

HERE SAT TORI

by

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BLACK.

A woman's terrified SCREAM.

It echoes into the void of city noise.

EXT. BRICK ALLEYWAY - EARLY EVENING

A man, ARTHUR, walks away from the light of the main street, casting him in deep silhouette as he turns the corner of a brick-lined alleyway. Veiny streaks of light extend into the crevices of the bricks.

ARTHUR (V.O.)
I used to help people in trouble.
Now I just listen to their screams.

Arthur collapses, leaning against the brick wall behind him, the main street light revealing his young, tortured face.

His 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 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. (The face is obscured.) He begins to calm himself down.

Rustling sounds from deeper in the alley startle him. He turns to see a BUM rummaging through a trash heap.

BUM
What's wrong, young man?

ARTHUR
The screams.

BUM
Part of city life.

ARTHUR
Doesn't have to be.

BUM
Sure does. Everyone's got misery.
Mob put me here.

ARTHUR
I'm sure they did.

BUM
Don't believe me?

ARTHUR
I can't believe in any of that
anymore.
(beat)
I've never seen them. And trust
me, I've done my fair share of
looking.

BUM
See, that's the problem. Don't
look, they find you. Turn on the
light and they scatter.

ARTHUR
Turn on a certain number of lights
with no roaches, and you'd start to
believe they don't exist, too.

BUM
Trust me. The Family's no myth.
They ain't no 'Bladed Justice.'

Arthur laughs more than he should.

ARTHUR
So you believe in a super-elite
mafia family that can't be caught
or proved to exist, but not a
single rooftop-hopping vigilante?

BUM
Nah, that's kid's stuff.

ARTHUR
Goodbye, pal.

Arthur walks away sour.

BUM
(between bites of a
scoured apple.)
What?

EXT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - NIGHT

Arthur ascends the stairs of the apartment complex from
street level to his front door, three stories up.

The bright lamp behind casts him again in silhouette as he
works the key into the lock and opens the door.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - ENTRY WAY - NIGHT

Arthur walks in and closes the door to face two COAT HANGERS.

The first is empty. He takes off his windbreaker and cloth cap, quickly hanging them up.

He takes a moment to stare down the second coat hanger, further in the dark corner. On it hangs a dusty TRENCH COAT and FEDORA HAT. He shakes off the stare and continues into the main room.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - MAIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Arthur surveys the empty room.

He looks at an empty spot next to a couch where depressions in the carpet indicate a chair once sat.

He peeks into the small attached kitchen, grabbing a cylinder of pills from the counter. He unscrews the cap and pops two pills in his mouth. He swallows hard.

Putting the container of medication into his pant pocket, he walks toward a door cracked open on the opposite side of the room, light spilling out. He announces himself.

ARTHUR

Home.

He pushes open the door slowly and walks inside.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - TORI'S STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

TORI sits at her easel, painting.

She is a natural beauty, at one in every aspect of her dress, hair and demeanor. The graceful movements of her brush portray an air of peace.

She's dragged a fuzzy recliner from the main room to sit in.

TORI

(not looking away from her
canvas.)

Where were you?

ARTHUR

Taking a walk. I wasn't up --

TORI

I know.

She looks at him and smiles. She trusts him.

ARTHUR
How do you know?

TORI
Your jacket's still hanging dusty
on the coat rack. Hat untouched.

ARTHUR
You act like I need them to do what
I did.

TORI
You know as well as I do, they
became a part of it. Inseparable.

ARTHUR
They aren't a mask.

TORI
They were yours.

ARTHUR
Even though you say you trust me,
maybe you'd trust me more if I got
rid of them, forever.

TORI
I would never want you to get rid
of anything for want of trust. I
do, however, think burying the
blade would help you move on.

ARTHUR
He is buried.

TORI
You assume I meant you, when there
sits a blade on our mantle.

Behind him, framed in the door to the main room, sits a long,
double edged sword on the mantle. Arthur closes the door,
obscuring it from their view.

Tori puts down her brush, and leans off the chair to him.

TORI (CONT'D)
I love you. I trust you to do
what's best for you.

He smiles.

ARTHUR
I know. Thank you.
(deep breath)
Maybe I just need something to
distract.

TORI
I can help with that.

ARTHUR
Well, of course that. But, you
know, something to ... channel ...
everything.

TORI
Of course. Any ideas?

ARTHUR
What about painting?

TORI
I'm flattered, but just because
it's my thing doesn't mean it has
to be yours.

ARTHUR
No, I've always wanted to. Admire
the patience. The precision.
Plus, I'd get to spend more time
with my favorite instructor.

TORI
Okay. Anything to help you find
your peace.

ARTHUR
So what's my first lesson?

TORI
Tomorrow morning --

ARTHUR
Okay.

TORI
-- you'll go buy me more paint.

Arthur raises his eyebrows.

TORI (CONT'D)
(smiling sweetly)
Please.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tori and Arthur lie in bed, facing each other. She's asleep.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

My sleeping angel. I don't like to sleep for fear of waking to find her having been a dream. Years of doing what I did have no doubt inclined me to reap the benefits of the night, even if now it's only to feel the rhythm of her breath.

EXT. MEGA MART - MORNING

A harsh cut to an angular corporate-stamped building with a half full parking lot.

INT. MEGA MART - MORNING

Arthur walks down vast aisles of consumer products, his posture putting him out of place in the rigid grid of compartmentalized wares.

He looks up to read the large signs indicating each aisle's contents, his eyes squinting at the harsh glow of overhead fluorescent lamps.

He locates the art supply aisle. At the far end a SKEEVY EMPLOYEE balances on a step ladder as he restocks the top shelf.

Arthur walks to the racks of paint bottles midway down the aisle. He takes out a small piece of paper from his pocket.

He reads the paper, then leans down to look across the rack, searching with his finger. Reading the different names of the paints, he comes across "Yellow Sol", "Ballsy Blue", and "Black Knight", passing them all.

His finger stops at "Blood Red Passion." He looks up to the tray. Empty.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

Damn.

He lets out a sigh that very nearly mimics "Damn."

SKEEVY EMPLOYEE

Can I help you, friend?

The Skeevy Employee hops off his ladder, making a jarring THUD on the linoleum. Arthur stands up to face him.

ARTHUR

I'm looking for "Blood Red Passion." Got any in the back?

SKEEVY EMPLOYEE

Oh, no.

(laughs)

Sorry. We stopped orderin' the Soren brand paints. Corporate got too many complaints about the snarky color names after they poked a jab at the Family. "Mob Mauve."

(sotto)

I didn't mind it.

Arthur looks him in the eyes for a second, but shakes off the burning curiosity and starts to walk away.

ARTHUR

Thanks.

SKEEVY EMPLOYEE

Wait, there. We've got other brands in red.

ARTHUR

She was very specific about it.

SKEEVY EMPLOYEE

You know, I think I know a shop that might still carry it.

The Skeevy Employ pulls out his wallet from his back pocket. It's spilling over with receipts, business cards, and long unused condoms. He searches through it like a file folder.

SKEEVY EMPLOYEE (CONT'D)

Here it is!

He pulls out a business card and presents it to Arthur, who promptly reads it:

"Cynthia's Art Supply."

The words form the shape of puckering lips.

Arthur looks to the Skeevy Employee and nods.

ARTHUR

Thank you.

He turns and walks away.

SKEEVY EMPLOYEE

Anytime, friend. Tell Cyn that
Lucy sent you!

Arthur doesn't turn to acknowledge this, furrowing his brow
as he quickens his pace.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

I've got to forget the times I
would have shaken a man like that
down till he bled information.
Push all that away if I'm going to
make a life like this work. I want
it to, but how can I when a menial
task like buying paint ends up
curdling blood by abetting the
curiosities of my past? Thankfully
it's more by habit than by desire,
and habits can be broken. Healed.
(beat)
Just find the paint. Just paint.

He looks at the watch face on the inside of his left wrist,
taking a deep, controlled breath.

EXT. CYNTHIA'S ART SUPPLY - DAY

The squat box of an art supply store stands in a part of town
where the condition of the sidewalk alone justifies the bars
that cover the windows.

A crisply painted sign above the entrance contrasts against
the decades-old bricks that make up the store's facade.

Arthur walks up to the door, comparing the sign with the
business card in his hand before he enters.

INT. CYNTHIA'S ART SUPPLY - DAY

CYNTHIA sits on a tall stool behind the small and cluttered
checkout counter, doodling on an unspooled length of receipt
paper. She's wearing a tank top with an unzipped hoodie, her
hands covered in dry strokes of paint.

She's a vision with a head of fine curls that fall to her
chest. The jutting curve of her chin portrays an unflappable
independence seen also in her consistently prominent teeth
and bountifully rouged cheeks.

CYNTHIA

Hi!

Arthur pays her little attention.

ARTHUR

I'm looking for a specific type of paint.

Caught by his lack of acknowledgment.

CYNTHIA

Oh, okay. What brand?

ARTHUR

Soren.

CYNTHIA

Oh, yeah, we totally carry that. What color?

ARTHUR

"Blood Red Passion."

She moves out from behind the counter, swooping over to a nearby tray. He catches a look at the skinny jeans she's wearing as she walks by. He shakes it off, looking away.

She picks up a bottle.

CYNTHIA

Oh, yes. Used to be called "Savior's Blood", but they changed it after they got buried under an avalanche of complaints. They're always getting in trouble for stuff like that.

ARTHUR

That's what I hear.

CYNTHIA

Kind of silly to risk the name when it's the paint you're selling.

ARTHUR

Even if my wife's their only customer, they can't be doing too badly.

CYNTHIA

She's a painter, then. This her signature color?

ARTHUR
Something like that.

CYNTHIA
You come out of your way to pick
this up for her?

ARTHUR
Yes.

CYNTHIA
Well, I'm glad you did.

He looks up at her for the first time, but she's turned away to put the bottle in a paper bag. She lazily slaps a few keys on the register.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
That'll be seven thirty-three.

He looks down and pulls a ten dollar bill out of his wallet. Hands it to her. She pops the register and counts change.

ARTHUR
So you're Cynthia?

CYNTHIA
I am.

She hands him his bag and his change.

ARTHUR
Thank you, Cynthia. I'm sure I'll
be back.

CYNTHIA
I'll be here!

He turns to leave, pausing for a second as if he might say something. He finally hunches his head down again and exits.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Tori sits on the couch, her eyes closed as she listens to Schubert's "Death and the Maiden" play from a turntable on the other side of the room.

She opens her eyes to the sound of the front door opening.

ARTHUR
Home. Had to --

She gets up and takes the needle off of the record so that she can hear him.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

-- I had to go across town to find it. Sorry it took so long.

TORI

Let's get started.

ARTHUR

Yes, I'm eager.

He sets the bag down on the Kitchen counter, and holds up a large piece of cardboard in his other hand.

TORI

What's that?

ARTHUR

I figured I wasn't quite ready for a canvas just yet.

She laughs a little.

TORI

Alright.

He walks over with the cardboard and opens the door to her studio.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - TORI'S STUDIO - DAY

Arthur places the piece of cardboard in front of the clean canvas Tori had prepared for him on the easel. He moves the recliner out of the way so that he has room to stand.

She sits in the recliner to observe him.

He bends over to the supply case on the floor.

ARTHUR

I don't want to use your special stuff, so I'll just grab something else here ...

TORI

Use whatever catches your eye.

He grabs a long brush and a dirty old bottle of paint from the box. Unscrewing the bottle sends flakes of dried paint to the floor. He stirs around the paint a bit with his brush before putting it on the edge of the easel.

He stands with the brush, looking at the cardboard.

ARTHUR
Now what do I do?

TORI
Paint.

ARTHUR
That's your first instruction? No tips?

TORI
Let's see where your intuition takes you first.

Arthur lets out a sigh and reluctantly puts brush to cardboard. He winces as he moves the brush about.

He gets frustrated and puts the brush down.

TORI (CONT'D)
What is it?

ARTHUR
It doesn't feel right.

TORI
Give yourself a chance to let go.

ARTHUR
I can't.

TORI
Yes you can. You let go the moment you decided to spend your life with me, and you can do it now.

She picks the brush up from the floor, puts it in his hand, and stands behind him. She grasps his upper arm to guide the flow of his strokes.

TORI (CONT'D)
You've got to have a direct line from your heart to the canvas.

ARTHUR
Cardboard.

TORI
Your canvas is whatever you choose. For me, it's literally a canvas. For a musician it's the air between their instrument and your ear.

(MORE)

TORI (CONT'D)

For you -- for now -- its a piece
of cardboard. Don't belittle it.

ARTHUR

Okay.

TORI

Don't rely on your outward
trappings. Satisfy from within.

Arthur closes his eyes.

TORI (CONT'D)

So many get caught up with outward
placeholders for internal need.

Arthur opens his eyes.

ARTHUR

I can't do it.

TORI

You're filtering it. Through your
head. Relax. You'll find your
pure line.

Arthur pulls away from her grasp.

ARTHUR

No, it's something else.

TORI

What?

ARTHUR

Right now, my promise to you ...
it's just words. Easily broken.

TORI

But I know you won't.

ARTHUR

I've got to make that promise
tangible before I can fully accept
everything you've given me. And
continue to give me.

TORI

What do I give you?

ARTHUR

Peace.

TORI

And what are you going to do?

ARTHUR

Get rid of the thing that's staring
me down from the mantle. Rid
myself of a past life filled with
violence so loud I can't hear the
words your saying.

He grabs her close.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Words I desperately want to hear.

He kisses her strongly before pulling away and stomping into
the main room.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - MAIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Arthur stands facing the mantle. His sword is displayed
prominently, though covered in a thick veil of dust.

He considers it briefly with contempt before grabbing it with
one hand and dragging it on the floor as he walks to the
entry way.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - ENTRY WAY - CONTINUOUS

Arthur hastily grabs the dusty trench coat and fedora hat
from the coat rack in the dark corner. He bundles the blade
and hat loosely into the coat.

He turns back to the main room to see Tori watching him.

TORI

Go with grace. Go because you
choose. Not because you feel you
have to.

ARTHUR

I choose this because I have to.

TORI

If you do this for the sake of your
peace --

ARTHUR

That you gave me.

TORI

-- then go peacefully. Make your atonement as the man you desire to be ... with me.

ARTHUR

Thank you. I'll soon be able to breathe again.

(beat)

I need a bag.

She leaves to another room. He stares for a moment at the serenity of his living room, allowing himself to be satisfied in his choice. He looks down at the bundle clenched in his hand, and closes his eyes.

She returns with a backpack. He looks up and accepts it. He stuffs the bundle into it as best he can, but it still protrudes out from the partially zipped top.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Thank you.

TORI

Do you know where you'll take it?

ARTHUR

Yes. I ought to satisfy as many as I can in this. Shouldn't take more than an hour.

She comes in close and holds his face.

TORI

I hope this is finally what you need.

ARTHUR

You're all I need. And I'm finally making that real. With it here, I think about 'me'. After this, it's all us.

He kisses her.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

She tastes like sweet relief, and I know everything's going to be alright. With her. I feel it. I'm not sure what the question is, picking at the back of my brain, but she's the only answer I need. I know she's the answer.

She smiles and pulls her head back to look at him. He smiles, too. She lets go of him.

He leaves.

EXT. POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

The long crisp bricks of the Police Department building glimmer in the daylight. Arthur, backpack still in tote, inches along the wall, stopping just before the swinging glass entrance door.

He crouches quietly and slings the pack off his back onto the ground in front of him, peeking back to make sure he's not being watched. From the front zipper pocket he removes a pen and paper tag onto which he writes:

"For Inspector Gundrum."

Taking the wrapped bundle out from the bag, he places it against the wall next to the front entrance. He stands and places the tag on top of the bundle.

He keeps his eyes on the offering as he backs away slowly.

His retreat stops uncomfortably. He rocks back and forth on his heels, looking back over his shoulder. Closing his eyes tightly and gritting his teeth in decision, he clenches a frustrated fist and dashes back down to the haphazard bundle.

His hands a flurry of unthinking determination, he unwraps the sword, propping it against the wall. The jacket he drapes smoothly beneath the sword, on top of which he gently sets his fedora hat.

He sticks the paper tag in the hat's brim.

Taking a last look, he dashes away with final abandon. He doesn't look back, sprinting forward across the parking lot, the soldier's grave shrinking behind him.

ACROSS THE STREET:

He continues across the street and slips behind one of the trees lining the sidewalk. He counts to five and peeks over a low branch toward the police station.

FRONT OF THE STATION:

OFFICER AZURE walks out the front door, unbuttoning her collar. She's a curvy cop. Heart shaped face. Her hair a black bob with clumpy bangs.

She pulls a cigarette out of her case and places it in her mouth, dangling as she searches for a light.

Flicking a lighter from her pocket, she looks behind her and notices the display.

The cigarette falls from her mouth and she snaps the lighter violently shut. She leans in for a closer look at the tag and reaches for her radio.

AZURE
(into radio)
This is Officer Azure. Get Gundrum
out front. Now.

ACROSS THE STREET:

Arthur can hardly hear her, but he hears enough to slip back behind the tree as Azure looks up from her radio to survey the parking lot and surrounding area.

Closing his eyes again, Arthur tries to slow his nervously rapid breath and LOUD PULSATING HEARTBEAT. He's able to do so, the years of situations that pale this one by comparison evident in his super-human promptness of calm.

Pulling down the sleeve of his jacket, he purposeful obscures the watch on his left wrist.

ARTHUR (V.O.)
Go peacefully. I hadn't thought
that the necessity of escape itself
could tempt that same thing I'm now
ridding from my life. Of course.
(beat)
The change is now. It has to be.
Don't revert. Don't rely on the
tools of your sin. Just walk away.
Right now. Walk. To her.
(beat)
WALK.

He forces his legs to carry him out from behind the tree. He tries to smile as he walks with a forced casualness down the sidewalk, keeping his eyes focused forward.

In his periphery he can sense the shape of a man coming out of the station door.

FRONT OF THE STATION:

The front door swivels open. Out swaggers INSPECTOR GUNDRUM. What he doesn't have in height he makes up for in presence. His hair is enriched with tufts of gray. He wears a shoulder holster and a wide tie covered in swirling eyes.

Gundrum looks doubtfully at Azure.

GUNDRUM

Alright, what is it, Claudette?

She answers by pointing with her radio.

Gundrum turns around and sees Arthur's shrine. All the put-on toughness falls from his face. He kneels and pulls the tag out from the hatband, running his finger across the handwriting that spells out his own name.

He stands, gazing down in awe at the items before him.

He pulls his eyes away to look out past the street, but Arthur is a speck among others in the distance.

With the tag cradled in his hands, he turns back to Azure.

GUNDRUM (CONT'D)

Get these into evidence before the media gets here.

AZURE

How would they -- ?

Gundrum answers by pointing to a small group of ONLOOKERS taking pictures with their phones.

GUNDRUM

Today might be the day I have to admit I'll never find him.

AZURE

Also the day you prove he exists.

GUNDRUM

Don't hold your breath.

He lowers his head and continues to examine the tag as he goes back inside.

EXT. POLICE DEPARTMENT - LATER

A young REPORTER stands outside the front of the building, holding a microphone to Gundrum's unwilling face.

REPORTER

Inspector, is this sword a hoax?
Or finally the proof you've been
looking for in the ongoing case of
the vigilante Bladed Justice?

GUNDRUM

I personally believe the items to
be authentic. If indeed they are,
and I believe we should proceed as
if they are, what they say about
the case is that it is closed.
He's hung up his hat. Literally.
Time for me to go back to the
investigations I've neglected for
too long.

REPORTER

What if they are the taunting of
your many critics in regard to this
ongoing investigation?

GUNDRUM

Then I'm still not going to waste
any more time looking for a radical
that scarcely broke any laws, and
only ever seems to aid in the
investigations I will now be
turning my attentions to. A man
that's never killed doesn't
outweigh dozens of murder cases
just because everyone wants to know
who he is. And that includes me.

Azure pops into frame and barricades the reporter from being able to reach Gundrum.

AZURE

That's all the questions for now,
thank you.

PULL BACK from the news report on a TV.

INT. DARK TV ROOM - NIGHT

Over a shadowy shoulder, the report plays on a TV in an ominously dark room. A gloved fist clenches the chair arm.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Arthur sits slouching in his couch, dreary eyed. Tori stands at attention next to him, her eyes staring wide at the TV.

REPORTER

... reporting from the front steps
of the Police Department. Back to
you in the studio.

The regular news continues as Tori looks down to her husband. He sits up a bit more, his eyes suddenly sharper. When she tries to speak, he throws up a silencing finger.

On the TV is a report on the latest in a string of local burglaries. Tori sees that Arthur's eyes are filled with compassion and a misplaced desire to help.

She gets up and marches to the TV, turning it off. She looks back to him.

TORI

Don't torture yourself.

He sits looking at the TV. Calming himself.

ARTHUR

I'll do you one better.

He rubs his nose as he breathes in deep, reinvigorating his face as he rocks up from the couch and heads toward the TV.

Leaning over the TV, he fishes for the power cord. He finds it right away and YANKS it out of the wall. Looking around the room, he finds a folded linen that he tosses over the TV.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

No more news. No more crime. Just
you. And Me.

TORI

And paint.

ARTHUR

Yes!

He moves back to her and they both drop down onto the couch.

TORI

You've had a big day.

ARTHUR

About as big as they come.

TORI

I think you've earned your canvas.

Eyebrow up.

ARTHUR

You sure? I'd hate to mess one up.

TORI

I know you will. But we've got rolls of it back there.

ARTHUR

Alright.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - TORI'S STUDIO - NIGHT

Tori sits in the armchair next to Arthur, who stands in front of the easel. He dips up and down as he prepares his brush and paint selections from the box on the floor.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

Bliss. I stretch and enjoy and savor every moment, now. I had the wrong motivation, fighting for a justice I'd never find, always two steps behind.

He dips his brush into the first remnant paint bottle.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

If I can't find satisfaction here, now, I'm not going to find it anywhere. She shows me how. My purity of essence allows each moment to collapse onto itself, ends and means swirling into an effort that is its own resolution. The cause its own effect.

He starts the brush slowly, dabbing with a gentle touch. His speed and fluidity build as he continues.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

I know peace I never dreamed possible for myself. I couldn't have known it, thrusting myself into a world of obsession and ideals sought with the conviction of a madman. No longer.

The streaks of paint begin to form the limbs of a couple entwined. The individual harshness of the strokes dissolve into an overall smoothness that defies its own pieces.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

It's in these moments, gifted by the brush, that I feel lifted out of time and begin to taste the eternal mystery. We've reconciled the ultimate paradox, pierced the mendacity, together.

He moves in close, putting face inches from the gooping paint globs, adjusting his final details and sharpening edges. He takes a particular moment with the lips. The puckering pair define each other with their overlapping silhouettes.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

No 'her', no 'me.' Us.

He sets the brush down on the easel and looks upon his finished work:

The passionate embrace of two people, so joined it is difficult to distinguish where one ends and the other begins. The perfect visual externalization of his own bliss.

Tori hovers over his shoulder, smiling as she takes in his first attempt. She still examines it as she begins to speak, her thoughts surfacing one at a time as she remains focused.

TORI

It's beautiful. You should be proud. You've done what you set out to do. You've let go of your past. Made peace in the present.

ARTHUR

Thank you. But is it done?

TORI

Only you can answer that. Do you feel it is?

ARTHUR

Yes.

TORI

Good.

She takes the canvas off the easel, walking out of the studio and placing it on the far left side of an empty wall in the main room.

She returns to the studio and Arthur is sitting in her chair. He looks tremendously satisfied.

ARTHUR
What now? Dinner?

TORI
Looks like you could use a post-coital smoke.

ARTHUR
Not quite, but that's an option too.

TORI
No. You're doing another one.

She sets a fresh new canvas down on the easel and strikes an "uh-huh" pose next to it. Arthur playfully raises his eyebrow and lifts himself out of the chair, sauntering over to her.

ARTHUR
I'm out of paint. I was using your leftovers.

TORI
Then use mine.

She bend over and pulls the fresh bottle out of the bag.

ARTHUR
Are you sure?

She looks over to his first painting, visible through the door to the main room.

TORI
Absolutely.

ARTHUR
Alright.

He accepts the bottle from her. He shakes it up vigorously in one hand as he uses the other to crack his neck. He sets the paint down, cracks his knuckles and shakes out his hands.

He washes out the brush in a plastic cup of water. He rubs the brush up against the rim, the paint clouding into the clear. He wipes the brush off on a towel and twists open the paint bottle.

He takes a dip from the "Blood Red Passion" and moves the brush toward the canvas, centimeters from his first stroke.

RING. The phone.

He looks at Tori.

TORI
I'll get it.

She hops up from the chair and runs into the main room. He sets down the freshly dolloped brush and leans against the wall opposite the easel.

She returns.

ARTHUR
Who's on the horn?

TORI
It's Mr. Wilde.

ARTHUR
(surprised)
Lewis?

TORI
Yep.

ARTHUR
Huh.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Arthur marches over to the phone on the kitchen counter.

ARTHUR
Lewis?

LEWIS (O.S.)
(filtered)
Arthur. It's been a long time.

ARTHUR
Has it? What do you want?

LEWIS
I thought you could clear something up for me. Beyond once being your friend, I'm also a fan of your past exploits.

ARTHUR
I've given that up.

LEWIS
Well, that's my question.

ARTHUR
There's no question, I'm out.

LEWIS
Then you didn't steal your stuff
back from the police?

ARTHUR
(worried)
What?

LEWIS
Turn on the news.

Arthur rushes over to the TV. He pulls off the linen covering and leans over the back to plug it in.

It squeaks to life and he can see an announcement in progress from Inspector Gundrum.

ON THE TV:

MEMBER OF THE PRESS
-- details of this theft?

GUNDRUM
Yes. At approximately three thirty this morning, items recently enter into evidence in the case of the vigilante referred to locally as "Bladed Justice" were stolen from our secure holding room. The items in number where three. One heavily worn trench coat. One men's fedora, size seven and three fourths. One double edged sword. Any citizen with information on this theft is urged to contact our department immediately.

MEMBER OF THE PRESS
Do you take this to imply that Bladed Justice is back?

GUNDRUM

As the items were initially forfeited willingly, albeit anonymously, we hope this theft is simply the work of an overzealous collector, but assume nothing until the items have been reclaimed into evidence. We can't speculate any further, but assure you that this breach in security is being investigated fully.

BACK IN THE MAIN ROOM:

Arthur switches off the TV and unhappily puts the phone back up to his ear.

LEWIS

Guess it was someone else, eh?

ARTHUR

You always did admire that sword. You get sticky fingers, Lewis?

LEWIS

You kidding? They'd smell me a mile away.

ARTHUR

I didn't figure you'd stink up the place. Thanks for calling.

LEWIS

Yeah, no problem. Call me and we'll snag some burri --

Click. Arthur pushes the phone back and turns to Tori.

TORI

What'll you do?

ARTHUR

Nothing. Whoever wanted it can have it. Plus, it'll keep Gundrum off my back. It's no longer a problem of ours.

Arthur walks back to the studio, determined.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - TORI'S STUDIO - NIGHT

Arthur paces the easel, picking the brush back up. She follows and returns to sitting in the chair next to him.

ARTHUR

Any words for my second outing? Am I pushing beginner's luck for two in a row?

TORI

Return to your bliss. As Always. Build on your work. Expand inward.

Arthur begins more fevered than before, an ease and speed that covers the canvas's negative space, leaving two figures of white. They seem to be moving toward each other.

The brightest section radiating from the space between them, an explosion of energy that defines their blinding white outline.

He scoops the bottom of the empty paint bottle.

He releases a deep breath and plunks the brush into the plastic water cup to indicate his conclusion.

He wipes his hands together finally and looks into the eyes of his proud wife.

ARTHUR

Now, I've had a fruitful day, but I won't let my bliss come at the expense of yours. We thrive together. Tomorrow, you paint.

TORI

But you've used up my paint filling your negative space. Beautifully, I'll add.

He looks at the watch on his right wrist. It's round face shows six thirty-three.

ARTHUR

Still time to get you some. We'll start early tomorrow.

RING. The phone again.

She goes to get it, but he holds up his hand to stop her.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Probably Lewis again.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Arthur first grabs his windbreaker as the phone continues to ring. He walks over to the phone and firmly picks it up.

ARTHUR
Lewis, I don't --

A raspy voice interrupts him.

VOICE (O.S.)
(filtered)
I have information for you.

Arthur takes a moment trying to place the voice. Nothing.

ARTHUR
Who is this?

VOICE
Information you'll want. Meet me
in an hour at the back of the
mortuary. By the dumpster.

ARTHUR
What's this about?

VOICE
It's about ... Otus.

Arthur's brow lowers into an angry 'V'.

ARTHUR
How dare you hang that name in
front of me. Whoever you are,
don't call here again.

He slams the phone down. Tori hears and calls to him from the her studio.

TORI (O.S.)
Who was it?

He grabs his cloth cap.

ARTHUR
Nobody. I'll be back soon. Sooner
if they closed early.

He opens the front door and walks out, beginning to close it behind him.

TORI (O.S.)
I love you --

SLAM. From the shut door comes the sound of his key sliding in and the locking of the mechanism.

EXT. CYNTHIA'S ART SUPPLY - NIGHT

Arthur runs to the front glass door just as Cynthia turns the sign over to read "CLOSED" and begins to lock up.

He taps on the glass. She looks up, scared, but smiles when she sees it's him.

She opens the door.

CYNTHIA
Hi.

ARTHUR
Hello. I need more.

CYNTHIA
Paint, right?

ARTHUR
Yes.

CYNTHIA
Come in.

INT. CYNTHIA'S ART SUPPLY - NIGHT

She walks over to the counter to turn a few lights on.

CYNTHIA
I already cashed out, but for you I don't mind. What'll it be?

ARTHUR
Same.

CYNTHIA
What was it? Soren brand?

ARTHUR
"Blood Red Passion".

CYNTHIA
You got the last bottle the other day. Let me see if I have more on order.

She hits a button to turn on her register monitor. She slaps the keys quickly and searches back and forth with her eyes.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Bad news.

ARTHUR

Backorder?

CYNTHIA

Discontinued.

Arthur rubs his upper lip with the inside of his hand.

ARTHUR

Well, I guess it's time to try something new.

CYNTHIA

Why not? You've got the choice this time around. Choose what pleases you.

She smiles. He doesn't.

EXT. CYNTHIA'S ART SUPPLY - NIGHT

Cynthia locks the heavy-duty lock on the front glass door.

CYNTHIA

Headed home?

ARTHUR

(takes a second)

Nope.

CYNTHIA

Want to join me?

ARTHUR

No, I may not have been able to get her paint, but tonight one of us is going to be satisfied.

CYNTHIA

Personal errand?

ARTHUR

Something like that. Personal curiosity. See you around.

She watches him go.

EXT. MORTUARY - NIGHT

Arthur stands under a light fixture on the back wall of the mortuary that looks over a sparsely occupied cemetery.

He tilts his watch toward the glow of the lamp to get a read on the time. It's late, and he's visibly tired. He squints his bagged eyes, looking out into the distance to take in the environment.

The cemetery has patches of trees with Spanish moss hanging from the already lush branches. Interspersed between the foliage and few gravestones are fixtures and railings of weather-worn stone.

The unexpected whir of wind blown leaves makes Arthur jump. He turns in the direction of the sound. Nobody.

From the opposite end of the cemetery he hears the distinct sound of footsteps. He quickly and rigidly spins back around and sees a GRAVE DIGGER walking toward him with a shovel over his shoulder.

The Grave Digger stops several yards away from Arthur and sticks the shovel into the ground, resting his elbow on the handle and his foot on the scoop.

GRAVE DIGGER
Looking for someone?

Arthur moves forward a step to try and get a better look, but the Grave Digger's posture stiffens to dissuade him from coming any further.

ARTHUR
Yes. Well, no.

GRAVE DIGGER
Not sure, eh?

ARTHUR
Do you have information for me?

GRAVE DIGGER
What's that?

ARTHUR
Information.
(hesitantly, through his
teeth.)
Otus.

GRAVE DIGGER
No, I'm Jo.

Arthur realizes this is not the caller. The voice doesn't match, either. He gives a defeated expression, turning to walk away. He rubs his hands frustratedly through his hair, angry at himself.

ARTHUR

G'night.

GRAVE DIGGER

Hope you find what you're looking for, after choosin' to come all the way out here at this hour.

The Grave Digger's words give Arthur pause. His face portrays regret which fades into overwhelming worry.

He shakes it off, confused and unfocused. He walks away with a quickened pace to his step. The Grave Digger shrinks behind him as he continues away from the cemetery, past the mortuary and onto the main street.

EXT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - NIGHT

Arthur walks up stairs to his front door with a slouched look of defeat in his posture. 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 ...

His eyes widen with an overwhelming intensity as he immediately THRASHES the door open.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - ENTRY WAY - CONTINUOUS

He runs into the apartment, slamming the door into the coat hangers behind it. He comes to a harsh stop in the entryway as he looks into the main room.

He's in complete shock as he stares at the horrifying sight before him:

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - MAIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

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.

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

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

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.

He manages to pull himself up and face his dead wife. Her eyes are closed. Her chest unmoving. He can't take it.

Looking away, he instinctively rises to his feet, which seem heavier than before, and lumbers over to kitchen counter. Reaching out, he grabs the phone and dials quickly.

His shaking hand raises the phone to his ear.

A female voice on the line.

OPERATOR (O.S.)
(filtered)
Nine-Nine-Five, what is your
Emergency?

ARTHUR
My wife ... she's dead. She --

OPERATOR
Sir, are you currently in a safe
location?

ARTHUR
Yes.

OPERATOR
Have you attempted to revive her?

ARTHUR
No, she's been run through ...

OPERATOR
Run through? Sir, we're going to
dispatch an officer immediately.

ARTHUR
I live at one-oh --

OPERATOR
Yes, Mr. Soloman, we have your call
ID; Inspector Gundrum should arrive
within the next fifteen minutes.

ARTHUR
Gundrum?

OPERATOR
Yes, sir. Is the murder weapon
still present?

Arthur looks at the sword and inscription. He assumes a paranoid calm as he realizes what he has done by calling for help. He gulps hard.

His eyes close in shame as he fabricates the necessary lie.

ARTHUR
No. No, it's not. Not that I can
see here.

OPERATOR
Alright, sir, please stay on the
line.

ARTHUR
Thank you, I'll wait for the
inspector's arrival.

Click. He hangs up the phone.

He looks at his watch and nervously rubs the back of his neck. He approaches the sword, making sure to keep his eyes focused on it, lest he catch a peek of her face and lose his composure again.

Extending his trembling hand, he manages to remove the hat from the sword handle. He goes to grab the sword, but within inches the shakes take over and he stops.

He doesn't want to touch it.

He removes the trench coat from her body as a few more of his tears trickle down and land on her unmoving chest.

He wraps the coat around the handle of the sword and pulls it out quickly, like a band aid. The gory gurgle from below cracks his tough cover and for a stammering moment, he weeps.

He quickly recomposes as he wraps the wet blade in the coat. He crumples the hat into the bundle and heads for the other side of the room.

AT THE CLOSET:

Just outside the door to Tori's studio is a small supply closet. Inside are dozens of upright standing rolls of unmounted canvas material.

Into the central tube of one of the back rolls he stuffs the tight bundle. Streaks of blood cover his hands.

He leaves the closet door open, but turns the light off.

BACK IN THE MAIN ROOM:

He slumps against the wall of the main room and stares at his wife's dead body. Hands through his hair, soggy eyes, he sits and ruminates as the moon's position in the window shifts slightly the shadows of time.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

Do I touch her? Do I talk to her?
Say goodbye? One last kiss? No.
Maybe just reposition her. Roll
her over to preserve some dignity
in this? Could I bring myself to
touch her cold skin, or should I
preserve her last warm touch in my
memory?

(beat)

Incoming footsteps leave me hoping
the canvas rolls prove adequately
inconspicuous. After everything I
gave for her, for us, I still find
myself hiding in fear of discovery.
Any link to that blade would be the
end, when she had only just granted
me a beginning.

Flashing Police lights shine in the apartment.

Gundrum steps into the main room after the creak of the broken front door, followed by Officer Azure.

GUNDRUM

Good god.

AZURE

Oh my dear --

They both come in far enough to see Arthur in the corner, pity on both of their faces.

GUNDRUM

Take care of him. The poor man's
in shock.

Azure approaches Arthur as Gundrum hunches to observe Tori's body, the police light intermittently casting long shadows from the window.

AZURE

Mr. Soloman, are you alright?

ARTHUR

My wife is dead.

AZURE

I'm sorry, sir, are you yourself
physically hurt? Do you require
medical attention?

He shakes his head "no".

AZURE (CONT'D)

Alright, I'm going to ask you a few
questions. Some of them will sound
odd, but they may help our
investigation.

ARTHUR

Alright.

AZURE

Did your wife have any known
enemies?

ARTHUR

She was an artist. No.

AZURE

What about family ... connections?

ARTHUR

Not on either of our sides. Not
that we know of. No.

AZURE

People of our parent's generation
don't really tend to talk about
those things, do they?

ARTHUR

You got that right.

She takes a moment.

AZURE

Did you see who did it?

ARTHUR

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

AZURE

Were there any indications in the
last week -- month -- that anything
was bothering her?

ARTHUR

The last week has been one of the
best and most productive of our
life together ...
(gestures to the paintings
against the wall)
... short as it was. No.

AZURE

Alright. Do you have somewhere you
can go for tonight?

ARTHUR

Not really. Well, there's Lewis,
but he lives off Thompson Street.

AZURE

Thompson Street? In the middle of
the drug district? No, I'll see if
I can't speed Gundrum up and get
out of here by morning.

ARTHUR

Why's he got such an interest?

He nods over to Gundrum, who is still examining the body as
OTHER COPS enter the scene and put up caution tape, take
references photographs, and dust for prints.

AZURE
(quietly)
He suspects a vigilante may have
killed your wife.

ARTHUR
Vigilante?

AZURE
(embarrassed)
Bladed Justice.

ARTHUR
I didn't think he existed.

She leans in to him.

AZURE
I still don't.

She gets up and leaves him sitting against the wall. He watches as they prod his wife's dead body. Gundrum finally rises from his observations and heads over to Arthur.

GUNDRUM
We should be out of your hair
before sunrise, son.

ARTHUR
Take your time.

GUNDRUM
Thank you. I'll be calling you in
a few days. We'll need to bring
you down for some business and
routine questions I would rather
not bother you with now.

Arthur nods agreeably.

Gundrum starts to walk toward the studio door.

ARTHUR
That's her studio. Was her studio.

GUNDRUM
She was very good.

Arthur looks up to him.

Gundrum points to the paintings leaning up against the wall.

ARTHUR

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

GUNDRUM

You an artist as well?

ARTHUR

No. Tried my hand. If you knew her, you'd probably try too.

GUNDRUM

Nah. Some just have it. Looks like you might. But I imagine that's not what you want right now.

Gundrum looks to the supply closet, door still open.

GUNDRUM (CONT'D)

What's this?

ARTHUR

Art supply closet.
(gulp.)
Light switch is on the left.

AT THE CLOSET:

Gundrum steps in and flicks the light switch on.

Arthur stays pressed up against the wall. Too afraid to look, he closes his eyes. Quietly controlling his breath, he slides his sleeve down to cover the heart monitor.

Gundrum circles the small closet, looking around shelves and under stacks of paper. He stops at the rolls of canvas.

GUNDRUM

Say, what're these?

Arthur opens his eyes and slowly rises to peek around the closet entrance.

ARTHUR

It's canvas material.

Gundrum gives an "Oh, interesting" look and starts pulling at the rolls, getting a feeling of their weight. Arthur stares cold, trying not to convey how paralyzingly scared he is.

In his curious perusal, Gundrum slides his hand to the back row of canvas rolls and Arthur goes bug-eyed. He turns away to hide his expression.

He hears Gundrum's hand idly slide off the material. Gundrum then comes up behind Arthur and puts his hand sympathetically on his shoulder.

GUNDRUM

She must've been a real do-it-herself type, stretching her own canvas. I'd of just bought one at mega mart. Sounds like you lost a great one.

(beat)

I promise to do everything I can for you in this.

He pats Arthur's shoulder and slides out of the closet.

BACK IN THE MAIN ROOM:

Arthur slides back down into his resting position against the wall in the main room. He watches as the officers complete their search and documentation of the scene.

FADE TO:

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - MAIN ROOM - DAYBREAK

Still framed exactly against the wall, 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.

After painfully making himself stand up, he attempts to look over into the studio but immediately closes his eyes.

He can't do it.

He looks over to the coat hangers in the entry way. He specifically focuses on the empty one still sleeping further in the dark corner.

He takes a moment to himself.

EXT. BRICK ALLEYWAY - DAY

Arthur walks, in his windbreaker and cloth cap. His head hangs down.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

I accept the pains of my past over
my tortured present at home as I
walk the not-yet-screaming streets.
I listen to the sunlight drenched
echoes of screams long past,
measure it up against my own pain
and deem them unworthy.

He turns the corner into a deeper maze of alleyways.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

The haunts of my previous life
taunt the overwhelming instinct for
revenge that courses through my
veins. We've all got the beast
that rears its head in times of
grief. Mine's just grown with
years of unwarranted curiosity and
the paradoxically unjust seeking of
justice. All the more impressive
that she tamed it in times gone by.

He looks up past the scaffolding of fire escapes at the
cloudy sky above him.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

I have to go home. Someone
murdered my wife so that I would
fight back. "Come back." But
doing that would erase all she did
for me. It would kill the part of
me she made better. Made whole.
I'm already starting to forget her
face. My greatest revenge will be
taken by ... not taking it at all.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - MAIN ROOM - DAY

The main room is empty and darkened with the blinds drawn
over the window and the studio door closed.

A shaft of light stretches across the floor, emanating from
the supply closet. Arthur's shadow grows and shrinks rapidly
within the projected box as the sounds of clinking materials
interrupt stretches of silence.

AT THE CLOSET:

Arthur rummages through the supply closet, grabbing half-
empty bottles of paint, frayed brushes, and long stained
palettes.

He comes across the rolls of canvas material and they give him immediate pause.

The bundle can be seen slightly protruding from one of the back rolls. Giving it only a brief moment of contempt, he goes back into the main room with his supplies.

BACK IN THE MAIN ROOM:

Arthur stands holding his supplies, staring at the closed door of the studio with a look of trepidation.

He steps toward it slowly, as if approaching a large animal. Every move he makes, toward the door, touching the knob, is held so he can gauge his own grieving reaction to their potentially upsetting effects.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - TORI'S STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

The door creaks open and the empty room is revealed to Arthur. He approaches the currently vacant easel and sets his supplies on the floor.

He rises and goes casually over to one of the freshly stretched canvases that had been left by Tori, but has trouble touching it. Anxiety.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

From scratch might be too much
right now. The empty canvas an
overwhelming reflection.

He looks to the main room. He sees his second painting leaning against the wall.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

Maybe just to redefine.

He goes into the main room. Framed in the studio doorway, he looks down, bends over and picks up the painting. Holding it lightly in his hands, he examines his work.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

Maybe that would be enough ...

He comes back and puts the painting on the easel.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

... enough to conjure ...

He splatters all his remaining paint onto his palette, blending them into a dark slush.

ARTHUR (V.O.)
... light in the dark. Conjure her
face in my waning, grief stricken
memory.

He moves the slush tipped brush up to the previously complete painting. He stops.

He looks over to the closet and closes his eyes to calm his frustration. He breathes large through his nostrils.

ARTHUR
Must I make her all the same
promises again?

He shakes his head with a regretful acknowledgement of his inevitable course of action.

EXT. CITY DUMP - SUNSET

Arthur stands in his full vigilante attire. Fedora. Trench coat. Sword in his gloved hand.

There is something inarguably singular about him wearing these items. He exudes an alarming personae just with the cut of his jacket, the fit of his hat, and the posture of his sword.

He looks with solemn determination over the mountains of garbage, evoking his years of self submersion in the seedy streets of the city that produced all this.

A well-worn pair of leather gloves, shaped to his hands with years of use, are removed against squeaking protest and placed in the pockets of his jacket.

He closes his eyes and, with his bare hands, slowly removes his coat -- as if shedding skin -- sliding the sword effortlessly between hands as he does it.

He tosses the jacket into the heap. It billows down and lands with its back facing up.

Giving the blade a look of contempt and sorrow, he plunges it down, piercing the back of the jacket. On the protruding hilt of still wobbling sword falls the fedora hat.

Arthur is gone. The dump is empty and silent save for the distant rustling of the wind.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - THE STUDIO - EARLY MORNING

The black mixture slaps against Arthur's previously painted picture. The radiating center is covered with strokes of black, the two figures becoming more specifically defined.

Arthur's eyes glaze over with the calm of his motions. His visions of softness engulf the room. The daylight that seeps through the blinds of the studio spill into the empty chair next to him.

As he continues to paint with a growing comfort and ease, the light begins to take shape in the chair. Particles illuminated in the shaft of light begin to congeal and form into THE IMAGE OF TORI.

She sits in the chair, a vision as he remembers her.

Each of his strokes brings her more definition and solidity. He keeps his focus on the canvas, and her image watches him as he completes his work.

On the painting, what was once a backdrop of explosive energy is now a stark blackness. Pulling his brush away and looking at it, the figures now somehow appear to be pulled away from each other, rather than together.

He looks his painting up and down, nods, and releases his firm grip on the brush, setting it on the easel ridge.

Finally, he looks over to the image of his wife. Her countenances is proud. He smiles.

Not daring to move forward for fear of disrupting her appearance to him, he takes in her face with a deep breath.

He closes his eyes, and releases.

He smiles, savoring the darkness of his lids.

EXT. CYNTHIA'S ART SUPPLY - DAY

Arthur takes his time walking up to the front door. He has a more casual posture about him.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

Who knew grief could be so brief?
I still feel the weight of her
death, but a freedom of expression
in the peace she endowed me with
before her death. I only find
myself wishing she'd been here
longer to experience it with me.

(MORE)

ARTHUR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I count myself lucky that we found
it at all. Found each other at
all. Something most die in the
unfulfilled pursuit of.

INT. CYNTHIA'S ART SUPPLY - DAY

Arthur walks in, ready to greet, and finds nobody behind the counter. He looks around. Nobody in the immediate area.

He starts to peek around the aisles and sees Cynthia emerging from the back room, brushing paint chips from her hoodie.

ARTHUR
Hello, Cynthia.

She looks up. Happy to see him.

CYNTHIA
Hey!

She walks up to him.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
It's been a little while. How's
the painting? How's the wife?

His smile trembles slightly. He looks down and answers.

ARTHUR
Painting's incredible.

CYNTHIA
Tori?

He looks up to her.

ARTHUR
She's dead.

She is shocked.

CYNTHIA
Oh my god, I'm so sorry.

She wraps her arms around him and he realizes they've never touched. He slowly accepts her embrace and puts his arms lightly around her.

ARTHUR
It's alright.

She looks up to him, puzzled.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

We had the most incredible life together. Short, but what's long? Nothing would have been enough.

CYNTHIA

Yes.

ARTHUR

I feel like she prepared me for her death without ever having talked specifically about it. Her ideas on life -- her life was enough.

She's in awe of him.

CYNTHIA

That's incredible. I hesitate to say you're lucky --

ARTHUR

But I was. I know it. I feel lucky.

She lets herself smile a little bit.

CYNTHIA

Do you want to go somewhere?

ARTHUR

Sure. Where?

She grabs her keys from behind the counter.

CYNTHIA

There's a bar a little further downtown, if that's alright.

Arthur squints his eyes for a moment, considering. He shakes his head and smiles.

ARTHUR

Sure, of course.

He opens the door for her and they both exit. She locks up.

INT. BAR - DAY

They sit down on stools.

Arthur looks around, relieved to see that the place is empty. The daytime separates him from his past.

CYNTHIA

You've been in the shop a couple of times now, and I've wanted to bring something up, but ...

ARTHUR

Yes?

CYNTHIA

I wanted to see if you remembered.

ARTHUR

Remembered what?

CYNTHIA

Me.

Arthur looks confused.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

We went to high school together.

He's surprised, his face showing a search for memory that is coming up blank.

ARTHUR

I'm sorry, you're right. I don't remember.

(beat)

That was only ten years ago, but it feels like a lifetime.

CYNTHIA

Must've been a hell of a decade. You graduated early -- to go to the police academy, if I'm remembering right.

ARTHUR

It didn't work out.

CYNTHIA

I'm sorry.

ARTHUR

Don't be. I just had to find my own way.

CYNTHIA

Tori?

ARTHUR

She came later. My way was lonely and bumpy. Thankfully she could smooth it out.

CYNTHIA

But what was it?

He wants to tell her.

ARTHUR

Maybe I'll tell you one day.

(beat)

Suffice to say it was enough to give a young guy like me a heart condition. Literally.

CYNTHIA

Is that why you wear two watches?

He looks down at his wrists. She's got him.

ARTHUR

Yep. One of them's a heart monitor. I take meds to help keep my hear rate below ninety-nine.

CYNTHIA

What happens if you go over ninety-nine?

He uses his hands to make an exploding gesture.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Oh god, has that happened to you before?

ARTHUR

No. I wouldn't be here talking to you if it had.

(beat)

I pushed it, though. For years, I pushed it.

CYNTHIA

How'd it happen?

ARTHUR

I say it was from lack of use.

She gives him an accusatory "smartass" look.

CYNTHIA

Well, what do the doctors say?

ARTHUR

They insist it was trauma induced.
I guess I'm inclined to believe
them, with how many lives worth
I've lived.

CYNTHIA

And still, you say no more.

ARTHUR

Let's say I was in a line of work
that might get my blood pumping
pretty steady from time to time.

He gives her a woeful smile and no more explanation.

CYNTHIA

Figures. You seemed like a
mysterymonger.

ARTHUR

Tried to bust them, actually.
Mystery's not my business anymore.

CYNTHIA

Everyone loves a good mystery.

ARTHUR

Curiosity killed the cat.

CYNTHIA

And you're the cat?

He nods.

ARTHUR

Trying not to get killed.

She laughs to herself. He watches.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

My past assaults me from every
direction, begging me to indulge.

EXT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - NIGHT

A large box sits next to Arthur's doorstep as he unlocks his
front door. He ignores it.

ARTHUR (V.O.)
A past curiosity promises
fulfilment while this forgotten
woman from my past makes me
curious. Begging to be fulfilled.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - ENTRY WAY - NIGHT

Arthur comes through the front door and moves to close it. He doesn't notice that his push falls short, leaving it cracked slightly.

He moves toward the studio.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - THE STUDIO - NIGHT

Arthur goes straight past his empty easel and picks up the last remaining blank canvas left by Tori.

He sets the canvas down excitedly on the easel and bends down to grab his supplies. He holds up nearly empty bottles of paint, unscrewing several of them and scraping out the remains with his brush and splashing them on his palette.

Cleaning the brush, he wipes the excess glops onto the edge of the palette and readies himself.

ARTHUR (V.O.)
Now, to see her again.

He puts his brush to the canvas and immediately something is different. His strokes are staggered, merging into harsher shapes. Having completed a few lines, he looks to the chair:

Nothing. She's not there.

He furrows his brow and continues. A few more strokes, still nothing. He tries closing his eyes and taking deep breath, but the ensuing movements of the brush are still crude and forced, rather than spilling out.

He opens his eyes and looks to the chair. Nothing. No Tori.

He looks back to his unfinished painting: a jarring image of a jagged man, hunched over. He looks at the craggy, depressed edges of the figure with disgust.

Trying to steady his brush by holding with both hands and leaning in closer the canvas, he attempt a few smooth strokes. They look passable, forming a simplistic curved body shape behind the man.

A woman without a face.

Frustrated, he throws the brush. Turning on the spot, his eye is caught by light from outside, spilling out in a sliver from the still cracked open front door in the main room.

He huffs out of the studio and opens the front door fully.

EXT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - NIGHT

Arthur looks down at the package next to his doorstep. He looks around and, seeing nobody, picks the box up and takes it inside.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Arthur sets the large box down in the middle of the room and looks for something to opening it with. He looks to the empty mantle and pauses for a second.

He goes to the kitchen and grabs a pair of scissors, which he folds open and lowers to the box.

Looking over into the studio, he sees his brush on the floor in a small puddle of paint.

He slashes the box open and pulls back the cardboard flaps.

Pulling back the paper packing material, he screams and falls backward onto the floor as he sees what rests inside:

His SWORD, HAT and JACKET, folded perfectly.

He shakes his head furiously as he murmurs "how?" over and over under his breath to himself.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

I understand now that I won't be
allowed to grieve. But how can I
hunt this nameless tormentor
without loosing her memory forever?
What can you do when your past
keeps landing on your doorstep?

He tries to steady his shaking hands to no avail. Out of sheer frustration and panic he kicks the box away from him with his feet, sprawling himself out on the floor.

His mouth cracks open and a breath escapes. With it he says,

ARTHUR

I don't know what to do.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - MAIN ROOM - LATER

Arthur sits at his kitchen counter looking more disheveled than he ever has. Stubble graces his chin and his already longish hair is a tousled mess.

He looks dejected at the phone sitting face down in front of him on the dull counter top. He looks like he's trying to convince himself of something.

Finally he swats the phone off the counter and quickly dials a number with a sense of regret and reluctance.

He holds the phone up to his ear with a sour expression.

LEWIS (O.S.)
(filtered)
Hello?

ARTHUR
Lewis?

LEWIS
Arthur, is that you?

ARTHUR
Yeah.

LEWIS
Man, I'm so sorry about Tori.

ARTHUR
So you've heard.

LEWIS
Yeah, man, I read her obituary.
I'm so sorry, brother.

ARTHUR
Hm.

LEWIS
What?

ARTHUR
It's nothing.

LEWIS
What is it?

ARTHUR
I never wrote an obituary.

LEWIS
That's pretty weird, man.

ARTHUR
Forget it, alright?

LEWIS
Sure thing.

ARTHUR
I'll try to do the same.

LEWIS
That what you been doing? Tryin' to forget?

ARTHUR
Exactly the opposite. I'm dead if I forget her face.

LEWIS
So what've you been doing?

ARTHUR
Painting. Trying to.

LEWIS
Too many distractions?

Arthur looks over to the box still strewn aside on the floor.

ARTHUR
... something like that.

LEWIS
This why you called me? You're always welcome here, Arthur. It's been a while since you've stomped Thompson. If you need a memory kicker, I'll be happy to share. There are options, brother.

EXT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The street sign on the corner reads "THOMPSON" and below it is a line of progressively more depressing houses.

Arthur walks up to the door of one with a dead lawn, weeds in the cement, and no mailbox.

He knocks twice on the door. After a little too long of a wait, the door opens and a waft of smoke spills out.

INT. LEWIS'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

There stands LEWIS WILDE, nearly 30, his hair longer and greasier than Arthur's, wearing a tank top under an unbuttoned shirt and sunglasses at night.

He's got a pipe in his mouth, the source of the perpetual cloud of smoke that follows him.

LEWIS

Come in!

Arthur coughs and tries to wave off the smoke as he enters.

ARTHUR

I can never tell what you've got in that pipe.

LEWIS

I usually don't know either.

He SLAMS the front door. They walk into the living room.

ARTHUR

Always something foul.

LEWIS

But always something. I never dwell on nothingness and things lost, brother.

ARTHUR

Trying to tell me something, sly guy?

LEWIS

What caused us to drift apart, Arthur? Was it her?

ARTHUR

No. It was before her. Pretty sure it was just you.

LEWIS

Sounds like she made you tolerable.

ARTHUR

She made me. Period.

LEWIS

Yeah, well, who made The Blade?

Arthur rubs his hands across his scratchy stubble.

ARTHUR

I don't know. Doesn't matter.
He's dead and buried.

LEWIS

Someone's not happy about that.

ARTHUR

I'm beginning to realize.

LEWIS

Well, I agree with them.

ARTHUR

You agree with my wife's killer?

LEWIS

Not like that, Arthur, but I think
you should allow yourself to finish
the work she kept you from.

ARTHUR

She never kept me from anything.

LEWIS

You can still answer the question.

ARTHUR

What question?

LEWIS

The Family. Do they exist?

ARTHUR

I'm done chasing a rumor, Lewis.
Searching for something that
probably never existed. Always
feeling one step closer with
nothing to show for it. I took
whispers as shouts. Coincidence as
evidence.

(beat)

Tori gave me the satisfaction that
pursuit never could. Taking one
more step to find them would kill
everything she gave me.

LEWIS

If you're so satisfied, then why
are you here to see me?

ARTHUR

Because now I'm alone. She showed me that there was nothing out there to uncover, and that the only journey worth obsessing over was one within.

(beat)

I stopped looking for the monster out there and she helped me slay the monster in here.

(points to his heart)

Then some monster -- out there -- slew her. And now I am alone.

Lewis takes a moment considering his friend.

LEWIS

Yes you are.

(beat)

But I've got something for you. You might even like the taste.

ARTHUR

Not likely.

Lewis leans over the back of the couch and picks up a dark glass bottle, which he reveals to Arthur.

LEWIS

I think it's just what you need.

Lewis pops the cork and takes a whiff of the fumes. He snaps his head back.

ARTHUR

If YOU recoil, it might just be strong enough.

Lewis hands Arthur the bottle.

LEWIS

That's the spirit.

Arthur swills it around a bit as he gazes into the cloudy glass. He finds the label intimidating.

ARTHUR

Thanks.

They walk to the front door and Arthur mutters a goodbye.

LEWIS

Go find her, brother.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - THE STUDIO - NIGHT

Arthur faces his unfinished painting with his brush in one hand and the bottle in the other.

He lifts the bottle to his lips and takes a dangerously large gulp. His vision distorts as he looks at the canvas.

ON BLACK:

Arthur stands alone, surrounded by blackness.

He blinks slowly, and in the far distance he can see a figure. Without thinking, he begins to walk toward it. His reactions are very slow and all of his movements sluggish.

As he makes his way across the infinite sea of darkness, it becomes quickly evident that it is Tori he is walking to.

Slowing even more in his final approach, he stops toe to toe, looking into her eyes. He puts his hand up to her face.

As he moves his hand across her cheek, it melts away with his touch, revealing blackness underneath.

The blackness spreads, dissolving her completely.

IN THE STUDIO:

The distortion of Arthur's vision begins to dissipate.

He's furious. He throws the bottle on the ground, sending glass shards and liquid everywhere.

Collapsing onto the ground, he looks up to the still unfinished painting, the empty face of the woman tormenting him. He covers his face with his hands.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Arthur sits on the couch. His clothes are crumpled and he looks even more disarranged than before.

RING. The phone.

He gets himself up slowly and gets the phone off the kitchen counter where he left it days before.

ARTHUR

Yes?

AZURE
Mister Soloman?

ARTHUR
Yes.

AZURE
This is Officer Azure. Inspector
Gundrum would like to meet with you
today if you are available.

ARTHUR
When?

AZURE
Would four o'clock be convenient
for you?

ARTHUR
I'll be there.

He hangs up the phone with no goodbye.

INT. GUNDRUM'S OFFICE - DAY

Arthur sits waiting for Gundrum in his empty office. He's made no effort to make himself presentable, sinking into the office chair just as in his sofa.

Gundrum enters.

GUNDRUM
Hello, Mister Soloman. Thank you
for coming down.

Arthur nods.

GUNDRUM (CONT'D)
May I call you Arthur?

ARTHUR
Sure.

GUNDRUM
Arthur, 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

What do you know?

GUNDRUM

In regard to your wife's murder, nothing. In regard to The Blade himself, I'm something of an authority.

ARTHUR

Really?

GUNDRUM

Well, as much of an authority as someone can be on a man most people think is an urban myth.

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, but I just want to come to terms with the loss of my wife.

Gundrum shoots Arthur a puzzled look.

GUNDRUM

You will. Once I've found him.

ARTHUR

And if you don't?

GUNDRUM

I will.

ARTHUR

I have to move on even if you fail, Inspector. And that means letting go now. I can't wait to see if justice is served. I'd appreciate no more calls than you deem necessary for your investigation. THIS investigation.

Gundrum sits for a moment before continuing.

GUNDRUM

I understand. And I appreciate your cooperation. You're right. We may never find him. It's a possibility I've gone over time and again.

(pause)

But you know what I really want to know?

ARTHUR

What?

GUNDRUM

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.

(pause)

He's not dead. Dead guys don't hang up their coat 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. Claudette has some routine things for you before you leave. Thank you for coming down today.

They both stand and shake hands.

ARTHUR

Any time.

INT. CYNTHIA'S ART SUPPLY - DAY

Cynthia is stocking items on a high endcap shelf, stretching her arms to reach.

Arthur enters the store, bells ringing as he opens the door. He notices the band of exposed skin between the top of Cynthia's jeans and the bottom of her shirt, which is quickly covered as she turns to see him.

CYNTHIA

Arthur!

ARTHUR

Hey, Cynthia.

CYNTHIA

What's up?

ARTHUR

I wanted to ask you something.

CYNTHIA
Anything.

ARTHUR
With everything going on, I've been
having trouble painting.

CYNTHIA
Okay.

ARTHUR
I understand if it's too invasive
or ... uncomfortable. I just
thought it might help me.

CYNTHIA
What is it?

ARTHUR
Can I watch you paint?

She smiles and lets out a half-laugh.

CYNTHIA
Of course.

ARTHUR
Where would be best?

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Arthur and Cynthia sit on the couch.

An awkward silent moment.

ARTHUR
Thank you for agreeing to this.

CYNTHIA
Well, I can certainly understand
creative blockages. We all have
them, it's nothing to worry about.

ARTHUR
I'm only worried that it goes
deeper than that.

CYNTHIA
How?

ARTHUR
It's slipping. I can't remember
her face.

She takes a moment.

CYNTHIA

Maybe that's not a bad thing.

ARTHUR

I don't know about that.

CYNTHIA

Well, you're probably right, because, honestly, I don't really know anything about you.

ARTHUR

That's not entirely true.

CYNTHIA

Isn't it? Every time we've talked, you're the man of few words. I understand if that's your thing, but it's okay to open up once in a while.

ARTHUR

What do you want to know?

CYNTHIA

Well, lets start with the bits I do know and work into the unknown. Like, I know you left school to go to the Police academy, but did you always want to be a cop?

ARTHUR

I always wanted to be a detective, ever since I was a kid. When I was four or five, a friend of my father's gave me a copy of Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, annotated and everything. I read them and it was less like discovering a book a more like unlocking something I already had. A thought process I found more natural than breathing. Eventually I found that a way of life doesn't necessarily a career make. First day at the academy, I knew it wasn't for me. Paper-pushing bureaucratic obstruction of justice as far as I was concerned. So I left.

CYNTHIA

That when you met Tori?

ARTHUR
No. That was later.

CYNTHIA
Okay, so you left the academy, but
hadn't met Tori. Just a wide eyed
wanderer, what'd you do?

ARTHUR
I had a ... brash youthful
reaction.

CYNTHIA
What does THAT mean?

ARTHUR
It means I don't want to tell.

CYNTHIA
Ha! Okay then, fine, no dwelling
on the past.
(beat)
What's in the box?

She points to the large box in the middle of the room.
Arthur rubs his temples.

ARTHUR
I can't tell you that, either.
Souvenirs of a past I can't seem to
get rid of.

She looks over to his paintings against the wall.

CYNTHIA
These yours?

ARTHUR
Yes! There's something we can talk
about.

She gets up off the couch and goes to look at them.

CYNTHIA
You're not bad, Arthur Soloman.
(pause)
That's a great name you've got, by
the way. A better detective name
than an artist's name, but it looks
like you've got the touch.

He gets off the couch and walks over to her.

ARTHUR
I hope I still do.

CYNTHIA
Let's see what we can do.

She walks into the studio.

IN THE STUDIO:

Cynthia goes up to the easel and looks at the unfinished painting Arthur left there.

He 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 your wife? 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.

BACK IN THE MAIN ROOM:

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. Before Arthur can even open the envelope, he quickly pulls open the door and throws himself outside.

EXT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - NIGHT

The envelope's deliverer is a HUGE MAN, now running down the stairs and into the darkness of the street below. He is wearing a long coat with the collar popped. Arthur can't get a good look at his face before he disappears completely.

Arthur takes a moment to consider pursuit. He calms himself down and moves toward the light at the front of the house. He slides his thumb under the sealed back of the envelope and rips it open.

He removes the folded piece of thick paper and slowly opens it to read a meticulously hand written note:

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

- Otus

Arthur keeps his focus firmly on the paper as he drudges back into his home.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

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

ARTHUR

You wanted to know more about me.

CYNTHIA

What's it say?

Arthur takes a moment before quoting.

ARTHUR

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

He purses his lips, the bottom trembling angrily.

CYNTHIA

What's it signed?

He hands the letter to her. She reads.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Who is Otus?

Arthur puts his hand over his face and rubs his closed eyes.

ARTHUR

You wanted to know more about me.
Well, after the academy, and before
Tori ...

CYNTHIA

Yes?

He finally looks up and stares her in the eyes.

ARTHUR

... I scaled rooftops in the night.
I hunted criminals and chased
rumors of mad mafia men. I sought
Justice. I brandished a sword.

She's frightened by his intensity.

CYNTHIA

You were --

ARTHUR

I was called many names by many people. "Bladed Justice" was one that stuck.

(beat)

Never could come to call myself anything when I was like that.

CYNTHIA

And now --

ARTHUR

And now my wife is dead and my grief interrupted. By a man so obsessed with my return to the life I laid to rest that he killed her to lure me back.

CYNTHIA

Find him.

ARTHUR

I could. But that would risk loosing the only thing I ever cared to keep. Remember why I brought you here?

CYNTHIA

To paint.

ARTHUR

To remember.

CYNTHIA

But how can you remember with ... this. With Otus on your back.

She holds up the letter.

ARTHUR

I can't. I don't know what to do.

She walks over to him.

CYNTHIA

Redefine.

He looks to her, the word catching him.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

If he'll never leave you in peace, then go make it. Find him without falling.

ARTHUR

Falling?

CYNTHIA

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.

ARTHUR

I'm not sure that's a tightrope I can walk.

CYNTHIA

What other choice do you have?

He looks at her with a desperate tiredness in his eyes.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

No. You're doing this for her, and you can't tell me she'd want you to quit, to --

ARTHUR

I don't know anymore!
(beat)

The day she died you told me her paint was discontinued. Is that the world telling me to forget?

CYNTHIA

The world only tells you what you choose to hear. Choose now.

Arthur plops himself down on the couch. He looks over to the facing wall. He sees his two paintings leaning in a row. Next to them is an open space. He looks at the unoccupied third and his face calms, his stress lines releasing.

ARTHUR

Okay.

CYNTHIA

What?

ARTHUR

Redefine.

He looks over to the large box. He lifts himself out of the couch.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
I've got to reappropriate the icons
of my past. Separate the
objectionable.

He opens the top flaps of the box and pulls out the sword,
setting it down on the floor. Cynthia looks on it with awe
as Arthur removes his fedora and trench coat from the box.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Redefine. Hone the negativity into
that which was always it's root:
the blade.

Holding his hat and jacket, he abruptly kicks the sword away,
sending it skidding into the studio.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Keep the jacket.

He sweeps his arms into the jacket, jumping it over his
shoulders with a building energy.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Keep the hat.

He sits the hat on his head with reverence. Taking a sensual
moment to adjust the brim, he turns back to Cynthia.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Redefine.

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

She can't help but smile in admiration.

CYNTHIA
You look good.

ARTHUR
I feel ready.

CYNTHIA
Completely?

ARTHUR
As much as I can be.

CYNTHIA
Are you afraid?

ARTHUR

Yes. Every step of the way. I'll be tempted by the hunt itself which, if successful, could put me toe to toe with a man who could kill me in more ways than I could guess.

CYNTHIA

But you'll be able to close that curiosity forever. Eating away at you. The last piece before you can move on.

ARTHUR

But is it the piece she kept me from? Or the piece that's keeping me from her?

CYNTHIA

Looks like we're going to find out.

For a second, Arthur looks doubtful.

ARTHUR

Is all this worth it? Aren't we meant to live with demons?

CYNTHIA

Some, yes. Not like this. Not the crippling kind.

ARTHUR

I don't know.
(beat)
I'm still so young.

CYNTHIA

Only in number. You've seen so much.

ARTHUR

Most I would give back to have the one thing I wouldn't.

CYNTHIA

That's why you have to keep going.

ARTHUR

Yes.

CYNTHIA

All this for paint.

He smiles.

EXT. CITY DUMP - DAYBREAK

Arthur, fully geared up in his trench coat and fedora, walks the long front gate of the City Dump toward the entrance.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

My focus must be kept to the task at hand. Find him. Find him and move on. Do not fall back into the life she saved you from. Do not let this light the fire. Take small steps toward salvation, not large, violent strides to satisfy personal curiosities. This Otus may hold the key to such temptations, but I must not allow that spark to start the fire. Silence the spark.

Before he reaches the entrance, he sees a DUMP WORKER walking on the other side of the chain link fence.

Arthur walks up to the fence and tries to whistle to the worker. He's drowned out by the sound of a scoop truck behind the nearest trash heap.

ARTHUR

Hey!

The worker looks up and takes off his hearing protection. He spots Arthur and, surprised, walks over to the gate. He waves off the scoop truck and the sound quiets.

DUMP WORKER

You in the right part of town?

ARTHUR

Yeah. Just wanted to ask you a few questions.

DUMP WORKER

You a cop?

ARTHUR

No.

DUMP WORKER

P.I.?

ARTHUR
Something like that. Look, do you
work nights?

DUMP WORKER
Most the time, yeah.

ARTHUR
See anyone around here that isn't
supposed to be?

DUMP WORKER
Yeah, you.

ARTHUR
Not me. Before today.

DUMP WORKER
This ain't a junk yard. You don't
get people 'round here very often.

ARTHUR
I'm not talking about a deal-
seeker. Someone really out of
place.

DUMP WORKER
Now that you mention it, I did see
a strange guy walking around the
north ridge last week.

ARTHUR
What did he look like?

DUMP WORKER
Big. Was carrying something in his
hand. Electronic.

ARTHUR
Like what? A phone?

DUMP WORKER
No, not a phone. It was lettin'
off this beeping noise. Caught my
attention. He was gone before I
could get to tell him to get.

ARTHUR
Thank you. I think that answers a
very big question of mine.

Arthur walks back the way he came, stepping a little faster.
The dump worker puts back his hearing protection and waves
the scoop truck on. It ROARS loudly back to life.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Arthur goes to the big box still sitting in the center of the room. He opens it to find his sword sitting at the bottom of its emptiness.

He clearly doesn't want to touch it, but pulls the brim of his hat down further before plunging his hand in and removing the sword.

He looks it up and down, and spots something underneath the hand guard: a small electronic tracking device.

Prying it off with his finger nails, he holds it up to the light to examine it. No markings.

Looking like his first instinct is to crush the little bastard, he stops himself and thinks for a moment. He considers the item again and jumps up, dropping the sword.

He sprints over to his kitchen counter and flips open a large phone book. Stopping on a page and scrolling to locate a name, he picks up the phone receiver with his other hand.

TRANSITION TO:

INT. COMPUTER REPAIR SHOP - DAY

Arthur stands in front of a counter that appears to double as a workstation. Open computers clutter the space, some on their side, some standing up like digital skyscrapers.

Behind the counter in a reclining office chair is the unkempt twenty-something DERRICK. He's got a magnifying eyepiece squeezed in his left eye, examining the tracking device.

DERRICK

Never thought I'd see you again.

ARTHUR

Never thought you'd have to.

DERRICK

Ever end up marrying that pixie of a girl of yours?

Arthur clenches his jaw.

ARTHUR

Anything identifiable on that thing? Anything traceable?

Derrick looks up for the first time at Arthur's lack of response. He sees his pain and doesn't press it.

DERRICK

It looks home made. No marks to speak of. Let's see if we can't pick up anything.

He trails off as he pushes his rolling chair with his feet, scooting deeper into the store. He twists himself back with a pair of wires.

He uses them to hook the small device up to his monitor unit behind the counter. He slides a large Fresnel magnifying plate over the glowing monitor. He indicates it to Arthur.

DERRICK (CONT'D)

You still have the one I got you?

ARTHUR

Yeah.

DERRICK

Good. Good.

(Sotto)

Heaven forbid we converse.

(back to Arthur)

Okay! Lets see what we got.

Derrick slaps the keyboard rapidly and focuses on the screen.

DERRICK (CONT'D)

Alright!

The processor makes a beep and Derrick slaps his hands together. Arthur leans over the counter to try and see.

ARTHUR

What?

DERRICK

Absolutely nothing.

ARTHUR

Damn.

DERRICK

Not a trace.

Arthur slams his fists on the counter.

DERRICK (CONT'D)

Oh, I'm sorry. Were you under the impression that my job includes decoding homemade tracking devices?

ARTHUR

It's --

DERRICK

I don't generally mess with that sort.

ARTHUR

It's just a dead end when I don't need one. Thanks anyway, Derrick.

Arthur heads out the front door. Derrick muses to himself.

DERRICK

Well, nobody ever NEEDS a dead end. Unless it's a like a cul-de-sac or something. Those can be nice.

EXT. THE CITY STREETS - VARIOUS - EARLY EVENING

Arthur walks with his hat lowered and his hands in his coat pockets. His walk is aimless in direction. The steps of a man lost in his home town.

He takes a seat on a park bench and removes his hat so the soft breeze can cut through his hair. He looks at the stars just beginning to penetrate the post-sunset sky. His face shows a longing for a time when he could appreciate it.

As the street lights begin to flicker on, he puts his hat back on and gets up from the bench. Deeper into the now glowing streets he walks.

INT. PHONE BOOTH - NIGHT

Arthur stands in front of a public phone. A passerby might think he's angry at it, staring so intently. He rubs his scratchy face with his hand before finally picking up the receiver and dialing a number he has no need to look up.

After several droning rings, the other end picks up. The voice of an old man, BEN, answers.

BEN (O.S.)

(filtered)

Hello?

ARTHUR
Ben, it's Arthur.

BEN
Arthur? Arthur Soloman?

ARTHUR
Heya Ben.

BEN
How are you Arthur?

ARTHUR
Would it be alright if I came over?

BEN
I think I can ward off sleep for
The Arthur Soloman.

ARTHUR
Thank you.

INT. BEN'S DEN - NIGHT

The den is dimly lit by a few well placed lamps, diffused by the gaudy shades that adorn them.

Ben sits in a very low couch, Arthur in the chair next to it.

BEN
So how's the investigation?

ARTHUR
How do you know I'm investigating?

BEN
You have not dressed like that
since --

ARTHUR
I know. It's not good.

BEN
That's too bad. On the one hand,
I'm sorry to hear that.

ARTHUR
On the one hand?

BEN
Yes. On the other, I'm afraid of
what you'll find.

Arthur looks at Ben for a moment.

ARTHUR

So am I, but you're the only one
who can help me find it.

BEN

Hardly. The retired don't help.
It's part of the rules.

ARTHUR

You got closer than anybody.

BEN

And what did it get me? Closer to
one thing is necessarily farther
from something else.

ARTHUR

What'd you do after Dee left?

BEN

I certainly didn't do whatever it
is you're doing.

ARTHUR

How can I not?

BEN

Take it from me, pushing down the
path you went -- the path you left
the force in order to walk -- the
path it looks like you're walking
again -- will give you only what
you see here.

(beat)

Empty.

ARTHUR

My home's already empty.

BEN

What about your heart?

ARTHUR

I don't know.

BEN

Looks like you're holding up
alright.

ARTHUR

How's that?

BEN
Well, you haven't killed yourself.

Arthur lets a breath out of his nose. The closest he can get to laughter at the moment.

ARTHUR
No. Not yet.

BEN
Well, then that tells me you haven't exhausted all your options.

ARTHUR
That's true. There's one thing I haven't wanted to look at. One angle I've purposefully avoided.

BEN
Then there's your way, because you're not getting anything out of me. Left that game for good. Not back and forth like you.

ARTHUR
You sure you couldn't just let me peek in your old file cabinet?

BEN
I'm sure I could. If I hadn't burned that damn obsession.

ARTHUR
One last stab at getting her back?

BEN
You can see how well that worked.

Arthur gets up from the chair.

ARTHUR
Looks like the path is clear then.

BEN
Bruise your knuckles till they talk?

ARTHUR
Nope. Read the obituaries.

Ben furrows his brow in confusion. After giving up his attempt at understanding, he lumbers himself out of the couch and heads over to a stack of newspapers on the other side of the room.

He grabs them and shoves the stack into Arthur's chest.

BEN

I loved your obituary for Tori, by
the way.

Arthur sorts through the stack quickly.

ARTHUR

I never wrote one.

BEN

Oh. Oh, I see.

Ben leans over to the side table next to his couch and grabs his reading glasses. He puts them on and looks over Arthur's shoulder.

Arthur finds the paper, pulling it from the stack.

ARTHUR

You have a pen?

Arthur rifles through the pages as Ben goes back to the side table to get a pen.

BEN

I always loved watching you do
this.

Ben gives the pen to Arthur, who sits down and zones in on the obituaries. He puts the pen lightly against his wife's entry as he reads it.

His eyes flit back and fourth at super-speed as he reads.

ARTHUR

Let's see.

BEN

What is it? Dvorak encoding?
Transaddition?

ARTHUR

Nope. It's a combination of Caesar
shifting and null pairs. He's
cleverly included the necessary
ciphers as well.

BEN

That's nice of him.

Arthur uses his pen to circle a series of letters from the obituary. In the margins of the paper, he accumulates them and begins decoding.

He finally releases the pen and slaps the paper down on the coffee table. Ben picks it up.

ARTHUR
It's an address.

BEN
I wish you weren't so good at that.

Arthur stands to go. He grabs his hat and plops it on his head. He approaches Ben to take the paper back.

ARTHUR
Thanks Ben.

Ben yanks it out of his reach.

BEN
You don't have to go.

Arthur leans in close to make his point.

ARTHUR
Young men like me aren't used to
having our memories go, and I can't
call up her up.
(beat)
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.

Ben nods.

BEN
Dee may have left me, but I don't
know what I'd have done if someone
had stopped me from at least being
able to fondly recall ...

Ben hands Arthur the newspaper.

BEN (CONT'D)
Go get him, Arthur.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Arthur enters and runs into his kitchen. Out from the bottom shelf of a cabinet, he pulls a big dusty case.

He sets the case down on a table behind his couch in the main room. Small puffs of dust shoot into the air as the latches snap open. He lifts the lid to reveal a processor monitor with Fresnel magnification plate and keyboard.

He plugs the unit into a wall socket and boots it up. More dust issues out of the device's churning innards as the monitor glows to life. The phosphor gleam softens the features of his face.

Arthur inputs the address written on the newspaper into the search bar and immediately receives a map and location information in block letters:

INK WELL PUB

A small, receipt-sized printout inches slowly from the racketing mechanics below the keyboard. Arthur rips it off and shoves it in his pocket.

Without bothering to turn the device off, he moves into his kitchen and pulls open a drawer. A hand gun and boxes of ammunition sit inside.

Picking up the gun, he considers the weight from hand to hand. Taking a test aim, his face displays a disgust he can't ignore. He drops the gun back into the drawer.

Dismissively closing the drawer, he leaps to the front door. Just as he is about to slam it shut, he stops.

Hand on the doorknob, he looks back to the phone sitting on the counter and thinks for a moment to himself. Reentering the apartment, he closes the door and heads back to the still-glowing processor monitor.

Into the search bar he types INSPECTOR GUNDRUM.

Almost immediately there is displayed a full dossier on Police Inspector Gundrum, Niall, age 46. Address. Phone number. Everything.

Arthur re-inputs Gundrum's displayed street address into the search bar. As a condensed version of the dossier prints out, a map indicating the address location is displayed.

This is added to the end of the printout, which Arthur rips out and puts with the other in his pocket.

He shuts the processor, unplugging it from the wall on his way to the kitchen counter. Pulling up a chair, he sits and grabs some loose stationary and a pen.

Taking a deep breath, he begins to write:

I used to help people in trouble.
Now I just listen to their screams.

TIME LAPSE as Arthur fills the pages of stationary with the full content of his narration thus far.

As he finishes reviewing the pages he's written, he removes another piece of paper from his inner jacket pocket: The note that Otus left on his doorstep.

He staples it to the back of his letter, folds them, and puts them into an envelope on which he writes only "GUNDRUM."

Sticking the envelope into his inner jacket pocket, he runs again for the door. Not looking back, he closes it with a SLAM.

EXT. INK WELL PUB - NIGHT

Arthur walks through the nearly empty parking lot toward the entrance of the Ink Well Pub. A homeless couple lies asleep in the front windowsill, sporadically illuminated by the flickering neon "OPEN" sign above them.

The heaviness of Arthur's footsteps wake them. They look up to see the immaculately dressed flatfoot command the front door open with his resolutely clenched fist.

He enters, coat billowing behind him.

INT. INK WELL 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 bartender props himself lazily against the bottle cluttered shelves behind him. Empty stools leave him nobody to serve.

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
Who is it?

Sander lays his pool cue down on the table felt.

SANDER
Maybe if he steps a little closer,
I can see for sure.

JACEY
The guy we been waitin' for?

SANDER
SHUT IT, Jacey.

Jacey pulls away from Sander and slinks toward Arthur.

JACEY
He doesn't look like --

SANDER
Hey!

JACEY
Stop your yellin' Sander, I'll find
out.

She gets up right next to Arthur and grabs onto his left hand. She pulls it into the light of the low-hanging pool table lamp to reveal: A band of lighter skin where his wedding ring once sat.

SANDER
See. It's him alright.

She circles behind him, feeling the lower part of his coat.

JACEY
No sword though.

SANDER
But he was right. He's back.

Sander moves around the pool table toward Arthur. Arthur moves his head slightly to follow him.

JACEY

Hittin' the streets again.

Arthur rigidly snaps his head back to her.

ARTHUR

No.

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

SANDER

Then why are you here?

JACEY

He 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.

Arthur continues to wail punches down on the fallen Sander. In the farthest, darkest corner of the pub, a figure drenched in shadow WATCHES.

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 the 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.

Despite the imposing presence, Arthur can't help but be stricken by how incredibly SHORT this man is.

ARTHUR

Who are -- ? 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.

ARTHUR

It's you.

OTUS

You look a bit surprised at my appearance. What, expected a big oaf like Black Larsen or something?

Arthur doesn't answer as Otus walks slowly toward him.

OTUS (CONT'D)

I may be small, but in the way of answers, I promise I don't disappoint. I'm told I pack quite a punch.

SMACK.

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 sits in a shabby leather recliner. Next to a simple lamp, he casually reads a very old copy of "Fanshawe" by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

His hand gently itches at his throat before he decides to close the book and put it down on the table next to him. The chair squeaks as he lifts himself out and into the kitchen.

IN THE KITCHEN:

As he pours himself a glass of water, he notices a breeze blow the curtains through an open window. He scrunches his forehead and 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."

BACK IN THE CHAIR, LATER:

Gundrum sits in the chair. His face displays a pitying expression as he reads the last of the letter.

He flips over to the note from Otus. An ominous curiosity consumes him as he takes in each word of the scrawl. To him, it reads like a confession.

With an instant change in disposition, he hops out of his chair more quickly this time. In one determined move, he grabs his keys and jacket from the hanger and heads out the door. The screen hisses shut behind him.

EXT. AZURE'S HOME - NIGHT

Gundrum's car pulls up to the front of Azure's place and he raps out a few loud HONKS on the horn.

Dogs bark as a light turns on in the front window. A robe wearing Officer Azure flings open the curtains. She spots Gundrum and disappears in a huff. He gets out of the car.

AT HER DOOR, MOMENTS LATER:

The door opens and Azure is buttoning up her shirt.

AZURE

What now?

Gundrum quickly holds up the letter in his fist.

INT. OTUS'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The Office is conservatively adorned. Deeply stained wood and artifacts of pursuits both sporting and intellectual.

Arthur sits centered between two windows at the far end of the room. His hands are cuffed behind the chair in which he is restrained.

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

OTUS

Doesn't look a thing like you!

Arthur looks up in his grogginess to see Otus take a seat behind a large, imposing desk at the opposite end of the room. His head feels heavy and pains his neck to lift.

ARTHUR

Where are we?

OTUS

My office. Right across the street from your flat, in fact.

ARTHUR

Been watching me, creep?

OTUS

You know that I have. Obviously, I know who you are.

Otus indicates the magazine. Arthur throws it off his lap with a jolt of his knees.

OTUS (CONT'D)

But do you know who I am?

ARTHUR

Otus.

OTUS

Yes, that is my name, but do you know who I am?

ARTHUR

The man who killed my wife.

OTUS

Correct. Do you know why I killed your wife?

ARTHUR

(snarky)

Well, you were watching me. Maybe
a perv. Jealous of her.

Otus smiles for a second before responding.

OTUS

No. Really now?

ARTHUR

To lure me back.

OTUS

Back to what?

Arthur shakes violently in his chair.

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.

ARTHUR

Say what?

Otus gets up from his chair and sits on the edge of his desk.

OTUS

I won't make you say you're "Bladed
Justice" -- even though I know you
are -- but you're in such denial
you can't even articulate, beyond
vague metaphors, 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.

OTUS

And now you find yourself
wondering, were you feeding into
their own fear and curiosity, or
did they actually know something?
Was it just the sword? Your weapon
unwittingly playing into their
myth?

ARTHUR

I came to realize it didn't matter
if they're real or not. I should
not have wasted myself obsessing
over anything, much less ...
(it pains him to say it)
... the Family.

OTUS

Really, you can believe whatever
you want. Whatever is most
convenient. Because they don't
exist.

Otus pushes himself off the desk and faces the wall.

OTUS (CONT'D)

Anymore.

ARTHUR

"Anymore"?

Otus quickly turns back to Arthur.

OTUS

There WAS a family.
(beat)
They became myth because they
operated mythically. On a mythic
scale.

Arthur looks harder at Otus, trying to get a read on him.

ARTHUR

What are you saying? Mafia?

Otus smirks at the use of the word.

OTUS

Ha. Compared to the mob, they were -- we were -- God. The super-mob. 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.

ARTHUR

If you're to be believed, then what happened to them? Why so past tense?

OTUS

It wasn't greed, like so many others. Never was our way. There was such ... honor. Such belief. No dissention amongst the ranks. No worm in the apple. No Judas.

ARTHUR

Well then, who was it?

Otus moves around the room as he reflects.

OTUS

An outsider. Grudged for a life stolen. The generations of dedication reflected in our father's garden burned to the ground. Father fell, and his secrecy, those same whispers that gave us strength, were our undoing.

(beat)

There was no heir. I was just a boy at the time, only beginning my swordsmanship. The family fell, dispersed, fled. I continued my training of my own initiative. On my own.

(beat)

I grew up. Matured to watch the world around me devolve. Disparate criminal organizations seeking more ... immediate results. More power. More money. Each chink of a coin ticking away the honor. The respect. All wound into the shameful package of better firearms; quicker, cleaner murders. The weight of death no more than a penny.

(beat)

(MORE)

OTUS (CONT'D)

There was no battle to revel. No discernible conflict to relish. It makes the victories tasteless and cold. A raw carcass where once we had a cooked meal.

ARTHUR

You talk too much.

Otus moves to sit back down at his desk.

OTUS

Being a man of action, I imagined you would say that. But this, aside from the carnal action on which we agree, is our highest form of expression. Whereas with the latter I hope to learn something from you, I thought I might impart something in the way of discourse.

Otus sits, crossing his legs.

ARTHUR

No thanks.

OTUS

Ha! But I am so very curious about you. And I'd be willing to bet, even if you wouldn't admit it, that you are curious about me, too. May I ask about your time as Bladed Justice? I'm such a fan.

ARTHUR

I don't think I have much of a choice.

Arthur indicates his hand cuffs.

OTUS

If I take them off, will you agree to indulge me for a bit?

ARTHUR

Yes.

Otus gets up from behind his desk, fishing a key out from his jacket pocket. He steps behind Arthur and unlocks the handcuffs, tossing them onto a nearby shelf.

OTUS

That's more like it.

Arthur rubs his sore wrists and watches Otus go back to his desk chair.

ARTHUR
 Alright. Shoot.

OTUS
 Where to begin?
 (thinks for a moment.)
 When you were on our tail all those years, you're not telling me it's a mere coincidence we both mastered the majesty of the blade?

ARTHUR
 Of course I'd heard whispers that the Family used swords. All kind of esoteric rumors. None of it was real until I worked a murder case that led me to a Renaissance Faire.

OTUS
 Ah!

Otus is wide-eyed at Arthur's story.

ARTHUR
 It was the first time I'd seen such a display of martial talent. The steel clanging against steel. In watching it, I felt its reality. I had already desired to take up vigilant work, off-duty ...

OTUS
 So humble in your description.

ARTHUR
 It was a humble endeavor.

OTUS
 You were a hero.

ARTHUR
 No one ever called me that, and hearing it from you doesn't convince me either.
 (beat)
 It was simple. I saw them and knew it was a match. A tool and a fear tactic all in one. Not so much the honorable tradition as with your family. I was just exploiting the image of it, more than anything.

OTUS

But you were good. There must have been passion there.

ARTHUR

I took to it. Sure. Would have dropped it if I hadn't. Not to disappoint you, but I often carried a gun as well as a sword.

OTUS

Ah, but how often did you use it? The reports in the paper were not of a man with a gun running the rooftops.

(beat)

Beside, what's a bullet but a bullet? Pull a trigger and it zooms away from you. With a sword, its an extension of your arm. A part of you.

(a small laugh)

It's funny ...

ARTHUR

What's funny?

OTUS

You remind me of him.

ARTHUR

Who?

OTUS

The Father.

Arthur doesn't know how to take this.

OTUS (CONT'D)

Would you like to see something of his? Well, he didn't just own it. He invented it.

Otus walks over to a long case sitting on a table adjacent to his desk. He opens the case to reveal a SWORD with a GUN fastened into the hand guard.

OTUS (CONT'D)

I'd say it was his personal downfall: conceding to the honorless advancements of modern cowards. Some things just aren't meant to mix.

He closes the box, locking it.

OTUS (CONT'D)

Then, there's you and I. Destined
to collide.

ARTHUR

Destined? You dragged me here.

OTUS

Forgive me for being the master of
my own fate.

Arthur shakes his head.

ARTHUR

You've convinced yourself there's
no such thing as crime, but really,
you're just an elitist criminal.
You tout that your "honorable"
weapon is superior to the newest
pistol, but their guns and your
sword are all just tools. Means
for the same end.

Arthur stands to face him.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Look, I may not be the biggest
supporter of organized justice, but
that doesn't mean that organized
injustice is any more valid a way
to live.

OTUS

Of course. Those times are gone.

ARTHUR

Isn't 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)

Just because you can't explain, doesn't mean I can't imagine. And I imagine you're wrong.

ARTHUR

Wrong?

OTUS

Deluding yourself. You can't hide the animal. 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. Had us in your grasp. 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. I don't know that you belonged to any family. You're hardly proof. You could fabricate the whole bit to bate me. I never made my suspicions -- my goals -- a secret back then. Anyone could have gleaned I was looking for that family in the sky, and 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 the shelf behind his desk.

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 over his desk, charging down on Arthur.

Arthur 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. He takes quick, fevered breaths to allay its climbing numbers. 87 ... 88 ... 89 ...

Otus's 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.

Otus grips Arthur's collar and corners him against a window as he looks at his monitor. 90 ... 91 ... 92 ...

ARTHUR
 (out of breath)
 You killed my wife ... over a
 misconception. You don't know who
 I am. You don't know ME.

SMASH. Otus kick out the window next to them, sending shards
 plummeting two stories down to the pavement.

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.

Otus SWINGS Arthur by the collar, throwing him out the
 window. He strides over to face it and JUMPS out to follow.

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

Arthur's heart monitor fades into the windswept distance.

INT. GUNDRUM'S CAR - NIGHT

Gundrum drives. Azure rides shotgun.

GUNDRUM
 This is it.

AZURE
 What do you mean?

GUNDRUM
 After I nab Otus, I'm out.

AZURE
 What'll you do then?

GUNDRUM
 I don't know. Maybe open up a P.I.
 business or something.

Azure looks at Gundrum. She smiles.

AZURE
 I'm there. It's you and me, pal.

Gundrum smiles and RAMS his foot into the accelerator.

EXT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - NIGHT

They duel to the top of the stairs that lead to Arthur's front door. Otus beats him there, KICKING the door splintering off its hinges.

INT. THE SOLOMAN HOME - CONTINUOUS

The dust settles into a cloud that is SLICED through by the flurried swings of their staccato back-and-forth.

Rolling through the main room, they obliterate everything adorning the walls and furniture. Tearing and crashing between the loud tangs of steel on steel.

After an escalating procession of increasingly faster swings and parries, 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

I think I can oblige.

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. Soren brand.

BLOOD RED PASSION.

Arthur accepts it with the hand not holding his sword behind
the door. Considering the paint, he finds himself at a loss
for words.

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.
(beat)
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 kitchen to find it empty.

The window above the kitchen sink is open, curtain billowing
in the night breeze.

He turns to look around the apartment. Empty. He surveys the damage done. Looking into the corners for any place a person could hide, Arthur raises his blade defensively.

He hears something behind him and turns abruptly.

Nothing. 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. He takes a moment with it.

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. He uses a handkerchief to WIPE SMEARED BLOOD FROM THE BLADE OF HIS SWORD.

Cynthia is dead.

Otus approaches Arthur in the Studio. He stops in the frame of the doorway, posing provocatively with the sword.

Arthur stares him down.

Otus hangs on the moment.

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

(gulp)

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. I beat ... Bladed Justice.
The blade has fallen. By my hand.

(beat)

I WON!

Arthur pushes himself up against the fuzzy recliner behind him, the canvas still in his grasp at his side.

Arthur's 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 of 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. His terribly frightened face.

Otus 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 two Police officers. His entire body flails in protest as they drag him into the back of a squad car.

Gundrum watches as the officers handle him.

He gives a satisfied look that disappears as he begins to walk up the 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.

Gundrum 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

No, Claudette. Don't mourn.
(beat)
He got what he wanted in the end.
Don't take pity here. In this case
... envy the dead.

TITLE OVER:

THE END.

FADE OUT.