

NOT BY BLOOD

Screenplay by
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Based upon the novel *The Frame* by
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NOT BY BLOOD

BLACK SCREEN - a THUDDING, muffled, rhythmic SOUND...

MARC'S VOICE (V.O.)

The heartbeat contains more
knowledge about the organ in the
pauses between the beat than in the
beat itself...

FADE IN:

EXT. WOODED PARK TRAIL - DAY

RUNNING SHOES... pounding down on a trail.

MARC'S VOICE (V.O.)

It is these interims, these times
of assessment... which are perhaps
the most important to listen to.

TILT UP to reveal MARC BEDNAR, 40's, decked out in serious
runner's wear, jogging along the path.

THE WOODS envelops Marc as he picks up his pace.

MARC'S VOICE (V.O.)

The space between each breath...
each heartbeat... each step... must
be just as revered - if not more so
- than the action itself--

MICHAEL'S VOICE (O.S.)

-- Moishe Bednar!

Marc slows his pace, reverie lost. He glances around to see--

A muscular MAN (MICHAEL PERELLI, 40's) and an athletic WOMAN
emerge from another path. Michael smiles, taking in Marc.

MICHAEL

Bet you haven't heard someone call
you that in a while, huh?

MARC

(dawning recognition)
... Michael?

Michael laughs, draws him in for a hug. History clearly
hangs between them.

MARC

Hey... what are you up to?

MICHAEL

I would say 'no good,' but it's not true. I work as a personal trainer now, over at Body of Fitness.

(gives him card)

Call me, yeah? We'll catch up.

MARC

Wow- that's... good to hear.

Michael nods. Marc seems flustered. The woman awaits.

MICHAEL

Oh - Marc - my client, Julie.
Julie, meet my buddy, my brother -
Mr. Marc Bednar. Aka 'Moishe.'

Marc eyes Michael a beat, shakes her hand briskly.

MARC

Hello.

(back to Michael)

Well... it's really good to see you, Michael.

MICHAEL

Is it?

Michael's eyes seem to bore into him.

MARC

Well. I gotta --

MICHAEL

-- oh, yeah. You probably gotta get to your article or something...

(to Julie)

This kid is a big shot columnist for Runner's World magazine.

MARC

(nodding, uneasy)

Yeah. Speaking of... don't want to lose my momentum...

MICHAEL

'Course not.

(giving him a card)

I would love to catch up, though.

MARC

Sure. Sounds good.

Agitated, Marc starts to run in place.

MARC (CONT'D)

Good to meet you.

MICHAEL

Let's do it again soon, huh?

Marc nods, leaves Michael quickly behind in a sprint. He shoots a look back and sees them jogging off the other direction. Marc stops on the grade... looks back again...

Michael's form being swallowed by a setting SUN.

MARC (V.O.)

That was the first time I'd seen of him since that long string of summers. Since the time when Michael Perelli's life became mine.

Back to MARC'S SHOES. The SOUND of an ICE CREAM TRUCK melody begins to build... DIRT segues to SIDEWALK... the FEET and SHOES losing age...

EXT. INNER CITY - STREET - DAY (PAST)

... racing along a sidewalk, heading toward an ICE CREAM TRUCK, parked across a BUSY STREET. YOUNG MARC, 10, nimbly cuts through moving cars.

MOMMON (O.S.)

IN HEBREW:

Moishe be careful!

Marc looks back and waves to his grandmother, MOMMON, leaning out of the window of a BROWNSTONE BUILDING... over a sign reading ZEYDA'S GROCERY.

Marc gives her an impatient "okay sign." He nears the window of the TRUCK. At the window is YOUNG MICHAEL, 11, with carrot-colored hair and a wiry frame.

MICHAEL

I just say you're marking up your goods. That's all.

VENDOR

Hey - you got the same overhead I do, you'd do the same thing, kid. Now either buy it or beat it. Let's go.

Michael eyes the vendor darkly. The vendor shakes his head looks to Marc.

VENDOR (CONT'D)
What can I get ya, chief?

MICHAEL
Hold on - you're telling me you won't sell me a Bomb Pop at cost but would instead have me go away?

VENDOR
(ignoring him - to Marc)
Kid - speak. What'll it be?

MICHAEL
(readying to leave)
I tell you, that's one helluva way to treat a Perelli. I'll just say that.

VENDOR
Whoa-whoa. What'd you say? You're a Perelli?

The Vendor's demeanor changes. Michael says nothing. Marc watches the exchange. The vendor grabs a pop sickle.

VENDOR (CONT'D)
Here you go, buddy. On the house.

MICHAEL
You sure?

VENDOR
Yeah, yeah. It's been a rough day, is all. Got a lot on my mind. G'head. Here --

Michael takes it. Looks at Marc. Back to Vendor.

MICHAEL
And one for my friend here, too.

The Vendor hesitates. Michael hands his to Marc.

VENDOR
Sure thing.

The Vendor hands him another. Michael pulls off the wrapper, stuffs it into the window and saunters off. He shoots Marc a winky grin and walks through traffic, effortlessly navigating the cars.

Marc hesitates a moment, then begins following, unwrapping the popsickle as he goes.

MARC (V.O.)

From that point we were pretty much inseparable for four years.

INT. MARC'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Marc is at his desk, in his apartment. He has paused long enough to talk to his girlfriend. LELA, in sweats, who has paused in a cleaning mode.

MARC

It just sort of shook me for a minute, okay? We good now?

LELA

You're sure that's all that's bothering you?

MARC

I'm sure, babe. Well, if you want to count the fifteen deadlines I have, that too. But, yeah. That's all.

Lela nods. He extends his arm. She lets herself be pulled in for a hug. He holds her, his eyes distracted.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Marc and Lela eat together. He is going over some copy, making notations. She sips wine, studies him.

LELA

So what happened after four years?

MARC

(glancing up)
... hm?

LELA

That separated you and Michael. What happened?

MARC

(indicating papers)
Lela... lemme just... can I--?

He holds up his work. Lela nods, eats. He tries to go back to work, but can't.

MARC (CONT'D)

I dunno. Michael's was the first place I'd go when I went to see my grandparents. But one day I showed up and there was a new family there. Nobody knew how to find him...

Marc drifts... then shrugs, busies himself in eating.

MARC

When I saw him again, Michael had changed...

The CRACK of of BALL on a BAT--

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

YOUNG MARC, now 16, wearing a yarmulke, runs back to catch a ball. It flies over his head and bounces into a woods as the batter circles the bases. BOYS have collected for a neighborhood game.

Marc hops a fence, heads deep into the brush. His eyes adjust, as he catches sight of the ball on the ground, next to an overturned BEER BOTTLE.

As Marc reaches for it, a meaty black HAND juts in and halts him. A menacing-looking teen, ROYCE (TORCH), glares at him.

ROYCE

This some kind of Jew-boy league we got goin' here?

Marc notices another teen - SKAR - and several YOUTHS emerging from the trees.

SKAR

Maybe he's one of those Matzo Balls we keep hearing about.
(kicking the bottle)
And now our beer's baptized it.

Skar laughs grabs up the ball. They toss it between them, forming a ring around Marc. The others CALL for him. Marc stands his ground.

ROYCE

What you wanna give me for this, boy? Huh? What you wanna give me?

SKAR
Gonna have to buy it back now, man.

ROYCE
Speak! What you wanna give me?

MICHAEL (O.S.)
Hey -- Torch!

Everyone looks over, to see Michael, 16, emerging from the trees. He is sinewy, with cropped hair and dark clothes.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Who made the rule that you have to be an asshole all the time? Huh? 'Cause they lied to you, man.

ROYCE
Stay outta this, Spiderman.

MICHAEL
(stepping closer)
Stay outta this? Man, I'm *in* it already. This is my family you're fucking with. And that means you're fucking with me.

Michael shoots Marc a grin. Marc is relieved.

ROYCE
This ain't none o' your business.

MICHAEL
Business. Okay. Let's talk business.

He steps up, Skar and the others back up. Michael gets nose-to-nose with Royce.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Here's the deal: You take your pussy-ass and your ladies the fuck away from here, or you get ZERO of my business. You dig?

Royce eyes him a moment, looks back at Marc, nods, and motions for the others. They disperse, wilted. Michael looks to Marc. Marc shakes his head, smiles.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Long time, no see, brother.

INT. RUNNERS JOURNAL OFFICES - DAY

Adult Marc furiously transposes from a pad into his computer. A CALL rings on his land line. He picks it up.

MARC
This is Marc.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
Hey, man - it's Michael.

Marc's work flow halts, fingers hesitating on the keyboard.

MARC
Yeah. Mike. What can I do for you?

MICHAEL (V.O.)
Well... was just... wondering if
you had time for lunch today.

MARC
Ah, boy. Afraid I can't, man.
Super busy this week. Can we check
in next week?

MICHAEL (V.O.)
(pause)
Sure, man, y'know and if you're
feeling spontaneous anytime...

CUT TO:

INT. TAVERN - SAME TIME

Michael, hunched over the BAR, sits with his phone and a couple of empty glasses before him.

MICHAEL
... I mean feel free to call,
y'know. Anytime. This is my cell.

MUSIC comes on a jukebox. Michael frowns at someone.

INT. RUNNERS WORLD OFFICES

Marc listens for a moment to the twangy MUSIC.

MARC

... sure. Just let me get through
a few things and I'll be in touch.
That sound good?

MICHAEL

Will do. And it was good to --

Marc hangs up abruptly. He sits staring at the phone. The
sound of a SIREN starts to build --

INT. ZEYDA'S APARTMENT - DUSK

CANDLES illuminate the room. Young Marc is hurrying down the
HALLWAY... through the LIVING ROOM. Mommon follows after
him, wiping her hands on a towel. They pass ZEYDA, his
grandfather, in a chair, lowering the newspaper. The SIREN
grows louder. Marc moves toward the window, stares out.

POV - Below POLICE CARS crawl through the streets. A couple
of OFFICERS are prowling around with flashlights.

Marc looks off, into the buildings and alleys, and sees --

POV - A FIGURE slinking across a roof... ducking away.

Marc finds a flashlight in a drawer, moves toward a DOOR.

ZEYDA

Where are you going?

MARC

Gonna make sure the doors and
windows are locked in the store.

ZEYDA

Good. Just be careful, Moishe.
And don't turn on any lights.

Marc nods, takes a candle, and heads down some steps.

INT. ZEYDA'S STORE - DUSK

Marc steps inside, approaches the WINDOW. The SIRENS wail
through the city. He locks the door, stands looking out for
a moment -- when a hand clamps over his mouth. Marc freezes.

HOARSE VOICE

One peep and I'll rip your tongue
out...

Marc complies, puts up his hands. He is whirled around by a pair of hands.

Michael, sweaty, grins at him. Marc whaps him in the chest.

MARC
You asshole.

Marc drops his voice. Looks Michael over.

MARC (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

MICHAEL
Me? Y'know... I just realized lately that I've never been into see your store. That's all. Thought I'd surprise you.

MARC
Well, you did.

Michael's smile is contagious. Marc shakes his head, then notices the backpack Michael wears around his shoulder.

MARC
Hey-- what is--

MICHAEL
(avoiding the question)
Bro - can I get some water from you something...?

ZEYDA (O.S.)
Marc? Who are you talking to?

Zeyda stands in the stairwell, looking down.

Marc looks at Michael, suspicion starting to creep in.

MARC
It's my friend, grandpa.

ZEYDA
Doesn't your friend know to respect our Sabbath?

MARC
He'll just be here a minute... until it's safer outside.

Marc and Michael trade a knowing look.

Zeyda comes downstairs further, eyes taking in Michael.

ZEYDA

Michael.

MICHAEL

Yes sir. You've heard of me?

ZEYDA

You're the fellow who saved Marc's
tucous in the woods. That was you?

Michael looks at Marc. He shrugs.

MICHAEL

Hey - anything for my brother.

Zeyda considers. Then - a RAPPING SOUND.

A POLICEMAN is peering inside the window. tapping with his
nightstick. Marc notices Michael ducking deeper into the
shadows. Neither moves as policeman taps again.

Puzzled, Zeyda comes down the stairs, shooting Marc a look as
he moves for the door. Opens it.

ZEYDA

Can I help you?

POLICEMAN

Sorry to trouble you, sir. I saw
some people moving around in the
dark in here...

The Policeman looks past Zeyda, taking in Marc.

ZEYDA

No lights for Sabbath, sorry.

The officer gives him the once-over, looking around.

POLICEMAN

Yeah, well. Three punks in ski
masks robbed the hardware store.
We think they're still in the
neighborhood somewhere.

Marc looks around and notices that Michael has vanished. He
hears a click and sees the door to Zeyda's office shutting.

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)
 Well... if you see anyone that
 looks suspicious... we would like
 to know.

Zeyda looks to Marc. A moment between them.

ZEYDA
 It's just me and my grandson here.
 My wife's upstairs.

POLICEMAN
 (nods)
 Sorry to bother you. Have a good
 night.

Zeyda nods, and ushers him out the door. He stands,
 thinking.

ZEYDA
 Moishe... tell your friend he can
 come out of my office now. Maybe
 he would like to join us for
 dinner.

Marc nods, as Zeyda moves up the steps. He looks back toward
 the closed office door.

INT. ZEYDA'S APARTMENT - DUSK

Michael sits awkwardly at the TABLE, now donned in a
 yarmulke. Zeyda is at the head of the table, CHANTING from a
 prayer book, as Michael's eyes dart around, uncomfortable.
 Marc looks amused at his unease.

AT THE TABLE - LATER

Mommon passes Michael a plate explaining in Hebrew the dish.
 Marc translates.

MARC
 And this is matzo ball soup.

MICHAEL
 Oh, yeah, yeah - matzo. Like how
 they call the Jew gang the matzo
 balls, right?

Marc looks uneasily at Zeyda, who stares into his plate.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
I'm... I didn't mean to--

Mommon senses the tension and taps Michael on the shoulder.

MOMMON
Fun vanen shtamt ir?

MARC
She wants to know where you moved to?

MICHAEL
Oh - another city. After my mom was laid off...

Zeyda TRANSLATES. Mommon listens, suspect.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
But I had to come back... I dunno. I can't keep too far away from a friend like Marc, here.

ZEYDA
Yes. Moishe is certainly a trusted friend.

MICHAEL
"Moishe?"

MARC
It's my Hebrew name. Come on, finish up.

ZEYDA
It's another term for Moses.

MICHAEL
(tickled)
Moses? Yeah? Like walkin' through the middle of the sea, Moses?

MARC
That's the one.

Zeyda is looking less amused. Michael senses the discomfort.

MICHAEL
Well. I really thank you folks for this meal. It sure is nice to feel included in something...

ZEYDA

A good meal keeps a good man off
bad streets. And any friend of
Marc's we consider a family member.

Michael meets his eyes a moment, then keeps eating. Zeyda and Marc trade a look across the table. They hear some sniffing. Both glance over.

Michael is trying to avoid crying. A tear drips onto his plate. More tears run down his hands.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry.... sorry, folks...

Michael wipes his face, struggles for his composure. Marc and Zeyda look moved.

EXT. ROOFTOP - EARLY EVENING

Michael and Marc sit on the edge of the roof, their backs against one another, gazing out over a vista of staggered row homes, as the last trails of the sun disappear. Michael seems troubled. He lights a cigarette.

MICHAEL

So... you buy all that crap, huh?

MARC

Hmm?

MICHAEL

I mean, it's just a different form... but all that ritualistic garbage... having to do something at a certain time in a certain way or God will look down on us... it's the same shit they try to feed us in church, man...

Marc turns to look back at him, waiting for more.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Don't get me wrong -- I love your grandfolks. Good people. But the whole religious thing...

(drifts)

Guess I just don't see the reason to have faith anymore.

MARC

After you lost your brother?

Michael looks at him, at first harshly. Then, he lightens.

MICHAEL

It wasn't the losing him. It was the way. He was butchered at Hamburger Hill. He was betrayed by some guys he trusted.

(beat)

Tony had this utility belt. Every time he saw a sunrise he'd put a notch in it for each day he lived. When they mailed the belt back with his body, there were 340 notches. 25 days shy of the end of his tour. The damn thing is still hanging in my closet.

Mommon calls from the stairwell --

MOMMON (O.S.)

Moishe! Es shpet. Es iz fertl nokh tsen. Dir geinin shlofn?

Marc gets up, brushes off.

MARC

She said it's ten-fifteen. Time to go to bed. It's late for them.

MICHAEL

Late? Brother, we're just getting started.

Marc doesn't move. Michael shrugs.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Okay. Thanks. For everything.

MARC

Hey - what are friends for?

Marc offers his hand. Michael lets him help him up.

EXT. ZEYDA'S STORE - NIGHT

Marc sees off Michael, who is strapping on his bag. Michael pulls out a few bills, offers some to Marc.

MICHAEL

Here - get yourself some ice cream or something.

MARC

Hmm? Oh, no - I can't take that.
Thank you.

MICHAEL

What? Against Sabbath rules?
G'head--

After a long consideration, Marc takes them. Michael grins and heads off. Marc follows.

INT. ZEYDA'S STORE - LATER

Marc sees Michael to the door.

MARC

You gonna be okay out there?

MICHAEL

Me? I'll be fine. This is my
turf. Besides - I have a little
friend who rides along with me...

Michael reaches back and pulls a blade - a serrated, intimidating-looking knife.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Meet my sweet. "The Slasher. We've
survived several street encounters
together. And people know how I
handle her...

Marc is unsettled, but tries not to show it.

MARC

Looks wicked.

MICHAEL

Mm. May you never know the full
power of its wickedness...

Michael's look unsettles Marc. Michael sheathes it, winks, pats him, walks out. Marc watches as he crosses the street... his form vanishing into the shadows. He is troubled to his soul...

-- a CELL PHONE RINGS --

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. MARC'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Adult Marc sits up, dazed. He has fallen asleep on the couch in front of a movie with Lela. The PHONE rings again. Marc grabs it up, stares at the readout. His demeanor shifts.

LELA (O.S.)
It's him. Isn't it?

Marc nods his demeanor growing visibly agitated.

LELA
Honey... maybe you need to
reconnect with this person somehow
right now. Who knows why...?

MARC
No.

Lela sits up, alarmed by his shift in tone.

MARC (CONT'D)
I... I'm sorry, Lela, I... I spent
a long time trying to get out of
the vortex of Michael Perelli. I
want to keep my distance from all
that...
(beat)
You have to understand that Michael
gives just as easily as he takes
away...

Lela considers. She turns off the TV, turns on a lamp.

LELA
This isn't about bringing Michael
back into your life. It's about
something else... isn't it?

Marc thinks a moment, then, shaking his head, gets up.

MARC
I need to go for a run.

LELA
Marc --

MARC
I *don't* want to talk right now!

Marc heads out the door, leaving her flummoxed.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Marc jogs along... lost in thought... we leave him below... as the STREET ages... to a previous time... we move into the window of a BROWNSTONE.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ZEYDA'S APARTMENT - MICHAEL'S ROOM - DUSK

Young Marc sits at a beaten desk, trying to peck out prose on a manual typewriter. He looks to his SHOES, tapping in anxiety on the floor. He stops moving -- but the TAPPING continues. He looks to his window. Now one is there.

Curious, Marc approaches his window, sees no one. He steps out --

EXT. APARTMENT - FIRE ESCAPE PLATFORM

Marc leans on the railing, gazing into the street, but no one is visible. Suddenly, he is aware of a figure standing behind him. Michael is there, wearing a grin.

MARC

Jesus!

MICHAEL

Been called worse.

Marc tries to calm down as Michael chuckles, patting him.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I need your help, bro. Right now.

MARC

... with what?

MICHAEL

With a girl.

(off his reaction)

With two girls. I got a chance to hook up with this honey, Lucy, but she's got a friend over. They work together at Palumbo's... you need to keep her occupied so I can do my thang, ya dig?

MARC

I can't, Mikey. Want to try to get some writing done...

MICHAEL

C'mon, you can always do that. She's beautiful. You'll love her. She's looking for something steady in her life. Maybe it's you...

Marc looks like he's wavering.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

There's liquor.

EXT. BROWNSTONE APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Michael approaches a bank of buttons, Marc uneasily in tow. Michael presses one. After a moment --

GIRL'S VOICE

Who is it?

MICHAEL

It's Spiderman! Open up!

A gleeful SHRIEK emerges on the other end. Michael shrugs at Marc. Then --

GIRL'S VOICE

Yo, Spiderman!

A plump Latina girl, LUCY, drops a set of keys over the edge. Michael deftly picks them from the air. They head inside.

MARC

Why do people call you that anyway?

MICHAEL

Keep your eyes open, and maybe you'll see.

INT. BUILDING - HALLWAY/APARTMENT

Lucy, buxom and short, throws open the door. She leaps into his arms. Michael laughs and carries her inside. She jumps off him and regards the trailing Marc dubiously.

MICHAEL

Lucy de Garza, this is my best bro on the planet, Mr. Moishe Bednar.

Marc scowls, as Lucy sizes him up.

LUCY
Well, welcome, Moishe. You better
crank it up. You gonna bore your
company....

She turns her attention back to Michael. Marc looks around --

INT. LIVING ROOM

Gloomier and lit with candles and incense. A lithe figure
(SHIONA) is lounged in a winged-back chair.

Michael sees Marc looking and calls out:

MICHAEL
Hey - Shi... come and meet my
buddy, here.

SHIONA
The name's Shiona, dickweed.

LUCY
And she ain't shy.
(nudging Marc)
You better not be either...

MICHAEL
(toward Shiona)
Well - whatever your name is
tonight, my friend here wants to
meet you.

Shiona, taking her time, floats to her feet. She saunters
into the light. She is 18, olive skinned and lovely. Her
eyes scan Marc, saying "you'll do."

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A TURNTABLE plays an album. Michael, already drunk, tips
back a beer in a fluid motion, then gives Lucy a sloppy kiss.
Marc, on the end of the couch, restless, looks toward --

Shiona, in the room's center, moving fluidly to the music.

MICHAEL
This guy here? Closest thing I
have to a brother. He's family.
(grabbing for Lucy)
His grandparents made me the best
meal I've had in months.

LUCY
 (tickling him)
 What about us? Don't we make you
 feel at home?

MICHAEL
 Aw, baby, course you do... we just
 don't have as many meals together.
 No disrespect, darlin'...

Shiona saunters over, pulling a rolled joint from her bra.

SHIONA
 I sure hope not.

MICHAEL
 Ah ha - now the party starts.

Shiona lights the joint, passes it to Lucy. Michael brightens
 and sits up, popping a new beer for Marc. Marc is puzzled,
 as the smoke reaches his nostrils. Michael takes a long
 drag, holds it out for Marc.

MARC
 Is that... marijuana?

Lucy giggles. Shiona raises an eyebrow at Michael.

SHIONA
 Oh, shit. You did not just say
 that.

MICHAEL
 (still extending it)
 C'mon man - let's go.

MARC
 Naw. I'm cool.

SHIONA
 That remains to be seen...

Michael holds it out a beat longer. Marc doesn't respond.
 Shiona, impatient, grabs it away.

SHIONA (CONT'D)
 He don't want it, that's his
 problem. But don't give it to the
 air.

Shiona takes a big puff. She cozies up next to Marc, looking
 into his eyes. Marc shifts nervously.

SHIONA (CONT'D)
Ain't nothing to be frightened
about, honey. Easy as breathing.
Here... watch how I do it.

Shiona takes a big deep drag of the joint, as he watches her, transfixed. She puts her arm around him, gently pushes her lips toward his.

SHIONA (CONT'D)
Just breathe in, baby...

Marc inhales her breath, his eyes closing. Their lips brush. Then, he begins to cough. Shiona smiles, looks to Michael.

SHIONA (CONT'D)
Think there's hope for this one,
Spiderman.

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

Shiona and Marc are slow dancing to music, moving against each other. The lights are low. Michael and Lucy grope each other on the couch. Marc is very glassy eyed, trying to relax. Shiona takes the lead, helping him glide around the room. She leans into his ear, purring.

SHIONA
Can I ask you something, honey?

Marc, blissful, pulls back.

MARC
Anything.

SHIONA (CONT'D)
Are you a virgin?

Marc sobers slightly, blinking to lucidity. .

SHIONA (CONT'D)
I mean with the weed.

Marc smiles sheepishly. Shiona's smile disarms him. She holds him, dancing. In the distance, Michael leads a wobbly Lucy off to the bedroom.

Shiona takes a drag off the joint, taps Marc. He opens his mouth to accept, taking in her smoke. This time, she presses her mouth to his... he responds.

INT. SHIONA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Marc opens hangover encrusted eyes. He looks over to see Shiona - next to him, stroking his hair, smoking.

SHIONA
Moishe. That's a funny name...

MARC
And Shiona isn't?

SHIONA
Not around my people.

MARC
Exactly.

She smiles. Tips her ash into a heavy glass ASHTRAY.

SHIONA
Your brother Mikey said that
"Moishe" is another name for
"Moses."

Marc thinks about it a moment.

MARC
He's not my real brother. Not by
blood.

SHIONA
Sometimes real blood don't matter.
All I know is, you're a lucky boy
to have a Perelli watching your
back.

Shiona rubs his chest, looking him over fondly.

SHIONA (CONT'D)
Oh well... 'spose Moses could be
your nickname.

MARC
I don't need a nickname.

SHIONA
Sure you do. Everybody round here
got one. Like how Michael is
Spiderman... and how they call my
brother 'Torch.'

Marc's smile drops. He sits up.

MARC
... your brother is Royce?

Shiona nods, puzzled. Marc gets out of bed, starting to grab up his things.

MARC (CONT'D)
Holy... shit --

SHIONA
Somethin' wrong with that?

MARC
Huh? No -- I just... I gotta go work in the store. I forgot...

SHIONA
Alright, well... guess I'll see you again, then... ?

Shiona is puzzled, as Marc hurries out. Shiona frowns.

EXT. SIDEWALK - MORNING

Marc is buttoning his shirt, quickly walking away, as Michael catches up to him.

MICHAEL
Hey -- hey! Where's the fire?

MARC
You asshole! You knew she was Royce's sister and you didn't tell me?!

MICHAEL
So?

MARC
So? You did it to get back at him! Didn't you? And you used me to do it!

Michael stops him from walking.

MICHAEL
No - YOU did it. All yourself. Because you dig her and you wanted to! And yes, maybe by doing so you said, 'hey, fuck you man' but that's not such a bad--

Marc shoves Michael back against a wall. Michael is calm. Marc has the realization of what he is doing and releases his grip. He hesitates a moment, then begins to run away.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Yo - we'll hang tonight, okay?

Marc keeps going.

INT. ZEYDA'S STORE - MORNING

Marc quietly into the BACK DOOR of the shop. He listens for signs of life... doesn't hear anything. He tries to stealth his way up the steps, when there is a CREAK behind him.

Zeyda has stepped out of his office and stands somberly staring up at him.

INT. ZEYDA'S OFFICE

Marc sits in a chair, being reprimanded by Zeyda. The old man is red-faced, sweating.

ZEYDA

Visiting with friends? Who are these friends, who keep you out all night?

MARC

I'm sorry, grandfather. I didn't mean to fall asleep... I was tired from working in the store...

ZEYDA

And, you're late for your next day! I rely on you to help me in the mornings, and I have no one! You worried your grandmother to death! You should be ashamed!

MARC

Please tell her I'm sorry, grandfather.

ZEYDA

You will tell her. You will apologize on your knees to that poor woman.

Zeyda looks him over with skeptical eyes.

ZEYDA (CONT'D)
Were you with a girl?

MARC
(not meeting his eye)
No. I was just hanging out with
Michael...

Zeyda nods, considers. He looks out the office window.

ZEYDA
I am a forgiving man, Moishe. We
have to be to get through this
life. But I knew Michael was
trouble the minute I laid eyes on
him. I believed this more after
our dinner. This boy may be too far
gone to be saved by kindness.

Marc looks up, as Zeyda turns to meet his eyes.

ZEYDA (CONT'D)
I do not want you to spend any more
time with this boy Michael.

MARC
Grandfather --

ZEYDA
Your mommon is saying she doesn't
want you to spend next summer with
us, Marc. Do you want that?

Marc is stunned. He shakes his head "no".

ZEYDA
You will not associate with this
Michael any further. Is that
clear?
(Marc doesn't reply)
Moishe.

INT. (ADULT) MARC'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Adult Marc lays in bed, wide awake. Zeyda's voice trailing
into WHISPERS as he stares at the ceiling. He looks at--

-- Lela, next to him, asleep, her body pulled away. Marc
picks up his CELL PHONE. Turns it OFF. Lays back.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. (YOUNG) MARC'S ROOM - DAY

Young Marc lays against his pillow, in his bedroom, in the midst of reading a paperback. A lazy summer day. Marc closes the book, gazes out the window at the buzzing city. He gazes around his room, bored.

LATER: Marc removes something hidden deep in a sweater drawer. He removes the shirt he wore the night with Shiona. He presses his nose into the fabric, inhales.

INT. CLOSET - LATER

Marc pulls out a file-box, hidden behind blankets on a high shelf. Inside is a couple of wadded BILLS and lots of change. He scoops it up.

EXT. CITY - DAY

IMAGES: As Marc makes his way along the STREETS, lost in thought... past KIDS playing baseball on the field. He looks toward the LINE OF TREES on the backfield. He keeps walking.

EXT. WATERFRONT - DAY

Marc stares into the glistening surface... the agitated waves on the water seem to echo his own restlessness.

EXT. LUCY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Marc loiters around the entrance, craning to see to the upper window. He ponders the buzzer. Finally, he takes out a pencil. He scribbles his phone number on a notepad paper and stuffs it into a mail slot. He hurries away.

EXT. PALUMBO'S RESTAURANT - DAY

Marc lingers a moment at the entrance, struggling to peer inside. Finally he makes his way in.

INT. PALUMBO'S RESTAURANT

The place is old-world and gloomy. Marc looks around.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Help you?

Marc spots a beefy counter guy (CARMEN), half-engaged in a paper.

MARC
Yeah... I'll... do you have
lemonade?

Carmen raises an eyebrow at him.

CARMEN
Just pop, kid. All kinds.

MARC
Orange Crush, please.

Carmen pops it for him, pushes it across.

CARMEN
Two bits.

Marc checks the change in his hand. Carmen plucks out two quarters. He throws them inside the register, goes back to his reading. Marc hesitates.

MARC
I was wondering...

Carmen raises his eyes.

MARC (CONT'D)
Is Shiona working today?

CARMEN
Now how would you know anyone by
that name?

MARC
She's a friend... of a friend.

CARMEN
Friend of friend of who...?

MARC
Michael Perelli.

Carmen's expression lightens.

CARMEN
So you're a friend of Spiderman's,
huh?

Marc is lost a moment for a response. Carmen's gaze is unnerving. After a moment he breaks into a smile.

CARMEN (CONT'D)
Well, if that's the case, you must
be my friend, too.

Carmen offers a meaty hand. Marc shakes it.

CARMEN (CONT'D)
Sugar works evenings, kid. When
the sun goes down. Come back then,
okay?

MARC
Sugar.... You mean -- ?

Carmen pulls his quarters from the register, hands them back.

CARMEN
Here. Don't worry about it.

The PHONE RINGS. Carmen picks it up.

CARMEN (CONT'D)
Palumbo's.
(beat)
Fuck you. Where the hell are you?
Do you want this shit or not?

Marc lingers a moment at the door, then heads out.

CARMEN (CONT'D)
(after him)
Tell Spiderman that Carmen says hi,
alright?

MARC
You'll probably see him before me.

Carmen's expression darkens as Marc turns his back and leaves
Carmen continues his phone business.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - DUSK

Marc strolls, reflecting, regarding --

THE SUN, dipping lower on the horizon. He passes an area
closer to the field... looks to the distant TREE LINE. He
does a double-take --

A FIGURE moves erratically through the chain-links of the
back fence.

Marc edges closer... trying to get a better view.

The figure turns. It's Michael, waving the Slasher around threateningly at an unseen menace.

Marc gets closer. Michael is in a dreadful state, sleeves rolled up, covered in sweat, jabbing into the air.

MARC
... Michael?

MICHAEL
(whirling)
Get back!

Michael struggles to see through his glassy eyes.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
I'll cut you man...! One step
closer and I'll do it!

MARC
Michael - it's me... it's Marc.

MICHAEL
M-marc...? Marc who??!

Michael jumps toward him, stabbing out.

MARC
Goddammit, it's Moishe!

Michael lowers the knife a moment, then his expression darkens again.

MICHAEL
Who put you up to this? Who are
you working for? The cops?

MARC
I'm not working for anybody! It's
me you asshole! Put the blade away!

Michael grows lucid. He drops the knife... shaking uncontrollably. Marc comes closer. Michael folds into him.

MICHAEL
Marc... juc get me to Lou...

MARC
... who?

MICHAEL
500... Penn.... Get me there...
He'll know what to do... please.

Michael buckles, shaking like a leaf, drawing sharp breaths. Marc throw his shoulder around him, helping him along.

EXT. STREET - ROW HOUSES

Marc helps Michael along a block of ROW HOMES. Michael goes from agitation to lethargy... starting to pass out.

MARC

Mike- stay with me. Where is it?

Michael perks up long enough to identify a house.

MICHAEL

522.... 52... 2.... there --

With a shaky finger he points to a particular unit.

EXT. ROW HOUSE - NIGHT

Marc helps Michael hobble up some stairs. He knocks on the door. Michael leans heavily against the railing. After a moment, a sweaty, big man, LOU CUPARELLA, answers the door. He eyes the visitors up and down.

LOU

... hell's this?

MARC

Are you Lou?

LOU

Maybe.

MARC

Mike said you'd know what to do.

LOU

Who the fuck are you?

Michael raises his head, groggy.

MICHAEL

He's my brother, goddammit! Let us the fuck inside, Lou!

Lou looks around outside, then waves them in.

INT. HOUSE

Marc helps Michael through the door, stumbling into the gloomy ROOM. Lou eases him into a chair.

Michael drapes himself over it. Lou motions for Marc to follow, continuing through a small kitchen near the back of the house.

LOU
Wait for him downstairs.

Lou nods to a descending staircase into a basement room.

LOU (CONT'D)
G'head. I'll come find you when he's ready.

Marc stares into the abyss, then heads down.

INT. BASEMENT

Marc makes his way to the bottom of the steps, his eyes adjusting. A haze of smoke fills the room. He peers around, discerning SHAPES of a handful of FIGURES.

ROYCE
Well, now. Look what done got spit outta Lou's toilet.

A SHADOW in a leather recliner near the back sits up.

Marc is grows nervous. Another door swings open, the light illuminating half of Royce's face. A blunt dangles from his lips. Nearby sits Skar, drawing some lines.

SKAR
No way... you here to get fucked up with us Jew boy?

MARC
No. I'm not. Thanks.

Marc starts to go back up the steps, but a BIG KID has swung himself over the staircase to sit, blocking him.

BIG KID
Jew boy's already fucked, I say.

Marc freezes. Yet another kid surfaces.

SKAR
Seriously, bro... join us. We're having some laughs. Right Torch?

Skar comes over with a bowl filled with what looks like candies. On closer inspection it's a bowl of pills.

Marc looks to Royce, rolling smoke into his nostrils, staring, lifeless.

MARC

I'm just here to help Mike Perelli.
That's all.

Royce looks at Skar and shares a derisive laugh.

SKAR

Man, that motherfucker's beyond
help now. He's so loaded with
crystal ain't the strongest horse
that can take him out anytime soon.
I seen him mainline it even.

ROYCE

Yo, don't talk to this shit. He's
probably a narc.

Royce gets up, moves closer. Marc is frozen.

ROYCE (CONT'D)

Well? That who you are? Marc the
narc?

Marc is frozen for a moment, thinking fast.

MARC

Man, how can you even ask me
something like that? Do you think
I would stoop as low as to be a
cop?

Skar and Royce are stunned. Marc presses his performance.

MARC (V.O.)

Serious? Do you know how much
money those dumbfucks make?

Skar throws a look to Royce. Royce's grin slowly melts.

MARC (CONT'D)

When you average it out, they make
less than being a waiter and take
ten times the risks. Would I ever
be cop? Hell, no, man!

Skar laughs and offers to slap Marc a high five.

ROYCE

Skar!

Skar lowers his hand. Royce weighs the moment. Finally, he reaches his hand into the bowl. He opens his palm before Marc, displaying several random pills.

ROYCE

Then you're not one of them. So if you're one of us, join us.

Marc hesitates, looks him in the eye. He takes a pill from Royce, lingers with it. They stare at each other.

Then -- Lou swings opens the door, looks downstairs at Marc.

LOU

He's good to go. And so are you.

Marc eyes Royce a moment longer, then heads up the stairs. They watch him go.

SKAR

Be damned if he didn't take it.

Royce is deadly unamused.

INT. UPSTAIRS ROOM

Marc follows Lou upstairs, not seeing Michael.

MARC

Where is he?

LOU

Upstairs sleeping it off.

Marc looks uncomfortably up a flight of stairs. GROANING emanates from somewhere.

LOU (CONT'D)

Relax. He'll crash for the night here. You don't want him on your hands anyway right now, anyway.

Marc is still hesitant as Lou ushers him to the door.

LOU (CONT'D)

Didn't know Spiderman had a brother.

MARC

He's my friend. We're not related by blood.

LOU
 Yeah, well... sure wouldn't know
 that to hear him blab about you.

Marc looks moved. Lou pats him as Marc steps out.

EXT. ROWHOUSE

Marc stands looking at the door a moment, then heads off.

INT. MARC'S ROOM - LATER

Marc sits on the edge of his bed, turning the PILL over and over in his fingers...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RUNNER'S WORLD OFFICES - DAY

A busy, Adult Marc turns Michael's card over in his fingers. He's making a call via SPEAKERPHONE. After a moment a tinny voice on the other end answers:

WOMAN'S VOICE
 Body Of Fitness.

Marc is momentarily lost for speech.

WOMAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)
 Hello? Body Of Fitness.

MARC
 Michael Perelli please.

WOMAN'S VOICE
 I'll connect you.

Marc is rigid.

His THUMB dances over the END button. As the RINGING seems to build in volume... a CLICK --

CUT TO:

INT. FITNESS CLUB - LOBBY/CAFE

Michael, wearing a matching sweat suit, pushes through the door of the club and stands grinning from ear-to-ear.

INT. WORKOUT AREA - LATER

RACQUETBALL PLAYERS smash into each other in a frenzy of friendly competition as Michael leads Marc past the glass courts. Michael spots an associate, LARRY.

MICHAEL

Hey, Lar - want you to meet my best bro in the whole world. Mr. Marc Bednar.

Marc throws Michael a stink-eye as Larry shakes Marc's hand.

LARRY

You two really brothers?

MARC

(quickly)
No.

MICHAEL

Well, if we were, we'd know the beauty and the beast in this equation, don't we?

Michael pats him, laughing. Marc stiffens. Larry senses the awkwardness and moves on.

LARRY

Nice to meet you, Marc.

MARC

Likewise.

Michael moves quickly ahead. After a moment, Marc follows.

INT. FITNESS CENTER - CAFE - LATER

Marc and Michael sit across from each other, in the midst of workout junkies and sounds of the gym. Michael is all smiles. Marc seems fidgety, not really looking at him.

MARC

... then... after graduation, my intent was to return to Philly.

Marc notices --

-- a YOUNG OLIVE SKINNED WOMAN, through a misty WINDOW, getting into a pool.

MARC (CONT'D)

But... early in my senior year, I met this girl...

MICHAEL

Ah, yeah. Here we go.

Marc looks at Michael ominously for a moment. Micheal recoils slightly.

MARC

Her name was Rhona. She was from Pittsburgh. There seemed like a lot of opportunities in Pittsburgh...

MICHAEL

(leaning forward)

Yeah? So where is she now, huh? C'mon, tell me everything.

MARC

(beat)

She became my wife.

MICHAEL

Yeah? Way to go man. That's great, Marky. You got any little one's running around?

MARC

No. No one.

Marc puts his head down a moment.

MARC (CONT'D)

She died.

The color drains from Michael's face as he stares at him. After a moment, Marc looks back up.

MARC (CONT'D)

An accident. It was a freak thing. We never saw any of it coming. She was three weeks pregnant.

(beat)

But hey. Life happens, right?

MICHAEL

Ah, man... I'm real sorry to hear that, Marky. I truly am.

MARC

Yeah... Yeah. Wel... It's quite a thing to lose someone you really, truly love. Or do you know about that?

Marc looks into Michael's eyes. Michael is affected.

MICHAEL

I know plenty about that brother.

MARC

And cut it with this 'brother' shit, okay? If you want any kind of contact with me. I mean it. You give people the wrong impression. Okay? *Can it.*

Michael is thrown.

MICHAEL

Jesus man. I just wanted to sit down and share a couple of--

MARC

And we did, okay. We did. So. We done, here.

Michael just holds Marc's gaze.

MICHAEL

Tell me you don't think I did what some said I did.

Marc says nothing.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

You tell me. Tell me what team you're on, Moishe.

MARC

I'm sorry. I guess I wasn't ready as I thought for this.

Marc starts to gather his food remains, getting up to go.

MICHAEL

Yeah. It took me a long time, too.

Marc heads away. Michael puts a hand on his arm.

MICHAEL
Wait a second...

Marc yanks away, keeps walking, leaving Michael stunned.

EXT. FITNESS CLUB - PARKING LOT

Marc reaches his car. He goes to put the key in. His hand shakes. He fumbles it, drops it to the ground. A percussive sound fills his ears, his own heart, as he hyperventilates. He leans heavily on the car, looks --

-- toward a DISTANT TREELINE.

MICHAEL
Hey -- Moishe --

He looks up, sees Michael jogging over. He runs in place for a moment, saying nothing. Marc waits for more.

MICHAEL
You still like to run, right?

MARC
What the hell's that supposed to mean?

MICHAEL
You like to run. So much you like to write about it. You run, you talk. Two things you were always good at.

MARC
What do you want, Michael?

MICHAEL
(shrugs)
How 'bout we go for a run?

Marc stares at him, unmoving.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Unless you think maybe you can't keep up with me.

EXT. RUNNING TRAIL - LATER

FEET RUNNING... two sets of SHOES pound the trail.

Michael and Marc run along the path. Marc not-so-subtly keeps Michael behind a couple of paces. For a while, nothing breaks the quiet but their footsteps. Then --

MICHAEL

You ever spend time thinking back, Marc? On how things might have gone with different decisions made?

MARC

I try not to...

Marc turns up another path, featuring an abrupt grade. Michael keeps a few paces behind.

MICHAEL

'Cause I think about those things... all the time.

Marc picks up his speed slightly. Michael manages to keep up.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

What about you, Marc?

MARC

What about me?

MICHAEL

Do you ever regret being part of my life?

MARC

I told you - I don't really think about it. It just... it's what is.

MICHAEL

(getting winded)

I just... shit, I want you back in my life, man. I want you back as my friend...

Marc shakes his head, keeps going, looking agitated, as puts more into his sprint, distancing himself from Michael. Michael sees his dropping back and talks louder.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I didn't kill her, Marc. You know that, don't you? I was framed. I would never do a thing like that--!

MARC

-- I really don't want to dredge it up again, okay?

Marc keeps running, Michael digs in, keeping up with him.
For a second, Marc is surprised.

MICHAEL
Why didn't you come visit me in
jail?

MARC
Life got in the way. Sorry.

MICHAEL
You didn't even come to Abraxas.
I never got a chance to discuss
anything with you...

MARC
Anything like what --

MICHAEL
Like what really happened, Marc.
That's what --

Marc abruptly turns, jogs in place next to him, closing the
space.

MARC
Yeah? So why now? Huh? It
happened. It's over! Why do you
have to bring it up now!

MICHAEL
Because we have to!

MARC
How much of I don't give a shit
didn't you understand?

Marc turns again, starts to run, Michael bears down, and
detains him. Marc, astonished, pulls away. Both men stop
moving, staring at each other.

MICHAEL
I need your help, goddammit! Now I
know somebody else was in that room
and saw things - or did things - I
can't be sure --

MARC
-- fucking SHUT UP!

Michael stares. Marc paces, beside himself.

MARC

That's not my life anymore!
 Alright? I've got a career, a
 fiance' - *this* is my life now!

MICHAEL

This is part of it, too.

Marc, furious, turns to start running again, sprinting straight up the grade. Michael follows... struggles to keep up, but is no match. Marc beats him easily, pounding forward. Michael drops back, catching his breath.

MICHAEL

Yeah, okay... you always did know
 how to run, Moishe - that's one
 thing you'll always be good at!

Marc sprints up the grade, leaving Michael far below.

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

Marc steps in, sweating, rattled. He moves like a caged animal around the room. He starts to shed his sweats, then stops short... stares at--

A couple of SUITCASES, near the door. He steps into--

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Mark moves inside, to see Lela, zipping up a last SUITCASE.

MARC

What's this?

Lela doesn't answer at first, then stops her activity.

LELA

I'm sorry, Marc. I need some time
 and space.

MARC

... time and space.

Marc sighs, sits on the edge of the bed.

LELA

I can't handle being kept in a
 cloud about your past. Something
 happened and you can't share. Or
 won't share... or...

MARC

Lela.

LELA

Don't say anything. Please. I thought of every possibly response you may have and none of them will work.

She grabs up a bag, looks at him.

LELA (CONT'D)

I think you'll have a pretty good idea of where and how to find me if you're ready.

Marc shakes his head. Throws his hands up.

MARC

Fine.

Lela nods, moves for the door, pauses.

LELA

We can't move forward, Marc. Not if this is following you.

MARC

(nodding)

Hope the time and space thing works out for you, Lela.

Lela nods, moves out the door. Marc sits on the bed, looking lost. After a long moment, he jumps up.

EXT. STAIRWELL

Lela is heading down hall. Marc throws the door open, calls after her --

MARC

Lela -- wait -- please.

Lela hesitates, looking back.

MARC (CONT'D)

I'll tell you.

EXT. CONDO - ROOFTOP

Marc sits on a wall of the rooftop, smoking, staring into the street below. After a moment, Lela sits beside him, her back against his. Marc readies himself, then begins:

MARC

Michael was tried for a serious crime in the fall of 1979. That's about the time we lost touch.

LELA

What kind of crime?

MARC

(beat)

He was charged with the stabbing death of a woman.

Marc has difficulty looking her in the eye.

MARC (CONT'D)

He was sentenced to 8 years in a correctional institute. Because it was drug related, Michael's lawyer argued for a second degree murder charge and a reduced sentence. A few years in, the state offered him the option of enrolling in Abraxas.

LELA

The rehab center?

MARC

(nods)

I never expected to see him again. I knew he'd get out, but... I never thought he would want to face me. I certainly never wanted to face him again.

LELA

Who was the woman?

Marc is choked for a response.

LELA (CONT'D)

Marc...? Did you know her?

MARC

(after a pained beat)

No.

Marc looks down into the streets, which --

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - (PAST)

We cruise through the STREETS of Marc's youth. Young Marc is hurrying through the streets, avoiding traffic.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - LATER

Marc strolls the perimeter of the FIELD, eyes searching. H He spots something beyond the trees and breaks into a smile.

Shiona is waiting on the bleachers. She spots him and smiles, coming down to meet him and walking with him.

Shiona makes a reach for his hand. He pulls away, self-conscious. She punches him affectionately as they walk.

EXT. PARK - LAWN - LATER

Marc and Shiona head for a boat rental pavilion. He looks over at her. She smiles. He reaches for her hand. She takes it. She watches his face as they make their way across.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

Marc and Shiona float in a small paddle boat near a cordoned-off area. Shiona rests her head on his shoulder.

SHIONA

Don't you wish it could be this forever?

MARC

Would be nice.

SHIONA

Peaceful. That's what this is.
(closing her eyes)
I like peaceful.

Marc nods, takes in the scenery. Then, Shiona.

MARC

How long have you worked at Palumbo's.

Shiona frowns, opens her eyes again.

SHIONA

Well, that's one way to kill the mood.

MARC

Sorry. I didn't mean...

SHIONA

No biggie. It's just that place is the opposite of peaceful. But I guess I can't complain. Nobody's got a decent job these days...

(beat)

Lou Cuparella phoned up Carmen and got me that job. Not long after, he said he was comin' over to get his 'fee.' Thought he was entitled to a little nooky for his troubles.

Marc hangs on her words.

SHIONA (CONT'D)

At first I just tried to say 'no' in a nice way. But he didn't take that answer. He kept comin' on harder, sayin' I was teasin' him. I told him nothing doin' - ever - and that pissed him off more. I guess you could say he started playin' rough.

MARC

How so?

SHIONA

When I'd push him away he'd slap me in the face and call me a nigger whore. Then one night, while I was at Lucy's place all alone, he snuck up the fire escape and before I knew what was happening, he's through the window and pinning me down on the couch. He pulls down my pants and tries to rape me.

Marc listens, jaw tightening.

SHIONA (CONT'D)

That's when I pulled out my baby.

Shiona pulls back her dress, revealing a KNIFE in a sheathe around her thigh. Marc shakes his head.

MARC
Now I understand why you and
Spiderman get along so well.

SHIONA
Shit. He'd better hope that my
baby doesn't have to take on his
'Slasher.'

Marc looks disturbed. Shiona smiles, rubs his back.

SHIONA (CONT'D)
Hey --

He looks over.

SHIONA (CONT'D)
If you ever see the scar Lou has
down his neck? That's his little
reminder that this pussy can
scratch.

MARC
So, he's never tried anything else?

SHIONA
Hell, no. And if he does, I'll cut
him in a worse place.

MARC
Why didn't Torch stand up for you?

SHIONA
Hell with him. He's worthless,
Besides, he knows Lou would stop
doing business with him if he did.
So he keeps his mouth shut.

Marc considers.

SHIONA (CONT'D)
Anyway, Lou won't fuck with me
again. Not just 'cause he knows
he'll lose more skin, but because
of something he knows I have...

MARC
Something like what?

Shiona studies him, touches his face.

SHIONA
Better you don't know, sweet
darlin'. Let's just say it's a
little black book.

She peddles the boat. Marc watches her strong form move.

INT. SHIONA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Marc and Shiona move into the foyer. She glances around, then pulls him into an area under the stairwell. They kiss.

SHIONA
You wanna come up, honey? Lucy's
at work.

MARC
I'd better just see you later.

Shiona smiles, runs her hand along his inner thigh.

SHIONA
Sure I can't change your mind?

Marc starts to succumb, when he becomes aware of someone standing in the shadows. Michael drifts into the light.

MICHAEL
Sorry lovebirds, but I'm gonna have
to steal my bro for a while.

SHIONA
Hell you are. He's mine.

MICHAEL
It can't wait. Besides, Torch is
on his way here.

Marc considers, gives Shiona a kiss.

MARC
I should see what he wants.

SHIONA
Baby...

MARC
Gotta run.

Shiona pulls him in for another kiss, then watches as he leaves with Michael.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL AREA - BACK ALLEY - LATER

Michael leads Marc through the seedy alley, keeping in the shadows, as he nervously shifts a backpack on his shoulders.

MICHAEL

Mikey, relax. I don't think he knows about me and Shiona.

MICHAEL

Actually... he kinda does.

(beat)

I kinda told him.

MARC

You what?!

MICHAEL

Relax, man. It says you have more balls if you know that he knows.

MARC

Shit! Why would you do that?

MICHAEL

Calm down, wouldya? He's not going to touch an honorary Perelli.

Marc shakes his head in disbelief.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Anyway - there's something more important. Lou is in trouble with some a thumb-breaker. He's laying low until he can get the guy his money back.

MARC

What does that have to do with me?

MICHAEL

Well, it has to do with me. And me needs your help.

MARC

I don't like the sound of this.

Michael scouts around before darting into another alley, Marc on his heels.

MICHAEL
All you have to do is simply watch
out for cops while I make a
delivery.

MARC
Delivery of *what*?

Michael just puts his finger to his lips to shush him, then
pats his cheek. He ducks inside a WAREHOUSE DOOR.

MARC
Mi --

Marc paces, muttering.

MARC (CONT'D)
Dammit, Michael... what have you
gotten me into?

Agitated, Marc sinks to a curb and sits, trying to relax.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ALLEY - LATER

Marc is now sitting against a wall, anxious. After a moment,
Michael steps out. The backpack looks clearly bulkier.

MARC
Now what are we doing?

MICHAEL
Man, you're just all questions,
aren't you? Haven't I told you to
trust...

Micheal becomes aware that Marc is looking past him. He
turns --

Lou looks Marc over with a dark glare.

LOU
What's he doing here?

MICHAEL
He's my lookout, man. I told you.

LOU
Yeah. I know this guy. Carmen
calls him the Kike.

Lou laughs. Marc doesn't.

LOU (CONT'D)
Well, he's a helluva buddy to you,
Spiderman. I can vouch for that.
Hey, Mikey - gimme a bone for
later, wouldya...?

Michael fishes a joint from his jacket pocket. Marc takes a moment to look Lou over... noting a small SCAR running down his neck, disappearing under his shirt. He fixates on it moment, then realizes Lou is looking at him.

LOU (CONT'D)
What the hell's with this kid? He
on something, or...

Lou trails off, staring past Marc. Michael and Marc also look that direction.

DOWN THE STREET - a PATROL CAR has paused at the mouth of the alley. A skeptical COP is behind the wheel, eyeing them.

LOU (CONT'D)
What the fuck? You--- you guys
get tailed?

MICHAEL
Get inside Lou. I'll distract him.

LOU
You do that... If shit comes down,
I don't even know you - you
understand?

MICHAEL
Yeah -- inside.

LOU
Ya dumb fuck.

Grumbling, Lou goes in, pulls the shade. Marc watches, as the patrol car turns, heads down the alley.

MARC
Shit. What do we do, Mikey?

MICHAEL
Brother... we run.

Michael bolts off. Marc follows closely.

COP
 (over the PA)
 Halt! Stay where you are!

Marc and Michael race down the streets, turning in elusive moves... until they distance themselves from the cop...

... before reaching a high DEAD END wall. Michael looks to the top, digging his fingers into the grooves of the brick.

MICHAEL
 I'll go up first. Toss up the pack
 and join me.

MARC
 (assessing it)
 ... you're going up there?

Michael winks and grabs onto the wall. He nimbly pulls himself up. He reaches the top and extends his arm.

MICHAEL
 Toss it!

Marc hurls the pack up to Michael and tries to mimic his climb, to no avail. He slips and slides down the wall.

Down the street, the patrol car spots them and starts speeding toward them.

Marc's foot slides on the wall. Michael grabs his wrist at the last minute and yanks him up, as the cop screeches to a stop underneath him.

Marc and Michael drop to the other side of the wall and race away.

EXT. MARC'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DUSK

Marc and Michael down the street, approaching Zeyda's store. Marc is sullen. Michael notes his dour attitude.

MICHAEL
 I'm sorry, man. I didn't know it
 was gonna go down that way.

MARC
 Why are you looking out for that
 slimebag anyway?

MICHAEL

Because we're paisan. That's what we do. Just like you and me. You're the only one I trust to get my back, Moishe.

MARC

Yeah? Well, maybe I don't want that job.

MICHAEL

You're killin' me. You know that?

Marc freezes as he spots Zeyda walking down the sidewalk, up ahead. He presses against the wall. Michael notices.

MICHAEL

How many people aren't supposed to know you're with me again?

MARC

You'd better get going, Michael.

MICHAEL

(nods)
See you tomorrow?

MARC

I guess.

Marc heads away. Michael detains his arm.

MICHAEL

Wait - forgot to give you your cut.

Michael hands Marc a wad of bills. Marc blinks, affected.

MARC

I... shouldn't take this.

MICHAEL

No. You're right. You should have more.

Michael hands him even more bills.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

There's more where that came from, too.

Marc is lost for a response. Michael pats him.

MICHAEL

You watched out for me today, man.
That's all you'll ever have to do.

Marc considers. After a long moment, he pockets the money.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Seriously, you were a big help.
I was real proud of you.

Michael pats him and turns to go, hoisting up the backpack.

MARC

Mikey --
(Michael hesitates)
What's in the backpack, anyway?

MICHAEL

(smiles)
Nothing you need to worry your
pretty little head about.

Michael winks, heads away. Marc watches him swallowed into the streets. A shrill CELL PHONE jerks us into--

INT. MARC'S APARTMENT (PRESENT) - NIGHT

The CELL PHONE rings on the night stand, next to a CLOCK RADIO reading 2:28. Adult Marc rouses, fumbling for it. He is alone in bed. Marc stares at the readout: UNKNOWN NUMBER. After another ring, he answers.

MARC

... is this your parent's number?

There is the sound of SNIFFLING on the other end.

MARC (CONT'D)

... Lela?

MICHAEL

(distracted)
... it's Mike...

MARC

What do you want?

MICHAEL

I just.... do you think we can
meet? I know a late night joint.

MARC

No, Michael. I can't meet you.
I'm not getting involved with you
any further. Goodnight.

MICHAEL

Please... please, man... I haven't
told you everything...

Marc wavers.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Just hear me out. That's all I
ask. For old time's sake.

(beat)

Help me, Marc.

Marc presses the phone to his head, closes his eyes.

INT. BAR - LATER

Marc steps in from a rainy night. He assesses the place,
spots Michael, sitting at the end of the bar. He approaches
and takes a seat next to him. Michael raises his head.

MICHAEL

I wasn't sure you would come.

MARC

I wasn't sure myself.

MICHAEL

I've drunken myself to oblivion
here, on many occasion.

MARC

Good to see you've found some
consistency, Mike.

Michael looks stung, staring at his drink.

MICHAEL

Yeah, well... I'll tell you another
consistency. I have a consistend
wish that someone would come along
and put a bullet in the back of my
head. Then maybe I would stop
thinking about how I threw my life
away. How I through our friendship
away.

Marc stares, unmoving. Michael catches himself, blanches.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Listen to me. Going on and on with the Mike Perelli show. What about you, my brother? What's the good word in your world? Huh?

Marc regards him in disbelief. Finally, he takes a sip of his drink.

MARC

My world. Well, Michael... ever since you've come back into my world, I have missed several work deadlines, I'm losing sleep and my girlfriend and I have separated.

Michael's smile fades.

MARC (CONT'D)

Now - do you still want to make small talk? Or tell me why you dragged me into this shithole in the middle of the night?

Michael takes a big drink and turns to him.

MICHAEL

There was someone else in the room that night, Marc. The night of the murder.

MARC

Oh, for God's sake --

MICHAEL

Marc - I believe somebody saw the whole thing!

MARC

Really? We're dredging this up?

MICHAEL

It *has* to be dredged up! Not just for me, for her - for all of us!

Marc stares at him.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - (PAST)

Young Michael and Shiona are arguing, their voices MUDDIED, as everything seems to move like liquid slow motion. She swings at him. He grabs her wrist. Shiona uses her other hand to pull his knife out of his belt. She swipes it at him. He keeps the blade distanced from his face.

PULLING BACK... into another room... someone watches like a voyeur from the deep shadows...

INT. BAR - (PRESENT)

Marc listens, seemingly disinterested.

MARC

What's your point?

MICHAEL

That there was a *witness*. Maybe someone different from the one who killed her.

MARC

Michael - you did your time. You can't take it back. Period. What difference will it make now to open it all up?

MICHAEL

It makes a difference to my *name*.

Michael grabs for his drink, knocking it over. Agitated, he grabs a handful of napkins, starts sopping it up, as Marc watches, noting the sweat on Michael's brow.

MARC

Are you strung out?

Michael avoids answering, keeping focused on his task.

MICHAEL

Don't you want the person who really killed her to pay for it? 'Cause I do.

Marc's hand juts out, as he stops Michael's arm. Michael looks him in the eye.

MARC

It wasn't you. Right, Michael?

MICHAEL
(hesitates)
I smacked her down Marc. I testified to that. But I did not kill that girl.

FLASH TO:

EXT. SHIONA'S BEDROOM (PAST)

Young Michael stands watching, sweating, desperate --
Shiona, on the floor, her chest rising and falling...

INT. BAR - (PRESENT)

Michael gives in to some tears. He turns away, wiping.
Marc signals to the bartender to get Michael a new drink.

MARC
So, who did you think you saw?

MICHAEL
I didn't see anyone... but I did catch a whiff of a familiar cologne when I came in...

INT. APARTMENT - (PAST)

From the shadows, Carmen drifts into the light. He walks around Shiona. His mind races. He uses a handkerchief to pick up a PHONE.

INT. BAR - (PRESENT)

MARC
So why didn't you bring this up in the trial?

MICHAEL
Why do you think? If I ratted out anybody there would be retribution. On my family...on my friends.
(then)
Will you support me if I reopen this case, Marc? Will you stand with me as your brother?

Marc considers, rubs his face.

MARC

I spent my whole life distancing myself from you, Michael. Don't try to rope me back in.

MICHAEL

You're not hearing me.

MARC

Oh, I'm hearing you. Loud and clear. And this is what you need to hear: You will leave me alone. You will make no more contact. I don't want anything to do with you now - or ever. Are you listening?

MICHAEL

(swallowing)

Since when does my brother say no to me?

Marc throws a bill on the bar, moving for the door.

MARC

I'm *not* your brother! And I should have said no all along!

Michael watches, helpless, as Marc heads out the door.

YOUNG MARC (V.O.)

No.

CUT TO:

INT. ZEYDA'S STORE - OFFICE - DAY

Young Marc sits before Zeyda, getting reprimanded.

MARC

No, alright? I am not hanging out with Michael Perelli!

ZEYDA

Do not lie to me, Moishe! Milton Katz said he saw you around the neighborhood with this boy.

MARC

It's a small neighborhood, grandfather. We wind up in the same places. I say hello.

ZEYDA

And what do you do after these hellos?

MARC

We visit. We talk about stuff.

ZEYDA

You are not telling the truth, Moishe!

MARC

Yes I am!

(flustered)

And what if I do spend time with Michael. So what? You're not my parents!

ZEYDA

Don't you disrespect me!

MARC

-- he's my friend! He's been like a brother to me! He's looked out for me!

ZEYDA

He is trouble! He runs in a dangerous crowd. Your mommon and I don't want you to be his friend!

MARC

Well -- that's not your choice!

ZEYDA

Don't you dare raise your voice to me, young man!

Zeyda rises, stands towering over Marc. They both notice that someone has come to the window.

Mommon stands there, eyeing Marc with conviction.

MOMMON

(IN HEBREW)

If you will not do as we say, you must leave our home!

Mommon stalks away. Zeyda sighs, looks to Marc.

ZEYDA

I'm sorry, Marc. But if you can't abide by our rules, I will have to take you back to your parents.

MARC

(muttering)

All because of my choice of friends.

ZEYDA

No. It's because of our choice.

Zeyda returns to his desk, picks up a phone, extends it.

ZEYDA (CONT'D)

You can call them and let them know what's happening. I'll drive you to the bus station tonight.

MARC

Don't bother.

Marc rises, starts to head out of the room.

MARC (CONT'D)

I'll get there myself!

ZEYDA

Come back here.

Marc ignores him, storming out.

ZEYDA (CONT'D)

Moishe!

INT. MARC'S ROOM - CLOSET

Marc digs the filebox from out of the blankets on the shelf. He pulls out a sizable wad of bills, pockets them.

INT. BUS TERMINAL - DAY

Marc sits at a bench, a duffel bag beside him, staring off.

MICHAEL (O.S.)

Hey - Moishe!

Marc looks up, to see Michael striding over.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

What the hell? Where you going?

MARC

My grandparents kicked me out. I have to go back to my folks for the rest of the summer.

MICHAEL

The hell you do.

Marc doesn't respond, staring at the ground.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

You weren't gonna even say goodbye? Not to me? Not to Shiona?

MARC

I was gonna write... I dunno.

(off his look)

I'm sorry, Mikey. I'm a little rattled right now.

Marc looks ready to cry. Michael sits with him, giving him the once over.

MICHAEL

So it's just a matter of not having a place to stay? Is that it?

MARC

No way I'm gonna stay with you.

MICHAEL

Naw, naw. Who said anything about that? You need to be independent, anyway. A man needs his own place.

(standing up)

So let's get you one.

MARC

(smiles, sardonic)

My own place? How?

MICHAEL

Buddy, with the right magic, anything is possible.

Michael whips out a chunk of bills, smiling.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

An older man, AL, walks Marc and Michael into a two room apartment. Marc takes in the space as Al hands him the keys.

AL
Here ya go. Just give me a couple weeks notice if you're gonna split.

MARC
Don't I need to fill out any papers, or...?

Al trades a look with Michael, then turns back to Marc.

AL
A Perelli's word is good enough for me.

Al heads for the door, Michael clapping him on the back.

MICHAEL
Thanks, Al. Sure appreciate it.

Marc notes that Michael hands him a few bills and a little bag of something. He turns his attention to a window. After a moment, Michael comes up to join him.

MARC
What am I gonna owe you for this?

MICHAEL
Just your promise that you won't let anyone tell you what to do ever again.

MARC
Deal.

MICHAEL
And that we're brothers. For all of time.

Michael pulls out The Slasher. Marc is confused. Michael turns the knife to his palm and makes a small cut. Blood oozes. He hands the knife to Marc. Solemn, Marc follows suit, making an incision. He puts his hand out.

MARC
Brothers.

Michael smiles and clasps Marc's hand.

MICHAEL
We're family, now. Paisan. You
understand? We stick together, no
matter what.

After a moment, Marc nods. Michael smiles.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Welcome to my world, Moishe.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ADULT MARC'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Adult Marc lays in bed, puts his forearm over his eyes, tries
to get to sleep... to no avail.

INT. LIVING ROOM -NIGHT

Marc stands looking out. Behind him, his COMPUTER SCREEN
glows.

Marc takes a seat at his computer. His fingers tickle the
keys... but he can't get started.

EXT. ROOFTOP

Marc sits on the roof, alone, staring into the city.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STREET/VAN - NIGHT

Michael and Marc wait on a corner. A grimy grey VAN pulls
up before them. Michael opens the door and Marc crawls in.

INT. VAN

Carmen is driving. Lou rides shotgun. Skar and Royce are
sitting in the van, on crates. Marc looks instantly nervous
as they take seats on the opposite side.

MICHAEL
Evening boys.

ROYCE
Whoa, whoa-- what the fuck is he
doing here?

MICHAEL

He's my partner. We do everything together.

SKAR

Oh, really... *everything*?

Michael fixes him with a cold eye. He calmly pushes his shirt aside, revealing the sheathed Slasher.

MICHAEL

Could you ask me that again, Skar? Don't think I heard you.

LOU

(chiming in)

He asked why the kike, Mike? Couldn't find a man we can trust?

MICHAEL

Are you kiddin'? I trust this guy with my life. He's family.

ROYCE

Yeah, well. I can't say I trust him with my sister.

Michael turns his attention to Royce. He unsheathes the knife, begins to pick his nails with the Slasher. Marc is looking very claustrophobic.

MICHAEL

I don't trust you with shit, Torch. Yet I put money into your hands again and again. Now what's that all about?

LOU

Yeah, c'mon, Torch. Would you rather know Sugar is banging some stranger at Belle Isle or that she's in the safety of an honorary Perelli?

Marc looks to Michael, who continues to stare down Royce. Royce finally grumbles, diverts his attention.

MICHAEL

Hey Carmen - how 'bout some tunes? It's like a hearse in here.

Carmen looks to Lou, who shrugs. He pushes in a cassette. Strains of "Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap" by AC/DC pound out. They ride along. Marc is gnawed with thought.

EXT. HIGHWAY INTERCHANGE

Lou's VAN turns onto a freeway interchange.

EXT. AFFLUENT NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

The VAN cruises a a tree-lined road. It slows and approaches a wrought-iron GATE. Beyond the bars, a striking MANSION.

Marc is confused, as the van backs up to the wall, pulling behind a blind of thick bushes. The others start exiting from the vehicle. Marc detains Michael.

MARC

Hey, man - where are we? What are we doing here?

MICHAEL

(shrugs)
Visiting the 'burbs.

Michael starts to go. Marc grabs him again.

MARC

You said you just needed a few guys to move.

MICHAEL

That's right. We're a few guys and we're moving. Everybody but you.

Marc notices that the others are putting on camouflage jumpsuits. Michael is stepping into his own.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Sorry we don't have one for you, bro. You're just staying with the van. Don't leave the cover unless you have to.

MARC

Just tell me what this is all about.

Lou looks at Michael. Michael takes Marc aside.

MICHAEL

Look - yonder is the home of some rich dude, okay? Lou found out they're gone all summer. And Carmen knows his way around the alarm. End of story.

MARC

You're robbing the place? And making me a part of it?

MICHAEL

You're *not* a part of it. You're just a guy sitting in a van looking out for uninvited visitors. And getting paid for your trouble.

LOU

What the fuck, Spiderman? You didn't brief him on what he was doing?

MICHAEL

I told you to trust me.

Michael looks back at Marc, intently.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Don't let us down, brother. There's a lot more in this for you on the other side.

Michael pushes off. The men start climbing out, climbing up onto the van, then hoisting themselves over the wall, hooking a rope ladder around the upper edge to descend.

Marc, about to jump out of his skin, gets behind the wheel.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. VAN - NIGHT

All is deathly quiet. Marc looks around, nervous. His eyes fall to the SCAR on his palm. He presses his thumb into it.

His attention is snagged by the SOUND of an approaching vehicle, the sweep of HEADLIGHTS. He spots a SECURITY VEHICLE, slowly cruising. Marc hunkers into the seat.

The vehicle continues like a slow shark around the curve. Marc breathes a sigh of relief.

Suddenly there is a THUMP on the van roof, just over his head. More THUMPS. Suddenly Lou is throwing open the door, practically shoving Marc aside, getting behind the wheel. Marc jumps into the back, as the rest of the gang piles in.

MARC

There's a security guy. He just went past.

MICHAEL

We know. He came up the driveway and did a loop. We were all staring out the windows, shaking to our nutsacks. But then he just cruised right out.

CARMEN

Dumbass rent-a-cops.

SKAR

It was beautiful, baby.

More THUMPS, as more men and items land on the roof. The gang starts scooping them up, throwing them in the back. Marc watches it all happen, overwhelmed.

He meets Michael's eyes a moment. Michael avoids it, keeps occupied.

INT. GARAGE/STREETS - LATER

The VAN pulls into a garage. The guys start to climb out. Marc is one of the first. He instantly heads back out the garage door, straight for the streets. Michael emerges, calling after him.

MICHAEL

Marc... hey, Moishe...

Marc keeps going. Lou comes up to Michael.

LOU

What the fuck's going on with him?

MICHAEL

I dunno. But I'll take of it.

LOU

Yeah. You take care of it.

(handing him some bills)

You take care of him, too, huh?

Michael snags the bills, runs out.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Michael spots Marc, jogging up the street, and runs toward him. When he starts to get near Marc, Marc speeds up, losing him. Michael keeps pace, then cuts up through an alley.

INT. ALLEY

Marc loses Michael for a moment, then Michael suddenly emerges from a side entrance, keeping pace with him.

MICHAEL

Wait-- will you just wait one second?

Marc starts to pick up his speed. Michael growls and accelerates, tackling Marc. They fall into some garbage cans. Marc fights to push him off, but Michael pins him down. Marc swings, but Michael angrily stops his punch.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

What the hell is wrong with you?

MARC

What's wrong with you? You put me into the line of fire, you son of a bitch!

Michael digs in his pocket, pulls out Lou's extra bills.

MICHAEL

Here - here, alright? A bonus, for your high-risk.

MARC

I don't want it!

MICHAEL

Yeah? How you supposed to pay rent?

Marc stops fighting. He doesn't protest as Michael stuffs the bills into his pocket. He climbs off of him, as Marc sits up, dazed. Michael slumps next to him. After a silence:

MARC

I want you to promise me. That you'll never pull me into something like that again.

MICHAEL

Fine, fina -- I promise. From now on, I give you the lowdown and you can choose if you want in.

MARC

No - I don't want "in" anything! Okay? Not ever!

MICHAEL

(stung)

My intentions were good, Moishe. I just want to see you stay independent... that's all.

MARC

Promise me.

Michael nods, holds out his hand.

MICHAEL

Deal.

After a long moment, they clasp their scarred hands.

EXT. STREET - LATER

Marc and Michael are walking home. Marc gnawed by something.

MARC

What was Lou talking about? With that whole "Sugar" thing?

MICHAEL

I dunno... probably just yappin' out his ass...

Michael looks at Marc, and sees that this answer doesn't fly.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

It's no big deal. Shiona... who goes by "Sugar"... she sometimes works at this Belle Isle place. It's a big time floating poker game. Happens a lot of Palumbo's.

Marc listens, troubled.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

It's no biggie. The bluebloods like havin' a good-lookin' chick around to serve food, keep their glasses full. That's all.

MARC

... that's all?

MICHAEL

I know that some of the girls do more... on occasion. But Shiona is a good girl. She's quiet. Melts into the background. That's how she's able to pull things off.

MARC

Things like what?

MICHAEL

Well... for instance... it was Shiona who overheard one of the players say his house was going to be empty for the summer. She told me... I told Carmen... Carmen told Lou... that kinda thing.

MARC

Jesus...

Marc stops walking, stunned.

MICHAEL

Look. You just gotta have fun with this girl and that's it. Get laid, smoke her pot, stay on her good side. But don't put too much into it.

(beat)

And don't fall in love, brother. Trust me on that.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OLDER MARC'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Adult Marc lays in bed, his arms outstretched. HEADLIGHT PATTERNS playing on the ceiling. He looks to his LEFT...

... where he sees LELA, her back to him, her head resting against his arm.

Marc opens his eyes, as if from a dream. He blinks, staring down the length of his arm.

There is no one against his arm. Realization sinks in. Then, on the other side, Shiona raises her head, her head resting on his RIGHT ARM.

SHIONA
Whatcha thinking about, sugar?

Marc looks to his RIGHT--

INT. MARC'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

Shiona's face greets him. Young Marc and Shiona are laying in bed, in the aftermath of lovemaking.

MARC
"Sugar." Now there's a nickname.
Doncha think?

SHIONA
... 'spose so.

MARC
I mean, it's supposed to mean
something sweet, I guess. Right?
Isn't that the idea.

Shiona shifts her attention to a nightstand, finds a joint in her glass ashtray, lights it. He studies her back.

MARC (CONT'D)
I heard through the grapevine you
were working at Belle Isle.

Shiona meets his eyes. She shrugs.

SHIONA
Sometimes I do. Yeah. Everybody
needs a second job these days.

MARC
What exactly kind of job is it?
(off her look)
I mean is it waiting tables, or...?

SHIONA
I do a little bit of everything.
When I was first hired, they just
told me to serve drinks and food.
(MORE)

SHIONA(cont'd)

If I stayed all night, I'd pick up
the early racing forms.

MARC

Ah, yeah? Does it pay well?

SHIONA

Well enough.

(then)

But not as good as the nights
things would get slow and I'd have
to do a trick or two. Now that was
good cash. Tax free, too.

Marc sits up, playing along.

MARC

Tricks? What you mean like magic?

SHIONA

No, honey. Ain't nothing magic
about it...

Marc nods. He gets to his feet, starts to put on his shirt.

SHIONA (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

Marc shrugs, goes for his pants.

SHIONA (CONT'D)

Oh baby... c'mon. It's nothing
like when I'm with you.

(touching his)

Hey. I've never felt this way
before. I'm serious. This - you
and me - is two people loving on
each other. It's not like screwing
in some room behind a bar.

MARC

Ah, Jesus.

Marc pulls away from her, putting on his socks.

MARC (CONT'D)

I'm sorry... I just... I gotta go
walk around, or something...

SHIONA

Hey --

Shiona pulls him back down to the bed.

SHIONA (CONT'D)
That was then. It's all different
now. I *feel* different.

He looks deeply into her eyes.

MARC
No more tricks?

SHIONA
No more.

MARC
(beat)
Promise me.

Shiona says nothing. Then --

A RAPPING at the door, startles them both. Shiona goes for
her robe.

Marc gets up, stares through the peephole.

POV - Michael stands there, shifting his weight, agitated.

MICHAEL
Hey, bro - you in there? Lemme in -
it's an emergency.

Marc opens the door. Michael, harried and scuffed, pushes in,
begins to pace, cagey.

MARC
... what is it?

MICHAEL
We're fucked man, that's what it
is. *I'm* fucked...
(looking to Shiona)
You're fucked.

SHIONA
The hell you talking about?

Michael goes to the window, peers through the shades.

MICHAEL
That mansion we robbed? It wasn't
some run-of-the mill old fart's.
They guy had mob connections.
Nobody knew... He got in touch with
Lou, Lou played dumb, denied
everything.
(MORE)

MICHAEL(cont'd)

But now he's mad as fuck that we gave him rotten info. End of the day: He threw us to the lions, Shi. He told 'em we pulled off the whole thing!

SHIONA

Oh, shit.

MICHAEL

Yeah - and his gumbas backed up the story.

(jabbing a finger at her)

Along with your traitor brother!

Shiona sinks to a chair, as Marc watches the exchange, helpless. Michael looks ready to rip out his hair, clearly strung out.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

How the fuck could you not know who we were dealing with, Shiona? Huh?!

SHIONA

Hey - I just told your ass a conversation I overheard. Ain't my fault if you didn't check it out...

Marc notices the Slasher, half-hanging out of Michael's belt. Michale suddenly whirls on Shiona.

MICHAEL

I need the book.

SHIONA

Shit. Ain't no way.

MICHAEL

It's the only chance we have of saving our hides!

MARC

What book?

MICHAEL

Your girlfriend here once showed me a guest book she stole from Belle Isle. It has a shitload of names in it and could be real interesting to the cops, to wives, to ex-wives. Most of all, it would take Lou down for good.

SHIONA

Damn right. That's why it's in a safe place.

MICHAEL

No place is safe! If he comes looking for you and finds it --

SHIONA

Let him come! He's gonna love seeing where I cut him next.

MICHAEL

I want that book, goddammit!

SHIONA

You keep your fuckin' paws off it! It may be the only way I can save *my* hide!

Shiona heads for the bathroom. Michael grabs her wrist.

MARC

-- DON'T!

Michael and Shiona are halted by Marc's outburst. Shiona yanks away and ducks inside the bathroom, slamming the door. Michael crosses to Marc, keeping his temper.

MICHAEL

You said you wanted to stay out of this, bro. Now might be a good time.

MARC

Whattya gonna do, "bro"? Use the Slasher on me?

Michael looks ready to do just that. Finally he drains. He sinks to the bed, running his hands through his hair.

MICHAEL

Will you come out for a walk with me? Lemme talk to you...

Marc hesitates... unmoving. Michael looks up, pleading with him. Over this we hear ADULT MARC:

ADULT MARC (V.O.)

Would you just talk to me?

INT. RUNNER'S WORLD OFFICES - DAY

Adult Marc is on his phone, leaving a message.

ADULT MARC

That's all I ask, Lela. I'm...
sorry I couldn't before. But, I
will... we can't have this distance
between us... so... I really just...
want to talk.

Marc hangs up. He tries to go back to work. His FINGERS hover over the keyboards. He looks around his desk, at the random DETRITUS: SHOES promo CALENDAR, a photo with a FAMOUS RUNNER...

His eyes are absolutely lost, as he stares at the screen.

The BLINKING CURSOR waits for a touch of the keys....

There is COMMOTION down the hall. Marc glances up --

Michael appears around a cubicle, searching around. He looks like he's been drinking. A RECEPTIONIST follows him.

RECEPTIONIST

Sir... you can't go back there.
Sir --!

Michael spots Marc at his desk and comes over. Marc stands, indicates to the receptionist it's okay. She fades back.

MICHAEL

Why won't you talk to me? Huh?
Why?

MARC

This is totally inappropriate,
Michael.

MICHAEL

I didn't take that rap to protect
those scumbags, Marc. I took it to
protect you! Do you ever think
about that?

REED'S VOICE (O.S.)

Marc --?

REED, Marc's EDITOR, stands a few feet away, concerned.

REED

We good here, or what...?

MARC

We're okay, Reed. Thanks.

Reed gives Michael a once-over and heads off.

MARC

This isn't the time. Please go.

MICHAEL

When is the time? Hmm. I did it for you. So your life wouldn't be ruined, like mine. And now you won't help me? Why?

MARC

Get out. Or I call security.

Marc lifts his phone. Michael stares through him. Finally, he turns and walks out. Marc hangs up. He breathes, rattled to the core.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - ALLEY

Young Marc and Michael are moving through the back-alleys. Michael is nervous, rubbernecking. Marc is lost in thought.

MICHAEL

You have to find out where she keeps that book. I have to get it in my hands.

MARC

You said you wouldn't involve me in anything anymore.

MICHAEL

Yeah, well, sorry pal, but you're in this with the rest of us!

MARC

No I'm not!

Marc looks at him in disbelief. Michael is beside himself with junkie anxiety.

MICHAEL

No? I keep you in the place you're living. I keep food on your plate, green in your pocket. You are *involved!*

MARC

(stopping in his tracks)
Then don't help out anymore. I'm going back to my folks. I'm sick of this shit.

Marc turns and heads away.

MICHAEL

Wait -- Marc -- Moishe!

Marc hesitates. Michael approaches him.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I'm scared to my shit, man. The Perelli name used to mean everything on the streets... now it's like wearing a target. I'm a wanted man. I don't even have control over Torch anymore.

Marc's color drains. Michael looks suddenly past him, down the alley.

A TRIO of YOUNG THUGS have appeared around the corner, stopping in their tracks, spotting Michael. They talk among themselves, then fan out and start to approach. Michael and Marc turn and start walking the other direction.

MICHAEL

Okay... we can handle this.

They spot two more YOUTHS, closing in on them from far ahead.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

There's a side alley ahead. When we get there, turn and run like hell. I'll handle these guys.

MARC

No way. I'm not leaving you.

MICHAEL

Don't worry. Some will go after you. But you can lose them on Jackson. I'll find you later.

The YOUTHS are closing in. Michael suddenly taps Marc.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

Go!

Marc bolts forward as Michael heads down another alley. A couple of the rear flank of the YOUTHS peel off and chase Marc, but he easily loses them in a fast sprint. They drop back, start running back into the alley.

Marc slows his gait and cuts suddenly down another alley, heading back toward the first.

ANOTHER ALLEYWAY

Marc emerges to see Michael backed against a wall, swiping with the Slasher, keeping the tormenters at bay.

Across the street, Marc grabs onto a fire escape ladder, pulling himself up.

The YOUTHS unsheathe their own knives... one pulls out a chain. They form a ringlet around Michael.

Michael spots Marc, reaching the rooftop. He grins, puts the knife between his teeth and leaps up onto the building, grabbing the niches in the brick and pulling himself skyward.

The YOUTHS are too stunned to react. A couple try vainly to follow, but slide back down. Another throws a GARBAGE PAIL lid, narrowly missing Michael, who continues to climb.

Marc shakes his head, grinning, watching him scale all the way up to the rooftop. Michael reaches the opposite building, steps back and waves to Marc.

There is a moment as they make eye contact across the chasm. Michael has a strange look in his eyes, then, he turns and runs, hopping rooftops, heading the opposite direction.

The Youths disperse, trying to follow.

OLDER MARC (V.O.)

That was the last I saw of Michael
Perelli as a boy.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Adult Marc and Lela are having coffee together.

MARC

The cops picked him up the next day. He was the number one suspect in the murder. She had his skin under her fingernails.

Lela reflects, sipping her coffee.

LELA

... what about this girl? Shiona?
Did you love her?

Marc is lost a moment for a response. Then, he nods.

MARC

It might be said it was the first time I felt real love.
(looking up)
But not the last.

Lela is moved, but still looks uneasy.

MARC (CONT'D)

I understand if you need to leave me, Lela. Michael Perelli is my curse. Not yours.

LELA

No. You not completing things with him is your curse. You need to either avoid him your whole life or go closer. For both your sakes.

MARC

Why is it my responsibility to help him?

LELA

It's not. But it is a relationship you started and something you need to finish, or you can't move forward. And neither can I.

Lela checks her cellphone, gets up to leave.

LELA (CONT'D)

Help his clear his name. If that's even possible.

Lela looks him over a moment, then gives him a kiss, kneeling beside him to look into his eyes.

LELA (CONT'D)
 I'm not leaving you, Marc. But I
 am going away. For the duration it
 takes for you to deal with this.

With that, she turns and leaves. He watches as she vanishes
 into the sidewalk traffic.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STREETS - EVENING

Young Marc is slinking through the shadows, uneasy. He turns
 a corner and freezes, looking down the street --

Where Zeyda is haggling with a NEIGHBOR.

Marc bites his lip... takes a few steps that direction, then
 stops himself. He loiters in the mouth of an alley a moment,
 pondering, then turns and starts jogging the other direction.

EXT. PALUMBO'S - NIGHT

Marc hesitates before the building entrance, before heading
 inside.

INT. PALUMBO'S

No one is out front. Marc peers through a door into--

-- DINING AREA. There are only a couple of people sitting
 around. One of them is an elder MOB ACCOUNTANT type,
 calculating on a pad and an adding machine.

Marc looks around. He spots a DOOR behind the COUNTER. He
 moves around it, pushing through.

INT. LARGE WAREHOUSE ROOM

GAMBLING TABLES are set up around the space. It is filled
 with smoke and HAGGARD PLAYERS. Marc spots--

-- a scantily clad SERVER GIRL moving around the tables.
 Another is getting her ass pinched by a bulldog faced PLAYER.

LOU (O.S.)
 --hey!

Marc looks around, to see Lou fastly approaching.

LOU (CONT'D)
Well, whattya say Kike? You here
to get in on the action?

MARC
(wavers, then)
I'm looking for Shiona.

Lou's features darken.

LOU
That bitch don't work here anymore.
In fact, she won't work again in
this town. Guaranteed.

Marc's eyes drop to Lou's arm.

There is a bandage around on of his bicep, the soak of blood
visible.

LOU (CONT'D)
You seen her?

MARC
I told you, I'm looking for her.

LOU
Yeah, well, you find her, I want to
know about it. I owe her a little
re-payment.

Fuming, Lou turns and heads off. Marc swallows.

INT. HALLWAY

Marc emerges into a paneled corridor. Nobody is around. But
he becomes aware of distant VOICES.

EXT. SHIONA'S APARTMENT BUILDING

Marc approaches. He fishes out a hidden key from a crack
between the mailbox and lets himself in.

INT. SHIONA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Marc steps inside.

MARC
Shiona?

Marc freezes. The place has been ransacked. The MATTRESS is slashed and thrown aside. A CLOSET DOOR is half open, the contents strewn onto the floor.

MARC (CONT'D)
... hey...? Shiona?

Marc stops in his tracks, as something foul seems to hit his nostrils. He looks down--

-- he's stepped into a puddle of BLOOD.

Marc pushes the ripped mattress aside, revealing Shiona's crumpled, bloodied body underneath. He buckles.

MARC (CONT'D)
Oh, Jesus... no... NO!

Marc cries in choking sobs. We PULL BACK into the darkness of another room.

OLDER MICHAEL (V.O.)
You weren't the first one in the apartment, Marc. I think someone was there even before me...

INT. SHIONA'S APARTMENT - EARLY EVENING

Carmen is frantically searching drawers. He pulls the final one out of a dresser, looks around, frustrated.

He pries open a buck knife, starts cutting into the MATTRESS. He becomes aware of VOICES approaching in the hallway. He quickly ducks into the darkness of the bedroom.

Shiona charges inside, Michael on her heels. He is clearly strung out, eyes-wild, pouring sweat.

MICHAEL
Goddammit, Shi, where is it?! You fucking tell me!

SHIONA
Fuck you! I don't got to do nothin'! It doesn't belong to you and you ain't gettin' it!

MICHAEL
It doesn't belong to you either!

SHIONA
 That book is the only thing
 standing between me and dyin'!
 And I am going to use it to bury
 Lou's ass in the ground!

Shiona stops in her tracks, spotting the first of the strew.

SHIONA
 Ah, shit...

But Michael is amped. He still comes at her, grabs her wrist.

MICHAEL
 Get it! Right now!

Shiona slaps at him -- her fingernails scratch across his face. He staggers back, touching the wound.

Shiona steps back, deftly draws her knife.

SHIONA
 C'mon, motherfucker. Try me.

Michael shakes his head, coming toward her. He wipes sweat from his crazed sneer.

MICHAEL
 You... selfish... ungrateful...
 bitch!

Shiona backs away, into --

INT. BEDROOM

No sign of Carmen. Michael gets close enough for Shiona to take a slash at him. But Michael sidesteps and pulls out his Slasher.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 You wanna play? Let's play.

Shiona growls, steps back and grabs the ashtray. She hurls it at him, catching in the side of the temple. He staggers, dropping the knife, falling back.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 Ahhh - fuck!

Michael rushes her. She stabs but misses. He grabs her wrist and punches her in the face. Shiona drops to the floor. Michael steps back, breathing heavily. He notices--

The RIPPED MATTRESS... the ransacked room. Then --

-- there's a noise from inside the CLOSET. The door is open slightly. A CREAKING noise.

Michael, paranoid, throws open the window and climbs out onto the fire escape. He takes a last look back, then descends.

After a long moment, Carmen slinks out of the closet. He regards Shiona's prone form.

INT. SHIONA'S APARTMENT - A MINUTE LATER

Carmen uses a handkerchief to pick up the phone. He dials a number. After a beat:

CARMEN

Lou? Think we got a situation here.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Adult Michael sits looking at the bar. After a moment, he reaches for his drink. He looks over.

Adult Marc, still in his jacket, is here too. He is far away in thought.

MARC

What it's only something you imagined?

MICHAEL

(takes a drink)
What if it's not?

INT. SHIONA'S APARTMENT - (PAST)

Lou is let into the apartment by Carmen.

LOU

You looked everywhere?

CARMEN

Everywhere I could think of.

LOU
Then you didn't look hard enough,
dipshit.

Lou starts perusing the place. He begins to feel around the gutted dresser, groping the inside layers.

CARMEN
What are we gonna do about her?

LOU
Shit, I dunno... where is she?

CARMEN
In here.

Carmen leads Lou into the bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM

Lou looks around the floor.

LOU
You sure the fuck tore up the
place.

CARMEN
What the hell was I supposed to do?

LOU
Maybe not let everybody know
something was this worth looking
for--?

Lou cuffs the back of his head. Carmen scowls and pulls the mattress aside, steps back.

Shiona's body is not there.

LOU (CONT'D)
What the fuck, Carmen?

CARMEN
She was right there, goddammit --

Lou looks up, into the mirror of a vanity.... as a reflection catches his eye. Carmen points --

CARMEN
Lou!

Lou turns, in time to see Shiona coming toward him, holding her bleeding jaw. She swipes at Carmen, coming up behind him, swiping with her blade. She catches him in the ear.

LOU
Ah -- what the -- !?

Lou steps forth, kicking Shiona in the stomach. She curls and goes to her knees. Lou further kicks her in the face with his boot. She crashes into the dresser.

LOU (CONT'D)
Crazy bitch!

Shiona is out cold, slumped against the dresser.

CARMEN
Holy shit, Lou! I didn't know she was still kickin'.

LOU
Fuck me.

Lou sits on the bed, rubbing his hands through his hair.

LOU (CONT'D)
Well... I doubt she's gonna tell us where it is, no matter how we try to shake it out of her.
(beat)
She's as good as dead.

Carmen looks at him solemnly. Lou is staring off. His eyes fall upon something--

-- a knife handle, half-under a pillow. Lou kicks it aside, revealing the Slasher knife.

Lou trades a look with Carmen. He pulls the case from the pillow and wraps his covered hand around the knife handle, turns his attention back to the unconscious Shiona.

Carmen sees what's about to happen, his eyes going wide.

CARMEN
No, Lou... ah, Jesus... !

Lou stands over Shiona, plunges the knife into her body. Carmen stumbles back, watching in horror.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING

We PULL BACK through the window, as the killing continues...

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

Marc, a drained drink before him, listens, stoic.

MARC
You can't be sure.

Michael sits beside him, hunched over.

MICHAEL
Carmen could be sure. And he's
alive and can be brought under
subpoena.

MARC
It's too late.

MICHAEL
No. It's just the right time.
Because we have nothing to lose
anymore. I can't be damaged any
more than I am. And they can't
kill your grandparents.

Marc looks at him.

MARC
That's what they said they would
do, y'know. If I'd ratted on them.

Marc nods a long time, then looks up.

MARC (CONT'D)
Hey Mike... back then... Did you
tell Lou where my parents lived?

MICHAEL
Hell no. Why would I ever do that?
Are you out of your mind?

Michael drinks avoiding his eyes.

MARC
Did you tell anybody? Carmen?

MICHAEL
Shit man, I'm sitting here telling
you how much I wanted to protect
you and you think I'd give up your
home town?

Marc continues to study him. Michael picks at the bar top.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

My life was ruined already,
Moishe... so I pled guilty to
something I didn't do. Telling the
truth would have hurt people I
loved. So it was better to lie...

Marc is staring into his REFLECTION in the BAR MIRROR... lost
in thought...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BUS - (PAST) - DAY

Young Marc rides solemnly along, staring out the window.

EXT. SUBURBAN CENTER - DAY

The BUS pulls alongside a curb at an intersection. A few
passengers step off, Marc the last of them. He is greeted by
his MOTHER... led to a STATION WAGON.

INT. STATION WAGON - DAY

Marc rides along, staring through the window. His mother is
talking but he is elsewhere, watching the SUBURBAN LANDSCAPE
pass by...

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

The STATION WAGON pulls into a circular driveway. Marc steps
off, as his mother opens the trunk. His DAD steps out to
the front entry, smoking a pipe, eyeing his arrival.

INT. HOUSE - DINING ROOM

Marc eats with his MOTHER and FATHER and OLDER SISTER. The
conversation flows, but Marc hears it only as MURMURS.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Marc moves through the room. MOTHER and FATHER have fallen
asleep in front of a flickering TELEVISION. Marc passes
through like a spectre, continuing up some stairs--

INT. ROOM

Marc goes inside his, quietly closes the door behind him. He
crosses the room, turns on a lamp. He jumps, as he becomes
aware of someone in the room with him.

Lou is sitting in a corner chair. Carmen sits on the bed, reading from an Esquire magazine.

LOU
Hey, Carmen. Look who's here.

CARMEN
Yo, hey - whattya say, Kike?

MARC
What are you doing here?

LOU
(shrugs)
Visiting. Isn't that what friends do?

MARC
How did you get in?

LOU
C'mon. Don't insult me. We got past the alarms of a million dollar mansion. You don't think we can figure out a way into this dump?

CARMEN
Besides, the kicker of it is all the doors in this place are unlocked.

Lou and Carmen chuckle. Marc is looking cagey.

There is a RUSTLE in Marc's closet. Royce steps out, closing the door behind him. He sucks on a toothpick.

ROYCE
Motherfucker needs to get him a new style, man.

Carmen and Lou laugh. Marc is ashen.

LOU
Yeah, kid. You might wanna listen to Torch on that. He has a way with the ladies.

ROYCE
Speakin' of, how old is your sister, man?

CARMEN

Yeah - we saw her leave for a date
or somethin'. Is she legal?

MARC

You guys need to leave right now.

LOU

Oh. Okay. Wow. How rude. I let
you come into my house, I can't be
in yours? I see...

Lou stands, taps Carmen to go.

LOU (CONT'D)

We'll be going, then.

He walks up close to Marc.

LOU (CONT'D)

But I do want to go with that which
belongs to me.

MARC

(swallows)

I don't know what you mean.

LOU

Don't you fuckin' lie to me. She
gave you something to take care of.
Didn't she?

Marc blinks. Lou stares through him.

MARC

Look - I saw from the beginning
that she was trouble, alright? She
was just a trick... that I hired a
lot.

Royce tightens, steps toward him. Lou holds him back.

MARC (CONT'D)

I swear to god. I didn't get any
closer to her than that. And she
didn't tell me shit.

Lou is wavering. Royce stares daggers into him.

ROYCE

Cut him, Lou.

LOU
Shut your fuckin' hole.

Lou looks back at him, eyes boring into him.

MARC
I don't want any part of any of it,
okay? I just wanna go back to my
life. I don't give a shit about
what happens to Perelli or anyone
else... I swear.

Lou looks him over, then grins. He taps his face.

LOU
You do that. You go back to your
cozy world of mowed lawns and
lemonade and we'll crawl back into
the sewers. And never shall we
meet...

(beat)
Unless you fuck up and do something
stupid. In which case, you're
gonna start having a lot of dead
ancestors. You hearin' me?

After a moment, Marc nods. Lou looks to Carmen. They head
toward the door. Royce lingers.

LOU (CONT'D)
Nice place your folks got here,
kid. They must do all right.

MARC
Please be quiet on your way out.

LOU
Oh. Certainly.

Marc follows them as they head out the door. Suddenly
Royce's hand snaps out, clenching his hand around Marc's
neck. Royce smashes him back into the closet, crushing him
into the hangers. Marc struggles. Royce gets into his face.

ROYCE
And if I find out you had anything
to do with my Shi dyin'...
anything... at all...

Royce's eyes are anguished. He sees something deep in Marc's
eyes. For a moment he has a lucidity. Lou steps in.

LOU
Let him go, Torch. C'mon--

Royce releases his grip. Marc falls back, gasping.

LOU (CONT'D)
No way to treat your host.

Lou pats Marc, nudges Royce out the door.

INT. STAIRWELL

Lou, Carmen and Royce head down the steps. They pass the LIVING ROOM, the sleeping parents, and matter-of-factly exit.

Marc, at the top of the stairs, stands watching. After a moment, he sinks to his knees, grabs the railing, shaking. After a moment, he begins to weep, in uncontrollable release... as the EVENING TV PROGRAM plays in the distance--

MICHAEL (V.O.)
Help me.

INT. BAR

Adult Marc is coming out of his reflection. He looks over. Michael is looking at him, imploring.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Help me get those cockroaches,
Marc. We can drag them into the
light.

MARC
What happened to the book?

MICHAEL
Never found it. I went back a
couple hours later but the cops
were there. One of them spotted
me. I climbed up a building but
they actually snagged me. Can you
believe that?

EXT. CEMETARY - DAY

Young Marc is watching Shiona's funeral rites. He looks around...

Lucy is here, her eyes wet and puffy, as she cries, comforted by her MOTHER.

Marc looks to the other faces.

Royce stares, like a statue, as the CASKET is being lowered.

Down the line of faces -- Lou and Carmen stand together. Lou whispers something to Carmen, who stifles a laugh.

Marc eyes them, boiling. He looks toward the SUN, beaming down... polarizing everything... He looks back to --

-- the casket, lowering. But now the upper lid is open. Shiona is sitting up slightly, looking straight toward us, as she disappears into the MAW...

INT. MARC'S APARTMENT

Marc starts awake. He sits up, on the edge of the bed. He rubs his face, his eyes darting.

INT. OFFICE AREA

Marc fires up his computer, tries to work. He watches as the WHITE SCREEN begins to emerge on the monitor...

Marc stares at the screen, his face a blank.

INT. RUNNERS WORLD - REED'S OFFICE

Reed, Marc's editor, is kicked back behind his desk, tossing a stress ball into the air.

REED

Well. I think this might be a first...

MARC

Hopefully a last. I'm just... blocked, Reed. I need to clear for a few days, then come back, have a fresh perspective, and...I dunno...

REED

Hit the ground running?

MARC

Something like that.

REED

Do what you need to do. We'll run a disclaimer saying our most popular columnist will be back soon.

(tossing the ball)
Which I hope is not false advertising.

MARC

No.

Marc, distracted, starts out the door.

REED

Hey --

Marc pauses.

REED (CONT'D)

Are you in any kind of trouble?

MARC

What do you mean?

REED

Anything to do with that unannounced visit the other day?

MARC

Nothing. I'm telling you, I just need some fresh air.

REED

Yeah, well - make it a few fast breaths, willya?

EXT. MARC'S CAR - DAY

Marc drives out of the CITY... heading along the HIGHWAY...

EXT. FREEWAY - DAY

Marc turns onto an INTERCHANGE... heading further out of town....

EXT. MARC'S OLD NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Marc cruises through the streets of his YOUTH... passing the area where Zeyda's STORE once stood... he slows, looking. A CVS PHARMACY is now in it's place.

EXT. LOT/TREELINE - DAY

Marc is on-foot, moving through an empty lot, approaching the TREELINE where he first encountered Royce as a youth. He parts the TREES, stepping out onto--

A PARKING LOT, behind an OFFICE BUILDING. The field is gone.

EXT. STREETS - LATER

Marc strolls up to a familiar block. He stands, looking at-- PALUMBO'S RESTAURANT - one thing that hasn't seemed to change a bit in all the years. Marc heads inside.

INT. PALUMBO'S - LATER

Marc steps in. There is no one at the front. He idly glances inside the RESTAURANT.

There is a smattering of CUSTOMERS. A gangly teen WAITRESS is too busy to notice Marc.

Marc heads the other direction, going behind the counter and into the back entrance.

INT. WAREHOUSE AREA

Marc steps inside. The once floating gambling area is now a musty place full of boxes and stacked furniture. He hears a tinny SPORTS BROADCAST and keeps moving through the gloom.

EXT. BACK OFFICE

Marc approaches an office entrance. He pauses in the doorway.

An OLDER MAN sits behind a desk, doing calculations, his back to Marc.

Marc taps on the doorframe. The man swivels around. It is CARMEN, now aged with thin wisps of fleeting white hair.

CARMEN
... help you?

MARC
It's me, Carmen. Don't you
remember?

Carmen is still puzzled.

MARC (CONT'D)
The Kike.

Slow realization grows on Carmen's face.

CARMEN
You look different.

MARC
This place doesn't. Some things
don't change, huh?

CARMEN
What do you want?

MARC
I want to see Lou Cuparella.

CARMEN
Good luck with that. He's dead.

Carmen goes back to work, trying to ignore him.

MARC
Just like Shiona Edwards.

Carmen pauses, looks up, as if struck in the face.

CARMEN
Just like... yeah. 'Cept his was 10
years ago. They're probably
chattin' it up in heaven now.

MARC
You really think Lou ended up
there, huh?

CARMEN
(shrugs)
I'm Italian. I have to.

MARC
What do you think they must be
saying to each other, Carmen?

Carmen doesn't respond.

MARC (CONT'D)
Do you think Shiona's asking Lou
why he murdered her?

MARC
You get the hell out.

Carmen again attempts to return to his task.

MARC (CONT'D)
Ever find the book you were looking
for?

CARMEN
(stopping short)
We thought you were sittin' on it.
We couldn't figure out who else she
might trust enough with it...

MARC
Nope. Still looking for it.

Carmen looks Marc in the eye, disturbed.

CARMEN
You were warned about what would
happen if you made any noise.

MARC
I remember. But I've been quiet a
long time, Carmen. Much like
yourself... Besides, Lou's dead.
What harm can it do him now if it
happens to surface?

Carmen doesn't answer, just holding him in his gaze.

MARC (CONT'D)
Or is it maybe that it could still
do you harm?

CARMEN
What the fuck are you after?

Marc shakes his head, turns to leave.

MARC
Just the knowledge that the book
still holds power over you. Be
seeing you, Carmen.

Marc walks out. Carmen struggles to turn his chair around.

CARMEN

Hey... HEY --! Get back here!

INT. WAREHOUSE AREA

Marc moves through the space, toward the door, as Carmen's calls echoes through the gloom.

EXT. SHIONA'S OLD BUILDING - DUSK

Marc's car pulls up before the building. He steps out.

He walks up familiar steps. The building is now CONDEMNED,. He approaches the dilapidated entrance. He squeezes through the hanging door --

INT. APARTMENT - FOYER

Marc crunches across glass and debris, making his way up the ragged flight of stairs.

INT. SHIONA'S OLD APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM

Marc moves inside, taking in the wreck that was once a living space. The room is gutted to the bare walls, the floors ripped up. Marc walks around, remembering... he looks toward the adjacent room. A smile drifts over his face --

POV - the other room for a moment looks like it once did. In the smokey shadows, Shiona moves, lithe and unabashed.

Marc stands looking... the VOICE of Carmen drifting in:

CARMEN (V.O.)

Couldn't figure out who else she
might trust enough to give it to.

Something dawns on Marc's face. He looks back --

-- the room behind his has transformed to the scene from the PAST. Michael is on the couch with Lucy. Lucy looks up and takes in Shiona with fondness.

Adult Marc blinks, thinking.

There is a CREAK on the floorboards. Marc is snapped from his daydream --

-- a JUNKIE has drifted out of another ROOM, stands looking at him... another JUNKIE drifts up behind him.

Marc takes them in a moment, then turns and slowly starts heading out.

EXT. SHIONA'S - OLD BUILDING

Marc comes walking out, shaken... in deep thought.

INT. RUNNERS JOURNAL OFFICES - REED'S OFFICE

Reed steps in to a ringing phone.

REED
Reed Fleming.
(beat)
Marc? Didn't expect to hear from
you, buddy.

INT. MARC'S CAR

Marc is on his cell, driving away from the building.

MARC
I need you to go back to your early
days, Reed.

REED
... 'kay?

MARC
When you were the best at finding a
source by any means necessary.
When I first met you. You remember?

REED (FILTERED)
I thought you were on a break.

MARC
I was. Then *I* got a break. I need
to find a source, yesterday.

INT. REED'S OFFICE

Reed sighs, puts down the stress ball, whirls to his computer.

REED

Okay - what's the name? ... de la
Garza... First name?

INT. BOWLING ALLEY - LATER

Marc moves along a line of ALLEYS... mustering courage as he approaches a counter. A plump, bespectacled WOMAN looks up. Lucy, aged by 20+ years. She blinks at him.

MARC

Hello, Lucy.

Lucy looks at him, suspect. Then, something dawns.

EXT. BOWLING ALLEY - LATER

Lucy stands outside the entrance, in the alcove, smoking. Rain comes down around them.

LUCY

Naw. She never gave me anything.

MARC

Are you sure?

LUCY

Hell, yeah. I'd remember. And what makes you think I would tell you anyway?

MARC

(shrugs)

Because you miss her. Like I miss her.

LUCY

(halted a moment)

What good's missing her gonna do?
Ain't gonna bring her back.

MARC

No. And it's not going to give Michael back his jail time, either.

Lucy nods, looking off.

MARC (CONT'D)

Do you think he deserved that time, Lucy?

LUCY

Hell, no. He didn't do it.
Couldn't do it. Everybody knows
that.

MARC

(nodding)

Then why won't anybody come forward
and say who really did it.

LUCY

'Cause some people know better than
to be a shit disturber.

She grinds out her cigarette.

LUCY (CONT'D)

Doesn't matter. What's past is
past.

MARC

What if there was a way to re-open
the case? Clear Michael's name.
Would it be worth it to you?

LUCY

Look, mister. I got three kids and
a house I'm losing. I don't need
anything extra to worry about.

MARC

(nods)

Are you sleeping okay?

LUCY

Sure. Sleep just fine.

MARC

'Cause I haven't been able to since
I started thinking about it all.
It won't let me go. Too many
questions to wrap my mind around.
Like who really killed Shiona, what
happened to the book...

(off her reaction)

And why any person who has it isn't
using it to find out the truth?

Lucy has had enough. She reaches for the door. Marc detains
her a moment.

MARC (CONT'D)

We both loved her, Lucy. And you're right, we're not gonna bring her back. But we could still do justice to her memory.

Marc extends his business card toward her.

MARC (CONT'D)

If you ever find yourself awake and wanna talk - this is me.

Lucy pockets it and heads inside. Marc looks defeated.

INT. MARC'S CAR - NIGHT

Marc drives, in deep reflection.

MARC (V.O.)

It is these interims, these times of assessment... which are perhaps the most important to listen to...

INT. MARC'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Marc is still dressed as if he has just gotten in. He is typing away at his keyboard, as the article materializes:

MARC (V.O.)

The space between each breath... each heartbeat... each step... must be just as revered - if not more so - than the action itself.

EXT. TRAIL - DAY

Marc is running along the trail, FEET pounding into the path.

MARC (V.O.) CONT'

In this space, the fact comes shining through: The heartbeat and blood are vitally dependent upon one another. One is form, one is fluid. They are related, yet made up of different types of cells, separate DNA code...

Marc slows down... coming to a standstill... as he stands there, breathing heavily...

MARC (V.O.) CONT'D)

Yet they are full partners on this cooperative journey... bound, like the lungs, like all other organs, in this unifying vessel.

INT. RUNNERS WORLD OFFICES - DAY

Marc arrives at his offices, makes his way to his desk.

MARC (V.O.)CONT'D)

When one recognizes and cherishes these relationships in the body, and maintains a respectful cooperation between the parts, this individual has achieved true success as a runner.

Marc's eyes fall upon a FED-EX PACKAGE. He looks at--

-- the RETURN ADDRESS space. There is none.

Curious, Marc opens the package. He pours a wrapped PACKAGE into his palm. Marc unwraps it, revealing a leathery BLACK BOOK. Marc sinks to his chair, turning the book over and over in his hands.

INT. LATE-NIGHT TAVERN - NIGHT

Marc steps up to the window, looks inside.

MARC (CONT'D)

But to be a true success, the aware runner equally listens to the silences... those periods of quiet, invaluable feedback:

INSIDE - Michael's back is to us. He is a deflated figure, slumped against the edge of the bar, leaning over his drink.

Marc makes a decision, then pushes inside. Through the blur, we watch Marc approach Michael at the bar.

MARC (CONT'D)

The times of standing still.

Michael raises his head. Marc puts a hand on Michael's shoulder, taking a seat beside him, as we...

FADE OUT: