

PENITENCE (TENTATIVE)

Written by

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Teaser

1

EXT. LAWN - DAY

1

HARTFORD (60s, m), hope sparking through his mellow manner, gazes upon the sight before him.

His VINTAGE SUIT flaps in the wind. A BRASS-LEATHER SUITCASE rests at his feet. He thumbs the FEDORA in his hands.

ROSARIO (O.S.)

Ready?

HARTFORD

I can't quite believe it.

ROSARIO (early 30s, f, Hispanic), carried by a hardened grace, straightens his collar and takes him in.

ROSARIO

Just as you came.

Hartford gaze is fixed just past her, to--

--the TOWERING HOUSE behind them. A behemoth of rooms and windows and splintering panels over rotting paint.

TREVOR (20s, m) leans on the open entry. He's the pebble in your shoe you'll never find.

KIPP (15, m), caring to a fault, stands by his sister KAYLA (15, f), who's sequestered to a wheelchair. A vacant stare.

They watch from the tall, raised porch.

HARTFORD

I'll miss it, you know? I will.

ROSARIO

And what a privilege that is.

Hartford slips the hat on and lifts his suitcase. Kipp waves goodbye. Trevor barely wiggles his fingers.

HARTFORD

You'll see to Owen for me? He's young and--

ROSARIO

Goodbye, old friend.

Hartford takes a final look, then tips his hat and starts. A FIGURE watches him leave from a window on the second floor.

2 EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS

2

Rosario joins the others on the porch.

KIPP  
Do you think that'll ever be us?

TREVOR  
What, old and poorly dressed?

Rosario rubs Kipp's shoulder.

KIPP  
Why now? Why him?

Trevor examines Rosario. She doesn't back down.

TREVOR  
Don't ask. She doesn't know.

A muffled THUMP comes from inside. Then another, and another.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
He's gonna hurt himself.

ROSARIO  
He needs time.

TREVOR  
That's the one thing we'll never  
need.

Trevor slinks into the house. Rosario and Kipp watch on as Hartford grows smaller and smaller. Kayla doesn't blink.

3 INT. OUTSIDE OWEN'S ROOM - DAY

3

The handle violently rattles on a chipped door. Then stills.

Silence. Until --

Steps run up, and THUMP! But there's no budge. An exasperated groan rings out as fists POUND on the other side.

OWEN  
Let me out! LET ME OUT!

POUND and POUND turns into PUNCH after PUNCH after PUNCH.

**Credits**

4

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD/CONVERTIBLE - DAY

4

A modern, 2020 RED CONVERTIBLE flies down the hall of trees.

JONATHAN (early 30s, m), cocksure, carefree, and untested, nods with the radio as he zooms, in a trance.

The music SPUTTERS. Jonathan tinkers with the dials but the crackling dwindles and dies. Trance done, the magic is gone.

JONATHAN

Lovely...

He spots someone ahead. It's Hartford trudging along the far shoulder. Jonathan's eyes linger on him as he speeds past.

Hartford wipes a handkerchief to his head. He's dripping sweat. Then an engine roars close - Jonathan's turned back.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Nice day, isn't it?

HARTFORD

Oh? Oh, why, yes. It is.

JONATHAN

It'd be nicer in a car.

HARTFORD

I don't mind the walk, really.

JONATHAN

You could love the drive.

Hartford looks up and considers. It's scorching.

HARTFORD

You are very kind.

Jonathan reaches across to open the passenger door.

5

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD/CONVERTIBLE - LATER

5

Hartford clutches the suitcase to his lap. He sits tall with a childlike wonder for the open air. Jonathan stares at him.

JONATHAN

So, you heading home or leaving it?

HARTFORD

A bit of both, I suppose. And yourself?

JONATHAN  
Just business. I've got land around  
here somewhere.

Hartford looks confused. They pass some scattered houses.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
My grandfather, he used to live up  
here. Best time of his life. He  
left it to me when he passed.

HARTFORD  
Were you close?

Jonathan laughs. Buildings start to speckle the streets.

JONATHAN  
No, he wasn't close with anyone.

HARTFORD  
I'm sorry.

JONATHAN  
For what?

HARTFORD  
That you weren't close.

Static CRACKLING breaks the air. The radio sputters back on.

HARTFORD (CONT'D)  
I don't know my son's face anymore.  
I've been too far, too long.

It's the heart of town now. The car stops at the bus station.

JONATHAN  
Your bus to anywhere.

HARTFORD  
Thank you.

Hartford exits. Jonathan hesitates for a moment before  
pulling something from the glove box.

JONATHAN  
Hartford? Do you know where I could  
find this place?

Hartford's expression SOURS. It's a grainy photo of the  
TOWERING HOUSE at its prime.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
He grew up there, my grandfather.

Hartford says nothing, then hands the picture back.

HARTFORD

Some trials we deserve, others we  
choose ourselves. Do *yourself* a  
kindness, son, and walk away.

He tips his hat and drags off. Jonathan is left puzzled.

6

INT. VACATED ROOM - DAY

6

Trevor flicks down picture frame after picture frame, all  
empty and ornate. Floral wallpaper matches antique furniture.

TREVOR

Silly me, calling dibs when it  
looks like the vaudeville just  
stormed though.

He holds up an egregious porcelain ballerina.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

If you must be tortured, then at  
least be it in style.

Rosario sands an unseen floor, her hair untamed.

ROSARIO

You'd help more if you didn't  
hinder, you know?

TREVOR

Ay, *Charito*, always the martyr. All  
this struggle and he'll just coming  
marching back.

Rosario stops and looks up.

ROSARIO

You really don't believe it?

Trevor spins the shade on an old lamp. The back is ripped.

TREVOR

How very, very cruel. A false hope  
for those without. Now *that*, I do  
believe.

ROSARIO

So hold your breath.

TREVOR

You tell Brooks yet?

ROSARIO  
Would he know if I did?

TREVOR  
Ouch. Vicious.

ROSARIO  
And while I'm usually all for this  
riveting commentary of yours, some  
of us have actual work to do.

Trevor concedes and leaves. Rosario continues sanding down  
the GASHES CLAWED and CARVED and spanning the whole floor.

7 EXT. TOWN HALL - DAY

7

Jonathan strolls up the steps as SMALL TOWN FOLK pass him by,  
brightly dressed and beaming. He observes, fascinated.

A WOMAN smiles to him, a MAN tips his head 'hello'. Jonathan  
smiles back. His high roller wardrobe feels out of place.

Before entering the building, he surveys the trim town  
square. It's as idyllic as a painting.

8 INT. TOWN HALL - COUNTER - DAY

8

Jonathan approaches the counter. A curly haired clerk, MAGGIE  
(f, 60s) is eager to serve. Jonathan spots her name tag.

MAGGIE  
How can I help you, dear?

He slides forward a FILE and his ID, his charm turned on.

JONATHAN  
Hi, I was wondering if you'd look  
up some property records for me?

Maggie looks in the file and peers at the ID.

MAGGIE  
Jonathan Strehle. Any relation to a  
*Johann* Strehle?

JONATHAN  
How'd you know?

MAGGIE  
We were all so sorry to hear.

Maggie waves down a YOUNG CLERK and hands him the file.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)  
Back room, the boxed archives.

The young clerk scurries into the back.

JONATHAN  
Did you know him?

MAGGIE  
Oh, no, not personally, no. I don't believe he ever made the trip out here. But he was always such a help. A benefactor, if you will.

JONATHAN  
Of course.

MAGGIE  
You might want to grab a chair, dear. Plans from that long ago, they'll take a while to find.

Across the room, a YOUNG WOMAN hands a WORKER a homemade pie. A COUPLE talks, at ease. Maggie catches Jonathan watching.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)  
It's different here, isn't it?

JONATHAN  
Spend your whole life in the city and it'll shield you from the world. That's what *Johann* used to say.

Jonathan taps the counter before heading away.

9

EXT. BACKYARD VEGETABLE GARDEN - DAY

9

Rosario drags a heaping TRASH BAG through the grid of plants and produce, carefully balancing a steel pail at her hip.

Flies buzz all over the TRASH BAG.

She reaches the compost pile near the back and dumps the contents of the pail: food scraps, newspaper, and weeds.

She turns the pile with a shovel before moving to a side.

MOUNDS of UPTURNED DIRT line the back of the compost pile. Rosario stomps her shovel into the next open plot.

Shovel in, dirt out, repeat. Rosario wipes her forehead with the fabric of her garden gloves, then tosses the shovel.



She turns and shakes the TRASH BAG over the newly-dug hole.

CHUNKS of FUR and stiff, clumped RODENTS tumble out.

Rosario balks at the smell, but SOMETHING catches her eye. She nudges the heap with her foot. Then groans.

ROSARIO

Oh, Brooks.

Flies scatter as she shovels on dirt. Little by little, it covers the HALF-TORN body of a FERAL CAT.

10

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

10

Jonathan smooths a large, sepia plan over the table. A perky WAITRESS (f, 30s) pours his coffee.

WAITRESS

Anything else I can get you?

JONATHAN

I'm fine, thank you.

She smiles and walks off. Jonathan savors the 'mom & pop' peace of the locale, then turns to his work.

He tracks the property lines with a finger, sipping on his coffee and comparing with the PDF version on his phone.

His phone RINGS.

He stares at the screen. It's a photo of a young woman laughing. It reads 'MARA'.

Finally, he hits decline.

He returns to the PDF, and then to the physical plan. But he stops. Looks closer. Something is different. Interesting.

Jonathan catches the waitress as she comes back around.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Actually, maybe you can help me with something.

His finger rests on a small, DARK PLOT in the center.

11 EXT. PORCH - DAY 11

Kipp sits on the swing bench across from Kayla. He takes her hand and examines it. The nails are long and JAGGED.

KIPP  
I'm not mad. Really. I'm happy for him.

He pulls out NAIL CLIPPERS and begins. CLIP.

KIPP (CONT'D)  
No, Hartford himself couldn't even say. Maybe it's the time.

Kayla stares off into nothing. CLIP.

Kipp stops, draws back.

KIPP (CONT'D)  
No, Brooks won't know.

Kayla, blank and unblinking.

KIPP (CONT'D)  
I don't want to ask him.

A tense air, then it's gone. Kipp takes her hand again. CLIP.

KIPP (CONT'D)  
Fine. I'll ask.

The sound of a engine roars. Kipp sets the NAIL CLIPPERS on Kayla's wheelchair. He stares as --

A 2020 RED CONVERTIBLE breaks through the line of trees.

12 INT. CONVERTIBLE - CONTINUOUS 12

Jonathan is stunned by the view. He recognizes it.

He steers slowly closer, his eyes never breaking from the towering, beast of a house as it grows.

He parks the car. He doesn't exit.

The consternation fades away. He's quick to recover.

13 EXT. YARD/PORCH - CONTINUOUS 13

Jonathan steps out of the car, charm turned on. He approaches the porch. His clean button down clashes with the rustic air.

Kipp stands.

JONATHAN

Hey there.

KIPP

Hey.

JONATHAN

So I think I've been driving in circles. They said take a right at the bridge but I passed about four. Is this 23 Tucker Lane?

KIPP

Yeah.

JONATHAN

This place used to be a boarding house, right?

KIPP

Still is.

JONATHAN

Wow, really?

Kipp nods. Jonathan's charm is getting nowhere.

The FIGURE watches from a second floor window. Jonathan looks around, looks up. He catches a glimpse. The FIGURE rips away.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Are your parents here?

KIPP

No.

JONATHAN

Is there anyone else I can talk to?

Trevor pops opens the front door.

TREVOR

Kipp, would it kill you to be a little cordial? And you, too, Kayla, you're being horribly rude.

Kayla sits catatonic in her wheelchair.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Please, come close. We don't bite.

Trevor extends his hand. Kipp looks uneasy.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
Hi. I'm Trevor.

JONATHAN  
Jonathan.

They shake.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
So, Kipp was telling me this place  
is still a boarding house?

TREVOR  
Oh, yes. Running strong since 1832  
and it shows. Why, are you looking  
for a place?

JONATHAN  
No, just passing through.

TREVOR  
How sad. We don't get a lot of  
company.  
(looking inside)  
Isn't that right, Charo?

Rosario comes up behind Trevor, wiping her hands on a cloth.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
Our lovely matron of the house.

ROSARIO  
What do you want?

She's effectively uninviting. For Jonathan, it's a challenge.

JONATHAN  
You know, my grandfather used to  
live here. I was wondering if I  
could take a look inside? I'd love  
to see where he grew up.

TREVOR  
You hear that? He's basically  
family.

JONATHAN  
Of course, I wouldn't want to put  
you out.  
(taking bills from his  
wallet)  
I can pay you for the trouble--

ROSARIO  
We're not a museum.

TREVOR  
Nor are we a prison, so I would  
gladly take a guest.

Trevor snatches the cash and sweeps his arm for Jonathan to come in. After a second, Rosario moves aside. Reluctantly.

JONATHAN  
Thank you, Charo. It means a lot.

ROSARIO  
It's Rosario.

JONATHAN  
Then, thank you, *Rosario*.

Jonathan enters. Rosario grabs Trevor's arm.

ROSARIO  
Watch the floors.

Trevor smiles before disappearing into the house.

Rosario and Kipp share a look. She sighs and heads inside.

Kipp sits back down with Kayla. He cocks his head, something's off. The NAIL CLIPPERS are GONE.

Kipp looks around, looks under, in the crease. Nothing.

KIPP  
(reprimanding)  
Kayla.

No response.

14

INT. EAST HALLWAY - DAY

14

Trevor leads the way. Jonathan studies the old paintings as they walk. The floorboards CREAK. Trevor opens a room.

TREVOR  
So here's the sitting room.

Jonathan looks in. The scant furniture is draped in sheets. Trevor keeps going and opens another room, then another.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
And the sitting room. And again.

The same open space, the same ghostly covers. They continue.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Not much variety, and not very much to do, I'm afraid.

JONATHAN

Do you always keep it like this?

TREVOR

It's a lot of space for the few of us. No reason to let it dust.

JONATHAN

And how many is a few?

TREVOR

Me, the twins, Bea, Owen and Brooks, though we did lose a fellow recently. A dreary sort, very "Death of a Salesman" kind of vibe.

Trevor opens the door to the VACANT ROOM. The floor sparkles with a new varnish. The GASHES and CLAW MARKS are gone.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

This here was his room. Careful, it's still drying.

They keep going towards a DARK corner.

JONATHAN

And what about Rosario?

TREVOR

She cooks, she cleans, she takes care of the repairs. We merely exist. 12 curfew's a bit antique, but it's a snazzy deal, really.

JONATHAN

So she owns the place?

TREVOR

From now 'till the end of time. Whoop, not this way.

Trevor suddenly shifts their direction. Jonathan looks to the end of the hall. The ground is CHARRED, the walls SCORCHED.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Nasty fire a couple years back. So who knows, one wrong step and--

Trevor FLICKS his fingers to the floor. A COLLAPSE.

15

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

15

The shelves are full of books stacked in every which way. Not a single empty space.

Trevor leans by the doorway as Jonathan peruses.

JONATHAN  
Quite the collection.

TREVOR  
First editions, third. There's  
probably something of value shoved  
in there. Somewhere.

Jonathan pulls a tattered book. He shuffles the pages.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
So, how long did your grandfather  
live here? Must've been cheerier  
back then.

Black scribbles start to peek through. He slows the shuffle.

JONATHAN  
I'm sure it was, though I couldn't  
say, he didn't talk much about his  
past.

Page after page near the end is covered in INK. UNREADABLE.  
The neighboring books have the same, blackened spines.

TREVOR  
They're old. It takes a toll.

Jonathan puts the book back. He goes to a side door.

JONATHAN  
What's this?

TREVOR  
Don't know. It's locked.

Jonathan twists the knob. Hard. It clinks open. He enters.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
Guess not.

Trevor slinks on over to the--

16 INT. MUSIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS 16

A dusty, GRAND PIANO sits in the center of the small room.

TREVOR  
Well, I'll be damned.

JONATHAN  
A 1930s Steinway model M. Haven't  
seen one in a while. May I?

TREVOR  
Please.

Jonathan blows on the dust and stands the lid. He takes a  
seat and uncovers the keys. His fingers hover for a moment.

Then he plays.

It's a simple, somber melody, like an old Victorian tune.

17 INT. KITCHEN - DAY 17

Rosario cuts carrots on a board. The music drifts in.

She stops. Stills. Listens.

There's a haunting quality to the song.

She shakes it off and CHOPS down the knife. Harder, faster.

18 EXT. LAWN - DAY 18

Kipp sits in the grass by Kayla's wheelchair. He looks up to  
follow the sound, then stands and pushes the wheelchair.

Kayla finally BLINKS.

19 INT. DARK ROOM - DAY 19

The lawn is visible through cracks in the shutters. The music  
comes in, muffled.

The FIGURE passes by. The movement shades the light.

20 INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY 20

Jonathan hits the final note. It hangs in the air.



TREVOR  
Delightful. Where's it from, the  
Great Depression?

Jonathan laughs. He shuts the keys.

JONATHAN  
Maybe. My grandfather had one just  
like this. I picked it up from him.

TREVOR  
And maybe he picked it up from  
here.

Jonathan closes the lid.

21

INT. FOYER - DAY

21

Trevor plops down on a worn sofa arm. There's a GRANDFATHER  
CLOCK at the end of a giant ORIENTAL RUG.

TREVOR  
And that concludes our tour today.  
Please tell your family and  
friends. We're here all week.

There's a SCRAMBLE under the floor. SCRATCHING.

JONATHAN  
What was that?

ROSARIO (O.S.)  
Our rats.

Rosario stands at a doorway. Trevor STOMPS on the ground.

TREVOR  
Pesky things. Pay no mind.

ROSARIO  
Trevor, could you get my notebook?

TREVOR  
Now?

ROSARIO  
Yes, please.

Something unspoken passes between them. Trevor ambles off.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
Would you like some tea?

JONATHAN  
I'd love some.

He follows her.

22

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

22

The kettle whistles. Rosario takes it off the burner. She pours into Jonathan's cup. Small, dry leaves float inside.

JONATHAN  
What is it?

ROSARIO  
*Mate de coca.*

JONATHAN  
I don't think I've ever tried it.

ROSARIO  
It's hard to find around here.

She takes the seat across from him and blows on her tea.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
Did you enjoy our home?

JONATHAN  
I thought it was inviting.

ROSARIO  
Really? What did it for you? Was it the rats or the burned wing?

JONATHAN  
The library was quite memorable.

They're both lighthearted. She takes a sip.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
It's a big place. It must be hard to maintain.

ROSARIO  
We get by.

JONATHAN  
Buildings like these, they're not safe when they're not restored.

ROSARIO  
What do you recommend?

JONATHAN

This place meant a lot to my grandfather. It was the only part of his life he ever mentioned. It would mean the world to me if I could see it put back to how he knew it.

Rosario says nothing. She takes a longer sip.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

I promise the price would be more than fair, for you and your residents, and you'll have as much time as you need for any arrangements.

ROSARIO

You want to buy my house?

JONATHAN

I'd like to, yes.

ROSARIO

What was it again? Mister?

JONATHAN

Jonathan. Jonathan Strehle.

ROSARIO

Is that German?

JONATHAN

It is.

Rosario finishes her tea.

ROSARIO

So that's what you really came in to see, then, Mr. Strehle? How much the property was worth?

JONATHAN

Not at all.

Rosario leans in, alluring.

ROSARIO

Well why didn't you just ask? I could've told you that.

She digs a finger into her teacup.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
 I also could've told you that you  
 don't know us, or what we want.  
 Maybe we like our crumbling home,  
 maybe we don't.

She takes out a single leaf and twirls it in her fingers.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
 But while you enjoy the freedom of  
 that fancy car and hotel sheets,  
 you'll never know.

JONATHAN  
 Is that your answer?

ROSARIO  
 My answer, Mr. Strehle, is that no  
 amount of money could make me leave  
 this house.

Rosario takes the leaf in her mouth and chews.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
 It's good for you. You should try  
 it.

Jonathan smiles politely.

23

EXT. PORCH/LAWN - DAY

23

Rosario stands at the entryway waiting for Jonathan to go.

JONATHAN  
 Thank you, still, for your time.

She nods. He starts down the stairs.

ROSARIO  
 Your grandfather, what was his  
 name?

JONATHAN  
 Johann Strehle. Why?

ROSARIO  
 No reason.

Jonathan continues to his car and gets it.

24 INT. CONVERTIBLE - CONTINUOUS 24

He can see Rosario still watching him. He starts the car.

He takes one long, last look at the house, and spots movement in the window, the FIGURE. He waves.

The FIGURE waves back. Jonathan pulls away.

25 EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS 25

Trevor comes up inside, next to Rosario.

ROSARIO  
You had your fun for today?

TREVOR  
Look at that car. Can we keep him,  
mummy?

Rosario turns back in.

26 EXT. RURAL BUS STOP - DAY 26

A bus rolls to a stop. The doors screech open. A BOY jumps off. A YOUNG LADY steps out. Then nothing.

One step, another step. The CLUNK of weary shoes.

Hartford waddles down, his suitcase clutched tight.

The bus drives off. Hartford is left alone.

His walk begins.

27 INT. KITCHEN - DAY 27

Rosario gathers Kipp and Kayla's dishes. Trevor dips a finger in his empty plate and sucks off the juices.

KIPP  
Thanks, Charo.

TREVOR  
Mm, scrumptious. You sure there's  
not a little more?

ROSARIO  
I'm sure.

Rosario scrapes the last of the stew into two bowls and hands them to Trevor and Kipp.

TREVOR

What a waste. I'll get the boots.

KIPP

Actually, I was wondering if I could take Brooks today?

Rosario is caught off guard. Trevor is amused.

TREVOR

Please. Help yourself.

Kipp places the bowl on a tray over Kayla's lap, then wheels her out. Trevor plucks a spoon from a rack before leaving.

Rosario is left to wonder what that was about.

28

INT. SOUTH HALLWAY, SECOND FLOOR - DAY

28

Trevor plops down next to a GREY DOOR, the bowl in hand.

TREVOR

You missed a big one, let me tell you. Good lookin' fella. Better lookin' watch.

He dunks the spoon and starts eating.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

God, this tastes amazing. Bea, you should try some. It almost makes this place bearable.

A SHADOW moves under the door.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

You know, Kipp traded you off for Brooks today. Brooks! Can you believe that? I never know what's happening in that creepy little head of his.

The SHADOW stills. Someone's behind the door.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Though he did show up for Hartford, which is more than I can say for you. But it's fine. You'll just catch him when he's back, isn't that right?

The knob slowly twists, squeaking. Trevor takes another bite.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
Look at me blabbing on. I like to  
snack when I talk.

The door creaks open just a sliver.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
This won't fit through there, will  
it?

The sliver grows. Out comes a hand in an ELEGANT, LEATHER  
GLOVE. It reaches for the bowl when--

Trevor CATCHES its wrist. Squeezes.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
Won't you come out, Bea? We so miss  
you dearly.

Tension taut. The hand pulls back, Trevor pulls harder.  
Finally, he releases.

The hand SHRINKS inside. The door slams shut.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
Your loss.

He takes the biggest bite yet, then leaves the food.

29

EXT. PORCH - DAY

29

Kipp parks Kayla at the far end of the porch. He grabs a pair  
of black rubber boots. They're covered in DRY MUD.

KIPP  
Don't move, okay?

Kayla's eyes are blank. Kipp slips the boots on and grabs the  
bowl from the tray in her lap.

KIPP (CONT'D)  
Alright.

He walks off. *Plat, plat, plat.* Boots going down the steps.  
His footsteps muffle on the grass.

There's the sound of a METAL sliding. Of a wood cover THROWN  
open. The soggy SQUISH of motion through mud.

SCRATCHING. BUMPING. It's all coming from down below.

The porch floor RATTLES. The tray shifts on Kayla's lap.

A muffled WHISPER. Silence.

Then it picks up again. *Squish, squish, squish.* Wood creaks closed, metal slides back. Footsteps on grass.

There's a soft mush in his steps as Kipp comes up the porch. He sets aside the WET, muddy boots.

He fixes the tray and puts down the EMPTY bowl.

KIPP (CONT'D)  
No, he didn't know.

He wheels Kayla away.

30

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

30

Jonathan sits on his bed, sepia plans spread out around him. He shuffles through them, but stops on a certain one.

The one with the small, DARK PLOT.

He pulls back and takes in the room. Clean, calm, boring.

His phone RINGS on the night stand. It's 'MARA' again. Just as bright and smiling.

He hits decline and turns the phone over, but his hand lingers. It moves to--

--the grainy picture of the TOWERING HOUSE.

Jonathan lays back and examines it. He turns it around. There's WRITING there, smudged beyond recognition.

He scoffs and flicks the photo away.

31

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

31

Rosario gently rocks the swing bench as she looks into the night. She pulls on the blanket covering her.

The window behind her clicks. The clasp opens. It's Trevor.

TREVOR  
Who do you think makes it first?  
Hartford or Owen?

ROSARIO  
Is it that you want to be right?



TREVOR  
Doesn't matter what I want.

He checks his watch.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
Quarter till.

ROSARIO  
Quiet.

She perks up at the muted sound of a car engine. Headlights break through the trees.

TREVOR  
And a new contender joins the race.

The rumble grows as Jonathan's 2020 RED CONVERTIBLE emerges.

32

EXT. LAWN/PORCH - NIGHT

32

Jonathan turns the car off. He grabs a duffel bag from the backseat and marches to the porch.

Rosario stiffens, but doesn't stand. Trevor's still there.

TREVOR  
Sneaky woman, what did you say?

She gives him warning look. Trevor holds his hands up.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
I'll wait inside.

Trevor retreats. Jonathan stops at the bottom of the steps.

JONATHAN  
Hi again.

ROSARIO  
Why are you here, Mr. Strehle?

JONATHAN  
Please, call me Jonathan.

Rosario doesn't bite. She's waiting for his answer.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
Well, I remembered you pointing out my inexperience and what not, so I thought, hey, maybe I can fix that.

ROSARIO

I suggest you go home. Wherever  
that is.

JONATHAN

But I barely made it here as is.  
Hidden roads, no service. I'd hate  
to try my luck again.

ROSARIO

And you thought what, that you'd  
stay here?

Jonathan climbs up. He drops the duffel bag beside him.

JONATHAN

My mistake, is this not a boarding  
house?

ROSARIO

A boarding house, not a hotel.

JONATHAN

Didn't a room just open up?

Flashes of RED and BLUE spill into the clearing.

ROSARIO

Now's not a good time.

Rosario adjusts her blanket and walks past Jonathan.

JONATHAN

Never is.

A COP CAR pulls up to the house, its lights cut off. SHERIFF  
ADLER (m, 60s) steps out, jolly and round.

SHERIFF ADLER

Rosario.

ROSARIO

Sheriff. Long night?

SHERIFF ADLER

No longer than most.

ROSARIO

How's Maisie doing?

SHERIFF ADLER  
That drill team's keeping her busy.  
Barely see her anymore with all  
those practices they've got 'em  
going to.

The sheriff walks to the passenger side. Rosario follows.

ROSARIO  
Thank you for this. I don't know  
what we'd do without you.

SHERIFF ADLER  
Oh, just don't let him off too easy  
this time.

He opens the back door and a PLASTERED OWEN (30s) tumbles  
over, his hostility tamed. She catches him. He grumbles.

SHERIFF ADLER (CONT'D)  
Don't know where he got those, but  
he was like that when we found him.

Owen's knuckles are RAW and BATTERED. Rosario pulls him out  
of the car. He can barely stand but still fights her.

ROSARIO  
Come on, Owen.

OWEN  
Get off me.

SHERIFF ADLER  
Careful there.

Jonathan swoops in and takes the brunt of the load.

JONATHAN  
Don't worry, we got him.

SHERIFF ADLER  
New boarder?

Rosario puts on a polite smile. It's not a yes, but not a no.

SHERIFF ADLER (CONT'D)  
Well, mister, you couldn't be in  
better hands.  
(to Rosario)  
You take care, now.

The sheriff leaves. Rosario and Jonathan start lugging Owen.

ROSARIO  
Help me get him to the kitchen.

Owen writhes, bends over, and PUKES over Jonathan's shoes.

33 INT. FOYER - NIGHT

33

A book sits open in Trevor's hand. The back end of the spine is blackened. His gaze is somewhere else.

*Tick, tick, tick, tick.* The seconds hand on the GRANDFATHER CLOCK goes around. 12 til midnight.

The front door opens, Jonathan and Rosario drag Owen through.

TREVOR  
So, Owen first?

ROSARIO  
Good night, Trevor.

Trevor watches them disappear through a doorway. He looks back to the clock. TOCK. 11 till midnight.

34 INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

34

Rosario runs the sink. She wets a towel and tries to clean the chunks of puke off Owen's face, but he swats her away.

OWEN  
Don't touch me.

Jonathan watches from a corner. Owen slumps on the table. Rosario moves to take his jacket but he SKIRTS her.

OWEN (CONT'D)  
I said get off.

ROSARIO  
It's soiled.

OWEN  
Whatever.

She brings him a glass of water. He doesn't even touch it.

ROSARIO  
You need water.

JONATHAN  
He'll sleep it off.

Owen seems to notice Jonathan for the first time.

OWEN  
Who are you?

JONATHAN  
Jonathan.

OWEN  
And who are you, *Jonathan*?

JONATHAN  
I'm staying here.

Owen says nothing for a second. Then he laughs.

OWEN  
Rich. That's rich.  
(to Rosario)  
You don't waste a single day, do  
you?

Owen glares at Rosario, then turns to Jonathan.

OWEN (CONT'D)  
What did she tell you to get you  
here? What did she promise?

Jonathan won't engage.

ROSARIO  
Owen.

OWEN  
You don't know anything, do you?  
No. Of course now.

His fingers tense into a fist. His BATTERED knuckles show.

OWEN (CONT'D)  
That's how it works.

ROSARIO  
You need to watch yourself.

Owen explodes to his feet. Rosario FLINCHES.

OWEN  
Don't tell me what to do.

Jonathan steps in between the two.

JONATHAN  
It's time for you to go.

OWEN

God. All your fucking rules.

Owen backhands the glass, it SHATTERS against the wall. Jonathan stands his ground. He holds Owen's stare.

Owen softens. He looks almost wounded.

OWEN (CONT'D)

I'm not the scary one.

Owen staggers away.

35

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

35

*Tick, tick, tick, tick.* The pendulum swings.

The minute hand is just one notch away from the very top.  
*Tick, tick, tick, tick--*

TOCK. Midnight. A cacophony of BELLS.

Trevor brakes his gaze. He looks to the front door. Waits.

Nothing happens.

The *tick*-ing picks up again.

TREVOR

Huh.

He snaps his book closed.

36

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

36

Rosario sweeps the broken glass. Jonathan wipes the puke off his designer shoes. Some bits stained his pants.

JONATHAN

Cheery guy.

ROSARIO

He's not usually like that. It's been a rough day.

JONATHAN

What was that about? What he was saying?

ROSARIO

Owen? With that many drinks in him, I doubt even he knows.

She empties the dustpan into the trash. He tosses his wipe.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
So, you still want to stay?

JONATHAN  
It'll take more than this.

Jonathan spots a leftover SHARD.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
You missed one.

ROSARIO  
Don't--

Jonathan winces. A sprout of BLOOD on his finger.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
You'll cut yourself.

Rosario grabs a cloth and sits by him. She takes his hand and dabs at the blood. They both lean in close.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
It's not deep.

JONATHAN  
Lucky me.

Rosario fishes a band-aid and alcohol wipe from a drawer. She cleans the wound.

ROSARIO  
You know, I still cut myself  
cooking. After all these years,  
you'd think I'd learn.

JONATHAN  
How long have you had the place?

ROSARIO  
Feels like my whole life.

JONATHAN  
That long?

Rosario peels the band-aid open, wraps it on his finger.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
And before then?

ROSARIO

I was in Peru, with my family. My  
hometown. There, all done.

Jonathan gently grabs her before she can pull away.

JONATHAN

Does this mean you'll take me on?

ROSARIO

Thank you for the help, Mr.  
Strehle. We'll talk in the morning.

Rosario slinks her hand back. Jonathan watches her go.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

Faint traces of moonlight illuminate the headstones.

Two weary feet trudge along the rows, the VINTAGE SUITCASE  
skimming blades of unkempt grass.

Hartford stops before two dusty graves, dahlias in hand. He  
kneels and opens his suitcase, revealing:

A vase. A bible. And nothing else.

He places the vase and flowers between the graves.

HARTFORD

We used to grow these in our yard.

Hartford lays his hand on the bible.

HARTFORD (CONT'D)

*I have fought the good fight, I  
have finished the race, I have kept  
the faith.*

He sets the bible by the vase.

HARTFORD (CONT'D)

I couldn't imagine how your gift  
would save me.

He takes out his handkerchief and cleans the inscription on  
one headstone, then the other.

HARTFORD (CONT'D)

It took a while, but I'm back.  
Didn't I say I'd come back?

The headstones read:



*"FELICITY HARTFORD, Loving Mother & Wife, 1909 - 1963"*

*"EDWARD HARTFORD JR., Loving Son, 1942 - 1963"*

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

The brass cross handles creak as they turn.

Jonathan splashes water on his face and neatly combs his hair. He dries off with a hand towel. He looks around.

The sink is supported by pipes. Cracks run up the tub. Dark blots spread along the tile lines.

It's not pretty.

INT. SOUTH HALLWAY, SECOND FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Jonathan exits the bathroom and heads down the hall. He passes the GREY DOOR.

A KNOCK makes him pause.

He looks back. There's nothing. He keeps going.

KNOCK. KNOCK.

He stops and follows the sound.

JONATHAN

Hello?

He slowly nears the GREY DOOR.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Is anyone there?

He brings his ear to the door and listens. Still nothing.

He raises his hand to the wood. *Knock, knock, knock.* There's no response. Jonathan tries the knob. It's locked.

He steps back and examines the hallway. Suddenly, there's a SCUTTling from inside.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

I'm Jonathan. What's your name?

No answer.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Were you the one waving at me?

Again, no answer.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
I hope I can meet you sometime.

A folded note slips out under the door.

He picks it up, unfolds it. Written there is a single word.

"leave"

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Jonathan serves himself from the array of fruit, fried sweet potato wedges, and fresh papaya juice.

Owen barely glances at him. Kipp feeds Kayla a puree. Trevor stuffs ham into his bread.

JONATHAN  
Where's Rosario?

TREVOR  
Out.

Owen finishes his cup of coffee and leaves without a word.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
Yeah, you too, have a nice day.  
(to Jonathan)  
Must be the hangover. How was the couch? Up to standard?

Kipp cleans the drip on Kayla's chin.

JONATHAN  
No complaints.

Kipp stacks his and Kayla's empty dishes into the sink. He gives a weak smile before wheeling Kayla out.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
I'm starting to get the feeling  
that I'm not wanted here.

TREVOR  
Does it matter? Charo's the one you  
need to win.

JONATHAN  
You were eavesdropping, weren't  
you?

TREVOR  
Who, me? Last night? Never.

Jonathan chuckles and lets it go.

JONATHAN  
Who lives up there in the south  
hall?

TREVOR  
Met Beatrice, did you? Chatty  
thing, that one.

JONATHAN  
She gave me this.

Jonathan slides over the folded note. Trevor opens it. He's genuinely stunned for a second, then recovers.

TREVOR  
Didn't think she had it in her. But  
lately I have been known to be  
wrong.

Trevor slides the note back.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
I wouldn't mind it. Bea's a little,  
you know.

Trevor circles a finger by his head. 'Cuckoo'. Jonathan doesn't buy it.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Kipp tightens his backpack. He kicks up the stand on his old bike until the rusty metal finally budes.

Rosario leans out the kitchen window, list and cash in hand.

ROSARIO  
Here. You can add whatever snacks  
you want.

Kipp takes it. He examines the contents of the list.

KIPP  
Are we buying extra?

ROSARIO  
Just follow the list.

Kipp stuffs the list into his pocket and looks up.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
Don't worry, I'll watch her.

Kipp slings his leg over the bike seat and rides off.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Rosario watches him go. She cuts two lemons in half and sets down the KNIFE. She squeezes them over a glass of water.

The pulpy liquid slowly drips down the side.

ROSARIO  
How are you feeling?

Rosario scoops in some honey. It dribbles in long strands.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry you feel that way.

She drops in a single, tiny TABLET. It fizzes and dissolves. She stirs it all, the metal spoon clinking around.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
But isn't it for the best?

Kayla is right there beside her, her head lolled to a side. Rosario gently squeezes Kayla's cheeks and her lips part.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
Slowly.

Rosario feeds her the lemonade in a spoon. Kayla's sight-line is veered away, and at its end, the KNIFE.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
I'm still fixing what you did.

That sharp blade, so close to the edge.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
So don't go putting ideas in your  
brother's head.

Just an arm's reach away--

But Rosario follows Kayla's eyes and spots the closeness of the KNIFE. She places it in the sink.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
That's not a pretty look.

Rosario feeds Kayla another dose.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

Jonathan stands over a bubbling fountain. Coins glisten in the water. His sight is trained down on a plaque:

*"In Loving Memory of Johann Strehle, Always In Our Hearts"*

JONATHAN  
It's very touching.

It takes a second for his expression to match his words.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
Thank you, Sheriff.

Sheriff Adler adjusts his belt. He's a step behind Jonathan.

SHERIFF ADLER  
Don't thank me. It was Maggie and some other ladies on the council, they ordered it a couple weeks ago, just came in today. It's the least we could do.

JONATHAN  
Is this the only reason you asked to meet?

Jonathan draws away from the fountain. The sheriff follows.

SHERIFF ADLER  
For the most part.

Jonathan waits. He won't volunteer any information. Kids play in the grass, a couple talks on a bench.

SHERIFF ADLER (CONT'D)  
I'm not one to beat around the bush, and since there's no delicate way to say this, so I'll just go ahead and ask. What exactly are you meaning here, Mr. Strehle?

JONATHAN  
I'm sorry?

SHERIFF ADLER  
Your grandfather owned more than half these buildings, and now you do. It's my job to look after the people of this town and their way of life, so you can see where there might be some concern.

Jonathan stops before his car.

JONATHAN

Sheriff, I assure you, I'm not here to kick anyone out or alter what my grandfather so painstakingly preserved.

Sheriff Adler visibly relaxes, his bulging belly spills.

SHERIFF ADLER

Good to hear, good to hear.

The Sheriff lingers.

JONATHAN

Is there anything else?

SHERIFF ADLER

No, no, I won't keep you. Just let me know if I can help. No ask is too big.

Jonathan considers the offer. He checks his watch.

JONATHAN

I've got a little while before my lawyer calls. How about I buy you a cup of coffee and you tell me about this place?

SHERIFF ADLER

Won't say no to that.

JONATHAN

Maybe you can tell me about my new landlord, as well.

Jonathan's cast his net.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Jonathan drives, the wind running through his hair.

He spots Kipp walking his bike up ahead, grocery bags hanging off the handles. He slows to a stroll beside him.

JONATHAN

You know, you're the second person I've meet like this. What happened?

KIPP

The chain popped.

Kipp keeps walking the bike. He stares ahead.

JONATHAN  
We're headed the same way. I could  
give you a ride.

KIPP  
Don't need it.

JONATHAN  
The food might spoil.

KIPP  
There's ice.

JONATHAN  
Not that much ice.

Water drips from the bags. Kipp stops, so does Jonathan.

KIPP  
What about my bike?

JONATHAN  
We'll make it fit.

Kipp doesn't have another choice.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - LATER

Kipp rides next to Jonathan. The bike is tucked wheels up in the backseat. Jonathan finally breaks the awkward silence.

JONATHAN  
How come you're not in school?

KIPP  
I'm taking a break.

JONATHAN  
And your parents don't mind?

Kipp doesn't answer. Jonathan's phone rings. "MARA" again.

KIPP  
Who's that?

JONATHAN  
An old friend.

KIPP  
Aren't you going to answer?

JONATHAN  
Why should I?

Kipp accept that reasoning. The ringing sputters and cuts out. No signal. It's a more comfortable silence, now.

45

EXT. YARD - DAY

45

Fire crackles inside a metal trash can. Mounds of curled, shrunken shapes crisp in the flames. Smoke trails to the sky.

Rosario prods at the embers with an iron poker. She holds an old shoebox at her waist. Sparks fly as the fire dances.

Kayla stares from the porch. Trevor watches from the doorway.

Rosario snaps up at the sound of a car. The convertible pulls in. Kipp unloads his bike. Jonathan wanders over.

JONATHAN  
Making s'mores?

ROSARIO  
Something like that.  
(to Kipp)  
Take the groceries inside. I'm almost done.

Kipp takes the bags inside. Jonathan leans over to see what's burning, but Rosario jabs the poker and puff of smoke rises.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
Careful. It's hot.

Jonathan follows the smoke with his eyes. It flows directly past Beatrice's window. There's no movement inside.

JONATHAN  
Nice fire pit.

ROSARIO  
The house doesn't take well to flames.

JONATHAN  
So I saw. Then carry on.

Rosario waits for Jonathan to enter, then opens the shoebox and pulls out a pair of ELEGANT, LEATHER GLOVES.

She looks to Beatrice's window and tosses them in the flames. Beatrice's shadow recedes. She'd been there the whole time.



The leather fingers curl and crisp in the blaze.

INT. FOYER - DAY

Jonathan is sitting on the sofa, typing on his laptop. The floorboards creak behind him. He lowers his screen and turns.

JONATHAN  
I thought you were Trevor.

Rosario is carrying a rectangular, dirt-stained bundle.

ROSARIO  
How come?

JONATHAN  
That guy's kind of everywhere,  
isn't he? Sorry I'm spread out, I  
don't really have a room.

Jonathan moves aside his files and duffel bag, but Rosario takes a far seat. She keeps the bundle in her lap.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
I was hoping I'd see you this  
morning, but you disappeared.

ROSARIO  
I had some errands to run.

JONATHAN  
(re: the bundle)  
What's that?

ROSARIO  
An heirloom.

She adds nothing more.

JONATHAN  
You've yet to ask me anything about  
myself. Why is that?

ROSARIO  
Is my disinterest that obvious?

JONATHAN  
I did ask the Sheriff about you. He  
had a lot to say.

ROSARIO  
Sheriff Adler, really? Like what?

Jonathan puts his laptop aside. His full attention on her.

JONATHAN

He said you're said you're sweet,  
caring, and that you've been here  
as long as he can remember. I'll  
believe one of those.

Rosario is unfazed.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Didn't sound like he really knew  
you.

ROSARIO

I don't go out.

JONATHAN

Did you finish your burning?

ROSARIO

I did.

JONATHAN

Correct me if I'm wrong, and trust  
me, I know how silly this is going  
to sound, but why do I sense this  
conspiracy to scare me away?

ROSARIO

You've simply caught us at a  
difficult time. That's all.

JONATHAN

Because of Hartford?

ROSARIO

Exactly.

JONATHAN

I met him, you know?

Rosario tries to hide her surprise, but it's too late.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Yes, when I was just coming to  
town. He was conflicted, and even  
warned me away.

ROSARIO

But you didn't listen.

Jonathan leans in. Peering.

JONATHAN

What are you hiding in this house?

Rosario doesn't crack.

ROSARIO

Water damage. Mold. Maybe a bit of termites. No treasure trove, as you can tell. In fact, I was surprised to still find you here, Mr. Strehle. Men of your conviction rarely last.

JONATHAN

My conviction?

ROSARIO

The sentimental kind. You try to buy a house you've never seen for a man who'll never see it. How else would you name it?

JONATHAN

And if I say that's not true?

ROSARIO

Then you lied to me, Mr. Strehle.

Rosario is finally interested. Jonathan opens his wallet and takes out the grainy photo of the TOWERING HOUSE.

JONATHAN

This is the only thing my grandfather gave me when he passed. Everything else, the lawyers handled.

He gives the photo to Rosario. She studies it, turns it over.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Before then, he'd never mentioned it. So I figured I'd come here myself, maybe see what it was that drove him.

She brushes her thumb over the smudged writing on the back.

ROSARIO

And?

JONATHAN

So far, all I've found is the town  
he kept like some twisted zoo,  
where the people worship someone  
they've never even met.

ROSARIO

You don't think he merits it?

JONATHAN

Johann Strehle? The man was a  
tyrant. He didn't believe in  
charity. Or kindness. Or family.

ROSARIO

That's very sad.

Rosario slides the picture back to Jonathan.

JONATHAN

It was effective. Not many can  
boast his real estate empire. And  
yet, he could never obtain the one  
property he wanted most. His  
childhood home.

Jonathan folds the photo, once, twice, and again with force.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Now there's a sentimentalist I  
didn't expect. He bought every  
single piece of land in a 10 mile  
radius. Except the one we're  
standing on.

ROSARIO

You're telling me this, why? So  
I'll gauge the price?

JONATHAN

It's not the price, that much, I  
can tell. There's some other reason  
you won't sell, which I don't  
understand. Why not get rid of the  
house you so obviously despise?

Rosario stays silent, not a hint of denial on her face.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

You won't tell me, that's fine.  
I'll just stay until I know, and  
then I'll convince you. But who  
knows, maybe you'll shoo me off  
first.

ROSARIO  
Like a game?

JONATHAN  
That's now what I'd call it.

ROSARIO  
And what will you do with the house  
if you win?

JONATHAN  
I'll bulldoze it to the ground.

Rosario laughs at his frankness.

ROSARIO  
It's still called sentimentality,  
even if the sentiments aren't nice.

JONATHAN  
Where do I sign?

ROSARIO  
I want to show you something.

Rosario begins to unwrap the dirt-stained bundle on her lap.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
I don't lie to my residents, I want  
you to remember that.

She opens the ANTIQUE LEDGER to the last written page and  
hands it to Jonathan. It's full of blood-red, cursive names.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
This ledger has been with the house  
since it was built.

Jonathan reads them. The last name written is "*Owen Hills*."

Above that, "*Kipp Jennings & Kayla Jennings*."

Then, "*Trevor Fernsby*".

Then, "*Paul Brooks III*".

And some lines above that, "*Edward Hartford Sr.*".

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
It's a record of every lodger we've  
ever had.

JONATHAN  
What about you?

ROSARIO

I'm an owner. It's different.

Jonathan scans back through countless, filled pages, amazed. A couple names here-and-there are completely scratched out.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)

This is an old, unbending  
tradition. Every person who's ever  
lived here has signed their name.

Jonathan finally reaches the first page. The start of it all. Rosario gently closes the cover and taps it with a finger.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)

And Johann Strehle isn't one of  
them.

Now it's Jonathan struck by the truth.

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

Owen leans over the railing. He sips from a bottle of Jack as he eyes Jonathan's car. The bottle's almost empty.

The front door opens. It's Jonathan checking his phone.

OWEN

There's no signal.

Jonathan tenses, he hadn't seen him. But Owen makes no sign of moving and Jonathan relaxes.

JONATHAN

Yeah, I guess I knew that. Doesn't  
hurt to double check.

OWEN

You leaving?

JONATHAN

Just getting some air.

OWEN

That's too bad.

Owen takes another swig.

OWEN (CONT'D)

A guy like you doesn't have  
someplace better to be?

JONATHAN  
You'd think so.

Jonathan checks one last time before putting his phone away.  
Owen observes him, then goes back to his drink.

OWEN  
Ever wish you could go back and  
change just a single mistake?

JONATHAN  
Sure.

OWEN  
One choice that decided your life?

JONATHAN  
You think I'm making a mistake?

Owen laughs.

OWEN  
Sign, don't sign. If you're here  
it's 'cause you've already made it.

Jonathan thinks.

JONATHAN  
Then what do I have to lose?

Owen gulps down the last sip and CHUCKS his bottle into the  
darkness. It shatters close to Jonathan's car.

OWEN  
Careful. There's glass.

Owen stops at the doorway.

OWEN (CONT'D)  
Whatever you're running from, it'll  
find you.

He slinks inside. Jonathan isn't bothered.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Rosario opens an ornate box. She removes an ivory stemmed,  
gold dip pen, and a small pot of RED ink.

ROSARIO  
You can still change your mind.

The ANTIQUE LEDGER lays open before Jonathan.

JONATHAN  
I already signed.

ROSARIO  
Not where it matters. These can  
disappear.

Rosario closes the folder over the contract papers.

JONATHAN  
I've yet to see Mr. Brooks.

ROSARIO  
He'll turn up eventually.

Jonathan inspects the artistry of the pen and the pot of ink.

JONATHAN  
An eerie tradition, isn't it?

ROSARIO  
Some might say mystical.

Jonathan dips the pen into the ink. He taps it against the side. *Clink, clink, clink.* Rosario watches him.

He brings the pen to the page. To the next open line. And it hovers there, a millimeter off the page. Hesitating.

ROSARIO (CONT'D)  
What's wrong?

JONATHAN  
All these questions and not a  
single guarantee.

CUT TO:

INT. SOUTH HALLWAY, SECOND FLOOR - NIGHT

The GREY DOOR gently parts. An empty bowl peeks though.

ROSARIO (V.O.)  
Some have come with doubts. Others  
with their fears.

The hand holding it is completely veiled in OLD BURNS. Green veins peer through the webbed, translucent skin.



INT. UNKNOWN LOCATION - NIGHT

Shackles close over a thin, gaunt wrist, binding it to a bed.  
The fisted hand doesn't move.

ROSARIO (V.O.)  
One comes to heal, while another,  
to be healed.

A sheet is thrown over, and as it settles, the fist relaxes.  
And the tiny glimmer of a nail clipper FILE shines through.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Trevor sits against a bookshelf, a pen and book in hand.

ROSARIO (V.O.)  
Everyone gets something different,  
Mr. Strauss.

He peacefully covers a page in ink, erasing the print that's  
underneath.

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

A silent night is interrupted by the sound of METAL sliding.  
A wood cover THROWN open.

ROSARIO (V.O.)  
That's why your stay will be what  
you make it.

Visible through the railing, pressing on the grass, a dark,  
blurry figure DRAGS itself out of sight.

BACK TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

ROSARIO  
I can't promise anything more than  
that.

JONATHAN  
Fair enough.

Jonathan puts the pen to paper and starts writing his name.  
It's a rough and rhythmic sound.

"Jonathan..."

*Tick, tick--*

EXT. GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

*--tick, tick.*

Hartford is kneeled before the graves, his back hunched, barely moving with his breath.

INTERCUT KITCHEN/GRAVEYARD

*"...Johann..."*

*TICK, TICK, TICK, TICK.*

A feeble gasp leaves Hartford's lips. A quiver curls his neck.

*"...Strehle"*

His shape SLUMPS over, sprawled and immobile. Finite.

TOCK.

CUT TO:

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

All hands on the grandfather clock align to the sky.

NO BELLS.

The pendulum is frozen mid swing.

BACK TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jonathan sets the nib pen down. He blows on the wet writing.

JONATHAN

There.

ROSARIO

See? Now that wasn't so bad.

Rosario takes the ledger. *"Jonathan Johann Strehle"* sits neatly at the base of a crimson column of names.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

The grandfather clock is still frozen in motion. Not a single hand has moved. The pendulum remains stuck to a side.

A moment passes. Then another.

Gears turn inside, and something finally CLICKS.

The pendulum falls back into its swing, and the seconds hand moves again.

*Tick, tick, tick, tick.*

Except now, it's going in REVERSE.

EXT. PORCH/LAWN - DAY

A cricket chirps on the porch steps. Suddenly, a ball comes BOUNCING and JINGLING down. The cricket scrams.

The ball rolls and rolls until it slows to a stop by a pair of penny loafers. A small hand picks it up.

It's a YOUNG BOY (11). Bony legs stick out of his schoolboy shorts. He's got a GASH in one knee and a BRUISE on his eye.

They're the same eyes as Jonathan's.

He shakes the ball. It JINGLES again.

YOUNG GIRL (O.S.)  
Hey, that's mine.

A YOUNG GIRL (10, African American) comes bounding out in Mary Jane shoes and a Peter Pan collar dress.

The Young Boy stares at her, then he stares at the house.

The paint is fresh, the wood is smooth. This is the TOWERING HOUSE at it's prime, the grainy photo come alive.

YOUNG BOY  
I found it.

YOUNG GIRL  
Yeah, in my yard.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)  
Penny, now don't go causing trouble.

The WOMAN steps out onto the porch. Her modest swing dress flows in the wind. Her hair is pulled into a bun.

It's a YOUNGER ROSARIO (early 20s), with a sweet and hopeful disposition.

PENNY

He started it.

YOUNGER ROSARIO

We will be kind to our neighbors.  
What's your name, boy?

YOUNG BOY

Johann.

Younger Rosario spies his blackish bruise and bleeding knee. She masks her concern.

YOUNGER ROSARIO

Well I'm Rosario and this little rascal here is Penny. Johann, how would you like to come in for some fresh baked caramel cake? And we can get you a bandage for that knee? How's that sound?

YOUNG BOY

Fine, I guess.

Younger Rosario smiles as both kids scurry in, then shuts the door.

Hanging there in shiny metal is the number "23".