## INT. BAR & LOUNGE - NIGHT

We OPEN with an OVERHEAD VIEW of piano keys. A PAIR OF HANDS come into view. Knuckles crack. Fingers spread out above the keys. But they don't play a note. Not yet. Hesitation.

The deafening silence amplifies the sounds of FOOTSTEPS and other SUBTLE BACKGROUND NOISES.

CLOSE SHOT of FRANK'S FACE. A blinding spotlight shining on him. In his late twenties, his haggard appearance nearly hides his baby face. Dark circles under his sad, droopy eyes along with a thick five o'clock shadow contradict his suit and tie. Nothing super snazzy, but most likely his "good" suit.

His WIDE EYES wander the room. A sense of dread. He's done this a million times. He's tired of it.

We PULL BACK CONTINUOUSLY to reveal Frank on a small stage behind his piano -- down an aisle through the what normally would be an AUDIENCE -- only about TWO or THREE PEOPLE spread unevenly across the room. Many empty tables. A FEW DRUNKEN REGULARS sit at the bar. Everyone preoccupied. As if Frank did not exist.

The CAMERA STOPS at the back of the room. Frank merely a silhouette under the bright lights on stage. Miniscule in comparison to the size of the nearly empty room.

Suddenly, a MAN'S SILHOUETTE steps into view, facing the stage. His back to the camera.

A CLOSE LOW ANGLE SHOT of Frank's profile. His silhouette against the bright lights. He hangs his head for a moment. More doubts. But he picks his head up. Takes a long breath. Tries to find some inspiration.

OVERHEAD VIEW of his fingers sprawled out across the ivories.

CLOSE SHOT of Frank shutting his eyes. Losing himself. Giving himself the illusion of a full house. All here to see him play.

OVERHEAD VIEW of his fingers pounding down on the keys. The opening chords -- the CLASSICAL PIANO PIECE. Popular. Perhaps LISZT or CHOPIN.

THE AUDIENCE -- a PATRON takes his eyes away from a book, glances up at the stage slightly annoyed. He returns back to his book.

STAGE -- The CAMERA circles around Frank. He surveys the audience while playing with great precision.

We catch a glimpse of the SLIM AUDIENCE -- nobody paying attention. As the CAMERA goes back to Frank, he wears a look of disappointment. Becoming distracted.

Frank, annoyed and peeved, shortens his piece and hurries it along. Angry eyes while making the last minute adjustment.

He reaches the final chords of the piece, which REVERBERATE throughout the room. A sad look on his face as he stares blankly at the empty seats.

Silence. Frank's performance only background music.

Frank forces a sad grin. Looks at his cocktail which sits upon the piano. Takes a swig. Hangs his head, shoulders slumped.

ENTHUSIASTIC APPLAUSE. One person CLAPPING. A MAN at the back of the room. Shadows hiding his face. Still CLAPPING.

Frank scrunches his brow. Confused. He narrows his eyes and leans forward for a better look...

BACK OF THE ROOM -- a PAIR OF HANDS clapping. Excessively. Going on for far too long.

Frank grows uncomfortable. Almost embarrassed. He flashes a sarcastic grin and nods. As the EXCESSIVE CLAPPING persists:

FRANK

(leans in to microphone) Thank you.

Frank stands up. Grabs his drink and splits. The BRIGHT SPOTLIGHT beams down on his empty seat at the piano.

INT. BAR & LOUNGE - AT THE BAR - LATER

A TRACKING SHOT shows an empty bar. Only a few DRUNKS left.

BEHIND THE BAR -- The CAMERA PANS CONTINUOUSLY -- A DRUNK pounds a shot, drowning himself in his sorrows -- ANOTHER DRUNK is passed out asleep, his head lying sideways on his arms -- as we CONTINUE TO PAN --

SAM (0.S.)

You think people come to a joint like this to hear Beethoven?

CAMERA STOPS at Frank. A look of despair. Sadness. Looks down at a drink that appears half empty from his point of view.

He takes a swig and shrugs. Fairly drunk. Lackadaisical in his delivery.

FRANK

I wasn't playing Beethoven.

SAM, the bartender, an average Joe, blue collar and middle-aged, wipes down an empty spot at the bar nearby.

SAM

Whatever. This ain't no opera house, Frank. Ain't even a piano bar. It's a fucking hole-in-the-wall dive that just so happens to have a piano. So, let's stick to the contemporary stuff, okay? Save that classical shit for Carnegie Hall.

Frank smiles sadly.

FRANK

You know, I played there once?

SAM

Carnegie Hall?

FRANK

(nods)

Long time ago. Guess I was like some kind of child prodigy. Even composed my own music.

Frank gazes down at his drink. Lost in thought.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Long, long time ago.

Sam stares at him, sympathetic.

SAM

Why in Christ are you playing here for?

Frank shrugs.

FRANK

It's reality. Pays rent.

Sam snickers.

SAM

I'd hate to step foot in your apartment.

(beat)

You know, maybe if you started taking requests, it would get the place jumping a little bit. Draw yourself more of audience. Get some extra bread in your jar.

Frank snickers pathetically. Looks up at Sam condescendingly.

FRANK

(smiling ironically)

Requests?

Frank motions his hand around the venue behind him. The CAMERA follows his hand, reveals empty tables and seats.

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

From who?

CAMERA back to Frank.

FRANK (CONT'D)

There's nobody to take requests from. And when there is, nobody cares. I'm background music. I barely exist. And it's not like I don't play the hits. I do Elton John, Billy Joel. All that karaoke, sing-a-long bullshit.

SAM

Hey, we're not holding you prisoner here, forcing you to play. I'm sure there's other spots.

FRANK

Not for me, there's not. All the gigs are going to cover bands and deejays. The rest of 'em are being replaced with Jukeboxes. There's no audience for me. Not any more.

Frank hangs his head. Staring at his drink.

FRANK (CONT'D)

I'm a dying breed, Sam. An endangered species on the brink of extinction.

Sam looks to the end of the bar, appears annoyed:

SAM

For Christ sake...

Sam walks out of view to the ...

END OF THE BAR -- EXTREME CLOSE SHOT ON a lit cigar. Lips sucking smoke from it and exhaling a thick cloud.

IN THE BACKGROUND, Sam approaches:

SAM (CONT'D)

Hey pal, no smoking in here!

In SLOW MOTION, the cigar falls into a cocktail glass. The CAMERA TILTS into an OVERHEAD SHOT. Reveals the cigar cherry fizzling out.

A CLOSE SHOT of Frank. Sam sets a drink in front of him.

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

Looks like you've got yourself a fan.

A MAN sits IN THE BACKGROUND. At the end of the bar. OUT OF FOCUS. BLURRED. As Frank turns to the end of the bar:

FAN comes into focus.

CLOSE SHOT of FAN -- in his thirties. Something elegant about him. Neatly groomed and clean shaven. Perfect hair, combed just right. A snazzy suit. But something off about him. Mysterious, piercing eyes. Menacing.

Frank nods at FAN. Just a brief acknowledgment before sipping his cocktail.

FAN continues to eyeball Frank peculiarly. As if waiting for Frank to further acknowledge him.

FAN

I enjoyed your performance up there tonight. You're quite talented.

Frank wears a labored grin. Skeptical. While staring at his drink:

FRANK

Sure thing, buddy.

Dead pause. FAN wears a dead serious expression. Staring at Frank. As if entranced by him.

Frank hangs his head. Feels eyes on him. He turns slightly to FAN. They stare at each other. An offbeat silence.

FRANK (CONT'D)

What?

FAN shrugs. His eyes fixated on Frank.

FAN

When's the next show?

Frank raises an eyebrow while growing uncomfortable by FAN'S long, awkward staring.

FRANK

Next show?

Frank turns back to his drink.

FAN

Won't be a next show.

FAN doesn't understand. In denial.

FAN (CONT'D)

What's that supposed to mean?

FRANK

(turns to Fan)

What do you think it means? I'm fucking done with this shit. It's over. I'm washed up.

FAN glares at Frank. Annoyed.

Frank looks back down at his drink. A defeated man.

A long awkward silence. The tension thick. Frank feels FAN'S contemptuous glare. Frank turns to him.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Is there a problem?

FAN thinks about it. His never-blinking eyes stuck on Frank while pondering. FAN shrugs, scratches his head. An odd, long delayed response:

FAN

Is there?

They stare at each other until Frank grows too uncomfortable. He turns away from FAN. Finishes off his cocktail. Sets the empty glass on the bar.

Frank stands up, tosses money on the bar. Ignores FAN, who studies him closely.

The CAMERA follows Frank as he leaves. He passes Sam:

FRANK

Take it easy, Sam.

Sam wipes down the bar:

SAM

See you next week?

FRANK

(nearing the door)
Don't count on it.

Frank glances back at FAN while leaving. The CAMERA PULLS AWAY from FAN who sits facing Frank. Watching him menacingly.

ANGLE ON Frank's drink which sits on the bar. IN THE BACKGROUND, Frank leaves out the front door.

Continue FOCUS ON the drink. Moments later, a HAND jumps into view and snatches the glass off the bar. Soon, FAN is seen leaving.

EXT. STREET CORNER - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Late night. Desolate. Frank the only one in sight. Frank reaches the corner, peers down the street. In the distance, HEADLIGHTS. Approaching.

Frank waves his hand out, hoping its a cab. FOOTSTEPS behind him. Frank glances back...

GLASS SHATTERS over his face. He drops like a ton of bricks. Out of a view. A LOUD THUD.

The HEADLIGHTS glow brighter as the CAR nears closer. The BRIGHT HEADLIGHTS:

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DARK ROOM - LATER

FRANK'S EYES. Shut. Out like a light. But his eyelids flutter while a SPOTLIGHT shines directly at his face.

Nasty gash above his eye. Blood trickling down his cheek. The BLINDING SPOTLIGHT awakens Frank. He opens his eyes. Still blinking. Groggy. Doesn't know where he is.

Frank looks down and sees a piano in front of him. He picks his head up and sees FAN sitting at the other side of the piano.

FAN sits in a chair, his eyes hidden beneath shadows. Studying Frank.

Frank moves his shoulders but seems stuck. Confused, he looks down to see his elbows bound to the arms of a metal chair by way of rope. The chair bolted to the floor.

He tries to move his legs, but his ankles are also bound to the chair. Panic. Frank looks up at FAN with wide, worrisome eyes. Breathing heavily, suddenly wide awake.

FRANK

What is this?

FAN doesn't respond. Only stares. Observing.

Frank looks down at his lap. Blank sheet music paper and a ball point pen. He looks up at FAN again. Surveys the dark room.

Frank explodes, desperately wiggles his arms. Stuck. On the brink of a full blown panic attack. Sweat pouring down his face. He rocks around in his chair but doesn't budge.

FAN (O.S.)

How long have you been playing?

Frank continues to struggle, GRUNTING while squirming around in his restraints.

FRANK

(frantic)

What the fuck is this?

Frank goes ape while trying his best to escape.

FRANK (CONT'D)

What the fuck am I doing here? LET ME GO!

FAN wears a business like expression while observing Frank closely. Thumbing his chin in thought.

FAN

I asked you a question, Frank.

FRANK

(explodes)

FUCK YOU! FUCK YOU! LET ME GO!

Frank tires himself out. Catches his breath. He takes a moment to survey the room. Looking for an exit plan. But comes up with nothing. Too dark.

Desperation peaking. Tears in Frank's eyes.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Why are you doing this?

FAN leans in, out of the shadows. The light exposing the menace in his eyes.

FAN

I believe I asked you a question.

Frank looks down at the cement floor. Thinks to himself in frustration. Takes a breath, looks up at FAN.

FRANK

I've been playing since as long as I can remember being alive.

FAN

What compelled you to play the piano?

Frank doesn't want to answer questions. A lot on his mind right now, so he just spits out answers:

FRANK

I liked the sound of it.

FAN

And why continue playing all these years?

FRANK

(struggles for an answer)

Shit man, I don't know...

(grows more frustrated

while thinking)

Because I was good at it. I won awards, competitions...

(beat)

Listen, I don't know why you're doing this, but I'm pretty sure its against the law --

FAN

I just don't understand why a man of your talent would just throw all those years of experience out the window. It makes no sense to me --

FRANK

(explodes)

Look at me, you fucking idiot! Open your fucking eyes and take a good look!

FAN stops talking. Only observes. Listens intently. As if fascinated by Frank's behavior.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Everything I've done! All the hard work! Years of lessons! It's all bullshit! One big fucking pipe dream!

Frank's angry self pity turns to sadness quickly. He balls his ass off, tears cascading down his face. Almost hysterical.

FRANK (CONT'D)

(calm)

They told me I was special. That I was destined for big things. I was supposed to be great. But they forgot to mention one thing. People need to give a shit. Without an audience, I'm nothing.

FAN only watches with no change of expression or emotion.

Frank wipes his eyes on his shoulder. Tries to calm himself. Catches his breath. Swallows, clears his throat trying to distract himself from his emotions. Straightens up, looks up at FAN.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Why can't you just let me go?

FAN

But if I do, Frank... what's in it for you?

Frank doesn't understand at first. Bewildered.

FRANK

If you're gonna kill me, just do it already. Fuck it, right? Who cares anyway? Just do it.

FAN smiles fiendishly while thinking to himself. Amused. Tapping his chin rhythmically as he stares at Frank and mulls it over.

FAN rises from his feet. Stands up. Paces back and forth.

Frank watches. Afraid of what's going through FAN'S mind. Thinking if he studies FAN well enough, he can figure him out.

FAN stops pacing. Approaches Frank, elbows relaxed atop the piano. He looks down at Frank.

FAN

I'll give you til morning.

FRANK

For what?

FAN

I want you to write a song. And I'm not talking about some half-hearted ditty. I want you to move me. Understand?

Frank doesn't know what to say. Frightened and befuddled.

FAN (CONT'D)

In the morning, you'll perform the song for me.

FRANK

(tired of this game)

Yeah? Then what?

FAN thinks, his eyes bouncing around wildly. Then focusing on Frank.

FAN

That all depends on you, Frank.

FAN turns, walks away. Disappears into the darkness, his FOOTSTEPS moving up a wooden staircase. Trailing off. Until a door OPENS and SHUTS.

A hush. Frank miffed.

He looks down at the blank sheet music and ball point pen. Shakes his head.

INT. DARK ROOM - THE NEXT DAY

SUPER: MORNING

Frank sits hunched over in his chair. Sound asleep. Blood dry on his face.

SOMEONE WHISTLES. Purposely to awaken Frank.

Frank flutters his eyes. Opens them. Sees FAN sitting in front of the piano. Watching him.

Frank clears his throat, sits up straight. Trying to wake himself up.

FAN

Spotlight's yours, Frank.

Frank doesn't respond. Still groggy.

FAN (CONT'D)

You didn't flake out on me, now, did you?

Frank shakes his head.

FAN (CONT'D)

Fantastic. Let's give it a listen, then. I'm excited to see what you came up with.

ANGLE ON Frank's hands as they reach out to the piano keys. Too far.

FRANK

I can't reach with my arms tied like this.

FAN licks his lips in thought. Scratches his chin. Finally, he stands up, walks around the piano to Frank's side.

FAN reveals a sharp knife that glimmers in the light. Frank's eyes slam wider. Nervous. Eyes glued to the knife.

FAN cuts Frank's arm loose. Carefully walks to the other side of the chair. Watching Frank closely. Making sure there's no sudden moves.

FAN begins cutting Frank's other arm loose. He glances at the sheet music in Frank's lap -- BLANK.

FAN

You didn't write anything --

Frank jabs the BALL POINT PEN into FAN'S neck. FAN drops the knife. Choking. Clutches the pen, which remains in his neck.

FAN stares at Frank in disbelief while staggering backwards. The whole time looking at Frank with wide, puppy dog eyes. How could you do this to me? As if Frank escaping never even crossed his mind.

Frank swipes the sharp knife from the floor and cuts his legs loose. Stands up and stretches out. Waking his sleeping limbs.

FAN drops to one knee. Clutching the pen in his neck. Blood oozing from between his fingers. Drops to his other knee, eventually to his back.

Frank realizes he most likely just killed a man. Not sure what to do. Should he help? But no. Frank did what he had to do.

Frank turns away from FAN. Leaves him. The CAMERA FOLLOWS him. Frank glances back while leaving.

We PULL BACK as FAN struggles on the floor, watching Frank disappear up a wooden staircase.

INT. HOUSE/DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A DOOR OPENS. Frank peaks into the room. Very bright, he stops and adjusts his eyes. What he sees confuses him:

A dinner table. Full. THREE PEOPLE sitting at each side of the table. SIX in total. Wearing COSTUMES. One a MAGICIAN. Another, a CLOWN. Across the table a BALLERINA sitting beside a SALSA DANCER. Also, an OPERA SINGER in old Victorian garments.

They all turn their heads and stare at Frank as he enters the room. A surreal moment. They all wear blank, dead pan expressions.

Frank doesn't know what to make of this. Caught off guard.

FOOTSTEPS. Tapping loudly upon a wood surface. Approaching.

A TAP DANCER enters the room. Cute but odd looking in a bright, colorful dance outfit. A ruffled tutu and tap shoes that clop loudly upon the floor with each footstep.

Her makeup and lipstick match her outfit. Red blush on her cheeks. Like Dorothy from Wizard of Oz.

She carries a steaming hot casserole dish into the room. Stops when she sees Frank. Holding a huge, colorful smile. Very perky.

TAP DANCER Hey there, handsome.

Frank remains frozen. As if just stepping into the Twilight Zone.

TAP DANCER clops her way to the dinner table, sets the casserole dish at the center. Sits down at the end of the table. Looks up at Frank.

TAP DANCER (CONT'D)

Hungry?

Frank stays speechless. Dumbfounded.

TAP DANCER (CONT'D)

(waves to empty seat)

Have a seat. David's practicing his comedy act.

FRANK

David?

Frank turns.

CORNER OF THE ROOM -- Sees DAVID. Early thirties, goofy looking. In suspenders. He stands on a small stage with a microphone stand. A SPOTLIGHT above him. His ankle chained to the wall.

DAVID

How's everyone doing tonight?

Everyone responds. Greets him in return. David beams proudly. In full stand up comic mode.

DAVID (CONT'D)

So here's how it works; I tell jokes, you laugh. Sound good?

Collective, surreal LAUGHTER. David smiles.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Can tell already I got myself a great crowd.

Frank slowly approaches David. Cautiously. Finally, he stops at the stage and analyzes David. In wonder.

David looks down at Frank. Laughs.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Autograph's after the show, sir.

LAUGHTER in the background. Frank leans in close.

FRANK

(whispers)

He got you too, huh?

David ignores Frank. Moves on with his act.

DAVID

(to audience)

So I walk into a bar the other day and I see --

Frank grabs David's arm, pulls him in close.

FRANK

(tight lipped, low voice)
Cut the fucking charade, man! Let's
get out of here!

David jerks his arm away from Frank. Slightly annoyed. Tries to move on with his act. But Frank grabs him by the wrist. Stares at him perplexed.

FRANK (CONT'D)

(tight lipped, low voice)
Don't you want to get out of here?

David stares at Frank confused.

DAVID

But... I haven't finished my act yet.

Frank, baffled, releases David's arm. Slowly backing away. All eyes on him as he backpedals. Frank staring back at them.

TAP DANCER rises from her seat. Looking at Frank with a smile glued to her face. She steps to the center of the hardwood floor.

The room turns dark. A SPOTLIGHT suddenly glows, shines on her. She breaks out into a TAP DANCING ROUTINE. Perky, yet very unsettling.

ZOOM IN on Frank's terrified expression. He turns, runs for the door.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The sun shines brightly. A big, green lawn out front. The FRONT DOOR OPENS.

Frank steps out, shuts the door. He walks out onto the large, empty lawn. Looks around. Sees an endless stretch of woods and road. Nobody in sight. Only him.

He walks out a DUSTY ROAD. Looks both ways. No signs of life. The road seemingly leading to nowhere.

A WIDE VIEW of Frank from the distance shows how alone he is.

CLOSE SHOT of Frank's confused face. Surrounded with desolation. He turns around, faces the HOUSE.

## INT. DARK ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

FAN crawls on his belly. To his chair. Leaving a trail of blood on the cement floor. Clutching his throat. His eyes heavy. Hands covered in blood.

He reaches the chair. Struggles but gets to one knee, one hand on the chair for leverage. He hoists himself up and plops down on the chair. Exhausted.

FAN looks at his hands and sees blood.

FOOTSTEPS descending down the wooden staircase grab his attention.

Frank comes into a view. Walks into the spotlight. Doesn't even look at FAN. Frank immediately sits behind the piano. A moment of thought.

OVERHEAD VIEW of Frank's fingers setting upon the piano keys.

CLOSE SHOT of Frank closing his eyes. Losing himself.

OVERHEAD VIEW of Frank's fingers dancing across the ivories, playing the OPENING CHORDS of an ORIGINAL PIECE.

FAN watches. Confused at first. Sits up straight. Curious. Even intrigued.

CLOSE SHOT of Frank playing the moving piece. No lyrics. Just a ballad. The song starts off sad, yet beautiful. Slowly picking up pace. Giving off a sense of hope as the song progresses.

We, including FAN, somehow get to know Frank's life story through this song. The pain. The struggle. The solitude. But the never ending hope. The only thing keeping him standing.

SLOW ZOOM IN on FAN, who appears moved by the piece. Blood covering his shirt. He appears to be weakening. Struggling to hold on.

SLOW ZOOM IN on Frank. Lost in the music.

Frank reaches the SONG'S CONCLUSION. The FINAL CHORDS reverberate throughout.

CLOSE SHOT of Frank opening his eyes. Staring at FAN. FAN stares back.

FAN, barely able to move, blood-covered hands clutching his throat wound, grins. He slowly removes his hands from his neck. Blood gushing.

He claps his blood-covered hands. Blood spattering into the air. A weak clap.

We slowly MOVE IN. ANGLE ON his bloody hands as the movement in his clap slows and weakens. Close to ending.

FADE OUT:

THE END