**🩸 Chapter 7: The Morning After**

*Soundtrack Cue: “The Rip” — Portishead into “Almost Blue” — Chet Baker*  
*Fluids: Sweat, Breath, Rain*  
*Ritual Tag: Sacred Aftercare / Shame Spiral / First Crack*

Elena woke like a dog kicked awake in a stranger’s bed.

The motel sheets tangled between her thighs—cold now, damp, smelling of sweat, cigarette ash, and the wet-spit edge of sex not meant to survive the morning.

For a heartbeat, she floated.

Half-dream, half-surrender.  
Breathing in Vivien’s ghost.

Then the weight of the night snapped the sheet tight against her skin.

The ache between her legs.  
The scratch at the back of her throat.  
The memory of Vivien’s mouth—patient, brutal—mapping every shame she thought she’d locked away.

Elena didn’t move.  
Stillness was all she had left.

Across the bed, Vivien Vale watched her.

Not smirking.  
Not speaking.

Just **watching**—like a woman memorizing the last thing she knows she’s not allowed to want.

The motel hum pressed around them—flickering neon bleeding through the window blinds, the radiator clicking like teeth grinding in sleep.

Vivien’s voice broke the silence like a match snapped in gloved fingers:

“We could stay. Nobody would find us here.”

Elena’s chest tightened.  
The answer tasted like iron.

“I can’t,” she said, voice too thin to be armor.

Vivien didn’t argue.

Didn’t reach for her.

The clock radio shrieked into the quiet—static, then a voice too clean to belong here:

"Mayor Falco promises crackdown on vice... sweeping arrests... restoring moral order..."

Vivien’s smile cut sideways across her mouth.

“Clock radio,” she muttered. “Some poor bastard set it to ruin our morning.”

Elena snorted before she could stop herself.

The sound hurt coming out.

She moved like the bed had already condemned her—peeling herself from the sheets, dragging the motel stink with her.

Every piece of clothing felt wrong against her skin.

The panties twisted at the waist.  
The bra biting into skin still raw from worship.

She buttoned her shirt wrong, missed the seam.

Vivien’s voice ghosted over her:

“You missed a button.”

Elena fixed it without looking up.  
Thumb fumbling the cheap plastic like a woman sewing herself shut.

"I know," she muttered.

A pause.

Vivien’s voice dropped, low and terrible:

"You looked beautiful last night."

Elena froze.

The laugh that tore out of her chest wasn’t human.

It was broken glass and old prayers.

“Don’t make it more than it was.”

Vivien didn’t.

Just lay there—still naked, still watching—as if she could memorize the last second Elena still belonged to her.

When Elena grabbed her coat, something small and slick tumbled out and spun across the filthy floor.

**Crimson Psalm.**

The lipstick clattered once against the leg of the nightstand.

A final offering.

Elena bent down, fingers clumsy, skin flushing hot against the cold.

She scooped it up and shoved it back into her pocket without a word.

Some sins don't get confessed.

They just burn under your ribs until breathing tastes like blood.

At the door, Elena hesitated.

Turned back once.

Vivien’s gaze didn’t flinch.

"Thank you," Elena said, voice cracking like a kneecap on tile.

Vivien nodded once.

No smile.  
No forgiveness.

Elena stepped into the rain.

The door clicked shut behind her like a throat sealing a secret.

**The City**

The rain didn’t fall.  
It **punished**.

It hammered her skin raw, forcing her to taste the motel on her tongue again—the sweat, the cheap soap, the coppery sweetness of betrayal.

She lit a cigarette with hands that trembled at the edges.

The first drag scorched her lungs clean.

Or tried to.

The city bled around her.

Neon ran into the gutters like sick rivers.  
Steam ghosted up from the manholes—thick, hot, sour.

A payphone screamed down the block.  
High and animal, ringing against the concrete like it had been calling since the world ended.

Elena didn’t move toward it.

She pressed her hand against her pocket instead—feeling the lipstick there like a loaded weapon nobody had taught her how to fire.

Not a badge.  
Not a gun.

Just a smear of shame shaped like a mouth she had kissed without permission.

"You’re a cop," she whispered into the rain.

"You’re a fucking cop."

The words didn’t even sting anymore.

They just clung to her like wet wool.

She crushed the cigarette into a puddle oil-slicked with neon regret.

The payphone kept ringing.  
The city didn’t care.

The city never did.

Elena walked.

Each step soaking her boots, her skin, her memory.

**Precinct — Later That Day**

The station house smelled like wet wool, rotted coffee, and lives pressed too long into polyester uniforms.

Fluorescent lights buzzed overhead like flies over a corpse nobody wanted to move.

Elena sat behind her desk, breathing shallow against the rising stink.

A stale mug of coffee sweated against her fingertips.

Gallagher slumped into the chair across from her, balancing a half-eaten doughnut like it owed him money.

"You look like a cat someone tried to drown," he said, voice bright as a razor blade.

Elena smirked out of habit, not want.

Gallagher sipped his coffee, eyes sliding sideways at her like a snake casing a broken bird.

“So," he said. "Funny thing."

Her muscles coiled.

"I went to pull that transcript from the Vale interview."

She blew smoke across the table.

Watched it writhe like something dying.

"Yeah?"

"Gone," Gallagher said, and smiled like a man sitting on a secret.

"Poof. Like your virtue."

He laughed.

Elena didn't.

Gallagher leaned back, chair creaking, the precinct sounds thinning into white noise around them.

"Janko’s hot. Wants a re-transcription. From the tape."

He shrugged, casual.

Deadly.

Elena flicked ash into the tray.  
Missed.

The ash floated down onto her paperwork like black snow.

"You mind pulling the cassette?" Gallagher said, all innocence.

Standard procedure, after all.

Sure.

Sure.

Elena lit another cigarette off the last one.

Blew smoke into his smirk like a curse.

"Peachy," she said, when he asked if she was okay.

Gallagher stood up slow.

Wiped powdered sugar onto her reports.

Walked away without looking back.

But Elena felt him watching anyway.

The station air stuck to her skin like motel sweat.

And outside, the city howled under the bruised sky.

**Elsewhere — Nightfall**

Vivien Vale moved like smoke bleeding under a locked door.

The rain slicked her legs where the trench coat gapped open—bare skin humming with the city's filth, the city's prayers.

She waited across from the peepshow theater, mouth tilted into a smile nobody earned anymore.

Through the fogged glass she saw him.

Slick hair. Cheap shoes.

Left hand flashing a silver ring under the neon rot.

Falco’s men marked themselves without meaning to.

And Vivien’s hands remembered how to read those marks.

The Mob was just a shield.

Noise.

The rot lived higher.

Closer to pulpits than alleyways.

Vivien’s fingers brushed the lipstick tucked against her thigh.

Crimson Psalm.

A psalm she wrote one body at a time.

Ellis would’ve wanted blood.

He had wanted memory.

Vivien gave him both.

Tonight, another man would gasp her name too late to survive it.

Tonight, another sliver of truth would slip free, bleeding, gasping.

Vivien stepped off the curb.

Rain caught the hem of her coat like fingers.

She pushed the peepshow door open with a hand steady as worship.

The city swallowed her whole.

It always did.