

"GRIEF SPLATTERED CANVAS"

A short film noir by

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EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

The cloud-filtered sunlight leaves no shadows on the decrepit storefronts and brick alleyways lining the city streets.

ARTHUR SOLOMAN travels down the sidewalk. His young, tortured face is full of exaggerated features, a heavy brow and distinct jaw. He's wearing a zipped up windbreaker and a cloth cap pulled down low.

He passes buildings with little consideration, finding his attention piqued instead by the gaps between. He stops at an alleyway as his eyes follow an ascending fire escape to the overcast sky.

FLASH: A vision of the same rooftop, now cast in the darkness of night. Standing atop the building is the silhouetted figure of a MAN in a TRENCH COAT and FEDORA HAT, gazing down in what seems to be Arthur's current position.

Arthur shakes off of the image as quickly as it had come. He quickens his pace to leave the alleyway, his face soured by the striking thought. He pulls his cloth cap lower to shield his eyes.

He walks quickly past another alleyway, but before he is too far from it, he stops, lifting his head to acknowledge a memory long lost. He slowly steps back to the alley.

FLASH: Night again. The same silhouetted man, this time brandishing a SWORD against a criminal fleeing into the dark.

Arthur shakes off this fleeting image just as quickly as the first. He keeps moving down the sidewalk, but sees a third alleyway in the distance which gives him pause.

He closes his eyes for a moment and swallows to accept the oncoming memory. Opening his eyes, he turns the corner of the alley with a kind of fevered dread.

FLASH: A grainy image of the silhouetted man, now closer than before, on the cover of a tabloid with the headline: "VIGILANTE BLADED JUSTICE."

The cover text fades away as we push into the image, the shadow cast by the man's fedora melting away, revealing for the first time his face: it is ARTHUR.

Violently shaking away the image, Arthur collapses, leaning against the brick wall of the alleyway.

ARTHUR (V.O.)  
I used to help people in trouble.

He removes his shaking hands from the pockets of his jacket, takes off his hat and runs his hands through his hair.

He wears a watch on both wrists. He looks at the square face of the watch strapped to the inside of his left wrist, its face obscured. He begins to calm himself down.

The sun is barely beginning to set as Arthur's attention is pulled away by the sound of a woman's terrified SCREAM echoing into the void of city noise.

ARTHUR (V.O.)  
Now I just listen to their screams.

EXT. CEMETERY - SUNSET

Arthur stands before a gravestone.

ARTHUR (V.O.)  
I measure it up against my own  
pain, and deem them unworthy.

A official looking figure, INSPECTOR GUNDRUM, stands a fair distance away from Arthur on the other side of the cemetery.

EXT. POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

Arthur inches along the wall at the front of the Police Department Building. He's wearing a backpack with a wrapped bundle protruding from its partially-zipped opening.

ARTHUR (V.O.)  
But my weapon of choice ...

Arthur crouches quietly and slings the pack off his back onto the ground in front of him, shifting the bundle to reveal its contents: his SWORD, wrapped in his TRENCH COAT.

ARTHUR (V.O.)  
... the blade with which I carved  
my own sliver of justice ...

He peeks over his shoulder to make sure nobody is watching as he pulls removes from the front zipper pocket a paper tag on which his has written: "For Inspector Gundrum."

ARTHUR (V.O.)  
... the sharp symbol of a violent  
life abandoned as I turned in The  
Blade ...

He props the sword against the wall, the jacket draped smoothly beneath it. On top of the hilt, he gently sets his fedora hat. He sticks the paper tag in the hat's brim and dashes quickly away from the soldier's grave.

INT. POLICE DEPARTMENT - EVIDENCE HOLDING - DAY

Gundrum holds the sword carefully in his gloved hands, placing it into an evidence locker. He takes one last look before SLAMMING and LOCKING the door.

ARTHUR (V.O.)  
... abandoned for her -- for us ...

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Arthur stands still in the cemetery. Gundrum takes a few soft steps toward him as the name chiseled into the gravestone is revealed: "TORI SOLOMAN, beloved wife, artist."

ARTHUR (V.O.)  
... was the same that struck her  
down.

EXT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - NIGHT

Arthur walks up to his front door. He looks through his keys, finding the proper one. Just as he lowers his hands to slide the key into the lock, he notices that THE DOORKNOB HAS BEEN COMPLETELY DEMOLISHED.

The sleeve of his jacket falls back to reveal the square watch face on the inside of his left wrist:

IT IS A HEART RATE MONITOR, steadily climbing as the SOUND of his heartbeat grows thunderously in volume. 76, 77, 78 ...

INT. POLICE DEPARTMENT - EVIDENCE HOLDING - DAY

Gundrum walks casually past the lockers as he goes to file another piece of evidence. He notices the locker from before. The door slightly ajar. He leans in to open it.

It's empty.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - NIGHT

Arthur is in complete shock as he stares at the horrifying sight before him:

On top of a puddle of her own seeping blood, TORI's body lays contorted on the floor. Her limbs are outstretched in terror. She is naked, covered only by the TRENCH COAT draped over her as if to vainly make tasteful this heinous sight.

The FEDORA sits on top of Arthur's SWORD, which is PLUNGED THROUGH HER HEART. On the blade, close to the hilt, is a new engraving that very boldly reads: "COME BACK."

Arthur collapses onto the floor, his body trembling in passionate quakes. His hands on the floor, he attempts to steady himself, tears exploding from his eyes.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

Tori. The woman who made me whole.  
Saved me from the senselessness of  
my violence ...

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

Arthur looks down to the heart monitor. 88, 89, 90 ...

ARTHUR (V.O.)

... and the foolishness of my  
pursuits. Chasing whispers across  
the rooftops of the screaming city.

Eyes closed, he breathes as deeply as his stammering will allow. In through his nose, out through his trembling mouth. Opening his soggy eyes, he sees the monitor number decrease.

EXT. CEMATARY - DAY

Gundrum walks up directly behind Arthur. He puts a comforting hand on his shoulder. He hand's him his business card.

GUNDRUM

(gently, quiet.)  
Condolences, Mr. Soloman. Come see  
us whenever you're ready.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - NIGHT

Police lights flash against Arthur's staring face as he sits on the floor of his living room. Gundrum kneels down, directly behind him, badge presented obviously on his belt.

He puts a comforting hand on Arthur's shoulder.

GUNDRUM

Did you see who did it?

ARTHUR

No. I was out buying her paint. I came home and saw ...

Gundrum nods, as if to alleviate any expectation to continue. He looks around the room, seeing a line of paintings leaning against the wall, a row of canvases.

GUNDRUM

(comfortingly)  
She was very good.

Arthur looks up, seeing the paintings Gundrum is referencing.

ARTHUR

Better than you think. That's just what she squeezed out of me.

GUNDRUM

You an artist as well?

ARTHUR

Tried my hand. If you knew her, you'd probably try too.

OFFICER AZURE, Gundrum's partner, comes out of the kitchen.

AZURE

No sign of the murder weapon.

Arthur looks to his wife's body, revealing that this time there is just the gaping hole in her chest. No sword.

Out of the corner of his eye, Arthur looks slyly over to a small closet on the other side of the room. The door is slightly cracked, rolls of canvas material stacked behind it.

Something is sticking out from the top of one of the rolls towards the back: a familiar BUNDLE, the SHINE of a blade barely detectable underneath.

Arthur quickly returns his attention to the officers completing their search and documentation of the scene.

FADE TO:

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - DAYBREAK

Sitting framed in the exact same spot, Arthur stares into the emptiness of the main room. His eyes focused directly on the spot where his wife's body laid.

Caution tape over the front door has been cut free and now flutters limply in the draft. The light from the morning sun peeks dimly in the window.

FADE TO BLACK.

ARTHUR (V.O.)  
I tried to paint.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - THE STUDIO

Arthur stands in front of an empty canvas resting on an easel. He dabs his brush violently on the palette.

ARTHUR (V.O.)  
To ignore the overwhelming instinct  
for revenge that coursed through my  
veins.

He puts his brush to the canvas, but his strokes are staggered, merging into harsh shapes. A jarring image of a jagged man, hunched over.

ARTHUR (V.O.)  
Someone murdered my wife so that I  
would fight back, but doing that  
I'd kill her twice over by  
betraying the part of me she made  
better.

He tries to steady his brush by holding it with both hands and leaning in closer to the canvas. A few smooth strokes form a simplistic curved body shape behind the man.

ARTHUR (V.O.)  
I'm already starting to forget her  
face.

He pulls back to look at his unfinished painting: the craggy figure and A WOMAN WITHOUT A FACE.

ARTHUR (V.O.)  
I used to be able to see her when  
I'd paint. Even when she wasn't  
there.

Arthur looks to the empty chair next to him, then back to the faceless woman on the canvas. He THRASHES the canvas across the room in his frustration, the easel toppling to the floor.

ARTHUR (V.O.)  
So, my greatest revenge will be  
taken by ... not taking it at all.

He looks over the cracked-open supply closet and the rolls of canvas hiding a bundle within.

He walks up to closet door and opens it all the way. Facing the canvas rolls, he pulls the bundle out, revealing the sword. His hands tense as he grasps it.

He winces as an IMAGE of Tori skewered on the floor FLASHES into his mind, causing him to drop the sword. Immediately he stomps out of the closet, SLAMMING the door behind him.

Grabbing a key from a nearby drawer, he locks the closet with a firm twist, pulls out the key and throws it across the room as he walks back to the studio.

ARTHUR (V.O.)  
So I paint. To keep her alive.

EXT. CYNTHIA'S ART SUPPLY - DAY

A squat box of an art supply store whose crisply painted sign above the entrance contrasts against the decades-old bricks that make up the store's facade.

ARTHUR (V.O.)  
But it was paint that also brought  
me to Cynthia ...

INT. CYNTHIA'S ART SUPPLY - CONTINUOUS

CYNTHIA is stocking items on a high shelf, stretching her arms to reach. Her hands are covered with dry paint strokes. Arthur enters the store, bells ringing as he opens the door.

He notices the band of exposed skin between the top of her jeans and the bottom of her shirt, which is quickly covered as she turns to see him. She's a vision with a head of fine curls that fall to her shoulders.

CYNTHIA  
Arthur, my god. I never thought  
I'd see you in here again.

ARTHUR  
So you've heard?

CYNTHIA  
I read her obituary in the paper.

Arthur stops on this.



ARTHUR

I never wrote an obituary.

CYNTHIA

Well, someone must have.

ARTHUR

These are the things I'm not letting myself think about.

CYNTHIA

I'm sorry. Forget it.

ARTHUR

Not likely.

(beat)

You know, the day she ... it was the day you told me her paint was discontinued.

CYNTHIA

"Blood Red Passion."

ARTHUR

You remember. Do you think that's the world telling me to move on?

CYNTHIA

The world only tells you what you choose to hear.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - MORNING

Arthur stares at his unfinished painting from across the room as he hangs up his windbreaker on a coat wrack. As he straightens the hanging coat, he finds a card in its pocket.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

A past curiosity promises  
fulfilment while this forgotten  
woman from my past makes me  
curious. Begging to be fulfilled.

He flips it over to read. It's Inspector Gundrum's card.

INT. GUNDRUM'S OFFICE - DAY

Gundrum sits across from Arthur, who is making no effort to be presentable, sinking into the office chair.

GUNDRUM

Mr. Soloman, I'd like to talk with you about something potentially sensational.

ARTHUR

I thought I was here to talk about my wife's death.

GUNDRUM

Exactly. Due to the nature of your wife's murder, I believe your case may play a role in another investigation I've been ... involved with.

ARTHUR

What investigation is that?

GUNDRUM

The vigilante sometimes called "Bladed Justice."

ARTHUR

You want to talk with me about some kid's story?

GUNDRUM

The hole in your wife's chest was not a kid's story, Arthur.

Arthur sits quiet for a moment.

ARTHUR

As fascinating as I'm sure your masked killer is --

GUNDRUM

He doesn't wear a mask.

Arthur's grip tightens nervously on the chair's armrests.

GUNDRUM (CONT'D)

Still haven't seen his face. Doesn't that strike you as odd?

ARTHUR

Regardless, that's a face I don't care to know. You're clearly up to your ears with this guy you might never find, but I just want to come to terms with the loss of my wife.

Gundrum sits for a moment before continuing.

GUNDRUM

I understand. And you're right.  
We may never find him. It's a  
possibility I've gone over more  
times than I'd care to consider  
(pause)

But you know what I really want to  
know? Why he quit. No. HOW he  
quit. Do you realize what it takes  
to get a person to do what he did?  
Absolute conviction.

ARTHUR

Or a death wish.

GUNDRUM

Maybe. More likely ruthless  
indignation. Passion. There's no  
way a guy like that quits.  
Something happened. He's not dead.  
Dead guys don't hang up their hat  
in the way of leaving their sword  
on my doorstep. Guy like that  
throws in the towel just to steal  
it back? None of it adds up.

Arthur looks at him with a moment of pity.

ARTHUR

Was there anything else you needed  
from me, Inspector?

GUNDRUM

No. I just wanted the chance to  
talk to you about this, Arthur. The  
Blade could prove more important  
than you realize.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - THE STUDIO - NIGHT

Cynthia enters the studio from the main room.

She picks up the unfinished painting and puts it back on the  
easel. Arthur props himself in the doorway.

CYNTHIA

This one's not finished.

He walks over to look at it with her.

ARTHUR

Yeah. She hasn't got a face yet.

CYNTHIA

Who's he?

ARTHUR

I think it's me.

CYNTHIA

Because of your brow.

ARTHUR

Yes.

She touches his brow.

CYNTHIA

What would it be, if she were me?

ARTHUR

Your lips.

They lean in to kiss. She stops before they can.

CYNTHIA

What about Tori? What would it be  
if it were her?

He looks away, broken.

ARTHUR

Her eyes. It would've been her  
eyes.

CYNTHIA

Would've?

He looks at her.

ARTHUR

Could be.

She nods.

They both turn in recognition of the SOUND of something  
SLIDING underneath the front door.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - CONTINUOUS

Arthur hurries over to the front door, picking up a SMALL  
ENVELOPE sitting on the floor. Shadows of feet walking away  
fall through the slit under the door.

Arthur instinctively puts a hand on the doorknob but stops himself, pausing to consider pursuit. He looks down to the letter in his other hand and lets go of the doorknob.

He hurriedly opens the envelope, a meticulously hand-written letter inside. His eyes flit back and forth as he reads:

ARTHUR (V.O.)

"I thought the ... death of your wife should be enough but in the way of additional persuasion, I shall return your discarded goods, and sign my name."

His eyes move down to the signature.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

"Otus."

Cynthia waits for Arthur against the couch. He shakes his head with a reserved fury, but does not look at her.

CYNTHIA

Who's it from?

Arthur crumples the note in his fist.

ARTHUR

A man who would prefer that I never remember Tori again.

CYNTHIA

Tori?

ARTHUR

What she gave me. What she made me. All lost if I yield to this man, taunting me with my past.

CYNTHIA

What does he want?

ARTHUR

Me.

CYNTHIA

Then go to him.

ARTHUR

I can't. Every step toward him -- toward the man I was -- is a step away from her -- from the man she made me. The man I still want to be.

(MORE)

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

I can't risk losing the only thing  
I ever cared to keep. Remember why  
I brought you here?

CYNTHIA

To paint.

ARTHUR

To remember.

CYNTHIA

If he'll never leave you in peace,  
then go make it. Find him without  
falling into your past ways, or  
whatever it is you're afraid of  
becoming again. You don't have to  
regress into the man Tori saved you  
from in order to end this. Change  
the rules. Redefine. Move on.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - LATER

Arthur KICKS down the closet door.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

I have to reappropriate the icons  
of my past. Separate the  
objectionable.

He kneels down to the floor, avoiding the sword.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

Redefine. Hone the negativity into  
that which was always it's root:  
the blade.

Picking up his hat and jacket, he abruptly kicks the sword  
away, sending it skidding across the floor.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

Keep the jacket. Keep the hat.

He sweeps his arms into the jacket, jumping it over his  
shoulders with building energy. He sits the hat on his head  
with reverence, taking a sensual moment to adjust the brim.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

Redefine.

With a restored and powerful demeanor, he pops the collar of  
his jacket and stands, exuding presence.

EXT. THE CITY STREETS - VARIOUS - EARLY EVENING

Arthur walks with his hat lowered and his hands in his coat pockets. The steps of a man with purpose.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

I've got a faceless portrait  
sitting in my studio. I need to  
find out who fills in the blank ...  
and if I can handle it not being  
the face of my wife.

The wind blows open Arthur's coat, revealing an envelope in his pocket marked "GUNDRUM."

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - NIGHT

Arthur sitting at a desk in his empty home, writing on a piece of paper. The envelope off to the side.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

The man I'm about to see could kill  
me in more ways than I'm capable of  
imagining. This is why I write to  
tell you of my life as Bladed  
Justice, and the better man he  
became. Because just as I seek the  
face of my wife, his is a face I  
thought you deserved to peek.

Arthur finishes writing and folds the paper, placing it into the envelope on which he writes "GUNDRUM."

INT. PUB - NIGHT

Arthur stands at the entrance. The flickering of the neon sign gives him a particularly sharp silhouette as he surveys the occupants. His eyes are slits beneath his hat's brim.

A couple playing pool in the far corner catch Arthur's eye. He approaches them without hesitation.

Getting a closer look at them, Arthur knows the type: the guy, SANDER, wears a long leather suit jacket and is trying to grow a mustache. The girl, JACEY, wears fingerless gloves and chews bubblegum.

Sander lands a successful shot in a center pocket. Jacey lets out a drunken yelp and lays a disgusting kiss on him.

As they pull apart, Sander notices Arthur standing just beyond the reach of the light cast by the overhead lamp.

SANDER

Well, look who it is.

Jacey squints to see.

JACEY

Looks like someone finally solved  
the obituary. Took ya long enough.

SANDER

Otus's clue must've bee harder for  
you to find than he thought. Some  
detective. But now you're back!  
Hittin' the streets again.

ARTHUR

No.

Arthur's heart monitor begins to slowly climb. 78 ... 79 ...

JACEY

Otus was right. All it took was  
cuttin' out the wife.

84 ... 86 ... 88 ...

SANDER

We'd wondered what happened to you.  
Bitch put you on a leash!

90 ... 95 ... 99!

BAM.

Just as Arthur's heart monitor starts to BEEP, he knocks  
Sander down with a square PUNCH to the face. Jacey SCREAMS.

In the tussle, Arthur's heart monitor is TORN from his wrist,  
silencing the beeps. Arthur's in such a fury, he does not  
take notice as it skids across the floor.

The heart monitor stops at the feet of a shadow hidden  
figure. A gloved hand picks up the device and considers it.  
The glimmering eyes in the blackness look to Arthur.

The veins in Arthur's neck protrude threateningly as he  
stretches over the pool table to grab the abandoned pool cue.

Arthur stands up, gracefully spinning the cue in his hands  
before raising it fiercely above his head. His blood-rushed  
face a knot of rage.

VOICE

STOP.



Arthur lowers the stick and looks away from the bruised and bloodied Sander. He hears clapping, and looks to the dark corner of the pub.

Out from the shadows steps OTUS, clapping his gloved hands. He's smartly dressed in a designer turtleneck and high-buttoning dress jacket. All black.

OTUS

Well, you didn't quite find me, but you got close enough. And by the looks of it ... you're ready.

ARTHUR

Ready for what?

OTUS

Let's just say that you might be holding a pool cue right now, but it looks more like a placeholder for something else.

Arthur's eyes widen. He drops the pool cue.

With lightning speed, Otus lays a devastating punch on Arthur's jaw that KNOCKS HIM OUT on contact.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. GUNDRUM'S HOME - NIGHT

Gundrum closes his refrigerator and takes a pitcher to pour a glass of water. He notices a breeze blowing the curtains through an open window.

Confused, he goes to close the window. He slides it shut and with a CRUNCH, he finds something wedged under the window.

He pulls it out and sees the envelope is marked "GUNDRUM."

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - NIGHT

Arthur sits slouched in a chair at the far end of the room.

Arthur slowly awakens as Otus slaps down a gossip rag with an artist's demonic caricature labelled "Bladed Justice."

OTUS

I've been watching you.

Arthur looks up in his grogginess to see Otus take a seat at the opposite end of the room.

OTUS (CONT'D)  
Obviously, I know who you are.

Arthur jolts the magazine off his lap with his knees.

OTUS (CONT'D)  
But do you know who I am?

ARTHUR  
Otus. The man who killed my wife.

OTUS  
Correct. Do you know why I killed  
your wife?

ARTHUR  
Well, you've been watching me.  
Maybe a perv. Jealous of her.

OTUS  
No. Really now?

ARTHUR  
To lure me back.

OTUS  
Back to what?

ARTHUR  
IS THIS A TEST?!  
(a beat, calming himself)  
You're Otus. I heard your name run  
off the mouths of countless low-  
life thugs, taunting me with the  
possibility that the thing I hunted  
all those years might actually  
exist.

OTUS  
You can't even say it. You're in  
such denial you can't even  
articulate what it is exactly you  
were looking for.

ARTHUR  
How can I call them by name? I  
wasn't even aware of them until  
someone mistook me for one.

OTUS  
Ah, I see. Mistook you because of  
your sword?

ARTHUR

Right. It was a local legend. Told mostly on playgrounds. A criminal family that used swords to kill their victims. Few believed it.

OTUS

They can believe whatever they want. Whatever is most convenient. Because they don't exist.

Otus pushes himself off the chair and faces the wall.

OTUS (CONT'D)

Anymore. There WAS a family.

(beat)

We became myth because we operated on a mythic scale. Compared to the mob, we were God. Had our hands in more pockets than any single outfit ever dreamed of. Nothing east or west dared challenge the suffocating whisper of our presence. But those times are gone.

ARTHUR

Is that what this is all about? Starting up some new "family"?

OTUS

No. The world has moved on. All I want is a fitting end. The end I was promised. You're the only one who can give that to me, I'm convinced.

(beat)

There's more meaning in the clash of our blades than anything the future can offer.

ARTHUR

I'm not that man anymore.

OTUS

You deny the animal. The natural instinct that drew you to the blade. Your life as a vigilante freed it, and your wife caged it.

ARTHUR

You've got it backwards. She freed me in ways you can't imagine.

OTUS  
(laughs, doubtfully)  
In the way of a "heart condition"?

Otus pulls the heart monitor out of his pocket and throws it to Arthur, who catches it and straps it back on his wrist.

OTUS (CONT'D)  
You're deluding yourself. You were alive on those rooftops, in those alleyways. You were free.  
(beat)  
You know how I know? Because you nearly had us. You were one step away. Before you quit. Before she pulled you away. And now you can do it. You can have me.

ARTHUR  
No. It isn't worth it. You could fabricate all this to bate me. I never made my suspicions -- my goals -- a secret back then. Anyone could have gleaned what I was looking for. You're just an obsessed freak that wants a go at me, and is making it as appetizing as you can.

Otus moves to a bag sitting on a table behind the couch.

OTUS  
(smiles)  
I wish that were so, sir, but it truly is that appetizing.

Otus unzips the bag and pulls out ARTHUR'S SWORD.

OTUS (CONT'D)  
The meal is here. I am the last member of the family you fought your life to uncover.

Otus balances the sword on his finger and nods approvingly before THROWING it across the room.

Arthur lets it fall at his feet.

OTUS (CONT'D)  
You came the closest. They were real. I am real.

Otus pulls out another sword from the bag.

OTUS (CONT'D)

And I really killed your wife to  
bring you here.

Otus removes his sword from its sheath with a resonating  
SHING, revealing a cutlass with a gently curved blade.

OTUS (CONT'D)

Now that she's gone, you can return  
to form.

Without warning, Otus gives his sword a twirl as he LEAPS,  
charging down on Arthur, who rolls to his knees, picking up  
his own sword from the floor just in time to PARRY Otus's  
crushing attack.

They quickly circle each other, Otus letting out a torrential  
succession of thrusts at Arthur, who struggles to block and  
defend himself from each precise move.

He manages to catch whirring glimpses of his heart monitor,  
taking quick, fevered breaths to allay its climbing numbers.

Otus has no concern for the surrounding room, with his  
devastating slices leaving a cascading wake of torn books and  
cracked picture frames spilling onto the floor.

Their blades lock.

ARTHUR

(out of breath)

You killed my wife ... over a  
misconception. You don't know who  
I am. You don't know ME.

OTUS

Oh, I know you. You are only what  
you put into the world. The total  
of everything that you do. You are  
responsible for the image.

(Beat)

I know you. The only "you" that  
anyone CAN know.

They throw each other apart, flanking either side of the  
couch in the center of the room.

They face down with swords extended, tips pointed mere inches  
from each other in the air. Arthur's face drips with the  
sweat of combat. He licks his upper lip, a long buried part  
of himself savoring it.

ARTHUR

Full disclosure. I got Gundrum on your tail.

OTUS

That pathetic do-good can't touch me. I'd rather die than be locked in a cell.

Arthur CHARGES, putting Otus on the defensive. The small man looks, for the first time, surprised. He'd look scared if he wasn't so delighted.

Pushing Otus into the kitchen, Arthur raises the sword above his head for a particularly harsh blow as ...

KNOCK KNOCK. The front door.

They stop. Otus is pressed against the kitchen sink. His eyes wide as he looks at the front door.

Arthur lowers his sword, hiding it behind his back as he approaches the door. He keeps one eye on Otus, who hasn't moved an inch. He's just as curious.

EXT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - NIGHT

Arthur slowly opens the front door. It's Cynthia.

CYNTHIA

Hello Arthur.

ARTHUR

Cynthia ...

CYNTHIA

Sorry to bother you at home, but I needed to give you something.

She reaches down into her purse and pulls something out. It's a bottle of paint. BLOOD RED PASSION.

Arthur accepts it with the hand not holding his sword behind the door. He looks up to her.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

There's always a little bit left to be found. Somewhere.

(beat)

Sometimes you have to fight to find it. I know I did.

ARTHUR

Thank you. This means a great deal to me.

CYNTHIA

Goodbye, Arthur.

She leaves. Arthur closes the door.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - CONTINUOUS

Arthur turns back to the room to find it empty. A window is open, curtain billowing in the night breeze. He looks around the apartment. Empty. He surveys the damage done, looking into the corners for any place a person could hide.

He hears something and turns abruptly. Just the wind. He turns around to the cracked door of the Studio. Arthur gulps hard and moves forward. He uses the tip of his blade to open the door slowly. He moves inside. Nobody.

He moves around the easel. He sees his unfinished painting: the jagged man and the faceless woman.

Arthur hears a CLICK and then a CREAK come from the main room. He turns to face the doorway. His face goes white at what he sees:

Otus walks through the front door, HOLDING CYNTHIA WITH HIS SWORD AT HER THROAT. He wrestles her forward, approaching Arthur in the studio, stopping in the frame of the doorway.

Arthur stares him down. Otus hangs on the moment.

OTUS

Now, you're not going to let me do to her what I did to Tori, are you? Consider this my assurance that you'll finish the game.

ARTHUR

Let her go.

OTUS

That all depends on who's speaking. Arthur Soloman? Or Bladed Justice?

Cynthia's eyes widen as she considers Arthur and his sword.

Arthur returns her look. Otus watches, waiting to see what Arthur will do. Arthur's hand tenses on the sword's handle, then loosens, threatening to drop it.

Finally Arthur raises his sword, pointing it at Otus with full stamina, promising further conflict.

Otus smiles and raises his own sword, PUSHING Cynthia violently out of the way as he charges Arthur, who struggles to defensively parry his attack.

Cynthia runs toward the front door and briefly turns to watch as Otus aggressively forces Arthur to the floor. Arthur notices Cynthia waiting in the doorway.

ARTHUR

Run!

Cynthia takes a worried last look before darting out the front door. Otus gazes down at Arthur, blade still pointed threateningly down at him.

OTUS

Don't be tempted by the thought that escape would somehow prevent me from killing her. If you back out now, I will most certainly arrange her a meeting with Tori.

Arthur's heart beat rises to a deafening THUD. The blood courses visibly through his neck, down to his wrist. The heart monitor reads: 97 ... 98 ... 99.

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

Arthur closes his eyes, taking something out of his pocket. He opens them and looks down at the PAINT BOTTLE.

He is flooded by the memories of Tori, assuming her calm.

His veins settle down, the beat silenced steady. On his heart monitor the number SNAPS from 101 to 77.

Arthur looks up at Otus, who trembles backward, pressed against the door frame. Arthur hasn't looked at him like this before. He's in total control.

Otus nervously raises his shaking sword to defend himself. Arthur serenely raises his blade and in a flurry of hyper-calculated moves that could barely be called an attack, he DISARMS Otus and complete DESTROYS his cutlass to shards.

The pieces of broken, useless metal fall to the ground. Arthur raises his blade to Otus's neck.

ARTHUR

You lost. The battle you wanted ... is over.



Arthur drops his sword. Otus gulps.

OTUS

And you certainly didn't  
disappoint. Just as life affecting  
as I had hoped for. Revelations  
abound.

Arthur moves toward his painting, disinterested in Otus's words.

OTUS (CONT'D)

In fact, you've made me realize  
something. In fighting you, the  
only thing more glorious than the  
dual ... the battle ...

(a beat, snarling)

Would be walking away the victor!

Otus KICKS Arthur's sword up into his hands.

In a single move, he GRABS Arthur's shoulder and PLUNGES THE  
BLADE INTO HIS BACK. The blade PIERCES HIS HEART and  
protrudes from his chest, SPRAYING the unfinished canvas in  
front of him with a shower of blood.

Arthur falls. On his way down, he aimlessly grabs the canvas  
off the easel and brings it with him. Otus stands over his  
victim, the sword still in him.

OTUS (CONT'D)

I won. The blade has fallen. By  
my hand. I WON!

Arthur pushes himself up against the chair behind him, the  
canvas still in his grasp. His words gurgle as he speaks.

ARTHUR

No ... No, you didn't win ...  
Because I'm here.

He puts his free hand, bloodied, onto the chair behind him.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

I'm right where I need to be.  
Because here ...

He takes his hand off the chair and puts it onto his chest.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

... here sat Tori.

Otus frowns, the taste of the victory spoiled for him.

As Otus watches Arthur hunch over his bloody canvas, the LIGHTS OF A POLICE SIREN outside move across his face. He BOLTS out the front door without taking a last look.

Arthur sits alone, hunched over his unfinished painting. He looks at the jagged man. He smiles. He looks to the faceless woman. He takes his finger, and with his own blood, finishes her with TORI'S EYES.

He smiles the most satisfied smile as he is bathed in a white light. He looks up, and his vision is filled with the face of his beloved. His eyes close on her bright, smiling face.

FADE TO WHITE.

EXT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - NIGHT

As Otus runs down the final steps and into the street, he is grabbed by Azure and Gundrum. His entire body flails in protest as they drag him into the back of a squad car.

Gundrum gives a satisfied look that disappears as he begins to walk up the front steps with Azure.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - NIGHT

Arthur lays dead as Gundrum and Azure enter. Azure gasps as she sees Arthur's unmoving body. She grimaces as she considers the blade protruding from his chest.

Gundrum takes a closer look and can't help but notice the slight curve at the edges of Arthur's mouth. He looks down at the blood-finished painting.

AZURE

At least he had the decency to stab  
the wife in her front. This is  
terrible. Just terrible.

Gundrum stands with her, looking down at Arthur.

GUNDRUM

Don't mourn.  
(beat)  
He got what he wanted.  
(beat)  
Don't take pity here. In this case  
... envy the dead.

TITLE OVER: THE END.

FADE OUT.