

CARNIVAL LIGHTS

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. FBI BOSTON FIELD OFFICE - MORNING

Cold light through tall windows. Halloween clutter in cubicles.

Chief Donnelly drops a folder.

LABEL: CARNIVAL LIGHTS

Inside: - Financial transfers - Corporate restructuring documents

- SPATA HOLDINGS

DONNELLY

Six months ago they were bleeding.
Now they're solvent. Too solvent.

MARCUS

Insurance bump?

DONNELLY

Maybe.
Or somebody's been skimming for
years and just cleaned the books.

Marcus flips a page.

SPATA HOLDINGS.

MARCUS

Who owns it?

DONNELLY

That's the problem.
No one. And everyone.

Beat.

DONNELLY (CONT'D)

Patriarch's dying. Boston General.

Money shifts the same week. I want eyes inside before the tent collapses.

Marcus closes the file.

MARCUS
Inside how?

DONNELLY
You ever work a carnival?

Beat.

Marcus doesn't smile.

CUT.

EXT. CARNIVAL MIDWAY - NIGHT

Out of focus.

Neon lights blur together. A Ferris wheel turns in the distance. Strings of bulbs glow and streak.

Carnival laughter overlaps - distorted, distant.

A CALLIOPE ORGAN plays slightly off-key.

MARCUS (V.O.)
The circus lets you be anyone you
want.
Strongman.
Mystic.
Hero.
Villain.

Blurred figures drift through the midway - masks, sequins, painted smiles.

A KNIFE FLASHES somewhere in the blur.

A LION ROARS.

MARCUS (V.O.)
Nobody asks where you came from.
Nobody asks what you did.

The calliope note stretches, warping.

MARCUS (V.O.)
That's the trick.

The sound thins into a high electronic tone.

Color drains.

MARCUS (V.O.)
You don't run away to join the
circus.

The tone sharpens.

MARCUS (V.O.)
You run away to disappear.

BEEP.

INT. MASS GENERAL HOSPITAL - ICU CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Fluorescent hum.

Marcus steps off the elevator.

A MAN bumps him. They lock eyes.

MARCUS
Watch it.

Through glass: Jason Thompson - machines breathing for him.

A NURSE blocks him.

NURSE
Family only.

Marcus waits. Then steps closer to the glass.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Machines breathe.

Jason Daniels - frail, oxygen line.

At bedside: MISS AVALON MISS PETRE MR. KRANKOWSKI

STEPHANIE - composed.

Jason opens his eyes.

SMASH CUT TO
TITLE:

CARNIVAL LIGHTS

ON SCREEN: BOSTON

Jason opens his eyes.

JASON The circus is what real life should be like.

Silence. Stephanie leans in.

JASON (CONT'D)
Sincerity.

Feeling. No lies.

A breath catches.

JASON (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Artists working together...
just to give a smile.

The monitor ticks.

He looks at Stephanie.

JASON (CONT'D)
Don't let it turn into numbers.

A beat.

JASON (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
If it stops being magic...
shut it down.

He exhales.

Eyes drift.

STEPHANIE
They don't die with you.

Jason's eyes flick to Krankowski.

JASON
We're too far behind-
(beat)
Money's moving in directions I
didn't approve.

Krankowski stiffens - just barely.

Stephanie notices.

Krankowski clears his throat, trying to be steady.

MISS PETRE looks down.

Jason continues, weaker:

JASON (CONT'D)
I want the books cleaned before
winter.

MR. KRANKOWSKI
We'll stabilize. We always do.

MISS PETRE
The Carnival doesn't survive on
applause.

A beat. He searches for something lighter. Finds an old
story.

MR. KRANKOWSKI
My dear departed uncle was a circus
clown before he died... God rest his
soul.

A few of them instinctively make the sign of the cross.

Krankowski shrugs, embarrassed by the silence.

MR. KRANKOWSKI (CONT'D)
I remember... all his friends came to
the funeral in one car.

A small, tired laugh breaks the tension. Not joy. Not comedy.
Just... memory.

Jason signs. His hand trembles – not fear, but relief mixed
with pride.

Krankowski steps closer.

Adjusts the IV. Too carefully.

Stephanie notices.

Jason's eyes flick to Krankowski – something unresolved
there.

EXT. MASS GENERAL HOSPITAL - DUSK

Marcus, across the street, observing.

Automatic doors slide open.

Stephanie and Miss Petre depart. A car is waiting.

INT. ICU - LATER

Through a narrow window:

A shadow inside.

A pillow lowers.

Weak struggle.

Jason claws. Draws blood.

Flatline.

EXT. MASS GENERAL HOSPITAL

Marcus's phone VIBRATES in his hand.

He glances down.

TEXT MESSAGE:

Jason Daniels - pronounced dead.
Mass General.

EXT. DANIELS CARNIVAL LIGHTS - BOSTON - NIGHT

Midway lights glow through light haze.

Performers pass in fragments

- CEDRIC, massive - MISS AVALON, unreadable - IGOR, watchful
- NATASHA, restless - CARSON, alert - MISS PETRE, polished -
MR. KRANKOWSKI, counting cash

STEPHANIE scans the grounds, searching.

She pulls BOBBY aside.

STEPHANIE
Do the opener with me.

BOBBY
Let's wake them up early.

They kiss - quick, performative.

XAVIER stands near a tent pole. Still. Watching.

IGOR notices.

IGOR
I've seen this before. No chance in
Hell you'll break that up.

XAVIER
Hell only works if you believe in
it. Everyone pays eventually.

Xavier drifts into the crowd.

INT. CENTER RING

STEPHANIE
Ladies and gentlemen—

Lights SNAP OFF.

Gasps. Lights return.

Above the entrance: DANIELS CARNIVAL LIGHTS flickers.

Only D I E remain lit.

Murmurs ripple.

Xavier doesn't react.

BOBBY
All part of the mystery! Happy
Halloween!

Music swells. The show begins.

EXT. BIG TOP - LATER

Xavier scans the crowd.

LUCAS, 30s, hustler, claps his shoulder.

LUCAS
Baltimore. You remember me.

XAVIER
Wrong guy.

LUCAS
Pay up or I sing.

Xavier backs him toward lion cage.

Straightens Lucas' collar.

Three quiet thrusts.

Lucas gasps.

Lion cage door opens.

Lucas stumbles in.

A paw pins him.

Bones crack.

XAVIER

You should've stayed in Baltimore.

He leaves.

A shadowed figure steps forward.

Snips Lucas' thumb.

Drops it into cotton candy.

Gone.

SMASH CUT TO:

Miss Petre's poodles dancing to applause.

INT. STEPHANIE'S TRAILER - NIGHT

11:30 PM. Circus noise fades outside.

Stephanie removes her Mistress of Ceremonies costume.

A RAP at the door. She opens it.

Xavier steps in. Closes the door without looking. His eyes sweep the room once.

STEPHANIE

You the new act?

He nods. No smile.

Bobby steps in.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)

I know your kind.

XAVIER

Your kind?

STEPHANIE
Drifters.

XAVIER
I don't drift.
(beat)
I land.

Bobby studies him now.

BOBBY
They come for me.

XAVIER
Then give them something worth
watching.

BOBBY
So what do you do?

XAVIER
I swallow the sword.

A shift in the air.

STEPHANIE
That's old. What else?

Xavier unrolls a satchel of knives. Clean. Precise.

A KNIFE WHIPS past Bobby's foot – THUD.

He retrieves it.

XAVIER
Now we understand each other.

Bobby claps, slowly.

STEPHANIE
(bored)
So you swallow. You throw.

Xavier never breaks eye contact with Bobby.

BOBBY
You good with ropes?

XAVIER
Try me.

STEPHANIE

This isn't Vegas.
This is family.
You answer to me.

XAVIER

Thirty days. Springfield. Then
Erie. If it works, we continue.

He offers his hand. Stephanie shakes it.

Xavier turns to leave. Bobby grabs his arm.

BOBBY

What about pay?

Xavier cups Bobby's chin.

XAVIER

Look at me when you negotiate. I
think the Lady wears the pants
here, right?

Bobby's reflection bends in the metal.

Xavier exits.

EXT. STEPHANIE'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

Igor and Natasha wait.

NATASHA

I don't like you.

Xavier keeps walking. She grabs his arm.

Leans in.

XAVIER

We just met. You don't want my
attention.

Xavier releases her.

XAVIER (CONT'D)

Teach her control.

Bobby exits the trailer.

BOBBY

Xavier. I'll show you the grounds.

Xavier nods once. They walk toward the Lion Tent.

Natasha watches them go.

NATASHA (RUSSIAN, SUBTITLED)
He's trouble.

Dylan (MR. BALLOONS) approaches. Igor stiffens.

DYLAN
Careful, Tasha.

NATASHA
Go blow up another balloon. That's
your talent.

DYLAN
Would be a shame if you fell from
the trapeze.

Igor steps between them.

Natasha walks off.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
There's always more happening
outside the big top. Drink?

IGOR
I'll pour.

Stephanie bursts from the trailer.

STEPHANIE
Bobby! Bobby!

IGOR
Miss Stephanie, what is it?

STEPHANIE
Papa is dead.

EXT. LION TENT

Bobby leans against the canvas. Xavier stands close – too close. Predator calm.

Fluffy is happily eating...something.

Xavier whispers something in Bobby's ear. Bobby blushes.

STEPHANIE (O.S.)
Bobby!

Bobby doesn't look away from Xavier.

Xavier brushes his thumb across Bobby's lower lip. Studies the reaction.

Leans in.

STEPHANIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Bobby!

Xavier leans closer.

XAVIER
(low)
Everything ends.

Beat.

XAVIER (CONT'D)
Everything begins.

Stephanie enters frame.

XAVIER (CONT'D)
(low)
Come here.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. CARNIVAL LIGHTS - MORNING

ON SCREEN: November 1

Morning dew coats the grounds. Daylight exposes the seams - dead balloons, scattered popcorn, playbills in the dirt.

Marcus Donnelly (48), plain clothes, scans the space like a crime scene waiting to happen.

His eyes linger on a faded carousel horse beside a trailer. Paint chipped. One glass eye missing.

Coffee in hand -

COLLISION.

Miss Avalon barrels into him. Coffee splashes across his chest.

MARCUS
Jesus-

MISS AVALON
That's a sign.

MARCUS
That's my coffee.

MISS AVALON
The dew is too heavy. Something
stayed.

MARCUS
I need the daughter, Stephanie
Daniels.

MISS AVALON
Clouds follow her.

She flips a tarot card.

THE DEVIL.

MARCUS
I don't buy that.

She drifts away.

Mr. KRANKOWSKI (55) The accountant, an ulcer with two legs.

MR. KRANKOWSKI
Are you the help they sent for the
teardown?

MARCUS
What?

MR. KRANKOWSKI
Get going. Head to the Mess Hall.
We pack up and head to Springfield.
I don't pay you to stand around.

Krankowski heads off.

Miss Petre and her 7 poodles walk by. One stops and looks up
at Marcus. They lock eyes. The dog raises his leg. Pees on
Marcus' boots.

Miss Petre and the dogs head along. Marcus shakes his head.

MARCUS
(growls)

Mr. Pierre tosses his head in arrogance.

INT. MESS TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Marcus steps inside.

Morning light cuts through canvas seams. Performers move around him, setting up coffee, tools, and costumes.

Marcus scans the space like a crime scene that hasn't happened yet.

His phone VIBRATES.

He checks the screen.

CALLER ID: SAC DONNELLY

Marcus steps just outside the tent flap.

EXT. MESS TENT - CONTINUOUS

Muted circus sounds behind him. He answers.

MARCUS
Blackwood.

DONNELLY (V.O.)
Tell me you're not already wrapped
up in circus politics.

Marcus watches the FAT LADY pass. He's eating Carmel corn.

MARCUS
Just getting a lay of the land.

He nods to a worker.

DONNELLY (V.O.)
What are you eating?

MARCUS
Carmel corn. I am blending in.

DONNELLY (V.O.)
(sighs)
I see you sent forensics the crime
scene.

MARCUS
Too clean. Monitors pulled.
Somebody's lying.

He sees a clown juggling. The clown waives. Marcus nods.

DONNELLY (V.O.)
 Observe and report.
 That's it.
 No freelance heroics.
 No attachments.
 You understand me?

Marcus watches a little girl run past with a stuffed tiger.

MARCUS
 Crystal.

Marcus watches the carousel go up and down.

Click.

He steps back inside.

INT. MESS TENT MOMENTS LATER

Natasha bumps him. Igor steadies her.

He see's Stepahnie.

MARCUS
 (to Stephanie)
 Special Agent, FBI, Marcus
 Blackwood.

STEPHANIE
 Why the hell is the FBI hear? My
 father died, that's it.

Carson and Cedric are arguing.

CARSON THE LION TAMER (36) is talking frantically with CEDRIC

CEDRIC THE STRONG MAN (42). Marcus gauges the temperature of
 their conversation and walks over.

CARSON
 (yelling)
 There were shards of clothes and
 bones.

CEDRIC
 Bones? Carson, you always lie.

CARSON
 (Portugese)
 Cedric, seu cabeça-dura, eu estou
 falando a verdade!

MARCUS

Morning.

They ignore him.

Cedric flexes. Marcus doesn't challenge. Doesn't flash a badge. He watches Carson's eyes instead.

CEDRIC

Outsider? Move along. You're not family.

Marcus eats his caramel corn. Happy to be at the circus.

MARCUS

(to Carson)

You look like you didn't sleep.

Cedric scoffs.

CEDRIC

We're busy.

Marcus nods like he agrees. Starts to walk away Then casually:

MARCUS

Bones don't just show up by accident.

Carson looks up. He's hooked now. Marcus moves to Carson.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

FBI, Special Agent, Blackwood.
Marcus Blackwood..

CARSON

(Portugese)

Não gostamos de estranhos.

MARCUS

(Portuguese)

Eu não gosto de mentirosos.
(I don't like liars.)

Mr. Krankowski comes up, ulcers acting up.

MR. KRANKOWSKI

(to Marcus)

Look, I am not paying you to stand around.

Marcus places a firm hand on Mr. Krankowski's chest to stop him. Shows his badge.

The Mess Tent bustles.

MR. KRANKOWSKI (CONT'D)
(yells)
30 minutes till Teardown.

No one listens. He mutters and walks away.

MR. KRANKOWSKI (CONT'D)
Carnival Lights will be the death
of me.

Marcus heads to the Lion Cage.

CUT.

LION TENT - CRIME SCENE

A body lies partially covered.

He studies: • Cage doors • Rigging overhead • Service paths

CARSON
You look at the air, not the dead?

MARCUS
I look for what people leave
behind.

He sees a business card on the ground. He picks it up.

POV: THAMES STREET OYSTER HOUSE

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Baltimore restaurant card. Boston
crime scene.

Carson shrugs. Marcus offers Carmel corn to Carson. He declines.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
(to Carson)
You do this?

CARSON
No! No!

MARCUS
(matter-of-factly)
Who did? It's your lion.

Carson and Cedric leave.

Stephanie enters and goes to Xavier

STEPHANIE

What's going on? I got one death already.

XAVIER

Now you got 2. Officer Looney Tune over there/

MARCUS

You know the corpse.

She looks at the few remains.

STEPHANIE

Not much left to look at.

MARCUS

The cage was unlocked. Did you kill this guy?

STEPHANIE

No! Why would you ask that?

MARCUS

I'll be joining the circus for a while.

XAVIER

(wise)

You want a villain? Fine. Blame me.

They look eyes.

MARCUS

You always talk this much?

A beat.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

A finger is missing. Somebody wanted evidence.

He takes out his phone calls forensics. Time passes. Body remains taken. Marcus is gathering clues.

TIME LAPSE — CARNIVAL LIGHTS TEARDOWN

The Big Top comes down.

Canvas folds. Poles drop. Cables coil.

The neon sign – DANIELS CARNIVAL LIGHTS – flares once.

Then goes dark.

Rides dismantle. Trailers lock. Light rain begins.

Mud swallows glitter.

A casket is loaded into a transport truck.

No ceremony. Just work.

EXT. JEEP – CONTINUOUS

Engine running.

Stephanie drives.

Mr. Krankowski sits stiff beside her.

BOBBY

Mr. Krankowski, you ride shotgun.

Krankowski obeys instantly.

Xavier slides into the back seat. Directly behind Stephanie.

In the rearview mirror – his eyes.

Not warm. Not curious. Assessing.

Stephanie sees. Looks back to the road.

Bobby squeezes in beside Xavier.

Xavier leans toward Bobby. Whispers something we don't hear.
Bobby blushes. He reaches for Xavier's hand.

No one speaks.

EXT. HIGHWAY – WIDE

The Jeep pulls away.

Where the Big Top stood is now an empty field of mud and glitter.

INT. COFFIN – MOVING

Jason Daniels' body shifts with the road.

A bump. His head tilts.

INT. MARCUS'S SEDAN - MOVING

Headlights cut through rain.

Marcus follows at a distance.

Coffee stain faint on his shirt.

He keys his mic.

MARCUS

Tyler, bones from the lion cage -
rush the DNA. See if this guy is
from Baltimore.

Thunder cracks.

EXT. SPRINGFIELD FAIRGROUNDS - LATE AFTERNOON

Cold rain. Mud. Exhaust smoke.

A stray dog watches the convoy pass.

Doesn't move.

A trailer park sign: MOBILE HAVEN.

Wind hits.

A faint metal creak. One bolt shears loose. The sign hangs
crooked.

The carnival settles in.

Marcus steps out of his sedan. Alone. Watching.

Across the grounds, the Mess Tent rises fast.

People gather.

INT. MESS TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Steam. Paper plates. Metal trays sliding.

STEPHANIE

We roll in tomorrow at eight.
Tonight we rest.

Marcus steps into line - behind Xavier.

They don't look at each other.

Natasha storms in.

NATASHA

(drunk)

He's dead and we just keep moving?

She grabs Xavier's shirt.

Fabric tears.

His tray tilts. Stew splashes across the table.

Cornbread hits the mud.

A few performers laugh.

Then stop.

Natasha beats on Xavier's arm.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

It was you. I know it.

XAVIER

Igor. Last time.

Natasha laughs bitterly and staggers off.

Xavier calmly gathers what's salvageable from the tray.

Marcus steps forward.

Offers his hand.

MARCUS

Marcus.

Xavier looks at the hand.

Then at Marcus' eyes.

Recognition flickers.

He doesn't take it.

Instead - He steps in close.

XAVIER

I know.

A beat.

Rain on canvas.

Wind rattles tent poles.

XAVIER (CONT'D)
People die.

A beat.

XAVIER (CONT'D)
You get used to it.

Marcus lowers his hand.

Xavier sits.

Marcus sits opposite him.

MARCUS
(offering cornbread)
You dropped this. Have mine.

XAVIER
Keep it.

Silence.

Engines ticking as they cool outside.

XAVIER (CONT'D)
Then you won't last long here.

Xavier stands.

Brushes Marcus' shoulder as he passes.

Marcus doesn't move.

MARCUS
(off to Xavier)
Can't wait to catch your act.

Xavier exits.

Marcus looks up.

Scanning.

Carson sits.

Miss Avalon sits.

No one speaks.

They eat.

Wind rattles canvas.

FADE.

MESS TENT – CONTINUOUS

Miss Avalon presses a tarot deck into his hand.

He sighs. Shuffles.

Igor sits next to Marcus.

She flips the top card.

THE TOWER.

Marcus looks at Xavier.

Xavier is already looking at him.

MISS AVALON

Some storms don't change course.

Xavier slowly polishes a knife on Bobby's shirt. He never looks at the blade.

POP!

Marcus is already half-drawn.

Across the tent: Dylan stands frozen, a shredded balloon at his feet.

Igor gently lowers the barrel.

IGOR

Things work different here.

LATER – PERFORMANCE PREP MONTAGE

– Canvas rises

– Poles driven into mud

– Generators rumble

INTERCUT:

· Miss Petre drilling her dogs – flawless · Fluffy ROARS – cage latch slightly misaligned · Xavier swallows a blade – perfect control · Bobby watching – something shifting

· Marcus watching – silent

Cedric lifts weight. Holds. Sets it down.

Holds. Sets it down carefully.

Marcus remains outside a second longer.

Looking at the rigging.

Then he goes in.

EXT. CARNIVAL SIGN - DUSK

The neon sign flickers on:

DANIELS CARNIVAL LIGHTS

The word DANIELS flickers.

D... I... E...

Then stabilizes.

STEPHANIE (O.S.)
Krankowski! Fix that sign!

NIGHT FALLS – CARNIVAL OPENS

Lights glow.

Xavier performs. Cedric lifts. Miss Avalon reads. Marcus watches.

A kid gets off a ride and vomits.

A mother pulls him away.

Fireworks BOOM.

Crowds rush into the Big Top.

INT. EMPTY BIG TOP - AFTER THE SHOW

Work lights only.

Dust hangs in the beams. Torn posters. Empty seats.

Xavier stands in the ring, throwing knives at a faded clown target.

THUD. Dead center.

Stephanie is sitting watching the two tigers in the ring.

STEPHANIE

(to Xavier)

Work on your aim. You work for me.

CARSON

You got the same stare he had.

Everyone looks.

She exits.

Marcus watches from the shadows. Quiet. Studying rhythm.

Another knife hits.

THUD.

Xavier doesn't turn.

XAVIER

(without looking)

You keep circling me...
people might think you're hunting.

Marcus steps into the light.

MARCUS

Maybe I am.

Xavier flips a knife in his palm. Smooth.

THUD. Dead center.

Xavier throws again.

THUD.

He finally speaks like he's answering something else.

XAVIER

Best part of this life?

Marcus watches the blade quiver.

XAVIER (CONT'D)
Tomorrow... I'm someone else.

Xavier pulls a knife from his belt and offers it.

Not friendly. A test.

Marcus takes it. Feels the balance.

MARCUS
Must make trust difficult.

He throws.

The knife lands— decent. Not perfect.

Xavier clocks it.

XAVIER
Only if you hang on to yesterday.

Marcus walks toward the target to pull the knife—

WHOOSH.

A blade buries into the wood beside Marcus' head.

He doesn't flinch.

He looks at the blade. Then at Xavier.

XAVIER
You moved.

MARCUS
You aimed.

Marcus pulls the knife free. Walks it back to Xavier. Offers it handle-first.

XAVIER
Most people duck.

MARCUS
You threw it close on purpose.

A beat.

XAVIER
You're still here.

THUD.

XAVIER (CONT'D)
You think you understand this
place.

MARCUS
I understand gravity.

Now Xavier steps closer.

XAVIER
You're waiting for me to slip.

MARCUS
Everybody falls.

A long beat.

XAVIER
This is survival.

Marcus doesn't answer.

XAVIER (CONT'D)
I'm exactly where I'm supposed to
be.

A long silence.

INT. BIG TOP - NIGHT (SHOW)

Miss Petre finishes with the poodles. Applause.

Xavier speaks low with Cedric— fast friends.

Marcus stands with Miss Avalon. No words. A quiet alignment.

INT. TRAPEZE PERCH - CONTINUOUS

Igor and Natasha ready.

IGOR
(to Natasha)
Keep it clean for the first round.
We come back later and give them
the magic.

Natasha rolls her eyes and kisses Igor. The crowd swoons.

INT. CENTER RING - CONTINUOUS

Bobby steps out. Top hat. Showman smile.

BOBBY
Ladies and gentlemen— do you want a
show?

Roars.

Bobby glances at Stephanie— then at Xavier. A wink.

Stephanie catches it.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
I said— DO YOU WANT A SHOW?

The crowd erupts.

Stagehands move in. Remove the safety net.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
No nets.

DRUMROLL. CYMBALS.

LIGHTS OUT.

A hush.

SPOTLIGHT: Bobby.

BOBBY
Cast your eyes high above—
the Russian Roulettes!

SPOTLIGHTS: Igor and Natasha. They wave.

Natasha reaches across and flicks dust off Igor's collar.

He grunts.

IGOR
You worry too much.

Igor swings first, hangs inverted — ready.

Natasha swings. Releases. Flips—

Igor catches her clean.

Applause.

Natasha returns to her perch, easy.

Bobby steps forward.

BOBBY

No, no, no— we promised you
extraordinary.

Natasha ties on a blindfold.

DRUMROLL builds.

Two spotlights: Igor and Natasha.

Marcus scans the rigging — not the performers.

Quick cuts:

- Cedric near a support cable.
- Mr. Krankowski glances toward the generator table.
- Stephanie watching from below — unreadable.

Drums. Spotlight. Applause.

High above — IGOR hangs by his knees. Upside down. Arms extended.

From his POV:

The world is inverted.

IGOR

Сейчас!

Crowd below is a ceiling of faces. Lights bloom like falling stars. Natasha swings toward him.

Their fingers almost touch.

She smiles.

Natasha swings.

Then—

Miss Petre's eyes flick to the rope anchor.

A whisper through the air. Not applause.

From Igor's inverted POV:

The rope doesn't fall.

The earth rises.

Natasha's body lifts away from him.

Her hair floats upward.

The crowd flips.

The band keeps playing.

One beat.

Her body hits.

From upside down, she appears suspended in midair.

Wrong direction.

Wrong physics.

The applause dies in fragments.

Igor hanging upside-down

IGOR (CONT'D)
(weeping)
Tasha! Tasha!

The crowd begins to scream.

Marcus steps into frame – from Igor's upside-down angle.

He walks into the ring like gravity belongs to him.

Grabs the mic.

Still inverted world.

MARCUS
Shut it down.

No screaming yet. Just the canvas breathing.

Someone laughs once—then realizes—

and stops.

The band falters.

Igor rights himself.

Now we're upright again.

Stephanie looks to Bobby.

Xavier reappears— cuff adjusted. Not winded. Not grieving. On time.

Bobby looks to Xavier.

Xavier looks at Marcus.

Marcus doesn't blink.

Petre sits still in the stands.

Hands folded.

Watching.

Igor stares at the rope.

Marcus is moving— eyes up, then down, clocking exits, rigging, hands.

Something flutters down from the rafters. It lands in Marcus's palm.

A playing card.

POV: QUEEN OF SPADES.

Dylan works the crowd, trying to calm them.

Time compresses: the crowd pours out.

Soon it's just Igor, Bobby, Stephanie, and Natasha's body in the ring.

An ambulance arrives. Lights wash the canvas.

Natasha is covered. Taken.

Cedric, Carson, and Miss Avalon watch from the side. No words.

Marcus approaches him.

MARCUS
Where did you go?

Xavier doesn't turn.

XAVIER
Backstage. Bobby panicked before
the blindfold.

Cedric backs him instantly.

CEDRIC
He was with me.

Marcus looks at Cedric. Then at the Queen of Spades in his hand.

XAVIER
Everybody slips.

MARCUS
Deal me in.

XAVIER
You're already at the table

Silence.

FADE.

INT. MISS AVALON'S PSYCHIC TRAILER - LATER

A dusty bottle. Small glasses. No ceremony.

Miss Petre. Cedric. Carson. Xavier.

Miss Avalon pours green Chartreuse.

They lift the glasses— not a toast. A ritual.

The door opens. Marcus steps in. He takes the empty seat beside Carson. The circle adjusts to make room.

They drink like medicine.

Miss Avalon shuffles. Slow.

Turns a card.

MISS AVALON
You say you don't believe...
yet you know what it means.

All eyes on Marcus.

MARCUS
My mother had the gift.
She ran off with the swordsman.
Left my father... and an eight-year-
old.

XAVIER
Glitter always shows up in the
dirt.

A beat.

XAVIER (CONT'D)
You want comfort or the truth?

Marcus holds Xavier's gaze.

The door opens.

Igor steps in. Rain on his shoulders. Eyes wrecked.

He sees the card. Stops.

Pours himself a drink.

IGOR
(low)
Напиток.

They drink again.

IGOR (CONT'D)
We have our rules.

A beat.

IGOR (CONT'D)
You're in now.

Marcus nods.

Miss Avalon looks at him— direct.

MISS AVALON
You're here for a reason.

A beat.

MISS AVALON (CONT'D)
Find what's killing us.

Marcus looks around the table.

No one looks away.

MARCUS
(quiet)
Hiding in plain sight.

Xavier lifts his glass.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. JASON'S COFFIN TENT - 1:00 A.M.

Ghost light hums.

Stephanie studies the contract.

STEPHANIE
Papa... what is SPATA?

XAVIER (O.S.)
You hate not being the one holding
the strings.

She doesn't turn.

STEPHANIE
You're too new here to speak.

Xavier steps into the light.

XAVIER
New doesn't mean blind.

He glances at the paper.

XAVIER (CONT'D)
You're not afraid of debt.
You're afraid your name isn't on
it.

That hits harder.

STEPHANIE
I'd rather bargain with the Devil.

XAVIER
(smaller smile)
You already are.

STEPHANIE
Then teach me how not to lose.

Wind shifts the canvas.

The coffin CREAKS softly.

He taps the coffin once.

XAVIER

Look at the books. Follow the
money.

He steps into shadow.

Gone.

Stephanie turns back.

Now the coffin feels heavier.

MISS AVALON (O.S.)

Your mother never folded.

Stephanie looks up.

MISS AVALON (CONT'D)

Don't either.

No embrace.

Just shared steel.

Ghost light steadies.

FADE.

INT. XAVIER'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Dim bulb. Canvas breathing.

Xavier is awake. Wired. Hungry.

A knock.

He opens.

No one.

Just a small white pastry box.

Inside:

Pink cotton candy.

And a thumb.

Sticky. Clean cut.

A folded note.

He reads.

NOTE

Stay paid. Stay gone.

A long beat.

He takes out a knife.

Clean slice across the cotton candy.

The thumb drops to the metal sink.

He turns on the tap. Water runs. Pink dissolves down the drain.

The thumb sits alone. He dries it with a towel.

Wraps it. Puts it in his coat pocket.

He looks in the mirror.

XAVIER

(quiet)

Let's begin.

He steps out into the dark.

EXT. BOBBY'S TRAILER - 2:00 A.M.

Soft Latin music bleeds through thin trailer walls. Warm light behind drawn curtains.

Stephanie approaches. Hesitates.

She knocks once— then opens the door.

INT. BOBBY'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

Bobby turns— breathing a little high, like he's been pacing.

BOBBY

(startled)

Steph—

He snatches a shirt from a chair, pulls it on too fast.

Stephanie takes in the space. Nothing obvious— but something's been reset.

STEPHANIE

Did I interrupt something?

BOBBY
No. I just... couldn't sleep.

A beat.

STEPHANIE
We rethink the Roulette act
tomorrow.

BOBBY
Yeah. Of course.

Stephanie watches him— searching for the thing she can't
name.

She doesn't find it.

STEPHANIE
Get some rest.

She exits.

The door closes.

Bobby stands still in the quiet.

BOBBY
(under his breath)
What am I doing..

The glitter under his eye looks like a bruise in this light.

A soft knock.

Bobby freezes.

He opens the door a crack—

His face changes: recognition... heat... surrender.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
You shouldn't be here.

Xavier steps in. The door shuts.

INT. BOBBY'S TRAILER CONTINUOUS

BOBBY
You shouldn't be here.

A beat.

Xavier takes out the thumb and places it on the counter.

XAVIER
You dropped something earlier.

BOBBY
(tense)
What's this?

XAVIER
You know.

Music continues.

EXT. BOBBY'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

Marcus watches.

A chair scrapes.

A body hits the wall—controlled, not chaotic.

A thud is heard.

He checks his watch.

MUFFLED VOICE (O.S.)
Ok. Ok, Jesus, it was...a joke.

THUD.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. MESS TENT - MORNING

Gray light. Mud drying in cracked patterns. Coffee steam rises from paper cups.

MISS PETRE stands a few paces from the others, phone to her ear. Her Russian is precise. Effortless.

MISS PETRE (RUSSIAN)
Нет. Всё спокойно.
(beat)
She sees Marcus and Igor.

MISS PETRE (CONT'D)
Yes the accounts are secure.
After Erie.

(MORE)

MISS PETRE (CONT'D)
Applause doesn't put money in the
bank.
The girl doesn't know.

MISS PETRE (CONT'D)
Да. Я знаю.

She hangs up.

Marcus and Igor stand nearby. Not hiding. Not interrupting.
She knew they were there.

MARCUS
Pretty good Russian.

Miss Petre turns. Mild smile.

MISS PETRE
Conversational.

A beat.

MISS PETRE (CONT'D)
My aunt worries.

IGOR
Your aunt... still back east?

Petre meets his eyes. Doesn't blink.

MISS PETRE
People worry everywhere.

Marcus studies her.

MARCUS
Everything fine?

A faint smile.

MISS PETRE
If it weren't... would I tell you?

Beat.

MISS PETRE (CONT'D)
Why am I explaining myself to you?
Don't you have a murder to solve?

She walks past them without waiting for an answer.

MISS PETRE (CONT'D)
Some of us invest in longevity. Not
spectacle.

Igor watches her go.

Silence.

Wind rattles canvas.

Marcus doesn't take his eyes off her retreating figure.

MARCUS
Everybody's lying.
(beat)
I don't like guessing.

Igor considers him.

IGOR
Truth is expensive.

Marcus finally looks at him.

MARCUS
I'm about ready to pay for it.

EXT. THE BIG TOP - MORNING

ON SCREEN: 8:00 A.M.

The Big Top sits quiet after Natasha's death.

Stray dogs nose through trash. Generators cough.

Fluffy ROARS somewhere behind canvas.

Miss Petre passes with her poodles in a tight line.

Pierre pauses near Marcus' shoe— considers lifting a leg.

Marcus glares.

Pierre thinks better of it and trots off, insulted.

Stephanie crosses to Marcus.

STEPHANIE
Anything?

MARCUS
Connections. Not certainty.

STEPHANIE
The cards?

MARCUS
Sent to Langley.
Pattern's forming.

Bobby passes by. Marcus stops him.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Hold up.

Bobby turns, smiling like a bruise.

BOBBY
What?

MARCUS
Who gave you the black eye?

BOBBY
Rough sex.

Bobby storms away.

STEPHANIE
I'd like to kill him myself
sometimes.

MARCUS
I think somebody is lying.

A sound rises as they near the canvas—

WHOOSH. THUD.

A man hits a mat too hard.

IGOR (O.S.)
CHObA.

Another THUD.

IGOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
CHObA!

INT. BIG TOP - CONTINUOUS

Igor drills performers with brutal precision.

Bobby claps, trying to keep it sharp.

BOBBY

Tighter!

Xavier comes into view— sweat-soaked, controlled.
 He lands a flip without bending his knees. Barely breathes.
 Bobby glances to Cedric— cues an accordion track.
 Up top: Igor and Xavier set positions. Lock eyes.

IGOR

СЕЙЧАС!

They launch.

Mid-air—

XAVIER

СЕЙЧАС!

They cross, flip, catch opposite bars in unison.
 Igor pulls out a blindfold. So does Xavier.

XAVIER (CONT'D)

ГОТОВЫЙ?

IGOR

(English)

You drop me, I kill you.

Xavier laughs— light, sharp.

XAVIER

Have a little faith, old man.

IGOR

Let me hear you breathe.

Xavier— steady breath. Controlled.

Silence.

Igor leaps.

CLASP.

They lock.

Blindfolds off.

They dismount.

Bobby steps toward Xavier.

Their eyes lock.

Bobby doesn't hug him.

He nods once.

Subtle.

Xavier gently pulls Bobby's head into his chest.

Xavier heads out.

Marcus lifts the blindfold.

Holds it to the light. Sees faint transparency.

A breath – not his own. Right behind him. Too close.

XAVIER
(low, in his ear)
Smoke and mirrors. You want to be
in the act?

Marcus doesn't turn immediately. He finishes inspecting the fabric. Then lowers it.

MARCUS
Everybody breaks.

A beat.

Xavier's breath almost a laugh.

XAVIER
You're waiting for my fall?

Marcus finally turns.

They're inches apart.

MARCUS
Everybody does.

A long stare. Xavier steps away.

INT. SIDESHOW TENT - LATER

Cedric warms up behind the curtain. Focused.

MARCUS
Those are hollow, right?

Cedric stares.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
C'mon. Wizard of Oz rules.
We're behind the curtain.

Cedric steps aside.

Marcus grips the bar. Strains. Nothing.

Cedric nudges him away and lifts it clean.

CEDRIC
You were saying?

The crowd pours in. The show snaps alive. Cedric steps out to applause.

Marcus scans the cramped space.

A deck of playing cards on a crate.

He spreads them.

Three Queens.

He turns the deck over. Checks the back pattern.

Ordinary.

He reaches into his jacket.

Pulls out the card that drifted into his hand after Natasha fell.

The QUEEN OF SPADES.

Marcus rubs the edge of the fallen Queen.

He checks the cut of the corners.

Exact match.

Not planted.

Belonged.

Quick FLASH – Natasha falling.

Back to Marcus.

CEDRIC (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You won't find it there.

Cedric stands in the entrance light.

MARCUS
Something already found me.

Cedric steps into the ring.

ROARS for the crowd.

Marcus looks toward the Big Top.

The game just changed.

INT. KRANKOWSKI'S TRAILER - DAY

Tight space. Paper stacks. Ink stains. Adding machine clicking.

Stephanie flips through ledgers. Curious. A little overwhelmed.

STEPHANIE
I never paid attention to this part.

She turns a page.

Stops.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)
We're covered.
(beat)
Like... covered, covered.

Krankowski stiffens almost imperceptibly.

MR. KRANKOWSKI
Some money doesn't belong to the tent.

The door opens without waiting.

Marcus steps in.

MARCUS
Smells like optimism in here.

No one laughs.

He notices the ledger open.

Steps closer.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Didn't know there was a future in
Big Tops.

(beat)

Maybe I should change jobs.

Stephanie gives him a look – now's not the time.

Marcus pulls up a chair.

Sits.

Starts scanning the numbers.

Krankowski instinctively reaches to close the book.

Marcus's hand comes down.

Firm.

Not aggressive.

Unmovable.

A beat.

Marcus doesn't look at him.

Just nods to Stephanie.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Sit.

She does.

They look at the page together.

INSERT –

Payroll cleared.

Fuel prepaid. Erie – paid in full.

DEPOSIT: SPATA HOLDINGS.

Marcus taps the line with one finger.

MARCUS

SPATA. That your idea... or Jason's?

MR. KRANKOWSKI

Older than Jason.

He flips back two pages.

MARCUS

Three weeks ago you were borrowing
from next month's gate.
Now you're winter-proof.

MR. KRANKOWSKI

Winter's expensive.
You plan for it or you freeze.

He leans back.

MARCUS

Didn't know applause was deposited
directly into checking.

Silence.

Krankowski adjusts his cuff.

MR. KRANKOWSKI

We secured backing.

STEPHANIE

From who?

He doesn't answer.

MARCUS

This is interesting.

Then silence.

Krankowski. No expression.

Stephanie looks at both of them. Driving to her own
conclusions.

Marcus's eyes drift.

On the wall— An old framed photo.

Jason in his red coat — master of ceremonies. Miss Petre's —
eyes sharp, unreadable. Krankowski — thinner, holding a
rifle. Dead aim.

Marcus studies it.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
You hunt?

KRANKOWSKI
Only when something needs putting
down.

Stephanie notices the photo for the first time.

STEPHANIE
When was this taken?

Krankowski doesn't respond.

Bobby steps in, show lineup in hand.

Reads the room immediately.

Marcus returns to the ledger. Bobby circles around and looks
over his shoulder.

MARCUS
SPATA.
(beat)
That your idea...or his?

Silence.

BOBBY
What's SPATA?

Krankowski says nothing.

Stephanie glances at Bobby – she doesn't have an answer.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
(to Stephanie)
You knew about this?

STEPHANIE
No.

A beat.

Bobby looks at Krankowski now – for the first time with real
suspicion.

BOBBY
Then who's running this family?

Krankowski finally closes the book.

Marcus's hand lingers on the cover.

Then releases.

MR. KRANKOWSKI
Your job is murder.
Mine is survival.

Marcus stands.

MARCUS
Sometimes it's the same thing.

He exits.

Stephanie remains. Looking at the photo. Looking at the closed ledger.

INT. BIG TOP - NIGHT (EVENING SHOW)

Packed. Humid. Electric.

Backstage chaos. Musicians tuning.

XAVIER
Bobby, Let's get out of here.

BOBBY
I am up after the poodles.

Now Marcus steps forward.

MARCUS
I'll stand in.

Bobby freezes.

Xavier turns slowly.

XAVIER
Cop... you want to dance with me?

Marcus steps closer.

No smile.

MARCUS
I always lead.

A faint pop of a rigging cable above. No one looks up.

Wind in the canvas.

Crowd noise fades under it.

Xavier smiles.

XAVIER
Then keep up.

Marcus turns and walks toward the exit.

Doesn't look back.

Xavier follows.

FADE OUT.

INT. MESS TENT - NIGHT

A few bare bulbs. The tent is half-struck— chairs stacked, tables crooked.

Marcus sits alone with a bottle of vodka.

Footsteps.

Xavier enters— calm, not hiding it.

Marcus rolls the bottle across the table.

MARCUS
Heard you've been expanding your
palate.

Xavier catches the glass without looking.

XAVIER
Careful.

Marcus takes a sip.

MARCUS
I'm trying to put my finger on
something.
(beat)
Baltimore keeps coming up.

A beat.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Funny city to disappear from.

Xavier's eyes sharpen. Test recognized.

He moves— He steps in.

Pushes Marcus back into a support pole.

Close. Controlled.

XAVIER
Careful what you go looking for.

Marcus doesn't struggle.

MARCUS
Afraid of what I might find?

Xavier stands. Releases him like it was nothing. Marcus watches his hands.

XAVIER
We're done.

He turns.

Marcus grabs his sleeve— not pleading. Marking.

MARCUS
(quiet)
We're not finished.

XAVIER
Careful what you go looking for.

He exits.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE MESS TENT - CONTINUOUS

Miss Avalon stands in shadow.

MISS AVALON
(softly)
Too late.

She looks toward Bobby's trailer.

FADE OUT.

INT. BOBBY'S TRAILER - NIGHT

A knock.

Bobby opens the door.

Relief.

BOBBY
Watch the eye.

Door shuts.

Silence.

INT. STEPHANIE'S TRAILER

Glitter smeared. Mascara running slightly.

STEPHANIE
(she texts Bobby)
YOU UP?

MASH CUT TO:

INT. BOBBY'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

Dark.

Phone on floor.

Screen glowing.

STEPHANIE
(the incoming text)
YOU UP?

A drop lands on the screen.

Too dark to tell if it's sweat... or blood.

A hand turns the phone over.

In the dark - breathing.

Not rushed. Not afraid.

EXT. THE BIG TOP - MORNING

Marcus walks the grounds.

FLASHBACK - 40 YEARS AGO

The SWORDSMAN laughs. Blade gleams under cheap bulbs.

Young Marcus tugs at his mother's sleeve.

BOY MARCUS
Mom..

She doesn't look at him.

MOTHER
Go ride something.

Mother distracted.

Dollar pressed into palm

The Swordsman winks at Marcus.

Marcus runs toward spinning lights.

Rides whirl. Music distorts. Cotton candy melts in his hand.

He comes back.

Empty tent.

Banner tearing.

The Swordsman banner tears down the middle – smile split in half.

Darkness swallows the midway.

Only wind.

Young Marcus stands alone.

Sticky hands. Mud. Waiting.

No one comes.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. PRESENT-DAY CARNIVAL TENT - NIGHT

Spotlight SNAP.

Knife THUDS into wood inches from someone's face.

EXT. SPRINGFIELD FAIRGROUNDS - DAY

The carnival gathers in loose clusters – smoke, coffee, silence.

Off to the side, away from everyone –

IGOR tightens a ratchet strap on a trailer. Efficient. Focused.

MARCUS approaches. Hands in coat pockets. Casual on the surface.

He watches Igor work for a beat.

MARCUS
You always work when everyone else
stands around.

Igor doesn't look at him.

IGOR
If I stop moving, I think.

A beat.

MARCUS
I need you thinking.

IGOR
You think I am your friend now?

MARCUS
I think you loved her.

IGOR
Love doesn't stop gravity.

MARCUS
No.
But it makes people want answers.

IGOR
You have questions. Ask.

MARCUS
You think it was an accident?

IGOR
No.

MARCUS
You think it was someone inside?

A long beat.

IGOR
You already know that.

MARCUS
Then here's the question.
(beat)

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Was it you?

Igor steps closer. Not aggressive. Not friendly.

IGOR

If it was...
you'd already be dead.

They hold eye contact. Neither breaks.

A beat.

MARCUS

You trust anyone here?

Igor watches the cast gathering.

Bobby talking too loud. Cedric smoking. Miss Petre adjusting a poodle's bow. Xavier – still. Watching nothing and everything.

Igor doesn't answer right away.

IGOR

Trust is for people who stay the
same.
Everyone here can be someone else
by morning... and not miss who they
were.

His eyes drift to Xavier.

Xavier is already looking back.

MARCUS

Then let's try something else.

Igor waits.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I say a name.

Igor studies him. This is dangerous. This is smart.

IGOR

What name?

Marcus scans the grounds like he's choosing a weapon.

MARCUS

Cedric.

Igor glances – subtle.

Cedric sits on a crate, tearing apart a roasted chicken with his hands. Grease on his fingers. Calm. No twitch.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
 If I'm wrong about you...
 I adjust.

IGOR
 Ask your questions, agent.
 But don't ever ask me to choose.

MARCUS
 Bobby.

Igor's eyes shift again.

Bobby laughs with Stephanie – too loud. But his gaze drifts past her... ..to Xavier.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
 Stephanie—

Igor cuts him off with a sharp look. A line crossed.

IGOR
 Enough.

He turns away, jaw tight. Protective. Or hiding something.

STEPHANIE
 (to the crowd)
 Time to get out of Springfield.
 Last stop before we break. Erie,
 PA.

BOBBY
 Nine-hour drive. Caravan stays
 tight.

IGOR
 I ride with the cop.

Xavier to Stephanie:

XAVIER
 You want me driving?

STEPHANIE
 No.
 Keep your eye on Bobby.

MISS PETRE
 Mr. Krankowski... would you escort
 me?

Two caskets are loaded side by side.

The caravan pulls out.

INT. MISS PETRE'S CAR

MISS PETRE
We should have closed the books
sooner.

MR. KRANKOWSKI
It would have surfaced anyway.

MISS PETRE
Now it's out of our hands.

MR. KRANKOWSKI
It was never in our hands.

MISS PETRE
Pierre's been restless. He feels
storms before they arrive.

MR. KRANKOWSKI
He always does.

Krankowski exhales through his nose. Not a sigh. Something older.

MR. KRANKOWSKI (CONT'D)
Youth is wasted on the young.

EXT. I-90 WEST - DAY

Vehicles snake through cold landscape.

Inside cars: silence, cards, books, drinks.

Fluffy paces in the lion cage— low growl.

Pierre sits upright in a crate, staring forward.

Animals don't blink first.

INT. MARCUS' SEDAN - AFTERNOON

Dashboard clock jumps: 1:15 → 2:30

Igor rides shotgun. Marcus drives.

Long silence.

MARCUS
You don't talk much.

IGOR
You don't ask much.

A beat.

MARCUS
Natasha—

IGOR
We were finished long before she
fell.
(then)
Her drinking made her sloppy.

MARCUS
You took to Xavier quick.

Igor looks at him— calm, unreadable.

IGOR
Are you asking... or accusing?

Marcus exhales.

MARCUS
Two murders behind us.
(beat)
Something else catching up.

Igor turns his eyes back to the road.

IGOR
Then don't slow down.

A sign looms: REST AREA - 1 MILE

Igor texts.

ON PHONE: LET'S PULL OFF. STRETCH.

EXT. REST STOP - NEAR UTICA, NY - NIGHT

SUPER: 6:00 P.M.

Fluorescent lights buzz. Wind cuts.

The cast unloads. Sandwiches get handed out.

Marcus heads for the bathrooms.

INT. REST AREA BATHROOM - NIGHT

Marcus washes his hands. Looks up- catches his own eyes in the mirror.

A stall door clicks behind him.

XAVIER (O.S.)
You following me... or just lonely?

Marcus dries his hands slowly.

In the mirror: Xavier, leaning on the sinks like he owns the place.

MARCUS
You always pick bathrooms for first dates?

XAVIER
Neutral ground.

A beat.

XAVIER (CONT'D)
You don't look like a man who believes in accidents.

MARCUS
Everybody lies. Truth comes out.

Xavier steps closer.

XAVIER
Difference is-
(quiet)
You need proof.
(closer)
I need opportunity.

A sound outside- voices entering.

Xavier and Marcus break apart like nothing happened.

Four men line up at urinals:

IGOR. CEDRIC. XAVIER. MARCUS.

A beat of awkward normal.

A stall door opens.

COOPER (40s), thick-necked, mean, steps out.

Another opens.

RENE (late 30s), coiled, hungry.

They clock Igor. Smile.

COOPER
Well I'll be fucked.
(to Igor)
Still making circus money?

Rene taps Igor's head twice.

The four men turn together— slow.

IGOR
Wrong man.

Cooper steps in— CRACK— right hook to Igor.

Igor absorbs it. Doesn't fall. Barely reacts.

Everything tightens.

Xavier shifts between them.

XAVIER
Everybody breathe—

Rene moves.

Xavier drops him hard to tile.

Cooper swings a baton— CRACK— catches Xavier.

Xavier hits the floor, dazed.

Rene's up. Gun out.

Cooper draws too— covering Cedric, then Marcus.

COOPER
Thirty grand.
Plus interest.

Rene's gun inches from Igor's head.

Marcus' training snaps on.

BANG—
Marcus fires. Rene drops.

Cooper whips toward Marcus—
Cedric SHOVES Marcus aside—
Cooper's shot goes wild— grazes Cedric's arm.
Marcus fires again— reflex—

BANG.

Cooper drops.

Silence.

Blood dripping.

Xavier already moving. Igor steady.

He reaches for the phone.

Igor watches.

Marcus pockets it.

Looks at Xavier.

MARCUS
You've got ten minutes.
After that, this becomes federal.

EXT. REST STOP - LATER

State troopers. Flashing lights. EMTs.

Miss Petre intercepts a family heading toward the bathrooms.

MISS PETRE
Restrooms closed. Pipes burst.

Pierre lifts his leg and pees on the father's shoe.

Marcus Talking with the State Troopers.

Marcus is calm. He doesn't oversell. He gives the story.

He can lie. And he's good at it.

INT. MARCUS' SEDAN - NIGHT

Igor drives now.

Marcus stares at his hands— blood in the creases.

Radio chatter fades.

Then he notices Igor watching him — not judging, not approving.

Marcus looks away first.

FBI radio SQUAWKS.

FBI AGENT (V.O.)
Blackwood, respond.

Marcus reaches—

Igor places a hand over Marcus'— gentle, firm.

They lock eyes.

FBI AGENT (V.O.)
Langley wants you back. Twenty-four
hours.

Marcus swallows.

MARCUS
Nothing to report.

Static.

He clicks the radio off.

Marcus catches his reflection in the side mirror.

He doesn't recognize himself.

Igor looks back to the road.

Marcus looks at his FBI badge in his lap.

He flips it face down on the dashboard.

Igor looks back to the road, drives on.

FADE OUT.

EXT. LAKE ERIE SPEEDWAY - NIGHT

SUPER: WELCOME TO ERIE, PA

The convoy rolls through the gates at 2:00 A.M. Headlights sweep empty grandstands.

EXT. LAKE ERIE SPEEDWAY - FAR EDGE - CONTINUOUS

MARCUS (V.O.)
 You cross a line... and the ground
 doesn't move.
 You tell yourself it was clean.
 Necessary.

Quick flashes:

- Cooper drops in the restroom.
- Igor's hand covers Marcus' phone.
- Blood in Marcus' palm.

MARCUS (V.O.)
 But lines don't disappear.
 They move... until you don't know
 which side you're on.

CUT TO:

Xavier is standing alone under the Erie lights. Wind snapping canvas. He watches the crew work.

He looks directly toward camera—
 —or toward Marcus across the lot—
 —not smiling..
 Just knowing.

MONTAGE - ERIE SETUP (TIME LAPSE INTO MORNING)

- Marcus throws his shoulder into a hoist line— earning looks.
- Carson feeds FLUFFY. The lion is calm. Too calm.
- Igor and Xavier rehearse a new sequence— Bobby watches, hungry.

- Stephanie and Krankowski argue over open ledgers.
- Miss Avalon flips a tarot card: DEATH. She covers it fast. She looks to Marcus.
- Miss Avalon does a private "reading" with Xavier. He shoves the cards off the table and storms out. She barely reacts.
- Rides go up. Lights test.
- Miss Petre walks the grounds with Pierre. The poodle passes Marcus, considers... then keeps moving, nose high.

EXT. ERIE FAIRGROUNDS - LATE AFTERNOON

MARCUS (V.O.)
Someone is engineering collapse.

Wind off the lake. Colder than Springfield. The carnival is half-assembled - skeletal rides, cables, canvas snapping.

Marcus and Igor walk the perimeter like men pretending to inspect logistics.

They're alone enough.

MARCUS
I'm going to try something.

Igor doesn't look at him.

IGOR
You always do.

MARCUS
I'm going to move the ground

IGOR
Under who?

MARCUS
Whoever touched that rope last.

Beat.

IGOR
Did they find something?

MARCUS
No.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
But someone here is going to think
they left something behind.

IGOR
Who do you tell?

MARCUS
Only one person.

Igor waits.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Stephanie.

Igor exhales through his nose. That's dangerous.

IGOR
She carries news like fire.

MARCUS
Exactly.

INT. CATERING TENT - LATER

Cast eating. Steam from soup. Metal trays clatter.

Stephanie moves between tables – leader mode, holding it
together.

Marcus steps in beside her quietly.

MARCUS
Lab flagged something on the
trapeze rope.

She stiffens.

STEPHANIE
What kind of something?

MARCUS
Lab flagged something on the
trapeze rope.
Doesn't wash off.

Silence under the tent noise.

Stephanie nods once. Calm face. Brain racing.

STEPHANIE
What do you need from me?

MARCUS

Nothing.
(beat)
Just don't warn anyone.

Marcus walks away.

INT. CATERING TENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Steam from soup trays. Metal clatter. Wind working the canvas.

STEPHANIE stands near CEDRIC. Casual. Too casual.

STEPHANIE

(quiet)
Lab flagged something on the
trapeze rope.
Something that doesn't wash off.

Cedric keeps wrapping his wrist.

The tape pulls too tight.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)

They're still testing.

She moves on.

Just tent noise.

Cedric crosses to CARSON at the rigging table.

CEDRIC

(low)
They found something on the rope.

Carson stills.

He leans toward MISS PETRE, adjusting a collar.

CARSON

They're testing the rigging.

Miss Petre's smile tightens.

Across the tent -

BOBBY laughs too loud at nothing.

It dies quickly.

Near the popcorn machine, DYLAN leans toward PIERRE.

DYLAN

He said he cut his throat.
Said there was blood everywhere.

Silence ripples outward.

Across the tent -

Marcus hears it.

XAVIER.

Sitting alone on an equipment crate.

The ripple worked.

CUT.

EXT. RIGGING AREA - DUSK

IGOR

Well?

MARCUS

Everyone adjusted something.
(beat)
Except one.

IGOR

That one does not fear gravity.

MARCUS

Let's see what he does when it
shifts.

INT. MISS PETRE'S TRAILER - MORNING

Tea service. Old photos on the walls: Miss Petre, a younger Krankowski, Jason- mud-and-tent days, and a 4th figure partially cut off.

Miss Petre notices. She turns the frame slightly.

Casual.

Miss Petre and Krankowski sit like royalty in a tight room.

A knock.

MISS PETRE

Come in.

Marcus enters. Miss Petre gestures to a chair.

MARCUS
Thank you for the invite.

Krankowski's eyes go to Marcus' bruised hand.

MR. KRANKOWSKI
After last night...
Nothing else needs saying.

Miss Petre pours.

MISS PETRE
Cream and sugar?

MARCUS
Plain's fine.

Marcus clocks the photos.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
You all go way back.

MISS PETRE
From the mud-and-tent days.
Before the lights. Before the
money.
When all you had... was the person
next to you.

MR. KRANKOWSKI
You learn to do many things in the
circus.
You adjust...or you don't last.

Miss Petre smiles.

MISS PETRE
I've stitched costumes, ridden
elephants... told fortunes.
The circus doesn't waste a body.

Marcus' attention catches on a framed photo: a handsome man
with pistols— SAMUEL THE SHARPSHOOTER.

Krankowski almost laughs.

MR. KRANKOWSKI
I was never that good.
Jason called my act boring.
Then Cedric came along— people
wanted a strongman.

MISS PETRE
 Mr. K found his true talent.
 Numbers. Investments.
 (a beat)
 He's very good.

He looks an older photo still. A younger girl and an older Russian.

MARCUS
 Miss Petre is this you?

MISS PETRE
 Oh yes, long ago. Old money.

Marcus rises.

MARCUS
 Appreciate the tea.

He opens the door— Miss Petre stops him.

MISS PETRE
 Marcus.
 (beat)
 You're family now. Rules are different.
 What will your act be?

Marcus considers.

MARCUS
 Maybe I juggle.
 (a beat)
 See what drops.

He exits.

Miss Petre sips her tea.

MISS PETRE
 (to herself)
 Careful, darling.
 Some things don't like to be dropped.

FADE.

EXT. BIG TOP - MORNING

SUPER: 10:00 A.M.

Marcus walks toward the Big Top.

CARSON (O.S.)
Marcus.

Carson hustles up— pale, shaky.

MARCUS
You okay?

Carson can't commit to the answer.

CARSON
We should talk.
You're FBI... right?

Marcus guides him a few steps off the path— away from foot traffic.

MARCUS
Talk to me.

Carson scans the grounds like prey.

Cedric passes with rigging.

Xavier crosses behind— doesn't look at them.. but slows half a beat.

Krankowski exits Miss Petre's trailer— "not watching" while watching.

Carson swallows.

CARSON
I know what he—

He stops. His eyes flick past Marcus.

MARCUS (LOW)
Carson. Now.

Carson meets his eyes— terror. Real.

CARSON
He didn't mean to—

A SHOUT inside the Big Top—

IGOR (O.S.)
CHOba!

WHOOSH. CLASP. A hard landing.
 Carson jolts like he's been caught.
 He backs away.

MARCUS
 Carson—

CARSON
 Not here.

Carson disappears into canvas and ropes.
 Marcus pulls out his notebook.
 Writes one word:

AFRAID.

Then heads into the Big Top.

EXT. ERIE FAIRGROUNDS - DUSK

Wind in the canvas. Workers shouting in the distance.
 Marcus watches CARSON across the lot — pacing. Checking his
 phone. Looking toward the animal cages.
 Marcus dials.

INTERCUT — DONNELLY IN BOSTON OFFICE

DONNELLY
 You calling me from a circus... or a
 confession booth?

Marcus doesn't smile.

MARCUS
 I've got a nervous act that wants
 airtime.

DONNELLY
 Define nervous.

Marcus keeps his eyes on Carson.

MARCUS
 He's circling the cages.
 Not the trapeze. Not the rigging.
 (MORE)

MARCUS (CONT'D)
 (beat) He's afraid of something
 with teeth.

Generator HUM fills the silence.

DONNELLY
 You think he cut the rope?

MARCUS
 No.
 (beat)
 I think he knows who did.

A long beat.

He hangs up.

INT. BIG TOP - LATER - SHOW IN FULL SWING

Bobby takes the ring like it's a throne- white jumpsuit, red
 tails, swagger.

BOBBY
 Ladies and gentlemen...
 Believers... and those who pretend
 not to believe-

Boos and cheers.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
 You want something you'll tell
 people about...
 and they won't believe you?

The crowd ROARS.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
 (lower, commanding)
 Then look...
 to the heavens.

SPOTLIGHTS SNAP UP.

Igor in red. Xavier in black. Matching sleeves. Gladiators.

Accordion. Drumroll.

They leap- flip- catch- transfer.

Once. Twice.

Then-

Xavier's hand SLIPS.

But his eyes never panic.

Marcus clocks that.

He MISSES the bar.

The tent EXPLODES in screams.

He slams into the net.

Bobby doesn't rush in. He LAUGHS. Sharp. Breathless.
Electric. Like he just got handed a gift.

From the ring, Bobby cracks the whip— sharp, controlled.

He circles.

Close enough to smell sweat and chalk.

The whip drags behind him like a tail.

CRACK.

Too fast. Too close.

The tip of the whip SNAPS across Xavier's chest.

A thin red line beads through the chalk.

The crowd CHEERS.

BOBBY (LOW, TO XAVIER)
That mistake... costs you.

Xavier smiles.

Bobby cracks the whip in defiance. The crowds cheers.

XAVIER
(low to Bobby only)
Careful.

He leans closer— the whip tip brushes his chest.

Bobby's jaw tightens— desire and rage fighting for the same space.

Stephanie watches from the wings— clocking everything.

Marcus watches— understanding this isn't about the act anymore.

Bobby turns back to the crowd— performer mask on.

BOBBY
You want real?

The crowd ROARS.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
You want danger?

The crowd roars.

His smile is wide. But his eyes don't match it. They're somewhere else. Somewhere dark.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
Then we don't lie to you.
(turns to Xavier)
Let's see who deserves to fly.

CLOSE ON MARCUS

The roar of the crowd distorts — animal, hungry.

Marcus looks at Bobby.

Not a showman.

The crowd goes feral. He snaps the whip inches from Xavier.

Stagehands hesitate. Xavier climbs like Navy Seal on mission back to the perch.

Stephanie's whisper, only for herself—

STEPHANIE
What are you doing..

The net is pulled.

The tent goes dead.

ROUND TWO.

Igor and Xavier fly again— perfect transfers.

Once. Twice. Three.

Xavier hangs upside down. Blindfold on.

CUT TO BOBBY

Bobby watches from below.

Jaw tight.

They don't need him up there.

They never did.

Igor blindfolds too.

IGOR

Дышать.

Xavier breathes with him.

CLOSE ON MARCUS

The crowd disappears.

IGOR

Сейчас.

SLOW MOTION—

Igor releases. Twists. Flies—

CLASP.

VELCRO LOCKS.

They hang by one arm. Muscles pumped. Brut force.

A thousands lungs release at once.

Punch. Punch. Punch.

They rip blindfolds off.

Land on opposite perches like kings.

Below, Bobby owns the center.

BOBBY

THE BLIND RUSSIAN ROULETTE!

Marcus watches Bobby soaking in the ovation.

Arms wide.

King of the ring.

Marcus doesn't clap.

Marcus watches Bobby basking in the ovation.

They descend on cables— adrenaline vibrating off them.

A three-way collision of bodies— sweat, laughter, too-close celebration.

Marcus forces a smile.

But his eyes stay on Bobby.

She pulls Xavier aside.

STEPHANIE

That fall—

XAVIER

(smiles)

Never play your winning hand first.

He walks off.

FADE OUT

EXT. BIG TOP MIDWAY - NIGHT - AFTER THE SHOW

IGOR (V.O.)

*The circus is what real life should
be like.*

Sincerity. Feeling. No lies.

*Artists working together to give a
smile.*

— Princess Stephanie of Monaco.

Marcus moves through the midway.

Boys win teddy bears for girls. Rides flash and spin. The calliope wobbles in the distance.

Miss Avalon weaves through patrons, reading hands, collecting secrets.

Marcus heads toward the lion cages— lost in thought, fingers unconsciously miming a three-ball juggle.

He COLLIDES— dead stop.

Igor stands in front of him.

IGOR
Brother. Pay attention.

A misstep gets you killed.

MARCUS
I'll remember.

IGOR
Where are you going with no reason
in your feet?

MARCUS
Carson. He started something
earlier.
I want to finish it.

They walk.

Marcus keeps glancing back toward the Big Top.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
You almost died up there.

Igor adjusts the tape on his wrist.

IGOR
He wouldn't let me.

Marcus frowns.

MARCUS
Bobby?

Igor shakes his head.

IGOR
Xavier.
Some act, huh?

They pass Miss Petre and Krankowski— moving fast, eyes
forward. Marcus nods. No reply.

They pass the animal cages.

A tiger watches from behind bars.

The tiger doesn't blink. Neither does Marcus.

He can't tell if it's tame... or waiting.

At the mess tent, Cedric stands outside— head lowered, not
welcoming.

CEDRIC (RUSSIAN)

Не путайте действия с честью.
(Don't confuse action with honor.)

Marcus answers without showing off.

MARCUS (RUSSIAN)

Я вас понимаю.
(I understand you.)

Cedric doesn't move. Marcus and Igor route around him.

Xavier jogs up, coming from the Lion cage, slightly winded, distracted.

XAVIER

You see Bobby?

Marcus clocks the distraction.

Xavier peels off, scanning.

Ahead: Carson's trailer.

The door opens. Bobby steps out – sees Marcus and Igor.

Too fast, he shuts the door behind him.

Starts walking the other way. Doesn't look back.

Marcus knocks.

MARCUS

Carson?

No answer.

Carson's trailer has "reset" energy (bed made, items missing)

Marcus spots a faint pale dust on the inside doorknob.

He rubs it. Tack.

A note:

CARSON (V.O.)

Had to leave. Needed a break.

Igor and Marcus look. Don't buy it.

A distant sound of a carousel still turning.

INT. BACKSTAGE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Dim bulbs. Canvas walls breathing with distant crowd noise.

Bobby wipes chalk from his hands. Still buzzing from the show.

Marcus steps into his path.

MARCUS

You were different tonight.

Bobby smiles – but it doesn't reach his eyes.

BOBBY

Was I?

MARCUS

You looked fearless.

(beat)

Like you had nothing to lose.

Behind Bobby, unseen by him – Xavier leans in a shadowed doorway, listening.

Bobby rolls his shoulders, savoring the moment.

BOBBY

This has always been me.

(leans closer)

I just needed the spotlight.

Marcus doesn't back up.

MARCUS

And Xavi?

Bobby's smile tightens. A flash of something feral.

BOBBY

He doesn't know what I'm capable of.

(beat)

None of you do.

A long stare.

Bobby brushes past Marcus – shoulder contact, intentional.

He walks off.

Silence.

Then–

XAVIER (O.S.)
Careful.

Marcus turns. Xavier steps forward from the shadows.

XAVIER (CONT'D)
Leave him to me.
(half smile)
Third act's coming up.
(beat)
It's going to be a killer.

Xavier heads in Bobby's direction.

Marcus stands alone in the corridor, the crowd's roar bleeding through the canvas like distant thunder.

INT. MESS TENT - MORNING

Gray light through canvas. Coffee. No one sitting comfortably.

The whole cast gathered.

Marcus scans faces. Notebooks closed. Watching breathing.

MR. KRANKOWSKI
We can't shut down.
We're booked all week. We lose the dates, we're done.

MISS PETRE
Who replaces Carson?

Eyes flicker.

Igor, steady.

IGOR
Two acts. Two paychecks.

Stephanie nods once. Approved.

MARCUS
Somebody here just made a mistake.

Silence.

XAVIER
(measured)
He's not pointing fingers.
He's counting bodies.

A ripple of discomfort.

Xavier stands. He begins circling the table.

Slow. Predatory.

XAVIER (CONT'D)

Two dead.
One gone.

He goes behind Stephanie and turns her around.

XAVIER (CONT'D)

Funny how money always arrives on
time.

He stops briefly behind Cedric. Petre. Bobby

XAVIER (CONT'D)

That means whoever did this... has
been eating with us.

A breath.

He turns over a Tarot card with panache: THE DEVIL

XAVIER (CONT'D)

Sleeping beside us.
Drinking beside us.
Bleeding beside us.

Xavier leans forward slightly.

XAVIER (CONT'D)

(to Krankowski)
Some debts last longer than
contract. Not everything can be
paid off.

Voice lowers.

XAVIER (CONT'D)

And when I find out who—

A knife appears—

THUNK— pinning THE DEVIL card to the table inches from Igor's
knuckles.

XAVIER (CONT'D)

—I'll break them.

Beat.

The knife disappears as fast as it arrived.

In the same motion Xavier pulls Bobby into a tight headlock.

Air leaves Bobby.

XAVIER (CONT'D)

Or maybe...

He loosens just enough for Bobby to gasp.

XAVIER (CONT'D)

...the killer is sitting next to you.

He releases Bobby. Lets him stumble back into his seat.

Xavier pulls into Marcus, whispers low.

XAVIER (CONT'D)

Maybe it's me.

He sits.

XAVIER (CONT'D)

Either way...

(beat)

I'm going to enjoy it.

Xavier flicks the blade open. Marcus's reflection warps in the steel. For a second, it looks like someone else.

Silence.

XAVIER (CONT'D)

Eyes up. It's showtime. Bobby,
Igor, rehearsal.

Xavier walks out. Bobby and Igor follow.

No one exhales.

CUT.

EXT. SIDESHOW TENT - BETWEEN ACTS - DAY

Crowd noise hums. Performers reset props.

Marcus stands off to the side, cataloging.

Igor and Cedric charm a young couple. Easy laughs.

Across the way- Xavier stands with a handsome young Hispanic man. Close conversation.

Private in public.

The man presses folded bills into Xavier's hand.

Xavier doesn't count it. Just pockets it.

They slip behind a hanging curtain.

Marcus clocks it. Looks away. Then back.

Minutes later: Xavier steps out alone, lights a cigarette.

The young man emerges— flushed, trying to look casual.

He lingers.

MAN

You gonna call?

Xavier pulls him in. Kisses him. Eyes never leaving Marcus.

Then— He lets him go.

XAVIER

No.

The man nods. Walks off.

Xavier crushes the cigarette.

Still watching Marcus.

Smoke hangs between them.

Marcus steps toward him. Slow.

They stop inches apart.

XAVIER (CONT'D)

You got something to say, cop?

MARCUS

Just making sure you're getting paid.

A flicker.

XAVIER

You're still here.
(beat)

XAVIER (CONT'D)

You've seen how I work.

MARCUS

Yeah.
 (beat)
 I'm starting to.

Wind through canvas. The crowd erupts inside the Big Top.

Neither moves.

XAVIER

Careful.
 (quiet)
 I don't miss twice.

Marcus almost smiles.

MARCUS

We'll see.

EXT. MESS TENT - AFTERNOON

Marcus approaches. Voices inside.

BOBBY (O.S.)

I want what's mine.

STEPHANIE (O.S.)

You were never promised that.

BOBBY (O.S.)

He told me. Partner.

STEPHANIE (O.S.)

He was dying.

A SLAP.

Marcus steps in fast – catches Bobby's wrist mid-swing.

MARCUS

Stop.

Bobby's breathing is feral.

Stephanie is ice.

STEPHANIE

Do that again –
 (beat)
 I won't miss.

Bobby heads out.

MARCUS

Hold up.

Bobby turns. Smiling like a bruise.

BOBBY

What?
You gonna shoot me too?

(beat)

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Like the rest stop?

He walks.

Marcus doesn't answer.

Work lights burn hot. Crew resets quietly.

Igor, Cedric, Xavier – low conversation.

It dies when Marcus enters.

MARCUS

Time we talked.

Cedric starts to drift.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Carson didn't trust you.

Cedric stops.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Natasha didn't either.

A beat.

IGOR

What are you implying?

MARCUS

Nothing.
(beat)
I'm counting.

Cedric's jaw tightens.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

You and Natasha argued that
afternoon.

CEDRIC
People argue.

MARCUS
She fell.

Silence.

IGOR (RUSSIAN)
Седрик... ты идиот?

Cedric doesn't answer.

Marcus lets that sit.

MARCUS
You knew about the affair.
(beat)
Да?

That lands harder in Russian.

Igor snaps his fingers. Cedric moves with him. They exit – fast.

Xavier steps close. He presses one finger into Marcus' chest.

XAVIER
Careful.
(beat)

XAVIER (CONT'D)
Secrets don't stay buried.
People do.

WHOOOSH –

A knife lands at Marcus's boot.

Marcus doesn't look down.

MARCUS
You and me?
(beat)
Different fires.

Xavier steps in, pulls the blade free. Wipes it once on Marcus's sleeve.

XAVIER
No.
(quiet)
Same fire.

He walks off.

Marcus exhales— controlled.

Stephanie enters. Bruise visible.

STEPHANIE
So? Where are we?

Marcus clocks the bruise.

MARCUS
You okay?

STEPHANIE
Please.
(beat)
Nothing glitter won't fix.

MARCUS
Bobby thinks he's owed.

STEPHANIE
He always does.
(beat)
We survived bad years.
His uncle floated us.
We paid him back.
(beat)
Bobby only remembers the fantasy.

Marcus watches her carefully.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)
Solve it.
I won't lose anyone else.

She exits.

Marcus stands alone.

Applause swells inside the tent.

His eyes drift to:

- Rigging
- Knife marks in dirt
- The exit flap Xavier used
- Stephanie's retreating figure

INT. XAVIER'S TRAILER - NIGHT

A knock.

Xavier doesn't move.

Another knock.

He opens the door.

Bobby stands there. Glitter scrubbed off. Black eye visible now.

No performance.

XAVIER

What.

Xavier turns away.

Bobby steps inside. Door shuts.

Generator hum. Close air.

BOBBY

What am I to you?

XAVIER

You're loud.

BOBBY

That's not what I meant.

A beat.

XAVIER

You're useful.

Silence.

BOBBY

Useful.

XAVIER

You like the spotlight.

BOBBY

And when I burn out?

Xavier steps closer.

XAVIER

Then you step aside.

Bobby laughs once. Thin.

BOBBY
Right.
(beat)

BOBBY (CONT'D)
You don't care who falls.

XAVIER
Only if they fall on me.

BOBBY
No.

Xavier's eyes flick.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
You don't get to decide what I am.

A beat.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
You think this is your show?

XAVIER
It is.

BOBBY
Not without me.

Marcus walks.

Not aimless.

Processing.

He texts.

Leads converging.

ON SCREEN:

Phone away.

He moves through the grounds.

Something's off.

Cedric drives a stake into the mud.

WHAM.

WHAM.

WHAM.

Too hard.

Doesn't look up.

Further down –

Igor stands with a thick-necked Russian in a heavy coat.

Not circus.

Not local.

They stop talking when Marcus passes.

Miss Petre stands close to Krankowski.

Too close.

They see Marcus.

Conversation ends.

Petre smiles.

Marcus moves through the grounds.

He stops for a hotdog. A kid bumps him. Mustard goes on his shirt.

A shadow crosses behind him.

A hand clamps over his mouth.

Cloth.

Sweet chemical sting.

Marcus twists –

Too late.

Black.

Dark.

Hood ripped off.

Marcus tied to a chair.

A card rests in his lap.

THE JOKER.

Pinned to his chest:

STOP ASKING.

No sound but breathing.

A door opens behind him.

We don't see who.

Footsteps approach.

A whisper – too close to his ear:

VOICE (O.S.)
Careful.

Then –

Black again.

EXT. TRAILERS – MOMENTS LATER

Marcus stumbles out from between units.

Disoriented.

Then–

SMACK.

He collides with Miss Petre and Krankowski.

Brochures explode. Pierre yaps.

A bottle rolls.

A card slides across gravel.

THE JOKER.

They all freeze.

Half a second.

Then crouch.

Miss Petre's hand reaches the Joker first– then she realizes what she did... and lets Marcus see it.

Marcus picks up the bottle.

Label visible.

CHLOROFORM. "SOLVENT / CLEANING AGENT" OR "ANESTHETIC ETHER"
OR "INDUSTRIAL DEGREASER" WITH CHLOROFORM AS AN INGREDIENT

He turns it in his fingers.

MARCUS
Chloroform?

MISS PETRE
For mice.

She smiles.

Pierre growls.

Krankowski studies Marcus' face.

MR. KRANKOWSKI
You should ice that.

Marcus stills.

MARCUS
Ice what?

Krankowski gestures vaguely toward his temple.

MR. KRANKOWSKI
You hit something.

They walk off.

EXT. BIG TOP - CONTINUOUS

Marcus stands alone.

Near his boot - A business card half-buried in gravel.

ERIE BANK & TRUST

Account: 3489256

He picks it up. Studies it.

Looks up.

Xavier walks by. Unhurried.

A kid runs up, breathless.

KID
Hey mister - is the knife thrower
real?

Marcus doesn't look at the kid. He looks at Xavier.

MARCUS
He's real.
(beat)
And he doesn't miss.

Xavier's eyebrow lifts. Just slightly.

The kid spins toward him.

KID
Mr. Knife-Guy! Can I get your
autograph?

Xavier drops instantly into warmth. Kneels. He signs with a flourish. Smiles like he's harmless. The kid beams. Runs off.

Xavier stands.

Back to Marcus now. The warmth gone.

A small smile.

Then he walks on.

MISS AVALON (O.S.)
Marcus.

He turns.

She stands in shadow. Not smiling.

She turns. Disappears inside her trailer.

INT. MISS AVALON'S PSYCHIC TRAILER - NIGHT

Low light. Candles. Smoke. No performance.

MISS AVALON
Your left hand.

Marcus hesitates. Then gives it.

She turns his wrist.

Her thumb traces the faded scales-and-blade tattoo.

MISS AVALON (CONT'D)
Ah.

MARCUS
What.

MISS AVALON
You don't chase monsters.
(beat)
You hunt balance.

She lays the cards, one at a time.

THE DEVIL. THE TOWER. SEVEN OF SWORDS. THE LOVERS – REVERSED.

Marcus notices the last one.

MARCUS
That's new.

MISS AVALON
No.
(quiet)
It's not.

She taps the reversed Lovers.

MISS AVALON (CONT'D)
Misaligned union.
Trust turned. Choice made for the
wrong reason.

Marcus stiffens.

MISS AVALON (CONT'D)
Focus on your mission.
Find what is killing us.

Her thumb presses again into his wrist—

A sharp pulse. Not mystical. Neurological.

Marcus pulls back.

MARCUS
What the hell was that?

MISS AVALON
You know what it was.
(beat)
Your gift.

He doesn't like that word.

MISS AVALON (CONT'D)
You're close.

A shadow crosses the canvas window.

Marcus moves instantly. Opens the door.

Cedric stands there.

Still.

Watching.

Marcus studies him. Shuts the door.

Inside—

The candles are already blown out.

Dark.

MISS AVALON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Your mother had it.

MARCUS
Don't.

MISS AVALON
You just don't trust it.

Marcus exits.

EXT. MISS AVALON'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

Cedric is gone.

Marcus exhales. Barely.

Mr. Pierre trots up. Tail stiff. Leg already lifting.

MARCUS
Oh no you don't—

Marcus scoops him up— Too slow.

Pierre sinks his teeth into Marcus's left hand.

The same hand.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
(low)
We're gonna be friends.

Pierre growls. Doesn't release.

Miss Petre arrives, serene.

MISS PETRE

Pierre.

The dog releases instantly.

Miss Petre studies Marcus's hand a beat too long.

MISS PETRE (CONT'D)

You shouldn't provoke what you
don't understand.

She takes the dog. Moves off.

Marcus watches her go.

Blood beads at the bite.

A little girl brushes past with cotton candy.

Sticky pink smears across the wound.

The mother yanks her away.

MOTHER

Honey— don't touch.
(whispers)
It's all an act.

They disappear into the crowd.

Marcus looks down at his hand.

Blood and pink sugar.

He wipes it slowly.

MONTAGE - 24 HOURS IN ERIE

MISS PETRE (V.O.)

There are people who have money...
and people who are rich.

- Xavier throws. Perfect.

MISS PETRE (V.O.)

Having money is simple.
It can disappear.

- Cedric lifts. - Stephanie arguing over ledgers.

MISS PETRE (V.O.)
 Being rich...
 is knowing who owes you.

– Bobby's trailer door closes. – Blind Roulette earns applause.

MISS PETRE (V.O.)
 Applause does not put money in the bank.

– ERIE BANK & TRUST.

MISS PETRE (V.O.)
 But fear does.

Cut.

END MONTAGE

INT. ERIE BANK & TRUST – DAY

Bright fluorescents. Too bright. Carpet vacuum-lined. Air over-conditioned.

Marcus enters with faint pink cotton candy smeared on his cuff – absurd against the marble.

He sits.

Across from him – JANE CONWAY (48). Polished. Severe bob. Blood-red lipstick. A gold pen aligned perfectly parallel to her keyboard.

She doesn't look up immediately.

JANE CONWAY
 And you are...?

Marcus slides his badge across.

She studies it without touching it. Then – delicately – rotates it ninety degrees so it faces her properly.

JANE CONWAY (CONT'D)
 Federal.
 We don't get many of you in Erie.

MARCUS
 I'm looking for an account.
 (beat)
 Three-four-eight-nine-two-five-six.

A flicker. She didn't expect that precision.
She types. Nails click softly. The printer hums.

JANE CONWAY
You know... most people ask for
balances.
You asked for ownership.

She slides the page halfway across.

Marcus reads.

SPATA HOLDINGS.

Silence.

Jane instinctively moves to retrieve the paper.

Marcus places two fingers on it.

Still. Final.

MARCUS
How long has the account been open?

JANE CONWAY
Longer than your file, Mr. Marcus.

She studies his hand – notices the cotton candy smear.

JANE CONWAY (CONT'D)
Carnival in town?

MARCUS
Something like that.

She releases the paper.

JANE CONWAY
SPATA moves money the way other
people move furniture.
Quietly. Overnight.
(beat)
They prefer towns like ours.

Marcus folds the paper once. Twice. Into thirds. Precise.

He stands.

JANE CONWAY (CONT'D)
Mr. Marcus—

He pauses.

JANE CONWAY (CONT'D)
If you're going to dig..
don't dig alone.

Not flirt. Not warning. Something else.

MARCUS
Do I need to?

She smiles – small. Surgical.

JANE CONWAY
Everyone does.

He hands her a card.

She finally pulls it without asking

JANE CONWAY (CONT'D)
Erie looks sleepy.
It isn't.

Marcus exits.

Jane watches him go.

Then – almost imperceptibly – she locks her computer screen.

CUT.

EXT. CARNIVAL LIGHTS BIG TOP – NIGHT

ON SCREEN: FINAL SHOW OF ERIE, PA

The midway screams. Lights strobe. Laughter bleeds into metal.

Miss Avalon's reading stand sits empty.

Marcus watches the crowd like he's guarding something already lost.

INTERCUT – XAVIER

Behind a side entrance curtain.

He adjusts his cuff.

Stephanie appears beside Marcus.

STEPHANIE

Have you seen Miss Avalon?
Not like her to be late.

MARCUS

When did she check in?

No answer.

Miss Petre lingers just left of frame.

STEPHANIE

Miss Petre, could you step in for
Miss Avalon?
Do the cards?

MISS PETRE

(soft)
Of course.
It's been a while.

MARCUS

She reads?

Stephanie doesn't dignify it. Moves.

Marcus kneels near the rigging.

A small cloth grip bag sits in shadow.

He taps it.

A pale dust blooms.

Fine. Slightly tacky.

He rubs it between finger and thumb.

Igor steps up behind him.

IGOR

Grip powder.
So you don't drop someone from the
sky.

Marcus nods. But he doesn't look convinced.

STEPHANIE

Igor – where is Miss A?

Igor is already moving. Marcus follows.

EXT. MISS AVALON'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

Marcus knocks.

MARCUS
Miss Avalon?

Nothing. He opens the door.

INT. MISS AVALON'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

Incense burns low. Candles gutter.

Miss Avalon sits at the table. Head bowed.

Igor steps forward. Lifts her chin gently.

A knife buried in her chest.

Marcus's eyes drop to the handle.

A faint pale dust clings to it.

He rubs it. Same tacky powder.

Flash - grip bag.

Flash - rigging.

Marcus clocked the grip bag earlier near rigging.

Now it's on the knife.

Someone used the same "tool" twice.

Pressed into her palm:

THE THREE OF SWORDS.

Outside-

LAUGHTER. APPLAUSE.

The circus roars.

Igor closes her eyes.

MARCUS
(low)
Not a word.

Outside-

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!"

The show swells.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. BIG TOP - NIGHT

The crowd is feral.

Bobby owns the room.

BOBBY

You want more than you expected?

ROAR.

BOBBY

Then hold your breath.

Music cuts.

No drumroll. No orchestra. Nothing.

Just canvas breathing.

Up high -

Igor and Xavier don't look at the crowd.

They look at each other.

Igor wraps his right wrist in tape. Slow. Ritual.

Xavier removes his jacket. Bare forearms.

No blindfold.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

No nets.

Crew hesitates.

Stephanie doesn't blink.

The net drops.

A physical ripple moves through the audience.

THE TWIST

Igor does not move into catcher position.

He steps back.

Xavier nods once.

Then – Xavier jumps first. The flyer.

Gasps.

He swings. Releases.

Mid-air twist.

Reaches –

There is NO ONE THERE.

He is falling.

The crowd screams.

Bobby CRACKS the whip.

Half a second too long.

Then –

From above –

WHOOSH.

Igor drops from a higher shadow line.

One hand already gripping a thin overhead bar.

He falls in a controlled arc.

They collide mid-air – Forearm to forearm. Lock.

Now – Igor hangs by ONE ARM from the bar.

Xavier hangs from Igor's forearm.

No net.

Dead silence.

Not applause.

Fear.

Muscle shaking.

Igor:

IGOR

ДЫШАТЬ.

Xavier breathes. In sync.

One swing. Two. On the third –

Xavier releases, grabs a side bar.

Igor re-hooks. They cross mid-air –

Catch opposite bars.

Perfect.

Explosion.

The audience loses its mind.

BOBBY

The World Famous: BLIND RUSSIAN
ROULETTE! We will see you in Fort
Lauderdale, FL starting January 15!

Marcus looks around. Faces looking for answers.

Cedric flex to a teenage girl.

Igor makes FLUFFY Roar.

Xavier throws his knives with precision.

Bobby is signing autographs.

Mr. Krankowski happily counting money.

STEPHANIE

So?

Marcus and Stephanie leave the big top and heads into the crowd.

EXT. CARNIVAL GROUNDS – CONTINUOUS

The rides run. Marcus and Stephanie walk. No words.

They stop at the memorial tent.

Two coffins.

Natasha. Jason.

Stephanie studies them— then Marcus.

STEPHANIE

You said there were Three.

Marcus doesn't look away from the boxes.

MARCUS

Miss Avalon.

Stephanie inhales— sharp, involuntary.

The ghost light flickers. And steadies.

CUT.

EXT. UNKNOWN TRAILER - NIGHT

Marcus and Stephanie stop at a trailer tucked slightly away from the midway glow.

No music here. Just generator hum.

Marcus knocks.

A beat.

The door opens.

INT. TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

MARCUS

(easy)

There he is.

Packed suitcases. Trunks. Garment bags. A life mid-escape.

MISS PETRE stands composed, tea service already arranged like she expected company.

MR. KRANKOWSKI is beside her—warm smile, accountant calm.

Stephanie steps in, curious—clocking the bags, the order, the readiness.

MISS PETRE

Tea? Then you can return to your badge.

STEPHANIE

(apologetic)

Miss Petre... we're sorry to disturb you at this hour.

MR. KRANKOWSKI

Warmly.
Do sit down.

MR. PIERRE trots over to Marcus—leg lifting.

MR. KRANKOWSKI (CONT'D)

Mr. Pierre—be a gentleman.

The poodle pauses... considers Marcus... then returns to Krankowski with offended dignity.

Marcus's eyes stay on the luggage.

MISS PETRE

See your dreams. Live your dreams.
Paris

Then looks to Krankowski.

MARCUS

Gun.

A beat.

Stephanie's eyes flash: What are you doing?

Krankowski calmly reaches into his breast pocket and hands over a small pistol like this is perfectly reasonable. Like handing over a pen.

Marcus pockets it.

STEPHANIE

(quiet)

Marcus! We are both so sorry for this inconvenience—

His eyes locked with Miss Petre and Mr. Krankowski.

PETRE

(softly)

I had no idea he was capable of this.

Krankowski laughs – broken.

KRANKOWSKI

Capable?

Mon chéri... this was your plan.

Petre doesn't look at him.

Krankowski pours tea for Stephanie and Marcus.

None for himself.

None for Miss Petre.

A subtle detail—almost missed.

Marcus eases Stephanie back into her chair with a gentle hand.

A smile like manners.

KRANKOWSKI (CONT'D)

You told me he had to go.

PETRE

I said the carnival must live.

(beat)

You misunderstood.

Stephanie lifts the cup.

Marcus covers her hand—stops her. Lowers it.

Miss Petre doesn't blink.

MISS PETRE

Perhaps too hot, dear.

Let it cool.

Silence.

Stephanie looks at Marcus—alarmed.

Marcus smiles back—calm.

MARCUS

(to Krankowski)

You're done.

(to Petre)

You're not as smart as you think.

PETRE

No. I'm smarter than you hoped.

MARCUS

Miss Petre... up for a reading?

Miss Petre brightens, almost delighted.

She reaches for the tarot deck.

MISS PETRE

Oh yes. I sat at a table today for
the first time in years.

Too bad about Avalon... I will miss
her.

Marcus watches Krankowski.

No reaction.

STEPHANIE

(whispers to Marcus)

How does she know about Miss
Avalon?

MR. KRANKOWSKI

Miss Petre... we do have a flight to
catch.

Marcus's smile fades.

MARCUS

Not tonight.
Maybe never.

MISS PETRE

What shall we read for?

MARCUS

You.

She keeps shuffling anyway. Smooth. Ritual.

MISS PETRE

And what question shall we answer?

Marcus leans in—quiet.

MARCUS

Why.

Miss Petre exhales like she's been holding that breath for
years.

She stops shuffling.

Turns over four cards—

FOUR OF PENTACLES.

KNIGHT OF PENTACLES.

FIVE OF CUPS.

THE CHARIOT.

Stephanie's eyes widen—she recognizes the language.

Marcus looks to Stephanie.

MARCUS

Stephanie... you've got the gift.
Tell me what it says.

Stephanie inhales—focus clicks on. She becomes sharp.

STEPHANIE

Four of Pentacles.
Control.
Holding. Greed.
A fist around the circus.

Marcus pulls the bank sheet from his pocket.

Slides it—face down—toward Miss Petre.

Miss Petre flips it. Reads. A micro-flinch.

Marcus looks at Krankowski.

Mr. Pierre stands at attention like he knows the room changed.

MARCUS

Three names on the holding account.
Jason Daniels
Simon Paul Albright (Krankowski)
Simone Avalon.

Stephanie stares at Krankowski.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Beneficiaries: Tilda Albright and
the heirs.

Stephanie stiffens.

STEPHANIE
Heir. I'm the heir.

Krankowski finally speaks—flat, honest.

MR. KRANKOWSKI
Jason was bleeding the business
dry.

MISS PETRE
He wanted out. I found the Moscow
boys. I found the leverage and he
found out. You can't run a
carnival on applause.

Marcus places the KING OF DIAMONDS on the table.

A quiet accusation.

MARCUS
Fibers in Jason's lungs from his
hospital pillow.
(beat)
And he fought back.

Marcus nods toward Krankowski's right forearm.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Turn it over.

Krankowski does.

A deep scratch—half healed.

Stephanie's breath catches.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Skin under his fingernails.

Miss Petre doesn't look away.

MISS PETRE
I did love Jason.
(soft)
He just wouldn't let go of the old
ways.

Stephanie looks between them—confused, betrayed.

STEPHANIE
Marcus we looked at this. All the
money coming and going.

Marcus sets down the SPATA contract.

Krankowski's smile returns—faint, private.

MARCUS

SPATA.

Simon Paul Albright.

That would be you Krankowski.

Krankowski doesn't deny it.

Miss Petre's mouth tightens—one fraction of a second.

MISS PETRE

There is enough money for everyone.

We can learn to do with a little

less, right Mr. Pierre?

Miss Petre answers without shame.

MISS PETRE (CONT'D)

Thirty-one years. "Tilda Albright."

SPATA.

Krankowski gives a small nod.

MR. KRANKOWSKI

Albright didn't sound theatrical.

Stephanie swallows.

She looks back to the cards—clinging to structure.

STEPHANIE

Knight of Pentacles...

Loyalty. Duty.

Someone who stays... while everyone
else performs.

Marcus places the QUEEN OF HEARTS on the table.

MARCUS

Money transferred offshore. Also to
to an account marked "H. Daniels."

Stephanie's eyes flash.

STEPHANIE

H...?

Marcus doesn't answer yet.

He slides the QUEEN OF SPADES onto the table.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)

Five of Cups...
Grief. Spite. Punishment.

Miss Petre's face goes still—then she speaks like she's reading her own autopsy.

MISS PETRE

Natasha talked.
(beat)
He said he was afraid of heights. I
cut one rope. One sound.

She closes her eyes.

MISS PETRE (CONT'D)

And then... silence.

Stephanie trembles—rage and horror.

Marcus sets down the JACK OF SPADES.

STEPHANIE

And the Chariot...
escape.

She looks at the suitcases.

Krankowski nods calmly.

MR. KRANKOWSKI

Taking charge of destiny.

Marcus's eyes harden.

MARCUS

Carson knew.

Krankowski's sips on the tea.

MR. KRANKOWSKI

He listened too much.
(beat)
I paid him for silence.
Then I got tired of paying. He just
went away.

STEPHANIE

Carson, too?

Marcus nods once.

A knock at the door.

Marcus stands.

MARCUS
I'll get it.

He opens— XAVIER stands there.

Calm. Certain.

He steps inside like he belongs.

STEPHANIE
What?

Marcus turns to Miss Petre.

MARCUS
Turn the last card.

SIX OF CUPS.

Xavier's voice is solid.

XAVIER
You forgot one heir.

Marcus takes the worn photograph from his pocket.

He places it down.

A younger Miss Avalon. Jason Daniels. And a small boy half-turned from the camera.

Stephanie leans in.

STEPHANIE
That's Jason.

MARCUS
When I walked into Avalon's
trailer...
that photo was the only thing that
felt... protected.
(beat) I tracked "H. Daniels."

Marcus looks at Xavier.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
You didn't come for money.
You came home.

Silence.

XAVIER

You two skimmed off the top.
 You tried to pay off a forgotten
 child.
 Now you don't get to.

Stephanie whispers—shattered.

STEPHANIE

Heirs to Carnival Lights...
 Stephanie Daniels... and Xavier
 Daniels.

Miss Petre lowers her gaze.

Krankowski removes his glasses.

No one breathes.

Marcus looks to Miss Petre.

MARCUS

Miss Petre. The Knife.

A long beat.

Miss Petre produces the knife—handles it like a sacrament.

Marcus holds it—then returns it, hilt-first, to Xavier.

A transfer of truth.

Krankowski swallows.

KRANKOWSKI We could have handled him.

PETRE

No.
 He would have looked.
 (to Xavier)
 You should have stayed a lost boy.

XAVIER

I was never lost.
 Just paid to forget.

MR. KRANKOWSKI

Mr. Pierre... you go with Marcus.

A knock on the door.

MARCUS

That would be the Erie Police.

Two officers come in.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAILER - NIGHT

Xavier steps out into the midway glow, already moving on.

MARCUS (O.S.)
Xavi. A word.

Xavier stops. Turns. No nerves. No curiosity.

XAVIER
You want pointers on swallowing the
sword?

Marcus steps closer—quiet, surgical.

MARCUS
Those payments.
(beat)
They weren't charity.

Xavier's face doesn't move.

Stillness.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Your middle name?

Xavier smiles—small, private.

XAVIER
Houdini.

He turns.

Disappears into the crowd.

Marcus watches—no victory, no defeat.

EXT. CARNIVAL GROUNDS - LATE NIGHT

Rides still run. Half-empty seats.

Marcus carries Mr. Pierre comfortably.

Marcus texts.

TEXT:
Carnival Lights. Solved.

He hits send.

He looks at the Big Top—empty, lit.

INT. BIG TOP - CONTINUOUS

Marcus steps into the ring alone.

Work lights. Dust.

He starts juggling.

Easy.

Unforced.

Like he's been practicing longer than he admits.

In the shadows:

Igor watches—half-smile.

Cedric watches—unmoved.

IGOR
Quick study.

CEDRIC
Still not family.

Marcus keeps juggling.

MARCUS (V.O.)
No applause.
Just gravity.

He bows.

Mr. Pierre pads into the ring, raises a paw—almost like a handshake.

Marcus lifts him.

They exit into the hum of the carnival.

INT. BOBBY'S TRAILER - SAME NIGHT

A knock.

Bobby opens the door—smug.

BOBBY
 Took you long enough. Where were
 you?

XAVIER (O.S.)
 Shhhh.
 (beat)
 Family business.

Xavier steps in.

From deeper inside—

IGOR (O.S.)
 Разденься.
 (Get undressed.)

Bobby's grin falters— then returns, forced.

Xavier shuts the door.

Xavier removes his shirt. Igor, shirtless in bed. Taps
 beside him. Smiles like a hungry tiger.

FLUFFY (O.S.)
 ROAR!

The trailer light clicks off.

EXT. CARNIVAL GROUNDS - NIGHT

The carnival alive.

XAVIER (V.O.)
 Tomorrow... I'm someone else.

MARCUS (V.O.)
 Sounds lonely.

Carousel turns behind him. Empty horses rising and falling.

XAVIER (V.O.)
 Only if you hang on to yesterday.

Marcus reaches the edge of the grounds.

Turns back once.

One ride still turns in the distance.

Alone.

MARCUS (V.O.)
That's the thing about carnivals..
(beat)
They don't wait for you to be
ready.
(beat)
They keep going..
(beat)
until somebody cuts the power.

The DANIELS CARNIVAL LIGHTS sign flickers.

One letter dies.

Then another.

The last bulb pops.

In the distance – A generator continues humming.

BLACK.

THE END.