

THE AZURA PROJECT

written by

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ACT 1:

FADE IN - EXT. AMERICAN SUBURB - DAY

A picturesque suburban cul-de-sac. The sun beats down on the asphalt, making it shimmer in the heat. Three young children shriek with laughter as they wrestle and dance around a perfectly trimmed lawn. Their bodies sway wildly, goofy oversized sunglasses bouncing on their noses with every step. The familiar tune of an ice cream truck approaches. Thrilled, they sprint across the yard, barely dodging a rusted Bronco sitting idly in the home's driveway. An open window near the front door reflects the sunny rays. A phone is heard ringing on the inside.

INT. LIVING ROOM

The RINGING continues louder and clearer, echoing through the dark velvet drapes that frame the windows. A subtle hint of jasmine and rosemary perfume the air. The answering machine picks up.

HOMEOWNER (V.O.)

(cheerily)

Hey, this is VANITY. When you hear the beep, kindly fuck-off and text like a normal person...(BEEP)

UNKNOWN FEMALE (V.O.)

(agitated)

Where were you last night? We're running out of time. Meet me at our usual spot at midnight. Bring him with you...(BEEP)

A shadow darts across the counter. A large tabby cat with pepper-gray whiskers leaps to a windowsill, sending a stack of essays sprawling to the floor. Ears perked upwards, it paces anxiously, glaring through the open window at a distant figure.

EXT. HOUSEFRONT

A woman stands along the sidewalk. The hot wind whips her soft auburn curls, swirling against a deep blue sky like a sea of tiny vortexes. A blood-red gown flares against the pale white skin of her back like a flame on snow.

EXTREME CLOSEUP.

Large indigo circles surround her deep emerald eyes. Small puncture scars nearly identical in size wrap around her neck, running down to her left breast. Her lips are dry and cracked, lipstick slowly fading with the daylight. The woman's weary gaze remains fixated on some invisible force. Soft footsteps approach. She's surrounded by children, each with a frozen treat in hand.

GIRL 1
(giggling)
What's wrong with her?

GIRL 2
Maybe she's broken. Like momma was
after daddy left.

A third child circles her slowly while taking long exaggerated sniffs.

BOY
She smells like shit.

GIRL 1
(mockingly)
So did your brother. I wonder what
he tasted like.

BOY
Shut up you fucking reeker!

He lunges at the girl, swiping furiously. She laughs, dancing around his swings with unnatural grace. She leaps into the street while taunting the other children with both middle fingers in the air. A large black SUV grinds to a halt. The driver pounds the horn repeatedly. The girl falls backward. She hastily shields her eyes, clumsily shoving her now-broken sunglasses back in place. She stands to her feet, studying the SUV as it pulls around her and out of sight.

GIRL 1
(menacingly to herself)
I wonder what you taste like.

The sickening crunch of bone striking concrete whips her attention back to the sidewalk. Her sister collapses to the ground, her body convulsing violently. The boy lies still. Blood paints the ground where his head struck the curb. Frozen with shock, the girl's eyes slowly meet the woman's gaze.

GIRL 1
(disbelief)
What did you—

She breaks off mid-sentence as a flurry of coughs drives her to her knees. Her muscles strain as all thoughts in her head turn from fear to confusion. The taste of rust fills her mouth. She crawls toward her sister, pain radiating through her body as if she'd been burned with acid from the inside.

WOMAN
(whispers)
They're coming...

A long-gargled breath escapes the girl's lips, then she's still, her eyes unfocused and cold. Tortured with fear, the woman screams, but no sound escapes her lips. Warm tears well in her eyes. Her brain signals to wipe them away, but her body betrays her, again.

A PIERCING BUZZ ECHOES OUT FROM ABOVE.

A barrage of fragmented canisters rains down on the cul-de-sac. The strange black cylinders spin to life, masking the street in a colossal cloud of smog. Thick orange smoke rises through the air, pouring from the objects until even sunlight can't penetrate. Tires screech against the asphalt as a low-pitched siren bellows out from the street's exit.

FEMALE (V.O.)
(repeating)
Please return to your homes. A
cleansing is in process.

Screams ring out amongst the chaos. Trails of flame light up the fog, flickering amongst the haze like fireflies in a storm. The pungent sensation of burning flesh pervades the woman's nose.

SOLDIER 1
Don't fucking move!

Two figures stand before her. Thick-plated body armor frames their crimson rubber suits. Military-grade flamethrowers strap over their shoulders, pointed in her direction. Their faces are shielded and dark, voices masked by a low-frequency modulator.

SOLDIER 2
Don't look like she's going
anywhere to me. A reeker do this
to her?

SOLDIER 1
Or something worse..

SOLDIER 1 holds up a small glass oval with a translucent black screen. It emits a quick blue light into the woman's eyes.

DEVICE (FEMALE V.O.)
Bio scan confirmed. Clear. DR.
VANITY HELSING, status, detain.

SOLDIER 2
How boring. I would've preferred
to watch her burn.

SOLDIER 1
A lot of people have been looking
for you, PROFESSOR. What luck I'd
be the one to find you.

SOLDIER 2
We've got another live one over
here! This one's just a child.

MUFFLED CHATTER sounds out from SOLDIER 1's earpiece.

SOLDIER 1
New orders. Rejoin the others.
I'll finish here and rendezvous
afterward.

The eager soldier nods, then bolts off, disappearing into a sea of orange. SOLDIER 1 hovers over the injured child, the mouth of his flamethrower just inches above her head.

SOLDIER 1

I can see you're in a fragile
state of mind professor. So let me
be perfectly blunt. Tell me where
he is, or the child dies.

The woman mutters inaudibly, her face strained with tears.

SOLDIER 1

We know your people are hiding
him, and we know what he is.

The leader presses his boot to the injured child's throat,
slowly crushing her airways.

SOLDIER 1

At least one life can be saved
today PROFESSOR. Now, tell me,
where can I find the nightcrawler?

FADE OUT...

ACT 2 - FADE IN: 12 HOURS EARLIER

INT. VLAD'S BEDROOM - MORNING

VLADIMIR KNIGHT wakes up in a sweat. DAVID stands by the
bed, his posture erect and his movements measured.

DAVID

Good morning sir. Your heartbeat
is elevated. Is everything okay?

VLAD looks up, startled.

VLAD

(breathless)

Yeah. Bad dream.

DAVID tilts his head, studying VLAD with detached
curiosity.

DAVID

I see. Would you like me to inform
the SENATOR of your condition?

VLAD
(shakes head)
No, that won't be necessary. I'll
be fine.

DAVID nods, then turns to leave.

VLAD
(hesitates)
DAVID?

DAVID pauses, looking back at VLAD.

VLAD (CONT'D)
(briefly looks away)
What time is my first appointment
this morning?

DAVID
9:00 AM, sir.

VLAD nods, then turns away as DAVID exits the room.

CUT TO: INT. VLAD'S BATHROOM

VLAD splashes water on his face and stares into the mirror, revealing a large array of pills on the counter. He picks up a bottle and takes one. His eyes are bloodshot and sunken. He grips the sink tightly and takes a deep breath. The bright bathroom lights are too much for VLAD's sensitive eyes. He shivers and closes his eyes, beginning a tapping pattern with his fingers as he breathes deeply. His senses seem to sharpen as he concentrates, and he becomes aware of an intense music beat coming from another room.

CUT TO: INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY

Fully dressed, VLAD exits his room and finds GREY, looking bleary-eyed and tousled in his glasses and mismatched pajamas, knocking on the door to the adjacent bathroom.

GREY
(yelling)
REINA, I gotta get ready for
school too!

VLAD
(smiling)
Use our bathroom GREY.

GREY snaps a salute and scurries down the hallway.

GREY
(yelling over his shoulder)
May the force be with you Dad!

VLAD chuckles to himself and shakes his head. As he approaches the bathroom door, he takes a deep breath. Just as he raises his hand to knock, the door swings open.

REINA
(sarcastically)
Oh joy, another unsolicited session with DR. VLAD.

VLAD
(firmly)
REINA, the music. Your mother and I have talked to you about this.

REINA
(dismissively silences music)
Whatever you say DR. VLAD.

VLAD
(calmly concerned)
We received a call from your principal yesterday. Can we talk about what happened?

REINA
Mr. Finch gave us an assignment and I challenged his premise, the end. Besides, weren't you and Mom the ones who taught me to never be afraid to share my perspective?

VLAD
Yes, of course, but we also hoped you might achieve that without calling your teacher a fucking tool, or my personal favorite, Mr. Dick-Head. You were nearly suspended.

REINA
(careless smile)
Just speaking my truth. It's not
my fault his little pride got
hurt.

VLAD
Well sometimes REINA, our truth
has consequences. Your mom and I
both agree it's time you learned
that.

REINA
What, you gonna ground me VLAD?
For pointing out how school is
just a twisted fabrication of
history designed to credit a bunch
of old white men for the
achievements of others.

VLAD
Yes.

REINA brushes past VLAD.

REINA
This is bullshit.

VLAD
REINA, your mom and I—

REINA
You're not my father!

DAVID suddenly appears with a small messenger bag slung
over his shoulder.

REINA (CONT'D)
(dubiously)
You don't even know what you are
anymore...

She slams her bedroom door, leaving VLAD and DAVID in
silence.

DAVID

Excuse me, but the SENATOR has informed me that she'll be unable to provide transportation this morning due to a prior commitment. I've taken the liberty of ordering us an Uber.

VLAD

(perplexed chuckle)

I guess none of the women in this house are communicating with me at the moment.

DAVID

(straight-faced)

Our vehicle will be arriving in approximately 9 minutes.

VLAD

Thank you DAVID.

VLAD descends the stairs and enters the living room. Just as the aroma of sizzling bacon greets his nose, he picks up on MAYA's raised voice coming from the backyard. Suddenly, MAYA enters the room.

MAYA

(smiling)

Good morning love.

VLAD

(kissing her cheek)

Morning beautiful. Everything okay?

MAYA

Yeah, just work stuff. How are you feeling?

VLAD

(jokingly)

Like Ali in his prime.

MAYA

(amused)

Well in that case, you get to talk with REINA yet?

VLAD
(hint of sarcasm)
You could say that.

MAYA
That bad?

VLAD
Let's just say I don't think I'm
welcome at Father's Day dinner
this year.

MAYA
Sometimes, I swear that girl is
determined to railroad her future.

VLAD
I think sometimes, what we
perceive as railroading can
actually be fear or uncertainty
about what's to come. That's why
it's important we keep trying to
meet her halfway, to understand
the root of her anger so we can
better know how to help her.

MAYA
(smirking)
Spoken like-

VLAD
(interrupts jokingly)
DR. VLAD?

MAYA
(straightening VLAD's tie)
I was going to say, a loving
father.

VLAD smiles warmly and the two embrace for a quick kiss.

VLAD
So what's this about a Uber?

MAYA's Chief of Staff, AMY, suddenly enters from the
kitchen.

AMY
 (speaking urgently)
 SENATOR, I'm sorry to interrupt,
 but you need to see this.

MAYA nods and quickly follows AMY out of the room. VLAD hesitates for a moment before following them into the kitchen. He enters to find them standing in front of the TV, watching a news story. The headline reads "Azura Foundation Accused of Corruption."

On the TV, a news anchor reports: The Azura Foundation is once again under heat for accusations of corruption. Foreign nations have called Azura's trial facilities "prisons for human guinea pigs". Rumors abroad have also reported cases of rabid outbursts amongst participants. News of these attacks began leaking early last year, of course leading to the universal adoption of "APP", Azura's *Android Partner Program*, resulting in yet another multi-trillion-dollar contract with local governments. In addition, news of corruption has begun to trail higher-level officials. Most recently, SENATOR MAYA ALEXANDER-KNIGHT made headlines when it was reported that her own husband had become a patient with Azura after being diagnosed with a rare-

The TV is quickly muted as the KIDS enter the kitchen.

GREY
 Good morning party people!

MAYA
 (smiling)
 Morning sweetheart. How's my
 little roboticist doing?

GREY
 (proudly)
 My project's almost finished! I'm
 going to have the best
 presentation in class.

MAYA
 (excitedly)
 I know that's right!

REINA ignores everyone and heads towards the door.

MAYA

Not so fast, you're grounded,
remember? Phone please.

REINA

(frustrated)

Are you serious? What if there's
an emergency!?

MAYA

(handing REINA an old flip phone)

That's why I got you this. Use it
only for emergencies.

REINA reluctantly takes the phone and heads for the door.

REINA

(shouts over shoulder)

I'm catching a ride with Kali.

VLAD

(to MAYA)

That reminds me, DAVID mentioned
you had a prior engagement this
morning. Does it have to do with
your call earlier?

MAYA

(sighing)

Unfortunately, yes. I've got a
very important meeting with some
eager contributors. I should be
home in time to tuck the kids in.

DAVID enters the kitchen.

DAVID

Our transport has arrived.

AMY

We should be heading out as well
SENATOR.

MAYA

(glances at TV)

Actually, let's divide and conquer. Head back to the office and schedule a press conference for this afternoon. I'll handle my meeting alone and join you after.

AMY nods and quickly exits to make a phone call.

MAYA

(turns back to VLAD)

Remember to take it easy. This is a process.

VLAD

(smiles)

Yes ma'am.

MAYA

(looks at DAVID)

Take care of him.

DAVID

Of course, SENATOR.

MAYA

(mockingly stiff)

DAVID, how many times must I ask you to drop the "Senator"?

DAVID

(hesitates)

I will keep DR. KNIGHT safe, MAYA.

MAYA nods with a small smile, watching as DAVID and VLAD exit towards the front door. As they disappear, she turns back to the TV with a heavy look of concern.

FADE OUT.

ACT 3 - EXT. STREET - DAY

As VLAD and DAVID exit the house and start walking towards the street, GREY jolts past them, making a beeline for the school bus.

VLAD
Slow down GREY-

An obnoxiously comical horn sounds from the Uber, drowning out VLAD's voice. Turning his attention towards the vehicle, VLAD sees the driver, TROY, stepping out to greet them. TROY is wearing a Batman-themed t-shirt and sneakers with Japanese writing. He's holding two bottles of an unknown drink, and there's a pair of headphones around his neck. The SUV is covered in colorful banners and decals promoting his podcast, *The Truth Behind the Jive*.

TROY
Greetings gentlemen! My name's
TROY, and I will be your captain
on this fine morning. Before we
take off, may I offer you each a
bottle of my premium CBD vitamin
drink, "Chillax", and on the house
of course.

VLAD
(awkwardly takes bottle)
Thank you for the drink and the
ride this morning, TROY.

TROY
It's my absolute pleasure, GREY?

VLAD
(chuckles lightly)
Afraid not. My son must've set up
the account. Call me DR. VLAD.

TROY
(grins)
You got it DOC.

TROY
(holds out bottle to DAVID)
And for you sir?

DAVID
I'm not designed to consume such
beverages.

TROY

(nods)

Say less. Allergies, trust me I
get it.

TROY opens the door, ushering VLAD and DAVID to their seats. As they settle in, they notice a small cooler filled with TROY's Chillax drinks and a holder on the back of the front seats displaying his business cards. TROY hums a tune as he hops into the driver's seat. As they pull away from the curb, *The Truth Behind the Jive* begins playing in the background.

TROY

So where to gentlemen?

DAVID

7th and Horizon, please.

TROY

(exaggerated whistle)

That's Silicon Valley 4.0
territory. Can't even walk there
if your last name ain't rich.
(laughs)

There's a brief silence as VLAD and DAVID exchange a quick glance.

TROY (CONT'D)

We headed to work, DR. VLAD?

VLAD

We are.

TROY

(nodding)

Funny, I've lived here all my
life, never known any hospitals or
universities near there though.

VLAD

(calmy)

I'm a psychiatrist, private
practice.

TROY

Word? It's been a minute since I
chopped it up with a shrink.

VLAD

May I ask why?

TROY

(shrugs)

Let's just say I'm a believer in
leaving the past in the rearview.

VLAD

I'd agree. Except I've found the
past has a way of catching up with
us, whether we want it to or not.

TROY glances in the driver's mirror, briefly acknowledging
VLAD's last comment before catching a glimpse of DAVID
observing him.

TROY

(to DAVID)

Forgive me, I'm afraid I never got
your name sir.

DAVID

I am DAVID.

TROY

(jokingly)

Well DAVID, there's some allergy-
proof waters back there in the
cooler if you're thirsty.

DAVID

As I said earlier, I'm not d-

Suddenly, VLAD doubles over in pain, clutching his fist
tight to his chest.

TROY

(concerned)

You good DOC?

DAVID quickly puts a hand on VLAD's chest then reaches into
the messenger bag slung over his shoulder. He pulls out an

(CONT'D)

inhaler-type device and quickly disperses it to VLAD.
VLAD's breathing begins to slow down, and he begins tapping
his fingers on his chest in a rhythmic pattern.

VLAD
(catches breath)
I'm fine. Thank you DAVID.

VLAD catches TROY's gaze in the driver's mirror, finding
him studying them intently.

TROY
(casually)
It makes sense now. 7th and
Horizon. You're headed to Azura?

VLAD doesn't respond.

TROY (CONT'D)
Can't say I blame you for not
telling me. I probably wouldn't
have said shit either.

VLAD
(hesitates)
In truth, it's not often I come
across someone who's comfortable
with my condition.

TROY
I feel that. Can't imagine your
patients were too thrilled?

VLAD
These days, my patients are all
trial members as well. It's the
only way they'd allow me to
continue practicing throughout the
course of my treatments.

TROY
Damn, so let me get this straight.
Azura hooked you up with a new job
too?

VLAD
(chuckles lightly)
Yeah, something like that.

TROY
(glances at DAVID)
What about him?

VLAD
DAVID is a highly advanced android designed by Azura to oversee patient care and monitor treatment progress. But as you can see, DAVID isn't just a machine.

TROY
Azura's Android Partner Program.
I remember it well. Could never get those commercials out of my head. (mimics humorously) "Making your lives easier one APP at a time." You really believe that noise DOC?

VLAD
Speaking from my perspective, I do. Besides, if people like myself are the monsters the media would have you believe, then who's to say that DAVID's kind aren't the true cure.

TROY nods, acknowledging VLAD's comment. The ride continues in silence, with *The Truth Behind the Jive* playing in the background. As they pull up to 7th and Horizon, TROY brings the Uber to a stop.

TROY
(smiling)
Don't forget to rate your boy 5 stars. And share the word with your patients, I deliver.

VLAD
(smiles and grabs a few business cards)
Will do. Thanks again TROY.

TROY
(driving away)
Take care DOC. And remember, keep
chillaxing!

DAVID
(observantly)
He's an interesting human.

VLAD
(chuckles and pats DAVID on the shoulder)
I liked him too. FADE OUT.

ACT 4 - INT. VLAD'S OFFICE - DAY

The scene opens with a shot of the sky/sun, followed by a time-lapse indicating that several hours have passed. The camera then cuts to the interior of VLAD's office, where he is sitting across from a woman named ELENA, who looks to be in her late 20s. The room is dimly lit by a single desk lamp, casting long shadows across the bookshelves lining the walls. A few framed diplomas hang askew behind VLAD's desk, and a stack of medical journals sits neatly in the corner. ELENA is fidgeting with her hands in a plush armchair, looking nervous as VLAD observes her silently.

ELENA
(looking out the window)
It's hard, you know?

VLAD
(calmy)
I do.

ELENA
(chuckles lightly)
Of course you do.

VLAD
(concerned)
Have the nightmares started yet?

ELENA
(looks at VLAD hesitantly)
I'm so tired sometimes. Then other
times I want to—

ELENA looks down, trailing off into silence.

VLAD

ELENA, there's no roadmap for what you're experiencing. Just two years ago, you were told you wouldn't live to see 30. Today, you're battling a fatal disease with something that's literally changing the very fabric of what you are. These trials are uncharted territory, and it's okay to be afraid of that. I know I am.

ELENA looks up at VLAD, her eyes glistening with unshed tears.

ELENA

It's just... it's hard to imagine a future when you've spent so long thinking you don't have one. And now that I have this chance... Like I should be happy right?

VLAD

Not necessarily. It's common for individuals undergoing experimental treatments to experience emotional distress. In fact, it's not uncommon for people to experience feelings of guilt, even when given a chance at a new lease on life. We call this survivor's guilt, and it's a normal psychological response to extreme circumstances. It's important to remember that your emotions are valid, no matter what others may say. You don't have to feel guilty for not being happy all the time.

ELENA

(looks away)

Can I ask you something DOCTOR?

VLAD

Of course, this is a safe space.

ELENA

What do you see... in your nightmares?

VLAD

(taken aback)

I... see myself, before the treatment. Weak, vulnerable, helpless. And then I see myself after. (pauses)

ELENA

How does it end?

VLAD

(hesitates)

The same way every time. Lost in darkness... and a smell.

ELENA

(anxious)

Blood? I smell it too.

Unseen tremors ripple through VLAD's frame, a silent reaction to the magnitude of his disbelief.

ELENA (CONT'D)

(fighting back tears)

I smell it all the time. Even now. Most days, it's the only thing I can focus on... What's happening to us DOCTOR?

Suddenly, the door to VLAD's office opens, and DAVID enters followed by a woman. She is tall with striking features and her hair is styled in a sleek, asymmetrical cut. Like DAVID, she wears a small bag around her neck that dangles gently as she moves, emitting a faint humming noise.

DAVID

Is everything okay sir? Your heart rate is elevated.

The woman walks over to ELENA, gently placing a hand on her shoulder.

VLAD

(shaken out of his thoughts)

I'm fine, thank you DAVID.

(to the woman) ZARA, I think
that'll be enough for today.

ELENA finally breaks down in tears, and ZARA comforts her as DAVID stands by, watching over the scene with a steady gaze. VLAD watches for a moment, then stands up, his expression troubled.

VLAD (CONT'D)

(to himself)

What's happening to us indeed...

As the office door closes, VLAD's phone buzzes. He picks it up, noticing missed calls from AMY. Just as VLAD ponders over the unanswered calls, DAVID steps forward, his own bag emitting a faint hum as it connects with his interface.

DAVID

Sir, I have MS. AMY on the line.
The SENATOR's press conference is
set to begin soon. She would like
to know if you've heard from her.

VLAD

(slightly concerned)

Not since this morning. Everything
okay?

DAVID remains silent for a few seconds as his internal interface responds to AMY with VLAD's question. He nods, ending the phone call.

DAVID

(to VLAD)

A simple miscommunication. She
apologizes for the inconvenience.

VLAD's brow furrows, concern etched on his face. He taps his chest silently, lost in thought.

DAVID

Sir, these elevated heart spikes
have been happening more
frequently.

VLAD

(ignores comment)

Have you faced a conundrum before,
DAVID?

DAVID

(ponders)

No, although some might consider
my very existence a conundrum.

VLAD

Yes. Many consider you an enigma,
a puzzle to unravel. You exist as
an artificial intelligence, not
bound by the same rules as human
beings. You're neither exactly
alive nor completely devoid of
life. It's a unique position, is
it not?

DAVID remains quiet, studying VLAD, processing his words.

VLAD (CONT'D)

I face a conundrum right now.
Doctor-patient confidentiality
prevents me from legally and
ethically divulging the details of
a patient's session to another
living soul. And yet, you're not
exactly alive, not by legal
standards, are you, DAVID?

DAVID

(hesitates)

No. As I am a manifestation of
artificial intelligence, anything
revealed would be free of any
legal conflict or ethical
concerns.

VLAD

(nods in agreeance)

I wanted to tell you this morning..
My nightmares have become more
vivid, and it's becoming
increasingly difficult to
distinguish dreams from reality.

VLAD (CONT'D)

Then today, ELENA shared with me
that she smells blood, all the
time, the same as I do. (pauses)
What do you make of this DAVID?

DAVID

(monotone)

I don't possess emotions or
subjective experiences, but I find
the convergence of these
occurrences... intriguing. It may
warrant further investigation.

VLAD's phone buzzes again. He glances at the screen, seeing it's a call from REINA's school. Simultaneously, a loud knock resonates from the office door. VLAD answers the phone while DAVID moves to open the door. VLAD listens intently to the voice on the other end, his expression growing increasingly serious. Suddenly, VLAD's eyes widen in fear. Turning towards the door, he sees nearly a dozen officers enter the room.

FADE OUT.

ACT 5 - FLASHBACK - VLAD'S HOME - NIGHT

A YOUNG VLAD, no older than 7, stands in front of his childhood home, watching as officers rush past him, entering the house...

CUT TO: INT. VLAD'S OFFICE - PRESENT

VLAD sits on the couch, his mind still trapped in the traumatic flashback. The voices around him are muffled and distant until one voice breaks through.

OFFICER

DR. KNIGHT... DR. KNIGHT?

VLAD's gaze slowly shifts towards the OFFICER, his dazed expression unchanged. Just then, a tall man in a black suit enters the room flanked by two large guards. He strides in with confidence, his gaze piercing through the room. He approaches VLAD, cutting in on the OFFICER's questioning.

FORD

Hello DR. KNIGHT, I'm FORD, the facility's head of security and Azura's lead investigator into the disappearance of your daughter.

FORD hands VLAD a backpack and flip-phone.

FORD (CONT'D)

We recovered REINA's belongings from the scene. Do you have any ideas why someone might want to take your daughter?

VLAD

(collecting himself)

Her mom, my wife, is a senator.

FORD

I'm aware. In fact, I've just spoken with your wife's CHIEF OF STAFF. She claims the SENATOR was headed to a meeting this morning. A meeting that ironically never existed on her schedule. Do you know anything about this, DR. KNIGHT?

VLAD

(confused)

MAYA said she was headed to a meeting this morning, and she'd be back late. Wait, you think the same people who took REINA could also have MAYA?

FORD

We're considering all possibilities. Our priority is to locate them both as soon as possible.

VLAD

(suspicious)

Where's AMY, and why is Azura heading the investigation and not local authorities?

FORD

MS. AMY is currently managing the hurricane of press inquiries at the capital. As for your other question, Azura has taken a special interest in the case, and if like you say the two events are in fact connected, then that makes finding both the SENATOR and your DAUGHTER a priority.

VLAD

(turns to DAVID)

We're leaving.

FORD

I'm afraid that won't be possible at this time, DOCTOR.

VLAD

(incredulously)

I need to be with my son, to explain what's happened.

FORD's guards shift, ready to intervene.

FORD

(calmly)

Local authorities are currently headed to GREY's school to escort him home safely. (pauses) As a father, I understand your concern. However, given the delicate nature of your condition, it will be safer for you to remain here at this time. I'm afraid that's not a request.

DAVID

(interjects)

Thank you. Please alert us of any further updates.

FORD nods in acknowledgment, his gaze lingering on VLAD for a moment before turning to leave. His guards follow suit, exiting the room along with the officers. As they depart, two facility members remain stationed in the hallway.

VLAD
(eyes closed)
What did you observe?

DAVID
Increased muscle tension, mild
jump in heart rates, changes in
posture. FORD, however, was
particularly difficult to read.

VLAD
I sensed it too. I can't make
sense of it... but it's like I could
taste their anxiety, especially
when I tried leaving.

DAVID
(observing VLAD's restlessness)
Sir, I can see your urgency, but
it's important that we consider
our options carefully. Leaving
abruptly may not be the best
course of action.

VLAD
(in an emotional outburst)
REINA is gone! And now MAYA...
There's nothing more important to
me than my family. So don't ask me
to sit idly while half of it's
missing. I'm leaving DAVID, and I
need your help.

DAVID
(positions himself in front of the door)
I'm afraid I can't allow you to do
that, sir. See, my programming
cannot openly defy a direct order...
However, even the best programs
can be subject to loopholes where
human error may be involved.

DAVID glances over at the fire alarm on the wall. VLAD
follows his gaze and realizes what he's implying. Suddenly,
VLAD pulls his phone from his pocket, pausing as he catches
a glimpse at the screensaver of his family together.

VLAD

(eyes widening in realization)
MAYA had REINA's phone... DAVID! Can
you track REINA's phone?

DAVID

(connecting to his interface)
Of course, sir. MS. REINA's phone
is currently 9 miles outside the
city, headed west. Shall I alert
the authorities?

VLAD

No, something doesn't feel right.
FORD knew more than he was letting
on. For now, we do this ourselves.

DAVID

(nods)
That just leaves the matter of
transportation.

VLAD

(reaching into his pocket)
I think I've got that figured out
too.

CUT TO: Exterior shot of the building as the fire alarm
blares out. VLAD and DAVID emerge from the chaos, among the
crowd of evacuating people. Just then, a familiar horn
sounds out behind them on the end of the block. They turn,
maneuvering through the crowd, avoiding attention until
they reach TROY's vehicle. They open the door and quickly
shuffle inside.

TROY

(grinning)
What's happening DOC. Didn't think
I'd be seeing you so soon. We do
appreciate your business. Where
you headed?

DAVID

(calmly)
Security will soon be alerted to
our absence.

VLAD

(hurriedly)

TROY, I don't have time to explain, but we need you to start driving west, like now.

TROY glances at the ensuing chaos out front, noting security dispersing through the crowd, searching.

TROY

(raising an eyebrow)

Local patient flees Azura with android... Sounds like a potential podcast episode of the year to me.

The vehicle pulls off, leaving the chaos behind.

ACT 6: EXT. ROAD - DAY

Miles outside the city, TROY's SUV speeds down the road. VLAD and DAVID are in the back seat, tension thick in the air with VLAD's revelations.

TROY

I knew Azura wasn't shit! Talked all about it in episode 57.
(glances at DAVID) Why not ditch the tinman? You know they can track it.

VLAD

(looks at DAVID, then back to TROY)

I trust DAVID with my life.
Besides, if my family is here, then any authorities following us will be right where they need to be.

Suddenly, a vehicle swerves and rams into TROY's SUV from the side with a deafening CRASH. The impact throws everyone inside off balance. Shattered glass sprays across the cabin, and metal screeches against metal. The SUV veers dangerously, tires screeching as TROY fights to regain control. VLAD's head crashes into the window, momentarily stunning him. The world around him blurs, and a ringing fills his ears. As his vision flashes in and out of consciousness, the pursuing vehicle continues its assault.

(CONT'D)

The SUV shakes violently with each impact, threatening to spin out of control. Then just as another collision seems inevitable, the pursuing vehicle suddenly pulls back, slowing down before swiftly changing direction and disappearing into the distance. TROY's last promo banner rips off with the wind, flying behind and getting caught on a neighborhood sign that reads "Welcome to Ivory Hills."

TROY

(frantic)

What the fuck just happened! Y'all
okay back there?

DAVID

(holding VLAD's head steady)

DR. KNIGHT's vitals appear stable,
I believe he's merely unconscious.

TROY

Well, then who just tried to kill
us? Because those mothafuckas
better have insurance.

DAVID

DR. KNIGHT, sir, can you hear me?
We are nearing the SENATOR'S
desti-

The SUV grinds to a halt, sending VLAD and DAVID flying forward in their seats.

TROY

(honking)

Move, kid! Get out of the way!

VLAD, still in a daze, gazes out of the window. He catches the fading image of a beautiful emerald-eyed ghost, bathed in fire and painted in blood, before slipping out of consciousness.

TO BE CONTINUED...