

PANDORE

1x01

*"THE DARK NIGHT
OF THE SOUL"*

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TEASER

EXT. WOODS-DAY

Bare feet pound hard against the ground as a petite young woman, Anna, races through the brush. Her breath, hard and rapid. She dodges the oncoming branches and leaps over sharp-looking stones. Her long dark hair weaves behind, catching the breeze along with the flow of her white summer dress.

She takes a peek over her shoulder—just one—and her wide-eyed gaze, frowning lips, and worried brows suggest she's not doing this as a hobby.

This is a chase.

One she fears she'll never escape.

Deeper into the forest, the sun barely escapes through the leaves. Tiny rays dance around her every movement. But as she slows, a certain presence lingers near. A dark one. She clutches her chest, gasping for air.

Her breath becomes short and rapid.

ANNA: Oh my God! I c-can't...run... (*winces*)

The tightness in her chest buckles her knees. The forest spins in place and a sudden chill fogs her breath. She rubs her shoulders in hope for some warmth, but even her hands were as cold as wet snow, despite it being the middle of the driest summer they'd seen.

The sound of crunching sticks creep behind her. Without turning around, her heavy gaze drops off to the side.

UNKNOWN VOICE (O.S.): Don't worry. You won't need either breath nor warmth much longer. (*cackles*)

Anna spins on her heels, facing her assailant. The assailant is an Effigy. Exactly as she is, but with all black eyes and ghastly pale skin. Like looking into a fun-house mirror of the future or of something dark within.

The Effigy has an uncanny mien about them. A type of confidence most rejected. The kind that's purely undeserved in a twisted reflection of Anna's fears.

However, Anna has a bit of a glow about her skin, brought upon a soft brim of youth and a successful influencer status. She tosses her arms down into tiny balls of fists.

ANNA: (*fed up*) What do you want? Why do you want to kill me? I don't even know who you are.

EFFIGY: (*rolls eyes*) It's not that I want you dead... (*ominous*) I need it.

ANNA: (*begging*) Why? What did I do? Please, you don't have to do this. I won't tell anyone if you let me live, I promise! No one will know. Please!

The Effigy backs her up against a tree with a sharp dagger in the shape of an ice pick pointing just below her jugular. The bark stings Anna's arms.

The dagger presses into her skin further, dragging down towards the center of her chest with enough pressure to cause a slight mark, but nothing too abrasive.

Her breathing picks back up, more rapidly than before. She shakes her head, eyes watering.

ANNA: P-please... p-please don't...

She starts gagging, uncertain why her throat aches with a scorched dryness. Her eyes swell as she inspects the back of her arms finding that the bark is covered in poison oak. Harmless to most, deadly to others.

They tilt their head with a slight, coy smile. Yet all she can see in their reflection is her face crawling with swollen redness, her mouth agape, and blueish streaks below her own eyes.

Tears stream down her face as she grabs out with a single hand, holding herself steady with the other. She pleads without a voice.

The Effigy backs away, disgusted.

Anna drops to the ground and attempts to grab at their feet to no avail. Slowing, turning more blue, and unable to see anything as clearly as before, her own strength fails, and the side of her face plummets into the dry ground.

A final breath puffs from her lips as the twinkle of life flees from her amber eyes, turning them from a golden escape into a blackened abyss.

Within her final moments, they acknowledge a familiar face.

CLAY DONOVAN

1. SHADOW OF DESPAIR

INT. DONOVAN HOUSE-MORNING

A hardworking cop on his way to becoming a detective, Clay Donovan, is seen standing next to the kitchen sink where water is loudly splashing inside a glass enclosure.

The tap sputters and the pipes let out a jarring groan. He quickly turns off the water and then proceeds to pour the contents of the coffee pot into the back of the machine. Above, the lights flicker as he gazes out of his four-paned window at a murder of crows frolicking in his yard.

Suddenly, a haunting apparition appears on the glass—a woman's ghastly face, with eyes as black as a demon's soul, staring back at him. His breath catches.

He's frozen, paralyzed by the terrifying sight. In an instant, he jerks his gaze away, and when he looks back, the apparition is gone, replaced by his reflection.

But as he looks down, he notices something off. The coffee had already finished brewing. Which wouldn't be possible unless he had blacked out for a solid ten minutes.

He steps away from the sink and heads for the front door. It's wide open, and the sun bleeds across the brown living room decor, creating a glow of golden light that dances over the worn leather couch and faded curtains, wrapping everything in a quiet, nostalgic warmth.

Dressed in uniform, ready for work, he carries a thermos in one hand and a mug of tea in the other. He pushes past the screen door, its squeaky hinges echoing in the open air, and clunks onto the porch.

Two rocking chairs have sat on the porch of this quaint ranch-style home for a few years, a cozy place illuminated by the wide, open glow of the warm spring sun.

In one of the chairs sits Brynn Hamilton-Donovan, a well-respected preschool teacher of Lockwood, Connecticut, a small town with a close-knit community.

Her gentle smile and curious gaze have always made people feel safe and at home. Her presence has warmed the hearts of many, more than even the midday sun.

People often assumed she'd become a nurse when she was younger, but Brynn has always known her true calling and has followed it, regardless of what others had wanted for her.

Clay stands beside her, taking in a deep breath. The fresh scent of cut grass and clean air has reminded him how much he loves being away from the city, away from the smells of exhaust and questionable food trucks.

Brynn looks up with a smile as he hands her the tea.

BRYNN: (*Jokingly*) Have you figured out a way to end bad guys once and for all, Mr. Superhero?

CLAY: Ha. Have you learned how to not worry so much about me yet?

BRYNN: Well, can you blame me? There's all this craziness in the world.

CLAY: Is that so?

BRYNN: Yup! And while you're being everyone else's hero, I'm stuck fearing you'll never have time to be mine when I need you.

CLAY: Hun... (*leans in*) You have nothing to worry about. Besides, you come first. Can't call me a hero when I'd rather burn the world to save you than you for the world. (*kisses her forehead*) Can I ask what you're so afraid of? You seem more anxious than usual.

BRYNN: You'll find out later. I'll save it for our date night tonight. (*smiles*) It's good news. I promise.

She pecks him on the cheek and pats his chest. He leaves for work and she reenters their home.

She heads down the hallway and turns to a closed door. Opening it reveals--

A crib, covered in sunlight, white with light gray sheets has a way of turning a craft room into a baby room. A room they never thought they'd be able to use again...

The room is painted in a light gray color with blue chevron lines alongside a single wall where

the crib sits.

Brynn, dressed in a cardigan sweater and tights, places a basket of folded baby blankets on a rounded ottoman next to the baby's soon-to-be crib. She makes her way around to the changing table on the end and puts the blankets on its bottom open shelf.

Brynn's nose crinkles as she considers moving the crib away from the sun and against the wall by the door. Shrugging it off as nothing more than pregnancy indecisiveness, she takes out a white pregnancy test from her pocket and places it gently upon the crib, plus side facing up.

INT. CLAY'S CAR-MOMENTS LATER

On his way to work, Clay immerses himself in one of his favorite pre-work tracks: "Hero" by Shaman's Harvest. Fully absorbed in the chorus and singing along, he isn't paying complete attention to the road.

Unbeknownst to him, an ominous figure lurks directly behind. A cold chilling smile breaks across its face as it quietly enjoys the fun Clay is having by himself. With a flick of its wrist, it dramatically adjusts the volume knob up and down.

Noticing the change, Clay tries to stop the knob from moving. He grips it tightly until it ultimately cracks and falls into his grasp. As he attempts to replace it, he glances at the road, momentarily distracted, only to quickly return his focus to the knob, before spotting a young woman standing in the middle of the road.

Reacting swiftly, he jerks upright, slams the brakes, and veers off to the side without hitting a single thing or person as far as he can recount.

He peers up and doesn't see the girl anywhere so he climbs out of his cruiser and steps out into the road looking up and down the highway.

Nothing...

He rubs his eyes and shakes his head. He's certain it was the same face he had seen that morning. But it couldn't be. Because that face was of a victim he once had the displeasure of digging up a few years ago.

He climbs back in his cruiser, more hesitant than before, and drives the rest of the way to work in heavy silence.

From a distance, Anna watches as his taillights disappear over the hill of the road. Unable to speak or cry out to him, she whimpers in place.

A dark figure looms behind her watching as she does.

2. GRAVE ENDEAVORS

INT. LOCKWOOD PD-AFTERNOON

The sun-drenched ceramic tiles and crudely painted walls are illuminated by the bright lights, casting a vibrant glow. A central desk commands attention at the entrance, with an officer stationed behind it, diligently distributing paperwork to departing officers as they set off to their assigned positions.

Down the main hall, Clay sits in a vacant conference room. Behind him stands a notice board of missing persons adorned with fear as the portraits all appear to be glaring down at him.

Restless energy causes his leg to bounce incessantly while his pen produces a rhythmic tapping against the table. A stack of papers lies off to the side, seemingly forgotten as his gaze fixates on the opposite direction.

A fellow officer, Makenna, knocks on the open door, but his gaze remains fixed.

MAKENNA: I need those reports, Donovan. Should've had them done weeks ago.

He doesn't seem to budge at the sound of her high-pitched voice.

MAKENNA: Donovan. Reports.

He dismisses her request with a wave and exits the room, brushing past her just a bit too closely. He's not concerned with wasting time signing off on things such as stolen watches, broken windows, and missing hub caps. No...the horrors he has seen makes all other problems feel like a waste of time.

Clay's phone buzzes in his pocket, but he ignores it as well. Instead, he focuses on refilling his thermos with the last bit of the coffee. The strong aroma fills the room as he rinses the pot and places it upside down in the sink, next to the coffee maker.

The door creaks open and then clicks shut behind him. A few steps approach him.

Clay glances over his shoulder and spots Detective Jones entering. The detective is tall and broad, wearing a single silver chain tucked within his collar with a secretive air that has always piqued Clay's curiosity.

After all, Jones has been around since Clay was a teenager, yet he still looks almost the same as he did fifteen years ago.

And how does he manage to run an entire police station while also solving crimes for the city on the side? Clay tries to keep up, but seriously, who can juggle all that? Some kind of superhuman?

CLAY: Oh, sorry. Just cleared it out. I can make more, but I doubt it'd last much any longer than this one did.

Clay turns and greets him with a smile. Jones returns the gesture.

JONES: Nope. Trying to cut back. Say, you've been doing great work here. Just wanted to let you know it hasn't gone unnoticed. Any plans for your PTO yet?

CLAY: Wanted to get as much done as possible first. Don't want to leave Mick overwhelmed with the extra workload he'd be taking on.

JONES: Speaking of him. I think it'd be great practice for him to take on your route today.

CLAY: Mine? What about his?

JONES: You're taking it until you take your mandated vacation. I know you like working hard, but take it as a gift. Relax a bit. Okay?

CLAY: Yes, sir. I won't disappoint. Not sure how Mick might take it though.

JONES: I'll inform him. It is my call after all.

CLAY: Sure thing.

His phone buzzes for a third time. He pulls it out and sees her usual three missed calls from Brynn. He scoffs at Jones and exits the room.

The signal bars drop below a single bar as he enters the hallway where he is instantly greeted

by a distraught woman screaming for help near the entrance amongst surrounding, helpless, officers. He puts his phone away and rushes to the main lobby.

Frantic, an older woman proceeds with demanding help from the Desk Officer.

DESK OFFICER: Ma'am, I'm going to have to ask you to calm yourself or we will arrest you.

OLDER WOMAN: Arrest me? Arrest the person who took my fucking daughter!

DESK OFFICER: We don't know anything about that. Now if you'd like to file a report, we can do that.

OLDER WOMAN: You're wasting time, just go out and look!

Clay moves in-between them and attempts to ease the tension.

CLAY: Ms. Lichen, what's going on? How's Anna?

REBECCA LICHEN: My daughter is missing, kidnapped, something. She's not home and hasn't been since she left last night.

CLAY: Any possible locations she might've gone to?

Clay pulls out a notepad and pencil and begins scribbling down everything she says that might be of some use to him later.

REBECCA: Last night, her friends and her went off into those woods to film a spooky video for her channel, Insan-anna-ty. Her phone is off, and friends are all at home not telling me anything.

CLAY: Oh, I've watched those. Well, my wife anyway. Those are dark. Was there any guest appearances or anything else she might've told you?

REBECCA: No, nothing. Like I said, she tells me everything. We opened our line of communication since her father and I separated. He was big on keeping secrets from us. From everyone.

A secret the whole town will never let down, or forget.

CLAY: Well, officially we can't file a missing persons report until it's been 48 hours. And, 17? Is it possible she overslept with her friends, maybe got eloped, or went to her dad's old place at all?

REBECCA: No. None of that. 48 hours? Are you serious? What if she's on the brink of death? And we just have to wait?

CLAY: Look, the best I can do is have you put in a report, and on my route today I'll keep an eye out. Given our history with you and your other daughter, I'm going to do everything I can.

Rebecca starts reciting a comprehensive register of names and corresponding addresses to him. The thorough list spans approximately four pages in his diminutive and tattered notepad, encompassing almost all of the remaining entries.

Jones emerges from the break room and makes his way towards him. Rebecca can't help but notice his sleek, well-tailored suit and gleaming shoes. She grins, and Officer Makenna escorts her back to the designated conference room.

JONES: I think it'd be dumb to not follow that lead. Unless you want more paperwork added to your pile in there.

CLAY: Oh, yeah. I already know this is a quick and easy case. She's most likely passed out in her secret boyfriend's arms still out in the woods. Close to 18, she's probably craving that freedom.

JONES: Unless she is in danger. Then what?

CLAY: Then we'd run the risk of tipping off any potential lead, or possible killer.

JONES: Damned if you do.

CLAY: Damned if you don't. Hey, have you heard anything about that detective position yet? We would make such a great team, c'mon.

Together, they amble out into the parking lot, side by side. Jones accompanies him to his squad car and lightly taps the roof.

JONES: And when one is available, I'll let you know. I'm fine working alone.

CLAY: C'mon, you can't keep blaming yourself for what happened. Besides, there was nothing you could do. I'll tell you what my wife tells me every day. "*You're only human, don't fret everything wrong.*"

JONES: I know...

CLAY: And, I know you'd rather have me.

JONES: How so?

CLAY: Because that last guy you interviewed then rudely rejected. Saw him down at the burger place. Makes \$20/hr now.

JONES: (*whistles*) Damn, more than I pay. Maybe I set him on the path he was meant for without even trying then. Should've heard him crying about his bills and debts in that interview.

CLAY: Goes to show, that when one door shuts, another opens. (*holds hands out*)

JONES: So now you're a door?

Clay derisively smirks while Jones saunters away, chortling under his breath. A fleeting thought crosses his mind about the potential of him considering Clay for the position, but Clay remains skeptical. Jones' characteristic laugh is a prelude to a resounding "Hell, no!" in most cases.

JONES: I'll meet you there!

Before climbing into his vehicle, Clay sends a quick message to Brynn: "*On a case, won't make it for lunch, see you tonight.*"

EXT. WOODS-MOMENTS LATER

Nestled between Lockwood and Billings lies a tranquil wooded enclave, commonly referred to as Killer's Ranch. This infamous moniker was bestowed upon this locale in the aftermath of Clay's most notorious case. Though, before then, it was once called the "Gates of Hell".

That was the one case that should've made him Detective but didn't. Despite the catching and

execution of the serial killer. Within its depths, this man held numerous women captive, with at least 50 of them laid to rest in its confines. However, not all of them have been unearthed to this day.

As Clay steers his car to the side of the road, Jones follows closely behind. A momentary hesitation washes over him as he contemplates exiting the vehicle. Goosebumps ripple across his skin, but he quickly shakes it off, taking a few deep breaths to steady himself before finally stepping out of the patrol car.

They emerge from their respective automobiles, brimming with chilled excitement. As they make their way along the trail, they come across shattered branches and recent footprints heading inward. Nothing particularly striking, but slightly out of the ordinary.

The nearby shriek of a mountain lion mating call sends an instant shiver down Clay's spine.

JONES: I remember when this place was once a family-packed park full of joggers and nature walkers.

CLAY: Same. Now it's like entering a nightmare.

Engaging in their journey, they attentively observe the environment while wolves howl in the distance. In their path, an unoccupied tent is found. The presence of scattered rubbish implies its recent abandonment.

With caution, Clay steals a glance inside. Startled, a fearful vagabond awakens from his sleep. He begins shaking uncontrollably, and Clay motions with one hand to project comfort and reassurance.

CLAY: Hey, hey, it's okay. Are you okay?

The man sits up.

VAGABOND: I'm in, am I in trouble?

CLAY: You know this isn't allowed, but I'll let it slide if you can maybe tell me what you might've heard last night. Or seen. Anything would be helpful. I'll be sure to make a call at the Bistro as well to hook you up with a nice warm meal.

VAGABOND: (*smiling*) Ah, thank you, Officer. To be frank, I haven't heard nothin' that ain't

normal out here.

CLAY: What are the normal sounds?

VAGABOND: Mountain lions, birds, sometimes a stray dog. Lucky! Oh, I haven't seen him in a while, hope he's okay.

CLAY: Anything else?

VAGABOND: (*leans in whispering*) The screams of ghosts. They haunt this place.

CLAY: Screams? Last night?

VAGABOND: And this morning. More and more join in every day. Something is wrong about this place. It's a Demon's Lair.

CLAY: Demons? Sure it's just not people you're seeing or hearing?

VAGABOND: (*chuckles*) If they were I wouldn't want to piss one off. They're everywhere.

CLAY: Where did you last hear the screams?

VAGABOND: (*points overhead*) Up that way. Not on path. Hidden.

Jones interjects and pulls Clay up by his shoulder.

JONES: C'mon, Clay. He's disturbed. Let's keep following the path.

Clay looks around and takes a deep sigh. An over sized black wolf rushes off to the right of them coming from the direction the man had pointed out as if running from something. He nods, crossing his arms. A slight tingle in his bones suggests what he should do.

CLAY: I say we take that way. Something tells me we might find what we're looking for.

JONES: Really? Advice from a man you don't even know? What kind of detective would that make you?

CLAY: Got any other leads then? I say we go that way. Call it, uh, call it a gut feeling. I'm going with my gut on this.

JONES: (*scoffs*) Mm. Are you sure about this?

CLAY: You were there when I found this place, and nabbed the guy.

JONES: 26 bodies you unearthed. I remember. But I also remember it being a bit peculiar. Tell me, how did you know where they were?

CLAY: (*chuckles*) If I told you you'd call me insane, toss me in a padded room, probably marry my wife then tell everyone I died or something. Joking, of course.

JONES: Try me.

CLAY: Okay. I can talk to ghosts. (*laughs*) No, not really, to be completely truthful I don't know how I did it. I get this tingly feeling anytime I am near danger and death...death always has this smell. It's awful. Like rotten eggs and sulfur on a hot and sunny day.

JONES: No one reported a smell until after seeing the bodies.

CLAY: I know, but I've always had a keen sense of smell. Better than most. Kind of like how I know you had eggs, bacon, coffee, and... (*whiffs Jones*) Apple pie for breakfast.

JONES: Yeah, but what kind of eggs? Eh?

CLAY: You like over-easy. So that's not a mystery. Disgusting though. Scrambled is the best. Of the best.

JONES: Okay, okay. Just lead the way Hound Dog.

In their descent, they venture down the unfamiliar trail. The bushes gently curve inwards, while the flattened grass facilitates their passage.

Clay proceeds with caution, mindful of avoidably disturbing any lurking snakes or spiders. After a brief span, they stumble upon an expanse of leveled terrain.

Clay recollects this particular area being frequented by teenagers seeking rendezvous or engaging in bonfire festivities that he has previously intervened in. What was once a vibrant setting now bears the stains of mortality.

At the heart of this clearing, his attention is captured by a pale mass resting upon the earth's

surface. Clay delivers a forceful tap to Jones' chest.

CLAY: There. C'mon!

He races off.

He gets there, and sure enough...it's exactly what he was hoping NOT to find again in this place.

JONES: Oh, shit. This isn't what I thought we'd find.

CLAY: This has got to be the work of a local occult group. No way around it. Either that, or fan of Deveraux's work.

JONES: Are you suggesting there's more of him around here?

CLAY: Wouldn't surprise me. He did run that cult for many decades before scratching that killing itch of his. This place, so many died here. Back during the witch trials, and because of that bastard I watched fry to death.

Surrounding the corpse, there are 12 hands, each adorned with a myriad of symbols including suns, moons, sigils, and zodiac signs. Despite the limited recognition, it is evident that the deceased body belongs to Anna.

Jones walks around her body and kneels to examine her left wrist. A branding mark had been left behind.

JONES: I'd agree with you, except, this is his signature. Either dealing with a copycat, or a man who found a way to rise from his grave which we both know is not possible. Look at this place. It's history is bound to attract some weirdos.

He pulls out his phone and makes a call.

JONES: (*otp*) Yeah, send 'em out. Found the missing girl. Also found something else we need to bag and tag as well...yeah, the whole team...okay, see ya in fifteen.

CLAY: (*trembling*) I-I can't. This. This is crossing a line. I can deal with finding dead bodies and tackling criminals. But this...she's just a child. Much like the other missing one's still here! Children, Jones!

Jones is caught off guard at his reaction. He's never seen Clay this upset before.

JONES: Hey, hey, it's okay. Look, this is our job. It comes with the territory. I told you, you need to take that time off. You have to, or you will have a mental breakdown and then I will have to put you in a padded room. Okay?

CLAY: (*visibly angry*) No. Now I can't take that time off. Not until everyone involved with this case comes crashing to the fucking ground. Because if I were these young women's father that is exactly what I would want!

Clay already fears he'll never be a father someday. So this only infuriates him more...

A dark figure emerges just out of sight from the corner of his eyes. One he's seen before.

He jerks towards the direction of the figure and in an instant it's gone. Jones is about to speak out but Clay raises a hand hushing him, scanning the surrounding area.

Nothing seems too out of the ordinary. Trees loom over, and overgrown brush clouds any clear sight he may hold.

The figure darts in the distance, disappears, then runs again in a different direction beyond the trees.

Without hesitation, Clay takes off towards it. But as soon as he gets there, it's gone again.

He spins in place hoping he sees it once more. Hoping it was nothing like he's imagining. Another howl echoes through the trees.

JONES: Donovan!

Clay ignores him. Unable to track whoever—or whatever—that thing is, he remains unmoved, calculating his next move.

Jones catches up to him. His steps heavy, unlike the figure who seemingly got away.

JONES: What is it? What did you see?

Not wanting to admit it, he doesn't know any other way to put it.

CLAY: The man who escaped his grave.

3. THE HAUNTING GAME

INT. LOCKWOOD PD-EVENING

A sinister gloom of despair coats Jones' office in shades of gray and shame as he slides his white-board to expose a wall of faces. He places Annas' photo near the end.

He pulls out his chain necklace exposing an almost empty hour glass the size of his thumb, rubbing it in somber regret.

???: (*chuckles*) It's not everyday you get to see a Reaper's Wall of Failures.

He spins on his heels and sees whom the chilling voice belongs to.

A woman stands before him, just on the other side of his desk near the door. She's tall, authoritative. Her auburn hair matching her fiery moxie. She's gorgeous in a conventional sense but her eyes, a shade of calming emerald, will pierce any man's soul who dares to cross her.

JONES: Hello, Darcey. What brings a fiend from the depths of Pandore to the Land of the Living?

DARCEY: Derrick. Got a feeling you know why I'm here.

She taps the case file on his desk. Then waves a finger across his wall behind him.

DARCEY: And based on your Wall of Lost Souls...you might want my help with that, too.

JONES: I work alone. Now what does this have to do with my case?

DARCEY: That's fine, I just know what happens to you if that little hour glass of yours runs out. But I know what happened to your victim. Also, Deveraux is a ghoul.

JONES: So it appears. Ever since his execution things have been off.

DARCEY: Well, that's what happens when you die before your time is up. Usually.

JONES: I fought to keep him alive until then. But with this town, it was a blood thirsty witch hunt. Can't blame them.

DARCEY: 'They know not what they do'. One of the first things you learn after becoming one of us.

JONES: What happened? How did he escape his eternal torture?

DARCEY: He pleaded for mercy and one of those god forsaken Angels came down and granted him forgiveness. They shattered his chains and he stole their Key of Janus. Before anyone could do anything he was gone.

JONES: Now he's picking up where he's left off. Using effigies and toying with us. You need to take him down for once and for all. Have any idea what he wants exactly?

DARCEY: To "have fun". I have an idea as to his whereabouts. But I need your help with that.

He grips his hour glass necklace, knowing what must be done. A Reapers Glass is this world's only hope because not even an Angel can break that law. But harvesting something as dark as Deveraux's soul will surely result in Jones' own demise.

JONES: Is there another way? Or someone else that could help?

DARCEY: Technically...there's one hunter you know.

They share a knowing glance.

JONES: It's not his time.

DARCEY: Precisely. Snag him before his time runs out. We used to have armies of hunters, now we have none. He can help.

JONES: No. I can't take Clay. Not when he's about to lose everything as it is...

INT. GIOVANNI'S BAR-NIGHT

The place is unusually crowded and loud, with upbeat music playing in the background. A drunk girl spins her top around near the blaring juke box, and a man one could only assume was her embarrassed husband stood near shaking his head in his hand.

Dressed in a low cut silk blouse, and faded blue jeans, Brynn sits patiently at the bar. Most patrons are wearing flannels and various colored parkas. She feels out of place; a little over dressed. She checks the time: 8:07. She's picking at her nails, anxious.

Lowen, the bartender, swoops in holding a glass. He gives his cheesy, presumptuous smile.

LOWEN: How about starting the night off with a shot of good 'ol Daddy Jack?

He's wearing a Hawaiian shirt with wrinkled khakis. Not the typical garb one would assume. Brynn could only imagine the atrocious footwear that getup could result in. Boat shoes, Crocs, or sandals. She couldn't decide which would be worse to see.

She excused his plight, given that they hadn't seen the inside of this place since the last time she had announced this news and there was a different owner at the time.

Brynn smiles and shakes her head.

BRYNN: Sparkling water is fine. Cherry if you got it.

The bartender nods. He sprays her a glass of water and then moves down towards the group of men at the end of the bar watching the sports channel. That's when she peeps his shoes—and to her surprise, *there are none!* Barefoot, in a bar. *How delightful*, she thinks to herself, giggling loud enough to earn a second scowl from him.

A firm hand gently grazes her lower back. She jumps at the sensation but smiles when she turns and sees Clay's half-grinned, handsome face. He greets her with a kiss.

CLAY: Hey, sorry I'm late. What's so funny?

She points at the bare feet. They share in small laughter as the bartender shows the group of men an old scar he acquired from a fishing trip.

BRYNN: Busy day today?

Hesitant, he let's out a sigh of defeat as he takes the stool next to her.

CLAY: Found a victim today. The other Leichen sister.

BRYNN: What? Oh no... That's terrible! What happened?

CLAY: They think it's a copycat or apprentice of Deveraux. But, uh...

She pats his hand and gives him a smile.

BRYNN: It's okay, you'll find the guy like the last one, right, Detective Donovan?

Without wanting to share his crazy theory he nods. He motions for a two finger shot. The bartender slides down a glass and Clay catches it. He takes the shot, winces at the strength, and puts it down empty. Patting his knee, he let's out another defeated sigh.

CLAY: Jones didn't offer me the position. Don't know if he ever will. But I'd rather not waste more time talking about it. This is our special night. Must have really good news to share with me if we're here.

He takes her hand in his and holds it tightly as he gazes gently in her eyes.

In the dark far corner of the bar, a shifty figure lingers. With a slight flick of his wrist things fall eerily silent.

Tires squeal outside, headlights shine brightly within. Clay's sight becomes blinded as he grabs Brynn on instinct and quickly moves to the far wall onto the side.

The car barrels inside crashing into the juke box, narrowly missing the patrons. Glass shattered falls out of the air and dances around the white smoke shrouding the car.

A man steps out, bleeding from his forehead. He holds a 9mm in his left hand and eyes Clay directly.

MAN: You! You promised me you caught the bastard and killed him! You promised me nothing like that would ever happen again. Makes me think maybe you don't care about your life.

Clay's sight adjusts to the lights and smoke stinging his eyes. He's able to make out who it is. Anna's father.

ANNA'S FATHER: Her death destroyed our marriage, Anna's death is going to destroy yours!

He points the gun directly at Brynn, who is cowering in the corner.

Before Clay could even think or rationalize what's going on he jumps in front of her, shielding the flying bullet from her.

Once the man realizes what he had just done, he drops the gun and takes a step back. The bartender pops up from behind and whacks the man with a shattered piece of wood in the back of his head.

Sirens wail in the back ground as Brynn holds Clay sobbing. His bloody chest dripping all over her hands makes her start to shake and tremble.

BRYNN: Please, no! Someone, help, please!

He can hear her cries for help echoing throughout his head. His vision blurs, unable to make out the many shadows surrounding him. He reaches up to touch her face one last time.

BRYNN: No, no, no! Clay, don't die. Please, you can't.

Just before his sight falls black, Anna's father lifts up just enough to pull his trigger once more. A single shot flown directly into Brynn's head.

Standing over his own body, Clay sees Brynn. Everything is slow, the sounds are silent, except the whimpering he hears behind him.

He spins and sees Anna.

ANNA: No, he can't take you too. You were my only hope.

He steps forward, but as he does Deveraux appears from behind her and smiles a toothy, chilling grin. He puts his arm around her neck and within the pale smoke, they vanish.

4. TAKE IT ALL AWAY

EXT. WOODS-EARLY MORNING

Deveraux, gripping Anna tightly, presses a knife to her throat as she struggles against him, her breaths sharp and panicked. The gleaming Key of Janus in his other hand catches the dim moonlight before he wrenches it upward and twists with deliberate force. The air around them grows heavy, vibrating with an ominous hum. The veil between the living world and Pandore shimmers like oil on water, then tears apart with a sharp, resonant crack.

A jagged portal yawns open in the shadowy woods of Killer's Ranch, spilling an otherworldly radiance that swallows the gloom. The ancient trees recoil, their gnarled branches twisting unnaturally, as if trying to escape the searing glow. The air reeks of sulfur and decay, mingling with the sharp tang of pine sap.

From the rift emerges a man whose presence halts even the rustling leaves. His footsteps make no sound as he steps onto the forest floor, his pristine black suit untouched by the mud and rot beneath him. His hair is slicked back, gleaming like polished obsidian, and his face—sculpted and flawless—exudes an unnerving stillness. The hollow sharpness of his cheekbones and the cold gleam in his silver eyes strike like a dagger to the senses, commanding fear without a word.

Talek surveys the scene with a faint, predatory smile, his gaze flicking to Anna, then lingering on Deveraux.

TALEK: (smoothly, but with a razor edge) Took you long enough.

Deveraux loosens his grip on Anna just slightly, smirking.

DEVERAUX: Good to see you, Talek...alive, that is. (laughs, low and mocking)

Talek adjusts his cuffs, his movements precise and deliberate, as though every gesture carries weight.

TALEK: (ignoring the quip) I trust the hunters' fate has been sealed? Though I must say, your incompetence has complicated my plans. That reaper—always drawing them in, like flies to a corpse.

Deveraux chuckles again, this time with a hint of cruelty.

DEVERAUX: Oh, you'll like this. Turns out, your precious reaper's time wasn't as precious as you thought. I had him killed. Couldn't resist the irony—he died saving *her* again. That putrid hero complex of his finally caught up with him.

Talek's smile vanishes, his expression sharpening like a blade. He raises one hand, forming it into a trembling fist, the air around him distorting with barely-contained energy. When he speaks, his voice is low, clipped, and brimming with restrained fury.

TALEK: Most psychopaths have an IQ under 100. A monkey would've followed instructions better than you. And yet, the swap wasn't his choice. Which means he won't be penalized in the afterlife. Do you understand what you've done? It's only a matter of time before they send him our way. He cannot die, got it? It'd be best if he were out of our way, but he's our gateway.

His gaze hardens, a flicker of disdain crossing his face.

Deveraux tries to play it off, his grin faltering slightly.

DEVERAUX: That would've taken years. You're always going on about time, but who's got that kind of patience?

Talek straightens his tie with a slow, deliberate tug, his lips pressing into a thin line.

TALEK: (dryly) When you're dead, Deveraux, time is all you have.

Deveraux shrugs, his bravado flickering as Talek steps closer, the predatory glint in his silver eyes intensifying.

DEVERAUX: If I wanted to work in the afterlife, I would've gone to hell instead. This? This was supposed to be fun.

TALEK: (coldly) Fun. Yes, let's hope your appetite for fun can fix itself. Otherwise, we'll both be finding new accommodations.

Talek leans in slightly, his voice dropping to a venomous whisper.

TALEK: Clay alive is the only reason we remain here, unbothered. He's the hinge, Deveraux—the balance. If he dies, they'll find us. The only alternative is ensuring he suffers eternally, trapped with every hunter that reaper managed to collect.

Deveraux's grin falters entirely, replaced by a flash of unease. The weight of Talek's words settles over him like a noose tightening around his neck.

Anna takes the moment of distraction to shift slightly in Deveraux's grip, her wide eyes darting between her captor and the spectral figure before her. The veil between worlds still ripples faintly, casting the forest in a ghastly, shifting glow.

DEVERAUX: (weakly) There's still time to fix it...right?

Talek straightens, his expression unreadable, and steps past Deveraux toward the still-shimmering rift.

TALEK: (without looking back) For your sake, Deveraux, I suggest you hope so.

With that, the portal begins to shift, closing behind him like a curtain falling on a grim play. The woods seem to hold their breath, and Deveraux feels the sharp, inescapable weight of his failure pressing down on him.

EXT. DOWNTOWN/THE AFTER-NIGHT

Clay's boots pound against the slick pavement, the rhythm erratic, desperate. Each breath burns in his chest, but he doesn't dare slow. The snarling black wolves—the Hounds of Hell—are too close, their ragged growls vibrating through the damp air, their snapping jaws grazing the space just behind him.

He veers left, then leaps right, narrowly avoiding a set of fangs as one of the beasts lunges. The open road ahead starts to shrink, swallowed by an encroaching darkness that creeps like an inevitable tide. Every step forward feels like another door slamming shut.

The hounds draw closer, their growls growing louder and more savage, overwhelming the sound of his racing heartbeat. Just as they're about to leap, a blinding light bursts out of the

darkness ahead.

Clay stumbles, throwing an arm over his eyes to shield them. The light rushes toward him, a freight train of searing brightness that silences the hounds in an instant. Their growls are replaced by a sudden, oppressive stillness.

Clay braces for impact, but it never comes...

Instead, he finds himself standing in an endless white void. The transition is so abrupt it feels like he's been torn from reality and stitched into a dream.

He blinks hard, lowering his arm. The plain stretches infinitely in every direction—featureless, empty. He pats himself down, his movements jerky with confusion. Not a scratch. Not a bruise.

His voice quavers as it breaks the oppressive silence.

CLAY: Hello?

The sound doesn't echo. The room absorbs it completely, as though even sound doesn't belong here.

Clay takes a cautious step forward, his boots making no noise against the pristine floor. The stillness is suffocating, pressing against his thoughts like a heavy blanket.

Out of nowhere, a figure emerges from the blank canvas of white.

It's him. The vagabond from before.

The same tattered clothes, the same unsettlingly familiar gait. The figure steps closer, and though the space is devoid of shadows, his presence feels dark, heavy, like an impending storm.

Clay's stomach churns as the vagrants' face comes into focus, the twisted familiarity sending a jolt of recognition down his spine.

CLAY: Where am I? What is this place?

VAGABOND: You're caught in-between. Not here, not there—just somewhere in the middle.

Clay takes a step back, thrown by the shift in the vagabond's demeanor. The ragged stranger

seems calmer now, almost otherworldly. Clay feels the crushing weight of fear and confusion start to ease as he looks into the vagabond's steady eyes, an eerie calm washing over him. It doesn't feel real—more like some kind of dream or illusion.

CLAY: Who are you? Where did you take me?

VAGABOND: So quick to ask, but never the right questions.

CLAY: I don't have time for this! I need to go back. I have to protect Brynn—and that girl! She's in danger. They both are!

VAGABOND: Are you so sure? Is it salvation you seek for them... or for yourself?

CLAY: What? What does that even mean? Is this... is this the afterlife?

VAGABOND: (chuckles) Oh, no. Not quite. Heaven? Nice idea, but it isn't where you've landed. You had no faith, no prayers, no gods. So here you are. A blank canvas.

Clay's jaw tightens as frustration builds, the weight of the vagabond's cryptic words pulling him under.

CLAY: I believe in protecting the people who can't protect themselves. That's what matters to me.

VAGABOND: Then you're already too late. The path you walked is gone. You can't go back. Only forward.

Suddenly, a sharp tear slices through the empty void. A jagged rift blooms, like a window into another world. Through it, Clay sees the bar—Brynn, frantic, and the other patrons stumbling to make sense of the chaos. In the corner of the room, something dark, fast, and sinister flickers in and out of view.

CLAY: That's why I need to go back! Look at them—they need me!

The vagabond's expression doesn't change.

VAGABOND: What you see is yours alone. Forward is the only way.

CLAY: No, I am going to stop this.

VAGABOND: You're stubborn—good. You'll need that. But know this: what lies ahead isn't a second chance. It's a correction. You weren't meant to die. Your fate was hijacked, twisted out of place. Fix it, or the cost will be more than just your soul.

CLAY: My soul is worth nothing without her.

VAGABOND: You want to fix fate? Fine. But fixing isn't rewriting—it's aligning. You'll need to see things as we do. A word of advice: don't look too hard at what you can't change.

Clay feels a sharp, searing pain in his eyes as the vagabond touches his forehead. When the pain subsides, his vision is altered. The room around him dims, shadows stretching and twisting unnaturally. Then he notices the faint, glowing aura around the vagrant—flickering and fading.

CLAY: What... what the hell did you do to me?

VAGABOND: Gave you clarity. (leans closer) And cursed you with the truth. It is temporary, meant for only its purpose.

Clay doesn't hesitate. Without waiting for permission, he dives through the rift, the light swallowing him whole.

INT. GIOVANNI'S BAR-NIGHT

Clay's breath hitches as the light around him swirls, bright and oppressive. Then, with a sharp snap, it dissipates. He stumbles forward, his boots scuffing against the familiar floorboards of Giovanni's bar. The hum of muted chatter and the faint clink of glasses flood his senses, grounding him in a scene that shouldn't feel so immediate.

He knows this place. The low buzz of the neon sign behind the counter, the smoky scent lingering in the air, and the jukebox's faint, offbeat melody—this is Giovanni's. And then it hits him. This isn't just Giovanni's bar. It's that moment. The same cursed scene.

Clay spins, scanning the room with new clarity. Every patron is frozen in his memory, every detail from before his death burned into his mind. But this time, there's something new.

Around each person, faint glows flicker. The reaper's sight pulls at his focus, making the invisible now painfully clear. Some lights are steady, strong. Others flicker faintly, hanging by

a thread. He clenches his fists, forcing himself to push past the disorienting vision.

And then he sees her.

Brynn sits near the bar, her usual sharp posture softening as she leans in to speak to the bartender. The glow around her is faint, pulsing weakly, like the final moments of a fading candle.

He checks the time: 8:00 PM...

Clay's stomach turns into knots. It isn't just a glow he sees radiating around her. It's the mark of her time. But as she turns slightly around, a tiny flicker of light—barely visible and hardly holding on—illuminates within her torso. It all of a sudden made sense to him, and why she'd pick this place...

The vagabond's voice rings in his mind: "Correct fate. You've got a second chance."

But now he understands the truth. This isn't just about him saving his own life. It's about hers. Brynn's clock is ticking, and time is slipping through his fingers. He now knows he was never meant to save her life.

His breath shudders as he moves toward her. This close, he can see the exhaustion shadowing her face, the delicate way she wraps her fingers around her glass. He reaches out, gentle, hesitant, his fingertips grazing her shoulder.

The moment they connect, the world shifts.

A vision slams into him—

Brynn, bathed in soft morning light, cradling a newborn baby against her chest. Her lips curve into a tender smile, eyes glistening as she whispers something only the infant can hear. An unshakable warmth radiates from her.

Clay's throat tightens.

They'd been trying for years. Years. Loss after loss had left Brynn hollow, left them both wondering if fate had decided against them. But this... this was the future she was meant to have.

And now he's supposed to let her die?

No.

His hands curl into fists. Fate may have dictated her end, but Clay? He isn't going to let that happen.

Not ever. Even if it means a life without him.

INT. LOCKWOOD PD-NIGHT

The dim light in Jones's office casts long shadows over the walls, accentuating the eerie collage of his work—photos, names, dates, and details pinned across an entire section like some grim investigator's case board. The air is thick with old paper and something colder, heavier, like the weight of every soul he's ever collected.

Darcey stands with her arms crossed, her sharp gaze sweeping over the wall.

DARCEY: You know, for someone who's supposed to be impartial, this looks obsessive.

Jones, leaning against his desk, flips open his pocket watch and checks the time, unfazed.

JONES: It's a system.

DARCEY: It's a shrine.

JONES: It's organization.

DARCEY: It's creepy.

Jones snaps the watch shut and finally looks at her.

JONES: You coming or not?

Darcey exhales through her nose, tilting her head just slightly.

DARCEY: I don't do errands.

JONES: It's not an errand. It's an appointment.

DARCEY: Same thing. You want me to hold someone's hand while you rip their soul out?

JONES: It's a woman. Sometimes it helps.

DARCEY: Right, because I'm the soft touch.

Jones smirks.

JONES: You have your moments.

DARCEY: No, I really don't.

Jones pushes off the desk, grabbing his coat.

JONES: Come on. Something's off.

She catches the shift in his tone immediately.

DARCEY: Off how?

Jones hesitates, fingers tightening around the pocket watch.

JONES: The time. Feels wrong.

Darcey glances at the board again, eyes narrowing.

DARCEY: Define "wrong."

JONES: Like someone's already tampered with it. Like something's moving ahead of schedule.

A flicker of something cold slides down Darcey's spine. She rolls her shoulders, pushing it off.

DARCEY: Guess we better find out who's screwing with your neat little schedule, then.

They cut across town, slipping through alleys and side streets like shadows until the neon glow of Giovanni's bar flickers into view.

A gust of wind rattles through the street, carrying the faintest whisper of something *wrong*.

Darcey suppresses a shiver.

Jones pushes the door open first, the scent of whiskey and stale smoke rolling over them. The familiar hum of conversation and the clink of glasses should make this feel ordinary. But nothing about this moment feels ordinary.

Jones sees it first.

Clay.

INT. GIOVANNI'S BAR-SAME TIME

Standing at the bar, hands braced against the counter like he's holding himself together by sheer force of will. His eyes are locked on Brynn, and even from here, Darcey can feel the crackling wrongness in the air.

Darcey follows his gaze. The glow around Brynn is dim, too dim, flickering weakly like the final moments of a dying flame.

Jones mutters under his breath.

JONES: Ah, hell.

DARCEY: Oh, you think?

She moves first, cutting through the bar like a knife, her voice slicing through the thick tension.

DARCEY: Clay. Step away.

He doesn't.

DARCEY: Now.

Slowly, Clay turns to face her. His expression is a storm—grief, defiance, something deeper that churns just beneath the surface.

DARCEY: If you do this, you're ensuring your own damnation.

CLAY: Then so be it. Death can take me. I'm not letting her die.

Jones exhales, stepping forward, voice calm but firm.

JONES: I can assure you, Clay—I do not want you. Your time will come.

Clay barely hears him. His body is coiled, every muscle locked, his decision already made.

Darcey doesn't waste time.

She moves to grab him—to stop him—

But the moment his fingers grip her wrist, a shock rips through her.

A deep, pulling force, unnatural and wrong.

Darcey gasps, her body locking up. Her energy—her very force—drains out of her like water through cracks.

DARCEY: C-Clay... let go.

But he doesn't.

A sound rises around them.

TICK.

TICK.

TICK.

Louder. Heavier. Pounding in his skull.

Darcey's breath comes ragged, her knees nearly buckling.

And then—Clay lets go.

She stumbles back, hand braced on the counter, heart slamming against her ribs.

But Clay doesn't hesitate.

He runs for Brynn—

Because time is slipping—

And he refuses to let it take her.

The dim glow of the bar's neon signs casts flickering colors across Clay's face, but his eyes are locked on Brynn—only Brynn. There's no room for hesitation, no space for fear. He has just moments before fate slams shut like a steel door.

CLAY: Brynn, I need you to listen to me clearly and understand me quickly.

She nods, her brows knitting together in confusion. That soft, familiar smile—the one that's always made him feel like home—fades into something else. Something heavier. Concern shadows her features.

BRYNN: Clay? You're scaring me. Are you feeling alright?

CLAY: I'm fine. Do this, please.

The air in the bar shifts, thick with the weight of something unseen—an oncoming storm pressing in from all sides. Brynn hesitates, her hands fidgeting as if trying to grasp onto something tangible in all this chaos.

BRYNN: What are you talking about? No one is shot.

CLAY: Not yet, but there will be.

A sharp breath. Her lips part, but he doesn't let her question him further.

CLAY: Do you trust me?

BRYNN: Yes, but—

CLAY: Then let me save you.

His voice is urgent, nearly breaking. He motions to her stomach.

CLAY: We are losing time.

A flicker of realization sparks in her eyes, but it's not enough. She shakes her head, caught between disbelief and dread.

BRYNN: Wait, who's getting shot?

CLAY: (*Softly, finality lacing every syllable.*) Me.

Her breath catches.

She doesn't move.

BRYNN: Come with me then.

He refuses, his stance unshaken.

For the first time in his life, he knows exactly where he's supposed to be.

Brynn's lips tremble, but she listens. She turns and rushes out the back door, the cold night air slamming against her like a wall. She runs.

Her hands shake as she fumbles with her phone. Her pulse hammers against her ribs, panic clawing up her throat.

The second the call connects, she gasps into the receiver—

BRYNN: There's going to be a shooting at Giovanni's—send EMTs now! Multiple casualties—please—

And then she hears it.

The screech of tires.

The sickening crunch of metal against wood as a car smashes through the front of the bar.

Shouts erupt inside. A man's voice, furious.

And then—

A single gunshot, cracking through the night like the toll of a bell.

Brynn's breath stops.

And all she can do is pray she isn't too late.

5. GUILT ALL THE SAME

INT. GIOVANNI'S BAR-SAME TIME

Time doesn't stop. It doesn't slow, doesn't hesitate. It just is, moving forward, dragging Clay along with it whether he's ready or not.

He stands in the wreckage of the bar, or rather—floats above it, his body lying motionless on the floor below. Blood seeps into the wood, soaking into every crack and groove. The chaos that had exploded mere seconds ago now hangs in eerie silence, as if the whole world is holding its breath.

He looks down at himself. At the ruined mess of flesh and fabric.

CLAY: Well, that's a damn shame.

A breath of movement cuts through the stillness. He turns.

Jones and Darcey step forward from the shadows of the ruined bar, their expressions unreadable. There's no shock in their eyes, no frantic energy—just the quiet weight of inevitability.

JONES: Time to go, Donovan.

Clay stiffens.

CLAY: Yeah? And what if I'm not ready?

DARCEY: That's cute. You think you have a choice.

She crosses her arms, gaze flicking to the body on the ground before returning to him. There's something else in her expression now, something knowing.

Before Clay can argue, the air shifts.

A presence slithers into the room, slick as oil, thick with malice. The temperature drops.

Deveraux steps forward, dragging Anna with him, the knife pressed tight against her throat. Her eyes are wild, darting between them, her breath coming in short, terrified bursts.

CLAY: Let her go.

DEVERAUX: Oh, I will. Just as soon as I'm done.

CLAY: Let her go. You want revenge? Fine. But Anna's got nothing to do with this.

Deveraux's grip tightened on Anna, his blade pressing dangerously into her skin.

DEVEREAUX: See, that's where you're wrong. She's got everything to do with this. Because of her, I had to improvise. Because of her, I found this. He twirled the blade between his fingers. And now? Now I get to continue my work in the afterlife. Imagine it, Clay—justice without interference.

He lifts the blade, its edge gleaming, dark and hungry.

Darcey goes rigid, her eyes locking onto the weapon.

DARCEY: That's a Hunter's Blade.

Jones tenses beside her.

JONES: Shit.

Clay doesn't like that reaction.

CLAY: Someone want to fill me in?

Darcey's lips press into a thin line, her usual sarcasm burned away by something grim.

DARCEY: That knife? It was forged by Atropos. You know, one of the Fates?

Clay's stomach tightens.

CLAY: And that means...?

JONES: It severs more than just life. Cuts a soul right out of existence. No afterlife. No second chances. Just—gone.

Deveraux smiles, slow and sharp.

DEVERAUX: Now you understand. This little toy changes everything

He drags the blade lightly along Anna's collarbone, just enough to leave a thin line of blood in its wake. She whimpers but doesn't pull away.

CLAY: You don't have to do this.

DEVERAUX: Oh, but I do.

There's something manic in his eyes now, a gleeful kind of desperation.

DEVERAUX: You see, I've spent years sending souls exactly where they belong. But now? (He lifts the blade, admiring it.) Now I don't have to send them anywhere at all.

Tension coils tight, thick enough to strangle.

Then—

A shift. A shadow.

Lowen moves.

He doesn't rush. He doesn't charge. He simply steps forward, his presence unfolding like a tide. The flickering bar lights cast strange shapes across his face, deepening the hollows of his eyes.

Deveraux doesn't see him.

Not until it's too late.

Lowen's hand plunges forward, passing through Deveraux's chest as if flesh and bone are no more than mist. A ripple of energy pulses outward, warping the air around them.

Deveraux chokes on a breath, his fingers spasming. The knife slips from his grip, tumbling end over end before clattering to the floor.

Anna stumbles away, gasping.

Jones doesn't hesitate. He lunges, snatching up the blade in one fluid motion. His grip tightens.

One strike. Clean. Precise.

Deveraux's body convulses. His mouth opens in a soundless scream, his form flickering at the edges, breaking apart like ash caught in the wind.

The air splits with a final, ragged cry—

And then silence.

He's gone.

The only sound left is Anna's ragged breathing, the distant creak of the bar settling under the weight of what just happened.

Jones straightens, still gripping the blade.

JONES: Hell of a bartender you got here.

Lowen exhales, stepping back, rolling his shoulders like shaking off dust.

LOWEN: I try.

Darcey eyes him, suspicious.

DARCEY: Who the hell are you?

LOWEN: (*Smirking*) Just a guy who knows when to pour a drink and when to step in.

Jones nods, almost approving.

JONES: Appreciate it, Lowen.

Lowen tilts his head in acknowledgment but says nothing more.

A soft gasp breaks the moment. Anna stares at something unseen, her expression shifting—

wonder, relief, something lighter.

ANNA: I see her...

She reaches out, her fingers trembling.

CLAY: See who?

Anna doesn't look at him. She can't. Because he's not there to her anymore.

Her lips part in a breathless whisper.

ANNA: My sister.

Light floods the room. A warmth Clay can't feel.

Anna steps forward, and then—she's gone.

Just like that.

And Clay—Clay doesn't see a damn thing.

Darkness pulls at him.

And in a blink—

He's somewhere else.

INT. HOSPITAL-SAME TIME

The steady beeping of machines fills the room, a rhythmic countdown to the inevitable. The scent of antiseptic burns in the air, thick and suffocating. Doctors move around the table in frantic motion, voices clipped and urgent.

NURSE: We're losing him.

DOCTOR: Charge again—clear!

A jolt runs through his body, making his chest arch before slamming back down. The monitor wails in warning. No response.

Clay watches, standing just beyond them, a spectator to his own dying. He should feel something—panic, fear, regret. Instead, there's only the cold realization of what comes next.

A hand clamps onto his shoulder. Heavy. Firm.

He turns.

The vagrant stands beside him, no longer wrapped in ragged layers. His clothes are different—an old-world robe, white and loose-fitting, something ancient and untouched by time.

CLAY: You again?

Mike smiles, something knowing in his expression.

MIKE: You must be something special. Someone very powerful is watching over you.

Clay scoffs, shaking his head.

CLAY: Who the hell are you?

MIKE: Just call me Mike.

CLAY: Yeah? Then what are you? I thought you were just some homeless guy.

MIKE: Traveller, Angel, Seeker of Lost Souls... I've had many titles in my time.

Clay snorts.

CLAY: Would explain your campsite choices.

Mike chuckles.

MIKE: I go where I'm needed.

Clay's gaze shifts back to the table, to the body that used to be his. His chest barely moves, the doctors scrambling to keep him here.

CLAY: I know I need to go. I know I need to move on. But I can't. Brynn needs me.

Mike watches him, unreadable.

MIKE: There are others who need you, too. Would you deny them the same protection?

Clay clenches his jaw, hesitation creeping in.

JONES'S OFFICE

Dim light flickers, the bulb buzzing like a trapped insect. The wall in front of Jones is filled with photographs—familiar faces, gone too soon. Some crossed out, some faded, all of them taken before their time.

Jones sighs, a breath weighed down with something unspoken. He holds a new photo in his hand. A fresh addition to the lost.

Clay Donovan.

Dead, but not. Gone, but not.

Jones presses the photo to the wall, smoothing out the edges. The tape holds firm.

For now.

The quiet whisper of paper against air catches his attention.

He watches as Clay's photo slips free, peeling away from the wall. It flutters down, landing face-up on the floor.

Jones doesn't move. Doesn't react.

But something in his eyes shifts.

BRYNN'S CAR

She sits in her car, hands gripping a tiny blue gift bag. Inside, the pregnancy test she bought earlier, the truth she hadn't been ready to face. Her fingers shake as she pulls it out, the weight of it suffocating.

Tears blur her vision. She swallows them back, pressing the test to her chest, her lips moving in

a whispered prayer.

BRYNN: Please... please, don't take him from me.

HOSPITAL ROOM

The beeping stutters. A hesitation.

Then—

A sound. A single, weak beep.

The nurse startles.

NURSE: Wait—wait, we have something.

The heart monitor flickers, a sluggish, struggling rhythm trying to claw its way back to life.

The doctors spring into action, a new urgency in their movements.

DOCTOR: He's stabilizing!

Mike watches, then turns back to Clay, amused.

MIKE: Hm. Interesting.

Clay stares at his body. He isn't dead.

But he isn't awake either.

He isn't anywhere.

And that—that's what terrifies him most.

MIKE: Ready?

CLAY: Will I be able to come back?

MIKE: As long as you're still technically living, I don't see why not.

Mike gestures toward something unseen.

MIKE: Now come on, there's someone I want you to meet. You'll love her.

Clay frowns.

CLAY: Your tone makes me think I'm going to hate her.

Mike chuckles, stepping forward.

MIKE: Still working on human sarcasm.

Clay exhales. Takes one last look at his body. At the life hanging by a thread.

Then follows.

"HERE TO STRAY"

EXT. WOODS-MORNING

The world is hushed, bathed in the cold, shifting light of early morning. The treetops burn with the first kiss of sunrise, gold spilling over the horizon like ink bleeding through paper. The air is crisp, heavy with the scent of damp earth and pine, the quiet hum of a world waking up.

A silhouette stands at the forest's edge.

Clay.

He gazes out at the rising sun, hands in his pockets, shoulders tense. The light stretches toward him, but doesn't quite reach, hovering just at the tips of his boots like it, too, is waiting.

Waiting for him to choose.

To stay. To go.

To move on. To hold on.

For a moment, he lets himself feel it—the pull of something greater, the weight of what he's lost and what still remains. The choice lingers, heavy in the air like the last breath before a storm.

And then—

A slow inhale.

A step forward.

Not toward the light.

Not toward the dark.

But right in between.

A man standing on the threshold of two worlds, not yet ready to let go.