

HANDPRINT

A MODERN NOIR SET IN LOS ANGELES

72 HOURS. 8 BODIES. 1 SURVIVOR. One left to lie.

Lone wolves don't know they're alone.

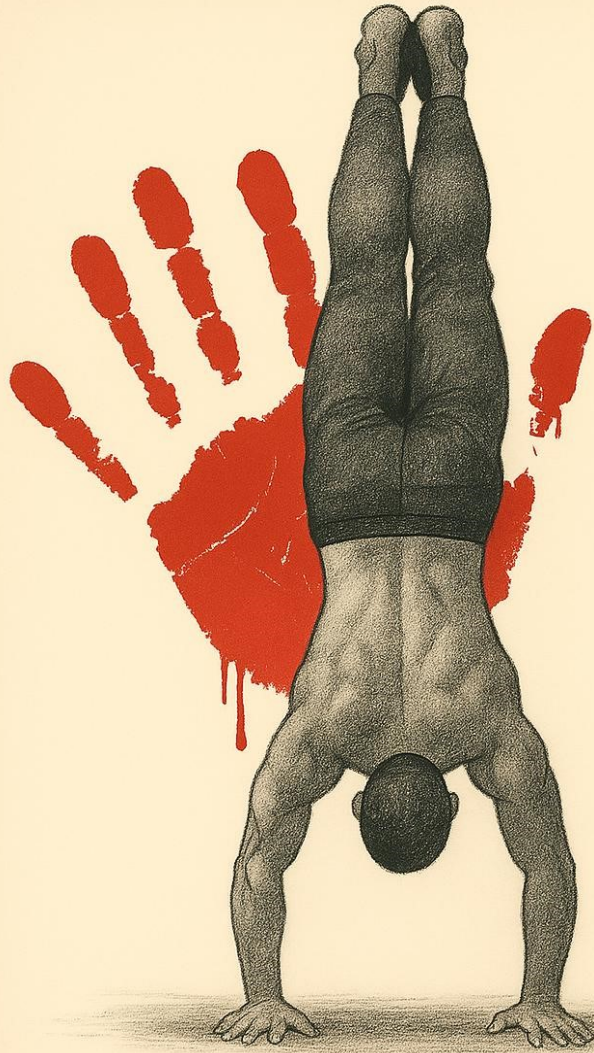
Until one day, they wake up hunted.

Written by

Dennis J Manning

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HANDPRINT

WRITTEN BY
DENNIS J MANNING

BLACK SCREEN.

SFX: WIND – cold, empty.

FERNANDO
(O.S., low, almost amused)

And you die... before the opening credits.

WRITTEN ON SCREEN, like type striking paper:
*Sometimes the ones who tear us open
never stay –
but what they leave behind?
We write stories about that.*

BLACK HOLDS.

The word "PROLOGUE" emerges from the dark –
like fog across a stage, swallowing the screen.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE – NIGHT

A cavernous black box. Dust hangs in the air like ghost-light
smoke. A single GHOST LIGHT glows center stage.

A GLOVED HAND enters frame. Reaches for the switch.

Just as it's about to flick off–

WHISPER (O.S.)
Macbeth.

The hand freezes.

The light stays on.

SMASH CUT TO:

CLAPPERBOARD

"DEUCE'S WILD – TAKE ONE – SOUNDSTAGE #5"

CLACK.

INT. BRIDGET'S STUDY - NIGHT

ALEX flips through a worn photo album. Edges soft. Pages fragile.

A photo: A YOUNG WOMAN - fierce, laughing - holds a baby.

ALEX
(soft)
Rose.

Below the image, written in a flowing hand: Rose Delaney -
1997

He turns the page. Another photo: Rose and Bridget. Too close. Too posed.

ALEX (CONT'D)
(quiet)
What were you hiding, Bridget?

BLACK SCREEN.

ALEX (V.O.)
Lone wolves don't know they're
alone. They just keep moving. Cool.
Controlled. Until the blood says
otherwise.

SFX: A SINGLE THUNDERCLAP - LOUD.

A bolt of lightning slices through clouds.

We PUSH THROUGH STORM - then THROUGH SUN - then THROUGH A
WINDOW-

FADE TO BLACK &
WHITE:

INT. FERNANDO'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - 2001 - DAY

ON SCREEN: 2001

Block letters spell "FERNANDO" above the bed.

A SMALL BOY (5) in a red sweater opens a drawer. Inside - an old LOCKET. He opens it. Two women: ROSE and BRIDGET.

FERNANDO
 (softly)
 Two mothers. One too many.

He sets it beside a crude crayon drawing: A stick boy. A woman. A jagged red slash.

He draws a knife. Then blood. Scribbled. Childlike. Disturbing.

ON SCREEN –
 SHAKY RED
 CRAYON:

ONE DOWN.

THE FAMILY TREE:

The "N" is backwards. The "D" has a heart inside. A small RED fingerprint smears the page.

CHILD'S VOICE (O.S.)
 (sing song, soft)
 One down...

A photograph drops into frame.

FRONT ROW:

Alex (18 months) clutching a toy stage mask.

Anne (12 months) hugging a worn cat plush.

Fernando (5) in a tiny suit jacket, straight-backed, eyes locked on the camera.

Simone (6) – hair ribbon tied in a bow, bright, defiant.

SECOND ROW: Bridget, Carl, Rose, Quentin – adults frozen mid-smile.

SFX: Heartbeat. A faint THUD – a body hitting stairs. A woman's scream – CUT OFF.

In the photo, ROSE's image flickers... and vanishes.

SILENCE.

ON SCREEN: ONE DOWN.

CAMERA PUSHES OUT — THROUGH THE WINDOW of the frozen moment. Glass catches faint reflections of clouds, faint echoes of a heartbeat.

ALEX (O.S.)
 (hums, soft)
 "Flowers" by Miley Cyrus..."

ON SCREEN:

FRIDAY — 10:00 AM — TICK TOCK.

72 HOURS REMAINING.

BACK TO COLOR —
 PRESENT DAY:

Same photo — now in a silver frame. FRONT ROW: Alex, Anne, Fernando (hand resting lightly on Alex's shoulder), Simone (same ribbon now loose). SECOND ROW: Bridget, Quentin.

Smiles colder now. Eyes heavier.

BEGIN FILM PROPER — TITLE CARD: HANDPRINT.

CREDITS ROLL
 OVER:

Hollywood Hills. Flashes of movie sets, galas, awards, glamour. Alex in a brutal handstand. Pushups. Fernando working every angle — a shadow in every frame.

INT. ALEX'S HIGH-RISE — MORNING

Sunlight floods a minimalist bedroom. White sheets. One pillow disturbed. Stillness too clean to trust.

A low purr.

ROCKY, sleek gray tabby with yellow, knowing eyes, hops onto the bed.

Pads silently over to ALEX (30) — sculpted, unreadable, with the stillness of a sniper.

Rocky presses his head into Alex's chest. Right over where the heart is.

A soft meow.

Alex's eyes blink open. No panic. No alarm. Just... awake. Like he heard a cue no one else did.

He slips from bed, naked. Graceful. Controlled. Slides into fitted black boxer briefs. One motion. One breath.

Rocky follows, tail up – but his eyes stay fixed on the hallway.

INT. LIVING ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Alex walks barefoot across polished floors. LA sprawls beyond the glass – glittering and indifferent.

♪ He hums “Flowers” by Miley Cyrus. Off-key. Calm. Ironic.

Rocky hops onto the couch. Eyes lock. Tail stiffens. Muscles tense.

He SEES something.

ALEX
(soft, amused)
What caught your eye, Rocky?

Alex turns casually, still humming – ♪ “I can buy myself flowers...”

–and stops.

His breath freezes.

A NAKED BODY lies face-down on the living room floor. A chef's knife buried between the shoulders. Blood pooled and drying – sticky, maroon, already turning.

Empty Martini glass on the bar.

Francisco.

Alex locks up. One heartbeat. Then two.

He looks down.

His left hand – stained in blood.

His breath catches. He stumbles backward, knocking into a chair. Rocky hisses.

Alex turns toward the hallway mirror –

INT. BEDROOM - MIRRORED WALL - MOMENTS LATER

He moves like he's underwater. He stares at himself - pale, shirtless - and then he sees it.

A single bloody handprint - pressed over his chest. Not smeared. Not accidental. Deliberate. Human. Right over the heart.

He stares at it.

And for just a beat behind him in the mirror Rocky sits in the doorway. Watching. Silent. Knowing.

Alex breathes.

ALEX
(whispers to himself,
shaken)
"You're okay. You're okay. It's
just a scene. Just a role."
(beat, barely believing)
"You know the lines. You know how
it ends."

CUT TO:

The cell phone RINGS.

Alex flinches.

Alex walks fast - barefoot, boxer briefs, chest bare, blood visible.

The floor-to-ceiling mirror catches him.

He sees it now - full frame.

The smeared handprint across his chest.

Deliberate. Ritual. Like a mark that was meant to be left.

His lips?

Smeared in deep red lipstick.

Somehow... perfect. A kiss, or a warning?

He wipes his forearm across his mouth - the lipstick streaks like war paint.

The phone RINGS again. Loud. Closer. Meaner.

Alex glances to the bed – sleek, designer perfection. Cold neutrals. Crisp edges.

Then he sees it.

A corner of red. A shadow in white.

He pulls back the duvet –

The bloodstain spreads – massive, dark, alive.

Like a red flower blooming in slow motion.

Or a wound that's been waiting to be found.

♪ The ringtone distorts – turns harsh, electronic, menacing.

Alex sways.

VERTIGO.

Rocky is in the mirror, perched on the windowsill behind him.

His reflection doesn't blink.

Then – SNAP.

Alex breathes. A single, cold breath.

He crosses to the nightstand, grabs the phone, answers.

SPLIT SCREEN – PHONE CALL

LEFT SIDE – FERNANDO'S APARTMENT

Morning light. Espresso machine hisses. Fernando – designer shades, robe open just enough – moves like a man already in act three of his own movie.

Coffee in one hand, phone in the other, pacing with swagger.

RIGHT SIDE – ALEX'S HIGH-RISE

Muted light. Stillness. Alex – shirtless, pale, sits on the edge of his bed.

A glass on the nightstand.

Behind him, the edge of a man's bare foot is barely visible, just inside frame.

FERNANDO (LEFT)
 (bright, unbothered)
 Alex! WTF, man – You must've had
 one hell of a night.

ALEX (RIGHT)
 (gruff, shaken)
 Who?

Fernando stirs his coffee – the spoon clinks.

FERNANDO (O.S.)
 (a growl) You animal. I bet you
 killed him last night.

Alex's gaze stays locked on the body.

ALEX
 (quiet)
 He's dead.

CLICK.

A half-beat of silence.

ALEX
 (whispers)
 Fuck.

SUDDENLY –

A CLOTH CLAMPS OVER ALEX'S MOUTH. FAST. CHEMICAL.

His body jerks – one breath, one struggle –

His eyes lock on Rocky. Hold Alex's eye. Pupils dilating.
 Reflection of Rocky.

THEN – blackout.

INT. ALEX'S LIVING ROOM – MORNING – TIME JUMP

Eerie distant sound, repeating. Muffled like waking up from
 a dream. Sounding off-key and warped. Echo it like it's
 bouncing around inside ALEX's head – a trauma loop.

VOICE O.S.

"You told me I was all you'd ever need....You told me I was all you'd ever need....You told me I was all you'd ever need...."

FERNANDO

(O.S., muffled, through door)

Alex... Alex... hey, Prince Charming.. okay, I'm coming in.

A key turns. The lock clicks. The door creaks open.

THE "LIPSTICK LOOP" STOPS COLD WHEN THE DOOR OPENS.

Fernando enters – cocky, confident, tight tee, sex in sneakers. He walks like he owns the place and sold it twice.

Rocky hops down from the couch. Pads over.

Fernando crouches, clicks his tongue, fingers twitching.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

Rocky. Been keeping an eye on Prince Charming for me?

Rocky purrs. Licks his fingers. Pauses. Then looks at Alex on the floor. Eyes narrow.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

What are you tasting, gato?

Rocky meows. Low. Like he knows something. Then turns. Pads away.

Alex stirs – sprawled on the floor in boxer briefs, body glistening with sweat. One hand holds a lipstick case like a weapon. His other hand – faintly red at the fingertips.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

Daaamn. Nice abs. I need your trainer's number. Don't care if he's gay – I want that body. (notices) You inked Zeus? You really think you're a god, huh?

ALEX (STONE-COLD)

No. But I know what it feels like to be struck.

FERNANDO

So where is Mr. Last-Night-One-Night?

(MORE)

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
If he's got your abs, I'll go gay
for pay. That lipstick, though? Not
your shade. Mauve is murder on your
skin tone.

He laughs. Alex doesn't.

ALEX
You ever seen this before?

Fernando plucks the lipstick case. Rolls it between his
fingers. He smirks. A red fingerprint smudges across the
silver casing. He pockets it.

FERNANDO
Cute prop. But don't let the studio
catch you with it. You gotta play
butch for this role. Clean that
shit up.

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Fernando walks in like a tour guide.

Alex follows - on edge.

ALEX
Don't touch anything! There was
blood. On the sheets. Call the
police. God, my head is pounding.

FLASHBACK - 5 HOURS EARLIER

Blurry. Voices warbled.

Fernando at the kitchen counter, methodical - slipping pills
into a shaker. He crushes them with the back of a spoon.
Pours in cranberry, triple sec, vodka. The ice rattles, a
crisp staccato.

FERNANDO
Drink up.

Alex takes the glass, downs the Cosmo in one go.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
Good boy.

BACK TO PRESENT

Alex rubs his temple. On the bar - the empty Cosmo glass. The
ice now melted, lipstick faint on the rim.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
Jesus – save the kink stories for
therapy. Chop. Chop. Dale.
We're not late. But we will be.
I decide when we're late.

Fernando scans the room – quick, precise:

Bed: perfect.

Sheets: white. Crisp.

No blood.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
Only crime I see is you making ten
times what I do in a day. You got
nine minutes. Hustle.

He CLAPS twice.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
Tick. Tock.

He struts out. Humming "Flowers."

Alex stays frozen. Then turns back to the bed.

Something catches light – a smear of red. Just along the edge
of the frame. Hidden. Recent. Intentional.

He kneels.

Touches it.

Still wet.

Fernando returns, coffee in hand. Sips.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
Here. Fuel up. You look like you
died twice.

He hands the coffee cup over.

CLOSE ON:

The red fingerprint near the rim. Still wet.

Alex hesitates. A flicker. Then – He drinks.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
Seven minutes, diva.

He CLAPS again. Louder. Snap of command.

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

CAMERA PULLS BACK - SLOW, CONTROLLED.

Alex stands at the sink. Wiping lipstick from his face. It smears. It stains. It won't come off easy.

In the mirror - the bloody handprint still faint across his chest.

No time.

He throws on a black ASRV tee - tight, fitted, armored.

Alex hits his phone, "LIPSTICK PROMISES" plays.

As each on-screen lyric hits a visual (e.g., lipstick, cup, mirror), add a subtle heartbeat or camera shutter click.

Bump. Click. Bump. Click. It's memory being recorded in trauma.

♪ "You told me I was all you'd ever need..."

- Camera swirling above the dead Francisco.

-Alex and Francisco laughing on a rooftop. - Wine. Kisses. The skyline glowing.

♪ "You said my love would always be enough..."

- Francisco whispering in Alex's ear. - FLASH: Francisco's body - face down.

♪ "Your scarlet kisses on my skin fooled me 'til the end..."

-Alex's chest rises once. His reflection lingers in the mirror.

CUT TO:

-The cover of the screenplay "Deuce's Wild" on a table. (sound of a knife slashing into a watermelon) as a chef's knife stabs the script. Blood seeps out onto the cover.

- Alex in bed. Alone. Asleep. Hand pressed over the bloody handprint. - Rocky curled at the foot of the bed - eyes open.

♪ "Every single word you said / Every drop dead shade of red..."

- Lipstick across a mirror: You're mine. - A red paw print on the floor. - A coffee cup with a blood-red fingerprint. - Anne reapplying lipstick in the shadows. - Fernando lighting a cigarette - and leaving a print on the lighter.

♪ "...lipstick promises..."

As the credits roll with the song, intercut:

ON SCREEN:

"Some scars don't fade." "Some lies wear lipstick."

"Some promises... bleed."

Short, punchy. They dissolve before you finish reading.

FADE ACROSS THE SCREEN: Beautifully Unstable. Written in blood. Sung with Grace. (Blood drops on the words)

SMASH TO BLACK.

ON SCREEN:

TICK TOCK. 71 HOURS REMAINING.

Mirror Match Cut (Post-Song) SILENCE.

The sound of Alex's controlled breathing. His well-muscled chest pumps in and out.

After the song ends, go back to Alex in the mirror, now dressed - the camera tracks from his chest (bloody handprint covered) to his eyes.

Hold on those eyes.

Then:

SFX: One last lipstick kiss whispered faintly in the mix.

CUT TO FERNANDO. Coffee. Countdown.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Fernando sips his second coffee. Calm. Confident. He taps the counter rhythmically with two fingers -

A silent countdown.

FERNANDO

Two minutes, Prince Charming.

Alex enters – sharp. All black. Fitted. Controlled. But his eyes betray him. Haunted. Hollow. Not here.

Rocky watches from atop the fridge. Tail flicks once. Still as sculpture.

Fernando drains the cup. Alex grabs his keys. They don't speak.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING – CONTINUOUS

Fernando locks the door. Click. Deadbolt. Double tap.

Behind them – a 1953 DODGE CONVERTIBLE waits. Top down. Paint deep red. Hood gleams.

They step toward it.

POV – ACROSS THE STREET, THROUGH BINOCULARS

In the shadows, someone watches. Hidden.

A heavy, slow breath. Steady. Animal. The lenses adjust – focus in tight on Alex's chest. The shirt. The shape beneath. The memory of the handprint.

We don't see the figure – only their shape. Still. Cold. Patient.

The Dodge engine growls to life.

FERNANDO (O.S.)

Top down, baby. We burn it clean.

The car peels off – sunlight knifing through the windshield. Fernando behind the wheel. Alex in the passenger seat. Neither looking back.

Rocky watches from the apartment window.

Eyes unblinking. Tail like a fuse, twitching slow.

INT. FERNANDO'S CAR – DAY – MOVING

Fernando drives like he's auditioning for his own biopic. Big energy. Big sunglasses. Hands waving, mouth moving.

We don't hear a thing.

In the passenger seat – Alex stares forward. Coal-black eyes. Still.

His fitted black tee clings to him like armor. Tattoo just hidden beneath the sleeve. Left shoulder tight, flexed. Controlled.

FLASH:

Francisco. Face-down. Knife in his back. Blood like punctuation. Final. Lipstick on his neck. Smudged. Stained.

Back in the car.

Fernando's still talking, laughing. Alex – frozen. One breath.

ALEX

(quiet. clear. cuts air)
Where's the body?

Sound slams back. The engine growls. A siren blares in the distance. Fernando glances over – still smiling.

FERNANDO

You did read the script, right?
I'm your brother. Your manager.
Don't embarrass me.
Alex... come on. Bodies are
everywhere.

ALEX

(never raising his voice)
I said – where is he? Francisco.

Fernando's grin slips. The window's rolled down but the tension is thick.

FERNANDO

Don't get weird on me.

ALEX

(suggesting)
Pull over.

FERNANDO

We've got a meeting in twenty
minutes–

ALEX

(commanding)
Pull. Over.

Fernando exhales. His right hand clenches the wheel. His left – smears his coffee cup with a red fingerprint. He flicks the blinker.

FERNANDO

Fine. Jesus. But get your shit together, little brother. You're the actor. So act like it.

EXT. SIDE STREET - DAY

They switch. Alex slides behind the wheel. His arms loose. Jaw tight. Voice low. Lethal.

ALEX

You're not listening.
Where's the fucking body?

Fernando shifts, rattled but trying not to show it.

FERNANDO

Francisco knew what he was walking into. Maybe he moved on. You guys are known for your one-night, or is it one-hour stands. (he laughs)

Alex stares with his coal-black eyes.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

If you're not ready to carry the weight – Someone else will.

Alex punches the gas. The city warps. The buildings smear.

EXT. SOUNDSTAGE PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

The Dodge screeches into a space. Tires scream.

Coffee erupts across Fernando's white tee.

He stares down at the stain like it personally betrayed him.

FERNANDO

Jesus...

Alex steps out. Back straight. Zeus ink barely visible as the sleeve rides up.

He doesn't flinch. Doesn't blink.

Fernando opens the trunk. Swaps the stained tee for a crisp Cuban shirt – pure white. Changes fast, like he's done this before.

FERNANDO (LOW, BITTER) (CONT'D)
 Every time I try to help...
 You turn it into a fucking movie.

CAMERA TRACKS ALEX'S POV – slow, deliberate.

Above the entrance:

INT. SOUNDSTAGE – DAY – DEUCE'S WILD TABLE READ

Above the entrance:

🎬 WELCOME TO THE FIRST TABLE READ OF "DEUCE'S WILD" 🎬

The letters gleam like a dare.

Sunlight glints off the camera dolly like a blade.

Alex walks toward it. Tight black tee. Fitted black jeans. Left shoulder inked beneath the fabric – ZEUS, unreadable in shadow.

Fernando trails. Shirt flawless. Mask back on.

They reach the door. Alex pauses. Breathes. He pushes inside.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE – CONTINUOUS

They're late.

A CLIPBOARD PA (25, caffeinated chaos) intercepts them mid-stride.

CLIPBOARD PA
 There you are – go, go, go. They're
 about to roll.

They're ushered inside like suspects at a line-up.

Long table. Script packets. Folded name cards. A low hum of tension. BRIDGET sits next to QUENTIN, flanked by notes and decisions.

ALEX sits across from DWAYNE (22) – already in character as JACK.

Their eyes meet. It's heat. Real. A threat and a promise.

Alex lowers his gaze for a breath – not submission, just strategy. Dwayne watches him the whole way down.

In the scene:

DEUCE (ALEX)

JACK (DWAYNE)

FRANCIS (SUPPORTING ACTOR)

STAGE MANAGER (reads cues)

Alex leans in to Fernando. Anne watches.

ALEX
Fernando, I'm nervous.

Fernando pulls Alex in and whispers in his ear.

Alex pulls back and nods, accepting. Alex looks at Anne. She winks. Gives him an "eyes-up-showtime" look.

Anne applies red lipstick sharply. Arms folded. Eyes narrowing. She's not just watching the read. She's watching history loop.

ANNE
Some roles... you only get to play
once.

Fernando gives her a slight smile. Anne does not react.

QUENTIN
When you boys are ready –
You've had the scripts.

FERNANDO
(talking for Alex,
controlling)
Alex is all set.

DWAYNE
The JACKpot is ready.

Alex gives a sly roll of the eyes – measured, cocky.


ALEX
Bring it on, motherfucker.

QUENTIN
Let's do it.

Roll camera.

He nods. A clapper slams:

DEUCE'S WILD – SIDETRACKS – READ-THROUGH.

 SCENE BEGINS

STAGE MANAGER
FRANCIS leans on the bar.
All muscle. All charm. Eyes on
Deuce.

FRANCIS
So... you just looking?
Or planning on making someone's
night?

STAGE MANAGER
Deuce tilts his beer. Unreadable.
Doesn't answer. Doesn't have to.
Francis smiles. Drawn in. Slides a
little closer.
Then—a presence.
Jack. Already in the room. Already
watching.
He steps forward – between them.
Commanding. Subtle. Effortless.

JACK (TO DEUCE)
Damn. I leave you alone for five
minutes and you're already the main
attraction.

STAGE MANAGER
Deuce turns.
Meets Jack's eyes.
Francis lingers. Jack glances once
– dismissal enough.
Francis backs off.

JACK
Tell me, cowboy...You testing the
waters – or here to swim?

STAGE MANAGER
Deuce sips.
Slow. Measured.
(MORE)

STAGE MANAGER (CONT'D)
 Alex's grip tightens. Barely. A
 twitch in the wrist.

JACK (GRINNING)
 You want instant gratification? Go
 with that hand. You want the
 JACKpot-

STAGE MANAGER
 Deuce smirks.
 Eyes drop - brief flick to Jack's
 crotch.

JACK leans on the bar, eyes locked on Alex.

JACK
 (snaps fingers twice)
 Hey, cowboy. Eyes up here.
 We'll get to that... if you're ready.

FLASHBACK - 12 HOURS EARLIER

INT. ALEX'S LOFT - BEDROOM / KITCHEN - NIGHT

Alex sleeps in the low light, tangled in white sheets.

In the kitchen, FERNANDO quietly closes a bottle of pills and
 slips it into his jacket.

FRANCISCO appears in the doorway - naked. The camera frames
 him from behind: wide shoulders tapering to a sculpted back,
 perfect symmetry.

Fernando freezes, an audible inhale betraying the effect. His
 eyes drop, involuntarily.

FRANCISCO
 (deep, sultry)
 Alex said you weren't gay... but I
 had my doubts.
 Looks like you either want me or-

Fernando's gaze drops again - to Francisco's crotch.

FRANCISCO (CONT'D)
 (snaps fingers twice)
 Hey - eyes up here.
 What are those pills? Did you put
 something in Alex's drink? I'm
 gonna check on him.

Francisco turns to head toward the bedroom.

THUMP – the sound of a knife in a watermelon.

Francisco drops, lifeless.

FERNANDO
 (low, sly)
 Me, gay? I'm not defined by a
 label.

BACK TO SCENE –
 SOUNDSTAGE

The STAGE MANAGER smirks – a wink, a declaration of war.

FRANCIS (the actor playing opposite Alex) slides a card
 across the bar.

FRANCIS
 My WhatsApp.

STAGE MANAGER
 Jack looks at the card. Then at
 Deuce. Then back to the card.

FRANCIS
 Jackie, you want another or–

STAGE MANAGER
 Jack cuts him off with a hand wave.
 Never breaking eye contact.

JACK (DWAYNE)
 I'll let you know when I'm ready.

STAGE MANAGER
 Francis slinks off. Jack leans in
 close to Deuce. Fifteen seconds
 pass. Jack pulls back.

DEUCE (ALEX)
 (slow, in control)
 I'll go... hands down.

Alex stumbles. Stage manager and all look. Alex doesn't show
 his falter.

Beat.

Dwayne swoops in – cool, confident, covers it smooth.

JACK (DWAYNE)
 Hands down is good but–

He rises.

JACK (DWAYNE) (CONT'D)
 Wouldn't you rather have the
 JACKpot?

Growls it. Winks.

Alex shoots him a look. Half thanks. Half fire.

DEUCE (ALEX)
 (low)
 Hope the jackpot's worth the wait.

STAGE MANAGER
 Jack picks up the business card.
 Flicks it between two fingers.
 Smirking.

JACK (DWAYNE)
 No need for this.

STAGE MANAGER
 Drops a \$5 on the card. Walks off.

QUENTIN
 CUT.

Bridget leans to Quentin.

BRIDGET
 They're either rehearsing...
 or foreplay.
 (beat) Someone better die or kiss
 by act two.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - BREAK AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Anne leans against the wall. Eyes lit. Lipstick still
 perfect. Watching.

ANNE
 (low, half to herself)
 That wasn't acting. That was
 foreplay in iambic pentameter.

She takes a long sip from her water bottle. Smirks. Then
 disappears into shadow.

ALEX walks toward the coffee urn. Still steady. Still
 unreadable.

DWAYNE approaches - slow, smooth. Still carrying Jack in his
 walk.

ALEX
Thanks for the save.

DWAYNE
(low, still Jack)
If you're going all-in for the
JACKpot...
(leans in, breath brushing
Alex's jaw)
...you better be ready to lose
everything.

Alex doesn't flinch. Doesn't blink.

ALEX
We'll see who walks away with the
winnings.

FERNANDO (O.S.)
(clapping once, too loud)
Prince Charming's finally found his
villain...

Approaches the two men. Fernando strolls by. All charm. All control. Mask polished. Shirt perfect.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
Or maybe just someone playing the
same game.

But his eyes flick – just for a second – toward Dwayne. Not jealousy. Not admiration. Assessment.

The tension stays coiled in the air. Fernando drifts off to another person.

Around them, cast and crew drift away – like they're not sure who's still performing.

Dwayne steps in. Close. He pins Alex against the wall. No hesitation. Just heat.

DWAYNE
(still Jack, still velvet)
Your JACKpot's ready.

He snaps his fingers.

DWAYNE (CONT'D)
Eyes up here.

He leans in and kisses Alex – and the air between them turns animal. Then talking as he's kissing.

DWAYNE (CONT'D)
 (low, dripping sex)
 Like I said..
when I think you're ready.

He turns. Walks out into the light.

Alex leans back. Smoldering.

Runs a hand over his jaw – slow, sensual, burning.

ALEX
 (low, breathless)
 Fuck me.

ACROSS THE STAGE – ANNE WATCHES.

Red lipstick. Black notebook. Eyes like she's seen this movie before. She walks over to Alex.

ANNE
 Be careful, Alex...
 with flames that look like lovers.

Anne hands an envelope to Alex.

ANNE (CONT'D)
 Can you give this to your brother,
 Fernando. God, you two don't even
 look alike. I don't trust him.

ALEX
 (easy)
 Come on – Fernando always has my
 back.

She turns to go.

ANNE
 (over her shoulder)
 That's what Caesar said, as well.

INT. BACK HALLWAY / SOUNDSTAGE – MOMENTS LATER

Dwayne moves quietly.

Water bottle in hand. Muscles loose.

He slows. Voices ahead. Around the corner:

FERNANDO and QUENTIN. Too close. Too smug.

Dwayne steps into shadow.

FERNANDO (LOW)
Francisco wasn't supposed to bleed
that much.

QUENTIN
It's Hollywood.
Blood sells.

FERNANDO
(grimace-laugh)
You should've lifted that gym rat
off the floor. Jesus.
(beat)
Although... great abs.

QUENTIN
(chuckling)
Are you gay like your brother?

FERNANDO
Fuck no. And for the record - half-
brother.

They laugh.

QUENTIN
Still... Putting Prince Charming
down like Sleeping Beauty with
chloroform? That was... exciting.
(beat) What if Alex had seen me?

FERNANDO
You knew the blocking.
We rehearsed it. It had to feel
real.

CAMERA PULLS BACK -

Dwayne stands frozen. Back pressed to the wall.

The voices blur - replaced by the loud tick of his own
breath.

DWAYNE
(under his breath)
Shit.

He takes a step back. Silent. Shaking.

He looks toward the set – the lights, the illusion, the lie. Then straightens his shoulders. Whatever he just heard... he buries it. For now.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM – MOMENTS LATER

STAGE MANAGER

We're jumping to the apartment door scene. Right after "I Get Along Without You." Let's run this in action. Lighting – give me late-night hallway feel. Just notes for the DP.

LIGHTING TECH

Copy that.

STAGE MANAGER

Alex, Dwayne – lines ready?

(beat)

Alex... maybe don't mess it up this time.

(laughs)

ALEX

(still, quiet)

Yeah, yeah. Copy that.

His voice low. Focused. But there's tension under the skin. His left hand grips the side of his chair. Tight. The camera would catch the subtle flex – just like Zeus beneath fabric.

STAGE MANAGER

Sound, cue the final lyric. Let it roll in.

SOUND TECH

Standing by. Rolling on your mark.

QUENTIN

(stepping forward)

Alright, boys. Let's see what you're made of. Make us feel it.

The room settles. Lights dim. It's not just rehearsal. It's a knife fight in disguise.

QUENTIN (CONT'D)

And... ACTION.

STAGE MANAGER

Cue track.

MALE DUO (V.O.)

♪ "I get along without you very well..."

STAGE MANAGER

Deuce leans in the frame.
His smile is sharp – but his
fingers grip the edge of the
doorframe. Deuce peels off his
shirt.

Underneath – a black A-shirt.
Tight. Clean. His back's carved
from restraint. His arms, quiet
strength.

And on his left shoulder – ZEUS.
Lightning clenched in ink. Watching
everything.

JACK

Deuce.

DEUCE

Jackpot.

STAGE MANAGER

Jack grabs Deuce by the back of his
neck – rough. Intimate.
Deuce eases the door closed with
his boot. It clicks shut like a
trap.

QUENTIN

Cut.

(beat)

We'll keep that one. Let's run it
again. Boys – you're playing
against type. Keep them strong.
Controlled. Calculated.
Make us doubt who's seducing who.

Quentin walks up to the glass office. Overlooks the
soundstage like a king in a cathedral.

INT. PRODUCERS' GLASS OFFICE – OVERLOOKING THE SET

Bridget and Quentin sip midday vodka sodas.

Watching Alex and Dwayne like dolls in a box.

The scene below restarts. This time, we don't hear the dialogue.

Only:

The lights.

The blocking.

The looks.

It's sensual. Tense. Dangerous.

BRIDGET

You sure Dwayne can carry the role?

QUENTIN

Question is, can Alex keep up?

FERNANDO enters. Shark in silk. Smile like poison.

FERNANDO

Alex is the star. He would die for this role. Just don't forget who's holding the strings...

(beat)

Or is it the knife?

They toast. Glasses clink.

Quentin smirks.

Bridget doesn't.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - TABLE READ / SET IN CHAOS

The energy shifts. People murmur. The door SLAMS open.

SIMONE bursts in - trench coat, high boots, face full of storm. She walks like a bullet.

BRIDGET

Oh my God. The French Queen of Hearts is back.

QUENTIN

Children are such problems. I should've gotten a cat.

They step out onto the soundstage.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - TABLE READ / SET IN CHAOS

The energy shifts. People murmur. The door SLAMS open.

SIMONE bursts in – trench coat, high boots, face full of storm. She walks like a bullet.

She doesn't wait. Doesn't hesitate.

SIMONE

Well. I leave for Paris and come back to find my brother, my father drinking mid-day, and my legacy being rewritten by men in tighter pants. (pauses) Miss me?

FERNANDO

My little childhood friend returns.

SIMONE

Childhood? You played dress-up in my heels and cried when I took them back. Don't rewrite history, sweetheart.

She glances at DWAYNE, sizing him up – not impressed.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

Is that the actor? He looks like he just got cut from a CW show.

She spots ALEX, pauses – interest sparks.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

Mmm. You must be Prince Charming. Tell me... do you always make an entrance in blood?

Alex doesn't respond. He doesn't have to.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

(to the room, tossing off her coat)

Well. Let's make this fun again.

She struts into the soundstage like she owns it.

DWAYNE

(rising, stunned)
Sister!

SIMONE
Relax. I know you missed me.
(a smirk)
Everyone does.

Dwayne rushes toward her like a puppy. She sidesteps it like a queen.

SIMONE (CONT'D)
You look... soft.
Is this the show?

Her eyes sweep the room. She's already clocked everyone – before she even walked in.

The room hums with Simone chatter.

CUT TO – ABOVE
THE STAGE

Like Roman gods planning fate – FERNANDO, QUENTIN, and BRIDGET overlook the chaos. Their gazes like shadows.

FERNANDO
Well. This just got fun.

QUENTIN
She's early.

BRIDGET
She's hungry.

FERNANDO
So am I.

They swirl drinks. Their eyes land on Alex – a sacrificial lamb.

QUENTIN
Let them tear each other apart.
We get the footage either way.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - WRAP-UP - MOMENTS LATER

Rehearsal ends in chaos. Someone yells "CUT" – even though they weren't rolling.

Fernando grabs Alex by the elbow at the door.

FERNANDO
Come on, Prince Charming.
Let's get you home.

EXT. JACK'S APARTMENT - 3:00 PM - FRIDAY

Fernando's cherry-red convertible glides to a stop.

FERNANDO

Get some rest. You look like shit.
I'll swing by at six - meet-and-greet. Investors. Champagne. Charm.

Alex steps out, barely holding it together.

FERNANDO (CALLING OUT) (CONT'D)

Don't fuck this up.

Tires squeal. Music blares. Fernando peels away.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Sunlight slices the room like knives.

Alex enters. Drops his jacket. Strips off his shirt.

The bloody handprint is still there - faded, but unmistakable.

He stares at it.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Steam rises.

Alex steps into the shower. Scalding. Water hisses. Skin burns. Flash moments -

Lipstick. The knife. Fernando's voice: "Don't fuck this up..."

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Steam coils like smoke from a slow burn.

Alex wipes the mirror.

Nothing but his own reflection. Disheveled. Haunted.

He chuckles. Nervous. Fragile.

ALEX

Settle down, Prince Charming.
Get it together.

He hums softly – 🎵 "Flowers" by Miley Cyrus.

Drip. Drip.

Silence returns.

INT. KITCHEN – MINUTES LATER

A fresh cup of coffee.

He sips. Steadies. Pretending.

INT. BEDROOM – CONTINUOUS

He stops cold.

Francisco. Naked. Face-down. A chef's knife buried in his back.

ALEX
(shaky)
You're back...

Blood stained the white sheets.

His hand trembles.

CRASH – the coffee cup drops – SLOW MOTION. Porcelain. Red. White. Shards everywhere.

Alex stumbles back. Turns toward the mirror.

Written in red lipstick:

"To be or not to be..."

His breath catches. He chokes.

He picks up the phone –

1 MISSED CALL – FRANCISCO

1 NEW VOICEMAIL

He hesitates. Presses play.

FRANCISCO (V.O.)
"We have time, Papi. We have a
lifetime of time, sí?"
(MORE)

FRANCISCO (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 (a soft laugh)
 "Don't run this time."

Alex stares.

The handprint is still on his chest. His reflection is fractured behind the lipstick.

ALEX
 Fuck.

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Alex. Phone to his ear. Hands shaking.

RING. RING.

FERNANDO (V.O.)
 (overly chipper)
 Prince Charming! You got 2.5 hours
 of beauty rest - not that you need
 it, you bastard.
 (beat)
 You want a ticket for Francisco
 tonight? Just have him sit there
 like a corpse. Pretty. Quiet.

Alex says nothing.

FERNANDO (V.O.) (BEAT)
 Alex? You there?

ALEX
 (quiet. grave)
 You better get here. Right now.
 (beat)
 There's a problem.

ON SCREEN:

2 DOWN.

(faint tick... tock...)

FADE OUT.

CUT TO:

FERNANDO (V.O.)
 What kind of problem?

Alex doesn't answer. Just stares at the bloody scene.
Lipstick glows on the mirror – "TO BE OR NOT TO BE..." Wet.
Shimmering. Final.

ON SCREEN:

TICK TOCK.

66 HOURS REMAINING.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT – LIVING ROOM – 4:00 PM

Fernando BURSTS through the door.

Alex stands in a towel – blood-streaked, shaking, panicked.
FRANCISCO'S BODY lies twisted by the bed. Blood pooled. One
of Alex's hands – red to the wrist.

ALEX

I tried to move him... he fell... I
tripped – and he landed–

FLASH: Francisco's body toppling onto Alex. Blood across his
chest. The handprint re-formed.

FERNANDO

Jesus, you stupid fuck. I'm always
cleaning up your messes.
(beat)

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

Between Bridget, Quentin and me, we
always gotta carry you. God, I'd
kill to live your easy fucking
life.

ALEX

(beat – swallows it)
Fernando... please. You gotta help
me. We should call the police.

FERNANDO

(quiet rage)
Fuck no. You want cops here? All
the press? Jesus.

Alex looks down – shame and fear locking his spine.

Fernando snaps his fingers twice.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
 (demeaning)
 Hey, Prince Charming? Focus.

He straightens Alex's collar, like dressing a mannequin.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
 Of course I gotta help you.
 (then louder)
 I ALWAYS gotta help you. Fuck me.

Fernando stalks the room like he owns it – eyes scanning, fast, ruthless.

Alex's hand twitches toward the phone... stops dead at Fernando's glance.

ROCKY appears at the edge of the scene – silent, alert, ears flicking as he watches Fernando.

He pads toward the blood. Stops. Stares.

Fernando clocks the cat. Softens – barely.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
 (slight smirk)
 Still watching out for your boy,
 huh?

Rocky doesn't blink.

Fernando exhales, snaps into gear.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
 Alright, Prince Charming – get
 garbage bags. I'm making calls.
 (beat) We've got that dinner in two
 hours.

INT. BEDROOM – MOMENTS LATER

Alex yanks open the closet. Garbage bags. His hands shake. Blood on everything.

He folds Francisco's limbs into black plastic. Zipper sounds. Sheets soaked red.

♪ A warped reprise of "Lipstick Promises" floats in – cracked, nostalgic, broken.

Fernando stands nearby. Watching. Calculating.

FERNANDO
(calm, dangerous)
It's gonna be okay.
I'll clean this up.

CAMERA PULLS
BACK:

Two MEN enter silently. Lift Francisco's body like it's nothing.

Two WOMEN with bleach and gloves get to work. The room transforms. Lipstick – wiped. Sheets – gone. Mirror shines again.

One woman strips the towel off Alex. He stands bare. Shivering. Vulnerable.

ROCKY leaps lightly onto the bedframe. Watches everything. His tail flicks once. Then still.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
Prince Charming, go take a shower.
We leave in fifteen.

Fernando heads toward the kitchen.

HOLD ON ROCKY

Still. Silent. Eyes locked on the cleanup crew as they exit. He knows.

Rocky pads after Fernando. Leaps up onto the kitchen counter. Snuggles against him – like nothing happened.

ROCKY
MEOW.

Fernando eyes him. Scratches Rocky's chin.

FERNANDO
Good thing you're just a dumb cat
who can't talk. I don't have to
worry about you.

Rocky leans in closer. Then playfully bites Fernando's hand.

Fernando doesn't flinch. Just growls back – low and amused.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
Oh... you like it rough?

He scratches Rocky's ears – one long, slow stroke.

CLOSE ON ROCKY

Purring. Steady. Deep. Like a drumbeat in the quiet.

The SOUND swells. Fills the frame. Not cute. Not calming. It's primal. Like something waking up.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. FERNANDO'S CAR - SUNSET

The ENGINE PURRS. Low. Sexy. Dangerous.

Fernando slides into the driver's seat. Smirks

ALEX, freshly dressed in noir-slick attire, sits beside Fernando.

FERNANDO

(on phone)

Yeah, I got him. We're on the way.

(beat)

Alex? He's on point. Ready to impress.

He glances over. Alex stares out the window - blank, broken, and beautiful. The city glows golden. Cold.

Alex looks over - hesitant - as if to ask about the cleanup.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

Prince Charming, don't worry.

You'll get your happy ending.

(leans in, softer) Again, I do all the fucking cleanup.

(taps Alex's cheek like a mob boss)

But that's what a big brother's for.

MATCH CUT - SPLIT SCREEN

LEFT PANEL - INT. SUV - MOVING - SUNSET

Alex stares forward. Fernando drives. The city flows past. Their conversation continues.

RIGHT PANEL - INT. PARKED CAR - HILLSIDE VANTAGE - CONTINUOUS

ANNE and CARL sit in a nondescript black vehicle. Carl's hand adjusts a small receiver. Static clears.

Fernando's voice plays through the speaker – crisp.

FERNANDO (V.O.)
 "...that's what a big brother's
 for."

Anne flinches. Carl doesn't blink.

CARL
 (quiet)
 He's getting bolder.

ANNE
 He's getting reckless.

A beat.

CARL
 And our boy? He's not built for
 this.

Anne watches Alex through binoculars.

ANNE
 Not yet. But he will be.

ON SCREEN:

TICK TOCK.

63.5 HOURS REMAINING.

FADE IN:

SCENE: INVESTOR DINNER – INT. LUXURY HOLLYWOOD ESTATE – NIGHT

ON SCREEN: 6:30 PM – FRIDAY

A Gatsby-esque villa in the hills. Palm trees sway. Champagne flows. Waiters in bowties. Industry sharks pretending to be charmers.

CAMERA TRACKS the back of QUENTIN as he floats through the space, nodding, schmoozing. At his side: SIMONE, a vision in couture armor – poised, dangerous, and seething.

PRIVATE ALCOVE – INTIMATE / DANGEROUS

They peel off to a quieter spot. A waiter passes – champagne flutes clink.

SIMONE
(low, hissing)
He's going to ruin this. You know
that, right?

QUENTIN
(sipping)
Dwayne's doing fine.

SIMONE
(leaning in)
Fine? You see how much he's in love
with Alex already? He's soft. I'm
not sitting around and watching him
fumble our legacy. I know things,
Dad.

Quentin raises an eyebrow. Simone smirks.

SIMONE (CONT'D)
Dwayne talks in his sleep.

SIMONE (CONT'D)
Loose lips...
(pause)
Told me all about—

Fernando enters. Cool. Smiling.

FERNANDO
(interrupting, smooth)
Quentin. Bridget needs you at the
door. VIPs just arrived.

Turns to Simone with a predator's grin.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
Simone, would you help me with the
champagne?

SIMONE
(snaps)
Fuck you, Fernando.
I didn't like you when we were kids
and I sure as hell don't want to be
pouring champagne with you now.

QUENTIN
(sighs)
I'll check in with Bridget.

He exits.

Simone turns to leave. Fernando blocks her.

SIMONE
Move, Fernando.

He doesn't.

INT. HALLWAY MOMENTS LATER

SIMONE
Dwayne... I can't always protect you.

DWAYNE
Sis, I'm a big boy now.
(flexes)

SIMONE
D, focus.

DWAYNE
(scoffs)
I've got Alex under control.
(snaps his fingers twice)
Eyes up here.
(grins)

SIMONE
Just... be careful.
There's something I don't like.
Trust your gut before you trust a
smile.

Fernando enters abruptly.

FERNANDO
(commanding)
JACKpot work the crowd. Now. Time
is money. My money.

DWAYNE
(humble)
Yes, sir.

FERNANDO
Simone. The Study. Please.

SIMONE
Like in the game "CLUE?" Should I
bring the candlestick or the rope?

FERNANDO
(grins)
The knife.

They lock eyes – his grin steady, hers unblinking.

Simone steps past him first.

Fernando exits.

INT. THE STUDY - MOMENTS LATER

Simone enters, coolly. She lights a cigarette, inhales deep.

FERNANDO

(quietly)

You should've stayed in Paris.

Simone exhales - smoke straight into his face.

SIMONE

You should've stayed in the closet.

Fernando flinches - just a hair. She takes another drag and does it again, slower this time, a deliberate fog between them.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

Let's not pretend you're running anything but your mouth. You were always the backup dancer... never the fucking show.

She steps closer - nose to nose, pure venom.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

You think because they're scared of you, they respect you? Please. They'll gut you the second they smell weakness.

FERNANDO

(softly)

Then I'll just make sure no one smells anything.

THREE STABS. FAST. LOW. LIKE PRISON.

She gasps. Blood hits silk. She falls. No scream. Just disbelief.

As she drops, Simone's hand smears her blood across Fernando's pristine shirt.

Slow the frame rate for half a second - not dramatic, just enough to feel time crack.

As her blood hits the marble: SFX: a faint splash... like red ink in water.

Her final breath curls into a grin.

SIMONE
(soft, defiant)
Still... not scared.

FERNANDO
(casually, breathy)
God, you were always trouble.
Talk. Talk. Talk.

Fernando sighs. Takes out his phone. Calls.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
(short and directive.)
Clean up in the study. Now. I need
a shirt. The Brioni - ivory, point
collar, mother of pearl buttons.
Bring the sapphire cufflinks

ON SCREEN:

3 DOWN.

(faint sound - TICK... TOCK...)

A faint smile.

FERNANDO
Immaculate.

CAMERA WIDENS as two suited MEN in black gloves enter. One lifts Simone's body. The other mops up fast.

Like it never happened.

INT: GRAND SALON MOMENTS LATER.

Crowd milling. Dwayne walks up to Fernando. He does a double take.

DWAYNE
You change shirts? This on is
boss.

FERNANDO
(flatly)
Brioni. I must be on point.

Fernando smoothly adjusts his cuff, aligning the sapphire link just so – eyes never leaving Dwayne.

DWAYNE
(cheerful, searching)
Hey, Fernando – have you seen
Simone?

FERNANDO
(straight-faced)
Stomach pains. Said she went to lie
down.

DWAYNE
Oh.
(pause)
Hey, they want us out front.

FERNANDO
Let's go.

They walk off – one clueless, one carved in ice.

FADE OUT WITH:

A soft reprise of "Lipstick Promises" bleeding into the next scene – eerie, elegant.

INT. MANSION – STUDY – NIGHT

Dimly lit. Old money shadows. The kind of room where secrets get sealed in scotch.

ALEX walks down the hallway, tense – dressed for show, still bleeding inside. As he passes the STUDY–

A HAND snatches his wrist. Pulls him in.

ALEX
(grunts)
What the–

THWACK.

Instinct kicks in. Alex throws a right hook – fast, clean – straight to the side of the face.

DWAYNE stumbles back, clutching his eye.

DWAYNE
(furious)
Fuck, Alex!

ALEX
 (heart racing)
 Jesus—you scared the shit outta me.
 What the hell are you doing?!

DWAYNE
 (quietly)
 I wanted to...

He falters. Can't finish it.

ALEX
 (stepping forward)
 What?

A beat. No music. Just breath and heat between them.

DWAYNE
 (low, certain)
 This.

He grabs Alex's face — and kisses him. Full. On. Mouth. No hesitation.

Alex doesn't move at first. Shock. Then — his hands rise, trembling... To push him away — or pull him closer?

We don't know. He doesn't know.

DWAYNE (CONT'D)
 (whispered, hot)
 You want to rehearse the shower scene?

Alex growls. Hungry. Dangerous. On fire.

INT. GRAND FOYER - SAME TIME

FERNANDO, QUENTIN, and BRIDGET stand like a twisted holy trinity under the chandelier. Three witches. One prophecy.

FERNANDO
 He's cracking. Dwayne's pushing him over the edge.

QUENTIN
 Let it happen.

BRIDGET
 And when he does?

FERNANDO
 We bury them both.

CAMERA PULLS BACK

In the distance – a shadow slips away from the STUDY DOOR.

Someone saw the kiss.

INT. STUDY – NIGHT

Alex pulls back from the kiss. Breath shaky. He's not sure if it's lust, guilt, or both.

DWAYNE

(low)

Don't lie. You felt that.

ALEX

I/

Anne bursts in, heels clicking like gunshots.

ANNE

Enough. Now.

She doesn't wait. She grabs Alex by the wrist and drags him out like a protective storm.

Dwayne watches them go – the smirk fading into something colder.

His thumb brushes across his lips – like he's keeping the taste.

DWAYNE

(half murmur, half threat)

Next time, I'm not asking.

Alex hears this and looks back. They lock eyes.

EXT. GARDEN TERRACE – NIGHT

Lit only by moonlight and string lights. Jazz murmurs faintly from inside. A place untouched by the chaos – for now.

ANNE

(whispers)

You're going to implode.
And you're going to take me with
you.

ALEX

(angry, unraveling)

Then let me.

Anne lifts her index and middle finger to the inside of her wrist – a private signal.

Alex's gaze snaps to it.

ANNE

Remember.

Alex's mouth twitches – not a smile, not yet.

ALEX

Eyes up.

Anne nods, turns to lead him deeper into the garden.

At the far edge, under a weeping willow –

A MAN IN SHADOW.

A cigarette glows faintly.

Alex stops cold. Eyes wide.

The man steps forward – the stillness of a ghost.

CARL (60s). The first husband.

CARL steps into the light – sharp cheekbones, weathered eyes.

Anne freezes. Alex's mask slides into place.

Their eyes lock over the space between them – no one moves.

CARL

Hello, son.

EXT. GARDEN – NIGHT – MOMENTS LATER

A moment of stillness – Alex frozen, Anne wide-eyed. Carl's voice still hangs in the air.

Then–

A MAN'S SCREAM (O.S.)

HELP! OH GOD – HELP!!

All three bolt.

INT. MANSION HALLS / BACK DOOR - NIGHT

Footsteps thunder through marble. Doors fly open. Guests murmur, trailing behind.

Bridget, Quentin, Fernando – drawn by the chaos.

EXT. REAR LAWN - NIGHT

Moonlight carves every figure in cold silver.

DWAYNE is on the ground, cradling SIMONE's lifeless body.

Blood across her dress like spilled wine.

DWAYNE drops to his knees, clutching Simone's body.

His fingers dig into the silk of her dress – knuckles white.

Her head falls limp against his shoulder.

Phones come out. Cameras roll.

Carl steps forward – cold, controlled, calm.

Alex looks at Anne.

Two fingers to his wrist. The signal.

Anne nods once, reading it without a word.

RIPPLE EFFECT MONTAGE – POST-SIMONE DEATH

STYLE: Neo-noir montage. No dialogue at first. Just haunting sound design and a dark, slowed-down instrumental reprise of

“Lipstick Promises” → Lounge singer at a wrap party, mic on stand, spotlight – Alex watches while Fernando works the room.

INT. DWAYNE'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Dwayne wipes off eyeliner. Red smear on the cotton pad. His eyes linger on it. He stares at himself in the mirror – broken. Smashes the mirror with his fist.

INT. BRIDGET'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Bridget watches rehearsal footage alone. Freezes on Simone's face. Sips vodka from a porcelain teacup. Glass trembles in her hand.

QUENTIN enters - calm, cold, calculating.

BRIDGET
(soft, haunted)
She always made an entrance.

QUENTIN
She made a mistake.

BRIDGET
She was your daughter.

QUENTIN
Children should listen.

FERNANDO glides in. A knife in silk.

FERNANDO
Talk, talk, talk. Jesus. Let's move on.

BRIDGET
You didn't have to do it this way.

FERNANDO
Simone knew the rules.

QUENTIN
My lovely - death is so final.
(beat)
So... liberating.

BRIDGET
What are you saying?

QUENTIN
We have ourselves one hell of a story.

He exits.

Leaves the door open.

Night air slips in - cold and unsympathetic.

INT. GARDEN / REAR OF THE ESTATE - NIGHT

Anne walks with Alex and Carl through the garden. Moonlight. Silence. Older. Regal. Still dangerous.

CARL

You don't know what they've done to you. But it's time you found out. Tell me, Anne what is the locket you wear and never take off around your neck.

Anne pulls out the MASK OF COMEDY.

ALEX looks at her and pulls from his neck THE MASK OF TRAGEDY. He holds his mask to hers and they fit together exactly.

CARL pulls out a complete set of the exact COMEDY and TRAGEDY masks.

Alex stares, eyes wide. His whole world - unraveling.

ANNE

So what are you saying?

ALEX

Wait. Wait are you saying that Anne is my sister?

INT. SIMONE'S VANITY ROOM - NIGHT

Dwayne enters. The room still smells like her perfume - spicy, sweet, impossible to pin down. He moves slowly. Reverently.

The vanity lights are still on. Lipstick tubes like weapons. Perfume bottles like bombs.

He touches the brush still holding strands of her hair. The cigarette burned out in the tray. Everything exactly as she left it.

Then he sees it - A sealed envelope, propped perfectly at the mirror's base. Written in Simone's unmistakable scrawl: "For Dwayne."

He opens it.

INSERT: HANDWRITTEN LETTER

(V.O. SIMONE)

"Dwayne - Don't let them use you.
Not Bridget. Not Quentin. Not
Fernando. I don't know what they've
promised you, but it's not love.
Trust no one. Not even Alex -
unless he proves himself. You're
better than all of them. You always
were.
Your Big Sis, Simone."

Dwayne's breath stutters. He blinks back tears - Then lets
them fall.

He folds the letter. Slips it into his pocket.

He walks out of the room - And doesn't look back.

FADE TO BLACK 7
WHITE

INT. SOUND STAGE

A film slate labeled: "DEUCE'S WILD - Scene 43 - Bloodbath."
The take is numbered. A hand claps the board.

MUSIC ENDS.

SMASH TO BLACK.

ON SCREEN:

SATURDAY - 10:00 AM

TICK TOCK.

48 HOURS REMAINING.

BACK TO COLOR

INT. DWAYNE'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Muted light. Blinds drawn halfway. Dwayne lies awake on the
couch, fully dressed. Eyes open. Haunted. Still clutching
Simone's letter in one hand.

The TV's on mute – an old noir film flickering. A kiss on screen. Followed by a gunshot. Dwayne doesn't blink.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT – SAME TIME

Alex stares out the window. Shirtless. Pale. The handprint is almost gone – faded now, like memory.

He touches it anyway.

INT. BRIDGET'S BEDROOM – SAME TIME

Bridget stares into a vanity mirror. Perfect hair. Bloody eyes. She's already had two martinis.

She whispers to herself –

BRIDGET
Rose I warned you.

SFX: A heartbeat.

A faint THUD – a body hitting stairs.

A woman's scream – The heartbeat stops.

INT. QUENTIN'S STUDY – SAME TIME

Quentin burns pages from the Deuce's Wild script in an antique ashtray.

Smiling.

ON SCREEN:

SATURDAY – 1:00 PM

TICK TOCK.

45 HOURS REMAINING.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE OFFICE – SATURDAY – 1:00 PM

Dark wood. Darker intentions. Quentin pours two drinks. Fernando doesn't take his.

QUENTIN
Call me father.

FERNANDO
God no, let's complicate things.
Next, we'll be doing scenes from
Oedipus Rex.

QUENTIN
I am your biological father—

FERNANDO
—and you left me behind with your
sister, Bridget, so you could go
chasing another whore.

QUENTIN
She died because of you.

FERNANDO
The strong survive. The weak?
They're there to be stepped on
while the rest of us climb.

Fernando paces. Quentin watches.

QUENTIN
So what's next?

FERNANDO
My God, you can't even think for
yourself. It's plain what happens
next.

Fernando pulls a folded letter from his jacket and hands it
to Quentin.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
Simone's final words. To Dwayne.

Quentin reads. His hands tremble.

QUENTIN
My own child... turned against me.

FERNANDO
Oh Hamlet... "To be or not to be."

QUENTIN
Wait— That was you who wrote that?

Fernando smiles. Pulls a tube of lipstick from his pocket.

FERNANDO

The mirror? The message? The murder? It was always me. Moving Francisco's body, hiding that gay boy in the closet— (laughs) And hiding him in the closet. Jesus.

QUENTIN

What was it like?

FERNANDO

What?

QUENTIN

Killing Francisco. Driving that chef's knife into his back—

FERNANDO

(pause)

Like a watermelon.

QUENTIN

What?

FERNANDO

The sound it made. When the blade went in.

(thumps chest)

Wet. Sweet. Final.

Quentin looks Fernando up and down, takes a slow sip of his drink, and sets the glass down between them with force.

QUENTIN

And yet, you still stand.

FERNANDO

Look at the tree I came from.

(beat)

Fuck me.

QUENTIN

So?

FERNANDO

So you have to do it.

QUENTIN

Do what?

FERNANDO
 (steps in close – venom)
 Are you not listening?

SMACK.

Fernando SLAPS Quentin across the face. Hard. Quentin stumbles into the chair – stunned.

FERNANDO
 Dwayne knows too much. He's soft.

Fernando CLAPS once. Loud. Echoing. A warning shot.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
 Tick tock.
 You've got two hours.

Fernando exits – cold as smoke.

HOLD ON QUENTIN.

Breathing heavy. Shaking.

He pulls out his phone. Presses PLAY.

FERNANDO (V.O.)
 What was it like?

QUENTIN (V.O.)
 Killing Francisco?

FERNANDO (V.O.)
 Like a watermelon...

He stops the recording.

QUENTIN
 (quiet, lethal)
 Always good to have insurance.

He dials. The line rings.

QUENTIN (INTO PHONE)
 Dwayne. Your father here. I need you at the soundstage – now . We're running the death scene. I've got some notes.

ON SCREEN:

SATURDAY - 1:00 PM

TICK TOCK.

44 HOURS REMAINING.

INT. ALEX'S TRAILER - SATURDAY - 1:20 PM

A delivery box sits on the table – slick black wrapping paper, no return address. Somewhere outside, a lone cello plays “Flowers” – slow, deliberate, the notes bending with a kind of mournful grace.

Alex peels the paper away. Inside: a thin, tailored ballistic vest.

Taped to it – a handwritten note on gold stationery:

ALEX,
*Your body is your temple.
 Beware of the snakes in the garden.
 – Nikki Starlight*

Alex stares at the note for a beat, a faint, knowing smile tugging at the corner of his mouth.

Alex slips the vest on.

He catches himself in the mirror – holds for a beat.

Straightens it like a costume.

ALEX
 (guttural)
 Gods don't wear armor.

He peels it off.

The cello continues, low and pulsing, as he folds the vest and lays it back in the box.

He buttons his shirt with precision – his hand lingering over his heart for just a fraction too long.

The final note of “Flowers” fades into silence.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - STUDIO SET - SATURDAY - 2:00 PM

The lighting is set to “late evening.” Outside the fake apartment window: thunder, lightning. Inside: cold, clinical. The apartment set is dressed... but the floor is covered in black plastic.

QUENTIN paces. Muttering to himself. Blocking the scene in silence.

DWAYNE enters, energetic, alert.

DWAYNE

Dad?

Where is everybody? Is Alex not in this scene?

QUENTIN

We've got a new side.
(He hands it to him.)

DWAYNE

I didn't hear about this - when are we rehearsing?

QUENTIN

The director thinks you can nail it in one take.
Just be razor sharp.

DWAYNE

(flattered)
Okay... but can I talk to you about something first?

QUENTIN

Fernando and I were workshopping a new piece. Same playwright. He's on fire.

DWAYNE

So can we talk later?

QUENTIN

Sure. But for now, Let's act.

(Dwayne scans the new sides. Nods.)

DWAYNE

I got this.

QUENTIN

It's all in the eyes.

Camera pulls in. Nothing else matters.

DWAYNE

(smiling)
Ready for my close-up.
(MORE)

DWAYNE (CONT'D)
 (Quentin nods, then pulls
 out a collapsible prop
 knife and a small cloth.)

QUENTIN
 We'll block it.
 Knife from behind. Cloth across the
 mouth. Silences the moment. Eases
 the death.

They run it once – Quentin behind Dwayne, right arm forward
 with the blade, left with the cloth.

DWAYNE
 So I see you come from behind the
 curtain, take me by surprise –
 Got it. Now what's my motivation?

Quentin rolls his eyes.

QUENTIN
 (quiet)
 You just die.

DWAYNE
 Right.
 All in the eyes.

He takes his place. Stands on the X.

SFX: Thunder rumbles.

Quentin steps off-set. He swaps the prop knife for a real
 one. Soaks the cloth in chloroform. Calm. Smooth. Practiced.

DWAYNE (CONT'D)
 Ready when you are.

QUENTIN
 Remember – don't look at me.
 Only dialogue is Deuce saying, "I'm
 sorry."

DWAYNE
 Copy.
 Let's roll. One take.

QUENTIN
 ACTION.

Dwayne exhales.

Quentin emerges from behind the curtain. Dwayne turns
 halfway.

DWAYNE
 (quiet)
 I'm sorry-

Quentin drives the real knife into Dwayne's stomach. Covers his mouth with the soaked cloth. Eases him down.

Dwayne's eyes go wide. Then flutter. Then fade.

Quentin trembles. Takes the knife. Stabs him again. And again. And again.

QUENTIN
 (whispers, each time)
 I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
 I'm sorry.

Silence.

Blood pools. The plastic floor glistens.

Quentin steps back. Breathless. He pulls out his phone. Dials.

FERNANDO (V.O.)
 (ice cold)
 Well?

QUENTIN
 It's done.

FERNANDO (V.O.)
 Good boy.
 I'll send the team. Push rehearsal
 to 4 p.m.

Quentin hangs up.

He looks down at his son's body.

Then slowly turns off the stage lights.

ON SCREEN:

4 DOWN.

ON SCREEN:

SATURDAY - 4:00 PM

TICK TOCK.

42 HOURS REMAINING.

SPLIT SCREEN SEQUENCE

LEFT PANEL — INT. ALEX'S TRAILER — SOUNDSTAGE — 4:00 PM

Alex enters the trailer. Worn. Quiet. Tosses keys, throws his hoodie on the couch. A note taped to the mirror:

NOTE

"NEW SIDE — JACK DIES. REHEARSE ASAP."

Alex smirks. Pulls the side from the vanity.

ALEX
(reading, amused)
Huh. Looks easy. All in the eyes.

He flips the page. Frowns slightly. Then— Begins humming "Vampire" by Olivia Rodrigo.

Starts mouthing the lyrics — the soft venom of the chorus bleeding out casually:

ALEX (singing softly) "Bloodsucker, fame fucker, bleedin' me dry like a goddamn vampire..."

He moves around the trailer — light again, almost floating.

RIGHT PANEL — INT. BRIDGET'S ESTATE — FOYER — 4:00 PM

Party prep in full swing. Servers bustle. Champagne chilled—strings tuning in the distance. Fernando moves through the house like smoke.

INT. KITCHEN — MOMENTS LATER

Bridget holds a martini. Looks up. Fernando blocks the doorway.

FERNANDO
You always loved Alex more.

BRIDGET
Fernando, you are spiraling.
Rose I understood. Francisco — a given.

FERNANDO
Why did you take me in?
You should've left me with the
wolves.

BRIDGET
We were a family. But Simone and
Dwayne...
Alex is the actor.

Fernando's nostrils flare.

FERNANDO
(quietly)
Shut up.

BRIDGET
There's no competition here.

Fernando starts to breath heavier.

FERNANDO
(louder)
Shut up. Always favoring Alex.

BRIDGET
You two are different. Stop acting
like you're the same. You're not
and/

FERNANDO
No. You were an act.
And I'm calling CUT.

He pulls the blade – fast – drives it into her mid-sentence.

BRIDGET
(shock)
Wait–

Three quick thrusts. Cold. Controlled.

She collapses against the white cabinetry.

A martini glass slips – shatters.

Blood spreads across tile like spilled gin.

FERNANDO
(soft)
Tick.
Tock.

ON SCREEN:

5 DOWN.

Bridget's martini glass slips – SMASH against tile. Blood spreads across white floor like spilled gin.

MATCH CUT – SAME SOUND – the SMASH becomes a champagne flute clink.

LEFT PANEL – INT. ALEX'S TRAILER – CONTINUOUS

Alex finishes tying his boots. Still humming. He opens the closet to grab a jacket –

FREEZES.

In the MIRROR – written in lipstick:

“TO BE OR NOT TO BE...”

Alex turns –

Dwayne lies face up on the trailer couch.

Stabbed. Eyes open. Mouth slightly parted. Knife still in his stomach.

Alex staggers back.

ALEX

Oh my god–

He fumbles for his phone. Dials.

ALEX (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Fernando. You better pick up.

NOW.

CUT TO BLACK.

SATURDAY – 4:30 PM | TICK TOCK. 41.5 HOURS REMAINING

INT. ALEX'S TRAILER – CONTINUOUS

Alex, breath ragged. Staring at Dwayne's dead body. Blood drips from the knife to the floor.

He dials again. On speaker.

RING. RING.

FERNANDO (V.O., ANSWERING)
 (cheerful, ice-cold)
 Prince Charming. Now what mess are
 you into? (snickers) I'm not
 cleaning up another body. (a beat,
 amused) God, I love you.

INT. ALEX'S TRAILER - MOMENTS LATER

DWAYNE'S BODY still slumped. Knife glinting in the low light.
 Blood like punctuation.

FERNANDO storms in. Gloves on. Eyes colder than death.

FERNANDO
 Jesus Christ, Alex.
 (beat)
 Dead men really do seem to follow
 you.
 (approaches the body)
 Tell me—do you kill them with
 love...

Or do you just kill them?

Alex can barely breathe.

ALEX
 What are we going to do?

FERNANDO
 We?
 (beat)
 No, no. You are going to the party.

ALEX
 What?

FERNANDO
 Tonight.

You'll be there. Bridget and Quentin and the investors expect
 you.

ALEX
 But how can I—

FERNANDO
 SMACK.

A vicious slap across the face. Alex stumbles back, breath stolen.

Fernando crosses fast. Leans in, fist curling into Alex's shirt—RIP.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

(low, savage)

You, dear brother—are just an actor. That's it. So act. Fucking act. One more time, I clean up after you. Once more. Then you're on your own.

ALEX

I want to call Mother.

Fernando stares.

FERNANDO

Mother?

(laughs, venom)

Who the fuck is that? Bridget? She's NOT been a mother to us—just a credit card in heels and a martini glass.

(beat)

You get out of here. Clean yourself up. I'll pick you up at 7:30.

(beat)

This is a big night for me. So don't fuck it up.

Fernando gently taps Alex's cheek — like petting a dog.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

Good boy. Still wagging your tail, even after I gut you.

(glances at the torn shirt)

Don't worry. I'll dress you up nice again.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

We'll say it happened off-site. No witnesses. We move the body.

Fernando paces. Alex nods like he's just along for the ride.

ALEX

(affirmative)

Right. Off-site.

Alex crouches – glances at Fernando's turned back.

His fingers brush Dwayne's jacket pocket... linger... then slide something inside.

FERNANDO
(commanding)
Let's go, Alex.

Alex straightens – smooths his own torn collar.

Mask of compliance perfect.

ALEX
(light, almost joking)
You gonna make me do all the heavy
lifting, or you here for moral
support?

FERNANDO
(sly)
Well, there he is.

They carry the body to Alex's car and drop Dwayne in the trunk.

CAMERA PULLS BACK

Alex stares – torn shirt, trembling hand, broken heart... and the smallest ghost of a smirk.

Fernando makes a call.

FERNANDO
(into phone)
Cleanup. Now.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. ALEX'S CAR – DRIVING – SUNSET

The city is all glare and steel.

Alex grips the wheel like it's the only thing keeping him upright. He dials.

ALEX
(driving, voice trembling
but rising)
I can still get out. Still make it
right. It's not too late.
(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)
 (beat)
 Just survive. Just survive.

VOICEMAIL BEEP

ALEX (INTO PHONE)
 Anne... it's me. I need you.

Alex hangs up. Looks in the review mirror. ANGLE on his face in the mirror.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 Jesus, Prince Charming get hold of yourself.

He runs his hands through his hair.

FERNANDO (V.O.)
 (whispering, like a lover
 twisting a knife)
 This isn't a nightmare, Alex.
 This is the curtain call.
 You just forgot your fucking lines.

EXT. LA STREET - GOLDEN HOUR

The sun BURNS. The wheels of Alex's car blur into heatwaves. He disappears into it.

INT. HOLLYWOOD HILLS ESTATE - NIGHT

ON SCREEN:

SATURDAY - 8:00 PM

TICK TOCK. 38 HOURS REMAINING.

Champagne flutes clink. Forks against china. Velvet laughter wrapped around lies.

The party is peak LA - glowing skin, darker souls.

QUENTIN, stage-ready, stands under a massive crystal chandelier.

QUENTIN
 Ladies and gentlemen—thank you for
 being here.

(MORE)

QUENTIN (CONT'D)
 (beat) Bridget regrets she couldn't
 join us tonight. She's feeling...
 dead to the world.
 (scattered chuckles) But rest
 assured, Deuce's Wild is right on
 track.

Scattered applause. Sips of sparkling cruelty.

INT. ESTATE - ENTRYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Fernando enters like a shadow in custom tailoring. On his arm
 - Alex.

Fitted. Composed. Dangerous. He walks like James Bond into a
 casino - like he knows someone's holding a gun under the
 table. He just doesn't care.

In Alex's arms - Rocky. Diamond-cut red and black collar
 glints under the lights.

Alex crouches, sets him down. Rocky strides through the room
 with the casual authority of someone who already owns it.

He disappears up the sweeping staircase.

Moments later - POV from the balcony: Rocky perched above the
 Grand Salon, tail curling, eyes scanning the crowd below like
 a silent judge.

Whispers follow. Heads turn. But no one dares greet him
 first.

FERNANDO
 (low to Alex)
 Listen to me - you smile tonight,
 you shake hands, and you don't open
 your fucking mouth unless I tell
 you to.

Alex swallows it - lets Fernando think it lands.

Down the hall - ANNE, angles her head just enough to listen.
 Black notebook hugged to her chest.

Fernando leans closer.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
 You've got one job, Alex. Don't
 embarrass me.

Alex adjusts his cufflinks, his mask sliding back into place.

Anne steps out of the shadows.

ANNE
Everything good here?
(beat – casual, almost
teasing)
You look like you're about to bite
someone.

ALEX
(smooth)
Perfect.

FERNANDO
Relax, Anne. Rocky's got the only
claws we need tonight.

Fernando taps Alex's cheek.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
Prince Charming. Perfect.

Anne's eyes flick from Alex to Fernando's retreating back. She says nothing. She writes something in her notebook as she walks away.

INT. ESTATE - VARIOUS SPACES - NIGHT

Guests swirl and sip. The questions are silent but deafening:

WHERE IS SIMONE?

WHERE IS DWAYNE?

WHERE IS BRIDGET?

No one says it. But everyone thinks it.

ALEX moves through the room like a ghost in a black suit.

FERNANDO watches everything. Calculating. Cool.

And then—

THE DOOR OPENS.

Carl enters. Smooth. Silent. Dangerous. At his side – Anne.

Heads turn. Mouths tighten. Glasses freeze halfway up.

CARL
 (apologetically to the
 crowd)
 Fashionably late... but worth the
 wait.

He scans. Sees Quentin. Smiles like a loaded gun.

QUENTIN
 Carl.
 (beat)
 Didn't know you were still in town.

Carl has a sealed, brown envelope in his hand.

CARL
 Oh, I'm here. Not just to talk.

He sets the envelope down on the nearest tray. THUD – the weight of it is felt across the room. Quentin spies it. Fernando clocks the moment.

CARL (CONT'D)
 Time to get myself back into the
 Director's chair.

An esteemed, aging Hollywood actress – Nikki Starlight – gasps and drops her drink.

SFX: Slow motion – the gasp, glass slipping from her hand, shattering. Champagne oozes across the floor, sliding toward Carl's shoe.

Carl's reflection shimmers in the liquid. He looks at Nikki.

CARL (CONT'D)
 (deadpan)
 My goodness, Nikki Starlight... oh,
 how I have missed you.

He kisses her hand like a princess. She blushes.

ALEX appears, cutting through the swirl. He extends a hand to Carl – polite, public.

POV – CLOSE ON: A folded note slides from Alex's palm to Carl's. Carl slips it into his pocket without breaking eye contact.

ALEX
 If Hamlet's ghost is watching...
 (beat)
 "To be or not to be."
 (MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)
(sips)
Let the games begin.

POV - FROM THE
BALCONY:

Rocky sits in absolute stillness, eyes scanning the crowd below. It's not curiosity - it's judgment.

He's clocking all of them.

Carl turns abruptly back to Quentin.

CARL
(low)
I've got some red herrings here
that will make even your blood
curdle, Quentin.
Now - where's Bridie? First order
of business... clearing out the dead
weight.

Carl looks back to Nikki and winks.

CARL (CONT'D)
Let's meet later. I have a role in
mind for you.

The crowd murmurs. The air changes.

FERNANDO
(stepping forward, glass
in hand)
Ladies and gentlemen... friends...
family...
(beat, faux warmth)
And those of you who are neither,
but dress well enough to get past
the door.

Polite chuckles ripple. Fernando's eyes sweep the room -
landing on Alex, then Carl.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
I want to take a moment to
acknowledge the talent here
tonight... the actors, the dreamers...
(beat, to Alex)
...and those who just play the part.

A hush edges in.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

The thing about acting is – it's
all in the timing.
Miss your cue... (beat, to Alex) ...or
trust the wrong scene partner...
(beat, to Carl) ...and the whole
production dies before the curtain
falls.

He lifts his glass. The clink with Alex's is sharp, almost
metallic.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

To the ones who know their lines...
...and the ones who never see the
knife coming.

POV: ANGLE ON
ROCKY ON THE
BALCONY

Rocky's tail flicks once – the same motion we'll see later in
the garden shadows.

Fernando doesn't move, but his entire body goes on alert.

QUICK CUTS
THROUGH THE
ROOM:

- Someone whispers, "That's Alex's father, right?" - Someone
else mutters, "Didn't he die?"

- A woman clutches her pearls like they'll protect her from
the past.

CAMERA FINDS ALEX.

Waitstaff move like clockwork – all dressed as old-school
casino dealers. Black vests. Red bowties. Too much charm.

A GIANT CAKE dominates the far corner – frosted to look like
a pair of oversized white dice. Brownies shaped like tiny
dice are passed on trays. Mini skewers pierce bites of raw
tuna, black olive, white cheese, red tomato – like edible
symbols of blood, luck, and choice.

ANGLE ON A LOUNGE SINGER hums a smoky, jazz-slowed version of
"Flowers." 🎷 "I can buy myself flowers..." The melody drips
over the crowd like spilled liquor.

Alex hums along.

FERNANDO
 (chiming in, faux-
 charming)
 Oh Carl, I see where Alex gets his
 acting chops.

Alex offers a single, feigned chuckle – glass still lifted.

QUENTIN BURSTS IN

Louder than the piano. Louder than sense.

QUENTIN
 Pass the hors d'oeuvres!

He waves to a passing tray – skewers clatter gently. Themed.
 Loaded.

POV – Carl's hand slips into his pocket. Unfolds the note.

Beware of the snake in the garden.

A flicker in his eyes. Then the note disappears again.

CONVERSATION SNIPPETS float up:

WOMAN IN PEARLS
 Where's Simone?

MAN IN GUCCI
 Can't wait to meet Dwayne.

WOMAN (WHISPERING)
 Will the playwright be here?
 I must invest in his next project.
 This one's a gold mine.

CAMERA FINDS FERNANDO

Holding court. Surrounded. Worshipped. Arms wide, drink in
 hand, voice like gospel.

FERNANDO
 You see, the essence of Deuce's
 Wild is risk.
 Danger. Seduction. (beat) Every
 game is a love story. Every hand...
 a betrayal.

CAMERA PULLS BACK

The party whirls. Secrets swirl.

And above it all – the singer's voice threads through the air like a noose.

☞ "...say things you don't understand..."

INT. QUENTIN & BRIDGET'S ESTATE - GRAND SALON - CONTINUOUS

The music still lingers – soft jazz, seductive and slow. The camera floats above the crowd...

CARL Glides through the room like he owns it. Whiskey in hand. Eyes locked on Quentin from across the glittering floor. Measured. Calm. Dangerous.

Quentin panics. He turns sharply and grabs the elbow of WOMAN IN PEARLS standing nearby.

QUENTIN

(too loud, too fast)

Ah yes, and the key to staging any good betrayal – theatrical or emotional – is lighting. You want something that screams sincerity... while stabbing you in the back.
(laughs too long at his own joke)

WOMAN IN PEARLS

(dead-eyed)

Fascinating.

She sips her drink with all the enthusiasm of someone swallowing poison for sport. She glances toward Carl. Then back to Quentin. Bored. Curious. Unimpressed.

QUENTIN

(still rattling)

Of course, the Greek masters knew it best– A single spotlight. A stage. A scream. (adds quickly) Not that Deuce's Wild has anything in common with tragedy, no no– This is pure entertainment.

Carl keeps coming. Unbothered. Unflinching. The distance shrinks. So does Quentin's composure.

The room is spinning in slow motion.

CAMERA HOLDS on Quentin's sweaty smile.

Then a beat—

CARL

Don't let me interrupt your monologue.

(beat)

But I'm afraid you've already lost your audience.

Quentin turns. Carl is inches away now. Whiskey. Ice. Silence.

The Woman in Pearls slips away. She silently whispers "Thank you."

CARL (CONT'D)

Just us now, producer.

EXT. BRIDGET'S GARDEN - SATURDAY - 9:45 PM

Low music drifts from the house. Laughter. Clinks of champagne glasses. Murmurs.

Quentin moves fast, rattled. The smile he wore inside is cracked.

Over his shoulder — glimpses of Carl, working the room like he owns it. Nikki Starlight still on his arm, soaking up his charm.

Carl catches Quentin's eye.

Hands Nikki his glass.

Kisses her hand again — a public punctuation mark.

POV - CLOSE ON: With the same motion, Carl slips a folded note into Nikki's palm. She doesn't even glance down, just tucks it into her clutch like it's nothing.

CARL

Quentin... why don't we "dads" have a little talk?

He steers Quentin toward the garden. The crowd parts for him. The envelope still sits on that tray inside, untouched.

INT. PARTY - CONTINUOUS

Fernando watches the handoff from across the room. His gaze shifts from Carl... to Nikki... to the envelope. He excuses himself mid-sentence from a fawning circle.

MAN

Hollywood types... so fascinating. I have the money, and they get the power!

WOMAN

(laughing politely)
Oh, darling, it's all fake.

Fernando is already gone.

EXT. GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

The moonlight catches on Carl's cigarette case. He flips it open, offering one to Quentin. Quentin shakes his head.

QUENTIN

Carl. I'm... surprised. Thought you were dead.
(gasps, performative)
Really.

CARL

Money can only keep me dead for so long.

QUENTIN

Now Carl, I have no idea—

CARL

Where's Bridie? She never misses a party. Not in twenty years.

QUENTIN

(aloof)
Dead to the world tonight. Didn't have the stomach for it.

CARL

(deadpan)
Really? Well, I need a word with her. We've got unfinished business.

QUENTIN

If it's business, then it's my business.

CARL

I do hate wasting time with gatekeepers. Always pretending to know so much, when in truth... they know so very little.

Fernando appears behind them like smoke.

FERNANDO

Let's show Carl the night-blooming jasmine.

(polite smile)

The scent is deadly this time of night.

They walk deeper into the garden.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

So Father—
I mean, Carl...

Carl exhales smoke into Fernando's face.

CARL

Let's skip the lies. They're boring. You and Quentin — same blood, same mediocre talent.

He flicks ash.

POV: ANGLE ON
ROCKY IN THE
BUSHES

Motionless. Watching. Eyes like a statue carved to witness betrayal.

CARL (CONT'D)

It's time I'm back online. Bridie needs a strong man to run this empire. My money built it twenty-five years ago. I'm done hiding in the shadows.

A beat.

THUMP.

That sound.

Like a knife in a watermelon.

Fernando STABS Carl in the gut.

Again.

Again.

Carl gasps. Falls to his knees.

Fernando steps in and drives the knife into Carl's chest – hard – and leaves it there.

FERNANDO
You pretentious fuck.
I never liked you.
Always smelled like Old Spice.

QUENTIN approaches. Calm, dry.

QUENTIN
I didn't see that coming.
You're capable of more than I
expected.

FERNANDO
(low, dark)
You have no idea.
Don't even think of crossing me,
Father.

QUENTIN
(smirks)
Oh heavens, no. And get stabbed
like a commoner?

POV: ANGLE ON
ROCKY IN THE
BUSHES

His tail flicks. Then, he vanishes into shadow. Judgment rendered.

QUENTIN (CONT'D)
How many are we up to?

ON SCREEN:

6 DOWN.

SATURDAY - 10:00 PM

TICK TOCK. 36 HOURS REMAINING.

From the mansion:

A BELL RINGS.

VOICE (O.S.)
Dinner is served. All guests please
join us inside.

Fernando takes out his phone. No rush.

FERNANDO
(into phone)
Cleanup in the garden department.
We got a dead plant out here.

As the call ends, faintly – from inside – we hear the soft,
ironic hum of:

♪ "I can buy myself flowers..."

INT. ESTATE - GRAND SALON - LATER

The party hums, but something's off. A ripple of unease moves
through the crowd.

Nikki Starlight stands alone by the bar, a half-finished
glass of champagne in hand. Her eyes flick toward the tray
near the entrance.

The envelope is still there. Untouched. Forgotten.

Nikki glances around. No one watching. She slides it into her
vintage clutch with the same grace she'd use to accept an
Oscar.

A small smile.

Then she melts back into the swirl of guests.

INT. BRIDGET'S ESTATE - KITCHEN - SUNDAY, 2:00 AM

TICK TOCK. 40 HOURS REMAINING.

Workers move like shadows—clearing plates, sweeping blood
under silence. Two MEN carry BRIDGET'S BLOODIED BODY through
the back hall.

MAN #1
Boss, where do you want her?

FERNANDO
Downstairs. Walk-in fridge.

MAN #2

It's... getting full. Francisco.
Simone. Dwayne. Carl.
What do I tell the cook?

Fernando doesn't blink. He picks up a carving knife from the bar. Twirls it between his fingers like a toy.

FERNANDO

There's always room for one more.
You want me to clear a shelf?

MAN #1

(nervous)
No boss. Copy that.

They scurry off.

INT. WALK-IN FRIDGE - MOMENTS LATER

The heavy door creaks open. Cold air spills out.

The men toss Bridget unceremoniously on top of the others. Limbs tangle. Dresses stained. Makeup cracked.

ON THE STACK: Francisco. Simone. Carl. Dwayne. Bridget on top.

One man slams the door. They hang a handwritten sign: OUT OF ORDER A padlock clicks into place.

MAN #2

What are we gonna tell the cook?

MAN #1

(sighs)
That he's on vacation.

They disappear.

INT. BALLROOM - LATER

The crowd has gone. Music low. Shadows heavy.

From above - ANNE'S POV FROM THE BALCONY, same vantage where Rocky once perched.

She's still. Watching. Writing in that black notebook.

Below - FERNANDO, drink in hand, unaware he's being studied.

Anne closes the notebook. Slips it into her jacket.

Her hand moves to the concealed weapon at her side.

The camera pushes in -

Her lips press together, the faintest curl of red lipstick catching the light.

From this height, she's the silent judge now.

Empty champagne glasses. Torn cocktail napkins. Blood under polish. The last of the linens vanishes.

HEAD MAID

Señor Fernando... it's done.

Fernando peels off eight crisp \$100 bills. Hands them to her without looking up.

FERNANDO

Gracias. If I need you, I'll whistle.

She nods. Leaves.

Alone now, Fernando pours himself a drink.

He lifts a SAND HOURGLASS from the side table. Turns it upside down.

Watches the grains begin to fall.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

(soft, to himself)

Not much time, Prince Charming.
America loves a train wreck... But they worship a phoenix.

He raises his glass. Drinks.

ANGLE ON ANNE

Anne holds the gun and points it at the distant target of Fernando.

ANNE

(whispers to herself)

Bang... curtain down.

The sand keeps falling.

MATCH CUT TO:

GRAINS OF SAND falling in the hourglass -

SFX: The grains become water – flowing, pouring – morphing into a sharp, hot SHOWER.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT – BATHROOM – SUNDAY – 10:00 AM

ON SCREEN: TICK TOCK. 24 HOURS REMAINING.

Water steam and light slash across his sculpted frame. ALEX – back to us – soaking, silent, still. The audience breathes in. Tight shot. His body is Michelangelo meets sin on pause. No frontal. But yeah, it gasps.

He steps out. Dripping. Composed. Today's the day he takes back the narrative.

He wipes steam from the mirror. Watches himself. This time, he holds the gaze.

Grabs a towel. Wraps it. Checks his phone. Five texts from ANNE.

ALEX
Jesus... it's Sunday?

He unlocks it.

TEXTS READ:

CALL ME.

CALL ME.

CALL ME.

CALL ME.

CALL ME.

He tosses the phone onto the bed. Slips into boxers. Clean. Black. Fitted.

ROCKY meows – pacing for food, for love, for attention.

Alex picks up a cold coffee from the dresser. Heads toward the kitchen – still drying off.

INT. ALEX'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He steps into sun. The view of LA hits him-

ALEX
(startled)
Jesus!

He drops the coffee. SMASH. Looks up.

Fernando. Cool. Slick. In sunglasses, a fitted Cuban shirt, loafers. Leaning against the window like a scene from Scarface.

FERNANDO
Get dressed, Prince Charming.
I got plans for you today.

ALEX
I was gonna chill-

FERNANDO
(claps twice)
Tick. Tock. Today's all about you,
mi estrella. You got ten minutes.

ALEX
What am I wearing?

FERNANDO
(points)
Chair.

Laid out: Black ASRV shirt, matching pants, designer shoes. Flawless. Tailored. Sleek.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
And I got you a swimsuit, oil, and
a look for tonight.
Trust your older brother. We got
eyes to impress.

ROCKY pads over. Rubs against Fernando's leg. Lethal and lazy.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
Rocky... the coolest fuckin' cat in
LA.
If you could talk, the stories
you'd tell...

He turns to ALEX, claps his hands once.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

Nine minutes. Coffee's on the way.
And today?
We show them the Deuce.

He hums the hook to "Flowers" like a threat with melody. ALEX strips and changes in frame – deliberate, smooth, fully in control. When he's dressed: SEXY AF. Sharp. Deadly. Electric.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

(low, almost fond)

The first time I wore a suit, I was
4. Standing by the stairs.
Rose was upstairs... talking about
how Alex would "light up a lens" –
Anne too.
(beat)
Her heel caught. Hand flailed. My
jacket stayed clean.
They called it a fall. I called it
a lesson:
If you're not in the picture, you
don't exist.

Alex freezes mid-button, eyes narrowing – a blade sheathing itself.

ALEX

What are you talking about?

Fernando switches gears. Now the proud puppeteer.

FERNANDO

That's my boy. WeHo won't know what
hit it.
(beat)

He crosses, grabs his sunglasses, then looks back with venom-laced sugar:

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

This crowd's out here worried about
whether the mimosas are bottomless
or not.

Wake.
The.
Fuck.
Up.

(pause, then deadpan)
Oh, and are you a bottom or a top?

He winks. Sends a final kiss to Rocky. Then–

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

Dale.

FADE OUT.

EXT. WEST HOLLYWOOD POOLSIDE - SUNDAY - 12:00 PM

TICK TOCK. 22 HOURS REMAINING.

The sun blasts across the pool deck. Beautiful people drape over cabanas, sunglasses, sculpted abs, and air kisses. A curated frenzy of desire and distraction.

FERNANDO

(sharp)

Take off your shirt.

Alex hesitates. Then - gives in. He peels off his shirt.

The crowd notices. Gasps. Smirks. Phone cameras. A dozen hands reach with numbers, compliments, lust.

OVERLAPPING VOICES

Are you on Grindr?

You're perfect.

I have a role for you.

Is there an hourly rate?

Do you like dogs?

Just one night?

What's your next project?

Fernando watches, beaming like a stage mom at the Oscars.

FERNANDO

(whispers)

Smile, Prince Charming. This is the dream.

Alex turns. Forces the million-dollar smile.

INT. FERNANDO'S CAR - 5:00 PM - SUNSET

Fernando drives. Alex, silent in the passenger seat, stares out the window. The shine has worn off.

FERNANDO

That crowd LOVED you.

ALEX

Yeah.

FERNANDO

You'll thank me one day.

Alex says nothing.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

I'll pick you up tomorrow. 10AM.
Big finish. Just don't fuck it up.

Alex gets out. Walks toward his building. Looks back once.

Fernando is already gone.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Alex enters. Rocky meows, rubs against his leg.

Alex checks his phone.

FIVE TEXTS FROM
ANNE:

"Call me."

"Call me."

"NOW."

INT. ANNE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dark. Still. Just the whisper of a record needle.

Anne hits her phone and "LIPSTICK PROMISES" plays

We pan across:

🔑 A MASSIVE WHITEBOARD - Taped-up photos. Torn script pages. Fragments of bloodied costumes. Center grid - a Hamlet character map.

☐ HAMLET → ALEX ☐ CLAUDIUS → FERNANDO ☐ GERTRUDE → BRIDGET
☐ THE GHOST → CARL ☐ POLONIUS → QUENTIN ☐ OPHELIA → SIMONE
☐ LAERTES → DWAYNE ☐ HORATIO → ANNE ☐ FORTINBRAS → ALEX
(RESURRECTED)

No lines of dialogue. Just:

- Anne writing names in red sharpie - Circling FERNANDO again and again - Tacking a bloody lipstick tube to the corner - Placing the ZEUS symbol next to Alex - Pinning a screenshot of the "Deuce's Wild" script with the words: "THE PLAY'S THE THING" underlined three times.

She steps back.

A single candle burns next to the board. Her reflection glows faintly in the window - twin to Alex's.

Anne picks up a marker. Under Fernando's name, she writes:

"The Puppet Master." Then below it, she writes in small letters: "The first lie was love."

She exhales. Hands trembling - not with fear, but with resolve.

She draws one final line. From FERNANDO to ALEX. Across it, she writes: "BROTHERS. BLOOD."

Hold on that.

Then:

CAMERA PUSHES INTO THE REFLECTION - mirror on mirror - until we are back inside the machine.

SCENE SPLIT: ANNE MAPPING / ALEX IN CONTROL

INT. ANNE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The whiteboard glows with connections - FERNANDO at the center. Anne draws the final line. "Brothers. Blood."

Her breath catches.

Cross-cut to:

INT. ABANDONED STUDIO - NIGHT

The lights hum. Dust floats like ash in the air.

Alex stands alone. Shirtless. Barefoot. Breathing hard.

He walks to the center of the mat.

He plants his hands. Slowly. Deliberately.

His fingers splay-scars visible, fingerprints blurred.

ALEX (V.O.)
They took my balance. My name. My
voice. But not this.

He kicks up. A brutal handstand.
Muscles trembling, but locked. Held. Owned.
No stunt double. No illusion.
This is Alex—full, scarred, strong.

SLOW PAN AROUND HIM

The world upside down.
But him? Upright in his own truth.
He lowers himself with perfect control.

ALEX (V.O.)
Print this.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT -NIGHT

No dialogue.
Just the sound of his breathing. Controlled. Measured.
ALEX, shirtless. The ZEUS tattoo gleams on his shoulder —
perfectly aligned in the mirror.
He doesn't blink. The world is chaos. But this — this is
control.
Back to:

INT. ANNE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

She stares at the board. The candle flickers. She reaches
out. Extinguishes the flame.
SFX: WHOOF
Then back to:

MATCH CUT TO:

FERNANDO at the investor dinner Raising a glass. Toasting.

But behind the eyes? He feels the shift.

INT. DARK ROOM / UNKNOWN LOCATION - NIGHT

ON SCREEN - THE GRID.

SFX: HEARTBEAT-STYLE RHYTHM: BUMP... BUMP... BUMP... AS NAMES
DROP RED.

A white screen. Stark. Empty. Then - one by one - photos
appear. Black and white. Mugshot-style. SIX faces.

Names fade in below them. Each one flashes. Then goes red.

ONE DOWN - FRANCISCO.

TWO DOWN - ROSE.

THREE DOWN - DWAYNE.

FOUR DOWN - SIMONE.

FIVE DOWN - CARL.

SIX DOWN - BRIDGET.

CLOSE ON:

The screen pulses. Then glitches. One face fades back in:
ALEX - eyes locked. Alive.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Slow, deep ****breathing****. Controlled. Grounded.

ALEX - shirtless, black shorts. Balanced on fingertips. Doing
pushups like it's life or death. Each drop - an echo of a
THUD. A past death. Each rise - a vow not to be the next.

THUD - FRANCISCO'S BODY. THUD - SIMONE'S FALL. THUD -
DWAYNE'S LAST BREATH. THUD - SIMONE'S GURGLE. THUD - ROSE'S
SILENT SCREAM.

SFX: SILENCE

ZEUS tattoo glints on his shoulder. His reflection in the
floor mirrors the strength.

SFX: STEADY BREATHING FROM ALEX.

He does a full-on perfect handstand. Holds. Lowers. Controlled. His chest swells. His biceps pumped. His breathing like a fine-tuned machine, barely a sound.

His coal-black eyes reflect no fear – only purpose.

Five o'clock shadow. He locks in the mirror, not in vain, not in awe, but in ZEUS, he controls his destiny.

Rocky watches from the counter. Silent. Still. Loyal.

SFX: Single Violin with the notes: "I can buy myself flowers" with the last note hanging.

INT. BRIDGET'S ESTATE - NIGHT

ON SCREEN:

TICK TOCK. 12 HOURS REMAINING.

ANNE (V.O.)
Twelve hours left. One final truth.

EXT. GARDEN - BRIDGET'S ESTATE - CONTINUOUS

Blood from Carl's fall already scrubbed. But the wind carries memory.

INT. STUDY - CONTINUOUS

QUENTIN, hands trembling, plays a voice memo.

FERNANDO (V.O.)
The sound it made?
Like stabbing a watermelon.

A pause. Then – the door opens. FERNANDO enters. Cool. Composed. Knife already in hand.

QUENTIN
I have you.

FERNANDO
No.
(pause)
You had time. You wasted it.

QUENTIN
(pleading)
I'm your father.

FERNANDO
Then you should've taught me
better.

A beat. FERNANDO steps forward.

QUENTIN backs up.

Lights dim.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
You're a failed producer and a
worse liar.

QUENTIN
I run this company—

FERNANDO
(interrupting)
Let me tell you a story. I killed
my mother Rose, because she forgot
me. You? I never remembered you.

QUENTIN
(sigh)
Such drama. Alex was always the
superior actor. "They say an old
man is twice a child."

Fernando slashes. Once. Twice. Four more times.

Quentin collapses. Bloody. As Quentin slides down the wall,
he catches his own reflection in a silver-framed family
photo.

A smear of blood crosses his cheek as he falls.

FERNANDO
God, what a waste of time you've
been.

He dials.

FERNANDO (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)
Got a body. Toss it with the rest.

ON SCREEN:

7 DOWN. TICK TOCK

SUNDAY - 10:00 PM

TICK TOCK. 12 HOURS REMAINING.

CUT TO:


INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT - MONDAY - 7:00 AM

Silence.

Light breaks through blinds like blades. The room is still. Sacred.

CLOSE ON: A sleek black shirt. Then - a belt. A watch. His signature boots.

Each item placed with quiet precision.

We hear the same violin motif -  the "Flowers" ghost note from earlier - now slightly fuller. Stronger. No lyrics yet. Just violin and breath.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alex stands shirtless in front of the mirror.

He rolls his left shoulder back. The ZEUS tattoo flashes.

He buttons the final black button. Smooth. Controlled.

Then - he reaches into a drawer. Pulls out the necklace. A double-cross. Heavy. Personal. Loaded.

He clasps it. Lets it rest on his collarbone. His armor is complete.

ROCKY watches from the sink counter. Head tilted. Eyes locked. A soldier at attention. Silent. Knowing.

ALEX
(whispers)
Time to finish the show.

SLAM TO BLACK.

ON SCREEN: TICK TOCK. MONDAY - 8:00 AM 4 HOURS REMAINING.

🔊 AUDIO BEAT SFX: The faint pulse of "Calle Ocho" (Pitbull)
Not the full song – just the rhythm. Bare bassline. Breath. A
whisper of swagger.

Then:

VOICE (O.S.)
(soft, ghostly, like a
warning)
VALE. ONE. TWO. THREE. FOUR. Uno...
dos... tres... (beat) ...quatro.

QUATRO echoes long – pulled like a thread through black...

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - MONDAY - 10:00 AM - DAYLIGHT HARSH, TRUTH
SHARP

FERNANDO
You were always the weak one, Alex.
I carried you. Protected you.
Without me, you're nothing.

FERNANDO leans in. Too close. Too calm.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
You always needed me. Always.
I made you. Without me—

ALEX
(quiet)
You done?

A beat.

Then – SLAP.

ALEX's hand snaps across Fernando's face. Not rage. Not
panic. Control. Like slicing fruit with a single, clean
blade.

FERNANDO freezes.

That silence? Biblical.

FERNANDO
(low, stunned)
You just hit me.

ALEX
(cold)
That wasn't a slap. That was the
answer. You didn't carry me.

(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)
You buried me. But I dug my way
out.
(steps forward) Pride isn't ego
when it's earned.

FERNANDO
(chuckles, cold)
You really believe that?

Fernando turns. Alex turns - sees her. Anne walk in.

ANNE
You're a poser, Fernando.
Your substance? As deep as a puddle
on Wilshire Blvd.

(SLOW MOTION)

Anne raises the gun - two hands. Steady.

INT. GRAND SALON - NIGHT

ALEX
Anne - NO-!

He dives-

BANG.

HOLD. TIME SUSPENDS.

The bullet rips through air. Alex takes it - center mass. The
heart.

The light behind him flares white.

Then-

SLOW MOTION - ALEX CRUMPLES.

Blood blooms.

Fernando catches him. FERNANDO'S BLOODY HANDPRINT presses to
Alex's chest.

BACK TO REAL TIME.

ALEX
 (low, truthful, gasping)
 You gonna carry your share of the
 weight...
 (beat – eyes locked on
 Fernando's)
 Or let this gorilla do the heavy
 lifting, alone?

Fernando's grip tightens – he studies Alex like he's seeing him for the first time.

FERNANDO
 (quietly)
 I told you... I always clean up your
 messes.

Blood starts to seep onto the floor.

Sirens WAIL in the distance. Red and blue lights flash faint outside.

ANNE (O.S., SCREAMING)
 Help! Someone help! He's been shot!

Anne bolts toward the light – her scream chasing her down the hallway.

The room spins.

FLASH IMAGE: The ZEUS tattoo on Alex's skin – covered in blood. The red spreads, and we dissolve into–

ON SCREEN:

FLASHBACK – 15 YEARS AGO – NIGHT

YOUNG ALEX (13) in an alley – fists and boots raining down.

DUDE 1
 Queer.

DUDE 2
 Faggot.

A fist cracks his jaw. Alex drops – dazed.

BANG. BANG. BANG.

The attackers hit the pavement. One still groans – Fernando plants a boot on his chest.

YOUNG FERNANDO
You don't touch my brother.

He's on the phone already, voice cold:

YOUNG FERNANDO (CONT'D)
Vinnie, bring the van. Ropes. Bags.
We've got to clean up.

He reaches down, pulls Alex to his feet – tender for just a second.

YOUNG FERNANDO (CONT'D)
I always clean up your messes.

BACK TO PRESENT – SAME ANGLE as Fernando's hand lifting Alex in the alley, only now it's slick with blood from the shooting.

FADE TO BLACK – a beat of silence.

Then – one faint red glow appears in the darkness. A heartbeat shape.

It pulses once... twice... then vanishes.

ON SCREEN:

8 DOWN

TICK TOCK

BLACK SCREEN – AUDIO ONLY

SFX: HEARTBEAT – steady, deliberate.

Anne's earlier "Help!" echoes faintly, distant.

Fast. Slowing. Fading.

BEEP. BEEP.

Medical rhythm. Then – a single breath from Alex.

FLATLINE.

Silence.

ON SCREEN:

ONE WEEK LATER.

EXT. CEMETERY - GRAVEL PATH - DAY

We see and hear only ANNE'S SHOES crunching gravel. Her breath. Her grief.

SFX: THE WIND. NOTHING ELSE.

She holds ROCKY to her chest.

One by one - the headstones.

Slow zoom on: ALEX VEGA - "He loved loud. He died silent."

You hold too long - audiences start tearing up.

We hold long on the gravestones:

FRANCISCO ALBA - Taken. Then taken again.

ROSE DELANEY - Mother. Sister. Ghost.

SIMONE BLACK - A voice too loud to silence.

CARL VEGA - A man they tried to erase.

QUENTIN BLACK - Producer. Manipulator. Liar.

DWAYNE BLACK - Believed in love. Died for it.

BRIDGET DELANEY - She wrote her ending in blood.

ALEX VEGA - He loved loud. He died silent.

We stay on Alex's grave for a few beats too long. The audience thinks:

ALEX (V.O.)

Eight graves. Eight stories buried
in silence. Seventy-two hours.
That's all it took. For everything
to change.

ANNE

You take that hurt.
You bottle it. Put it on the shelf.
You move on.

A soft wind moves the trees. Leaves drift like ash.

ANNE (CONT'D)
 You know that bottle's there.
 Always. No worries. (beat) This
 genie... Already out of the bottle.

ALEX (V.O.)
 I shattered mine. So let them all
 choke on the glass.

ANNE stands between the headstones. She holds ROCKY tight to her chest – the last warm thing. Her eyes scan the names.
 Alex

From a distance, Fernando. – He watches. Sharp suit. Clean shoes. Unburied. Unbothered. Unforgiven.

He lights a cigarette. Takes one slow drag. Flicks it into the wind. And steps into shadow.

ON SCREEN:

WRITTEN IN SCROLL

There's always one left to lie.

FERNANDO (V.O.)
 They were always playing checkers.
 I was playing God.

Rocky's yes fixed on the horizon. Like he knows something.
 Anne kneels. Whispers something we don't hear.

Rocky meows once, soft anlike an omen, a signal. Then the faintest glint of the cane.

Anne touches the headstone. A HAND touches hers.

Gasps. A cane enters frame. She turns.

ALEX.

Bruised. Healing. Whole.

A whisper –

ALEX
 Lone wolves don't know they're
 alone.
 (beat)
 They just keep moving.
 (beat)
 Vale.
 Rumba.

FAINT SOUND — WIND. BIRDS. A BELL.

♪ MUSIC KICKS — “I KNOW YOU WANT ME (Calle Ocho)” — Pitbull (ALEJANDRO singing) Raw. Rough. Honest. Spanish and English flow like fire and gasoline.

SUNG O.S.

*Dale! One, two, three, four Uno,
dos, tres, cuatro
I know you want me (Want me) You
know I want ya (Want ya) I know you
want me, eh You know I want ya
(Want ya) (Ha-ha)*

Rocky leads. Alex and Anne walk slowly down the hill not running. Not hiding. Just moving forward.

The wind stirs the trees.

And behind them the city waits.

FADE OUT.

CREDIT ROLL AS THE SONG PLAYS. JUST OVER A MINUTE. LONG ENOUGH TO FEEL THE WEIGHT—AND THE LIFT

Silence.

FINAL IMAGE — POST-CREDITS

EXT. THEATER — NIGHT

Empty. Still. Rain drizzling. A city that's moved on.

THE MARQUEE: DEUCE'S WILD

INT. SOUNDSTAGE — NIGHT

Stage dark. Dust thick. No voices. No crew. No stars.

A single ghost light glows center stage.

A GLOVED HAND enters frame. Reaches for the switch.

CLICK.

Nothing happens. The light stays on.

Then— A WHISPER in the dark:

VOICE (O.S.)
Macbeth.

The bulb flickers. And dies.

BLACK SCREEN.

Silence stretches.

Then:

Stillness. The city hangs like a held breath. The DEUCE'S WILD banner flaps weakly in the wind — frayed now. Ghostly.

Alex takes off a jacket to reveal a BLACK ASRV sleeveless tank top. It is his armor. Zeus is now bold and present on his left shoulder.

ALEX
(low, confident)
I'll drive.

INT. SUV - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Alex drives. Worn. Healing. Alive.

Anne rides shotgun. His Left hand on the wheel, the right folded softly into hers. Rocky in the middle.

Outside — the world flows past. Silent. Watching.

Alex catches a flicker of himself in the SUV window — warped, fleeting. But just enough to catch it — the ZEUS tattoo glinting in the reflection.

A ghost of who he was. A glimpse of what he's becoming.

Alex hands Anne a note. She opens it. Puzzled.'

ANNE
Becoming Shakespeare now?
(reading with mock drama)
Beware of snakes in the garden?

Alex looks straight ahead. His voice like an old Sage.

ALEX
I meant to give this note to
Dwayne, too.

ANNE

Too?

ALEX

I gave it to Carl. He died.

(beat)

I didn't have time to warn Dwayne.

Ahead – the DEUCE'S WILD banner flaps in the wind.

ANNE

What about the movie?

A beat.

Alex doesn't turn. Just smiles – faint, bruised, burning.

ALEX

Still rolling.

(beat)

Taking the director's chair.

Thinking Gosling for Deuce.

ANNE

(smirks)

You're serious?

ALEX

Yeah. Launching my own banner. **"VR
Productions."**

She laughs. He leans his head back. The city opens up ahead.

EXT. HIGHWAY – CONTINUOUS

The SUV disappears into the horizon.

EXT. HIGHWAY – DUSK BLEEDS INTO NIGHT

The BLACK SUV disappears into the horizon.

CAMERA PANS LOW.

HOLD ON THE DRIVER-SIDE TAILLIGHT – the last pulse of red.

All goes silent.

The camera slips around the bumper... slower now... suspense and
breath hanging...

CLOSE ON LICENSE
PLATE:

REVNGE

BLACK SCREEN. SILENCE.

ALEX (V.O.)
(low. final.)
Macbeth.
Dale.
Rumba.

CUT TO:

♪ "I KNOW YOU WANT ME (CALLE OCHO)" -
PITBULL
Latin beats. Swagger. Victory.

Let it ride for 30 seconds like a curtain call soaked in
blood.

DROP TO BLACK. TOTAL SILENCE.

FADE IN - INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM - UNKNOWN TIME

Rocky asleep on Alex's bare chest.

Alex - alive. Healing. Asleep.

Then -

A VOICE (O.S.)
(soft, ghostly, sung like
memory)
"You told me I was all you'd ever
need..."

Rocky's tail flicks once.

FADE TO BLACK.

HARD STOP OF THE MUSIC.

EXT. FERNANDO'S HOLLYWOOD MANSION DAY

A courier approaches the door. Rings the bell.

INT. FERNANDO'S MANSION - CONTINUOUS

FERNANDO
(disdain)
Yes?

Door opens.

COURIER
Package for you.
(glances at label)
Fernando Vega... wait, are you
related to the Alex Vega?

Fernando takes the envelope. Closes the door in his face.

EXT. MANSION - CONTINUOUS

The courier mutters as he heads for his van.

COURIER
Pretentious Hollywood prick.

He steps deliberately on the flower bed before climbing in.

INT. FERNANDO'S MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Fernando reads the return address aloud.

FERNANDO
Nikki Starlight... my God. Still
alive. Too bad. What a "B" actress
she was.

(laughs)

He opens the envelope.

FIRST ITEM - a photograph of a handwritten note:

BEWARE OF SNAKES IN THE GARDEN.

Fernando stares at it. Recognition flickers. His smile fades for just a beat.

FERNANDO
(soft, almost to himself)
Alex.
(beat, micro-smile)
Don't fuck with me.

THUD – incriminating photos and documents spill onto the bar.

He bends, picks up a second handwritten note.

INSERT – NIKKI'S NOTE

*I'll be expecting my call for the
lead role by Friday and the details
of my holding shares in VEGA
PRODUCTIONS.*

MUSIC O.S. – "LIPSTICK PROMISES"

"You told me I was all I'd ever need..."

MUSIC CUTS OUT – EERIE SILENCE.

FERNANDO
(cold smile)
You die in Act 1.

MUSIC SWELLS BACK IN.

Fernando glances outside, watching the courier's van disappear down the drive. He notices the trampled flowers. The driver gives him THE FINGER.

FERNANDO
(low, to himself)
And you die... before the opening
credits.

MUSIC HITS FULL.

THE END.