

THE AQUA VITAE PARALLAX

Written by

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Based on, *The Aqua Vitae Parallax*  
by Austin Ross.

Address  
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EXT. KHUMBU GLACIER, HIMALAYAS - DAY

Altitude: 8000 meters.

EXTREME WIDE SHOT of a bright blue clear sky. The sun is a blazing sphere throwing off sharp light. The Himalayas lay sprawling beneath the brilliant sky. A minute figure makes his way along the landscape.

CLOSE UP of a YOUNG MAN, in his early twenties. He begins his ascent across the glacier and in the direction of the highest peak- Everest. A roughly sewn and ragged bag is slung across his shoulder. He is the only living, moving being on the range. All around him fierce winds blow, swirling the snow. The Young Man walks on.

As he approaches a blocked passageway, he slows his pace and looks pointedly at the obstacle. An minor avalanche begins. It clears a pathway where none existed before. The man climbs on. He's making his way toward the top of Mount Everest.

He stops at a mountain outcropping and takes in the view. He's only a few metres away from the peak. His visage and expression are serene. He takes in the view and a small gentle smile appears on his face. He sits down cross legged in the snow. He pulls the bag off his shoulder. From inside the bag he extracts a ragged, faded woolen shawl. His breath is cloudy as it leaves his mouth. He gently unfolds the shawl and drapes it around his shoulders. A gust of wind buffets the snow around him and the Young Man pulls the shawl tighter around himself.

CUT TO:

EXT. KHUMBU GLACIER, HIMALAYAS - TIME LAPSE SEQUENCE.

The sequence shows the Young man in the same pose barely moving.

He occasionally picks up a corner of his shawl to wipe some perspiration off his face. It's always only the one particular corner.

A circular cycle of day and night occurs numerous times. All the while the Young Man sits in the same pose, meditating.

The snow and ice around him gradually begins to melt away as time passes on. The brown earth beneath the snow eventually begins to show.

CUT TO:

EXT. KHUMBU GLACIER, HIMALAYAS - DAY

By the time his immediate vicinity is devoid of snow, the Young Man opens his eyes. Much time has passed.

He looks around at the scenery. He slowly stands up. The shawl slides off his shoulders and gently falls to the earthy ground.

The Young Man glances at ground where the shawl lies. He then turns from it and walks away.

CLOSE UP of the fallen shawl. The edge of the shawl bears the perfect imprint of the Young Man's face.

CUT TO:

EXT. KHUMBU GLACIER, HIMALAYAS - TIME LAPSE SEQUENCE.

CLOSE UP of the shawl lying on the earth covered mountain outcrop.

SLOW ZOOM OUT as the wind picks up. Slowly the snow and frost return to the area once again. A fine covering of snow begins to encrust the shawl. Eventually layer upon layer of snow buries the shawl until it is completely hidden from view.

WIDE SHOT of the outcropping covered in snow, no different from the rest of the mountain range.

CUT TO:

INT. RAINBOW TEN TENT, BASE CAMP - EARLY MORNING

Altitude: 7,970 Meters.

Fifteen sleeping bags lay about the ground of a large camping tent. Five of the sleeping bags are in a separate corner. Ten sleeping bags, some paired up, are spread across the remaining space. One of the campers, STEVE LEISURE, a blond 35 year old man is the only one awake. He's standing at the entrance of the tent poking his head out into the early morning darkness. He turns away from the entrance, letting the flap fall back to cover the opening.

STEVE  
(slightly hoarse voice)  
You guys.

CAMPER 1  
(GROANS)  
Shh!

STEVE  
Come on sleepy heads, we've got to  
start climbing soon!

CAMPER 2  
It's not even 4 o'clock yet!

CAMPER 3

C'mon Stevie. Come back to bed.

STEVE

We've got to start moving at first light! We won't make it to the top in time if you sleep in.

CAMPER 3

I'm still exhausted from yesterday. Please Steve. Come back to bed. Just a bit longer.

STEVE

(sighs irritably)

Fine.

(mutters huffily)

If there's a storm and we don't get to the peak in time you'll be wishing you'd listened to me.

Steve makes his way across the tent and stops at an empty sleeping bag. It's placed close to where CAMPER 3 is snuggled in his own sleeping bag. Steve, still seeming huffy climbs in to his accommodations and snuggles up to Camper 3.

CUT TO:

EXT. BASE CAMP - TWO HOURS LATER

Early morning sunlight shines on a cluster of eleven tents, their surrounding landscape covered in snow.. Ten of these are small two-person tents. Outside the largest tent, nine puffy eyed men are eating power bars and sipping steaming beverages from thermos flasks. They wear brightly coloured soft-shell mountain jackets.

Steve exits the large tent, fully geared up. He has his goggles on and an oxygen tank strapped to his back. He's dressed like the others in a bright soft-shell jacket with the hood up. He stops when he sees that his friends aren't fully ready to go.

STEVE

(groans)

You'll are still *eating*?

CAMPER 4

(rolls his eyes)

Jeez Steve, relax. This is supposed to be *fun*.

Steve opens his mouth to retort when a SHERPA exits the tent and walks up to the group.

SHERPA  
(accented English)  
Ok. Everyone has to get ready now.  
No more time to waste.

Steve's friends and fellow climbers hurriedly chomp down on the rest of their power bars and gulp down their beverages. All the while they briskly walk over to their large tent and enter it to retrieve their gear.

STEVE  
(mutters)  
Sure. Take *him* seriously but call me a killjoy.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIMALAYAS - LATER

Altitude: 7900 meters.

EXTREME WIDE SHOT of a large portion of a steep side of a mountain. Eleven people- the Sherpa leading the group comprising of Steve and the other nine climbers- make their way up the mountain. All eleven climbers are connected by pitons, carabiners and climbing rope. The terrain is steep but the Rainbow Ten are agile. Steve brings up the rear in the line of climbers who move upward in a single file.

Snow covers much of the mountain but the sky is clear and the sun shines bright.

All of a sudden a strong wind picks up and begins buffeting the climbers. The gale begins swirling around the snow settled on the landscape. The climbers are obscured from view.

WIDE SHOT of the group of climbers. The Sherpa at the top stumbles.

CLOSE UP of his hand slipping and losing it's grip on the ice pick buried into the side of the mountain.

LONG SHOT of the Sherpa being whipped away by the ferocious wind. He flies off the side of the mountain. The force of his body being thrown off yanks at the climbing rope attached to his body.

CLOSE UP of the various pitons being ripped away from the side of the mountain.

CLOSE UP of Steve forcefully imbedding his ice pick into the mountain face. He then swiftly pulls out a small sharp knife tucked into his jacket and slashes through the climbing rope connected to him.

WIDE SHOT as with a low RUMBLE, an avalanche starts up higher up from the climbers.

CLOSE UP SHOTS of various climbers scrambling to get a hold on the mountain surface as the pistons and ropes yank them downward.

WIDE SHOT as the avalanche picks up speed and draws closer to the climbers.

LONG SHOT of the Sherpa SCREAMING as he falls downward.

WIDE SHOT as all the climbers connected to the Sherpa also begin to fall. They fall in order of who was closest to the Sherpa in the ascent.

Steve is the only member of the climbing expedition who isn't yanked away with the Sherpa's descent. He clings onto his ice pick and digs his studded boots into the snow. However the avalanche is gaining on him. The ice begins to lose it's grip in the mountain slope as the RUMBLE of the avalanche signals it's approach. The snow around the ice pick loosens and the ice pick starts slipping along with Steve's shoes.

Once the avalanche reaches Steve, he begins to fall albeit at a much slower pace than his fellow climbers. With the force of the avalanche he's flipped on to his back and his large rucksack acts as a giant sled. He begins gliding down the mountain slope while his friends fall rapidly.

The free falling team reaches the edge of a cliff. The other nine climbers fall right off the cliff and into the abyss. Steve, who's riding the tail end of the avalanche, reaches the cliff a few seconds after his friends. As he nears the edge of the cliff his rucksack slows down his descent. A part of his rucksack snags a protruding rock in the snow, stopping his fall mere centimeters from the edge of the cliff.

As he is stopped by his rucksack from falling over the edge, Steve hits his head on the tightly packed snow. He falls unconscious.

FADE OUT.

EXT. HIMALAYAN CLIFF - DAY

24 hours have passed.

The weather is calm. The sun is bright in the sky. Steve still lies unconscious on the cliff where his rucksack was caught. His body lies diagonally with the edge of the cliff falling to his left.

Steve's eyes are scrunched as he struggles to open them. He is beginning to regain consciousness. He moves his arms upwards, stiffly. His left arm, when moved, hangs over the edge of the cliff. This startles Steve.

He jerkily pushes his body further away from the edge. His face is crumpled in pain. He only manages to move a miniscule distance.

He pushes his left hand into the snow covered ground to get better purchase and propel himself. Instead on hitting solid packed snow, his palm sinks into a soft patch of wet snow. He grabs and gathers up fistful of the snow and brings it up to his face. He squishes it in his gloved palm. He flings it away.

He tries to move again, this time using his right hand to grab at a tightly packed patch of ice. He uses this hold to yank himself away from the cliff edge. His right arm trembles from the strain and stiffness due to the cold. He's still only able to move a small distance.

He keeps pushing and sliding his body away from the edge in small increments. He's using both his hands now. He pulls with his right hand and pushes with his left. This causes his left hand to sink lower into the wet patch of snow. Steve stops attempting to move. He lifts his head up off the ground and winces in pain. He sees the depression in the wet snow created by his left hand.

Using his right hand and the compacted snow, Steve slowly moves himself closer to a protruding boulder a foot away from the cliff edge. Steve grabs hold of a groove in the boulder and pulls himself up. He leans sideways against the boulder. He PANTS from the exertion. He rests his head against the boulder and passes out.

FADE OUT.

EXT. HIMALAYAN CLIFF - LATER

The light has dulled when Steve regains consciousness again.

His lips are cracked. He begins struggling to reach the flask holder on the side of his rucksack. He finally manages to grab hold of his water flask. He yanks it out of the holder and with trembling hands unscrews the cap. He gulps water thirstily. He breathes heavily in relief.

As he screwing the cap back on his flask, Steve notices the wet patch of snow. From his vantage point he can see that the wet snow is limited to a certain area. Carefully he digs his heels into the compact snow and leans forward toward the wet snow. He begins digging with his gloved hands.

CLOSE UP of wet patch of snow as Steve has dug in deep.

Steve makes a fist with his hand as he grabs hold of something buried in the depression. He pulls. He slowly, but with a firm grip, yanks out the ragged shawl that the Young Man dropped centuries ago.

Steve pulls it toward him, letting it bunch up in his lap.

CUT TO:

EXT. BASE CAMP - NIGHT

Steve is seated on a sleeping bag set on the ground outside the large tent. He's huddled up in a bunch of blankets that are wrapped around his upper body. His rucksack is placed on the ground to his right. He's gripping, with both his gloved hands, a steaming cup of some warm liquid. He takes careful sips intermittently.

Few feet away, in front of one of the smaller tents, a small group of the other campers stand huddled. They MUTTER to each other incoherently. They glance over at Steve on and off as they talk. Some frown as they look over at him.

Steve takes a few shuddering breaths clearly trying not to break down. He barely manages to retain his composure.

CUT TO:

INT. KATMANDU AIRPORT SECURITY CHECK - NEXT DAY

Steve is standing in line for security clearance at the Kathmandu Airport. He's the second in line to meet the SECURITY PERSONNEL. The line moves forward.

Steve is now the first in line. The security personnel looks up at Steve.

SECURITY PERSONNEL  
(bored monotone)  
Anything to declare.

STEVE  
Nothing to declare.

The Security Personnel waves Steve on in a dismissive gesture. Steve steps on looking relieved.

CUT TO:

INT. NEW YORK AIRPORT - LATER THAT NIGHT.

Steve is standing at a giant electronic board with the list of flight departures. He stares for a few moments clearly steeling himself for a decision. He looks tired and has dark circles under his eyes.

After a few more moments, he turns away from the board and begin walking in the direction marked for Departures.

CUT TO:



EXT. GULFCREST, ALABAMA ESTATE OF PASTOR LEISURE - NEXT DAY

A grey Ford Sedan, driven by Steve, pulls into the driveway of a white 1884 Greek Revival Manor house. Fifty acres of land surround the house.

PASTOR JOSHUA LEISURE, Steve's father, is seated in a rocking chair on the front porch. He's sipping beer from a bottle covered in condensation. He's dressed in a red checkered shirt, well worn jeans and hunting boots. His hair is snowy white and is tucked under a red baseball cap.

Steve gets out of the car and swings a backpack onto his shoulder in a fluid motion. He slowly approaches the porch. He climbs up the steps and Joshua stands up.

Joshua hugs his son and claps him once on the back. Steve grips the shoulder strap of his bag and gingerly puts his free hand on his father's shoulder. At his touch, Joshua draws away from the hug. He holds his son at arms distance.

JOSHUA  
(wrinkling his nose)  
Go shower boy. You reek.

Steve disengages himself from his father's grip and walks into the house. Joshua sits in the rocking chair once again and takes a swig of beer.

CUT TO:

INT. STEVE'S BEDROOM, ESTATE OF PASTOR LEISURE - AFTERNOON

It's 3:00 P.M.

Steve is in his bedroom, freshly showered and wrapped in a towel. His hair is slicked back and wet. He moves a little slowly, as though slightly weak. The sky as seen from his window is bright, sunny and cloudless.

He strains as he picks up his bag from the floor near his bed. He places the bag on his bed. He unzips it and begins rummaging through the contents. He stops moving when his hand touches the shawl right at the bottom of the bag.

He gently pulls the shawl out of his bag. He sinks down onto his bed.

Outside his first floor bedroom window the wind suddenly picks up. Both of the window panes are open. One of the panes slams shut with a BANG due to the wind. The glass shatters.

CUT TO:

## PASTOR JOSHUA'S BEDROOM

Joshua is putting on his black cassock. The loud BANG makes him startle. The sound of glass shatter follows immediately. He runs out of his room.

CUT TO:

## STEVE'S BEDROOM

Steve is standing up near his bed and staring dumb struck out his window. Both panes flap violently in the wind. One is glass-less. The sky as seen from the window frame is overcast.

Joshua rushes in noisily. Steve turns around at the sound of his hurried footsteps.

JOSHUA  
(worried)  
Steve in the name of the good lord-

Joshua glances at the shawl on Steve's bed as he speaks. He sees the imprint of the face on the corner of the shawl. He GASPS.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)  
(whispers)  
Mother of God!

He swoons and falls to the floor unconscious. Steve can be heard faintly.

STEVE  
Papa!

FADE OUT.

## INT. PASTOR JOSHUA'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Joshua is laid out on his king-sized bed. A singular but powerful bed side lamp lights the room. Steve is clutching his hand and weeping. Joshua's wife ESTER, a full bodied woman dressed conservatively, stands in the corner of the room closest to the bed. She watches Joshua intently, her expression one of worry. Six other people surround the bed, standing at a respectful distance. Most are teary eyed.

Joshua scrunches his eyes as he slowly begins to regain consciousness. Ester GASPS.

ESTER  
(trembling voice)  
He's waking up!

Steve clutches his father's hand even tighter and leans closer to his face. He gently touches his father's cheek.

STEVE  
(voice thick from crying)  
Pa? Can you hear me?

Ester cautiously approaches the bed.

ESTER  
(faintly)  
Joshua?

Joshua opens his eyes and squints at the bright light emanating from the lamp on his left.

JOSHUA  
(gruffly)  
What's-

He notices the other people in the room. He struggles to sit up. Steve and Ester try to help. He pushes their hands away.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)  
What's going on?

STEVE  
You fainted Pa.  
(small sob)  
You hit your head as you fell. You  
were out for an hour!

Ester reaches across the bed and pats Steve's hand that rests on the mattress.

ESTER  
(soothing tone)  
I've called for Dr. Barking. He was  
tending to another patient but  
he'll be here soon.

JOSHUA  
(barely audible)  
So I'm not dead?

STEVE  
(upset)  
Dad of course not! Don't say that!

Joshua doesn't even hear Steve.

JOSHUA  
(still speaking softly)  
I could have sworn I saw him.

One of the people assembled frowns. He looks at Ester.

PARISHIONER 1  
(nervously)  
Saw who?

Joshua looks at the man.

JOSHUA  
(intensely)  
Jesus our lord that's who!

Everyone in the room, barring Steve, GASPS. Some people cross themselves. Steve glances at the parishioners, nervously. He clears his throat and looks at his father.

STEVE  
Um... Pa. Actually you did see something-

Joshua stiffens and widens his eyes.

JOSHUA  
That's enough boy.

STEVE  
(startled)  
Pa-

JOSHUA  
(very stern look)  
Enough I said. Be quite when I tell you.

Steve looks hurt.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)  
And I'll have no more sniffing out of you.

Steve clenches his jaw, stands up and exits the room.

CUT TO:

STEVE'S BEDROOM - LATER

Steve is zipping up his toiletry bag. He opens up his travel bag and puts the toiletry bag in.

Joshua opens up the bedroom door, without knocking, and walks in. He stays close to the doorway and keeps some distance between him and his son. Steve is startled and whips around.

STEVE  
You still won't knock.

JOSHUA

(scoff)

No, I won't knock to enter a room  
in my own house!

STEVE

(turns back around to face  
his bag)

It was a mistake to come here.

(his voice wavers with  
emotion)

You'll never stop treating me like  
an outcast.

JOSHUA

(smirking)

Always crying like a little girl.

Joshua's comment makes Steve want to sob but he purses his lips together to keep from making any sounds.

Joshua walks up to the bed and sits down. He still keeps his distance from Steve. Steve doesn't look at his father.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)

Let me see it.

STEVE

(avoiding eye contact)

See what.

JOSHUA

(grabs Steve's wrist)

Don't toy with me boy.

Steve flinches. He looks at his father. He grits his teeth.

STEVE

(looking at the wrist his  
father is gripping)

I'm going to need *both* hands to  
work.

Joshua lets go. Steve rummages in his bag and pulls out the carefully folded shawl. He packed it in a plastic sealing pack. He hands the shawl to his father.

Joshua takes the packet, reverence clear on his face. He stands up and turns around facing the bed. He slowly unpacks and gently draws out the shawl. He unravels it, holding the shawl up in front of him. He zeroes in on the corner with the imprint.

He drops to his knees. Steve jerks forward instinctively, to help his father. Joshua places the shawl on the bed and begins to weep. Steve sinks to his knees beside his father.

Joshua and Steve both look at the shawl and in unison cross themselves in front of the imprint of Christ's face.

Both men silently pray for a few moments. Steve also begins to weep and SNIFF occasionally.

Joshua crosses himself once more and slowly stands up.

JOSHUA  
(softly)  
Where did you get it?

CUT TO:

STEVE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's 2:00 am. Joshua and Steve have been talking for hours.

Joshua is sitting at Steve's desk. The shawl is spread out on the desk. The desk lamp, fitted with a white LED light, is switched on. The imprint on the shawl glows starkly in this white light. Steve is seated on his bed.

JOSHUA  
So you were almost at the top of  
Mount Everest by then?

Steve looks exhausted.

STEVE  
(heavy sigh)  
Pa we've been over and over this  
for *hours*. This finally confirms  
what western historians have been  
unwilling to confirm. Christ our  
lord-

Joshua crosses himself. Steve doesn't notice.

STEVE (CONT'D)  
- spent his youth in that part of  
the world.

Joshua runs his hands over his face. He's exhausted too.

JOSHUA  
(short laugh)  
Some hours ago I would have slapped  
you silly for having said that.

Steve smiles wearily.

STEVE  
And as usual, you would have been  
wrong.

JOSHUA  
(frowning)  
What do you mean boy?

Steve EXHALES forcefully making an impatient sound.

STEVE  
If it hadn't been for me and my  
friends-

Joshua grimaces when Steve says 'friends'.

STEVE (CONT'D)  
- this shawl would never have been  
found! You wouldn't have ever seen  
it.

Joshua stands up and slowly begins walking toward the window.  
It's pitch dark outside and dead silent. Steve also stands up  
and turns in his spot so he faces the window as well.

STEVE (CONT'D)  
(emotional)  
If who we were and how we were  
treated our *whole* lives hadn't made  
us want to go up that mountain...

Steve's voice trembles so he stops for a second. He inhales  
deeply.

STEVE (CONT'D)  
(clears throat)  
If we hadn't been there when the  
avalanche hit. If I hadn't been  
thinking fast- the shawl would  
never have been found-

JOSHUA  
(speaks softly. Still  
gazing out the window.)  
Are you saying if you hadn't  
been... abnormal... the shawl would  
have stayed hidden?

STEVE  
(gritting his teeth)  
If by "*abnormal*" you mean  
HOMOSEXUAL-

Joshua flinches at the word. He turns around and swiftly  
strides towards his son.

STEVE (CONT'D)  
- then yes. That's what I'm saying.

Joshua grabs his son's shoulder with one hand and raises the  
other to strike him. Steve flinches away and makes an  
involuntary WHIMPERING sound. At the sound, Joshua freezes.

He quickly glances over at the shawl. He slowly lowers his hand. He lets go of Steve's shoulder. He takes a few steps away from his son. Steve watches his father, wide eyed and shocked at his father's restraint.

JOSHUA  
(low mumble)  
Everyone is right.  
(grips his forehead with  
his fingers)  
And everybody's wrong.

STEVE  
(cautiously)  
What do you mean, Pa?

Joshua shakes his head and begins shuffling over to the bedroom door.

JOSHUA  
(wearily)  
I need to sleep on it. I'll tell  
you everything tomorrow.

Steve looks at the shawl.

STEVE  
(whisper)  
But what do you want to do with it.

Joshua stops at the doorway and leans against the frame.

JOSHUA  
(sighs)  
I need to sleep. I'll tell you  
everything tomorrow.

STEVE  
You said that already!

JOSHUA  
(wrinkles his face in  
irritation)  
Go to bed Steve.

STEVE  
(grumpy)  
Fine. If you don't want to talk-

JOSHUA  
(angry growl)  
Do not test my patience boy! I told  
you I have to think.  
(sighs)  
Just let me be. We'll speak first  
thing tomorrow morning, alright?

Steve smiles.



STEVE  
Alright Pa. Good night.

JOSHUA  
(small smile)  
Good night son. And get some rest.  
You'll need it for what lies ahead!

Joshua shuffles out of the bedroom. Steve flops down onto his bed.

CUT TO:

INT. STEVE'S BEDROOM - NEXT DAY

The sky seen from the window is over-cast. It lends a gloomy look to the bedroom. Insufficient light enters the room. No sounds of birds chirping. Steve is sitting on his bed, looking out the window. He takes a deep breath and lets out a SIGH. He stands up.

CUT TO:

LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Steve walks into the room and takes a look around. The coffee table stands on top of a white faux fur rug. A steaming cup of coffee lies on top of the table. Three straight-backed wooden chairs are arranged around the table. The shawl is draped over one of the chairs. The imprint of Christ is facing outward. Steve gazes at the imprint for a few moments. He slowly walks toward the chair with the shawl. He kneels down in front of it and makes the sign-of-the-cross with his hand. He then genuflects on the floor in front of the shawl.

Joshua walks into the room. He stops when he sees Steve kneeling. Steve is crying and his shoulders are shaking. Joshua walks forward and kneels down next to Steve. He looks at the shawl.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK: EXT. PASTOR TONY LEE'S HOUSE - DAY

A much younger Joshua is dressed in a leather jacket. He is POUNDING on Pastor Tony Lee's front door. TONY'S WIFE opens the door.

YOUNG JOSHUA  
(gruff)  
This Tony Lee's house?

Tony's Wife look worried.

TONY'S WIFE  
Ye-yes. He's not at home.

YOUNG JOSHUA  
Where the fuck is he then?

Tony's Wife flinches when Joshua swears.

TONY'S WIFE  
At church.

YOUNG JOSHUA  
Fine I'll look for him there.

Joshua turns around and walks off down the street. Tony's Wife calls after him. She's very scared.

TONY'S WIFE  
WAIT! Who are you?

CUT TO:

INT. BAPTIST CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

Joshua is sitting at the back of the church on the pew closest to the door. He's watching TONY LEE who is standing at the front of the church, near the altar.

In front of the altar a long table is set up. It is laden with food: soup, bread, coffee and juice. Tony Lee is dressed in clothes that a pastor would wear. A line of scruffy looking children lead up to the table. They are orphans. Pastor Tony and a Matron, the MATRON of the orphanage, are serving out the food. They're having a conversation. The church is empty and their words echo across to where Joshua sits.

MATRON  
(worried)  
Pastor, what are we going to do now  
that the money has run out?

TONY LEE  
(calm voice)  
God will provide.

MATRON  
How? Will you go back and borrow?  
Weren't you told that you had to  
pay them back last week?

Tony pats the woman gently on the shoulder.

TONY LEE  
Don't worry my child. God will have  
a plan.

The Matron stops ladling soup and covers her face with her hands. She's sobbing.

MATRON

Pastor what will happen if you  
don't pay them back.

Tony looks distressed. His eyes are moist. He looks at the line of orphaned children. They look scared. He crosses to the other side of the table. He walks to the children. They rush to him and cling to his clothes.

TONY LEE

(voice trembling)  
God will provide.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE BAPTIST CHURCH - LATER

Joshua is standing at the entrance, framed by the church doorway. He's facing the street looking at Tony surrounded by the orphans and the Matron. Tony stoops to hug a child.

A Black Cadillac STS drives by at high speed. The tires SCREECH on the pavement. The front passenger window is rolled down. The muzzle of an Uzi machine gun pokes out. The POPPING sound of bullets pepper the air. Tony, the orphans and the Matron are all gunned down. The Cadillac speeds on ahead and leaves the scene.

Joshua has dropped to his knees, stunned.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Joshua is sitting in the waiting room of a police station. His eyes are puffy from crying. A policeman, OFFICER JOHNSON, comes out into the waiting room. He looks around for Joshua.

OFFICER JOHNSON

(calls out)  
Joshua?

Joshua looks up.

YOUNG JOSHUA

(clears throat)  
Here.

OFFICER JOHNSON

Come with me please.

Joshua stands up and follows Officer Johnson out of the room.

END OF FLASHBACK.

BACK TO:

INT. PASTOR JOSHUA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Joshua is blinking away tears. He turns to look at Steve. Steve looks very pale. His face is shining from a thin film of sweat.

JOSHUA  
(frowns)  
Steve?

Steve is struggling to stand up. He is too weak to support himself. He manages to stand upright for a few seconds. He wobbles on his feet. Joshua stands up quickly to reach out and help him. Steve loses his balance and falls and hits the ground hard. Joshua isn't quick enough to catch him.

ESTER (O.S.)  
(screams)  
Stevie!

CUT TO:

STEVE'S BEDROOM - LATER

Steve is tucked under the covers in his bed. DR. BARKING is sitting at his bedside touching Steve's forehead. Joshua and Ester are anxiously standing close to the bed. Steve begins to stir.

DR. BARKING  
(gentle)  
Welcome back young man.

STEVE  
(groggy)  
What's going on?

Ester sobs.

DR. BARKING  
You seem to have symptoms of a viral infection. You passed out from the fever. Have you been feeling ill before today?

STEVE  
(coughs)  
Ye-yes. I've been nauseous and weak.

DR. BARKING  
(frowns)  
How long have you had these  
symptoms?

STEVE  
For a few days.

JOSHUA  
Since your trip?

Dr. Barking looks at Joshua.

DR. BARKING  
What trip?

JOSHUA  
He was in the Himalayas.

STEVE  
I was in an avalanche accident. I  
was trapped under ice and snow for  
nearly two days.

Dr. Barking raises his eyebrows.

DR. BARKING  
Well then my boy. Look no further!  
That's the reason. Ill prescribe  
some medication. Make sure you get  
plenty of rest and fluids.

Steve starts a coughing fit so only nods in response to the  
doctor. Dr. Barking pulls out his prescription pad from his  
coat pocket and scribbles. He tears off the paper and hands  
it to Ester.

DR. BARKING (CONT'D)  
Drive into town as soon as possible  
and get these for him.  
(to Steve)  
Take the pills after heavy meals.

STEVE  
(hoarse)  
Yes Doctor.

Dr. Barking rises from the bed. Joshua reaches across and  
holds out his hand. Dr. Barking grasps his hand and shakes  
it.

JOSHUA  
Thank you Doctor.

DR. BARKING  
(smiles)  
Anytime Pastor.

Dr. Barking leaves the room and Ester follows him. Once they are alone, Steve clears his throat.

STEVE  
Um... Pa. Have you had time to think about-?

JOSHUA  
(snaps)  
Don't finish that sentence boy! It has to remain a secret for now.

STEVE  
(confused)  
But why?

JOSHUA  
(gruff)  
Because I say so!

Steve SIGHS loudly.

STEVE  
Pa. You could trust me you know.

Joshua looks intently at his son for a few seconds.

JOSHUA  
Hmm. Ok.

He sits down on Steve's bed. Steve struggles a bit but manages to sit up under the covers.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)  
(low volume)  
Do you realise how we can use this to attract new converts? I can make our church the predominant one in the world!

Steve looks at his father, wide eyed.

STEVE  
(whispering)  
You should store the shawl in a refrigerated place while waiting for the appropriate time to kick off your seduction plan.

Joshua lets out a SHORT LAUGH.

JOSHUA  
Seduction plan. I like that.

STEVE  
(pleased)  
Do you have a plan in mind already?

JOSHUA  
(contemplating)  
It's not fully formed yet. I'm  
working on it.

STEVE  
In the meantime store the  
(whispers)  
You-know-what  
(normal volume)  
In the freezer. You can seal it in  
a plastic bag before you store it.

JOSHUA  
Hmm. Sounds like a good idea.

CUT TO:

EXT. ESTATE OF PASTOR JOSHUA LEISURE - DAY

THREE MONTHS LATER.

WIDE SHOT of the estate compound. A long line of men and women of all ages leads up to the front door of the mansion. The crowd shuffles restlessly, murmuring to each other.

An OLD DEVOUT MAN stands holding onto the arm of his SCEPTICAL GRANDSON.

OLD DEVOUT MAN  
(gruff)  
Finally our faith will be rewarded.

SCEPTICAL GRANDSON  
But Grandpa, aren't you a little  
suspicious? Why would the shawl  
turn up here?

The Old Devout Man slap the arm of his grandson.

OLD DEVOUT MAN  
Because Pastor Joshua was chosen!  
He was deemed worthy.

The Sceptical Grandson rubs his stinging arm. He turns his face away from his grandfather and rolls his eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. PASTOR JOSHUA'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

TRACK SHOT of Pastor Joshua at the dining table. A family of five, members of his congregation, are seated around him. They sip cups of coffee. Joshua smiles and nods at them.

CONTINUOUS TRACK SHOT leading to the Kitchen where Steve is seated. He's sipping a steaming cup of tea. He is very pale, skinny and weak. He leans back in his seat and SIGHS. He turns his head and gazes out the kitchen window. He can see the line of devotees gathered on the compound.

Suddenly he sits up straight in his seat. His eyes are wide. He struggles and pulls out his cellphone from his trouser pocket. He presses a number on speed-dial.

CUT TO:

INT. PROFESSOR ALBERT'S BEDROOM, NEW YORK - EARLY MORNING

ALBERT lies buried in his bedclothes. The SHRILL RINGING of his cellphone jars him awake. He is furious.

ALBERT  
Jesus H Christ!

He fights his way out of the covers and reaches for the cellphone on his bedside table. He clicks to answer the phone and the RINGING stops.

ALBERT (CONT'D)  
(growls)  
This better be good. Who in the devil's name is calling me so early?

BACK TO:

PASTOR JOSHUA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

STEVE  
It's Steve. Can you talk?

BACK TO:

PROFESSOR ALBERT'S BEDROOM, NEW YORK

Albert hurriedly sits up in his bed. He is concerned.

ALBERT  
(gasps)  
Steve! My poor thing. How are you holding up? I heard about the accident.

BACK TO:



PASTOR JOSHUA'S KITCHEN

Steve's eyes are moist with tears. He purses his lips. He clears his throat.

STEVE  
(weak laugh)  
I could really be better.

BACK TO:

PROFESSOR ALBERT'S BEDROOM, NEW YORK

ALBERT  
Why haven't you come to see me.  
It's been three months since the  
accident-

BACK TO:

PASTOR JOSHUA'S KITCHEN

STEVE  
I'm at my Pa's estate in Alabama.

BACK TO:

PROFESSOR ALBERT'S BEDROOM, NEW YORK

ALBERT  
(gasp)  
Oh my god. Steve! Are you ok? Is he  
giving you a hard time?

BACK TO:

PASTOR JOSHUA'S KITCHEN

STEVE  
(shrugs)  
It's not as bad as you think.  
Listen, I'm calling about something  
else entirely.

BACK TO:

PROFESSOR ALBERT'S BEDROOM, NEW YORK

ALBERT  
And what's that, darling?

BACK TO:

PASTOR JOSHUA'S BEDROOM

STEVE  
Do you still have that portable  
machine you told me about? It could  
date old relics-

BACK TO:

PROFESSOR ALBERT'S BEDROOM, NEW YORK

ALBERT  
(frowns)  
My portable carbon dating machine,  
you mean?

BACK TO:

PASTOR JOSHUA'S KITCHEN

STEVE  
(excited)  
Yes! That one. I need you to fly  
down with it. There's something I  
have to show you.

BACK TO:

PROFESSOR ALBERT'S BEDROOM, NEW YORK

ALBERT  
(confused)  
Why-

BACK TO:

PASTOR JOSHUA'S KITCHEN

Joshua is eavesdropping behind the kitchen doorway.

STEVE  
(eager)  
Trust me. You won't regret your  
trip down here!

Joshua strides into the room fuming. Steve hangs up.

JOSHUA  
(angry)  
Who was that?

STEVE  
(startled)  
Pa-

JOSHUA  
Who's coming here? I don't want any  
of your '*friends*' coming here.

STEVE  
But if he doesn't get here we can't  
confirm if it's real!

JOSHUA  
(frowns)  
What are you talking about?

STEVE  
The shawl, Pa!

JOSHUA  
(confused)  
What does you friend have to do  
with-

STEVE  
He's a Professor of Antiquity and  
Archeology at the University of New  
York.

JOSHUA  
(narrows eyes)  
I don't want any outsiders to find  
out about this. They may try to  
take the shawl-

STEVE  
Look Pa, I'll broker a good deal  
with him. Let me handle it ok?

JOSHUA  
How can he help?

STEVE  
He's bringing along a portable  
carbon dating device.

JOSHUA  
(confused)  
Carbon-

STEVE  
Dating. It helps accurately reveal  
when a specific object existed,  
historically.

JOSHUA  
How does *that* work?

STEVE  
The machine measures the carbon  
level that is emitted by the target  
in question.

(MORE)

STEVE (CONT'D)

An organic matter imbibes, while alive, stable and unstable carbon isotopes. When the organic matter dies, the unstable carbon isotope decreases without the possibility of replenishment. This enables the machine to calculate with great accuracy the time of creation of the organic matter in question.

JOSHUA

(scoffs)

It's a shawl. Not an organic-

STEVE

(emphatic)

Of course it is! What was it made of when it was created? Where had it been all these years? If the Shroud of Turin was dated in this fashion, I'm sure we can use the same methods.

JOSHUA

(gruff)

I hope you are right, boy.