

"THE NARROWS"

Follows Tropophilia in the Empress Trilogy

By

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FOR KRISTA C. ,

FOR JARED C. ,

AND FOR MY UNCLE JOHN - FLY BY NIGHT

OPEN ON:

MUSIC CUE:

SCHUBERT'S 'SERENADE'

[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=ZPA0L2WB86E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpa0l2wb86e)

A BORDER:

From above, we rush over the long, barely marked division of two large areas of land.

The land is dry with tough, spare little trees, shrubs, and rocks.

A DRONE is running the line.

The top of the drone, which we watch as we fly with it, above, sports the words:

SECESSIONAL BORDER DATA COLLECTION UNIT

BRENDA (VO)

I even miss the stickies, the little burrs, they're like tiny stars or dried little sea urchins, and they love cotton socks.

I miss calling a place to swim a 'watering hole', and I miss people who say 'caramel' the right way.

And though I miss the spirit of independence, I also do truly hate it.

I do.

CUT TO:

A TRUCK with POLICE MARKINGS AND SIREN BAR pushes through the dirt, pulling off from the border line, it's marked with stars and stripes and says:

US FEDERATION VEHICLE

CUT TO:

The opposite side of the border, driving the OTHER

DIRECTION, a smaller car, also a cop car, emblazoned:

SOVEREIGN TEXAN BORDER

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. NORTH CHICAGO STREET - NIGHT

A BAT fusses and skitters around a light whose too-bright bulb is clotted with bugs.

Below, on an unbusy street, BRENDA stands, watching, somewhat transfixed, or maybe just zoning out.

Over her shoulder is a WORK BAG and she looks smart, made up, etc - heading home.

CUT TO:

AT HOME:

A simple, cute flat - Brenda watches television, it's about bats.

She wears a black BLINDFOLD on her head.

T.V. MAN

The job of management in a colony falls to a few specific bats.

We don't know much about how this choice is made.

But it does appear to be true that administrative power - if we can call it that - passes on in some cases within a family.

This is not unique to the mammal world. But it is unusual for the kingdom of fliers. Another reminder that no matter what they look like, bats are indeed mammals, and a lot more like us than we sometimes notice.

FADE IN:

EXT. "BACKSTAGE" RESTAURANT - LUNCHTIME

"Backstage" is on the pointed corner of two avenues in the kind of unholy arrowhead union that the North Side of Chicago is fond of for joining two streets.

It faces a smallish park with a COMMUNITY CENTRE at its far side, partly visible through the scatter of trees.

The park likewise comes to a point - a more sensible ninety-ish degree one - facing "Backstage".

Across, on both sides, are small theatres, hence the name and traditional purpose of the restaurant.

Red marquees crawl with brightbulb play names.

It's an ordinary day and "Backstage", which has a high industrial ceiling (pipes and wooden vaulting) has a few full tables seated.

It also has tall, empty frontside windows and a fine view of the street and park: it's a bright restaurant even with all of the traditional dark wood.

An older couple ORDERS from a server.

Her curly long hair is down and she's in black and white, a blouse tucked into a smart skirt.

She's black, as opposed to the majority of the people in the restaurant and neighbourhood.

She's talking easily and familiarly.

Meet BRENDA HARBIN (34), taking her table's order.

OLD WOMAN

...and that's all, that's just fine.

BRENDA

Ken, how about you?

OLD MAN (KEN)

The plain chicken plate, please. No potatoes. Bread instead. Extra bread.

Brenda JOTS it down, nodding.

OLD WOMAN

Brenda...

Who looks up, follows the old woman's LINE OF SIGHT and sees the YOUNG MAN standing nervously by the front door, at the windows, leaned on the sill, fidgeting with one of the free local magazines "Backstage" offers in his hand.

OLD WOMAN

I wasn't sure before, dear, but he's looking at you. I'm certain.

Brenda looks him over.

She's got nothing.

He's either reading or pretending to read the magazine.

BRENDA

I don't know him.

(PAUSE)

You two been talking me up?

KEN (WITH A LAUGH)

She's right, Brenda. He's trying to hide it, but he's been watching you.

Brenda throws a look to the bar where a pair of other servers are chatting.

One notices her.

Brenda jerks her head towards the front and the windowsill where the young man waits.

The other server sees him, nods to Brenda and heads his way.

BRENDA (WITH A WINK)

He gets Kelsey. He'll forget all about me.

IN THE BACK:

The kitchen, medium-sized, steam and sweat, Brenda is standing, cooling off by a fan, above which she sticks a ticket.

BRENDA is a Texan transplant, dark-skinned mixed Latina with the smile of someone who was taught to be kind to all people, always, at least at first.

STEFFA is suddenly AT HER SIDE, huffing and puffing.

Brenda SMILES.

STEFFA

Hot enough for ya in here?

BRENDA

Summer in Chicago.

STEFFA

I don't like it. Makes the audience sleepy.

BRENDA

Yeah? That why Shelby cranks the air conditioner all the way up at the Belmont?

STEFFA

Ha! Maybe. Make the room cold.

BRENDA

Keep folks awake? Not a real vote of confidence in her material, huh...

STEFFA

Are you kidding? Shelby's great. She writes her characters into corners. Impossible corners. Then somehow they make it out.

Brenda nods at this, adamantly.

BRENDA

Right.

It gets a bit old for me. One obstacle after another. Always some big problem just before it brightens up by the end.

Life doesn't really move like that for me.

It just kind of....

She holds a hand out in a waves-undulating motion and hums a bit with her mouth.

Steffa laughs sharply at this and claps her hands.

STEFFA

Oh god...You sound just like her...

I look forward to *your* first play. Or at least your next late-night share.

Brenda nods, somewhat dismissive.

BRENDA

Hey, did you see that guy out there? Kelsey's table? Single.

STEFFA

Yeah. He was staring at you earlier.

Brenda frowns, hands move to her hips.

BRENDA

Was he? That's what the Watsons said!

STEFFA

Yeah, he was. He asked for you, but Kels took him.

BRENDA

He looks...I dunno. Maybe familiar. I'm so bad...maybe? I dunno.

STEFFFA

Mmmm. My dad used to say "maybe's a fifteen percent word..."

BRENDA (MISHEARING)

Like fifty-fifty?

STEFFFA

Fifteen. Teen.

BRENDA

Oh, I see. Fifteen. Shit. Not great odds, huh?

STEFFFA

Maybe means no. That's the rule.

TIME PASSES:

Dishes rest, washed, in square white racks.

An industrial quick steam washer lets off its last puffs of vapour.

A **DOORWAY** in the BACK OF THE RESTAURANT - NIGHT
(SAME)

...is opened with DARKNESS beyond, and sound rising, PIANO sound.

We HOLD on the doorway

Then WALK DOWN INTO THE BASEMENT

Which is a performance space with a stage and open areas for chairs to seat maybe eighty, and standing room.

It's nearly full.

Onstage, **BRENDA** reads a CARD she holds in front of her.

The lights are low around her.

BRENDA (TO CROWD; QUIETLY)

I had a strange day today.

Anybody else have a weird one? I had a strange one.

Strange day. Mhm. And when I say that I mean strange for nowadays, which is really fucking strange, right?

A few people WHOOP and a scatter of them approve or clap.

BRENDA

I'll say...

I'll say.

But strange doesn't even come close to describing what you're going to see tonight.

She's gone from a comically intimate whisper to full voice.

People shout and whistle.

BRENDA

Folks, it's gonna take *playing like your life depended on it* to a new level.

(LONG PAUSE - ANTICIPATION
BUILDS)

But I'll let you see for yourself - here they are!

She holds out her hand with the card she read from and the LIGHTS reveal, behind and beside her, a MAN AND WOMAN at a piano.

CLOSE SHOTS of the piano player - the woman: her **hands, nails, mouth (she licks her lips), and eyes.**

Oddly enough, she is BANDAGED, it goes around her forehead.

The MAN stands behind her.

He holds a TINY BALL PEEN HAMMER.

MAN

Our star doesn't speak.

More importantly she doesn't sleep.

You see, she has a terrible concussion,
and sleep might kill her.

So she plays and plays and plays.

But she must feel the music. If it doesn't
come naturally and she strains herself to
think about it...

...it could also kill her!

Therefore...

The man pauses and LEANDS near the woman, straight-backed
and poised.

He holds the SMALL HAMMER near her head and then, swiftly,
surgically, TAPS the side of her bandage.

A TRICKLE OF BLOOD spills down the side where he knocked
her.

People GASP.

Someones says that they'll be sick.

The man HOLDS UP a flat HAND: relax.

And the music BEGINS.

Her **HANDS** spill up and down the piano in exquisite
patterning that is hypnotically precise, and the piece
FILLS the room:

Franz Liszt: Liebestraum - Love Dream

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpOtuoHL45Y>

MAN

Yes...play! Play!

Play to stay awake...

CUT TO:

INT. BEHIND THE STAGE - BACKSTAGE -NIGHT (SAME)

Performers chat and laugh.

The piano player's bandage is carefully removed, revealing the **squib** full of fake blood beneath it.

She sighs and talks with her fellow performer, the man.

We cut to a few shots of the restaurant/theatre as

NIGHT PASSES

and becomes DAY.

FADE OUT:

OPEN ON OUTDOORS

Static shots of a north Chicago street, park, cafes, a few tall billboards.

EXT. CHICAGO'S NORTH SIDE - DAY

Brenda is WALKING towards **BACKSTAGE**.

We see "Backstage", latish afternoon, early evening light draining from the sky.

Brenda walks out of the front door.

She has her purse over one shoulder and she's fishing a BOOK out from it.

She walks to a nearby BUS STOP.

OPENS her book.

Checks the time on her phone.

Then **FREEZES**, eyes ahead on the opposite street.

The **GUY** is sitting, fidgeting, at a cafe opposite.

He's got a BAG in front of him.

He's facing the other way, can't see her: likely doesn't know she's there.

Right?

She pauses.

Wiggles a bit, fusses.

Checks her reflection in the partial view on the busstop billboard.

And CROSSES the road.

Sitting at a round metal table in front of a small cafe, smoking a cigarette, is FERN (28).

He's unshaven, tidy enough, dark skin, wearing a polo shirt, rings on his fingers.

Brenda ARRIVES.

BRENDA

Um, hi. Frank?

He JOLTS slightly, looking up to see her.

He seems self-conscious about the cigarette, like he might put it out, but Brenda smiles and asks if she can have one.

CUT TO:

Close shot of a second, full cigarette being lit with a smaller, half-smoked one.

They're speaking.

BRENDA

Yeah, it was nice. But it wasn't quite there, right?

He shrugs, seeming edgy.

FERN

I thought...I thought you were great. I don't know. Couldn't shake it from my mind. Now I'm down to my last day here.

BRENDA

I still find that crazy. You wanted to see me? Someone you went on *one date* with?

He's watching over her shoulder.

She notices his KNUCKLES are scraped up.

FERN

Who knows how it works. But for the last few days I've had it in my head. Got to see her. I don't still have your number. I didn't mean to come bother you where you work. So when you sent the other waitress, I figured I'd let it go...

Brenda wears her concern on her face.

BRENDA

Well, Frank...I mean...It's fine. It's okay. I just couldn't really place you. I didn't remember our date.

Sorry. It was months ago.

He nods stiffly, quickly.

His HANDS are quivering.

Now she's curious.

BRENDA

Frank, are you okay? Don't take this wrong, but you look awful.

He gives a quick, high laugh.

Smiles.

FERN

No, it's good. It's good. Just...

Did you think there was something there? With us?

She looks at him carefully.

After a long pause she chooses her words:

BRENDA

I felt like you needed there to be. And that's...

I'll be honest-

That's a lot of pressure for the first time meeting someone.

You brought a lot to the table.

And then his mood turns, and he's shaking his head before she even stops.

FERN

No, it wasn't...it wasn't like that. No. You missed it. You don't understand.

Taken aback, Brenda frowns.

BRENDA (CRISPLY)

What can I do for you? Hmm? You're spending your last day coming to see me. I thought it was a sweet gesture.

Now you're mad?

He draws in a long, deep breath.

FERN

No. No, no. No, I'm not mad.

(PAUSE)

I'm afraid.

And then he bursts out CRYING, tucking his head into his arm.

Brenda's eyes widen and she gets up out of her seat and walks to him.

BRENDA

What's wrong? What are you afraid of? Listen, Frank, the city's hard. It's not

for everyone.

I mean...look at all the refugees, you know? There are Texans coming over all the damn time.

Through his sobs she hears him say something.

She can't make it out, asks him to repeat it.

FERN

You seemed so happy. You seemed so...set.

She shrugs, arms around and patting him.

BRENDA

Oh, I don't know about that.

And even if I was.

You know you can't just get that from a person, right? I mean if you felt that strongly about it, it's probably a good sign you're missing something.

He half-nods, half shrugs.

FERN

Funny you should mention refugees....

BRENDA

Is it?

He laughs somewhat coldly.

FERN

You said Texas. You know, some people don't even say it these days. Won't even say the word. And they *definitely* won't say Houston.

Houston.

I say it.

I wonder what your take is on that. D'you

believe what they say here? That it's hell
over there?

Or do you think the other rumors are
right...they've made some kind of
paradise...

He puts his cigarette out.

A long moment passes, and we **slow down** to take a
long look at Brenda, in whose eyes something has
changed, activated.

She's very still and quiet.

BRENDA

Put your hands on the table.

FERN

No, no.

It ain't like that.

(MEANINGFUL PAUSE)

She doesn't want you dead. The opposite.

BRENDA

It's like that.

I've got a clean ID and clean blood.

I'll bet they gave you papers. But blood?
Ain't cheap. Cost me a whole closet full
of boots. So you can't afford to deal with
the law.

Which means you can't afford a chance that
I make a scene.

And Houston? That's big talk.

They kill you for that shit nowadays.

(PAUSE)

Hands.

He laughs.

Moves his HANDS on top her hers, on the table.

BRENDA

There you go.

Leave them here.

Tell me what you're here to tell me.

What does my mother want from me?

Fern leans over and suddenly whispers **SOMETHING** into her ear, and as he does, he **lightly holds** her head over the table, near his, and we

PULL BACK AND WATCH FROM ACROSS THE STREET,

Hearing only cars passing.

Dopplering horns.

Bike wheel racket.

The tick of a walking signal light.

Chatter.

And then **CUT IN CLOSER** to see, unhearing, Fern's LIPS moving near Brenda's ear.

CUT TO:

DING!

Elevator doors open in...

INT. BRENDA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT (SAME)

The hallway is darkened.

She steps out of the elevator, and another woman does as well, turning and briskly moving along the hall while Brenda steps out and pauses for a long moment.

The footsteps echo while she stands waiting, purse over shoulder, and a grocery bag in hand.

C.U. Her hand around the bag, unmistakably gripping a

bottle's neck.

CUT TO:

INT. BRENDA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (SAME)

She is sitting on her COUCH in her small living room whose sliding doors are open, curtains blowing lightly in the breeze.

Otherwise the space is small, the walls and where they meet show wear, and the refrigerators in the condensed kitchen space filling up the rest of the apartment's entry/non bedroom area is plain, with off white grit in the tiny spaces between the white ridges of its surface.

A fan, stood next to the television across from Brenda is spinning, slowly right to left to right to left and passing, blowing coolly across Brenda's face every six seconds or so.

Along her upper lip, a bead of sweat.

It rolls over the top of her lip, and her mouth parts softly, dropping the bead of sweat over and down into it.

Now, from the TV, we hear:

MASTER SOMMELIER (OS - TV)

...and these are going to tell you about a few of the wine's factors, beginning with the alcohol content...a dryer wine is going to have a higher alcohol content. The viscosity changes.

Legs, or tears, are where we see that.

What do you think? Will a dryer wine display more prominent streaking or less?

Next to Brenda, on the floor, is the now-empty grocery bag.

On the table, the wine bottle from it.

She POURS IT carefully into a glass.

Swirls it and looks for legs.

THE BOTTLE IS MOSTLY EMPTY NOW

And Brenda is out on her small balcony, smoking.
She's on the phone with a friend.

BRENDA (INTO PHONE)

It was strange.

(PAUSE)

No.

(PAUSE)

No.

(PAUSE)

It's fucked up, but he was much more....I
liked him a lot more today.

When I put together who he was it got a
lot more interesting. Maybe I just haven't
been laid in a awhile, I dunno.

Now we **push closer** and this time, the voice on the other
end fades up into clear audibility.

MALE VOICE (OS, THROUGH PHONE)

I don't know, Brenda. It sounds like he'd
probably burnt the rest of his bridges
before he came to you.

If he's really here working for her, he's
either clumsy or he got bored. Either way.
How can you trust him? He flipped on them
for you. So then he flips on you
eventually for something else.

She nods, thinks it over.

BRENDA

I know. You're right, Sims.

He's heading out of town. He said...he
used a funny phrase. He said he was 'going
back to close accounts'.

MALE VOICE (PHONE)

Going back? Who would go back? If he's from there...you know where...why would he? Of course he'd stay here. It's a nightmare over there. People are starving.

He's a cock-up on a job from Houston who decided he liked life in the Federation more. It happens all the time. I don't know *how* anyone gets across the border. But I know nobody in their right mind would go back.

BRENDA

Cynics die young, Sims.

SIMS (PHONE)

I'm counting on it.

She smiles, extinguishes her cigarette.

BRENDA

You really buy all that, though? Don't you ever wonder about the other stories?

Through the phone: a sigh.

Brenda laughs.

BRENDA

Okay. Point taken. I hereby file your advice, thank you.

And now Brenda is quiet.

Very quiet.

And, over the sight of her framed in her small balcony, blowing smoke out over the dark street, we see

FLASH INSERTS

(SOUNDLESS)

Of Fern

LEANING ACROSS

And then, the close shots of HIS LIPS whispering to her.

SIMS

No more politics.

You studying?

Red or white tonight?

BRENDA

Still on reds, learning all about-

The phone line WAFFLES, CUTS OUT, is **DEAD**.

Brenda looks down at her phone, but doesn't have a strong reaction.

She sends a quick text repeating her goodnight.

CUT TO:

EXT. Border Line - Twilight

A US FLAG held in a hand, waving in the wind, and then **AFLAME**.

Once lit, it's passes to another hand, then another, then another, down a line of people...

WIDER, we see the flag moving down the line, the border, and the line of people holding it, a mixed bunch; black, white, and brown.

CUT TO: A young girl, Brenda, CLINGS to the LEGS of an adult woman, her MOTHER, whose voice we hear faintly, shouting, rallying.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRENDA'S STREET, FORSYTH AVE - LATE NIGHT (SAME)

Brenda, head down and hands in pockets, has a light jacket on.

She passes businesses, mostly closed now:

Pilsen Playhouse

Gallery Fenix

Locksmith

She shoulders past them, turning into the small, hyper-bright

PILSEN LIQUOR

At the counter, Brenda politely checks out with a pint of rum.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAYGROUND - LATE NIGHT (SAME)

The basic menu: A four swing rig, monkey bars connecting two plastic slides to a small station with a fake ship's helm.

A small circular merry-go-round, the kind without animals, where kids stand and their weight pulls the base plate round and round.

A few painted metal animals mounted on thick coils of spring.

And benches.

On ONE SUCH BENCH,

BRENDA and a YOUNG MAN are making out.

We see from afar, then cut close.

Her hands are in his hair, holding him close.

He's got a hand on her leg.

CUT TO:

They SWING

MAN

You ready for my big move?

BRENDA

Sure!

MAN

I'm gonna go all the way over. Loop de loop.

BRENDA

If you go fast enough you can reverse the rotation of the earth. We could go back in time.

She laughs.

CUT TO:

They walk, kicking stones, share the rum.

BRENDA

This is great. This is one of the best.

MAN

You meet a lot of guys?

BRENDA

I dunno. Maybe. Not really. Who cares.

MAN

True.

(PAUSE)

But it's not always ideal, huh?

She shakes her head.

Makes a face in the dark - maybe he sees it and maybe he doesn't.

BRENDA

Saw an old one today, actually.

MAN

Player?

Sounds like he couldn't get you out of his head.

Brenda laughs again.

BRENDA

I sense...that you are being sweet. But I'm telling you, it was weird. Unsettled me. Kind of threw me off.

He came to my work, you know?

The man frowns, shakes his head.

MAN

Shit.

How'd he know where you worked?

Brenda OPENS her mouth to answer.

Then CAN'T.

She frowns.

Her date walks on, joke-skipping, whistling in the quiet air.

CUT TO:

INT. 'BACKSTAGE' - NIGHT

Darkened rows of seats mostly full, everyone still, the curtain LIFTS.

On stage is an ENORMOUS WINE GLASS **prop**.

It is large enough for an adult man, naked, to be CURLED UP INSIDE IT, swimming in DYED LIQUID the approximate colour of white wine.

The audience GASPS, delighted.

To the **SIDE OF THE STAGE**, Brenda stands, watching, with a LAPTOP at a desk station.

She hits a button, and now CLIPS from WINE TUTORIAL VIDEOS **FLASH** from a far-mounted projector across the HUGE GLASS AND MAN and along the back wall, bathing the stage in soundless visions of wine and wine tastings.

The MAN in the glass is breathing through a large purple STRAW.

EXT. 'BACKSTAGE' - A LITTLE LATER

The place is clearing out.

Folks leave in pairs, trios, and on their own.

Steffa and Kelsey depart after hugging Brenda.

She begins walked away towards a bus stop, when a POLICE VEHICLE pulls up alongside her, lowering their passenger window.

She looks over to them from the sidewalk.

Looks around.

Some people, none too close.

BRENDA

Need me?

OFFICER (O.S. IN CAR)

Can we buy you some dinner?

BRENDA

Full, thank you.

OFFICER

Ice cream it is.

CUT TO an ice cream parlor where Brenda sits with two cops; woman and man.

She's enjoying a bowl of vanilla ice cream.

Music plays softly: *The Tennessee Waltz*.

FEMALE OFFICER

And then what? He left?

Brenda, spoon in her mouth, nods.

FEMALE OFFICER

Has he ever harassed you before?

Brenda shakes her head.

BRENDA

No. And I don't know that I'd say he did the other day, either.

That kind of guy doesn't stick around long anyways. You might as well just let him drift on out of town like he drifted in.

He'll be in Denver by next month, you know what I mean?

They smile.

MALE OFFICER

We do know the type, yes.

But have you seen the news lately? There's so much movement at the border....*so much*. Used to call it uncrossable. But they hack the drones now. Ones with money get fresh blood.

My opinion-

His partner here shook her head somewhat chasteningly, clearly familiar with this speech.

MALE OFFICER

-I think they get bored over there. So many criminals went and now...well, now it's pretty stable. I know we're not supposed to say that, but it is. She's got things pretty under control over there. Wouldn't mind if we were able to do things her way, from time to time -

FEMALE OFFICER (INTERRUPTING)

Maniac. She's a madwoman. It's horrible.
You don't mean that, Francis.

He cocks his head and shrugs as if he just might.

MALE OFFICER

Wrong as it may sound; I'm not the only
one who admires the expediency.

Brenda has moved on to coffee, now.

BRENDA (SMILING)

They've still got the good coffee over
there. Mexican. Brazilian. Colombian.

Arabica.

MALE OFFICER

Eh. I don't envy their food. Or any of it,
really. Just making a point.

She's right-

(GESTURES TO HIS PARTNER)

It's a different world over there.

But the point is, they keep coming this
way.

Now what does *that* tell you?

BRENDA

Maybe they forgot something on their way
out. Misplaced it.

The cops laugh.

FEMALE OFFICER

Like a set of keys?

MALE OFFICER

That's funny...keys!

Brenda stares down at her cup, where shitty instant coffee is swirling as she moves the mug like a wine glass.

BRENDA

I don't want to take the bus much later than this, guys.

MALE OFFICER

We'll run you back.

FEMALE OFFICER

Of course we will.

INT. BRENDA'S FLAT - NIGHT (SAME)

The door opens and she enters, but stands still, not removing anything, not really settling.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT (SAME)

The same two cops.

The male officer is leaned back and sleeping, his top shirt button undone, arms folded over chest.

His partner, meanwhile, has the car's COMPUTER SCREEN up in the centre console.

She slips a FLASH DISK into it.

Eyes her partner: he's out.

The disk loads, a file opens.

It's a FILE FOLDER with several files:

Voice1

Voice2

Voice3

Voice4

Et cetera.

She drags them to another window and runs them through a program that they feed into, titled 'IDENTI-TRU'.

After a loading bar completes, a PERSONAL FILE MATCH signals, and a file loads, no telltale photo, but a name and details.

The female police officer nods to herself.

She then powers the screen down.

CUT TO:

INT. BRENDA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (SAME)

Empty rooms.

Empty sink with a few pieces of silverware.

Couch with rumpled blanket.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY 55 - NIGHT (SAME)

Brenda DRIVES, wind in her hair, eyes ahead.

CUT TO:

She's pulled over at a rest area, deserted.

INSIDE her car, she's asleep, lying across the backseat.

DRIVING AGAIN, drinking water.

From HIGH and AFAR we see SAINT LOUIS in the distance.

Brenda is nearing the city before sunrise.

CROSS FADE INTO:

EXT. SMALL HOUSE - WEE HOURS (SAME)

It's a house in south city.

BUDWEISER cans on the lawn, and a few small CARDINALS pennants.

An ELECTION SIGN, with BLUE outline and a candidate's name.

The candidate is Latino.

From inside the house we hear music, drums and bass guitar.

We push CLOSER to the front door.

Then INSIDE where it's tidy and open, not a lot of furniture, a large flatscreen t.v. On the far wall of an empty living room where a drummer is playing, and a bassist.

The drummer wears a headscarf, it's a woman.

The bassist is a man in a t-shirt with dark, near-eastern features matching the woman's attire.

In an adjoining KITCHEN which is fairly cluttered, **SHAY** (34), shaved head, tidy stubble, handsome, olive skin like his housemates, is COOKING.

He's frying up breakfast with POTATO slicings on a nearby cutting board, a tray of eggs, some just shells now, etc.

He fries up massive potato omelets which thin sliced potatoes inside the egg bready outside.

He fries up tomatoes, and beans.

He slides a few such breakfasts onto large, gaudy plates as the music sounds behind him.

CUT TO:

Wide shot: instruments are put up, the group of them eat on the floor of the living room.

With their hands, which they wipe frequently and dip into a central washbowl.

SHAY sits comfortably on one leg, with one up, leaning his right, eating hand over the food.

They speak to each other quietly.

It's dark out but early pale light is beginning to trickle into the lower sky.

SHAY

Ramadan kareem, fam.

MAN

Humdillah.

WOMAN

To you too.

A KNOCK on the DOOR.

Shay looks up.

The others do also, rapidly, very alert.

A voice follows, calling out in Arabic.

They're calm when they hear it.

Shay washes his eating hand, wipes it, and stands.

AT THE DOOR:

It opens.

Shay stands, sees a familiar face.

It's a young man looking panicked.

They speak in quick, clipped Arabic, starting with greetings and a handshake and kisses to the cheek.

The man explains the issue at hand.

Shay nods, listening, then steps out to follow him.

They walk ROUND the house to a back shed where two other young men stand looking worried.

There's a vague DIN from within the shed.

SHAY hears them out, then smiles.

Speaks in English.

SHAY

You didn't want to wait until after Suhur?

They throw their hands up, lament the situation.

One says:

YOUNG MAN (WHISPERING)

It will have suhur too. It will eat *our money.*

Shay nods, steps forward.

He walks to the SHED DOOR and looks at the heavy LOCK on it.

He takes a KEY from around his neck, hidden under his t-shirt collar.

He unlocks it; the door opens SLOWLY.

Creaking...

Light fills the small shed.

In it there's a SEPTIC TANKARD, rusty, smallish, and SHAY HOLDS HIS NOSE.

The BOTTOM of the tankard has been DETACHED from the largest portion of it, and rests on the ground below it.

It's a SECRET STORAGE SPACE.

Packed with something which we can't see, covered in newspaper.

Shay turns around, pointing to the state of things, and shouts a bit.

The young men throw their hands up, protesting, then suddenly all CROUCH and COWER, Shay turns back and sees the source of all the trouble, a

BAT

Knocking around, in fitful bursts of flight, bumping into things,

Hitting the walls, the ceiling, and finally falling DOWN where it writhes on the floor.

Shay, without hesitation, REACHES to a nearby SHELF in the shed and grabs an old rag, bends down, and SCOOPS UP the poor creature.

He holds it carefully, hand around its neck, sliding his hand around its body like a fisherman running the scales of

a catch down.

One of its EARS is badly MANGLED.

The bat PANTS, mouth open and tiny teeth visible.

Shay is holding it, facing in the shed.

The men behind slowly stand up again, some lean to look, or advance a bit, none draw close.

Shay turns around.

SHAY

See, it has some problem. Not disease,
yani...ears. That's like his eyes, eh?

That's how they travel.

Poor guy...

BACK AT THE FRONT OF THE HOUSE

The door.

Shay comes round from the back, empty-handed now.

He comes up to the front door and opens it with his free hand.

He walks in and sees, sitting on the ground, with his two confederates, BRENDA.

C.U. : **Shay**, his eyes, his face.

SHAY

You crossed over...

She nods, stands up.

She walks slowly to Shay and stands in front of him.

He lifts one of her hands and holds it to his face.

SHAY

Am I right in thinking you're not really here?

BRENDA

Come on and eat. I'm here. We won't talk yet.

SHAY

Should I worry about when we do?

She nods very slowly.

SHAY (CONT.)

I'm taking a shower. Sun's up. Anything active you need, let's do it before noon.

CUT TO:

It's later in the day and four people sleep around the living room at Shay's house.

HE and another YOUNG MAN are sitting by a COMPUTER RIG with a TOWER DVD BURNER next to it: seven slots on what looks not unlike a pc tower but is whirring away burning discs.

Next to it is a LABEL PRESS.

SHAY waits, the disc slots open, finished, he TAKES A DISC, POPS IT INTO a small portable dvd player on his lap, waits for the opening images and warnings, then POPS the top, takes it out gingerly (his hands are in BLUE LATEX GLOVES) and moves it to the label press.

The press has a stack of labels next to it with a name we can't see.

YOUNG MAN

Three hundred more?

Shay nods.

SHAY

What did the last one do?

The young man shrugs.

YOUNG MAN

I think we threw out about thirty.
Shay makes a face, pauses what he's doing.

SHAY

Remember my request?
My advice?

YOUNG MAN

Oh, I did! I think I did...
He nods and rises, walking away and coming back with a notebook.

YOUNG MAN

I wrote it down. We moved off a hundred
seventy four. Threw out twenty-six.
Shay nods.

YOUNG MAN

Next time I could write down what
neighbourhoods. Maybe....time of day
people are buying?

SHAY

That's a good way to think.
But...yani...don't do that.
You feel me?

The fellow nods.

Shay looks OUT THE WINDOW and sees BRENDA on the LAWN.

He stands, quickly, and walks out the door.

EXT. FRONT LAWN, SHAY'S HOUSE - (DAY) SAME

She sits on a lawn chair with one next to her.

Shay goes and sits down.

SHAY

You can't keep crossing over. The moment they ID you, you catch a bullet.

She shakes her head.

BRENDA

It'd be real hard, now. I don't look the same. I don't have the same name. I don't carry anything I used to.

Look....

She pulls up her shirt sleeve up over her shoulder.

SHAY

You had it burned off...

BRENDA

Well - they don't *burn* you. But, yes. It's gone. I don't even wear the same piercings.

Anyways, they hang in Illinois. No bullet. I catch a rope.

He shakes his head and sighs; she softens.

BRENDA

So you're pirating movies?

He shakes his head half-cocked: an east-Asian ascent.

SHAY

Not pirating. Just printing them and selling them. Kid's learning with that.

She nods.

BRENDA

You know what I always thought.

You should've been a teacher.

He shakes his head slowly and smiles.

SHAY

Your mom should've.

Brenda's face slowly sinks.

BRENDA

She had a guy on me.

That's why I'm here.

I don't even wanna call or write now. I don't know who's watching where.

But she had a guy up there. He was on me for more than a year.

Then something funny happened. You wanna know?

Shay nods.

He takes a joint out of his pocket and lights it, passes it, she declines.

BRENDA

Ramadan...

SHAY

Oh, shit.

Shit.

You'd think it was my first time. Jeez, I'll add an hour tonight.

He stubs it out.

BRENDA

I'm not fasting, but I still don't smoke.

He nods.

SHAY

I wanna hear. Tell me. Someone bother you?

You've got people up there, right?

You carrying these days?

She frowns.

BRENDA

No, fuck that. Come on, Shay.

You're so dumb.

He shrugs.

SHAY

I stash mine up for the month. It's in the closet til sundown.

BRENDA

My hero.

So.

This guy's on me for months and months. And he's not good. He's sloppy. He gets in the dumpsters behind work one weekend and my boss sees it and I pull his picture off one of our alley cams. Boss is a security freak like that. I work at a cool place. You'd like it. It's a theatre downstairs, restaurant on street level.

SHAY

Like a movie theatre?

BRENDA

Ah-ah. Chicago: it's stage drama and improv and storytelling and...like that.

He nods.

BRENDA

So that's way back. Now I know what he looks like. I find him at the end of my street on night guard.

I tell everyone I'm out of town for the weekend one week and I stay with a friend. I scout my place and he's in there. I see it from the street. He's gloved up and he left everything as it was but he had a fucking light on in there. Childish.

Anyways. This is where it gets weird.

Three months ago he quits. Calls it.

I figure mom's called him back, figured he's off to Houston.

But he doesn't. He just cuts the surveillance out. And instead he approaches me.

Shay raises an eyebrow.

BRENDA (CONT.)

Mmhm. Finds me online on a forum for our theatre. And he starts up a chat. Asks me out. I play it like I don't know who he is.

So, Shay, listen to this - we go on a date. Terrible time. Guy's a mess. Like clearly already...you know...

SHAY

Some things don't change.

All the boys love Mandy lane.

A long pause settles between them.

SHAY

Houston. It's so sad now. People here don't even say that word.

BRENDA

I know...I know.

It's how she wanted it. Her own little kingdom.

It's weird. But Texas always went her own way.

SHAY

How will you get back to Chicago? Where do you cross?

She gives him a look.

BRENDA

Shay...

SHAY

I don't want to know. Okay. But, Brenda...the day will come when you need to go the other way. Over there. Back home.

When you do - you ask me, okay?

Don't go with another runner.

Come to us.

Across from them the neighbourhood:

People walk and kick trash.

Kids dig their whole hands into chip bags.

Older folks on porches talk to each other with heads thrown back, laughing.

Women lean into other women's cars and chat idly.

SHAY

I won't mistake it for meaning anything it doesn't.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. CITY BUS - DAY

Back in Chicago: Brenda sits quietly, purse on her lap.

She's wearing EARPHONES.

The full bus has a lot more people who match her melanin levels than the restaurant or even her neighbourhood.

She looks comfortable, taps a finger on the windowsil.

Through her headphones we hear:

"There are characteristics that can be seen but not smelled or tasted, and some that can be smelled but not seen or tasted, and some that can be tasted but not seen or smelled.

On the whole, we'll learn what we learn about a glass from all three of these sources of information working in concert.

We call these discreet indicators if they can tell you something meaningful entirely independent from each other..."

Ahead, a YOUNG WOMAN sits, dark glasses on, a CANE in one hand.

Nearby, some youngsters are watching.

Not malicious, not even laughing, but staring, and finally, one nudges the other, whispering a dare.

The second teenager reaches ACROSS to in FRONT of the blind woman's face and waves her arm and fans fingers.

Then withdraws.

Both kids look amazed.

CUT TO:

The bus de-boarding at a stop just across from "Backstage".

Brenda steps off, and soon after, after a few other people, so does the blind woman.

Brenda pauses.

Then calls to her:

BRENDA

Excuse me, miss.

A few people crane their necks, move on when they see Brenda staring at the young woman, who has paused but does not turn.

BRENDA

With...glasses...

Now the woman turns.

She's light-skinned, mixed.

She smiles, WIDELY.

INSIDE "BACKSTAGE"

Brenda, now behind the BAR, serves the young woman a drink.

She's KERRY (29), holding a plain-looking messenger bag, a small white purse, and her cane, which is now leaned against the bar.

BRENDA

Here you go.

She moves the glass directly in front of Kerry and then, gingerly,

CLOSE UP:

TAPS THE RIM.

It DINGS, clicking with her fingernail.

Kerry's BROWS raise.

She takes a drink.

BRENDA

We're not open in here yet. You're a real VIP right now.

Kerry smiles.

KERRY

What if I've got someplace to be?

Brenda, taking out a stack of crystal ashtrays from a lower cabinet, pauses.

BRENDA

Well. You'd have said so.

KERRY

You bring people in here often like this?

Seems like a hard security policy to recommend.

Brenda lines up the ashtrays along the bar, skipping Kerry's spot.

But Kerry reaches to the nearest one, feeling it, and feeling inside it.

KERRY

Why do they even put those out anymore?

Can't smoke inside.

Can I?

Brenda says "nope" quietly, and shakes her head.

BRENDA

You could tell they were trays? That's amazing.

Like a superhero.

Kerry laughs a bit.

KERRY

They set down heavy like glass. But they're not drinks cause no-one's around.

To be honest, I was hoping I'd get a

handful of peanuts or popcorn.

BRENDA

Popcorn? Girl, you're not from the north side, are you?

Kerry shakes her head.

BRENDA

That's funny, cause you remind me of one of my coworkers.

KERRY

What's her name?

BRENDA

Kels. Em....Kelsey.

She begins spacing out the ROUND TABLES throughout the main space, drawing the curtains, letting the light into the high-ceilinged restaurant.

BRENDA (QUIETLY)

Actually I was gonna ask her to cover me today....

CUT TO:

Brenda and Kerry sit.

The room's set up now; it's half past two, nearly time to open.

A few more staff busy themselves, and music is playing.

KERRY

You have someone in your life.

Like me.

She points to her face.

BRENDA

I do.

How did you guess?

Kerry shrugs.

KERRY

You're accommodating, but not in the way most people try to be.

Little things.

So who is it?

Is that why you want to hang out?

Gee, and I was feeling special.

Brenda holds two hands over Kerry's.

BRENDA

It's not part of my life that I talk about.

I hope that doesn't come out wrong.

It's someone close.

Family.

KERRY

I respect that. Where are you from?

Brenda looks around the restaurant.

BRENDA

My people are from Texas.

C.U. Kerry's mouth slightly opens, a silent gasp.

KERRY

Really...

That's. Well. Excuse me, but that's kind of sexy.

I can't hear it, though - in your voice.

BRENDA

Of course not. I'm not trying to get arrested. We shake 'em. They teach you how. Before you cross out.

But I was pretty young anyhow.

Kerry begins to ask more, but Brenda quiets her.

BRENDA

I haven't been back in a long time. But...I dunno. It's all been on the news a lot lately.

KERRY

Right. Rosa. They think she doesn't have long.

They have no idea who will succeed her.

Brenda nods, slowly.

BRENDA

Yeah, sounds like it's chaos.

CUT TO:

TITLE CARD:

'SAINT LOUIS'

INT. SHAY'S SHED - DAY

Shay and a few guys lean against the wall, light pours through.

One of them, in front of the others, is sitting at a DESK that looks a bit out of place, working on a COMPUTER.

COMPUTER WORKER

It looks...like it could work. The problem, though -

We can't know without trying it out.

And we can't try it out without giving

ourselves away. But it looks good to me.
It's clean code. I've never seen anything
like it.

It could be massive. Everyone with a cell
phone anywhere within ten feet of them...

Shay nods slowly.

SHAY

Well. You're just one person checking in a
long chain of our best.

So it matters. Your opinion. If you think
it could be ready, I pass that back to
Houston.

Another fellow next to Shay shakes his head, looking
mournful.

AFGHAN GUY

She's that bad?

Shay nods.

SHAY

Could be days. And when it happens we need
lights out from Chicago to the border. A
clear path. We need fireworks like
nobody's seen.

(PAUSE)

If life continues after Rosa is gone, it's
because Brenda makes it back there.

SHAY

We can't consider any other option.

INT. "BACKSTAGE" KITCHEN - EVENING (SAME)

Brenda blows smoke out of a window just below a kitchen
exhaust fan.

Steffa joins her.

BRENDA

Why do we put ashtrays out?

Steffa throws her arms around Brenda, hugging her, and sighs.

STEFFA

I'm tired today. Dunno why.

BRENDA

I know that Lolo thinks everything through. Anything we spend money on.

Why do we still put ashtrays out?

Steffa shakes her head, holds out two fingers pleadingly,

ACCEPTS Brenda's cigarette.

STEFFA

It's a widget.

People play with them.

Men like to touch something.

And women like them too - they feel good. Ashtray on the bar. Like their dads and uncles had.

Brenda nods.

BRENDA

Bit old fashioned for Lolo.

It's a nice thought, though.

STEFFA

You know, when I got in earlier, for a second I thought you were sitting with Kelsey.

I was pissed!

She dramatically draws out the last word.

Brenda takes the smoke back and finishes it off.

BRENDA

I know - she was beautiful, huh?

She's blind.

Fade out:

OPEN ON:

INT. BACKSTAGE (BASEMENT) - LATE NIGHT

The audience, the stage, the dark.

Onstage in the pale spotlight is STEFFA whose gentle features we recognize, barely, beneath a BATMAN mask and outfit.

As such, she sits perched on a stool with her arm under chin in The Thinker's pose.

She growls into the microphone....

STEFFA/BATMAN

It's...very hard to be an actual bat-man.
I am a mammal but I fly.

I don't really fit in with birds at all,
they act like I'm a very clever monkey
that's snuck in among them.

I dunno, maybe they're right...

A saxophone begins to sound mournfully in the background,
and the exaggerated noir effect draws laughter.

STEFFA/BATMAN

I like to go to the park and just ride my
bike with my mouth open. Let the bugs fly
in.

More laughter.

STEFFA/BATMAN

I got an ear-ache from a fight with a criminal by the docks a few weeks ago. I was bumping into things right and left. It was really bad.

These eyes?

Don't even need 'em. Useless....

In the audience, Brenda WATCHES, smiling.

FADE OUT:

Hold on Black.

Music Cue:

Debussy: Reverie

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqXwzUW_fhM

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

TITLE CARD: 'FIFTEEN YEARS AGO'

Saint Louis, but nothing to show us that except for a YOUNGER Shay and Brenda in bed, talking, holding each other.

Smoke curls up from an ashtray next to them, rising to a ceiling fan that spins and disperses it.

TEENAGE SHAY

I don't know what I'd say. I guess I'm hoping...that it doesn't happen.

Brenda is lying on his chest.

TEENAGE BRENDA

It's going to. I know you're being nice when you say that, but I'm really hurting...not knowing.

Can't you just tell me what you'll say when she asks you?

TEENAGE SHAY (SHAKING HIS HEAD)

The only thing you ever say to Rosa.

Yes.

I can, I will, show me where. How high,
how far. Yes without question. Yes, it'll
be an honor and a privilege.

I know it's different for you...

But what she means to us here...I can't
explain.

A long moment's quiet.

TEENAGE BRENDA

She will ask you, Shay.

She'll put you in charge as soon as
they're ready to make their move. You'll
be...her. Here in Saint Louis.

I'm worried that's the reason she's
letting us have each other for now.

He shakes his head.

TEENAGE SHAY

She wants you happy. And me. It's all good
for us. It's good for everyone.

Shay kisses her and turns onto his side, facing away.

Brenda runs her hands along his back.

TEENAGE SHAY

She's your mom - you can't see it like we
do.

What she's got...it's an antidote.

She accomplishes things-

TEENAGE BRENDA

Okay, Shay. I know. I didn't mean to get

into the whole thing.

He turns back onto his back.

Brenda lights a partial joint from the tray.

TEENAGE SHAY

There's time. We have lots of time.

Brenda AWAKES with a start

CUT TO:

She sits on her couch, wrapped up to her shoulders in blanket, watching her wine videos.

There are two glasses in front of her.

She listens to the video.

ON THE TABLE

A peach-coloured curtain loop, the sort of two-foot-long fabric piece that goes around the lower part of each side of curtains and then fixes to hold them drawn.

Brenda picks it up, lifts it to HER FACE.

She holds it OVER HER EYES and TIES IT ON.

She then uses both hands to switch the glasses several times.

WINE VIDEO INSTRUCTOR (OS)

Are you ready? Pause here and have a try.

Brenda reaches and fingertips the table until she snatches up the remote.

She COUNTS down from the top power button:

Four down, two over - MUTE

KNOCK KNOCK

It's her door.

Brenda doesn't jump or jolt.

BRENDA

Should be unlocked!

No voice responds, but the door can be heard opening, and then feet fall, it is shut again.

Quietly, a MAN enters.

While Brenda stretches her arms over her head, he walks into the room and sits across from her.

BRENDA

Sims?

And so it is.

He quietly sits in the seat across from her, smiling a bit curiously at her and her getup.

SIMS

It's me.

But god help you when it isn't...

I'm not gonna lecture you like I want to.
But please be cautious, Brenda.

She goes a bit stiff.

BRENDA

What is it.

What's wrong?

A sigh from the man.

SIMS (33) is also black, wearing jeans and a white tank top under a loose button-down shirt with short sleeves.

SIMS

I had a question for you, actually.

Should I ask it?

I've been debating.

Brenda reaches up and slowly, **C.U.** Undoes her blindfold.

BRENDA

You can ask it.

SIMS

Have you ever heard of 'walking the narrows'?

It's...

Well I guess it's an old phrase.

BRENDA

Like...on the straight and narrow?

He shakes his head.

SIMS

No. No, sounds like that though, doesn't it?

It's a bit of the opposite.

Well, not really.

She shakes her head, too.

Pours the rest of the wine into her glass.

BRENDA

Explain it to me?

SIMS

Sure.

It's a theatre term. It's a nickname for Off Broadway. Or...secondary stages in general.

I'm sure The Belmont or Backstage would qualify.

But it just means the place that actors

get stuck when they're good but not...you know. They don't have that *something*.

You get caught in a narrow world. The nearly-greats.

Because narrows are...it's a geographical term. Inlets of water that lead to the ocean. You get it?

The idea of walking the narrows is how hard it is to leave that. To get to the open water.

The...ocean I guess. Something like that.

BRENDA

The ocean's the goal?

Sims laughs.

SIMS

Yeah, I guess it doesn't work for you.

She shakes her head.

Shivers, shoulders up: demonstrating fear.

BRENDA

Mortified of open water.

SIMS

It's a thought, though. I mean...I know your life used to be a lot different.

You don't get bored here?

BRENDA

No.

And if you'd ever been in a place like I left...you wouldn't ask that.

He yawns.

It's late.

BRENDA

I had a nightmare.

Really strange.

Sims raises an eyebrow.

Stretches.

SIMS

Yeah?

She nods.

BRENDA

Mhm.

I feel almost....almost panic. I think I might have done something reckless? I don't know.

I drove down to Saint Louis...

He's listening.

She shakes her head: *nevermind*.

SIMS

Brenda....that's such bad news.

You went to see Shay?

BRENDA

I did. Of course I did.

He shakes his head.

SIMS

Sometimes I feel like the only reason you put in time with me so you won't have zero friends.

You've never needed anything from me.

He pauses, a bit frustrated.

SIMS (CONT.)

Being...having a past...It's not the same as surviving one.

BRENDA

I'm tired. I don't want to talk about this right now.

SIMS

You don't want to ever. I've only got the nerve to bring it up cause I'm tired too.

There's a long pause.

It's very late

They're both very tired.

Neither meets eyes, but after a moment, he's looking at her, leaning his face into a hand whose elbow rests on his knee.

SIMS

No? Nothing to say?

BRENDA

Isaak.

I'm sorry.

Sims throws his hands up.

SIMS

I'm going home.

BRENDA

Hey, Isaak? Do you think things are okay out there?

Seems tense. I haven't seen the news or anything.

SIMS

When's it ever okay?

'When life is fairly comfortable...then
the people say there is freedom.'

You should think about that. We're all
tired, you know? I mean the cause goes on
and all that, but you're postponing
something that *has* to happen. And it will.

She remains silent.

SIMS

But not until you decide so, I guess.

And he leaves.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRENDA'S STREET - LATE NIGHT (SAME)

Long shot of the avenue.

She's walking, once again, along a mostly-closed part of
the street.

She reaches an apartment building.

Punches buttons into the box outside the gate.

CUT TO BLACK.

We hear a couple's intimate sounds.

INSIDE a small bedroom, on a mattress on the floor, with
low tables near, ashtrays, books, a bicycle wheel, gloves,
and other sports gear:

BRENDA and her DATE from the other night are in bed-

Lying on their sides, facing each other, they're kissing.

Brenda's eyes are closed and his are open.

He's kissing her neck. She's leaning her head back and
accepting it.

She lowers her head and buries it below his, with his chin

leaned up, on top of her head buried in his chest.

MAN

This is why men build bridges...

She lifts her head and looks at him.

Kisses him; their faces damp and hair matted.

BRENDA

Why didn't you ever ask me how I am?

He gets shy, shrugs.

BRENDA

I know you're being nice. You're nice.

MAN

I hope so.

She turns and lies on her back.

BRENDA

I guess lately I've had a few things-

I've had some things come up and remind me that I haven't always been here.

Haven't always had this peaceful life.

He smiles.

MAN

I don't know if most people would call Chicago a really peaceful kinda place.

BRENDA

You aren't going to ask what secrets I'm hiding?

MAN

Eh. It's the same things, usually. For most people. Right?

Sex, drugs....

She smiles sadly.

Shakes her head.

MAN

No?

Oh. Huh.

Rock and roll, then.

Quietly, she says:

BRENDA

Rock and roll, I'm afraid.

You wouldn't believe it.

He frowns.

Kisses her shoulder.

MAN

Uh oh. That's the scary one.

She sits up, lights a cigarette.

BRENDA

Listen.

Where I work, it's a restaurant...

They've got this theatre below.

They do a thing. It's in the middle of the night. Once a month. There's one tonight...starting in an hour.

It's a public share stage. People come and tell a story. Fiction. True. Whatever they want. I've been meaning to go speak. For....years now.

It's on tonight. Do you wanna come?

He sits up, too, yawns.

MAN

I'm pretty beat, Brenda.

I would...

She kisses him, puts the cigarette in his mouth.

BRENDA

No, that's fine. It's late.

Don't worry about it.

I'm gonna go, though.

He nods, says 'okay' through smoke.

Squeezes her arm and then lies back down, staring up at his ceiling.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. 'BACKSTAGE' BASEMENT THEATRE - LATE NIGHT (SAME):

It's quite dark.

Folks drink, smoke, talk, and laugh quietly.

People sit along a ledge that runs under the windows that, at shoulder height, show the alley beside the building.

People lean near speakers connected to the PA.

Some are dressed up:snazzy couples.

Most are in casual clothing.

The lights, already low, LOWER FURTHER,

And everyone finds a seat and settles, clack, swish, hush, hush.

ON STAGE, A STOOL and on it is STEFFA.

STEFFA

Let's get started. Everyone knows the

rules: go until you're done, don't break our hearts, don't induce fits or draw the ire of any major divine powers.

Tell us about something meaningful for you, and we'll listen like it's meaningful for us, too.

Help us learn to care about something we've never cared about before, or shed some light on something you know we've felt.

And we'll be eternally grateful.

She holds her microphone out and sweeps the room for a long moment.

Nobody says anything.

STEFFA

I love this young lady right here, miss Brenda.

Brenda, come on up - I can't wait to hear your piece.

Patrons clap and BRENDA walks up and takes over the stool.

BRENDA

It's so late, guys...

Hi, everyone.

It's been a long time since I've done something like this. I don't think it gets easier unless you're the kind of person who never found it that hard in the first place...which I'm not. Some of you're aware of that.

Anyways.

I want to talk about childhood. And I'm hoping to do it in a way that you've not necessarily heard before.

Might be a little out there-

She gestures in a wide sweep with her hand.

BRENDA

And maybe, you know, we'll all stay out there for a bit.

So is everybody in? You all ready?

She's looking down at and even to the floor past her mic, but raises her eyes to the room and then sees:

KERRY

In a second row, between people that she doesn't seem to know.

People are cheering.

They're in.

They're ready.

BRENDA

Okay. This is way back before the split.

When it was the United states.

There were fifty, and it seemed like such a neat number to me.

Anyways this story takes place in Saint Louis. Picture it. Rainy summer in a hot city. Rain hitting tin roofs and rusting kids' bikes.

If you're lucky, it floods an abandoned yard or a small field. Maybe your yard. And then you can all go splash in the mud.

We took our clothes off for that - the mud. Even girls. Didn't matter at that age. Bunch of naked kids in the mud in North Saint Louis didn't mean anything to anyone.

Until it did.

Downtown there is so small and narrow. Everyone's outside of it. Somehow it is a big city without having any of the parts a big city's supposed to have. It's like a massive bug, some kind of beetle, that a spider's sucked the guts out from. It just lies there like an empty exoskeleton.

I swear there's a courthouse in town, a major one, near the center of everything, near city hall...and it's got a painting along its side of...like...the outside of a nicer court building - columns and statues and sculptures and stone walls. It looks like a prop of a real court building.

That's Saint Louis.

So when a place is like that and everyone talks about going somewhere else, people look for something to blame. They want to know why it our city - and it's a pretty place - was, was so pathetic compared to what it should have been.

So everyone blamed everyone else. It was a bloody city back then. Bloody Saint Louis.

My mom's got a name there. I've never said this out loud here. And I shouldn't now...

But my mama's got a name out there. And back home, where I'm from.

And the thing to do, then, was to get street guys as security. People had to. So these footsoldiers, they'd come and park in front of your house all night. Or you could set them up a table in the yard. My mama...soon she had them walking me to school. And the corner shop. I didn't really think about it. See - she was so important to me, and she was mom so she was in charge. It made sense that everyone else did things for her, too.

But when Saint Louis finally fell apart,
and the separatists got rounded up and
hailed down to Jefferson City...and...

(PAUSE - **EMOTION**)

...and those busses....those seventy-five
people...

When that happened, mama ran. She left me.
So I grew up. With boys. With boys all
around.

And eventually I was older and fell in
love with one of them. I'm not sure if
she...meant for that to happen. That's
probably the wrong way to think of it.

I fell for a scrawny Afghan boy whose
people had filled the gap mama left. They
were street kings. They sold everything,
made everything, kept things running,
always moved, always driving, always
working, always sweating. Hustling.

I loved him. He was sharp like strong
drink. He was tender. Like my mother. And
this is why she left me with his people...
like her, he's a true believer. He doesn't
know life without faith. So she figured
he'd always be trustworthy.

So you might wonder...why I'm here.

I liked every part of the hustle but the
fear. These people didn't sleep. I didn't
know a damn thing about a normal night's
sleep til I got to Chicago. I thought
everybody slept in shifts, watched out
front in shifts, watched out back in
shifts, kept a piece under the bed, in the
medicine cabinet of the bathroom, taped up
under the toilet top...we had four in the
kitchen.

Shay and me were good at being in love.
But he wasn't keeping up with the
business.

Have any of you ever had a moment where you realized that it's you: you're the problem? For someone else? For some thing? For yourself? It's really hard. Really fucking sad.

I wondered so many times if that's what mama realized. It seemed like she'd gone for her sake. But maybe she left me for mine. I wasn't allowed to ask if she was coming back. I asked all the time. They were her men. They had been. But they just shook their heads.

So I ate with the guys and worked with them. I prayed with them and during the holy month I fasted.

We didn't hear anything from Texas. It wasn't allowed. No news, nothing. And when it did come back through - word of mouth - people kept it from me. It drove me crazy. They talked about mama like she'd been their saviour, but now it was like she was dead.

We just couldn't know what was true and what wasn't.

And mama, over there...I know it now, but, had no idea, then. She might have been dead. People always whispered about her. When I was a kid I noticed that, too. She was the only person I knew that people whispered about even while she was alive. The first time I heard it I got so worried I asked if she was hurt.

The rumours drove us crazy. For every person who came back and said that Houston had been razed and that everything was being looted and trashed....someone else would make a run across to our side and tell us about this incredible place.

But when it came to mother, I was certain.

Because they still whispered about her.

Then Shay's best friend, Azif, came back from a run to the border. He was thin and sick. But he had more excitement in him than I've ever seen in a person. He talked about Texas. He said it was like paradise. The people ran everything. The streets were safe, there was food for everyone, it was fair. The law worked. Everything you'd want to hear about a place. It sounded perfect - like a good revolution. Like one that had worked.

But he had been anxious, and he wouldn't eat. He spent all day praying or in the shed, cleaning the guns. We didn't know what was going on, but things were good for us. Shay and I were working every day. We had money. We were never in a rush. His people, my people...it was a good time for our business.

Azif was scaring us; wasting away. Finally he talked to me and Shay. He said he'd been given a message. From my mother.

He'd talked to her. He said she was like a queen there. He said she would be studied for a thousand years.

*(HER VOICE **LOWERS**, TEETH
CLENCH)*

I've never been that angry. I felt hate come into me like a bone breaking.

I saw something once, a video...a hoard of insects rushing us a tree to strip it. It was like that.

I was so mad I couldn't sit and listen to it. I grabbed Azif. Grabbed his neck. I spat on him. He was so small I got him all in my arms, I was...

I said he was a liar.

He kept apologizing. I knew he was honest. But it was too much, it was more than I could hear.

I was...so angry to hear that things were good. That she had gone there and...and become this thing for people. This thing that I never asked her to be, never needed her to be. I knew she was great, I didn't need her to do anything. Nothing. She could hold her arms open and I knew she made the sun rise and set.

She had left me. And I'd been scared she was done, or dead. But I didn't know how mad I was that she might have done it...have gotten love from everyone. A whole state. A whole country.

But he said it was true. He kept saying 'Everything they promised...everything she promised...it's all there.'

But she never promised any of that for me. It was always for everyone else.

(PAUSE)

Then he told us the message she'd sent.

Mama had ordered me to go to Houston, and Shay had to stay. That's what he said. She didn't ask how I was, didn't want to tell me not to worry.

She just said come.

And leave Shay.

Like I was one of her drivers, or a pet.

Shay was torn up. He'd do anything for her. He'd drop dead if she told him to do it. For the city. For the fight.

But I think this broke his heart. He told me...

(TEARS UP, SLOWS DOWN)

He said we should get pregnant. He said mama would never make me leave if I said I was going to have a baby.

Azif...he was so sorry. He got so sick. Shay stopped talking to him. Screamed at him.

Then Azif got too sick and couldn't go to hospital. He couldn't go any place or he'd get arrested. We had doctors on payroll, too. We had a few but none of them were that good. They knew trauma. If you got shot or hit or cut, they'd get you clean and sewn up.

But I knew they couldn't help Azif. He needed medicine. I used to get it for us. I was the only one who knew people with clean names. I was off-limits, too, cause of my mother. But I had friends. Azif's brother and sister asked me to get him something, please. Get someone to look at him. Anything.

And...

And Shay told me to say no. He said Azif had put us in a terrible position, and he never should have passed on the message.

He said Azif was a liar.

I couldn't believe it. But I remember I loved Shay so much. I...took him to bed right then. We didn't leave our room for two days. We didn't take any visitors. We didn't eat. We slept and had sex and Shay couldn't talk to me about any of it. I knew he'd never go against her.

He'd tell me to go, in the end. He'd go her way. He needed me to live happily, but he needed her to live.

For two days we just lay in sweat and

didn't even get up to put the fan on. Just let all the poison out.

We went at it so long and so sad...

Someone came to the door, once. Azif's sister. She got past the guards, we don't know how. Emergency or something. And Shay grabbed a gun and shot up the ceiling near the door till she stopped crying outside of it. She just screamed and then she was gone.

And after two days awake together, Shay slept, so long. I watched him just...wrecked. No energy left in him. He might as well have been outside of his body, just more sweat on the bed. I looked at him and knew he'd sleep a long time. And I also knew Azif must have died. I could feel it. I'm not sure how. But he was gone. So was my Shay, part of him.

So was mama.

I felt like she'd needed a sacrifice from us and Azif had been it. So it had been paid. A life was given for the sake of her...word. Her influence. She'd tested it. It was still there; the power to say *come or wait. Live. Die.*

*(BRENDA DRAWS IN AND THEN
LETS OUT A LONG BREATH)*

So I figured she'd gotten what she needed. And so had Shay. He'd convinced me with his silence that he might take my side.

He wouldn't have, though.

He'd have woken up all hung over even though we hadn't smoked or drank.

He'd have woken up and we'd have been silent for a day or two, gone and eaten and worked a bit.

And then while I cried, he'd explain to me about principles. About decisions. About how I could never know what she meant. And what Houston meant.

And then I would have had to hate him too.

So I left.

I'm not her daughter anymore.

She chokes, stops.

*

No more words come to her.

*

Quiet murmurs and sympathetic sounds from the crowd - but mostly silence.

People whisper: they can't tell if it's performance.

On stage Brenda is composed but on edge, lightly reeling as if she'd just taken a punch.

KERRY keeps his head facing the stage, RIVETED

Her HANDS, **C.U.** Grip the arms of her chair.

EXT. BACKSTAGE - DEAD OF NIGHT (SAME)

Empty streets...

Here, and nearby.

- 1) Another street; LOGAN CINEMA, Intelligensia, quiet as hell.
- 2) Crossroads, comix shops, seen in few-second static shots, all silent.

- 3) Apartment blocks, folks dragging out trash, smoking cigarettes on their balconies, it's all very still.
- 4) Back at **Backstage**, in front of the building, a COP CAR pulls up.

CUT INSIDE THE COP CAR

It's the two police officers we met earlier; male and female.

They sit quietly, eerie light cast over their faces.

They are SHIMMYING OFF gear, setting items aside in the car, knives, pens.

C.U. Of their cell phones as they remove them, open the car window, and TOSS THEM, far.

On the car's laptop screen, there's a TIMER.

It's counting down:

22:34

...

22:33

...

22:32

...

22:31

...

22:30

...

They wait.

Back inside **Backstage**, Brenda sits on stage, silent.

People begin to APPLAUD.

Steffa's MOUTH is agape.

Kerry stands up and moves, cane sweeping, to the side wall of the room.

And then

EVERYTHING

GOES

DARK

Shouts in the pitch black basement.

Kerry moves with confidence along the wall until she reaches where it meets the side of the stage.

She lifts her cane and lays it down, then pulls herself up and rolls over onto the stage.

She retrieves her cane.

Sweeps it and meets BRENDA'S STOOL.

She rises and moves to where Brenda is now STANDING.

Brenda RECEIVES KERRY, somehow knowing it's her.

The two of them TURN AND PUSH BACK THROUGH THE STAGE AREA, and BRENDA CLINGS TO KERRY'S HAND as

Kerry sweeps and moves expertly in the dark.

They soon arrive at a door that seems to appear out of nowhere.

And step OUT into an alley, and moonlight.

The **COP CAR**, now, ROARS AND FLASHES LIGHT at the end of the alley and Brenda turns Kerry, who's already angled to the sound.

Now Kerry slips BEHIND BRENDA and holds her hand, letting her lead, and they walk, fast, to the cop car.

THE FEMALE OFFICER IS OUT and SHOUTING:

'Here! Here!'

CUT TO

Inside the COP CAR:

The male cop turns, from the passenger's seat, and reaches back, says:

'PHONES'

And Brenda and Kerry find theirs and hand them to him (he holds his palms out)

He takes them and

CHUCKS them out the window.

EXTERIOR SHOT of the CAR as the phones are ejected.

INT. BRENDA'S FLAT - DEAD OF NIGHT (SAME)

The front area, small kitchenette, all still, all quiet.

Dark.

The **FRONT DOOR** is pushed OPEN and BRENDA enters with the FEMALE COP.

Brenda GASPS AND PLACES A HAND OVER HER MOUTH IN HORROR.

The police officer shines a flashlight, illuminating, in **our foreground**, a hitherto unseen object:

A BODY

Hanging just past the kitchen in the living room.

Where the coffee table's been kicked over.

It's **FERN**

Brenda RUNS TO IT AND GRABS IT, tries to PULL IT DOWN, she's flustered, confused.

The FEMALE COP grabs her and pulls her away, they:

(Quick shots)

PACK A FEW THINGS UP

And LEAVE

THE TIMER IN THE COP CAP

18:09

...
18:08

...
18:07

...

INSIDE THE CAR

Brenda weeps into her hands and KERRY holds her.

They drive, racing quickly, SIRENS ON through the streets.

And now, as the timer gets lower, they

TURN SHARPLY onto LAKESHORE DRIVE and RUSH ALONG THE WATER
in the minimal late night traffic.

And we see **C.U.** THE MALE OFFICER forcibly disconnects the
car's laptop screen from it's affixed stand and, even as
its timer lowers, THROWS IT OUT HIS WINDOW AS WELL.

CUT TO:

INT. SHAY'S HOUSE - DEAD OF NIGHT (SAME)

A PILE OF CELL PHONES in a basket, which is passed around;
a few more added to it.

Carried OUTSIDE to where a BONFIRE RAGES

And DOZENS OF PEOPLE STAND AROUND.

The BASKET is TOSSED IN.

The PHONES, **C.U.** Burn.

AND NOW WE SEE A SERIES OF QUICK CUTS:

Phones in piles burning in TRASH CANS

and BONFIRES

and in DUMPSTERS

Burning.

SHAY'S FACE as flames dance and taunt...

He TAPS the shoulder of a fellow next to him, who's got a laptop.

The young man TAPS THE KEYS DECISIVELY,
COMPLETING SOME UNKNOWN ACTION, then folds the laptop and
tosses it as well into the fire.

CUT TO:

A HIGH SHOT OF SOUTH CHICAGO

The edge of the city, around Bronzeville, the downtown sprawl begins to drop off to worse-off looking areas.

Along the water, the **cop car** races.

And now:

From high above, and far, an ARIAL OMNISCIENT SHOT we see
DOWNTOWN CHICAGO

GO DARK

The entire skyline **LOSES POWER**

But the SOUTH SIDE, a line neatly drawn now around the 60
blocks, is dark, too, until it

LIGHTS UP:

But after a moment we realize that it's not house and
street lights, but **TORCHES,**

Thousands, countless,

All over the SOUTH SIDE

Flaring up in unison, roaring to life.

The lights begin to MOVE;

Sweeping slowly north.

WE PUSH FORWARD FROM ABOVE racing through the dark night
sky and the low whispering clouds,

Over the **shock of torchfire,**

Collected as a mass, a front, illuminating

Pay Day Loan shops and

African Beauty salons,

Schools and libraries,

Police stations and Popeyes, and house after house after house after house.

CUT TO BLACK:

OPEN ON:

EXT. BONFIRE - LATE AFTERNOON

Men are dancing on one side, women on the other, a mixed group, largely Afghan immigrants, but also black and white.

The men are in a line with canes, chanting and dancing, clapping, singing.

Women on the other side are covered: they dance and flirt and sing in response.

There is food along low tables around the bonfire.

Brenda sits with a hand holding one of Kerry's, whose head is LEANED on Brenda's shoulder.

SHAY is nowhere to be seen for now.

The music continues and Brenda is moving Kerry's hands along different FOOD ITEMS on a plate, and whispering to her what they are.

Kerry tries one, then another, making faces, laughing.

Behind the FIRE there is another table with a **BLACK T-SHIRT**, extra large, showing the **FACES** of **FALLEN**:

Names like:

Azzad

Charles

Lashawn

Tashira

Risha

Fatima

and more...

And behind this is a large framed PHOTOGRAPH of

ROSA who wears the beret and epaulets of a revolutionary.

CUT INSIDE the house where SHAY is praying in the lowing light, along with two brothers, as another brother and two sisters sit against the wall, passing a joint.

C.U. Shay's face: he's done.

Still on his knees, he sighs.

Rises.

He walks to the front of the house and looks out the WINDOW at the neighbourhood celebration.

Turns back and walks through the hallway

Pausing at a door, not entering

Then going to HIS ROOM

And, inside, opens a CLOSET to retrieve a SUIT, which he takes out.

Sounds and ululations from outside, and light coming riotously through the window from fire and torches.

SHAY takes his clothing off, piece by piece, and dresses himself in the suit.

Buttoning up the cuffs,

Combing his hair with a small black comb.

Staring in the mirror, his beard LONGER NOW than when we last saw him

He takes out a small bag, opens it, and takes out the silver scissors from within.

He begins to CLIP and CUT his beard short.

Until, in the mirror, he's now quite trim.

CUT to a RAZOR over his cheeks and chin.

As he does, Brenda **enters the room** behind him and goes to lie down on the bed.

Now Shay, wiping his face, does as well, next to her, not quite close.

C.U. : she TOUCHES his FACE, the smooth parts of it.

And she closes her eyes.

Soon he stands and slowly, gingerly, picks himself up and leaves, but we **hold** on her shut eyes and enter

Her dream:

BRENDA'S FACE as she naps against a desk

On her head a POWDERED WIG

In her hand a GAVEL

She is sleeping quietly, profoundly tired until a

HAND wrests her from her dreams

and she SITS UP, her wig now matched by black ROBES and we are:

INT. OLD SAINT LOUIS COURTHOUSE - DAYTIME

And Brenda, roused by an unseen (and now gone) person awakes to find herself in a fearsomely HIGH judge's seat, exaggeratedly far above the courthouse, into whose large chambers light is pouring.

DOWN ON THE COURT FLOOR, seemingly terribly far below, is the OLD COUPLE from Backstage in Chicago, her friends, KEN and RUTH.

They are dressed up for court, looking nervous.

They both SWEAT a great deal.

*Drops of SWEAT fall to the floor with a CLATTER in **S.M.***

Brenda's hand grips the gavel.

*She look to her right and, high in the rafters, perched like a **BAT** she sees SHAY, muscular, his neatly-shaven face.*

A sound like a fluttering of wings can be heard as he perches in the sunlight, visible and frightening.

Brenda then looks to the high LEFT corner of the dome-roofed courthouse and sees

*ANOTHER PERSON also perched like a bat or a gargoyle, only now in the **SHADOWS**, though we can tell that it is a BLIND WOMAN, eyes BOUND BY A BLINDFOLD, dark hair and skin:*

*Is it **ROSA**?*

Brenda looks afraid.

She lifts the gavel and TAPS her head like the piano performers in the basement, and a trickle of blood comes down from it and falls into a WINE GLASS

She notes the legs, the colour as more drips

And lifts it to her LIPS...

...

CUT TO BLACK:

OPEN ON:

INT. ROOMFUL OF WOMEN - DAY

It's Shay's house, in the neighbourhood.

A handful of women, along with Kerry, are chattering quietly and working on sewing, knitting, and pressing.

A FEW QUICK CUTS

1 - People work in the yard

2- A woman with an opened doctor's bag is sitting with children nearby, and a line of mothers and children waiting, Kerry is speaking with her and holding an infant.

3- Shay and Brenda sit up ON THE ROOF, he's lying across her lap. They're quiet, watching the neighbourhood.

The neighbourhood looks much the same as before: no sign of major changes.

BRENDA

I had a long dream last night. We rode into the city. All of us. Kerry was singing.

Shay nods slowly.

SHAY

Maybe some day.

BRENDA

And mama was gone.

Shay nods again, and then shakes his head sadly.

SHAY

I'm worried to even read what comes in from Texas anymore. They say she might have years, might have days.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST PARK - DAY

Kerry and Brenda walk along a remote part of the bike path winding round the large park.

KERRY

I feel strange not hearing news.

BRENDA

You've got to push through it. Look at it like a wall. All those nerves...feeling out of touch...not hearing from people...push through it like a wall.

KERRY

But why? What's the prize on the other side?

Kerry's STICK swishes along the sidewalk.

BRENDA

Different for everyone. But. What did you want that you didn't have? What would you want for yourself that you weren't getting?

Now's when you can fight hard for those things.

KERRY

I don't know if I'm built for that mentality, Brenda. It's hard to be around sometime. Battlefield talk.

BRENDA

But you weren't happy in Chicago. You would have stuck around so your family didn't worry, and you would have died in the neighbourhood.

KERRY

What's wrong with the neighbourhood? We're in the neighbourhood here! It's where you've brought me! I can still smell weed and barbecues. Ain't enlightened down here, thank you very much.

BRENDA

Does it feel the same to you? Really?

Kerry shakes her head, *no*.

KERRY

No. But I don't know why.

I feel good here. Normally people help me so much, it's a pain in the ass...but then if they don't I get even madder. Here's better.

People give me work. This morning I taught some girls how to cook greens the right way. They were all laughing. They're so

sweet.

Brenda nods, eyes heavy in the sunlight.

They walk past low prairie and small ponds.

BRENDA

It's strange, isn't it?

They're my people.

Kerry shakes her head at this.

KERRY

Hard to comprehend. But who's anyone's people now? When I was a kid I knew people laughed and watched because I'm blind. But it took me so long to understand the idea of being black.

It hurt so bad. Like God had done this extra thing. I can't even see but I know that when people see I look bad to them. Do you know how strange that is?

Can you imagine that?

You go somewhere, to a new planet, and there's a new dimension of you that you can't sense, and people tell you that in it....it's...

BRENDA

But that's not all being black is.

I mean...you talk...you talk like you're from the neighbourhood. You aren't trying to fit in with anything.

You seem cool with it.

You've got your hair natural. I love that.

KERRY

Thank you.

Sure, there's a lot more. I learned all that. How people smell.

Whether they smell like soap and soapy water, or whether like deodorant and spray.

Whether their sweat's got spice in it-

BRENDA (JOVIALY)

Shut up!

Kerry's smiling a bit.

KERRY

Mhm!

I can kiss someone and tell you.

Tell you if she's white or black.

Brenda pauses as she walks.

BRENDA

She?

You're like that, huh?

KERRY (QUIETLY)

Mmm. See if I met you just now, first time, I'd know you were black.

Telling me:

'You're like that....'

BRENDA

What would a white woman say?

KERRY

Hell no, I don't do impressions.

BRENDA

What would she say?

Wait - what would a Chicana say? Eh?

She squeezes Kerry's arm, laughing.

Kerry laughs, too.

BRENDA

You may not be right with God, but I didn't like you cause I thought you were perfect.

I like you cause you-

Well, anyways.

KERRY

No! You've got to tell me now.

You can't stop there.

Come on...

You're a big shot here. Heir to the throne of some kind of crime kingdom.

I can't believe it.

You've got to tell me.

BRENDA

Well. Speaking of mama.

I'll tell you what she used to tell me, okay? When I'd say that shit.

Mama, why do you say I'm your favourite?

Do you love me?

KERRY

Oh? Is that what I sound like?

BRENDA

Exactly, mmhm.

They reach a small particularly picturesque little pond

with a bench facing it and Brenda says 'here...' and guides Kerry to sit with her.

BRENDA

So. When I'd get like that.

She'd tell me this story.

Ready?

KERRY

I'm ready.

Wait. No. Tell me later.

I don't want to hear now. I think I understand, anyways. I think I get it.

Brenda looks a bit puzzled.

BRENDA

What's the matter?

Now Kerry's lip quivers a little bit, but she shakes her head staunchly.

KERRY

Nothing.

BRENDA

What is it?

Kerry takes off her DARK GLASSES and wipes at her eyes.

KERRY

I can't go back to Chicago, can I?

BRENDA

It's not going to be how you know it. Not much longer. The change has to happen here, too. And everywhere. Like Texas.

Understand what I mean?

Kerry nods.

KERRY

Cause I prayed and prayed to be strong
enough to change life myself.

But I guess God had to do it for me.

Through you.

Brenda smiles.

BRENDA

No need to bring a man into this.

Kerry laughs.

KERRY

But honey, you're not keeping me around
for no reason.

And not just cause you like...whatever. My
honesty or some shit.

There's something else-

Isn't there?

And Brenda lets out a long breath.

Nods, knowing Kerry can't see it.

KERRY

True, isn't it?

BRENDA

Maybe I wasn't ready to leave Chicago all
at once.

KERRY

And your mama. You are going back to her
aren't you? It's cause I'm blind like her.

I took psychology!

Brenda laughs.

BRENDA

Tell me more about how everybody's soap smells...

What's my Shay smell like?

He got spicy sweat?

I'm gonna call him *spicy sweat* from now on...

FADE OUT:

OPEN ON:

EXT. SHAY'S YARD - LATE DAY

A long white plastic table is being set up.

Kids run around, bringing plates and forks and, a pair of them, a pitcher of water.

A CAR swerves up to the street in front of the house, and its door opens, with a handsome young fellow escorting KERRY out, her arm looped through his, beaming under her dark glasses.

Under her other, free, arm, she cradles two BROWN PAPER bags with WINE BOTTLES visible through their open tops.

QUICK CUTS of the table being set.

Now BRENDA stands as a handful of others sit.

Shay's there, and Kerry.

Shay is CLOSING HIS EYES while Kerry's former escort TIES A **BLINDFOLD** onto him.

SHAY (TO KERRY)

No cheating.

KERRY (SMILING)

Sounds like you're ready to lose.

In front of each contestant, both of whom are helped to set

their hands on what's in front of them: three glasses.

C.U. The glasses are **filled**.

KERRY

Hey, hold up. Where's my blindfold?

The person helping them pauses and looks confused.

Brenda, pouring the wine, laughs, and says to get her one.

They **blindfold** Kerry.

BRENDA

It's a nice feeling, still, isn't it?

I like it just for how it feels around my head and my eyes.

KERRY

You're kind of a freak, huh?

Brenda TAPS Kerry's hand chastisingly.

CUT TO:

Glasses being sipped by the two contestants.

Brenda explaining what they should taste for 'Now think about acidity....now try to - hmm - I don't want to give anything away...now try to notice if there.....'

KERRY

Why is it we still get decent wine?

BYSTANDER

Decent? I don't know about that...

KERRY

But I remember when coffee changed. And all the sugar we bought at the stores was suddenly hard and clumpy.

BRENDA

This is fair wine. There are midwestern vineyards and east coast vineyards.

So which of *these* is older?

Which is a better grape?

Which is more refined?

Kerry leans towards Shay and whispers:

KERRY

I love when she talks about it...don't you?

He nods.

CUT TO:

FIREWORKS

Without context, crackling and ricocheting in the sky.

WALKIE TALKIES

In the hands of some KIDS who are walking the neighborhood in a pack, talking happily and chatting into their walkies.

UP ALONG THE STREET they pass (ONE AFTER ANOTHER) **garage after garage** and **street after street** they pass

CARS being **OUTFITTED**

Sitting in their drives or rolled out onto the street

One after another

As if people are gearing up for some sort of event...

- **CAMEROS**

- **GRAND AMS**

- **CADILLACS**

- With **FINS** and **SPOILERS**, Shimmering rims, spinning rims, fresh paint.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. SHED BEHIND SHAY'S PLACE - EVENING (SAME)

Brenda and Shay lie in a raggedy hammock in the shed, near the faux tank with its stash of....something.

It's an old shed but tidy; the air is crisp and shadowy.

BRENDA

I was happy, Shay. Didn't think I would be without you, but I was. I don't know what's sadder. It used to be sadder to think about not being around you.

Now it's kind of sadder that it happened. I adjusted. I made do.

SHAY

It's okay. It *is* sad.

BRENDA

I try to just replace it with feeling proud.

I loved you because you were loyal and you believe what you say.

Then I hated you for the same thing. It doesn't make sense. So I'm proud. When you love and hate something or someone, I think the best option is to separate them from you and just feel pride.

SHAY

I don't know. There's so much happening now. Chicago's...it's happening there. I think. We don't know. It's so hard to get good news, just like from Texas. What will happen? I have so many brothers and sisters up there.

Will it work?

Do you think?

BRENDA

I don't know. Texas was ready.

Shay laughs.

SHAY

Yeah, but they always were...I'm surprised it didn't happen fifty years ago.

BRENDA

All I know is that it's good for people to be free. And for some people, comfortable means free. For others, equal means free. So what is it?

I can't gauge it unless things change. Unless they conflict and come to a head and alter and a new even more radical freedom comes.

That's just how I measure it.

I could be wrong. But I think Chicago will be more free now.

SHAY

Even if the city takes it back? Even if the wrong guys set up there?

BRENDA

People choose. You have to let them choose wrong if they're going to.

Shay shakes his head.

SHAY

I don't know.

But it's all very familiar. We'll get you to where you need to go.

But it will happen in a rush. You know?

With noise and...shit...messy. Shooting.

That's how *I* measure things now.

I think...I think....I must have cut myself a deal at some point. Like...decided that I'm more afraid of nothing than I am of too much.

I can always pray through the stress of clatter. But I can't escape the fear of silence. Nothing happening.

BRENDA

Ya habibti...*'iidha kunt takhshaa
alssamt , kunt takhshaa Allah...*

(if you fear solitude, you fear God...)

SHAY

I know. It's true.

But it's easier to say that I'll be part of his will. His will for change and for more radical, truer freedom and rightness and order and love. His desire for all to submit in unison, equal and perfect.

It's easier to say that I'll move his hand, than that I'll wait and watch the board.

How is a man to choose?

It's sacred to wait on Allah and trust.

But if I am passive and people suffer and are selfish and die, fat and stupid...then who was I?

More to be judged. A man who knew better and said nothing. The broken heart of lawful Allah in a man's body...

BRENDA

But my dear, it does not just always need

to be just you. You are not the only one.

SHAY

I don't think that-

BRENDA

I know. Listen to me. I just...I wonder if
mama didn't put a lot of pressure on you.
Very young. You know?

And it's not fair. You need to share it
with people. I see you talk to these
boys...share with them. Trust the. If you
start to not trust the people you're
building the future with, then you're not
building the future. Just preserving the
mechanism.

SHAY

I do!

I trust them.

She's quiet a long moment, lying in front of him as his
arms are around her.

BRENDA

I know people come across. I know they
come from Texas to here.

But they still say it's impossible to go
the other way...

Drones...

Shay smiles.

SHAY

Don't worry. You said yourself...I'm too
stubborn and want to control everything.

I'll get you across.

I'll get you to your mother.

And once you're there...

BRENDA

Shh.

That's up to me.

And you *will* be okay with whatever I decide. Understand?

Because part of me wants to slap her across her face.

SHAY

If you kill Rosa, your first act as her successor will have to be punishing yourself...

The word 'successor' hangs in the air.

BRENDA (SADLY)

You don't see me doing that, do you?

SHAY

Which one?

Silence, they sway...

FADE OUT:

OPEN ON:

EXT. SAINT LOUIS - SUNRISE/EARLY MORNING

SHOTS AROUND THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

An old woman opens a back door and lets out her dogs.

Some teens are asleep in a plastic kiddie pool on a lawn where they've 'camped' with pillows and bags of chips.

A few Muslim men and women pray, in separate groups, in lines.

Now INSIDE

Shay sits on the ground drinking coffee with a few

lieutenants.

SHAY

We've got the right spot.

Brenda is lying down on her stomach, a bit away near the sitting pillows.

Two young girls are doing her HAIR.

BRENDA

Why not water?

SHAY

Arkansas is still the best bet.

WOMAN

East Texas, you mean.

Shay nods.

SHAY

The artist formerly known as Arkansas, mmhm.

Brenda smiles, her eyes closed.

BRENDA

It can't be that hard. It's not like there's desert around it.

And then we see INSERT SHOTS

of the **CARS ALONG THE STREET**

as Shay answers her:

SHAY (V.O.)

Right. So we all breech together. But the rest of us do it....here, here, here....you get the point?

BRENDA

Draw attention.

He nods.

SHAY

It'll look like a rush. Like last summer.
It'll look like a whole gang's moving
across.

BRENDA

They'll engage you.

SHAY

We're unarmed. We'll make some noise, then
hold still.

We're gonna go live with a video feed nine
minutes before. That's long enough for
chatter to build.

Whatever happens to us will be broadcast.

I'll raise a white flag.

BRENDA

Like an actual...?

SHAY

Yes.

She likes it.

BRENDA

And me?

SHAY

You'll go across with someone else. Not
one of us.

A local.

BRENDA

Coyote?

SHAY

No. You're too high value. Nobody who'd know who you are. We've got to pick someone up on the way. Someone impressionable.

BRENDA (SIGHING)

Throw some kid who thinks Texas is Sherwood Forest a thousand dollars to rush me through some dingy patch of the woods and into East Texas...

SHAY

Yeah. We don't even know where. Can't plan it. Can't have any record. None of us that could talk if interrogated. It's between you and whoever I find for you.

Got it?

CUT TO:

Car after car

After car

After tricked out car

Rushes down the block in South Saint Louis and **merges**

Onto **Interstate 55.**

Until from the air we can see a massive caravan: twenty-five or so cars.

CUT INSIDE one of them, where BRENDA, face wrapped in a headscarf, hair braided, sits with KERRY.

BRENDA

Have you decided what to do?

Are you gonna ask Shay to take you back to

Chicago?

KERRY

You know I'm staying.

BRENDA

You should teach. They need you. These girls could learn so much from you.

You should ask someone to show you how to pray.

Try going to mosque.

KERRY

And if I don't want to?

BRENDA

Then do God's work just the same.

But for most of us; the sharing of prayer and the recitation of what we know...

It keeps us rich.

And you're a diamond, Kerry.

(WHISPERING)

You're a shining light.

I look at you and that's all I can see.

Tears appear beneath Kerry's dark glasses.

She GRIPS her cane, collapsed across her lap.

KERRY

I hope I meet someone else who thinks that, too.

I'm afraid I won't.

BRENDA

Well.

If I say it, it's law, remember?

So you *know* it's true.

Kerry leans her head on Brenda's shoulder.

From out and above, we see them drive on...

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. SMALL TOWN - MORNING

A corner shop.

A church.

A movie theatre, its sign a plain white marquee with untidy black lettering...

...with **twenty souped up cars in its parking lot.**

On the marquee, beneath the movie listings, the final line says:

'Happy birthday, Silvia Brennan'

INSIDE THE CINEMA

TWO TEENAGERS are staring at the crowd of people, none of whom look much like residents.

Shay addresses the owl-eyed youngsters.

SHAY

You like the cars?

The two adolescent exchange a glance.

It's a boy and a girl, stringy-haired and curious-seeming.

BOY

Which one's yours?

GIRL

Are you a...

...a car...group?

Shay smiles.

SHAY

You know the convention center up in
Springfield?

The boy shakes his head but the girl nods, drawing a look
from him.

GIRL

Yeah, sure. The convention center.

SHAY

That'll be us soon, along with lots of old
guys and vets.

BOY

Which car's yours, though.

SHAY

Me personally?

He leans forward on his elbows.

SHAY

If what you mean is which one did I fix
up, fit out, and turn into the maximum
version of itself?

That'd be about twelve of 'em.

But my one's the white Charger. I like
Dodge.

BOY

I like Dodge, too. My dad says they make
the best trucks. He's gonna get one,
maybe.

SHAY

You wanna drive it?

GIRL

We've got to stay here and work.

SHAY

Well, yeah. And we wanna see a movie. But later, when you two are off, okay?

No verbal answer, but the boy nods vigorously.

SHAY

Twenty tickets please. Whatever flick you guys recommend.

GIRL

Y'all just missed a real good one. Really funny one just stopped running last week.

BOY

We got a good horror one though if you all think you can handle it.

He looks to Brenda and Kerry and the others.

KERRY

That's the one we want.

The boy turns and punches into the register, while the girl picks up her red cinema visor and moves around the kiosk and crosses to the concession stand, where she waves over the group.

GIRL

Guys want any snacks or sodas?

CUT TO:

INT. THEATRE SCREEN ROOM - MORNING/MIDDAY (SAME)

The dark room is full of rapt faces as the telltale sounds of suspense emit from the unseen screen.

Brenda is WHISPERING to Kerry about what's happening.

Kerry's smiling.

Brenda continues to narrate until - coinciding with a wicked sound from onscreen - she gives a little SCREAM.

CUT TO:

BLACK

HOLDING

FADING INTO...

A **small notebook** that says 'Brenda's only!!!' is lifted and carried by a hand quite clearly not Brenda's.

It is taken in **close shots** to a bedside table.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

This is what we found.

Is this it?

We hardly hear an answer, but the hand holding the notebook now now sets it down on the table, then its holder pulls up a chair, and though we still don't see him, sits down.

He has long black hair in a ponytail.

His voice - maybe native.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

I want to hear it all. I don't care if it's embarrassing, okay?

Don't worry about me.

The man nods, lifts the notebook.

MAN

Okay.

He clears his throat and wavers for a moment, launching in with a tone slightly elevated, theatrical but quiet, and a bit higher.

MAN (READING)

Today things got a little better. But it drives me crazy when it seems so easy for

people. Especially mama. But I don't want to talk about her. I write about her too much. If she ever reads this she's gonna get an ego.

WOMAN (LAUGHING)

It says 'get an ego'? That's a strange phrase.

MAN (REGULAR VOICE)

Yeah - 'gonna get an ego'. You know what she means.

WOMAN

Okay, sorry, go on.

It's funny that she says that. About me reading it.

I never did.

Now we see the fellow's face, in candlelight.

He's handsome, wheatish skin, native features.

MAN (READING)

Fuck Saint Louis. It's dead here. It's no black people really where we are either. Mama keeps meeting with the other guys. The middle easterns. I don't like it, they always come just men, a bunch of them. They don't stare or say anything to me. But it's weird. I wish they would. Not like that, but just cause I have no idea what they're thinking.

Some of them seem nice. They act like mama's in charge. Ugh. I'll tell them how she clips her toenails and wraps them in little folded tissue paper. Or that she got me a gift card to the stupidest store I don't ever even go to. Cause she knows the guy there. It's so sad.

I hate feeling sad about her. When she

does something like that it makes me want to slap her. It's so sad when she makes a fool out of herself. She's all bossy with them, then with me she tries to talk about music and sounds like a kindergartener.

I fucking hate motown. It's a dumb name and it's dumb music.

I ate too much at Kiara's party, I tried to get her cousin to take me to the gym. So bad. She said I was flirting cause I kept promising him things like I'd make out with him if he drove me there, but for real I was just feeling too fat.

You can't even search for Texas now online. You get the government news. That's it. Mama likes it or something. Or she and people are all saying how it's like old times when you heard things and couldn't be sure if they're true. What the fuck - that's good? Not knowing what's bullshit and what's real? What the fuck are they talking about?

Sometimes my friends ask me and I can tell them cause I'm from there, but I'm not supposed to bring it up much. Or just say I'm happy I left. That's bullshit too.

Texas was way better food. I like one park here, and it's clean. But you have to scan your ID card for everything. And white people act really fucked up and polite, they get all weird. It's worse, though - back home we all just teased each other, or people were mean. I didn't like that but it was better than this-

The man - somewhat caught up in the journal - pauses.

From the bed, the woman is crying.

He sets the book down.

ROSA

I should have just brought her here at the start...

What else was there to do, though?

It wasn't safe. I thought I could get her here later. But she changed...

MAN

Nobody plans on their kids growing up.

It's impossible.

We write a resume for them without even realizing it. Then they don't tick the boxes and we lose our minds.

You didn't know what would happen when you sent for her.

It's okay, Rosa. She's coming.

Rosa shakes her head.

ROSA

No.

Tonight I have no more...I can't. It's not a question of will anymore. I can tell. I've crossed into some new place. It's just going to quiet from here. And calm. But there's no more fight in me.

CUT TO:

EXT. TEXAS/MISSOURI BORDER (FORMERLY ARKANSAS/MISSOURI BORDER) - DAWN

A small depot with a few men in it and a few around, armed.

A paramilitary vehicle as well.

CUT

to another, very similar little depot, slightly different colour, men in different positions, no vehicle.

CUT to another

And another

And another

CUT above to the SKY where a **DRONE** whizzes, along an unseen border line, passing over a depot.

Then, in quick cuts, another and another, and another.

NOW C.U. Of the drone's armaments, long barrels on the narrow wings.

And a payload beneath it, three slender missiles.

BACK DOWN at the first depot, we PULL BACK until we are observing the small building from a long shot.

After a long moment, a DRONE goes whizzing by overhead.

WITH THE DRONE, then up in the clouds and the dark blue night, then rushing wide and finally, low, back to:

EXT. SMALL TOWN - NIGHT (SAME)

It's a sky full of stars above the OUTDOOR PATIO of a Mexican restaurant.

Music plays as our RAGTAG GANG sits to eat, along with the teens from the cinema, PAIGE and CLARK.

They sit between Kerry and Shay, with the rest around in a wide circle, talking, drinking, and laughing.

PAIGE

I wanna try the Mexican food there so bad.
I heard it's amazing. Really different and
all fresh ingredients and spices we don't
have.

Brenda nods.

KERRY

Cumin.

SHAY

Cumin! Jesus. Yeah.

Cumin.

CLARK

What's that like?

He seems to be asking Brenda in particular, who he's been consistently staring at.

Brenda takes a moment to notice that she's in the hot seat.

BRENDA

Oh, well. I mean you've got meat and beans and sour cream here. It's pretty close.

SHAY

Come on...

Cop out!

KERRY

Yeah that was hella lame.

BRENDA

What's it like?

I don't know - it's a spice. It's a totally unique flavour! That's why it's...a spice! That's why people use it in the first place...

SHAY

Paige, to answer your question - there's *nothing* like a full proper Tex-Mex meal. Cumin and fresh cilantro and salsa verde...It's crisp and smoky and hot...really hot. You have to drop a dollop of sour cream in your mouth after every bite. And then steam comes out.

CLARK

Like in a cartoon....

KERRY (LAUGHING)

Yeah - like Loony Tunes!

Several laugh.

Things calm.

CUT TO:

OUT IN A BASEBALL FIELD

Shay is walking with Clark and a couple of guys while Paige sits with Kerry and Brenda on the bleachers.

PAIGE

I wanna get my hair like that. I don't know how. I think it's so pretty.

Brenda nudges Kerry.

BRENDA

She means you, Beethoven.

KERRY

Okay, smartass, he was *deaf*.

Paige looks confused.

BRENDA (GESTURING TO KERRY)

She's blind.

Paige looks sheepish, says 'oh'.

KERRY

Blind as love, baby girl.

You didn't notice?

Paige shakes her head.

Brenda makes a face.

PAIGE

Oh - I mean, no.

I saw people help you. I thought you were just drunk.

Kerry smiles.

KERRY

You like my hair?

Paige nods.

BRENDA

She can't see you, love.

PAIGE

Ah! Sorry. I'll get better about it.

Yeah, I love your hair.

Was it expensive to get it done?

KERRY

She did it.

PAIGE

Damn. Really?

Are you best friends?

Brenda puts her arm around Kerry's shoulder.

BRENDA

This's my girl. She's my whole entourage.

PAIGE

What does that mean.

BRENDA

One good person's enough.

CUT TO:

EXT. EDGE OF THE WOODS - NIGHT (SAME)

Shay, two other men, and a woman, walk with Clark.

They're shin-deep in tall grass and weeds along the edge of the woods.

In moonlight.

Clark is showing them.

CLARK

I mean...I figured you guys were moving drugs or something.

It's not a secret down here...why people come through.

They didn't ever before. Then they started.

My dad says it'll be soon the government'll come scrap us all out and monitor the area.

But it's okay cause they might have to pay us to leave and buy our houses...maybe we get good money for it.

They gotta pay fair, it's a law.

He's walking them, pulling back branches from time to time, a bit aimless.

SHAY

Does that bother you? That we're running drugs?

Clark shrugs.

Eyes down.

CLARK

Yeah.

(PAUSE)

I guess people have to make a living.

But you guys...are you on drugs?

Shay shakes his head.

SHAY

Nah.

CLARK

You don't seem like it, to be honest.

I get high sometime.

SHAY

I want to make you an offer.

Clark pauses.

All do

Now Shay and the other three - behind him and silent - are in a line facing the boy whose back is to the woods.

CLARK

Okay.

There's a long pause.

Shay stares the kid down.

Then reaches out and holds, in his hand, a SET OF KEYS.

SHAY

You like that Charger?

I'll give it to you.

But the first drive you take in it....

...you go across for us.

Clark is speechless.

CLARK

I really, really like that car.

But you don't...drive across.

Did someone tell you that?

You have to walk.

Shay sighs and nods.

SHAY

I see. Could you get one of us through? Do you know the way?

The boy eyes the keys, says nothing.

SHAY

Same deal.

FADE OUT:

OPEN ON:

INT. MOTEL - LATE NIGHT (SAME)

Shay walks back to bed from the bathroom.

BRENDA

Still feeling bad?

He nods before climbing in.

Shay and Brenda spoon in bed and speak quietly.

Pale light comes through the window.

SHAY

They're gonna have runners all up and down the border.

They'll be watching all of it.

Wherever you come through, they'll meet you.

BRENDA

I think my mama's dead.

She must be.

Shay is silent.

BRENDA

Do you think so?

SHAY

I didn't think such a person existed. Not in this era. Not in the modern world.

I feel...it's like a light coming down from Allah.

Your mother was one of the old kind. Really, she was wise.

Brenda touches his beard.

He kisses her neck.

We **close in** on her as she speaks.

BRENDA

I don't know what I'm gonna do.

Paige told us today that Chicago they took the capital. She said it was pretty peaceful. But Washington is saying they'll send in troops.

That's crazy.

I mean...you aren't going to do that in Saint Louis, are you?

No word from Shay.

BRENDA

Shay?

Honey?

She turns around and looks at him.

He's **out**.

CUT TO:

The harsh light of morning.

Brenda sleeps, rouses.

Behind her, SHAY

She wakes and rolls a bit, onto her back, he's still and stiff.

She shoves him a bit, then wakes up, looks at him.

Comes round....

Shay is **dead**.

Brenda SHOVES HER HAND in her mouth and stifles her own scream, somehow knowing to keep quiet.

She LOOKS at the door and WINDOW, shut.

She gets out of bed and CRAWLS to the window,

looks out

There's nothing out of the ordinary...

...

Brenda breathes in

Breathes in

Turns, rushes back and KISSES Shay on his forehead and face

Then PRAYS quietly in Arabic, and then spins round, and

RUSHES the door, BURSTING THROUGH IT and SPRINTING for the parking lot.

She arrives; cars are all there.

No people in them.

BRENDA

I don't...

Who...

Shit.

Hands in her hair, she is panicking, standing in the bright lot.

She turns and RUNS.

CUT TO:

INT. CINEMA - MORNING (SAME)

At their ticket kiosk, PAIGE and CLARK.

Brenda comes through the front door in a fury.

PAIGE

Jeez!

What's wrong?

But Brenda opens her mouth, then says NOTHING.

She's confused.

Worried for them.

For herself.

Doesn't know the extent of what's happening or if anything's happening at all.

Where is everyone?

She didn't even look in their rooms - danger seems imminent.

She walks up to Clark, close, PULLS HIM across the counter.

BRENDA

Which way?

He's dumbfounded.

CLARK

Well, I'm taking you!

She shakes her head.

BRENDA

No! Shit, kid...no that's all done. I have to go now.

Tell me.

CLARK

God...I mean...there's a spot. We were there last night.

I know people hike through there.

I've heard you can do it in a week and it doesn't cross any of the border where there's drones.

She nods.

Paige is crying.

BRENDA

Cardinal direction. North, south, east west.

CLARK

Um, um...shit...south and west. Keep going like that.

Now Brenda looks to Paige, determined, scary.

BRENDA

Just...keep your fucking mouths shut, okay?

But a tear rolls down her cheek.

Paige nods, so does Clark.

BRENDA

Have the fucking car. I don't know. I'll leave it there.

And she LEAVES.

CLARK

Wait!

The spot!

BRENDA (HALFWAY OUT)

I know where it is. He gave me the coordinates.

CUT TO:

EXT. EDGE OF THE WOODS - MORNING (SAME)

The wide low fields, short stalks of green bending under the wind as it ripples through.

The stark, tall, impenetrable treeline against the field.

From quite a ways a way from the forest itself, Brenda is making her way through the field, having driven as far as she could and abandoned Shay's car.

Then Brenda **STOPS** and we watch her face, **up close**

She's silent, staring ahead.

In the distance, in front of the trees, is a **person**, standing, facing Brenda's direction.

Brenda now **COVERS** her **MOUTH**, then walks forward, slowly, hands on her knees, out of breath after a minute, trudging wordlessly until she's quite close.

It's Kerry, whose glasses are not on her face.

She stands very still, and is *LOOKING at Brenda*.

BRENDA

They didn't....

Emotion finds her - she chokes.

BRENDA

You didn't do me? You...let me live?

Kerry nods.

KERRY

I'm in trouble.

Brenda bends down and, from her boot, draws a long **knife**.

Kerry doesn't move.

KERRY

It's not...the cause isn't what you think it is, Brenda.

You guys aren't fighting for peace.

You're bringing war where there was none...

Brenda nods, walks forward slowly, and **kisses** Kerry on her cheek.

BRENDA

So blind.

And again, a kiss - to the forehead, and with a swift, hard, downward pull, Kerry's throat yields up spurts of red **blood**.

She gasps through it and lets herself fall forward onto Brenda.

KERRY

You're...

Wrong...

From some distance, we see Brenda holding Kerry where she stands, now dying, then dead.

BRENDA (V.O.)

You get older and you miss things. Most people are lucky and they miss them right there in the same place where the things were.

And they never have to wonder about if they changed or the world did. They changed. The world is around them, just the way it was.

CUT TO:

INT. THE WOODS ALONG THE BORDER - LATE AFTERNOON

Brenda pushes through the woods.

Stops at a clearing and takes off her jacket and leaves it, bloodied.

She carries on.

She stops and cries, she says 'Shay...Shay....'.

She carries on, minding the sun: South and West.

MUSIC CUE: James Blake - My Willing Heart

BRENDA (V.O.)

I miss the car salesmen in pointy boots. I miss big belt buckles. I miss the crossing guard at my school - Miss Cordy - and her bright yellow vest.

I miss my name.

It isn't *Brenda*.

I don't even say it in my mind anymore...

(LONG PAUSE)

I miss my mama.

Now she **sleeps**.

Walks, hikes onward.

Is dry-mouthed.

Sucks on small stones to keep her saliva flowing.

Crouches at some water, hesitant, but then too thirsty, and drinks from it.

Carries on.

Partly wretches, but doesn't let herself throw up, eyes streaming from strain.

Pushes on.

BRENDA (V.O.)

I miss finding frogs every chance I could
with my friends.

And boys who acted like they were *all that*
cause their mamas told them they were.

I miss being a Texan girl and putting the
world in its place every day.

And waking up the next day and always
finding it right there. Bigger than me.
Knowing I'm the one who changed.

Not God.

Close shots of Brenda's face as the woods around her
thin....

NIGHT and she sleeps again.

Her shoes are wearing, are dirty.

CUT:

She **SITS and HALLUCINATES (slow motion)** a WINE GLASS that
she can fill up with creek water, greenish and full of bits
and bobs.

She eyes it, looking for the legs, the colour, the alcohol
content.

CUT:

She carries on and then - is OUT of the TREES.

*

And at a long dry-looking road.

*

It seems to run for ages, with plain grasslands behind.

*

Only, the grasslands are

FULL OF PEOPLE -

A mass, a hoarde, an unbelievable number, all quiet.

And Brenda GASPS.

And when she does, from behind her in the woods, as her hands rests over her mouth, an

ERUPTION OF BATS

Who rise up like smoke off of the trees and circle into the air in a stream, departing with screeches and shrieks.

*

And from the mass of people, a man walks forward,

The **NATIVE MAN WHO WAS READING TO ROSA.**

And as Brenda approaches him on unsteady feet, the mass of people behind him begin to whisper.

*

And in their centre, they PART.

*

The older man reaches Brenda and then KNEELS and KISSES her hand.

She looks down at him and he shakes his head, his eyes moist.

She understands: she did not make it in time.

*

In the low golden light, the massive crowd has parted to make a path, leading to a **LONG COFFIN** rigged up on carrying poles, carried on the shoulders of two rows of men and women, with an ornate RED AND GOLD CANOPY above it - the coffin itself is also gilded.

It has the bearings of a royal processional.

It is beautiful in the spare empty field.

The man WALKS Brenda to the crowd and takes her down the split path in their centre and slowly, over a minute or so, up to the coffin.

The people's whispers rise and form into a chant.

They are saying:

ROSA!

And some are shouting and some are crying and many sing.

And Brenda reaches the front of the coffin procession, and the carriers set it DOWN.

And she sees now that on top of the coffin is a

CROWN.

And as the people on either side of her, and the old man behind her, shout and sing and chant, someone rushes to her and gives her **WATER** which she pauses to hungrily drink -

Tipping the bottle back and pouring it down her throat and spilling it, then pouring it on her head and hands and washing herself a little, but keeping her composure, even as relief comes down on her in an unbearably fine way.

Now, wet and cleaner and clearer-eyed she **WALKS** forward until she is **AT the coffin,**

The CROWN in front of her,

Waiting for her.

Which is when the crowd becomes silent, and Brenda's eyes heavily, full of tiredness and things we cannot hear or know, close.

And then (CLOSE UP SHOT)

OPEN AGAIN:

THUNDER CUT TO BLACK:

*

THE END