDON

Let the day begin!

ALL OF THE LIGHTS IN TOWN GO OUT. Now there are only dim STREETLIGHTS, and the stark white point of the STEEPLE, still LIT against the starry sky.

TEENS

AAAAAaaaaaaand!

THE STEEPLE GOES DARK AS WELL.

CHEERS, WHISTLES. LAUGHTER. The timed lights do the same thing every night, but tonight's special. It's the night when a legendary spirit is said to walk out of myth and into their lives.

MCU ON FOUR BOYS - all 15 (as of this minute) - ALEX Dunkelmann (wiry, Brian Grazer hair), JAY CHAN (Asian, likable and smart), ADAM "BUG" HELLER (a picture of innocent wonder), and JEROME BROWN (BIG, African/American, blind).

They along with everybody else are staring at the river.

HOLD ON THE DARK, SPEEDING WATER -

BRANDON (O.S)
 (telling a ghost story)
 Fifteen years ago tonight The
 Riverdale Slasher swore he'd return
 to kill all children born the night
 he died. Only on their birthday
 could he come. Seven children were
 born in Riverdale that night.

He looks around at them all - and all are making ghost-story
 OOOOOOooooos until he cuts them off with a magisterial sweep
 of his hand. Silence.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
 These are the names of the
 Riverdale Seven -

As he calls the names, the kids step forward and form a line,
 linking hands. There are two of the seven not noted yet. One
 is BRITTANY CUNNINGHAM (15, blond, smart, ambitious).

BRANDON (CONT'D)
 Brittany Cunningham, Jay Chan, Alex
 Dunkelman, Bug Heller, Jerome
 Brown, Penelope Bryte -

Everybody says in unison -

ALL KIDS TOGETHER
 Who likes to watch!

CUT TO the 7th of the 7, PENELOPE (15, Flaming red hair,
 intense eyes) - indeed watching them all from afar -
 unamused.

BACK TO BRANDON -

BRANDON
 And last but not least -

Everybody shouts his name -

KIDS TOGETHER
 Brandon O'Neil!

Applause in celebration of his perfection.

BRANDON
 (Elvis)
 Thank you, thank you very much.
 (MORE)

BRANDON (CONT'D)
 (back to ghost story
 voice)

We now summon him, one time for
 each of the seven. If he does not
 appear within seven seconds, he
 must wait another year!

He turns to the river and calls out -

BRANDON (CONT'D)
 If you are there, O Slasher, make
 yourself known!
 (he sticks up his hands
 and puts a finger up for
 each count)
 Make yourself known, make yourself
 known -

And the KIDS JOIN IN -

KIDS/BRANDON
 Make yourself known, make yourself
 known, make yourself known, make
 yourself known!

They all start the backward count. We CUT TO VARIOUS SHOTS OF
 THE KIDS during this. They're faces showing goofy defiance,
 and a few, a bit of fear.

BRANDON / KIDS
 Seven, six, five, four, three, two,
 ONE!

They all wait. Nothing rises from the river.

CUT BACK TO THE KIDS, CHEERING, BOOING, LAUGHING.

BRANDON
 May the Riverdale Seven survive
 another year!

KIDS
 SO MAY IT BE!

VARIOUS SHOTS SHOW THE SEVEN - getting shoved, hugged,
 whacked - and, for each one, getting a GLOSTICK NECKLACE
 wrapped round his or her neck. There's one necklace left
 over. Someone hangs it off the side mirror of the wreck.

As the applause fades we become aware that a GROUP of the
 kids has started singing a low, MINOR CHORD.

Among them are CHANDELLE BROWN(18, African/American and striking), and a Latino, very street-smart girl (MARIA RAMIREZ 18) They and the rest keep the chord going on and on, no singer breathing when another does. It's seamless and spooky.

Then Maria and Chandelle step out of the chorus and stand silent, heads bowed, a few feet from the rest.

No one breathes - the sense of anticipation is great, and several are glancing at watches or cell phone displays. Then all eyes go to Brandon. He cries out darkly -

BRANDON
Fear ye the Monster!

Immediately the kids respond - putting all their pent-up emotion into it -

KIDS TOGETHER
(loudly)
FEAR YE THE MONSTER!

Chandelle immediately raises her head and starts singing a haunting, child-like song that starts with that warning, backed the ghostly CHORUS.

CHANDELLE
Fear ye the monster
Born with two heads
One makes you happy
One makes you dead.

The CHORUS sings a repeat, as the kids look around at the trees. Something scary is hovering, it seems. We just don't know what, and they just don't know -

ALEX
(to Jay)
Where's it at?

JAY
Patience, Grasshopper.

BRANDON (O.S.)
FEAR YE THE MONSTER!

WIDE ON ALL -

KIDS IN UNISON
FEAR YE THE MONSTER!

Chandelle's head goes down, Maria's comes up, and she sings the second verse -

MARIA

Fear ye the Monster
His hands and his feet
Two that will grab you
Two that are fleet

As she sings the increasingly ominous 2nd verse, there's movement in the trees near the river. Then - as the chorus sings the echo of Maria's stanza -

A MAN EMERGES FROM THE DARKNESS OF THE TREES.

There are GASPS, CHEERS, YELLS - this is no ordinary man. He stands six or seven feet tall and has TWO PAPIER-MACHE HEADS - the right one white, with wide-open painted eyes and happy painted smile. The left one is its opposite - red glaring eyes and a mouth twisted in an evil sneer.

ON PENELOPE - watching. She hears the CHEERS for the monster, but she doesn't smile.

BACK WITH THE MAIN GROUP -

ON JAY - getting clapped on the back -

ALEX

This is the best one yet, Jay!

JAY

(grins)
Fun fun fun.

ON BRANDON - SCREAMING -

BRANDON

FEAR YE THE MONSTER!

The thing starts coming at them - there's LAUGHTER and SCREAMS as the kids dodge away -

KIDS IN UNISON

FEAR YE THE MONSTER!!

Maria's head stays up - Chandelle's rises - and both girls and the choir sing together -

GIRLS/CHOIR

Fear ye the Monster
Born with two heads
Which one is evil?
Which one is dead?!

The body beneath the two heads is cloaked by black cloth all the way to the ground, so the man seems to float, which is eerie, given his huge bloated body - it's ten feet around.

And now TWO LONG MACHE ARMS RISE out of it, the right arm open wide, as if offering comfort, the left arm raised over the monster's head with a GIANT KNIFE in its hand. The knife is clad in reflective Mylar, so it CATCHES THE FIRELIGHT in a most frightening way.

ON Bug'S FACE - electrified - eyes wide - full of wonder and fear and a heady intoxication he won't be able to comprehend till his journey's end.

THE LONG KNIFE is STABBING at the WHITE HEAD -

ON PENELOPE - tears on her face.

THE RIGHT ARM is trying to stop it - THE MONSTROUS MAN starts weaving, lurching.

CHEERS, LAUGHS, SCREAMS OF DELIGHT - as

HANDS - real KIDS' HANDS - poke out from the black cloth, trying for balance. Things clearly are getting out of balance here. And then SOMEONE cries in alarm -

BRANDON

COPS!

AN APPROACHING SIREN sends the place into giddy chaos - everybody running for cover. The giant man's arms flail and the whole creature collapses, KIDS spilling out from beneath the black cloth. PAPIER-MACHE HEADS crunch to the ground as everyone abandons the thing, running with the rest.

AN UNMARKED COP CAR ROARS INTO THE CLEARING.

Kids take to the woods or run off along the river - with YELLS and CHEERS and LAUGHTER.

IN THE WOODS

With the LIGHTS OF THE ARRIVING CAR STREAMING THROUGH THE TREES - Bug, Alex and Jay watch from cover. Jay and Alex laughing their asses off.

ALEX

That was the best one yet, Jay.
Genius.

JAY

Fun fun fun - I gotta get home or
My grannie will ground me.
(MORE)

JAY (CONT'D)

See you tomorrow in Biology. Good luck, you two!

He ducks off towards the bridge across the river. Bug and Alex run in the opposite direction, into the woods.

BACK AT THE ROAD. The cops (Lt. Frank PATERSON, 48 and Lt. Bobby LAKE, 41) make no effort to pursue. They eye the bonfire, the two-headed heap, the rusted ambulance dancing with CANDLES. It's all starting to fade under a haze of smoke and ground fog, like it's already slipping into memory.

LAKE

Fire keeps ghosts away. That's what they say.

Paterson's says nothing.

LAKE (CONT'D)

It's just once a year, Frank. It means a lot to the kids.

Paterson looks away from the ambulance.

PATERSON

Once a year's once too much.

The two return to the car. Paterson has a noticeable limp.

AT THE AMBULANCE. The minute the cops are gone, SOMEONE approaches through the SMOKE. A wraith? No, just

PENELOPE.

She stops at the Driver's door. Takes her glowing necklace off the mirror and hangs it around her neck. Then she sits down in the grass, leaning her back against the door.

MCU ON HER - eyes watching this way and that, sad and fierce at the same time. And says quietly -

PENELOPE

God watches out for me, Bug. I watch out for you. 25/8.

Then just sits there, watching the river flow into the firelight, then back into darkness again.

PLUNGE TO BLACK:

TITLE UP:

25/8

HOLD, THEN

TITLES FADE
FADE UP FROM
BLACK ON

INT. PLENKOV MASTER BATH AND BEDROOM - NIGHT

A WALL-LENGTH MIRROR over a beautiful GRANITE COUNTER and twin sinks. Upscale appointments, top-of-the-line hardware.. Modern, clean, in excellent taste. on one side, precisely arranged shaving supplies and a tooth brush. On the other side, products for skin and hair in a jumble. This the most human side, and even more of a human touch is a SONOGRAM, scotch-taped to the mirror. A baby's curled, ghostly image clearly.

There's a 2nd MIRROR BEHIND CAMERA, and with a SUBTLE DOLLY MOVE, we have the optical illusion we're looking into a GLASS TUNNEL that for certain leads to a separate reality.

O.S. a TV serves up THE EVENING NEWS.

TV NEWSCASTER (O.S.)
Until tonight's murder, the sixth
in all, there's been no clue as to
who this killer might be.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

TV SCREEN. B.G. we glimpse a pleasant bedroom. BOTTOM FRAME, there's the foot of a comfy bed.

NEWS ANCHOR
But now the Riverton Ripper and the
knife he uses have been caught on
tape! Our exclusive coverage begins
after these messages.

A COMMERCIAL STARTS - OUR SHOT MOVES UP THE BED - UP THE SHAPE OF A BODY UNDER THE COVERS, UNTIL IT STOPS ON A PREGNANT TUMMY.

The tummy jumps at its summit.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Whoa...

THE WOMAN'S HAND pulls back the covers. A TINY HAND pushes
against her skin.

CLOSE ON SARAH PLENKOV, 29 - as happy a woman as can be, nine months pregnant, entranced by the life within her.

SARAH

We're gonna name you Adam. That
okay with you?

The baby KICKS. Sarah beams.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I'll take that as a "yes."

INT. BASEMENT WORKSHOP - NIGHT

ABEL PLENKOV, 33, a meticulous man with a powerful build, is carefully painting the name "Adam" on the side of a just-finished HOBBYHORSE. He's using the same blood red he used for the head and saddle.

Sarah appears on the stairs.

SARAH

He did that hand thing again, Abel.
You should've seen.

ABEL

He served his time. He wants out.

SARAH

(smiles)
Soon.
(re. hobby horse)
That's fantastic.

ABEL

Hope he likes it.

He puts it aside to dry, next to a beautiful DOLL HOUSE, also his work. Over the house's door is the name "Leah." The letters are black, but the careful lettering the same.

SARAH

And the house is beautiful.

ABEL

Gives her something to obsess about
besides the baby.

SARAH

She'll be okay once they can play together. Come to bed, okay? The news is making me want to nail doors shut.

She ducks back upstairs.

Abel peels off his latex gloves. They glisten red with paint, but his hands are clean. He hits the LIGHTS and heads out.

That's when it happens.

In the dark he trips and crashes to the floor. Worse, he hits his head on the bench on the way down.

He stays down a few long seconds, dazed, rubbing the spot he hit. Then he sits up. Wondering what he could have tripped over in this neat-as-a-pin shop.

The culprit is a child's STUFFED BUNNY. Floppy eared, lovingly worn. Abel smiles.

ABEL

(to self)

Wait til there's two.

Abel pulls it from under the bench, but as he does, there's a brief SCRAPE of metal against concrete. Abel looks under the bench. There's something SHINY back there.

He reaches and pulls out a WICKED-LOOKING FOLDING KNIFE. In the military it would be called a Tactical Knife. Perfect for, say, taking out a sentry.

Abel gets up and turns the light back on. The blade's wet with red stuff that's now on his hands. And it has a single word etched on it.

VENGEANCE.

The lettering's in the same distinctive style as that on the hobby horse and doll house.

WOMAN'S VOICE

(whispering - from Abel)

Is that blood?!

Abel claps his hand over his mouth. Then takes it away.

ABEL

Who said that?

WOMAN'S VOICE

Sorry! But -

ABEL

Not another word!

In this flash of anger, Abel folds the knife and shoves it in his pocket - all in one swift move. To all appearances, it's done without Abel even conscious of doing it. Nor of what skill he demonstrates, or that he's done it left-handed, even though he's been right-handed since birth.

ABEL (CONT'D)

We have rules here. You talk at Doctor Blake's, period. What if Sarah were to hear? What would she think?

He listens to make sure there are no further outbursts. And while he does, we ask ourselves, *what the hell just happened?* When Abel spoke in the woman's voice spoke, everything about him changed. Posture, gender, person - it was like watching a great actor transform himself completely.

But Abel wasn't acting. Nor controlling the voice. In fact, from his reaction, this all is spontaneous, has never happened to him at home. It seems to have shaken him badly.

He puts a shaking hand over his eyes and we

GO TO BLACK:

COME BACK UP ON:

INT. PLENKOV BATHROOM / MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Abel uncovers his eyes just enough to blink. He's at the brightly-lit counter we saw in our FIRST SHOT, in front of that big mirror.

He just doesn't remember how he got there.

ABEL

Please God, say it's a bad dream.

A new voice pops up -

MALE VOICE

(whisper)

What's under your hand?

Abel starts - takes his hand away from his face and sees a smear of BLOOD beneath his eye. He swipes it away and hisses back -

ABEL
No talking means you too.

ANOTHER GUY'S VOICE
What about the knife?

A completely different voice and accent.

ABEL
(hasn't a clue)
What knife?

3RD GUY'S VOICE
I think I've heard someone.

A NEW WOMAN'S VOICE
Moving around in the dark when we were asleep. I've told you, Abel.

Abel, bouncing between characters, slams back to his own -

ABEL
You were having a nightmare.

NEW WOMAN
My nightmare's that you haven't listened. Do you know who that is, moving around when we sleep?

Abel hangs his head.

ABEL
Maybe we're all imagining it.

The lameness of this excuse releases a torrent of VOICES - and there is a sense of fear becoming palpable in the room - even though it's only Abel there, really.

1ST WOMAN
Dr. Blake said call him if you think there's someone we don't know. He was very clear about that - call immediately.

Abel throws up his hands -

ABEL
Okay. Okay fine.

He turns to leave, but stops immediately. And then changes right before our eyes. It's hard to describe, except to say that every trace of what's ordinary, compromised, in denial and uncomfortable disappears from him. Utterly. Abel Plenkov has vanished, and when he turns back to camera, he's a force to be reckoned with - his NEW VOICE smooth and sinuous and absolutely evil. Remember the telephone voice in SCREAM?

Evil like *that*.

EVIL VOICE
Call Doctor Blake? You do that and
I'll kill your wife and kid.

There's a metallic SNICK.

Just like that, the knife is out of the Abel's pocket and in his left hand.

Abel drops it, horrified. Looks around for back-up.

ABEL
Guys?

No answer. They've deserted. *And he's in a confrontation with someone he didn't know existed a minute ago.*

ABEL (CONT'D)
Who are you?

EVIL VOICE
(amused)
Look in the mirror.

Able does. Who *is* that? It's him, and yet it's not.

It's at that very moment that Sarah darts in and flings her arms around his neck! He damn near has a coronary. We do too.

SARAH
Sorry! Just need a hug.

Abel holds on, dazed. She buries her face in his neck.

SARAH (CONT'D)
That knife's disgusting.

Abel goes rigid.

ABEL
What?

She smiles spookily.

SARAH

The Ripper's. Caught on camera.

Abel eases sideways to block any glimpse of the knife. It's inches away on the counter. Her hug gotten, Sarah heads back for the bedroom, but with a gentle warning as she does.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Get that paint off your hands
before bed, young man.

Abel looks at his hand - bloody where he held the knife.

Head reeling, he hides the thing in a waste basket beneath the counter and washes his hands as fast as he can. It's hard to get the damn stuff off!

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

Abel - they're showing it again!

INT. PLENKOV MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

TV GRAPHICS - RIVERTON RIPPER BREAKTHROUGH.

ON ABEL AS HE ENTERS WITH CLEAN HANDS.

ANCHORMAN

The break police have been praying
for is here. A security camera has
caught our first clue.

SECURITY CAM FOOTAGE. A SHADOWY FIGURE pursues a woman down an ally, throwing her to the ground not ten feet from lens. She flings her arms up. The killer raises his knife.

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

Police say the killer's almost
certainly male, in his late 30's or
early 40's. It was too dark to see
his face - but here is the
breakthrough clue -

THE IMAGE FREEZES AND THEY ZOOM IN ON THE KNIFE. Its BLADE perfectly caught to reveal a word on its blade.

"VENGEANCE."

There can't be a doubt. It's the knife that Abel just hid.

FLASHBACK - THE KNIFE STABS - THE WOMAN SCREAMS -

ABEL JOLTS ON THE BED. He switches the TV off.

ABEL
Sorry. I just can't...

SARAH
What kind of man could do that?

ABEL
A monster.
(out of the blue)
I'm going to check on Leah.

CUT TO:

INT. PLENKOV UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Raking angle, to the stairs to the first floor. We hear Abel before we see him.

VOICES (O.S.)
Abel, please! You -

ABEL
Shut up.

He comes into sight, a bit out of breath. He's carrying the DOLL HOUSE.

ABEL (CONT'D)
(glaring at the darkness)
What do you think I am, anyway?
Stay away from me. I didn't hear you when I needed you. Cowards.

He stops at the door and pulls himself together. Wouldn't be good for Leah to see him fighting. Always appear calm and neat before her. She's excitable enough as it is. He sweeps hair from his eyes. Straightens. Soon he looks nearly sane.

INT. LEAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

HE ENTERS THE DARKENED ROOM of his daughter, LEAH, 4. She's sleeping like an angel. He sets the house on her dresser top. It has a cord. He plugs it in and the LIGHTS COME ON INSIDE THE HOUSE. It's a lovely sight. If you were small enough, you'd want to live there.

Abel is pleased. He turns to the bed.

Leah's pillow has fallen. He retrieves it from the floor. His right hand goes to retrieve it, but his left hand gets there first.

Abel goes to put it under her head, but stops with it just above her face. His right hand brushes a wisp of hair from her eyes.

ABEL

Remember I loved you, Leah.

Oh my god, is he going to suffocate his own kid? He's looking at her with frightening intensity!

He switches hands. Makes his left lift her head, and do it gently, too. With his right he slips the pillow beneath.

INSERT - LEAH'S FINGERS close around his thumb.

BACK WIDE - Abel wraps his hand around hers. It's a moment of peace. Then his face snaps to evil.

EVIL VOICE

She dies if you tell.

Abel instantly is back, horrified. He lurches up, rushes to the door and pushes the lock - *on the inside knob.*

INT. PLENKOV UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Abel tests the lock. It holds solid. He turns.

ABEL

Okay. Make me go get the key.

There's no answer. He smiles grimly.

ABEL (CONT'D)

Nothing to say? Because you know.
You don't have free will. I do. And
no one's gonna hurt my child.

EVIL VOICE

So why'd you lock yourself out?

The response was instantaneous, and cuts to the bone. This guy seems to be one step ahead of Abel on everything. Abel knows he's got to act - and quickly.

CUT TO -

INT. ABEL'S SHOP - NIGHT

Abel rushes to a cordless phone on the wall next to his bench. But the moment he touches it, he convulses so violently he loses his balance.

He gets his left hand out in time to catch himself - but at the expense of the just-painted hobby horse.

His hand's planted right on its saddle.

He pulls it away and looks.

Perfect hand print on the saddle, and a hand painted red.

EVIL VOICE

Final warning, Abel. Keep quiet and you live in peace. Rat on me and you live in a house of blood. That what you want?

ABEL

I want you to get out of me!

EVIL VOICE

That's not gonna happen. Put the phone down before somebody gets hurt.

Abel backs up with the phone clenched in his right hand.

ABEL

You're not going to hurt anybody.
Not on my watch.

EVIL VOICE

Your watch? I've killed six times
in six weeks on your watch.

ABEL

I'll call Dr. Blake and he'll call
the police and the police will
throw you in jail.

EVIL VOICE

Not before this night is out.

ABEL

Go to hell.

EVIL VOICE

Waste of time. Everyone's dead down
there already.

Abel closes his eyes. And he makes his decision. He grabs the phone and dials.

While it RINGS, Abel hunches his shoulders, expecting an onslaught. It doesn't come. But neither does Blake.

DR. BLAKE (MACHINE)
 This is Doctor William Blake.
 Please leave your message at the
 tone. If your call's urgent, page
 me at 555 1524.

BEEP. Shit! Abel rattles off a quick messages just in case.

ABEL
 Doctor Blake? It's Abel - we need
 to talk - it's very urgent.

Hangs up - calls Blake's pager - punches in his own number -
 hangs up.

Then he does the only thing he can. Stares at the phone. He
 sees he's left it half red from the paint on his hand.

He wipes his hand on a rag and waits.

CAMERA PULLS BACK, BACK, INTO DARKNESS, ABEL in his shop in
 the only island of light, getting smaller and smaller.

THE SOUND OF THE RIVER COMES UP, GETTING LOUDER AND LOUDER.

CUT TO BLACK

AND THE RIVER IS GONE. As if hacked off by a knife.

UP ON -

INT. PLENKOV MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Abel is standing over the bed, looking down at his sleeping
 wife. Noting the rise and fall of her breath. Her hair across
 the pillow. The swell of her belly and its promise of a son.

Tears well in his eyes.

He eases onto the bed and sits, back against the headboard,
 eyes on the telephone just there on his nightstand.

Holding on tight.

Waiting.

CUT TO:

INT. WORKSHOP.

WIDE ON SHOP. Neat and orderly, as usual. Until we PAN TO THE
 WORKBENCH.

The cordless is there. Smashed to pieces.

A TELEPHONE RINGS LOUDLY.

INT. PLENKOV BEDROOM - NIGHT

Abel jolts awake - grabs the phone.

ABEL
(whispered)
Hello?

VOICE (FILTER)
Abel? This is Doctor Blake. Is
everything okay?

Abel swings his feet out and sits on the bed's edge,
whispering so he won't wake Sarah.

ABEL
I wish it was, but no. I tripped
and fell and hit my head and... I
have a situation here.

DR. BLAKE (FILTER)
(calming)
Then it's good you called. Have you
taken your medications?

ABEL
It's not that. I found something.

INT. BLAKE'S BEDROOM - INTERCUTTING - NIGHT

Blake, a man in his 60's, is interesting in an academic rebel
sort of way. He's in pajamas, sitting on the edge of *his* bed.

DR. BLAKE
What did you find, Abel?

ABEL (FILTER)
A knife - right here in my shop,
under the bench. It's just like the
one on TV.

DR. BLAKE
(beat)
Which knife on TV?

BACK ON ABEL

He screws up his face - whispering.

ABEL

The one used by that guy that's
killing people. The Ripper.

He starts sobbing, clamping his hand over his mouth so he
won't wake Sarah.

Blake is silent a moment. Then -

DR. BLAKE (FILTER)

Just because you find a knife in
your shop doesn't mean -

ABEL

It had the word "Vengeance" on its
blade! And blood on it. And
everybody started saying there
might someone new hiding in me! I
swear I haven't hidden anything -
not the knife, not another
personality!

He realizes his voice is rising. He goes back to a whisper.

ABEL (FILTER) (CONT'D)

But the second I went to call you,
there was somebody new - saying not
to call you, or else!

ON BLAKE

He's on his feet now, already half dressed, phone on SPEAKER.

DR. BLAKE

Or else what, Abel? Did he say?

ABEL (FILTER)

(whispering)

Or else he'd kill Sarah and Leah.

Blake keeps his voice calm, but he's dialing on his cell
phone as he tries to talk Abel down.

DR. BLAKE

You've done the right thing, Abel.
I'll be there in five minutes -
meanwhile I want you to have Sarah
drive to her sister's house.

ON ABEL

- as he unexpectedly explodes - smashing the phone into the bedside lamp.

ABEL

Just get here before it's too late!

The lamp is history - the room thrown into jagged shadows. Abel, horrified at his own outburst, jerks around to check Sarah. Thank god she's still sleeping.

ON DR. BLAKE.

DR. BLAKE

Abel?

(forced calm)

Listen to me. *It's important you do what I tell you - alright? Tell Sarah to take Leah and go to May's house right now.*

ON ABEL

ABEL

She's asleep - I can't...

He looks, sure he's wakened Sarah with his outburst. But she *still* hasn't stirred.

DR. BLAKE (FILTER)

Abel?

Abel's staring at Sarah. *Something's not right.*

DR. BLAKE (CONT'D)

Abel, are you still there?

He pulls back the blankets, and gasps.

What he's looking at now is a grizzly mess. BLOOD is everywhere - and Sarah is irretrievably dead.

Abel starts SCREAMING.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE PLENKOV HOUSE - NIGHT

ABEL'S SCREAMS MERGE WITH SIRENS. TWO BLACK & WHITES and an AMBULANCE roar up. TWO COPS from one car flank the house, The other two race for the front door. Dr Blake gets out of the ambulance with two EMT's. Everyone can hear Abel's SCREAMS.

INT. PLENKOV MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

ON ABEL - as his scream reaches an impossible peak. Then his expression snaps into a look of utter triumph and his SCREAM transforms to a HOWL OF PSYCHOPATHIC RAGE.

EVIL VOICE
I warned you, didn't I?

Then he stops.

Someone's banging on the front door.

CUT TO -

INT. LEAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The child is wide awake - no way she wouldn't be. EMERGENCY LIGHTS FLASH out her window and there are BLOWS to the house's front door.

That's bad enough - but with a tremendous percussion a KNIFE stabs through her own door.

There are guttural shouts of struggle - HER FATHER and ANOTHER MAN - then the front door SPLINTERS and MEN can be heard RUNNING and SHOUTING DOWNSTAIRS.

The stabbing of Leah's door stops. Whoever was fighting her Daddy says bad words and runs away.

Then, as a forecast of things to come, the gutsy child goes and unlocks the door.

INT. PLENKOV UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Leah steps out into an empty hallway. We hear BLAKE downstairs -

DR. BLAKE (O.S.)
 There's a light in the shop! That's where he was calling from!

MEN CHARGE INTO THE BASEMENT. Leah runs for her parents.

INT. PLENKOV MASTER BEDROOM / BATHROOM - NIGHT

Leah stops in the doorway, halted by the sight of her father tumbled on the white bathroom tiles - stabbing at himself with his left hand, trying to stop it with his right. He soon pitches over - a bloody heap!

Leah doesn't have a place for a vision like this.

LEAH

Da-Da...?

The man twists around and glares at her.

Whoever that is, he is not her gentle father. He hisses at her, then falls on his face and is still.

Leah runs for her mother, but stops by the bloody bed.

CU ON LEAH'S HORROR-STRICKEN FACE. Next moment a bloody, absolutely possessed lunatic lurches up behind her - his knife raised to strike!

But that doesn't happen, thank goodness. There's a deafening set of EXPLOSIONS - BLAM - BLAM! - and the lunatic pitches forward, his blow never struck.

He falls, and falls right over Leah - KA-SPLUSH.

REVEALED when he falls is the COP that just shot him. It might take us a moment, but it's PATERSON, the older of the two cops in our opening teaser. He was 48 and a Lieutenant there. He's 32 now and a Sergeant. His partner, Patrolman BILLY Lake, is only 25.

Paterson and Lake drag Abel off the little girl and across to the far wall. Paterson covers him while Lake checks for a pulse. Lake shakes his head.

Paterson holsters his gun and goes to Leah.

Her eyes are wild and her face smeared with blood. But miraculously, she's unhurt.

Paterson, with surprising gentleness and calm, talks to her.

PATERSON

What's your name, sweetie?

She doesn't speak.

DOCTOR BLAKE.

Leah. Her name's Leah.

PATERSON

(still to her)

That's a pretty name, Leah. You want to go downstairs with Billy?

She tries to look around him to her mother, but Paterson leans so she can't.

PATERSON (CONT'D)
 Mommy needs to sleep. Okay?

She looks at all the men. Doesn't trust a one of them. But she doesn't have a choice right now. She nods.

PATERSON (CONT'D)
 (to Lake)
 Get her to child welfare. Everyone else stays out. Have the EMT's stand by out in the hall.

LAKE
 You got it, Sarge.

Lake takes Leah away. Paterson looks to Blake.

WITH BLAKE - as he double checks for a pulse on Abel. No dice. Just glassy eyes staring up at him until Blake closes them himself.

The older man struggles to his feet, desolate. He looks to Sarah. Beyond hope.

Then something draws his look to her belly.

Something is moving there - a LITTLE HAND is pressing up against her skin.

Blake is electrified.

DR. BLAKE
 EMT's - on the double!
 (to Paterson)
 Where's that knife!?

PATERSON
 That's evidence.

DR. BLAKE
 Give it to me - the kid's alive!

Paterson hands it to Blake - just as the EMT's rush in.

DR. BLAKE (CONT'D)
 Give me a hand!

The female (JEANBAPTISTE 30, Haitian-American), and male (GUS 28, Caucasian) race to his aid.

CAMERA PANS OFF as the knife goes in, HOLDING ON PATERSON.

The shaken man crosses himself. He can hear the blade cutting, the EMT's straining as they pull the body open.

Suddenly HIS WALKIE-TALKIE blares to life -

LAKE

Sarge - Captain needs an update.

Paterson walks into the bathroom, lowering his voice.

PATERSON

Tell him we got the Riverton Ripper
- that should make him happy.

LAKE

No shit?

PATERSON

It's the knife. There can't be two.
"Vengeance" written on the blade.

We can hear Lake talk into a cell phone, then -

LAKE

Captain says bring it to him
personally. Anything else?

Paterson hears a SLAP, then a BABY'S CRIES. He looks over,
astonished -

IN HIS POV - Jeanbaptiste lifts the BABY into the air. Alive
and kicking.

BACK ON PATERSON - amazed.

PATERSON (INTO WALKIE)

Tell him we got a live baby up
here. A boy.

Paterson grabs towels and takes them to Jeanbaptiste, then
finds the knife, bags it in an evidence pouch and puts it in
his jacket. Then steps away. The kid's a great thing, but the
rest is carnage.

He walks a distance away, seals the bag and puts it in his
jacket pocket. Done.

He looks down at Abel's corpse.

PATERSON (CONT'D)

(low)

You missed the kids, fuckface.

Paterson turns to leave.

ABEL
 (EVIL VOICE)
 I'm saving them for last.

Paterson wheels back, gun drawn, eyes wide. But Abel has already sunk back to the floor, message delivered.

PATERSON
 This prick's still alive.

Gus looks over. Abel's looking very much like a corpse again.

GUS
 We both checked him. He's dead.

PATERSON
 Not dead *enough*.

Gus scoots over. Checks again.

GUS
 Damn.

Blake, checks too. Reacts.

DR. BLAKE
 Atropine!

Jeanbaptiste already has a syringe loaded. She stabs it into Abel's arm.

JEANBAPTISTE
 (at Paterson)
 What he say?

PATERSON
 That he was saving the kids for last.

Something about that gets to her.

JEANBAPTISTE
 Lets get this kid to the hospital.

GUS
 (re. Abel)
 What about him?

Jeanbaptiste looks at the man like he was a snake.

JEANBAPTISTE
 Whatever.

Then she looks at Paterson.

GUS

Watch him.

The two EMT's and the baby disappear.

Paterson looks over at Plenkov. The Atropene is working - the guy's eyes are open again. But he sure as hell doesn't look like any kind of threat.

CLOSER - ON BLAKE AND ABEL.

DR. BLAKE

Can you hear me, Abel?

A tear splashes out of a glassy eye. And there's that raspy, whisper again - but weaker.

ABLE

Forgive me...

DR. BLAKE

We'll get you to a hospital.

The man's barely able to ask -

ABEL

Please. Pillow. For my head...

Something catches Blake's ear.

DR. BLAKE

Abel? That you?

"Abel" nods desperately. He can't say more. Paterson stuffs a pillow under the guy's head. Abel is moved, and frightened.

ABEL

Thank... you.

He reaches out to Paterson. Paterson doesn't move.

DR. BLAKE

(low)

He's not a monster, for godsakes.
Someone inside him, not him.

Paterson takes the hand.

ABEL

It wasn't me.

Paterson wants his hand back, but the dying man holds on with feeble urgency. And speaks one last sentence, his voice sounding slightly different.

ABEL (CONT'D)
 (whispering)
 See you...

Paterson senses something - but too late. Abel clamps his gun hand with steel-trap quickness -

EVIL VOICE
 - in Hell.

His left hand unholsters Paterson's gun with lightning speed and SHOTS HIM TWICE in the chest!

BLAM! BLAM!

Paterson slams back with horrible cry, crumpling in agony. And the EVIL VOICE is back - hissing at him.

EVIL VOICE (CONT'D)
Hurts like hell, doesn't it?

With that, Abel, if it can be said that's who it is now, wheels on the stunned Blake.

DR. BLAKE
 Abel - talk to me!

EVIL VOICE
Abel's stepped away. Leave a message when you hear the shot.

BLAM - Abel puts a single round right through Blake's forehead. The doctor's dead before he hits the floor.

Jeanbaptiste runs in - thinking Paterson's the only one with a gun - and Abel's got her right in his sights.

EVIL VOICE
 Here's for saving the baby.

BLAM!

The bullet slams home.

But not Abel's bullet, and not into Jeanbaptiste.

It's Abel that falls.

He lands with his eyes still looking to see who shot him.

It's Paterson. Ashen and slumped against the wall, his backup smoking in his hand.

PATERSON
 (barely)
 That's for nothing.

CUT TO:

EXT. A ROAD / RIVER / WOODS - NIGHT

The road threads through woods, glimpses of a RIVER on the left. Flashing lights of a COP CAR and an AMBULANCE approach at high speed.

GUS (SOUND PRE-LAP)
 We're approaching the town of
 Riverton on River Road, with
 Escort.

LAKE'S BLACK AND WHITE and THE AMBULANCE SCREAM BY -

INT. AMBULANCE - NIGHT

Gus drives pedal to the metal, giving his situation report into his walkie.

GUS
 We have an infant born from a
 postmortem mother, doing very well.

ANGLE ON THE BABY - stowed in a linens bin, rosy-cheeked.

GUS (CONT'D)
 We have one Detective Paterson,
 shot twice, both in the vest.

ANGLE ON JEANBAPTISTE AND PATERSON. She's just pulling off his shirt. Two flattened bullets fall to the floor.

GUS (CONT'D)
 We got one perp, Abel Plenkov,
 under full constraint and critical.
 Multiple gunshot and stab wounds.

ANGLE ON ABEL - triple-strapped to the gurney and handcuffed to its rail. He's barely breathing, but no one's taking chances anymore.

JEANBAPTISTE AND PATERSON -

Paterson, his vest off now, has two god-awful bruises where the bullets struck.

JEANBAPTISTE

Lucky duck.

He watches her quick patching job - gauze pad and binding tape flying. What they've gone through has made them close, without their recognizing it.

PATERSON

You warned me.

Paterson sinks back against the bulkhead, in pain.

JEANBAPTISTE

You saved three lives. Mine, for sure. Don't beat yourself up.

She tosses him his shirt and picks up the baby, sitting on the same bench he's on, rocking it.

PATERSON

He gonna be okay? Long range?

JEANBAPTISTE

Depends how long he was in there after she died. Anything past ten minutes isn't good.

PATERSON

I bet she hung on a long time.

JEANBAPTISTE

I bet she did.

(brightens)

Want to give him his temp name? We have to put one in our log.

PATERSON

How about Bug?

(off her laugh)

He's cute as one. Or Clarence.

JEANBAPTISTE

Bug it is.

She wraps the newly dubbed Bug in a blanket, singing to it.

JEANBAPTISTE (CONT'D)

Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

She rocks him gently.

JEANBAPTISTE (CONT'D)
My grandmother sang that to me.

Peterson winces as the Ambulance bounces.

JEANBAPTISTE (CONT'D)
(at Gus)
Don't kill us getting there.

GUS
Sorry - thought we were an
ambulance.

Paterson has pulled a book from a cubicle.

INSERT OF COVER -

BETWEEN GOOD & EVIL
the search for the center
by
Dr. William S. Blake

BACK ON THEM -

JEANBAPTISTE
I was reading it for night school.
He was an authority on Multiple
Personality Disorders.

PATERSON
"Search for the center"? What's
that?

JEANBAPTISTE
Remember the song, "I'm up on a
tightrope wire, one side's ice and
the other's fire?"

PATERSON
No.

JEANBAPTISTE
Blake said we so-called sane people
in so-called civilized nations
occasionally ping pong from one
extreme to another too - war peace,
love hate, happy sad - because
we've all got different versions of
ourselves inside.

PATERSON

So we're all split personalities?

JEANBAPTISTE

Similar, but no. The difference is, we have versions of *ourselves* inside - parts of the same whole. We put our good sides forward and shove the worst in back, and most of the time we're human and sane. Because we're all the same person.

PATERSON

That's why I stopped drinking.

JEANBAPTISTE

Me too. Anyway, Blake said people with split personalities didn't have versions of themselves inside - they actually had different individuals inside them. All with differing opinions and agendas.

PATERSON

Like a boarding house.

JEANBAPTISTE

Right, a recipe for disaster. So, Blake's approach was to hypnotize a patient, root out all the personalities in him, and make them an offer they couldn't refuse.

Paterson likes this story.

JEANBAPTISTE (CONT'D)

Let's say he was working with Abel's multiples. He'd tell that that if Abel was judged insane, they'll all end up in an asylum, not just him. Bad food, bad company, bad bars on the windows.

PATERSON

Or?

JEANBAPTISTE

Accept that Abel was captain and they were passengers in his plane. Enjoy the trip, and live in a nice house, safe and sound. That balance is what Blake called the center.

PATERSON

How many passengers did Abel have?

JEANBAPTISTE

Two women, three men. Blake said they were all nice people and had agreed to the deal readily. That's why he gave Abel such freedom.

PATERSON

Which was the killer?

JEANBAPTISTE

None. He was a sixth personality Abel didn't know he had.

Paterson looks at Bug. Remembering.

PATERSON

Back there, when I told you Plenkov said he was saving the kids for last, you got a look on your face. Like that meant something.

She nods. This part is more personal.

JEANBAPTISTE

My grandmother was from Haiti. She'd say Abel had seven separate souls, counting himself, not seven personalities.

PATERSON

What's the difference?

JEANBAPTISTE

Souls go on after death, personalities don't. It's a bigger picture of things.

PATERSON

Ah.

JEANBAPTISTE

She'd say that when Abel's evil soul got outed, he was left with only two options. One, kill the others and take over the body.

PATERSON

So that might not be Abel over there any more?

JEANBAPTISTE

That's what she'd have said. I don't believe this stuff.

Paterson looks at Abel's glassy stare.

PATERSON

I should've aimed for his head.
(beat)
What's Option 2?

JEANBAPTISTE

Option two is when the evil soul finds everyone unified against him and the cavalry on the way. He can't win, so all he can do is kill the body - somehow get it dead.

PATERSON

End it all.

JEANBAPTISTE

Except souls don't end, remember? They go on to their next incarnation. So that's where he wants to get.

PATERSON

So some poor baby gets Abel's evil soul, and six get Abel's soul and the five other nice one?

JEANBAPTISTE

If the bad soul leaves the body. Seven babies, one set on killing the others as his vengeance. But if the soul manages to hang on and stay with the body, it's be six babies, and one pissed off old man waiting to kill them for agreeing to turn him in.

Paterson smiles, intrigued.

PATERSON

So, which is it?

JEANBAPTISTE

We can't know until he acts, either as Abel, or as a new kid with murder in his heart.

The ambulance pitches, and Abel's head lolls over, his doll's eyes staring right at Paterson again.

PATERSON

I wish he'd fucking make up his mind if he was dead or not.

JEANBAPTISTE

He's brain dead. We checked.

PATERSON

(shivers)

You mind handing me my coat?

It's at the foot of the gurney. She reaches for it. Finds something first.

JEANBAPTISTE

This yours?

She holds out an empty evidence bag. Paterson sees it and freaks.

PATERSON

Get away from him!

He lurches for her but her throat's already cut. She sprawls over him - her blood blinding him -

Gus hears her gurgled scream and twists around - stunned by what he sees - Jeanbaptiste flailing - Paterson trying to get out from under as the ambulance careens off the road -

EXT - THE ROAD / WOODS / RIVER - NIGHT

The ambulance goes up on two wheels -

INT - AMBULANCE - NIGHT

WILD ANGLES ON ABLE - cutting through binding straps as fast as a maniac can - which is fast!

ON GUS - fighting the wheel - losing it -

ON PATERSON - hand clenched to Jeanbaptist's throat - drenched in blood and screaming at Abel -

The rest is lost to mayhem as the ambulance cartwheels and everything inside flies to hell.

EXT. ROAD AND RIVER - NIGHT

STUNT - THE AMBULANCE CRASHES SPECTACULARLY - skidding straight for the river. Doors fly open - equipment ejects - GLASS SHATTERS -

INT/EXT. LAKE'S BLACK AND WHITE / TWO-LANE - NIGHT

LAKE SEES THE FIREBALL IN HIS REAR VIEW MIRROR.

LAKE
HOLY___!

EXT. TWO LANE - NIGHT

ANGLE ON THE BLACK AND WHITE - screaming through a wild U-turn - heading back. We stay with it until it stops. Its HEADLIGHTS and the MOON giving us our ONLY LIGHT.

ON LAKE - running to the BURNING HULK OF THE AMBULANCE.

Gus is half in, half out of the windshield. Lake pulls him out, but he's dead.

Out back, Paterson, bloody and crazed, has pulled Jeanbaptiste away and is down with her - holding her hand. But she's gone and Paterson knows it.

LAKE
Frank!

Paterson lurches up, leg shredded but working - and staggers off for something white over in the grass.

LAKE (CONT'D)
Frank!?

Paterson finds a BLANKET. Picks it up. Empty. He throws it away. Staggers on. Stops. Bends down and picks up something else.

He stands back up and turns around with the naked baby. Turns to Lake with the kid held in his arms.

We can't tell if it's alive or dead.

Then we hear it crying, no doubt scared to death and wondering what kind of world he's been dragged into.

Lake runs over. Paterson hands him the kid and takes out his gun.

PATERSON

Get him to the hospital and call
for backup - go.

LAKE

What about you?

Paterson's already heading for the river.

LAKE (CONT'D)

He's gotta be dead, Frank.

PATERSON

I'll make sure he is.

ON PATERSON - stopping at the water's edge, staring down at
HALF OF THE GURNEY. It's just inches the river. Splayed
rails, cut straps. No handcuffs.

The other half, and Abel Plenkov?

Gone.

WITH JEANBAPTISTE. PATERSON comes back from the river, find a
sheet in the debris and puts it over her. Then he sits cross-
legged beside her in grass, gun in his lap, keeping the
vigil.

CROSS-FADE IN A MATCH SHOT TO -

EXT. SAME EXACT PLACE - MORNING.

The ambulance hasn't moved an inch, but in the morning light
it's rusted and old again, as we first saw it, fifteen years
into the future.

Paterson and Jeanbaptiste are gone.

ACROSS THE RIVER, THE CHURCH BELL IS TOLING SIX.

CUT TO:

INT. A BOY'S BEDROOM - DAWN

In the DISTANCE we can HEAR THE BELL TOLL ITS LAST BEAT.

HOLD FOR A SILENT BEAT, then PAN OFF TO an OLD DOOR ON
SAWHORSES - A MAKESHIFT WORK BENCH. Its top is covered with
LARGE FEATHERS, CLOTH, even a bowl of Papiere Mache. It's
chaos, but clearly a place of considerable creativity too.

WIDER, ON THE ROOM. Everywhere are BOOKS and posters of and about birds. Especially soaring birds. One in particular - long wings spread in the wind, vaulting a mountain.

Beautiful. Ancient.

This part of the room is extremely neat, each book even with the next, each picture level on the wall. Creative chaos at the bench, careful order everywhere else. Hmmm.

REVERSE ON A SINGLE BED. A BIG STUFFED SUITCASE ready to go.

Bug lies sleeping fitfully. Body twisting, hands pushing against his blankets - as if he were trapped in a sinking ship.

The wall behind his bed has just enough light on it for us to see a LONG BLADE poke through it.

The blade makes a HISSING, downward SLIT, then disappears back to the dark it came from.

Next moment the wall's pulled asunder exactly like flesh and a BLOODY HAND reaches down and grabs Bug by the face.

The kid jolts awake, whips a FLASHLIGHT off his bed table and shines it on the wall.

A perfectly normal wall.

Bug swings his legs off the bed and sits on its edge, rubbing his head. He doesn't look terribly upset. More like it's part of what life's dealt him and he can deal with it. He gets up and walks over to a STUFFED RAVEN sitting on his chest of drawers. It has Bug's GloLight necklace hung around its neck.

It's staring at that wall behind the bed.

BUG

Thanks, Edgar. Good job.

CUT TO:

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY.

Bug OPENS HIS BEDROOM DOOR - then stops. Just outside his doorway there's a wrapped gift and a card on the floor. He picks it up and reads the card.

INSERT ON CARD - In handwriting: "Bug. Happy 15th. Mom."

ON BUG. Big smile.

CUT TO:

INT. A GARAGE GYM / A PINK BATHROOM - DAY INTERCUTTING

BRANDON - doing pushups like a machine. His CELL PHONE RINGS.

BRANDON
(off Caller ID)
I know you want me, Brittany.

BRITTANY (FILTER)
I've got today's assignment,
Brandon. Got paper and pen?

BRANDON
Of course.

Brandon scrambles to find paper and pen.

ON BRITTANY - a BlueTooth phone glowing in her ear. She's at the mirror in an upscale bathroom, auditioning tops. Each one is more trendy and expensive than the previous. She holds them up to her body as she talks, not liking any.

BRITTANY (FILTER)
Alex Dunkelman eight, Bug, three.

ON BRANDON -

BRANDON
Alex gets an eight??

BRITTANY
You have a problem with that?

BRANDON
No. Except his father's on parole for assault. Giving an 8 to the son of a violent felon usually comes with a bonus, that's all.

ON BRITTANY -

BRITTANY
(wary)
Don't say something you'll regret,
Brandon.

BRANDON
Nothing big. A blow job would do.

BRITTANY
(pleasantly)
How about I have my dog bite it off
and bury it in my backyard?

CLICK.

Brandon remains positive.

BRANDON
How big's your backyard?

CUT TO:

INT. A BEDROOM - DAY

ON JEROME BROWN - playing on a cheap keyboard atop his desk. His fingers move but we hear nothing. Jerome does, because he's got the earphones. He's also singing, but in a TONELESS WHISPER. Jerome's room is spare. No pictures or posters, no eye candy at all.

There's a LIGHT KNOCK at his door and his sister Chandelle enters.

CHANDELLE
Your bus is here, Jerome.

Jerome continues playing and singing. Chandelle walks over and pops one out of his ear.

CHANDELLE (CONT'D)
Your bus. Outside. Waiting.

Jerome looks up and smiles. If we didn't notice he was blind in our teaser, we will now.

JEROME
You look great, Chandelle.

She flips him the bird.

CHANDELLE
How many fingers am I holding up?

JEROME
One. Ask me something hard.

CHANDELLE

Six tonight at church. If you're late again, you'll regret it.

She goes out.

JEROME

I regret it already.

CUT TO:

INT. JAY CHAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

A room of an artist who happens to be a kid. Jay's the kid who made the monster outfits in our teaser. There are mock-ups and drawings of the it - showing how kids will operate it from below, how it will move - they're like those drawings of Leonardo Di Vinci. It's clever and oddly beautiful.

Despite this creative clutter, it's a pleasant room. SUNLIGHT slants through its open WINDOW. Its CURTAINS stir in the breeze.

OLD WOMAN'S VOICE

Jay! You gonna be late. You up?

No answer. The door cracks open and a woman in her 70's peers in. This is Jays grandmother, POPO. Asian, old country.

POPO

Jay, how you like I poor cold water on you?

WIDER, INCLUDING THE BED. It's empty.

POPO (CONT'D)

(calling)

Jay? You still home?

No answer. She looks at the window. Shrugs.

POPO (CONT'D)

Likes to go out window instead of stairs. Crazy boy.

CUT TO:

INT. SUNNY BEDROOM - DAY

PENELOPE BRYTE - is on her knees finishing morning devotions.

PENELOPE
 (rapid-fire, earnest)
 - and please watch over the
 missionaries, our soldiers our
 President, Pastor Baker, Mom and
 Dad, oh, and the Seven today,
 especially Bug. Keep him from evil
 and evil from him, in Jesus' name
 amen.

She closes her Bible and slips it in her backpack. Sweeps her long red hair into a chignon.

PENELOPE'S MOTHER (O.S.)
 Penelope. You're gonna be late!

PENELOPE
 (lightly)
 Liar, liar, pants on fire.

She bops to her desk. A CELL-PHONE PHOTO OF BUG is her Mac's desktop backdrop.

INSERT ON BUG'S PICTURE.

The boy smiles gamely out at life. If he was a deer and life was a truck coming straight at him, he'd think that truck was bringing hay.

Penelope kisses him lightly and runs from the room.

CUT TO:

INT. ALEX DUNKELMAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

ON ALEX Dunkelman - watching a ROAD-RUNNER CARTOON. Road Runner is about to get caught. He grabs a bucket of paint and at lightning speed draws a tunnel on the side of a rocky mountain, then runs into the tunnel and escapes. Wiley Coyote barrels after him and splats into the mountain wall the painting's on.

Alex finds this very amusing, and cackles at the coyote he loves so much.

ALEX
 You gotta believe, Coyote.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Hey asswipe.

Alex jumps. His father (QUINT, 40'S, a scary guy with ex-con tats) looms in the hall.

QUINT

I'm trying to get some sleep. Get your ass to school or I'll lock you in the cellar for the day. How'd you like that?

He's not joking. Alex shuts down his computer and goes to leave. But Quint doesn't move out of the way.

QUINT (CONT'D)

What did I just say?

ALEX

Could you just step back a little?

QUINT

You think I'm going to hit you?

ALEX

No.

QUINT

Well then get going.

Alex makes a break for the stairs. His stepfather PUNCHES him hard in the ribs as he goes by.

QUINT (CONT'D)

Never trust no one, you dumb shit.

Alex yells back -

ALEX

(disappearing downstairs)
That felt good, Quint - thanks!

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - DAY.

We were at the far end of these woods during our teaser. They're someone's unsold acreage that'll be a mini-mall soon, but for now it's still a place of mystery.

It's also a favorite shortcut from town to school.

ANGLE ON BUG AND ALEX - Bug pulling the ROLLING SUITCASE, Alex opening a present from Bug. It's Bug's stuffed Raven.

ALEX

You're giving me your crow?

BUG

Raven. His name's Edgar. He guards you while you sleep. Point him at your bed and nothing can touch you.

ALEX

Sweet.

He stops and puts it in the crook of a tree, it's dark eyes gazing towards where they're going.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Let it keep the banshees at bay while we're at school.

Bug's not sure this is what he expected.

BUG

Do you like it, though?

ALEX

It's the best stuffed raven anybody's every given me. I'm giving you and Brittany a Las Vegas weekend.

BUG

Brittany doesn't know I'm alive.

ALEX

You'll be flown First Class for two days and nights of star-studded shows and high-stakes gambling.

Bug likes Alex's flights of fancy, and laughs.

BUG

You don't have to give me anything.

Alex looks at the suitcase.

ALEX

What's in there, anyway?

BUG

I redid the whole thing.

Alex stops.

ALEX

What?! When?

BUG

Last night. I was asleep, and then had all these great ideas, so I got up and worked. It's not a hand puppet any more.

He ducks through a hole in a chain like fence and comes out on a sidewalk. We can hear KIDS and BUSES and such (just O.S.) (Or see them, if our location permits).

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVERTON HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

AN UNASSUMING SCHOOL ON A GRASSY CAMPUS. YELLOW BUSES disgorge 7th to 12th-graders under the watchful eyes of the school's leader (PRINCIPAL PRATT, 40'S), and its entire security force, (OFFICER RAMIREZ 40'S).

Among the crowd we glimpse Penelope Bryte walking with a thin girl, (MELANIE PRATT 17), the two in earnest conversation, and Jerome Brown, who's with a group of SPECIAL NEEDS KIDS and their watchful TEACHER.

Alex and Bug ENTER FRAME.

ALEX

Not a hand puppet? What is it?.

BUG

You can wear it now.

A CELL PHONE RINGS, unnoticed by Bug.

ALEX

Your pants are ringing.

Bug jumps as they RING AGAIN. He digs out his new phone.

BUG

Hello?

WOMAN'S VOICE (FILTER)

You like it?

Bug's face lights up.

BUG

Mom, it's wonderful!

He pokes at it randomly and May is suddenly on speaker.

MAY (SPEAKER)
I Scotch-taped your number on it.

Bug pokes more, trying to get her off speaker.

MAY (SPEAKER) (CONT'D)
We'll read the manual tonight.
Happy Birthday, Bug. Sorry I had to
go to work so early this morning.
Two women went into labor at the
same time. No big deal. I'll see
you later. Love you.

BUG
Love you.

She's gone. Bug stares at the phone, not knowing how to turn
it off.

ALEX
Red button.

Bug hits END and stuffs the phone back in his pocket.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Does it have a camera?

BUG
I just got it.

ALEX
How much memory?

BUG
Can't remember.

ALEX
It's small.

BUG
Is that bad?

ALEX
That's good.

CROSS FADING

EXT. JUST OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL'S FRONT DOORS - DAY

This area is owned by SENIOR GIRLS, who are in turn ruled by
FANG, 19, a girl with edgy beauty and feral charisma.

With her is Maria Ramirez, Chandelle Brown and Brittany Cunningham, her crew.

BRITTANY

Your cleaning's in your car, the Jimmy Choo's are returned for store credit and your new music's in your iPhone. Business-wise, the Chronic from Maria's cousin in Guatemala is selling briskly in its first public offering.

Fang smiles.

FANG

You're a keeper. Know how to steam open an envelope so it doesn't show?

BRITTANY

Put it in the freezer for an hour. Opens itself, reseals perfectly..

She hands Brittany an envelope.

BRITTANY (CONT'D)

This's for Bug.

FANG

Just have it ready for our 2:30.

Brittany doesn't say another word. She stows the envelope, checks her watch and speed dials.

MARIA

Bug alert.

BRITTANY

(into phone)

Go.

IN THEIR POV - Bug and Alex approach in the distance.

FANG

On your way.

Brittany heads off, chastened.

FANG (CONT'D)

(to herself)

Birthday greetings, Bug.

CUT TO -

EXT. CAMPUS WALKWAY - DAY

ON OFFICER RAMIREZ - Keeping an eye on the two stragglers.

ALEX

You want to come over tonight? We could burn the house down with my father in it?

Ramirez doesn't take the bait.

Bug smiles. Despite his apparent naivete in many matters, he's completely attuned to Alex's off-the-wall humor.

BUG

He give you something for your birthday?

ALEX

A hematoma.

He shows the morning's bruise on his ribs.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Made it himself, too.

He stops - spotting Brittany.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Bug, look who's coming. Light of your life!

(beat)

Uh-oh.

Brittany has stopped directly behind Ramirez.

BRITTANY

Excuse me, Officer Ramirez? Maria said you know about baseball?

Ramirez turns to her, which puts his back to the boys.

OFFICER RAMIREZ

I live baseball.

ALEX

(realization)

Distraction maneuver.

BUG

What?

ALEX

C'mon!

Alex grabs Bug and starts to run - Bug crashes right into Brandon O'Neil. Football letter jacket, coolest of cool, he says briskly to Bug -

BRANDON
This, Bug, is a three.

He punches Bug hard in the arm - WHAK!

Bug cries out in pain and staggers back, clutching his shoulder in disbelief. Brandon's got Alex by the shirt.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
And this, Dunkelman, is an eight.

He punches Alex right in the stomach. Alex goes down with a horrible groan. Brandon jabs a finger at him.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
Stay away from the Fang Zone.
(to Bug)
Stay away from him.

He heads off.

ALEX
(barely)
That... felt good... Brandon.
Thanks.

BRANDON
(over shoulder)
Fuck you, ass wipe.

Wrong term to use on Alex this morning.

ALEX
Not as good as your mama, though.

Brandon wheels, murder in his eye.

BRANDON
You just bought a twenty.

He charges - but a piercing voice cries out -

STERN VOICE (O.S.)
Brandon O'Neil!

Brandon stops in his tracks, Ramirez swings around, Brittany freezes. In one split second the center of attention shifts to Penelope Bryte, the praying redhead with the crush on Bug, and she marches that attention straight to Brandon.

Brandon sees Ramirez's staring right at him now, so he can't kill Alex, can't be cool in the eyes of Brittany, can't do jack shit - and this girl is intense - eyes flashing, finger jabbing like Gabriel's sword.

PENELOPE

Do not bring the wrath of Jehovah down upon you. Your sins are many and a stench in the nostrils of an angry God!

(low)

Like knocking up Melanie Pratt, who's only fifteen and the Principal's daughter.

Brandon's jaw drops.

BRANDON

Melanie's pregnant?

PENELOPE

She's in my prayer group.

(intense again)

What men will do to you in prison is nothing compared to what demons will do to you in hell. On beds of fire. Through all eternity.

She glares at him, eye-ball to eye-ball.

BRANDON

I'll get you for this, Penelope.

PENELOPE

(sweetly)

If you do, Satan will get you.

Brandon looks around for back-up, but Brittany has vanished. He saves what face he can, lobbing at Alex -

BRANDON

When you least expect it, Dunkelman.

Then he quits the field. Penelope smiles sweetly at Bug.

PENELOPE

Hi, Bug. Happy Birthday.

BUG

Thanks, Penelope. Same to you.

PENELOPE

Did you get my note?

BUG

Note?

PENELOPE

In your mailbox this morning.

BUG

No.

She takes this in. Leans in close.

PENELOPE

You're in danger, Bug. Pray.

BUG

Danger?

PENELOPE

He's coming.

BUG

Jesus?

PENELOPE

We should be so lucky.

She turns to Alex, who's still on the deck.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

Rise up and gird your loins, Alex.
The end is near.

She walks off. Bug helps Alex up. Both are hurting badly.

BUG

Penelope just said the end is near.

ALEX

For Brandon, definitely.

THE FIRST-PERIOD BELL RINGS.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Let's go.

Bug rubs his temples fiercely.

BUG

I'm afraid, now that she said that.

ALEX

We're fifteen, Bug. We are men.

BUG
I don't feel like a man.

ALEX
No man does. You have to fake it.

BUG
Fake being a man to be one?

ALEX
(nods)
Absolutely. You can't run when you're scared. That's bad faking. You have to face it like a man even though you're not. The better you fake it, the better man you are.

BUG
Just fake it.

ALEX
Fake it good. Same for getting hurt. Tell whoever did it to you that it feels good. It makes them nuts.

BUG
(trying it out)
I thank Brandon I can't lift my arm.

ALEX
Exactly. My gut is enjoying its destruction. And we'll remember what Brandon has given us.
(smiles)
I'm amazed you're getting this so fast. It's tricky.

BUG
I'm faking that I do.

ALEX
But you're faking it good.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE RIVER / A BACKWATER (OR WHATEVER) - DAY

WIDE SHOT. PATERSON and LAKES PULL UP on a dirt road ending at scrubby backwater of the river.

No houses in sight, but an AMBULANCE, a BLACK AND WHITE, and the COUNTY CORONERS OFFICE VAN are crowded into the tiny clearing. Paterson and Lake go to the verge of the embankment and look down.

PATERSON

Shit.

Below, an old Boston Whaler with an even older Evinrude is tied up at the bank, rods and a bait pail in it. The FISHERMAN, in his 70's, is talking to a COP. A COUPLE FIREMEN in boots are groping around in the water, but the main catch is already lying on a tarp a couple feet up the bank.

It's a young male.

CAMERA DOWN AT THE RIVER AND BOAT.

PATERSON clammers down the slope just as a Fireman turns the kid over.

It's Jay Chan. Pale purplish skin, and eyes gone dead-fish white, staring up at Paterson like he can't believe what's happened to him.

CORONER

We don't have a name yet.

PATERSON

Jay Chan. He's from Riverdale.

CORONER

Came five miles then. The old guy thought he was a catfish until he reeled him in.

LAKE

Big catfish.

CORONER

He doesn't see too well. You want us to hold him?

PATERSON

Any wounds on the victim?

CORONER

I don't see any. We'll get him back to the Morgue.

PATERSON

(to Lake)

Get the old guy's statement and let him go.

LAKE

You thinking homicide? There was a lot of beer at that thing last night. Maybe he just fell in.

PATERSON

I hope that's what it was.

Paterson looks back to the fireman as one fishes a GloStick necklace out of the water and holds it up.

CORONER

What is that?

PATERSON

Something that says he was number one.

(straightens)

Nothing gets out to news, no calls to the school until the family's notified.

He heads back up the bank.

CUT TO:

INT. BIOLOGY CLASSROOM - DAY

Brandon, Penelope and Brittany share this class with Bug and Alex. Brandon fakes boredom, Brittany fakes perfect attentiveness. Penelope doesn't know from faking. She's looking out the window at something that's got her on red alert. The rest of the students are the usual too-cool-for-school lot, will marry early, die drunk in collisions, implode into obesity or be ground to dust in wars fought for the folly of the few. God bless them all.

Their teacher is Mr. Kaiser.

MR. KAISER (O.S.)

As you know, class, we're nearing the end of our reports on living creatures. Dogs, sheep, honey bees and so forth.

EXT. PENELOPE'S POV - DAY

THE WOODS - is just across the street from the school. Someone over there could easily watch the school.

MR. KAISER (O.S)
 We had an especially nice one from
 Brittany Cunningham last session,
 on the butterflies of our state.

But what catches the eye is a SHADOW that could be a MAN
 standing inside the fence, in the shadows of the trees. Or it
 could just be a shadow.

INT. BIOLOGY CLASSROOM - DAY

BACK ON PENELOPE - as she looks away, disturbed.

MR. KAISER
 Now let's see who we have today...

Despite herself, Penelope looks back to the woods.

EXT. POV TO THE WOODS - DAY

THE MAN/SHADOW IS GONE.

INT. BIOLOGY CLASSROOM - DAY

ON KAISER -

MR. KAISER
 (checks his schedule)
 Today's presentation will be by...
 Adam Heller. Are ready, Adam?

Penelope, a whiter shade of pale, turns her eyes to Bug. He's
 not moving.

MR. KAISER (CONT'D)
 Adam??

ON Bug - jerking alert.

BUG
 Yes, Mr. Kaiser.

Bug troops towards the front of the class, followed by Alex,
 who drags the wheeled suitcase behind him. Alex looks like he
 should be in the E.R.. Bug's right arm dangles like a
 puppet's without its string.

BUG (CONT'D)
 I will be assisted in today's
 presentation by my associate, Alex
 Dunkelman.

BRANDON

(low)
Dumbfuckelman.

Alex ignores this and opens the suitcase. No one can see what's inside.

BUG

(faint)
My subject today is a bird.

MR. KAISER

Just a little louder, Adam. Those
in the back would like to hear.

Bug takes a deep breath. He looks like he might fall over. He rubs his head hard and squints.

MR. KAISER (CONT'D)

Adam? Are you alright?

Bug glances at Alex.

ALEX

(barely audible)
Fake it good.

Bug stands straighter and raises his voice a bit.

BUG

My subject today is the largest
bird in the Americas, unchanged for
fifteen million years and only
recently rescued from extinction.

Alex hauls a large *something* from the suitcase. It's a suit of some kind made from the huge feathers we saw in Bug's room. We glimpse PLASTIC BOTTLES and TUBING sewn into its inner lining, and a huge head and legs with talons and god knows what else. It's all a bundle and the head is flopped over, so we can't tell what kind of bird it might be. Except large. Then -

With one sudden move Alex whips the whole thing over his head and body and disappears entirely inside it, transforming himself into a huge bird.

Mr. Kaiser's eyes widen - the class giggles nervously.

Alex's arms are thrusting into the wings, and the wings start coming to life. Shapeless clumps of feathers are now taking form towards something truly impressive.

BUG (CONT'D)
 I present to you, the California
Condor!

As soon as Bug says that, Alex raises his arms straight out at his sides, unfolding those big wings. And with a snap of his head deep down inside, Alex manages to deftly mount the huge bird's head directly atop his own.

CLASS
 (amazed)
 Whoa...

MR. KAISER
 Good lord...

Amazingly, the bird is now impressive as hell. Peering down at the room, the creature's humongous, even at rest, but with its wings spread to their full span - the class is struck hard by how spectacularly big this bird is!

As Bug sees what he's created, the exchange of power from bird to boy is palpable. Bug sparks with an electricity we've never seen in him - mounting in intensity.

BUG
 The wing-span is ten feet wide, the body more than four feet high, and it weighs as much as a sack of cement!

Mr. Kaiser begins to feel apprehension about what's developing here. Bug is getting louder and louder, and the fervor of the boy, like the Condor itself, is getting a bit scary. And now Bug gives a wave - and Alex starts moving - "soaring" through the class - wing tips brushing walls, making kids duck. Alex must be inspired as well, because there are a few screams, a few laughs, and a lot of kids who don't know what the hell's going to happen next.

Penelope's eyes are shining, Brittany's are round as bottle caps, and Brandon's... are darkening.

Brandon doesn't like so much attention drawn to someone else - especially these two. He wants to hurt someone again. That, he thinks, is what the situation calls for.

BUG (CONT'D)
 He can soar effortlessly for days until he finds his food - which is carrion.
 (a bit possessed)
 (MORE)

BUG (CONT'D)
That's a dead, stinking body
crawling with maggots! - to him,
that's ice cream!

Mr. Kaiser is standing now -

MR. KAISER
 Bug...

BUG
 (one pro to another)
 Just showmanship, Mr. Kaiser. The
 facts are pretty much correct.

Kaiser sits back down - Bug snaps back to ringmaster.

BUG (CONT'D)
 A California Condor can consume the
 carcass of a cow in one day - that
 of a whale in three!

BRANDON
 Bullshit.

BUG
 And if anyone tries to harm it -

The Condor, Alex, sails over to Brandon and lands right next to him. It folds its wings and swivels its massive head to fix him in its ancient gaze.

Nobody in class breaths. Brandon laughs, but not inside. The huge bird's eyes are boring right into his soul.

BUG (CONT'D)
 If anyone even so much as touches
 one of its feathers -

Brandon has to counter or he'll lose street cred. So he reaches out as cockily as he can and touches one of the bird's feathers.

Nothing happens.

Brandon grins wickedly. Leans close to the bird's head.

BRANDON
 What, you gonna bite me, asshole?

The Condor opens its beak wide and a huge STREAM OF VISCOUS FLUID SHOTS OUT INTO BRANDON'S FACE.

BUG
The bird will vomit copiously on
its tormentor!

Pandemonium ensues.

Girls scream, boys knock over desks trying to get clear of the increasing spray, Mr. Kaiser is leaping to his feet - and Brandon attacks in full fury - slamming into the bird - tackling it so hard boy and bird tumble over a table, crashing to the floor. Meanwhile something's happening with Bug - he's feeling the power of faking it great and it's lighting him up like a roman candle.

BUG (CONT'D)
And if that doesn't work, the great
bird has another defense! Bottle
Two, Alex!

MR. KAISER
Brandon - stop!

Brandon is atop the bird, pummeling it with his fists.

BUG
It will poop on its tormentor!

SPLURT! - Alex-the-bird twists its butt around and shits all over Brandon's hundred dollar Nikes.

BUG (CONT'D)
(over the chaos)
That's why no one should ever screw
with the California Condor!

There are feathers flying, Brandon gets one last kick in at Alex, then Mr. Kaiser's pulls him off -

MR. KAISER
Our team would be pretty lame
without its star quarterback all
season, don't you think, Brandon?

BRANDON
(shaking with anger)
Whatever.

Brandon slouches towards his seat, a mess. Alex emerges from the feathered wreckage and calls in gleeful defiance -

ALEX
Those kicks felt good, Brandon.
Thank you sooo much!

Bug turns to the class, eyes scrunched shut.

BUG
 Alex and I thank all of you for
 your kind attention.

He grabs Mr. Kaiser's waste basket and barfs into it.

CUT TO:

INT. BOYS' BATHROOM / A GRAFFITI-SCRAWLED STALL - DAY

From a stall we can hear Bug being sick. No need to go stare.

After a few moments he exits the stall and rinses his face in the basin.

He looks frail and vulnerable now, rubbing his temples, clearly in pain. He glances at himself in the mirror. And there's something wrong with his REFLECTION.

He puts his right hand up to the glass.

His reflection of course puts its hand up, too. But it puts its left hand up. It's a reflection, *it should have its left hand up!*

THE BELL RINGS LOUDLY.

Bug clamps his hands over his ears until it stops. It's a reflex very similar to one of Abel's. When Bug opens them again, his reflection is normal, and Alex is there, grinning.

ALEX
 You were awesome, Bug. And the suit
 - genius!

BUG
 Fun fun fun.

Alex spits a bloody gob into the sink. Bug's sees that.

BUG (CONT'D)
 Brandon's really mad now, I guess.

Alex looks at him.

ALEX
 Brandon's way past mad.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Alex and Bug hustle down a crowded hall. 2nd bell has rung and kids are the halls are emptying. Due to their injuries they look like two Quazimodos.

ALEX

He's past steaming or seeing red.
He's approaching Postal, maybe
nuclear. But he can't do squat
unless his Master says so.

BUG

Brittany?

ALEX

Fang. She's behind your arm and my
gut. The fish stinks from the head.

BUG

Why would Fang want to hurt us?

ALEX

I got an eight for being outside
the girls 2nd floor bathroom
between two and two-thirty. That's
when Fang debriefs her minions.
Anyone caught there then is
considered a spy.

BUG

Just being there doesn't mean you
were spying.

ALEX

I was spying. There's a revolution
going on, Condor. Fang must fall.
But we can't bring her down without
intelligence.

BUG

You're smart.

ALEX

Intelligence as in information.
How do we learn what she's up to?
What's she'll have her minions do
next?

He stares at Bug as if he might have the answer.

BUG

I don't know.

ALEX
That's why we need some sort of
listening device.

He scratches his head.

Bug'S PHONE RINGS. He fetches it from his pocket.

BUG
Hello?

ALEX (FILTER)
Condor? Coyote.

Bug turns to see Alex waving his phone at him.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Fang and gang will arrive in the
toilet in three minutes. Everybody
else clears out five before. Now's
your window.

BUG
Window?

ALEX
For getting your phone in there.

BUG
What?

ALEX
Don't worry. We have stolen their
tactics and made them our own.

Alex taps his watch.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Tic toc.

CUT TO -

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE 2ND FLOOR GIRLS BATHROOM - DAY

The hallway is deserted. Bug and Alex peer around a corner and look down another hall, towards the bathroom. Coming the other way, tap-tap-tapping with his white cane, is Jerome Brown. He seems a little lost.

CLOSER ON JEROME. He stops at the doorway to the girls bathroom and taps the door, then bulls right in. FEMALE SHOUTS. Then TWO GIRLS usher him right back out.

GIRL #1
Wrong rest room, Jerome. Down the
hall on the left!

JEROME
Sorry. Did I scare anyone else?

GIRL #2
No one's in there - it's the
forbidden zone in thirty seconds.
You'd better get out of here too.

They rush off. Jerome waves his cane at Alex and Bug.

JEROME
Clear!

BACK ON Bug AND ALEX.

ALEX
You got thirty!

BUG
Not enough time.

ALEX
Fake that there is. Spread your
wings, Condor!

Bug races for the bathroom.

INT. 2ND FLOOR GIRLS' BATHROOM - DAY

Bug darts in and runs to the first stall. It's surprisingly
clean. Maybe because it has a sign Scotch-taped to its wall.
DO NOT USE! FANG.

He gets up on the toilet lid and asks into his phone -

BUG
Can you hear me?

ALEX (FILTER)
Ten seconds!

Cattle-prodded, Bug puts his telephone out of sight on a
ledge above and gets the hell out of there.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE 2ND FLOOR GIRLS BATHROOM - DAY

Bug barrels out the door and races to Alex. Both duck back
around the corner.

ALEX
 (loving it)
 Three, two -

Next second FANG AND CREW appear down the hall, heading for the bathroom.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 Come into my parlor said the spider
 to the fly.

INT. JANITOR'S CLOSET.

ALEX AND Bug DART IN - shut the door, LIGHT THE LIGHT.

Alex grins at Bug. Says with open pride.

ALEX
 Condor.

Bug smiles shyly.

BUG
 Coyote.

Alex puts his phone ON SPEAKER.

There's a BLARE of LAUGHTER - Fang and gang are coming through loud and clear.

ALEX
 Buahaha.

CUT TO:

INT. GIRLS BATHROOM/JANITOR'S CLOSET INTERCUTTING - DAY

FANG deploys her troops.

FANG
 Brittany - window, Chandelle -
 door. Maria - three minutes.

She fires up a joint and fills her lungs with Guatemala Gold.

Brittany opens a window, Chandelle guards the door, Maria disappears into a stall, all with military precision.

Brittany sets up shop in the same immaculate stall Bug used as step stool moments before, the spotless toilet lid her office chair. Spotless except for someone's footprint right on it. She rubs it off with toilet paper and sits.

Backpack open at her feet, Blackberry in her hand, she knows what's coming.

BRITTANY
Ready to report, Fang.

Fang flicks the joint out the window and turns. This is not someone you'd want to cross.

FANG
There was a glitch with
administering the Numbers this
morning?

Brittany clears her throat nervously.

BRITTANY
The numbers were administered
properly and on schedule. However,
before Brandon could make good his
escape, Penelope Bryte cornered him
in front of everybody and told him
he was going to hell.

FANG
Brandon would enjoy hell. He'd kick
some ass and we could expand our
markets.

BRITTANY
(nods)
Thing is, it caused a stir. And
Maria's Dad was right there, and
could've seen -

Maria is out of the stall and at the sinks.

MARIA (FILTER)
Dad's cool. I have stuff on him. My
mom would kill him if I told.

FANG
Maybe Penelope needs a nine.

JANITOR'S CLOSET -

Bug reacts in alarm.

CHANDELLE (FILTER)
Ooooo.

BRITTANY (FILTER)
She's obsessed with Bug, that's the
problem.

(MORE)

BRITTANY (FILTER) (CONT'D)
 (tossed off)
 Girls find him attractive.

Bug reacts with hope -

GIRLS BATHROOM

Fang is eyeing Brittany.

FANG
 Do you?

BRITTANY
 Well, he's...

Launching at her -

FANG
 He's a cretin, a brain-bomb waiting
 to go off. The only real friend he
 has is Dunkelman, and Dunkelman
 just uses him as his monkey.

JANITOR'S CLOSET -

Bug is stung mute - Alex is shocked -

FANG (CONT'D - FILTER) (CONT'D)
 He's not attractive, Brittany - he
 was stillborn - he's been in and
 out of institutions half his life.
 Bug's killed people - wake up and
 smell the Starbucks -

By now both Alex's and Bug's jaws are hanging open.

BUG
Monkey?

ALEX
Killed people?

GIRLS BATHROOM -

FANG (CONT'D)
 (softening)
 Brandon's the one for you, Britt.
 He's a diamond. A diamond in the
 rough, okay, but a diamond none the
 same. By comparison, Bug's a lump
 of coal. Trust me on this, okay?

Brittany's neck is red.

BRITTANY
 Okay, Fang.

FANG
Good. Let's go, it stinks in here.
(at Maria)
What you do in there?

MARIA
Took care a bidness - that's what
we're here for.

Raucous laughter from the older girls.

Brittany's already out the door.

EXT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Bug walks blindly, crushed. Alex catches him. Gives him a serious look.

ALEX
Say "Thanks, Fang, that felt really
good."

Bug looks at him, heart-broken.

BUG
I'd be lying.

ALEX
That's the point.

BUG
Thank you, Fang. I needed that.

ALEX
Don't say you needed it. That makes
you weak. Say it felt good.

BUG
Thanks, Fang. That felt good.

ALEX
It felt fucking great!

BUG
That felt really great.

ALEX
Fucking great.

BUG
That's a bad word.

ALEX

You know why bad things happen to good people?
Because they're not bad.

Bug concentrates.

BUG

Thanks, Fang. That was a fucking great thing to say.

Alex smiles.

ALEX

I have hope for you, Bug.

Bug gives a shy smile.

BUG

Thanks, Alex. It's a bad fucking word.

ALEX

One more thing.

BUG

(sweetly)

I don't know if I can *handle* one more fucking thing.

Alex blinks. What has he created?

ALEX

You have go get your phone.

BUG

Are you fucking kidding me?

Alex looks to see if Bug is putting him on. He's not. Alex tries to stay focused.

ALEX

They'll trace it and know you were in there. You gotta go back.

BUG

No fucking way.

ALEX

Way. And stop saying fuck.

BUG

You say fuck.

ALEX
You're not me.

He gestures as he says this, jabbing his finger first at Bug, then at himself. It's a quick gesture, completed before Alex realizes that Bug, standing square in front of him, has duplicated the gesture precisely, and opposite-handed. Alex might as well be standing in front of a mirror.

There's one of those "That didn't just happen" moments for Alex. But it did, and even now, in more subtle ways, Bug continues matching him perfectly. Breath. Blink. You name it.

Alex swallows and Bug does too. Alex runs his hand through his hair. Bug runs his through *his* hair - the exact same way at the exact same time.

Mirror backwards.

It's downright scary.

Alex slaps Bug without thinking.

Bug rocks back on his heels, blinking, looking around like he's just waking.

BUG
Did something just happen?

Alex looks genuinely spooked. Bug lost.

ALEX
No.

Bug looks at Alex, remembering one thing.

BUG
Do think I'm a monkey, Alex?

ALEX
Have you killed people, Bug?

Bug thinks.

BUG
Not that I can remember.

ALEX
I can't remember buying you bananas, either.

Bug smiles. Good enough for him.

BUG
I'll be right back with the phone.

CUT TO:

INT. 2ND FLOOR GIRLS' BATHROOM - DAY

Bug sticks his head in.

BUG
Hello?

Nobody. He darts over to Brittany's stall.

INSIDE THE STALL -

Bang - Bug trips on something and goes down hard, smacking his head on the toilet - WHACK!

ON THE FLOOR WITH HIM - he sees stars for a moment, holding his head. Then sees what he tripped over.

Somebody forgot her backpack.

He checks the name tag. BRITTANY CUNNINGHAM!

Bug is horrified - *her stuff's all over the floor!*

He starts cramming it back in - lipstick, hairbrush - a handkerchief. (He gives that a quick sniff then puts it back, embarrassed he even did that).

Next instant he hears the last thing he'd ever want to hear in this situation - Maria Ramirez, right outside the bathroom in the hall!

MARIA (O.S.)
What, Alex, you didn't get the memo?

ALEX (O.S.)
(loud, so Bug can hear)
I just was passing by, Maria.

Bug hears the OUTER DOOR OPEN -

ALEX (O.S. (CONT'D))
Brittany - don't go in there!

Brittany?! Bug is double horrified.

BRITTANY (O.S.)
Move, Alex.

Bug pulls the stall door shut and locks it. Jumps up on the toilet, grabs his phone and squats, feet on the lid. But *wait* - there's a NAIL FILE and an ENVELOPE he missed on the floor and *Brittany's heading his way!*

Bug stuffs the envelope in his shirt - but he can't get to the nail file - *Brittany's at his stall door!*

She gives it a tug. Bug freezes.

BRITTANY (CONT'D O.S.) (CONT'D)
(calling through)
Excuse me - my backpack's in there.
Prada?

BUG
(whisper)
Tell me this is a nightmare.

BRITTANY (O.S.)
Excuse me?

Bug claps his hand over his mouth. *What was he thinking - talking to himself?*

Balancing precariously, breath held, he prays she'll go away.

Instead, Brittany's hand comes under the door and grabs the fingernail file!

Bug's so surprised by the move he jumps a little - and watches in horror as his phone spills off his lap.

It drops straight into Brittany's purse and disappears.

Nearing panic, Bug reaches desperately to retrieve it - but it's too late.

Brittany jams the file through the crack, flips the latch and jerks the door wide open.

She's caught utterly off-guard - seeing the boy she just got told was had killed people squatting on her toilet looking at her with saucer eyes.

BRITTANY (CONT'D)
EEIIYAAAAAAAAAAAAA!

Bug, tipped into pure panic by her piercing scream, tries to scramble off the toilet. He slips and falls half in, half out of the bowl itself, yelling in alarm.

BUG
AAAGH!

Brittany's sure she's being attacked now. She grabs her purse and runs for her life -

BRITTANY
AAAIIIIIIIEEEE!

BUG
Brittany!

INT. HALL AND 2ND FLOOR GIRLS' BATHROOM - DAY

Brittany explodes into the hallway and crashes into Maria.

MARIA
What happened!

BRITTANY
Bug's in the toilet!

MARIA
What?!

BRITTANY
Squatting!

At the corner - LOOKING PAST ALEX. He turns through camera when he hears RUNNING FOOTSTEPS. He groans and covers his face. OFFICER RAMIREZ SHOTS BY.

Ramirez, running since the first scream, rounds the corner.

OFFICER RAMIREZ (O.S.)
What's going on?

INT. 2ND FLOOR GIRLS' BATHROOM / STALL - DAY

ON Bug - extracting his foot from the toilet - hearing -

MARIA (O.S.)
Bug Heller's taking a dump in the girl's toilet!

Bug's jaw drops. One leg soaked, the other stuck through the lid, he makes a panicked grab for Brittany's pack - desperate to get his phone back. Same time, Ramirez storms the bathroom.

RAMIREZ (O.S.)
Where are ya?!

Bug flops back on the toilet and lifts his legs, praying for a miracle. It doesn't come.

Ramirez yanks the door open, sees Bug squatting like a see-no-evil Bug on the crapper and recoils in disgust.

OFFICER RAMIREZ

Aw, man!

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. PRINCIPAL PRATT'S OFFICE - DAY

MCU ON MAY HELLER - 38, a good looking woman marked by stress. Especially now, with the O.S. TAP TAP TAP.

PRINCIPAL PRATT (O.S.)

Adam...?

ON PRINCIPAL PRATT. A martinet who thinks he's still too forgiving. Tapping his pencil on his blotter.

PRINCIPAL PRATT (CONT'D)

You were in a toilet in the girls' bathroom with Brittany Cunningham's purse. Any of these three would be inappropriate. You did them all.

ON BUG - head lowered. A noticeable bump on his forehead where he struck the toilet in his fall.

PRINCIPAL PRATT (CONT'D)

Can you explain yourself?

Bug shrugs.

WIDER. Pratt tap-tap-taps his pencil. Nearby: a photograph of his wife, and daughter Melanie, the girl we saw with Penelope this morning. The pregnant one. Mother and daughter look happy, for the moment.

PRINCIPAL PRATT (CONT'D)

That's your answer? A shrug?

There's nothing Bug can say that won't implicate Alex.

BUG

I'm Sorry.

PRINCIPAL PRATT

Sometimes "I'm sorry" just isn't enough, Adam.

BUG

I'm sorry. I'm praying about it.

Pratt seems a little surprised.

PRINCIPAL PRATT
Do you pray often?

BUG
Fuck no.

Bug clamps his hand over his mouth, shocked at what just came out of it. May is staring at him in complete disbelief.

BUG (CONT'D)
Sorry!

Pratt stands. His expression grim.

PRINCIPAL PRATT
Thank you, Adam. You may go.

Bug looks up in disbelief.

PRINCIPAL PRATT (CONT'D)
Your mother and I will chat.

Bug looks at May.

MAY
Wait outside. We'll talk there.

BUG
I don't mind walking. First Baptist, six o'clock.

Before May can say otherwise, Bug EXITS.

PRINCIPAL PRATT
(gestures)
Please.

May sits. Pratt leafs through Bug's file. It's worn and dog-eared, the only thing like that in the office.

PRINCIPAL PRATT (CONT'D)
As you know, I was brought in less than a year ago, following Principal Scott's untimely death.

MAY
One drunk is all it takes.

PRINCIPAL PRATT
(nods)
Peace, love and understanding.
Weren't those his watchwords?

MAY

His favorite song. He used to say that was his job description.

Pratt puts down the folder.

PRINCIPAL PRATT

My job's doing what's best for the children, Mrs Heller.

(gestures at folder)

Sadly, like much of what Mr. Scott left behind, their files are a mess. I can't find any medical records for Adam, for instance. Except his vaccination records.

(smiles thinly)

The one thing he must have to attend school in this state.

MAY

Mr. Scott wanted to protect the kids, too. He cared a lot.

Pratt smiles. He must like chess.

PRINCIPAL PRATT

You're a nurse at Riverton General?

MAY

Head nurse of OB-GYN.

PRINCIPAL PRATT

Are there any records pertaining to Bug kept there?

MAY

He's never been sick in his life.

PRINCIPAL PRATT

Despite the fact that Riverton Gen was where he was brought the night of his birth?

MAY

There were six other children born that night. One was a breach birth - we didn't take a lot of notes.

PRINCIPAL PRATT

Jerome Brown, yes. A pity.

(leans forward)

Can we speak just as parents?

MAY

Sure.

PRINCIPAL PRATT

This isn't the first time Adam's acted out. Two years ago he fell asleep in study hall and woke up screaming. Another day a friend put him in an empty locker as a joke, and Adam became so hysterical he had to be sent home. I'm sure you -

A spark has come into May's eyes, though her voice is calm.

MAY

Brandon O'Neil's no friend. He's a bully that's never gotten more than a slap on the wrist. You want to hear some of the things he's done? I'm sure Quarterbacks don't have these kinds of files.

PRINCIPAL PRATT

We're talking about Adam right now. Today, before the bathroom incident, he terrified the class with a giant bird that actually vomited and worse.

Pratt gazes out his window at lengthening shadows.

PRINCIPAL PRATT (CONT'D)

We both know Adam was trapped in his murdered mother a long time.

MAY

Please don't go there, Mr. Pratt.

PRINCIPAL PRATT

I know she was your sister. I'm sorry. And I'm sorry lack of Oxygen and early trauma do what they do.

May bridles.

MAY

Are you suggesting Adam's mentally challenged?

PRINCIPAL PRATT

I'm not.

MAY

As for early trauma, Adam knows nothing of what happened. I've gone to great pains to keep it that way.

PRINCIPAL PRATT

With a little help from your friends?

MAY

With a lot of help. From Mr. Scott, yes, from Riverton Seven parents, from the whole community. I'm the only mother Adam's ever known, and it damn well better stay that way.

PRINCIPAL PRATT

That might not be possible any longer, Mrs. Heller. His father was criminally insane. It's an unfortunate fact that Adam shares the same genes.

May is stunned.

MAY

I can't believe this. What's next, Mr. Pratt? Villagers with torches?

She stands. He does too - aggressively enough to stop her.

PRINCIPAL PRATT

I'm saying that sometime after the festivities last night, which your son attended, Jay Chan was murdered. Your son was one of two children he was with moments before he drowned.

May is speechless - she's lost the momentum.

PRINCIPAL PRATT (CONT'D)

(rattles it off fast)

An impressionable boy with a troubled inheritance on an evening of grotesquery involving an urban legend of seven children having to die at the hands of a monster - I wouldn't be surprised if he did anything.

(sighs)

Tomorrow I'm sending Adam for Psychological testing.

(MORE)

PRINCIPAL PRATT (CONT'D)

It's within my legal rights to do so, and that is what I'm going to do.

MAY

Mr. Pratt, please.

PRINCIPAL PRATT

My job is to protect the children no matter what. I'd advise you to keep Adam on a short leash until what I'm sure will be a painful investigation is completed by the police. Good night, Mrs. Heller

CUT TO:

EXT. A WOODS AND GLADE - DAY.

Dappled sunlight, a breeze through second-growth trees, and a little grassy clearing. It's getting on towards sunset and birds are settling for the night. A distant CHURCH BELL CHIMES. A LAWN MOWER SHUTS DOWN a few blocks away.

Very quiet now.

DEEPER INTO THE WOODS. Bug is finishes digging, a figure mostly in shadow, obscured by leaves and branches. He throws the shovel down and tugs something big and dark to the hole and heaves it in.

Then stops, twisting around. Listening.

CLOSER ON. He's listening. Dirt-smearred, out of breath.

We hear it too - the VOICE OF BRITTANY APPROACHING - talking on her cell. He drops the shovel a and runs off into the darkening woods.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET AND WOODS NEAR SCHOOL - DAY

Brittany Cunningham walks down the sidewalk opposite the main campus of the school. This area of the woods, fence and street is what Penelope was watching from Biology class. When she did or didn't see a man in a long black coat.

BRITTANY

I'm five minutes away, Mom. I know it's a rude to be late. I'll be there in two shakes.

Brittany makes a face and drops her cell phone back into her backpack. Stops. There was a noise off in the woods.

She listens.

It doesn't happen again.

She's about to continue on her way when Brandon O'Neil jumps on her out of nowhere.

BRANDON
Hey, Brittany!

She yelps, sees who it is and frowns. He's sweaty and out of breath.

BRITTANY
Training for the marathon?

BRANDON
Gotta keep in shape. You're in
great shape.
(half a beat)
Got time for that B.J.?

She looks at him, amazed.

BRITTANY
You're like a crotch dog. You know,
the ones that stick their nose in
your crotch when you're not
looking.

BRANDON
It's like a handshake.

Brittany walks away. Brandon lopes along after. On the hunt.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
I went the extra mile for you
today, Brittany. I could've gotten
expelled for that 8. Plus I got
shit on twice, once by a Jesus
freak, once by a fucking buzzard.

BRITTANY
Condor.

BRANDON
It's got me tense.

BRITTANY
Start a hobby.

BRANDON

This is my hobby. How about as a birthday present?

BRITTANY

It's all of our birthdays.

BRANDON

I need it. I want it. It should make you feel special.

(the clincher)

Fang thinks we're a good match.

Brittany stops dead. Turns and looks at him.

BRITTANY

My father had a crotch dog. Mom had it gassed. Put of its misery.

Brandon grins charmingly.

BRANDON

Misery's what I'm talking about.

Brittany sighs. Some inner wall crumbles. Maybe the price of no has risen too high above the price of whatever. She looks around. Across the street on the practice field, the girls' soccer team is still running plays.

BRITTANY

In the woods. I'm late for the memorial/birthday celebration thing and so are you. The shortcut will give us an extra minute. Count to sixty.

He gives a wary smile.

BRANDON

You tricking me? I got a temper.

BRITTANY

It's a business thing, Brandon.
 ("quotes" fingers)
 "Blows coworkers on occasion"
 doesn't look good on a resume.

BRANDON

Sixty seconds.
 (smiles)
 Fifty.

Brittany ducks through the fence and into the trees.

ANGLE ON BRANDON FROM AWAY. Calling into the woods.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
Forty-two!

REVERSE ON BUG -

Just inside the treeline, watching. His dirty face streaked with tears.

BRANDON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Thirty-one!

Bug rubs his head where it hit the toilet. When he looks again Brandon is gone.

CUT TO:

EXT - DEEPER IN THE WOODS - DAY.

It's darker here. The thick foliage makes the sun fight for admission. Brittany walks briskly, head down.

BRANDON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Thirty seconds!

Brandon nearer than he should sound. He's cheating.

She turns to go on and jumps.

IN HER POV - EDGAR THE RAVEN is staring down at her.

She picks up a stick and pokes him until he falls.

BRANDON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
fifteen seconds!

He's closer still. He must be running. Brittany turns and starts running too.

CUT BACK TO BRANDON. He catches sight of her - and sees she's not waiting for him at all - she's racing away like he's nothing but a joke!

BRANDON (CONT'D)
Hey! Brittany Bitch!

BACK WITH BRITTANY - hearing that tonal shift. Brandon's usual laid-back dude voice is suddenly sharp with fury. Knife-sharp. And from the sounds of him crashing through the trees, she knows he's left the niceties of the path behind and is homing in on her like a heat-seeking missile.

She starts running flat out.

MOVING WITH HER as she runs, weaving through the trees. At last she stops and listens.

Brandon can't be heard. Either he's given up or he's doing what she's doing. Listening.

She looks the other way. There's an opening in the trees. Sunlight, the distant sound of rushing water.

And the SOUND of TIRES ON PAVEMENT - rising, rising -

- Then, glimpsed through the trees, a COP CAR flashes by, LIGHTS BLAZING.

Brittany runs for the road.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD / RIVER / TOWN - DAY.

BRITTANY breaks out of the woods and climbs the embankment to the two lane blacktop. She looks after the car that sped by.

IN HER POV - it disappears over a distant rise.

No other cars in sight. She looks to her left.

There's the RIVER, and on the far side, THE STEEPLE OF 1st BAPTIST CHURCH rising bone white above the trees.

But between the road and the river, there's that rusting wreck of an AMBULANCE.

Brittany looks away. The thing gives her the creeps.

Then she looks back. And despite the goose bumps creeping up her from the river's chill, she walks closer, until she's on last inch of pavement, looking down at that tangled metal.

IN HER POV - just the other side of the hulk of ambulance, SOMETHING COPPERY RED is moving. It looks like flames - waving, disappearing, waving again at the whim of the wind.

CLOSER. Now we can see it's HAIR. Long red hair.

Brittany leaves the safety of the road and goes down the embankment.

AT THE AMBULANCE -

Brittany peeks around the far side.

IN HER POV -

Penelope Bryte is sitting on the muddy ground, her back against the car's door. She's gazes at Brittany with weird intensity, hair matted with leaves, mouth open to say something.

Something she will never, ever get the chance to say.

ON BRITTANY - so scared she can't scream.

BRANDON (O.S)

Gotcha!

Brittany wheels around and sees Brandon crash out of the trees and leap to the road.

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

Now you're gonna get it!

He charges, eyes enraged.

Brittany runs for her life.

Brandon blasts after her - until he sees the body.

Then he skids to a stop, staring in disbelief.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

Holy crap.

It just takes that one instant for us to know that bully though he might be, Brandon O'Neil is no killer.

He turns and throws up violently.

His CELL RINGS. Brandon jumps. Answers.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

Hello?

BRITTANY (FILTER)

Just because she embarrassed you in front of me, you killed her? You are going to burn in hell!

BRANDON

What? Me?

BRITTANY

Better start running the other way, Brandon. I called the police!

CLICK.

BRANDON

No, no - don't do that, Brittany!

But she's already gone.

Brandon turns and stares at the body. No one he *knows* has ever been dead.

He creeps closer. *Until he can see the mass of blood and tissue that once was her throat.*

The reality of this hits him like a fist. He turns at a sound.

A SIREN. He looks down the road in horror and sees COP CARS speeding his way from the town bridge.

Shit!

He does exactly what Brittany told him to do - he runs the other way - across the road, into the safety of the trees.

EXT. THE WOODS - DUSK

Brandon's a hundred yards from the road before he looks back. COP CAR LIGHTS probe through the trees, but no one's coming after him.

He looks as deep as he can into the woods behind him. All the shadows are merging into one great darkness.

Then his phone RINGS AGAIN -

Brandon jumps like he was Tasered - answers before it rings again. Looks - no cops heard it, hopefully. He checks call-waiting. Gives a little cry of relief.

BRANDON

Brittany, please don't call the cops. I knocked up Principal Pratt's daughter, Melanie? He'll have me killed in my cell.

(beat)

You understand what I'm saying?

Silence.

But he can hear breathing and movement. The connection's fine. Brittany must just be speechless at what he's done.

He realizes he's lost her as a friend - that he disgusts her. He even realizes that he disgusts himself.

Tears brim in his eyes.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
 (honestly)
 I know I'm a pig. I can't help
 myself.

He stops. Sucks in air like he just stepped into a cold shower and woke up. Something just hit him.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
 Whoa.

He wipes the tears out of his eyes and laughs strangely. Tries to explain what just happened feeling.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
 Remember when we had to read Moby Dick, and there was a sailor who killed a penguin just to be mean, and the ship sank and God made him wear the dead penguin around his neck 24/7 as punishment.
 (shakes his head)
 That's been my whole life - a stinking weight on me for the stupid stuff I've done. But just now, someone just lifted the fucking bird off my neck. I'm a hundred pounds lighter.

He looks up at the stars emerging above the trees and speaks from a heart he didn't know he had.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
 God as my witness, Brittany, I might've killed a penguin or two in my life, but I didn't kill Penelope Bryte.

He finally gets a response. But not from Brittany.

EVIL VOICE (FILTER)
 You don't have the balls.

Brandon stares at the phone, instantly freaked out. That wasn't Brittany - that was some guy. He looks at caller I.D. again. It still says Brittany.

BRANDON
 Who is this?

EVIL VOICE (FILTER)
 (whisper)
 Someone from your past. You
 wouldn't remember.

BACK CLOSER ON BRANDON - as he strains to identify the voice.

BRANDON
 Put Brittany on, please.

EVIL VOICE (FILTER)
 She's not here.

BRANDON
 Where is she?

EVIL VOICE
 Where you're gonna go.

Brandon feels a knot tightening in his gut.

BRANDON
 I'm going to the church.

EVIL VOICE (FILTER)
 No you're not. Think hotter.

BRANDON
 Miami?

EVIL VOICE
 Try Hell.

Brandon freezes.

That line didn't come through the phone - it came from right behind him!

WIDER FROM BEHIND. CAMERA RUSHES HIM as he spins in shock - STOPPING ABRUPTLY IN CLOSE-UP as SOMETHING SLAMS INTO HIM BELOW FRAME.

His teeth clench so hard we hear them CRACK. His eyes go wide, and he stares out at the universe with a revelation.

Life is complicated but Death is simple. Everything boils down to just a few things:

The knife in his gut.

The taste of his own blood.

The cold of the woods, now that the sun is gone.

He falls OUT OF FRAME BELOW. The knife RAISES INTO FRAME.

"VENGEANCE" ETCHED ON ITS BLOODY BLADE.

CHANDELLE VOICE (PRE-LAP)
 (singing)
 I've got to cross that River Jordan
 I got to cross it by myself

SMASH CUT TO -

INT. FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH - NIGHT

We're inside that white church with the steeple, a spare, informal space. The pews are filled with ADULTS and KIDS, and there are other smaller GROUPS off in corners, talking earnestly, some crying, others on cell phones.

Tonight was meant to be a time to honor the dead of fifteen years ago. But it's immediately clear they've gotten some of the very bad news and are stunned by it.

The singer is CHANDELLE, by the way. Singing like an angel. Behind her is a mixed-race CHOIR, silent and listening. We might even recognize a few younger faces, from the opening teaser's chorus.

CHANDELLE
 (singing)
 Ain't no one else can cross it for
 me / I gotta cross it by myself.

Just as she's singing this last line, Jerome and Alex enter in the back. Jerome runs down the aisle to a battered grand piano and sits ready, hands poised, when his sister sings "cross it by myself."

She doesn't continue singing. The whole place goes silent - choir poised, audience hanging, Chandelle fuming.

CHANDELLE (CONT'D)
 Jerome, where you been?

Jerome's answer is to launch into a gorgeous and heart-wrenching INTRO to "You'll Never Walk Alone." When it stops the silence is so loaded, Chandelle has no choice but to shut up and sing. And from there it's all call-and-response fireworks of the soul - the music filling the auditorium.

CHANDELLE (CONT'D)
 When you walk through a storm /
 Keep your chin up high / And don't
 be afraid of the dark -

The song goes on as we play the following Side Scenes, the lyrics being heard or not heard fully, but always there.

"At the end of the storm is a golden sky, and the sweet silver song of a lark. Walk on through the wind, walk on through the rain, though your dreams be tossed and blown. Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart, and you'll never walk alone, you'll never walk alone."

ANGLE ON the church's PASTOR and several others consoling an ASIAN WOMAN who must be Jay's mother. Several other MEMBERS OF HER FAMILY comfort her as best they can.

ANGLE ON A GROUP OF PARENTS off in a corner. One, BRANDON'S MOTHER, the other BRITTANY'S. The others are there for support and comfort.

BRITTANY'S MOTHER

Did you reach Brandon?

BRANDON'S MOTHER

No - but he really wasn't keen on coming. He might be in a dead spot, too. No luck with Brittany?

BRITTANY'S MOTHER

No. And she swore she was coming.

BRANDON'S MOTHER'S SPEED DIALS AGAIN - and the phone is immediately answered. She looks at caller ID and her face lights up -

BRANDON'S MOTHER

Brandon - where have you been? You -
 (she stops - something wrong.)
 Who is this?
 (listens)
 Why are you on my son's phone,
 Lieutenant Paterson?

She gets the news, sags, her hand coming up to her throat.

BRANDON'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

Oh my God... First Baptist Church.
 Yes I'll be here, but -

Paterson has hung up.

The woman dissolves into tears. Everyone around her rushes to comfort her or get news of what's happened to her child or their child - it's awful, and we -

CUT TO:

INT. BUG'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bug, still in his coat, is on his knees by the side of his bed, matching exactly how Penelope knelt beside her bed. He's just finishing -

BUG
(quietly)
Thank you for listening, Sir. I
hope you can help us. Goodbye.

He stands and looks out his open window. A wind blows the curtain in like a ghost. Outside he can hear DISTANT SIRENS.

Something metallic clatters to the floor, on the far side of his bed.

He goes over. It's the knife. VENGEANCE on its blade.

Bug picks it up, fascinated, staring at that blade, staring at the blood dripping on his hand.

CLUNK.

THE SOUND this time from the closet.

Bug crosses to his closet.

He eases the door open and shines the light in there.

Nothing.

He turns to go back to bed and bumps right into Brandon O'Neil! Brandon's wet and tangled with leaves. He looks scary as hell.

BUG (CONT'D)
Brandon! What're you doing here?

Brandon looks desperate, his voice hoarse and faltering -

BRANDON
Sorry - I saw your light on, your
window open. I need help, Bug.

BUG
After what you did to me and Alex?

BRANDON
That was wrong, but I need help. My
teeth hurt. They hurt so bad.

BUG
Your teeth hurt?

Brandon's mouth gives a sharp *CRACK*, and the kid winces.

BRANDON
See what's happening?

His front teeth are on crooked now. He reaches in and pulls out a whole section of upper teeth and soft palate and thrusts it at a horrified Bug.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
Chew my food, Bug - I'm starving!

He takes a step towards Bug and stumbles - the clot of tooth and gum goes right into Bug's face.

Bug WAKES WITH A SHOUT - CLAWING AT HIS MOUTH!

Looks around.

Normal room. No Brandon.

Bug's still in his rumpled clothes, though. He looks rumpled and just a little... dangerous.

He goes back to close his window, just in case. Just as he's about to close it - ALEX GRABS HIM FROM OUTSIDE!!!

BUG
Yaiihght!!!

ALEX
Sorry! Mind if I drop in?

Alex pops into the room easy as pie.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Quite a day, huh? I'm about faked out.

BUG
What are you doing here?

ALEX
I killed my father. I need a place to hide out.

BUG
You really killed him?

ALEX
I wanted to. Actually he was trying to kill me.

Bug stares at him. Alex pulls Edgar, the Raven, out of his pack.

ALEX (CONT'D)
I think Edgar saved my life.

BUG
You went back and got him?

ALEX
Good thing, too. Someone had
knocked him out of the tree.

MAY (O.S.)
Bug? Get down here, Please.

BUG
Stay out of sight!

Bug goes out the door and closes it behind him. Alex plops on the bed, bouncing on it to test it.

ALEX
Nice.

CUT TO:

INT. HELLER HOUSE - NIGHT

Bug sits at the dining room table staring into space. A condemned man waiting to be sentenced.

The PHONE RINGS. Bug makes no move to answer it. Neither does May.

BUG
You should go to the church. People
are wondering where you are.

MAY (O.S)
(stern)
We're in quarantine.
(then lighter)
We'll have our own celebration.

May comes in from the OS kitchen with a cake ablaze with 15 candles. She sets it in front of him. Puts on a smile.

MAY (CONT'D)
Take your coat off. Stay a while.

Bug does. A leaf falls off the collar.

MAY (CONT'D)
Where were you so long, anyway?

BUG
Burying a friend.
(off May's look)
My Condor. Brandon ruined it. I
gave it a decent burial.

May laughs.

MAY
You gave me a start.

BUG
What, you think I killed somebody?

MAY
(reacts)
Well, that's a silly thing to ask.

She sits. There's an awkward silence.

MAY (CONT'D)
Make a wish.

Bug makes a wish and blows out the candles.

BUG
I wished I could make you proud of
me, instead of what's happened.

May cuts him a piece of cake.

MAY
Carrot. Your favorite..

BUG
I'm sorry.

May accepts that, and appreciates it.

MAY
Bug, I love you. I'll always be
proud of you. But if things come
up, if you're accused of something,
or even if somebody just suspects
something about you, I need to know
the truth from your end.

BUG
I can defend myself.

MAY

I need to know. Like, what were you doing in the girls bathroom?

Bug lowers his head, mortified.

BUG

I was trying to get my phone back. The one you gave me.

MAY

What was it doing in there?

Bug is mortified.

BUG

We were using it as sort of a spy device. We were trying to gather... information about something.

May doesn't like this. And it doesn't sound like Bug, either.

MAY

Who's "we?"

BUG

Alex.

MAY

I should have known.

BUG

It's not his fault, entirely. I was curious to know what Brittany thought of me.

MAY

Brittany Cunningham? She's kind of sophisticated for you, isn't she?

BUG

I like her.

May takes a beat.

MAY

So did you find out? What she thinks of you?

FANG (O.S.)

She thinks he's a retard.

The door SLAMS and Fang stalks through the living room and on up the stairs. *Fang?*

Yes Fang - Bug's older sister, Leah, and the bane of his and May's lives. From now on we'll call her Leah, her given name.

MAY
 (calling after her)
 Do not use that word in this house!

But Leah's gone. May, steaming, looks at Bug.

MAY (CONT'D)
 Just because Leah says mean things
 doesn't make them so.

BUG
 It does to Brittany. Leah told
 her....

MAY
 Leah told her what?

Bug thinks it over.

BUG
 I said I wouldn't lie, I didn't say
 I'd tell you everything.

He says this without anger. In fact, he says it rather endearingly. May smiles.

MAY
 Fair enough. Neither one of us has
 to tell the other everything.
 (happy to change the
 subject)
 I've got an idea.

She takes out her cell phone and speed dials.

BUG
 Who you calling?

MAY
 Your phone.

BUG
 Mom! Please.

MAY
 Stop worrying. I'll just arrange to
 get it back.

EXT. THE WOODS / RIVER / ROAD

AT THE PENELOPE CRIME SCENE - COPS, CORONER, A NEWS CREW.

A COP nearest the woods, turns around. He hears a CELL PHONE RINGING. But nobody he knows of is in those woods. The CELL PHONE STOPS. He heads for the woods.

IN THE WOODS. The cop approaches and looks down. Doesn't see anything and pokes around, sweeping brush aside with his foot. Then he finds it.

BRITTANY'S PACK. Bloody. And a few feet away, Brittany herself. Dead, a GloStick necklace glowing around her neck.

The cop straightens and yells back to the crime scene -

COP
We got another one!

SMASH CUT TO:

CUT TO:

INT. HELLER HOUSE - NIGHT

MAY
It went to voice mail.

BUG
She's with Brandon.

MAY
What? How do you know.

BUG
I saw them go off together. Into the woods. They were gonna, you know.

May gets it.

MAY
Oh my goodness.

CUT TO:

INT. FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH - NIGHT

The place has turned into a counseling center, war room. Parents are besides themselves - hugging their kids if they're there, terrified if they're not - as Paterson tries to calm them.

PATERSON

I do not want to unduly alarm you all, but we have lost three kids today, all three members of the Riverton Seven. Jay Chan might not have been, but Brandon O'Neil and Penelope Bryte appear to have been murdered.

A gasp goes through the whole place.

PATERSON (CONT'D)

Now, I advise you all to stay right here, rather than go home. Pastor Johnson agrees. We can protect you here, and there's safety in numbers.

His CELL BUZZES. He checks it, listens, and puts it away. He's good at hiding what he's feeling. But he definitely heard something upsetting.

PATERSON (CONT'D)

I've got things I have to do, but please take seriously what I've said.

He heads for the door. Pastor Johnson takes over, doing his best to calm everyone.

ANGLE NEAR THE DOOR OUT.

Lake's there, keeping track of who comes and goes. He's already read Paterson's face.

LAKE

What?

PATERSON

The unit at the old ambulance scene heard a phone ringing in the bushes. Went over and found Brittany Cunningham.

LAKE

It's raining bodies. Did they check Last Call Received?

PATERSON

(nods)

She hadn't had a call for half an hour.

LAKE

There must've been a second phone.

PATERSON

If there was, it was one of those new ones that have legs, cause it wasn't there.

He opens the door to leave.

LAKE

Her parents are here - aren't you going to tell them?

PATERSON

(grim)

No. You are.

He goes out before Lake can protest.

CUT TO:

INT. HELLER HOUSE - NIGHT

May refills Bug's milk glass as he polishes off the last of his piece of birthday cake.

BUG

That was delicious.

MAY

There's more where that came from.

BUG

No, thanks, I -

LEAH (OS)

Time for presents!

Bug and May look to see Leah coming back downstairs carrying a box wrapped in colorful paper.

MAY

(taking hope)

Well, there's a first time for everything.

LEAH

I don't give gifts just to give gifts, May. Gifts should *mean* something.

She puts the box on the table next to Bug. It's big.

LEAH (CONT'D)
Happy fifteenth.

She stands waiting.

BUG
What is it?

LEAH
Open it and you'll find out.

THE PHONE RINGS. Neither Leah or May make a move for it. Bug takes a step, but Leah cuts him off.

LEAH (CONT'D)
Open it.

Bug pulls off the paper and opens the box. He smiles, a bit confused.

THE PHONE STOPS RINGING. Bug lifts out a hobby horse. The hobby horse - with his name painted blood-red on its side and a man's HAND PRINT on its saddles blood-red paint.

May's on her feet, livid.

MAY
Bug, go to your room.

BUG
What?

MAY
Please.

Bug senses this is something big between May and Leah, a place he'd rather not be. He heads upstairs, taking the hobby horse with him.

May turns on Leah.

MAY (CONT'D)
How could you?

LEAH
Somebody's got to bust his cherry.

May slaps the girl hard.

Leah hardly blinks. In fact she smiles.

LEAH (CONT'D)

You're not answering your phone,
May. It's been ringing off the
hook.

May, still in shock at what she's just done, can barely
answer.

MAY

I don't want to talk to anybody
right now.

LEAH

You should. It's good to keep up
with the news.

She grabs the REMOTE and turns on the TV. It comes right up
on the breaking news.

NEWSCASTER (O.C.)

These are the first murders in this
peaceful community in fifteen
years. Not since the Riverton
Ripper, a mentally deranged family
man killed seven people, including
his pregnant -

May grabs the remote and turns off the TV.

LEAH

Don't you want to know who the
victims are? Jay Chan and Brandon
O'Neil. Both were sevens

MAY

Just once, why don't you focus on
something positive?

LEAH

Because positive is a lie. I face
things.

MAY

You think hiding in your room is
facing things? Nineteen and still
in high school? Never dating?

INT. BUG'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alex is at Bug's computer, tapping away.

Edgar is back on station, watching the whole room.

Bug's checking out the rocking horse. He gives it a gentle rock. Notes the hand print. Then he see's there is something on its belly.

INSERT - The identification of the maker there, branded into the wood. "From the Shop of Abel Plenkov."

BACK ON BUG - puzzling that one.

BUG
Who's Abel Plenkov?

ALEX
Is he a ball player?

Bug's head turns - the argument downstairs has gotten more heated.

LEAH (O.S.)
Dating? What planet are you from?
My father tried to kill me when I
was four - my mother was murdered.
You weren't there - I was.

ON ALEX AND BUG.

ALEX
Whoa.

INT. DOWNSTAIRS - HELLER HOUSE - NIGHT

May has just snapped from guilt to attack mode.

MAY (O.S.)
And how long are you going to use
that to justify your pathetic
cowardice?

Leah is instantly outraged.

LEAH
Coward? You think I'm a coward?

MAY
You hide from being a human being,
for openers. You get kids at school
to do your dirty work. At home you
hide in your room. You're still in
high school at 19 because you're
too chicken shit to get on with
your life.

LEAH

(off-balance)

What about you? You're nothing but an old maid. Why don't you get out?

May steps forward and puts her face right in Leah's. And this time she's not blinking.

MAY

I had a that kind of life, Leah. I put it aside to raise you and Adam. It's a life I've never regretted for a minute because you're my sister's kids, and she had more love and laughter and courage in her on any given day than you've shown in your whole miserable life. So, find courage and some heart, or get out.

May turns and disappears into the kitchen.

Leah is left stunned.

CUT TO:

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY & BEDROOMS - NIGHT

ON BUG, IN THE HALLWAY NEAR HIS OWN ROOM. He's heard it all. Leah, armor pierced, interior smoking, stops halfway up the stairs, seeing Bug in his doorway.

BUG

Hi.

LEAH

Fuck off.

She heads for her room. Bug goes after her - an act we couldn't imagine him doing earlier - and stops her.

BUG

Why do you hate me so much? *I've* never done anything to you.

LEAH

Yes you have. You ruined my life. The minute you were born everything went to shit. You were the miracle baby, I was the painful reminder. It's been that way ever since. You get to live in a dream, I get to live in a nightmare.

(MORE)

LEAH (CONT'D)
I'm sick to death of your
innocence. It's an insult to me.

She goes into her room and slams the door.

BUG
What do you mean, Miracle Baby?

No answer.

CUT TO:

INT. LEAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Leah's got her back to the door, keeping the hurricane at bay.

CLOSER ON HER - as her eyes focus on -

HER DOLL HOUSE - the very one her father crafted for her. Only now it's draped in black.

BACK ON Leah - as something deep inside her finally breaks.

WIDER - as she seizes the thing, lifts it over her head and smashes it to the floor. And then she does it again, and again - smashes it until it is unrecognizable as anything but kindling.

Sweet dreams and fine machines in pieces on the ground.

CUT TO:

INT. BUG'S ROOM - NIGHT

ON BUG and ALEX - frozen in place, looking at the wall separating them from Bug's sister. The faint SOUND OF LEAH SOBBING can be heard for a few moments, then there's utter silence. Alex, to his credit, acts like he's doing something at the computer. As for Bug, he's in some kind of awe or deep astonishment or even revelation. Fang, Leah, is *human*. She can feel pain.

He never thought he'd live to see the day.

ALEX
Um, I found out who Abel Plenkov was.

BUG
Who?

ALEX
The Riverdale Slasher. And your
father.

Bug just stares at him for a long moment.

BUG
Okay. That makes sense.

ALEX
It does?

BUG
It does.

INT. LEAH'S ROOM - NIGHT

Leah is on her knees beside her ruined house, curled in a fetal ball.

There's a KNOCK on her door.

LEAH
Go away.

LOUDER KNOCKING. PERSISTENT - BAM, BAM, BAM!

She flings the door open.

LEAH (CONT'D)
Do you want to die?

Bug pushes past her - carrying the hobby horse with him. He marches to the remains of the doll house.

LEAH (CONT'D)
What're you doing? Get out of here.

Bug raises the hobby horse over his head and SMASHES IT AGAINST THE FLOOR - INTO THE SHARDS OF THE DOLL HOUSE.

Leah watches in astonishment - almost fear. Bug is possessed - swinging down with all his might. The horse disintegrates under the force of his blows, its blood-red head splintering, its little rockers flying across the room - the whole thing reduced to broken pieces in ten or fifteen furious seconds.

Done, Bug turns and looks at his sister.

BUG
There.

He straightens his shirt. The envelope he put inside and completely forgot about way back in the girls restroom, falls to the floor.

He picks it up and walks out of the room.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY.

Bug walks right past May - who's at the top of the stairs, not knowing what the hell is going on. Then he comes back and looks at her.

BUG

I know you're not my mother.

May is frozen in place - hearing what she's dreaded Bug saying for a decade and a half.

MAY

Bug - I'm so sorry. I -

He stops her, and says matter-of-factly:

BUG

You went the extra mile for me.
Nobody else. You're the mother I
have, and the one I want. End of
story.

Bug goes into his room and closes the door.

May sinks back against the wall. Then, call it Mother's Intuition, she looks towards Leah's room. Leah's standing there looking at her.

LEAH

What got into him?

May has no anger left.

MAY

What's gotten into all of us?

Leah blinks. May's tone is as if nothing has happened. Or everything had happened and she's stronger for it.

LEAH

I'm sorry, May. I've been a bitch.

May doesn't nod, or say *yeah, you have*, or anything like that. She just looks at Leah, savoring that for the first time in years it feels good to be in the same room with her.

MAY

We're going to the church. You, me,
Bug. You should pack for the night.

LEAH

You talked to somebody?

MAY

Yes, I did. It's not safe here any
more. They've found another body.

LEAH

Who?

MAY

Brittany.

Leah bursts into tears. Falls back against the wall. May
tries to hold her but Leah won't let her.

LEAH

Just get Bug.

May goes down the hall to Bug's door and knocks. Opens the
door.

MAY

Bug?

Bug isn't there.

On his bed is a note. She picks it up.

INSERT: "Mom - I'll see you at the church. Get out of the
house."

May looks. Bug's window is wide open.

Leah joins her.

MAY (CONT'D)

He hasn't snuck out his window
since he was ten.

LEAH

Where'd he go?

MAY

He says to the church.

LEAH

Then that's where he'll be.

May looks at her and nods. Then Leah does let May hug her, and hold her.

INT. DOWNSTAIRS, HELLER HOUSE - NIGHT.

May and Leah race downstairs and out the front door, locking it behind them.

The house falls silent. Silent as a tomb.

CUT TO:

INT. BUG'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

ON THE EMPTY ROOM.

Empty, that is, until Bug crawls out from under the bed and Alex steps out of the closet.

Bug looks at his friend.

BUG

Alex. I need you to go. Go to the church. It's not safe here.

ALEX

It's not safe anywhere. You know what's happening? We're getting picked off - the Riverdale Seven are now the Riverdale Three - you, me and Jerome.

BUG

Brittany too?

ALEX

Yeah.

Bug turns and looks at the open window, his face away from us.

BUG

Penelope sent me a note.

ALEX

What? When?

BUG

This morning, I think. Fang stole it, then I got it out of Brittany's pack by accident.

ALEX
What, she try to save your soul?

Bug turns and gives him a funny look.

BUG
Pretty much. She said it was going to happen this year.

ALEX
The killings?

BUG
Yeah.

ALEX
So your... the slasher's really did come back?

BUG
She said that if the slasher went into the river and survived, he'd be the one coming for all of us but one. One of us is neutral cause he's the seventh.

ALEX
You, me or Jerome?

BUG
My vote is Jerome.

ALEX
And what if he didn't survive?

Then one of us seven is out to kill the other six.

ALEX
That's it?

BUG
One more thing. She said don't rule anybody out, even myself, but that we'd all be forgiven.

He turns to his desk drawer and pulls out a huge knife. Alex's eyes go wide.

ALEX
What's that?

BUG
The biggest knife I could find in
the kitchen.

Bug walks over to him. Raises the knife.

BUG (CONT'D)
I'm going to kill you now.

Alex looks at him - trapped.

ALEX
No you're not.

BUG
Why not?

ALEX
Because you're Bug. And my friend.

Bug stares at him a long moment. Then flips the knife and
hands it to him handle first.

BUG
Now you.

He turns his back. Alex looks at the knife. Then says
quietly.

ALEX
Do you think I could kill somebody?

BUG
I think we all could.

ALEX
Bug. Turn around. I want to see
your stupid face.

Bug turns around. Scared, actually.

ALEX (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I -

BUG'S CELL PHONE RINGS.

But Bug doesn't have his phone. And why is EDGAR RINGING?

ALEX (CONT'D)
Your crow's ringing.

BUG
 (totally creeped out)
 Raven.

Bug goes to it and sees it has a slash in its breast. He reaches in and pulls out his cellphone.

BUG (CONT'D)
 How'd my phone get in Edgar?

ALEX
 How would I know?

BUG
 If you put it there, I guess.

THE PHONE STOPS RINGING.

Alex looks at him, tears in his eyes.

ALEX
 I didn't mean to do it.

Tears flood Bug's eyes as well.

BUG
 She was mean, but she didn't
 deserve to die.

ALEX
 She?

Then, as if struck by lightning, he lunges straight at Bug. But he doesn't stab - he drops the knife and shoves Bug as hard as he can with both hands.

Almost in the same instant, ABEL PLENKOV SCREAMS THROUGH THE DOORWAY FROM THE HALL AND STABS DOWN AT BUG WITH INCREDIBLE FURY!

Alex's shove sends Bug flying, but it puts him right on target for the knife. Abel's knife plunges deep into his back!

He gives an awful cry and twists around as the knife is jerks back out. B.G. Bug staggers up and sees the huge man - sees Alex, bleeding horribly, throw himself on the man.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Run, Bug!

But Bug doesn't run - he charges even as Abel flings Alex off and turns.

Bug crashes into him so hard the man is knocked backwards.

He turns and with one swift move turns Edgar towards the man, then snatches up the kitchen knife. A split-second later Abel is on his feet and attacking again.

Bug counters with a duck and upward slash - getting the man across the thigh. Howls of pain from Abel - a leaping dive from Bug that gets him to his work bench. He dives under it and flips it over - catching the brunt of Abel's next charge. Abel's knife goes right through the thick top of the bench, and gets stuck - just long enough that Bug can counter-attack - stabbing the guy right in the neck.

Abel howl in rage and pain, and with one huge sweep of his powerful arm knocks Bug flying, Bug one way, his knife the other.

Before Bug can do anything to defend himself, Abel hauls him up and slams him into the wall - then puts his own knife right to Bug's throat.

TIGHT TWO SHOT - THE TWO MEN FACE TO FACE - INCHES AWAY, the knife right at Bug's face.

And that EVIL VOICE says

EVIL ABEL

Hello, son. I've saved you for last.

The blade caresses his cheek, millimeters from his eye. Bug tries to lean away from it, but there's just no room.

The demon lowers the knife OUT OF FRAME BOTTOM.

Bug is shaking now - tears springing into his eyes. All that crap about some sort of Zen - it's gone - he's just a kid frozen in pure terror.

EVIL ABEL (CONT'D)

Or would you rather I gutted you like a fish? Speak up - I can't hear you groveling yet - and I will have you grovel, so your father can hear it in hell.

(smiles a hideous smile)

Oh, I forgot - you didn't know your father - I killed him before you were born.

That somehow gets through to Bug. He straightens up and looks right back at the monster, despite his tears.

BUG
 You're nothing to me. I'm my
 father's son, not yours.

EVIL ABEL
 Then join him in hell.

He raises his knife to strike -

AT THE PRECISE MOMENT PATERSON FIRES FROM THE BEDROOM DOORWAY
 - BLAM, BLAM, BLAM!

Bug is dropped and scrambles away.

ON ABLE AND Paterson. ABEL SPRAWLING, TRYING TO GET AWAY,
 PATERSON WALKING AFTER HIM PUMPING ONE BULLET INTO HIM AFTER
 ANOTHER.

Finally his weapon, a semi-automatic that holds twelve in the
 clip and one in the chamber, is empty.

There's dead silence in the room. Except for the distant
 TOLLING OF THE CHURCH BELL RING MIDNIGHT. And, nearer, the
 quiet voice of Bug -

BUG (O.S.)
 Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray
 the Lord my soul to keep.

Paterson, pulling himself out of a trance of pure rage, looks
 over.

Bug is on the floor beneath the open window, Alex's head
 cradled in his bloody lap, holding his hand.

ALEX
 (barely audible)
 If I should die...

BUG
 ...before I wake, I pray the lord
 my soul to take.

Alex smiles.

ALEX
 Condor. Fake it good.

BUG
 I will, Coyote. I swear I will.

And Alex is gone. Just the TOLLING BELL now.

Bug stands. Gets Edgar and solemnly turns him towards his friend. Then looks at Paterson.

BUG (CONT'D)
 (to Paterson)
 How'd you know to be here?

PATERSON
 Alex killed his father tonight.

Bug turns and looks at him.

PATERSON (CONT'D)
 He told his mother he was coming here to die.

Bug seems to take this as if there are no surprises left.

BUG
 Is Jerome okay?

PATERSON
 Jerome's just fine.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE RIVER / THE TOWN - NIGHT

LOOKING ACROSS THE RIVER to the LIGHTS of RIVERTON and the LIGHTED WHITE STEEPLE, its bell TOLLING the last stroke, of midnight.

BUG
 Then let it end.

ALL THE STORE LIGHTS IN TOWN GO OUT. Now just the steeple is lit.

Then THE STEEPLE GOES DARK AS WELL.

JEROME'S PIANO does a great one-bar intro - and the CHOIR launches into a powerful song of triumph and deliverance - "Oh Happy Day."

SCREEN PLUNGES TO BLACK, but THE MUSIC CONTINUES.