

STATIC

Pilot - "The Great Frequency"

Written by
James A. Reeves & Candy Chang

v5.1
February 28, 2026

+1 248 376 8334
james@jamesreeves.co

1. SERIES OF SHOTS - INT. SUPERSTORE - NIGHT

Silent black-and-white security footage of a superstore in the style of Target. The timestamp says 11:59pm. People shop. They stop. Look up. Cover their ears. 12:00am. The image splinters as the lens cracks.

Now we're in the store, full color and close up. Pizzas. Tater tots. Waffles. Fluorescent lights flicker. Voices wail. The freezer glass shatters.

A seasonal display with a Christmas tree bursts into flames.

In Women's Apparel, voices cry out to God. A gunshot. Blood sprays across a rack of blouses.

Back to the cracked security camera. The mute image of panic glitches. A title appears with the sound of a radio being tuned:

STATIC

The timestamp on the footage quickly reverses. 12:00, 11:59. The cracks in the lens disappear. 11:58, 11:57. People return to shopping. 11:56, 11:55, 11:54...

2. EXT. VEGAS STRIP - NIGHT

A downpour. Clear plastic umbrellas choke the Strip. A queue of rideshare vehicles outside Assyria, a mammoth casino-resort.

The radio static continues, tuning through stations.

RADIO VOICE 1

-the electric company will begin rationing power based on your social-

Static.

RADIO VOICE 2

-humans don't have the technology to suck out a person's intestines through their naval, but I'm telling you, that's what-

2. INT. KAY'S CAR - THE STRIP - NIGHT

The dashboard clock reads 11:41. A jade dragon dangles from the mirror. KAY, 60s, drums her fingers on the wheel and waits. She's a small woman, sharp-featured and dressed in black.

She fiddles with the radio, nested within the dashboard's bank of screens, familiar but larger, more insistent: massive GPS display, her 3.1-star rating above a message that says *Probationary Status*.

RADIO VOICE 3

—the universe might not even exist, maybe the sun is hanging from a tree somewhere—

Static.

RADIO VOICE 4

—Interstate 15 was shut down this morning when six women laid down in the southbound lanes—

Kay sighs. She wrestles a piece of Nicorette from its plastic and tosses it on a small mountain of wrappers in the cupholder.

Through her windshield, a commotion: dozens of umbrellas flock toward the entrance of Assyria, where a dapper man smiles and shoots his cuffs before he's swallowed by a thicket of raised phones.

Kay closes her eyes.

KAY

I attract wealth with ease. Abundance is my birthright. I manifest prosperity through divine grace.

She flips down the visor to inspect her face. A newspaper clipping is pinned next to the mirror: a photo of a young woman howling with a streak of black paint covering one eye and running to her chin.

As Kay picks at the gray weeds poking through her dye job, the rear door jerks open and a shadow slides in. Kay quickly flips up the visor and turns on her customer-service voice.

KAY

How're you doing on this rainy night?

The PASSENGER, 30s, does not look up from his phone.

PASSENGER

Just get me to Sumeria before midnight.

Kay eyes the clock. 11:43. She pulls into traffic and immediately hits a light.

KAY

What's your game? Texas? Seven-card? Omaha?

He remains glued to his screen.

KAY

Well, like they say, you don't play the cards, you play the man.

A drunk blonde on stilettos toddles in front of Kay's car like a freshly born deer. The girl tilts her umbrella and puckers her lips for a selfie. A torrent of runoff water knocks her into the cross-traffic and she's nearly creamed by a pickup.

KAY (LAUGHING)

You see that? If she died, I'd like to see that picture. Lots of folks would. Imagine a museum filled with them. Some varsity kid before he goes over a cliff, maybe a posh lady smiling as she tumbles off a cruise ship. But it'd be classy, yeah? Quality prints, nicely framed. Museum of the Last Selfie, I'd call it, because even those who die stupidly deserve to be remembered, don't you think?

(Looks at her passenger in the rearview hopefully.)

Just need an investor, maybe someone to handle the licensing.

PASSENGER

You sure you can get me to Sumeria before midnight?

KAY

Wanna bet on it? After this light, it's a quick hop onto the freeway—

PASSENGER

I'll throw in an extra hundred if you're right. Now please, stop talking."

Kay bites her lip, trying not to speak. She glares at the red light, willing it to turn green. But to hell with wishing and hoping. She punches the gas and tourists scramble out of her way as she runs the light and hooks a hard left onto Interstate 15.

As the harsh light of the Strip fades behind her, she relaxes. Her passenger begins to argue with a voice in his ear.

PASSENGER

The fuck you mean they're already bringing in the—? I came all this way—

yes, I'm in a car now. Okay. Five minutes. Understood.

(plucks a white lozenge from his ear)

Driver. Hey. Driver. Can you get me there in five minutes?"

Kay shrugs, still salty about being shushed.

PASSENGER

For chrissake, you can talk.

KAY

I'll get you there in four.

4. EXT. HIGHWAY EXIT - NIGHT

The edge of the Vegas sprawl: skeletons of half-finished condos punctuate the big-box stores and parking lots.

5. INT. CAR - NIGHT

PASSENGER

Looks like a fucking moon settlement out here.

Kay blinkers off the ramp and hits a river of taillights. Gawker slowdown. Roadside flares in the rain. The disco lights of a cop car.

PASSENGER

There goes your extra hundred.

They inch past a pot-bellied man in the bed of a pickup, shirtless and wailing. He holds a red canister of gasoline over his head and threatens to pour.

A family in a minivan takes pictures, dangling from their windows to get a better shot.

PASSENGER (CONT'D)

Look at this hopeless fuckwit. When did everyone get so pained? So sensitive?

He lowers the window, and the Gas Can Man's tirade becomes audible.

GAS CAN MAN

You don't know what I heard! I can't live with these noises in my head no more—

PASSENGER

Then light up already! More for us.

He rolls up the window with a satisfied grin.

PASSENGER

Driver. You need to get around this.

The car inches forward. A fireball erupts in the rearview.

The passenger's phone dings with a flurry of alerts.

PASSENGER

Christ, they're about to start. Please, lady, I'll sweeten it with another hundred if you get me there in two minutes.

She looks at the clock on the dash. 11:47.

KAY

Two hundred plus the fare?

PASSENGER

That's what I said.

She grins and punches the gas.

The passenger shrieks as she straddles the curb, zips around the stalled traffic and froggers across six lanes, leaving screeching tires and horns in her wake.

She trailblazes through the landscaping and lands with a thud. Her visor flips down as she rolls to a stop before the revolving doors of Sumeria.

Kay smiles at the terrified man in her backseat.

KAY

That'll be two hundred plus the fare.

PASSENGER

You demented bitch.

KAY

But you're here. In one minute, not two.

PASSENGER

I'm not paying a penny. I'm going take everything from you until there's nothing left but dust. Reckless endangerment, Emotional distress. Unlawful imprisonment. Did you see the wreckage back there!

KAY

They're fine. They have airbags.

PASSENGER
Airbags? What's your name?

He nods at the photo clipped to the visor.

PASSENGER (CONT'D)
That you in that picture? Being fucking
crazy?

Kay glares at him, her face no longer pleasant.

KAY
Out.

The passenger does not move. Kay trembles with anger. He points his phone at her face and begins to film.

PASSENGER
Hey everyone, this psychopath almost
killed me tonight—

Kay screams, and it's an earsplitting wail, a lifetime of frustration unleashed. The passenger scrambles out of the car, and when the door slams shut, she sighs with relief.

But the passenger is orbiting her the car, still filming.

PASSENGER
I've got your license plate, you crazy
slag. I've got your face, and oh, I've
got you. Everyone's gonna see this. The
police are gonna see this. You fucked
with the wrong—

Kay squeals out of the parking lot. A screen on her dashboard makes a sad ding as it flashes *Zero Star Ride*.

6. EXT. SERVICE DRIVE - NIGHT

We follow Kay's car down the miracle mile.

Sirens as several patrol cars speed towards the intersection where Kay caused an accident.

Kay's car hooks a quick turn into the parking lot of a superstore and slides between two large pick-up trucks.

She cuts the engine and pops another piece of Nicorette into her mouth even though she's already chewing one.

KAY
Abundance is my birthright. I manifest
prosperity through divine grace.

More sirens fill the night. She considers the superstore: a good place to hide out for a while.

7. INT. SUPERSTORE - NIGHT

Kay shambles down the main drag of the store. Canned music plays in the background.

A man in a card dealer's vest sniffs a bath towel.

A woman with an airbrushed walrus on her sweater whispers before a voice-controlled blender.

A man in flip-flops shouts "shoot me an email" to nobody in particular while he examines a can of air freshener.

As Kay passes the cosmetics section, she catches her reflection and flinches. She pauses to tidy up.

Nearby, two young women goof around, filming each other with their phones. GOLD, 20s, wears a gold wig and matching gold tank top that says *Texting Is for Cowards*. SILVER, 20s, sports a silver hoodie with *Bay of Pigs* in bubble letters.

They whisper-giggle at Kay combing her wet hair with her fingers. They point their cameras at her.

Kay gives them a middle finger and grabs a hairbrush from the rack.

A radio squawks, the chatter of a walkie-talkie. A young cop stands in the main aisle, surveying the store.

Kay ducks behind a lipstick display and counts to ten.

KAY (WHISPERING)

I attract wealth with ease. Abundance is my birthright.

When she peers around the corner, the cop is gone but the SILVER and GOLD are approaching with their cameras. Kay steps back and a fast-moving shopping cart knocks her to the floor.

Silver and Gold laugh at the collision.

FATHER JIM, 50s, stands behind the shopping cart. He reaches down for Kay's hand.

FATHER JIM

You alright, sister? I'm so sorry, these carts just zip along and—

GOLD

Christ, this is a sad old people scene.

(waves a gold-plated vape pen at Silver)

Get your shit, Sil. I'll be outside. Eight minutes 'til showtime.

Gold leaves.

Kay takes the priest's hand. Back on her feet, she turns to scream at those awful girls. Gold is gone, but Silver is making a beeline for the frozen food section. Kay's about to tell her to shrivel up and die but the girl is crouching before a frosty window Kay knows well: dinners for one. Her heart softens just enough to put her tongue back in her mouth.

She considers the wine bottles in Father Jim's cart.

KAY

That's a lot of blood, Father.

Father Jim cocks his finger and winks, enjoying the joke.

She considers his smile. Those merry eyes. Maybe if he wasn't a priest.

He continues on his way and Kay heads toward the back of the store, where the flatscreens in the electronics department play a scene from *Family Therapy*, a vintage sitcom we'll visit often: YOUNG TANNER WHITNEY, 10, grins in the living room of a 1990s TV home.

YOUNG TANNER WHITNEY

You'll never know what time it is!

Canned laughter, applause.

A man in flip-flops and a Funkadelic t-shirt stands before the screens, laughing. This is CHUCK, 60s.

CHUCK

Stone classic. Gone too soon, eh?

KAY

Not soon enough, if you're really asking.

CHUCK

The hell's wrong with you? That bot was a national treasure.

KAY

My daughter would still be alive if it weren't for the man that boy became.

The screens cut to a solemn reporter:

REPORTER

You'll never know what time it is. A catchphrase many have said, but only Tanner Whitney could deliver. This beloved sitcom star became a political dynamo and, for many, a hero.

The broadcast cuts to footage of TANNER WHITNEY, now in his 40s, thundering at a podium. He's glossy and telegenic like Bobby Kennedy, and his face is replicated across a dozen flatscreens.

TANNER WHITNEY

We share only fear. Only the desire to retreat from each other. And this must change! Because you *know* what time it is!

Whitney winks at Kay from a dozen screens. She chomps her gum like she wants to kill it.

KAY

操你祖宗十八代!

—a slur that Whitney's ancestors should be fucked to the eighteenth generation. But we need no translation.

KAY

Flags flew at half-mast the day he was buried.

CHUCK

I know. I remember.

KAY

Meanwhile I was driving two thousand miles from Nebraska to collect my baby girl from the county coroner.

On the screens, Tanner Whitney is observing construction sites and looking concerned in rural diners.

KAY

The idea that this feckless halfwit would have been our vice-president...

CHUCK

Well, welcome to Vegas.

REPORTER

—reports of his appearance at Assyria tonight turned out to be another hoax—

Kay spits at the screen.

KAY

My daughter's been forgotten but these ghouls have transformed a sitcom star into Bigfoot—

The cop emerges from Home Decor with a scented candle.

Kay hurries the other way, leaving behind the bank of flatscreens. Some with displays that say 11:58.

In the frozen food section, Kay stands before the ice cream. She walks away. She returns. Yes, she's earned it. She grabs a pint of Fudge Jelly Frenzy and heads toward the checkout.

The line for the self-checkout is unholy, crammed with people too tired or fucked up to work the machines. She brings her ice cream to the lone human cashier, a gigantic man whose belly grazes the register

His name tag says *Leo*, and he towers over Kay as he scans the ice cream with his barcode scanner.

LEO

This flavor any good? Been meaning to try it.

KAY

It'll get me through the night.

Kay hands him a wrinkly twenty-dollar bill. Leo studies it like a relic, then he scrapes the till for change.

It's a routine transaction until:

The superstore's sliding doors slam open. A gust of wind blows through the store, carrying the sound.

The sound is an otherworldly frequency without any reference point in human experience. It is rendered onscreen as a low sustained drone like a bottomless dial tone, and people react in terror, fits of devotion, and sometimes rage—for reasons we will slowly learn.

Kay covers her ears and narrows her eyes as if remembering something. Has she heard this before? Does she know something the other shoppers don't?

Here comes the pandemonium we glimpsed in the cold open: Some shoppers are on their knees, weeping as they cover their ears in a trance while others fight and rage at their hallucinations.

An woman kneels in prayer, crosses herself, and gazes at the fluorescent lights, begging for forgiveness.

The sound grows louder, rolling through the store like a wave and shattering every screen in sight: televisions, check-out monitors, the phones in shoppers' hands.

A man races down the aisle, cuddling a bath towel and bawling like a child.

A woman with a walrus on her sweater climbs a table of sports bras and howls along with the sound, the cords in her neck threatening to snap.

A family of five presses their foreheads to the floor and begins to pray in a language Kay does not recognize.

Silver kneels before the dinners-for-one, serene as glass doors crack and shatter around her. Transfixed by a wondrous vision, a tear rolls down her cheek and a beatific smile appears.

Noticing Silver's moment of ecstasy, Father Jim stands in the frozen food aisle, eyes closed and arms outstretched, waiting for deliverance.

FATHER JIM

*And I heard behind me a great voice, as
of a trumpet!*

His head jerks back as a silhouette appears in the aisle, flickering and glitchy as it lopes toward him, swinging a giant mallet. A taiko drum booms.

Father Jim drops into a duck-and-cover position. When he dares to open an eye, the shadow is gone.

At the checkout counter, Kay squinches her eyes shut.

Then comes an ugly thud, the sound of flesh slapping something hard.

She slowly opens her eyes and looks down at the conveyor belt in horror: an old man in swim trunks, left arm cocked the wrong way, legs shattered into fins, and lips peeled in a frozen howl. His damp skin glows, luminescent as if backlit, and his eyes are wild and wrong like a fallen horse. They find Kay.

KAY

You again.

She looks at Leo, but he doesn't acknowledge the corpse—he's staring in the middle distance as he stares at someone we cannot see.

LEO

I'm so sorry, baby. It won't never happen again.

Kay clamps her hands over her ears and looks back at the conveyor belt—but there's only her pint of ice cream.

LEO

Wait, wait no no don't go.

His eyes regain focus. He realizes Kay is watching him.

LEO

You. You did this. You're messing with my head, you witch!

Leo scrambles onto the conveyor belt and strangles Kay with the cord of his barcode scanner.

As Kay grapples with the cord around her neck, the sound continues. She glimpses a woman who grins at the ceiling, then nods and calmly lays down, hands across her chest, still smiling. Near the Last-Minute Gift Ideas, a teenage boy does the same.

The sound blooms, edging toward the human. It erupts into a squeal as if the universe itself is coming undone, a voice but more like a pulse:

VOICE (O.S.)

Sunset. Sunset.

The store goes dark.

The young cop appears beside her in the gloom.

COP

Please, can you make it stop?

KAY

Help . . . me.

His scented candle falls and shatters when he reaches for his gun.

Leo and Kay pause their struggle and watch him disappear into Women's Apparel.

Gunshot.

The noise distracts Leo long enough for Kay to plunge a thumb into his eye. He tumbles off the conveyor belt and crashes into a rack of gift cards.

She runs about twenty feet, then scoots back to grab her ice cream.

8. EXT. SUPERSTORE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Kay climbs through the shattered windows and races across the parking lot with Leo in pursuit.

Out of breath, Kay collapses against a car. Clutching her ice cream, she turns toward the oncoming cashier like someone bracing to get hit by a truck.

The sound stops.

There's only the ambient noise of a suburban night: traffic on the parkway, a light breeze rattling the trees, and Leo and Kay panting.

Rage drains from Leo's face. He drops to his knees and bawls at Kay's feet.

LEO

Oh god, ma'am, please forgive me, I don't know what got into me . . . what I tried to do to you in there-

Kay does her best to help the large man to his feet.

KAY

It's okay. It's not you.

LEO

How do you know?

KAY

(sweetly in Mandarin)
Sorry, I don't understand.

Leo looks down at Kay with his good eye, confused. Hadn't this woman just spoken perfect English?

She slips her hand into his gigantic paw and gives it a squeeze.

They hold hands and watch the store burn.

Emergency lights illuminate their faces as ambulances and fire trucks arrive. Other shoppers stagger out of the store as if waking from a dream, blinking with surprise at the snow shovels and fondue forks in their hands.

9. PHONE VIDEO - PORTRAIT MODE - INT. SUPERSTORE - NIGHT

The phone's flashlight sweeps across the rubble that fills the dark superstore. Lights fritz and voices moan as Gold picks her way through a mess of shampoo bottles and cosmetics.

GOLD (O.S.)

Silver? Sil, where are you?

The footage is shaky as a man and woman walk by, naked and wailing with their arms over their eyes like Adam and Eve expelled from the garden. Gold's camera pans past them and lands on Silver, crouched on the floor, back turned as she studies her face in the shard of a mirror.

GOLD (O.S.)

Oh God, Sil...are you okay?

Startled from her stupor, Silver turns to the camera.

SILVER

Turn it off!

Her hand covers the lens.

10. INT. SUPERSTORE - NIGHT

Father Jim with red drips running down his cheeks. He looks down and finds the top half of a broken wine bottle in his hand. He stares at it in wonder.

Looking up, Father Jim sees Zed kneeling before the only remaining light in the frozen food aisle, a baroque painting as Zed stares intently at the "dinners-for-one" and cries tears of joy as he whisper-chants:

ZED

No preservatives. No preservatives.

Father Jim drops the bottle and zombie-walks out of the superstore in shock, the shattered glass grinding beneath his boots.

11. EXT. SUPERSTORE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Father Jim joins the crowd, closes his eyes, and listens.

DEV

-never heard anything like it. People were going bonkers, but I kept my head, you know, just wanted to get everyone out of there safe-

SHOPPER #1

-absolutely bugshit, like somebody was making me remember all the wrong I've ever done all at once-

SHOPPER #2

-I thought I was being attacked, but I didn't mean to hurt anybody-

CHUCK

-terrorism, like those diplomats who got their heads scrambled in Havana and Kiev-

SHOPPER #3

No, this was extraterrestrial, and I bet it's just the beginning-

SHOPPER #4

Christ lady, it was just a busted speaker or a glitchy alarm system.

SHOPPER #5

Is that all it was? Because I saw you, tough guy. I saw you crying out for your

mama. A broken speaker made you do that?
You're *that* sensitive to faulty wiring?

Silver and Gold join the growing crowd, and Gold checks her phone, which is jammed with incoming text messages: it's time / where ARE you? / YOU'RE LATE / we don't SEE you.

GOLD
Fuck. We're live.

She wraps an arm around Silver, raises the phone to their faces, and forces a big smile.

PHONE VIDEO — PORTRAIT MODE

GOLD
Silver and Gold here for another edition of Punchline. And we'll have some fascinating new faces for you tonight because all hell just broke loose here on Cactus Avenue. But first, I'm taking a moment to rebalance my portfolio by pushing just a little more into PetroChina Aerospace—

SILVER
Stop. I can't do this.

She unwinds herself from Gold's embrace and leaves, but Gold yanks her back into the frame.

GOLD
Silver's still a bit shocked. I'm shocked too. I mean, this store is *burning*—

SILVER
Just fucking stop, Goldie!

Silver grabs the phone.

RETURN TO:

The superstore parking lot, where Silver stands on tip-toes, holding the phone just out of Gold's reach.

GOLD
Give me the phone, Sil. We're already running late, and we need to post—

SILVER
What did you hear?

GOLD
I heard a fire alarm. Because there's a fucking fire.

Silver tosses Gold's phone to her and walks away.

GOLD

You don't want to do this with me? Fine!
Go lone wolf, let Christ into your heart.
But you'd better post a clip tonight, or
they'll find you. And they'll leave
nothing left of you except a smudge of
that trash lipstick!

Gold marches into the crowd, camera raised.

We move past the crowd and follow Zed as he walks down an aisle of cars. He's a different man now: shirt tucked, hair tidy, posture straight, and he moves with such ease that he seems to float.

Father Jim trails behind him, struggling to catch up.

FATHER JIM

Hey brother!

Zed does not respond. He keeps walking towards the dark edge of the parking lot. Father Jim hurries after him, his boots clacking on the concrete.

FATHER JIM

Hey now, I'm talking to you!

Ignoring him, Zed hops onto the hood of a minivan and walks up the windshield, a gesture so fluid it looks preternatural. Father Jim watches in awe.

Zed sinks down and sits crosslegged on the rooftop, gazing at the superstore, oblivious to Father Jim.

FATHER JIM

I know you can hear me, friend. What happened to you in there?

Zed stares at the store and smiles.

FATHER JIM

Tell me.

Zed's mouth moves silently, radiating calm as he quietly chants to himself.

Father Jim slaps the side of the minivan. Zed does not respond. Father Jim pounds on the hood.

FATHER JIM

Answer me!

Red and blue lights sweep across the priest's face as a fleet of ambulances, cops, and fire trucks arrive.

12. INT. KAY'S CAR - NIGHT

Kay's hands shake so badly that she cannot fit the key into the ignition. She focuses on the ice cream perspiring in her passenger seat and takes a deep breath. Calmer now, she starts her car.

As she backs out, her headlights catch Leo, hands on his hips, planted in front of her car like a tree.

Kay drives forward, ready to play this game of chicken, but Leo doesn't budge. At the last moment, she punches the brakes, her bumper kissing his knees.

Kay curses under her breath, rolls down the window, and leans out to say something, but Leo is gone.

The passenger door jerks open and Leo squeezes in, rolling Kay's ice cream to the floor. She sighs.

LEO

What happened in there?

KAY

I don't know anything.

LEO

Like hell.

Leo notices the fare meter that says *Probationary Status*. He rootles around in his cashier's apron, pulls out the crumpled twenty, and slaps it on the dashboard.

LEO

You're a driver. Now drive.

13. EXT. SUPERSTORE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

As Kay's car leaves the superstore, a tour bus comes flying into the parking lot, its white sides painted with a cursive phrase: *And Thus Saith the Lord*.

The bus parks at a distance from the reporters and emergency vehicles. A stream of somber men, women, and children pours from its doors.

Dressed in white gowns buttoned up to their collars, the Neo-Pentecostals gather around a slender man with a bullhorn who points a trembling finger at the cluster of ambulances and witnesses weeping beneath shock blankets.

PREACHER

Brothers and sisters, I want you to look upon those fallen children. Those sinners could not withstand the voice of judgment, for it conjured terrible

visions that drove them mad. We know this. It is written.

The Neo-Pentecostals raise their hands and say *amen*.

PREACHER (CONT'D)

Only the *saved* can hear the Lord's grace. For centuries the Lord has spoken *through* us, causing us to speak in tongues, but now, at last he speaks *for* us—

A bottle breaks. The sound of a scuffle and squawking feedback as the preacher's bullhorn is taken away and a new voice booms.

CHUCK

That's not your savior in there, that's not anyone's god or genie, it's our goddamned government—

NEO-PENTECOSTALS

Heretic!

A scuffle breaks out, and cops hurry over, trailed by reporters—and Gold.

14. PHONE VIDEO - PORTRAIT MODE - EXT. SUPERSTORE - NIGHT

Gold stands with Chuck in front of the superstore and despite his tough-guy appearance, he's starstruck in the presence of Gold.

Techno music plays in the background, and the screen is a swirl of flying hearts and emojis.

She gives her trademark wink and summons her TV voice.

GOLD

Hey everyone, by now I'm sure you've seen the news about the bugfuck crazy situation developing here on Cactus Avenue, and I've got a special guest—

CHUCK

Oh Gold, this is a dream for me, I just love Punchline, and I love y—

GOLD

(glares at Chuck)

Not yet.

(returns to host mode)

A few minutes ago, I pushed a bit more of my pocket money into Gazprom Comcast—don't let its flat trading base fool you, this puppy's about to get *pumped*.

(to Chuck)
 Now, this eager fellow is Chuck, and he's going to tell us what he thinks *really* happened here tonight. Ready, Chuck? You have twenty seconds to entertain, enlighten, or enrage us. Go!

A twenty-second countdown appears on the screen:

TWENTY.

CHUCK
 No doubt it was the government. The CIA, specifically.

SIXTEEN.

CHUCK (CONT'D)
 Way back in the sixties they developed something called 'aural destabilization'—

GOLD
 Aural *what?!*

Gold mugs for the camera and the drizzle of emojis becomes a storm.

TWELVE.

Chuck chews his lip while Gold bops along to the music.

NINE.

CHUCK
 Well, they invented these gigantic sound cannons. Tools for crowd control—

FOUR.

CHUCK (CONT'D)
 —that make noises that cause headaches, vomiting, the evacuation of the bowels—

GOLD
 Ew.

ONE.

The emojis stop, the screen flashes red, and Gold slaps Chuck hard, bloodying his nose and sending him crashing to the pavement.

He sits up and grins.

CHUCK
 Thank you, Gold!

He looks after her in awe as she wanders off in search of her next guest.

15. INT. KAY'S CAR - NIGHT

Kay and Leo drive in silence, watching the car's headlights plow along an empty desert road. Leo snuffles and sighs, dabbing at his bloody eye.

KAY
How much farther?

LEO
Just keep going.

Kay turns on the radio and starts scrolling through stations. Leo shuts it off.

LEO (CONT'D)
How can you think about music right now?

Kay checks the rearview but sees only darkness. The distant lights of an aircraft cross the sky.

LEO (CONT'D)
Talk to me, dammit. Say something.

KAY
Nobody wants to fly anymore

LEO
What?

KAY
All the turbulence and fistfights and whatnot, so here's an idea: you get on the plane and they aestheticize—no, what's the word?—anyway, they knock you out. A huff of gas, a pill or two, and they slide you in a drawer and revive you when you land. Everyone is happy: the passengers, the stewardesses. I'd call it Instant Airlines.

LEO
What's wrong with you?

KAY
You can't say *stewardess*?

LEO
For fuck's sake, tonight was like death itself, no, something beyond death, and you're talking about—

(pauses, considers Kay)
 You heard that sound before, didn't you?

QUICK AND JARRING JUMP-CUT – THREE SECONDS LONG

YOUNG KAY, late 20s, on her knees, alone in the middle of an empty road at night, framed by cornfields. She's covering her ears and screaming.

LEO (CONT'D)
 Some monster reached into my guts tonight and delivered my worst moment on a platter and you're talking about—

KAY
 You're the one who tried to strangle me. You don't get to be upset.

LEO
 I need to see my wife tonight and make things right.

KAY
 Why? You tried to strangle her too?

Kay eyes the ice cream melting at Leo's feet while he stares out the window.

LEO
 I'm not just a cashier.

KAY
 Who is?

LEO
 I used to haul freight.

He peels back his sleeves and displays his forearms.

LEO (CONT'D)
 Left one's permanently tanned, and if you look close, half my face is a few shades darker than the rest of me. Spent a lot of time behind the wheel, thinking of all the ways I was going to be a good man for Bev, and maybe someday she might even look at me like she loved me the way she used to.

KAY
 Bev.

LEO
 Love of my life, high school sweethearts, the whole shebang. I took it for granted that she'd always stick around. But she's not coming back, I know this—

Kay rolls her eyes as Leo begins to bawl again.

LEO (CONT'D)
 -if I don't make it right with her
 tonight-
 (sobbing, unintelligible)
 I never believed in hell, but-

KAY
 You don't need to figure it out. Not yet.

Leo smiles through his tears, grateful for the change of subject. He nods at the photo pinned to her visor.

LEO
 Who's that?

KAY
 My daughter.

He studies the snapshot of the howling singer with a slash of black paint running down her cheek.

LEO
 She looks famous.

KAY
 She was for a minute. But that was a long time ago.

LEO
 We're almost there. You'll want to take the next left. See that dirt road?

The car's headlights sweep across the headstones of a small cemetery.

16. INT. FATHER JIM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Father Jim's tiny apartment is dark, except for a pool of light over the kitchen table, where he sits before a shoebox and a half-finished jigsaw puzzle of Tom Cruise in *Top Gun*. Nearby, a battered and dog-eared copy of *The Time Is Now: The Life of Tanner Whitney* sits on top of a pristine Bible.

A pot of water boils on the stovetop next to a box of Rice-A-Roni.

He runs his fingers along the shoebox and sighs, debating whether to open it. Then he flips the lid and riffles past military ID cards, a Bronze Star, and movie ticket stubs. At the bottom, there's a folded, brittle sheet of newspaper. He carefully unfolds it:

The Times-Picayune

THE DRUMMER STRIKES AGAIN!

Six dead in latest Saturday night hunt.

Next to the article, there's a photo of cops standing around lumpy bodies beneath bloodied sheets.

Father Jim quickly stuffs the clipping back into the box. He goes into the kitchen, opens the box of Rice-A-Roni, and sprinkles the rice on the floor. He kneels.

17. EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

Kay leans against the car, half-watching Leo in the distance as he crouches before a headstone. She pops two pieces of Nicorette in her mouth and shuts her eyes.

Leo's sobs fill the night, loud and pained.

LEO

(in the distance)

I'm sorry, baby, I'm so so sorry.

Raising himself to his feet, Leo shuffles towards the car, wiping his face against his sleeves.

KAY

I'm sorry.

LEO

I told myself I was on the road for her, but the truth is I didn't know how to look at her. How to act. I was *ashamed* of my sick wife. And if you want to know the whole truth-

Kay doesn't. She makes a noise, hoping he will stop.

LEO (CONT'D)

I couldn't get as drunk as I liked around her. Oh, I kept telling her I was going to sober up, love her right, and we would be golden after she got better. Because I never expected her to die, you see. Not so soon. Not like that. I tried to visit her at the hospital one night, and her family barricaded the door. Arms crossed. Dirty looks. The whole nine. She died the next morning.

Leo collapses, bawling.

LEO (CONT'D)

That was two years ago, and I couldn't even come here 'til tonight.

Kay crouches before him.

KAY

I get it. I've been there.

(taking his hand)

You like ice cream?

18. EXT. FITZY'S ALL-NITE YUM-YUM DINER - NIGHT

The mismatched shapes of Kay and Leo fill a booth by the window.

19. INT. DINER - NIGHT

Kay and Leo sit with coffee and bowls of ice cream. Kay savors every bite. Leo doesn't touch his.

KAY

Just gonna watch it melt? This pistachio cola is out of this world. Try it.

LEO

No.

She pitches a hunk into his bowl anyway. Leo picks up his spoon and takes a sad bite.

LEO

Yeah. That's good.

KAY

Told you. And I know how you're feeling. I lost my daughter, and now there's no way to make things right.

LEO

(nodding into his sundae)

All we have are graveside apologies.

KAY

At least you knew your wife.

Leo looks up, realizing he's not the only one in pain.

Kay gazes into the middle-distance, mouth working, preparing to say something she's never said aloud.

LEO

Tell me.

KAY

Yes, I heard that sound before. With my daughter.

QUICK FLASHES — KAY'S MEMORIES — EXT. NIGHT

- Young Kay drives down a city highway while LITTLE CARLY DEE, 7, cries in the backseat, nestled between bags of clothes.

YOUNG KAY

Don't worry, things are going to be better, you'll see. We're not just turning over a new leaf, we're going to turn over the whole damned tree.

- Hours later, Little Carly Dee is still wailing, louder and louder, until Young Kay can't take it anymore. She pulls to the side of a country road and steps outside.
- Young Kay drops to her knees, framed by cornfields while her daughter's cries become a sustained hum. Then:

A rustle in the fields, and Little Carly Dee's cries merge with the sound, coming so fast and fierce it lays the cornstalks flat. Young Kay covers her ears and screams as a body falls from the sky: the old man in swim trunks. He lands in the same position we saw on the conveyor belt: arms and legs at wrong angles, blood around his head.

Little Carly Dee stands behind her, head tilted up to the sky, calm and transfixed.

END FLASHBACK.

Kay sits in the diner, biting her lip. Then she snaps back to the moment, to Leo in front of her.

LEO

You saw something that night, didn't you?

Kay nods.

LEO

And you saw it again tonight?

Kay nods.

KAY

Back then, I refused to admit anything happened. Oh, Carly asked and asked, but what could I say? I told her it was just a bad dream, that she'd imagined the whole thing. Because I didn't want to frighten her. Because I needed to believe

it had nothing to do with her. And eventually, I did. I convinced myself it was just nerves, a hiccup in the brain. But she never trusted me after that. I drove her away because I couldn't admit—

She looks up at Leo, wondering if he is judging her.

KAY

What else could I do? When you encounter something you can't explain, a fork in the road appears: you can spend your life trying to understand it, or...repression is underrated, don't you think?

LEO

I was a fan until tonight.

A commotion interrupts them, a stir among the diners as everyone turns to watch the flatscreens on the walls.

NEWS ANCHOR

—unexplained chaos tonight at a south-side shopping center, where we're receiving reports of several casualties, including a police officer.

The broadcast cuts to a reporter whose feed immediately glitches, scrambling his face into chunky blocks of cyan and magenta. The anchor returns.

NEWS ANCHOR

Looks like we're having some trouble with Dan's uplink. But I'm told we have a stable connection from a witness on the scene.

The broadcast cuts to Gold's phone. She winks as she pulls a woman with a walrus on her sweater into the frame.

VOICE IN THE DINER (O.S.)

Fuck yeah, Gold's made the big time!

GOLD

Lucy, what do you think happened here tonight? You have twenty seconds to entertain, enlighten, or enrage us. Go!

The countdown appears:

TWENTY.

LUCY

I...why, I don't know. It was so loud, and it sounded so big and bottomless that it made my bones shiver—

FOURTEEN.

LUCY (CONT'D)

—and it felt like an oncoming train or, no, more like a magnet...wait, that's not quite right, more like a bright light that could peek inside me, and it began to hum until I couldn't see.

EIGHT.

GOLD

I'm not asking for a literary description here, Lucy, I'm asking what you think it was. The weather? A UFO?

SIX.

FIVE.

FOUR.

LUCY

Alright then.

(looking directly into the camera.)

Imagine the creepiest thing you did that you thought nobody would ever know. Maybe you abused someone you loved or left somebody for dead. Maybe you fantasized about your mother. Whatever haunts you at four o'clock in the morning, it sounded exactly like how that memory feels. Except much, much louder than you can ever believe.

The countdown stops.

GOLD

Ooh Lucy, that's good. Now, what do you think it was?

LUCY

I think it might have been, well, I know this sounds crazy, but I think it could have been...God.

Gold gives a melodramatic frown.

GOLD

Oh Lucy, you were doing so well. She cocks back her hand, and just as it makes contact with Lucy's face, the feed cuts to a commercial for a machine that controls your brainwaves while you sleep; it has a catchy jingle: *Wake up energized and get more done!*

A few voices in the diner boo, robbed of their climax.

Kay looks at Leo.

KAY

Don't be stupid enough to think what happened in that store was divine.

LEO

How are you so sure?

KAY

Know what I do to support myself when I'm not driving drunks around Vegas? When I'm not cleaning every possible human fluid out of my backseat? I scrub the internet. I delete pictures of beheaded men and bawling children.

Leo lays down his spoon and pushes away his ice cream.

KAY (CONT'D)

After you've seen every bodily cavity scraped, polished, and turned inside out, it ruins your faith in any kind of cosmic intelligence.

Kay digs into her ice cream, then points her spoon at Leo to punctuate her point.

KAY (CONT'D)

Anyone who says otherwise is just fooling themselves, Leo. Wishful thinking.

LEO

But if faith makes somebody a better person?

KAY

Most of the pictures I deleted were the result of somebody doing something in the name of their imaginary friend. I've seen what fantasies do to people, and it's not pretty. That's why I told my daughter that sound was just a dream.

LEO

Where is she now?

Scraping forks and murmuring televisions fill the lull.

KAY

She ran away when she was sixteen. Never saw her again, except for her picture in the papers, mixed up with some celebrity.

LEO

Who?

KAY

You heard of Tanner Whitney?

LEO

I'm a breathing American, of course I know...

(something clicks)

Your daughter? She's the one—

Kay interrupts Leo quickly, masking her grief with irritation:

KAY

Yes, she was the woman in the car. The woman who died in a car with some idiot sitcom star. And that's all she'll ever be known for, if she's remembered at all.

LEO

I *knew* I recognized that photo. She did that song—how'd it go?

He hums a little riff, the words on the tip of his tongue. He begins to sing, off-key and terribly.

LEO (CONT'D)

But sometimes ooh you can hear better in the dark. Sometimes...badum-baybee.

His excitement fades as he remembers the grieving woman before him.

LEO (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry, I can't imagine—

An argument breaks out at a nearby table of diners.

WOMAN

—just saying it *could* be, so we shouldn't joke around!

MAN

Yeah? You really think it's Jesus? That he's kicking off Judgment Day at the superstore? Alrighty then, why not here at this fine establishment?

The man's cheeks jiggle with a mouthful of food as he raises his arms along with his voice.

MAN (CONT'D)

I'm right here, Lord! I'm ready to hear you loud and clear!

He raises a hand to his ear like a mime. Splashed coffee and laughter from his buddies. The joke is good, so now he's kneeling in the aisle, mugging for everyone in the diner as he throws his hands up to heaven's glory.

MAN

Here I am, Jesus, come and get me!

He returns to his seat when the laughter fades.

The diner is suddenly quiet. Everyone's eyes are back on the television.

NEWS ANCHOR

Authorities are searching for a woman who fled the scene after causing a six-car crash moments before chaos erupted at a nearby superstore—

The broadcast cuts to the clip filmed by Kay's passenger: her screaming face loops on every screen, looking absolutely unhinged.

Kay sinks into the booth and hides her head behind a massive laminated menu.

KAY

Oof. Should've washed my hair.

LEO

Come on, let's get you out of here.

20. PHONE VIDEO - PORTRAIT MODE

Silver stands before a blank wall, dead-eyed with her mouth half-open. The aesthetic is raw, unfiltered, and there's none of the production value we saw in Gold's videos.

She stares into the camera for an uncomfortable length of time. Then:

SILVER

I'll show you what I saw.

She delivers a frightening makeup tutorial, a series of quick cuts as layers of blush, foundation, ketchup, toothpaste, and olive oil cover her face until she looks pop-eyed and loony with rings of blood around her mouth, reminiscent of Goya's *Saturn Devouring His Son*.

21. EXT. DINER PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Kay and Leo stand in front of her car.

KAY

Nobody pays attention to middle-aged ladies, right?

LEO

Not when they're screaming like that. What on earth were you so upset about?

KAY

Just some creep who wouldn't pay what he owed.

LEO

Well, we need to ditch your car.

KAY

We?

Leo paces in a little circle, thinking. Then he nudges Kay towards her car.

LEO

Alright, I've got a plan. We'll head out to—

Red and blue lights sweep into the parking lot. Three patrol cars surround Kay and Leo, and five cops jump out with guns drawn.

22. INT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT

The police car drives down a dark stretch of two-lane blacktop. Kay squirms in her handcuffs in the backseat while the COP twists the radio dial.

KAY

I didn't do anything!

COP

There's that mess on Cactus Avenue, for starters.

KAY

That little fender-bender? You're worried about some bad traffic when the world's gone—

COP

And maybe you killed that officer in the store tonight.

Kay stops squirming.

KAY

No, no. I saw him. He walked past me while this terrible sound was...he couldn't take it.

The cop eyes her in the rearview. An odd smile appears. Then he returns his attention to the radio. The car drifts into the opposite lane.

KAY

Maybe you should keep an eye on the road.

COP

Shhh.

He leans forward and turns up the static on the radio, head cocked as if listening for something: it's the same gesture Kay performed before entering the superstore. And Kay notices.

COP (CONT'D)

Signal's clearer out here. And she might be on tonight.

KAY

Who?

COP

The Voice of the Red Rocks.

Cop continues fiddling with the radio until a woman's voice breaks through the static:

CARLY DEE (ON THE RADIO)

—because we're not just turning over a new leaf, but the whole damned tree—

COP

Ah, there she is.

Kay gasps, realizing she's not crazy. And she's terrified.

KAY

Carly?

CARLY DEE (ON THE RADIO)

—and isn't this the most tragic thing? All of us staggering through our days, feeling alien in this overheated world of credit cards and traffic lights. But you're not alone. I'll show you. If you're in your car right now, I want you to flash your headlights.

A truck in the opposite lane flashes its headlights, and the cop does the same. The cop grins at Kay in the rearview mirror.

COP
Righteous, isn't she?

Kay's lips move, but no words emerge, only a strangled yelp. Then:

KAY
(to herself)
Where's this coming from?

Cop is oblivious to Kay's terror. He just thinks it's a neat show.

COP
Nobody knows! But whoever this lady is, she created that wild noise they're talking about tonight. The Great Frequency, she calls it.

Kay shakes her head as she tries to make sense of what this man is saying about her daughter.

CARLY DEE (ON THE RADIO)
-the entire organism has been polluted-
(static)
-but I promised you a new frequency that would bring us to our senses.

Her voice disappears into the static.

The cop returns to fiddling with the radio while Kay stares ahead, transfixed.

The two-lane blacktop expands into a parkway, and a string of sodium lights announce the arrival of the city. As the darkness gives way to streetlight, Kay notices four shadows in the road. No, not shadows. Objects. Lumpy. Legged. The treads of boots. Hands splayed on the pavement.

KAY
Look out!

Cop jerks the wheel and punches the brakes. Tires squeal as the car spins onto the median and crashes into the concrete base of a lamppost.

23. INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Father Jim sits in the dim light of the first pew, hunched over his tented fingers. If anyone else were here at this hour, they might admire the sight of a priest in repose, lost in his own humble conversation with God. If they came closer, they would hear him whispering:

FATHER JIM

Oh, Cary Grant and Robert Redford, oh Tom Cruise and Tanner Whitney, oh please—

Something rustles in the corner, and for a moment Father Jim sees the hulking silhouette of a man with a mallet. He hurls the wine bottle.

FATHER JIM (CONT'D)

Stay out of my head, you demon!

The bottle explodes beneath a stained glass panel of Veronica wiping the face of Jesus. Father Jim crouches and gathers the shattered glass, cursing his foolishness.

As he rises to his feet with shards in his hands, a shadowy figure with wild hair rushes toward him. Father Jim screams and the glass tinkles across the floor.

It is FATHER ISAAC, 30s, wrapped in a bathrobe and the weather of sleep.

FATHER ISAAC

What in God's name are you doing here at this hour?

FATHER JIM

Forgive me, Isaac. I'm fine.

FATHER ISAAC

You don't look well, Jim.

Father Jim doesn't feel well, either. He slumps into a pew and gestures for Father Isaac to sit next to him. Father Isaac sits, his posture perfect compared to Father Jim's slouching figure.

FATHER JIM

Tonight I saw...people screaming, they were on their knees, and this sound—

Father Isaac sniffs Father Jim and studies the smudged ash on his trembling hands.

FATHER ISAAC

Oh my, were you caught up in that fire at the superstore? I saw it on the news.

FATHER JIM

It wasn't a fire. I heard something-

FATHER ISAAC

Oh, that's just panic and rumor-

FATHER JIM

No, no, it's very real-

FATHER ISAAC

-an excuse for chaos and rabble-rousers-

FATHER JIM

Please, brother, I need you to listen. I need y-

FATHER ISAAC

-could be terrorism like they're saying, but probably just some foolish prank-

FATHER JIM

I need you to stop talking!

A line has been crossed, and the two priests pause to adjust themselves to these new conditions.

FATHER JIM (CONT'D)

Please, listen to me. Hear my confession.

Father Isaac rises and straightens his bathrobe. He gestures at the confessional.

FATHER ISAAC

As you wish.

The two men awkwardly take their positions, both unaccustomed to this formality.

FATHER JIM

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. I am filled with doubt, I am consumed by fear and anger, because God has made Himself known tonight.

FATHER ISAAC

He's always making Himself known to us. He speaks to us constantly if we're willing to listen.

FATHER JIM

No! He does not. I thought He did, but I was very wrong. I spent my whole life thinking I heard Him. In my heart, maybe, or some corner of my head. But I was fooling myself. Tonight was the real deal, the authentic item, oh yes, our Good Lord rolled through the store,

visiting torment and revelation upon everyone in His path.

(fights tears)

And I was ready to receive His grace, just as it says in Revelation. *And lo, I heard a great voice, as of a trumpet.* But I heard nothing. I saw only—

QUICK AND JARRING JUMP-CUT – THREE SECONDS LONG

A crying child alone on the sidewalk in his pajama feet, elbows skinned bloody. A taiko drum booms, and a man's shadow appears above the child.

BACK TO CONFESSION:

FATHER ISAAC

You saw?

FATHER JIM

Nothing, just a bad memory. But there I was in the frozen food aisle, on my knees, *tormented*, when I caught a glimpse of this man...this sloppy creature, and he was absolutely *radiant*, beaming with *ecstasy*. It was divine. It was grace. He knew it. I knew it. I saw it.

(sniffles)

Why him? What did that man do for God that I did not?

FATHER ISAAC

Perhaps it is not for you to judge God's mind—

FATHER JIM

I needed to know, so I followed him, and he heard me calling out to him, oh he heard me alright, but he was too *raptured* to respond. And I felt so much rage, such jealousy, that I wanted to hurt this man, Father, I wanted to beat him like a drum. Because I realized this church, everything we do here, everything I've devoted myself to, it's all just make-believe.

Father Isaac laughs softly.

FATHER JIM

This makes you laugh?

FATHER ISAAC

Your faith has finally been tested, Jim. And it's been found lacking.

FATHER JIM

So you believe me. That God appeared tonight.

FATHER ISAAC

Of course not. What you're describing, what they're talking about on the news, that's no God I recognize. But you believe it. Of course you do. You've always believed God exists to punish and reward. You play the easy-going charmer, the buddy of the people, but deep down, you believe the Lord exists to smite everyone in your path. And if you'll forgive me for saying, brother, I think you'd let them burn just so you can hear their screams.

FATHER JIM

I came to you for counsel.

FATHER ISAAC

And this is what I'm offering.

The confessional's panel slides open and Father Isaac looks at Father Jim.

FATHER ISAAC (CONT'D)

Your celebrities will be here early tomorrow for the baptism. You look wretched. Get some rest.

FATHER JIM

My celebrities?

FATHER ISAAC

You're never going to be their friend, Jim. No matter how hard you try. You're only their priest.

He leaves Father Jim alone in the silent gloom of the confessional booth.

24. INT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT

Kay wakes up. She winces from the pain after the seatbelt nearly cut her in half. The cop is slumped in his seat with his head cocked at an unnatural angle. A spray of blood is splashed across the lamppost, which has shattered the windshield and mangled the dashboard.

She beats her head against her window, screaming.

KAY

Help!

Two women and two men remain lying on the pavement. They are dressed in black: boots, jeans, t-shirts. Kay can't see their faces. Why aren't they frightened? Or helping?

Kay beats her forehead against the window, harder and harder. The glass spiderwebs. There's a dribble of blood.

The SHADOW WOMAN closest to the car turns her head, and Kay can just make out the whites of her eyes.

KAY

Please. Please help me.

The woman stares at Kay. She slowly sits up. The man beside her tries to pull her back to the ground, but she jerks away and approaches the car on unsteady legs. Her face remains in shadow until she enters the pool of light that surrounds the wrecked car.

Kay screams. A streak of glittery black paint runs down the woman's face, just like the photo of Carly Dee.

The woman drifts past Kay's window. She hears the crunch of glass and the driver's door being kludged open. The woman scrabbles through the cop's pockets for keys. She releases the power locks and returns to Kay's door, opening it gently.

SHADOW WOMAN

Shhh. They're still listening.

She looks back at her companions lying on the pavement, staring at the sky. Then she crouches close to Kay.

KAY

You're...dressed like my daughter.

SHADOW WOMAN

Your daughter? Is that right?

(studies Kay)

I thought you looked familiar. You've got the same scream.

(silently mimics the screaming snapshot/video)

Your face is everywhere. They're saying you terrorized that superstore. But we both know that's not true. Oh I know all about you. She talks about you on the radio. A lot.

(pauses, smiles)

Did you really make all those poor people jump off that bridge?

KAY

What are you people doing in the middle of the road?

SHADOW WOMAN

If you're really her mother, you would understand. We lay our burdens down where she tells us. Tonight she brought us here. She brought you here. I think she wants you free. Even though you liked to lock her in her bedroom.

Two of the Shadow Woman's companions sit up, glaring at her. Glittery black paint runs down their faces too.

KAY

You knew my daughter?

SHADOW WOMAN

She's not your daughter anymore.

Kay hangs her throbbing head.

KAY

Please. No more riddles. Just help me.

Shadow Woman presses the seatbelt button. Then she tips Kay forward and unlocks the cuffs. She nods at the cop.

SHADOW WOMAN

You better go before his buddies arrive.

Shadow Woman turns to leave. Kay grabs her arm.

KAY

I heard Carly on the radio. It was *her*, talking about—

The woman's companions are on their feet now, and they're heading toward the car.

SHADOW WOMAN

Get to the show at Echo Cliff.

KAY

What show?

WOMAN

You'll need a guide. There's a Gas 'n Go a few miles west. Someone there can help you find it. Bring cash.

The woman rejoins her companions, and the four of them silently return to lying on the parkway.

Kay deliberates, then reaches for the cop's neck. There's a pulse. He stirs slightly. She carefully pulls the walkie talkie from his belt.

KAY

Um, accident on Cactus Avenue. Officer down? Send help.

RADIO DISPATCHER

Please repeat. Ten twenty.

Kay tosses the walkie talkie and climbs out of the car for a long run into the desert night, leaving four people lying in the road behind her.

25. EXT. SUPERSTORE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The smoldering store is surrounded by emergency vehicles, news crews, and clumps of people in the aftermath.

FIVE YOUNG WOMEN enter, holding hands and dressed in black: boots, jeans, t-shirts. One of them carries a paintbrush and a bucket of paint; another cradles a small radio that plays Carly Dee's static-ridden voice.

CARLY DEE (O.S.)

—marooned in concrete, the architecture of brutal people, designed to obliterate wonder—

As the women get closer to the store, they pause. One of them paints a large black rectangle on the pavement. The paint shimmers.

CARLY DEE (O.S.)

—since the beginning of time, the cosmic membrane has separated us from the divine. But we can hear a signal on the other side if we watch the sky and listen —

The four women lay down in the corner of the rectangle. More people join them, holding hands and dressed in black. Soon a few dozen people fill the rectangle.

CARLY DEE (O.S.)

—because the virtuous will rise to the stars when the Great Frequency wakes us from our slumber.

They lay on their backs, looking at the sky: black paint is streaked down their faces, flecked with glitter.

26. NEWS BROADCAST - INT. STUDIO

The upbeat music and graphics of a mainstream cable news program. ASA KODAK, a news anchor in the Anderson Cooper style, nods at the camera.

ASA KODAK

Good morning, and welcome to this special edition of *Wake Up, America*. We're still struggling to understand the mysterious event that occurred last night at a superstore outside Las Vegas. By now, this footage, the *only* footage, of the event has become familiar to all of us: studied, analyzed, dissected—and debated.

CUT TO VIDEO:

Grainy black-and-white security footage: a fish-eye view of the superstore with shoppers queued in the check-out lines and milling in the aisles.

Suddenly, like an invisible shockwave rolling towards the camera, people drop to their knees, screaming and covering their ears as screens shatter, one after the other, until the camera lens cracks so badly there's nothing left to see.

RETURN TO STUDIO:

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

Joining me tonight for a conversation about the possible causes, we have three experts—

The panelists are agitated, eager to get their argument out first, and they begin speaking before they can be introduced.

EXPERT 1

This whole thing is a hoax, Asa, and it's not that hard to pull off. It's simple science. Every object has a resonant frequency where a particular sound can make it vibrate. If it receives that frequency at a sustained force, it will shake so violently that—

EXPERT 2

It's because we're changing the barometric pressure, the climate crisis—

EXPERT 3

No, it's terrorism, plain and simple. Who's that woman on the radio? She's been hijacking the airwaves for weeks now, claiming knowledge of this event *before* it occurred. Then we have that screaming lady who caused a traffic accident moments before the attack, a convenient diversion—

ASA KODAK

And we'll get to all of this in a moment. But first, let's go to the scene, where local authorities are struggling to deal with a crush of visitors from all over the world.

27. NEWS BROADCAST - EXT. SUPERSTORE PARKING LOT - DAY

A massive crowd presses against a line of police barricades. It's a motley collection of zealots, conspiracists, gawkers, and shriekers. Some wave their signs for the camera: *We're Listening! / Stop the Government Experiments! / Ready for Revelation*, etc. A few wear the ghoulish makeup from Silver's tutorial.

REPORTER

Asa, I'm standing before hundreds of protestors, scientists, religious groups, and the just plain curious, all eager to approach the site of last night's event. It's been relatively peaceful until a few moments ago, when fistfights broke out between several of the religious denominations, but they seem to have formed some kind of truce.

The reporter gestures at the crowd, where a sea of white gowns, burkas, saffron robes, and shtreimels mingle together, threatening to spill over the metal barriers.

REPORTER

Authorities are restricting access to the site until the cause can be determined.

The feed pans past the barricades towards a line of cops in full riot gear. Beyond them, the front of the superstore is largely empty save for a fire truck and three white vans surrounded by scientists in pressurized suits fiddling with gadgets for measuring radiation, etc.

REPORTER

But Asa, I can tell you, these people are impatient to get past these barricades and see for themselves.

The metal barricades are now heaving, and the cops take a step closer, drawing their clubs and tear gas.

There's a cry in a dozen languages — *Now!* — and the barricades fall and a great wave of humanity swarms the cops and floods into the parking lot, some climbing the fire truck and white vans and raising their arms in triumph.

The superstore has been seized.

The gowns, burkas, robes, and shtreimels begin to sort themselves into distinct clusters.

Some people drop to their knees in prayer; others start clawing at the bricks of the store, taking relics. Dozens of people from last night are still laying in their black rectangle, unmoving.

28. INT. CHURCH - DAY

Father Jim mingles with an expensive-looking family, laughing and back-slapping while Father Isaac stands near the baptismal font, watching.

FATHER ISAAC

Father Jim, perhaps we should get started?

Father Jim hops onto the dais, joined by a glossy young couple cooing over their infant and a half-dozen parents and godparents.

A contingent of photographers start snapping away as the couple hands their baby to Father Jim. He delivers a killer smile to each camera while Father Isaac sighs.

FATHER JIM

Oh, I'm delighted to be here with you fine people, and we're about to gain a new follower today! For this child shall receive new life through the Holy Spirit.

He cradles the infant over the water.

FATHER JIM (CONT'D)

So now, parents and godparents, I ask you: Do you reject sin? *I know I do!*

PARENTS & FAMILY

I do.

FATHER JIM

And do you reject the glamour of evil?

PARENTS & FAMILY

I do.

FATHER JIM

Do you reject...

Father Jim trails off. Father Isaac looks up.

FATHER JIM (CONT'D)

Evil in its many forms?

PARENTS & FAMILY
(uncertain)

I do.

The baby begins to cry.

FATHER JIM

Do you trust in God, even if He will not show us His face or allow us to hear His voice? Even if He has abandoned us in a world of frightening shadows?

Father Isaac looks at Father Jim with concern.

PARENTS & FAMILY
(faint, uncertain)

I do?

Father Jim dips the baby into the water.

FATHER JIM

I baptize you in the name of the Father...

A taiko drum booms.

Unsettled, Father Jim raises the infant from the water and looks at the expectant faces of the parents and godparents, who clearly did not hear anything unusual.

He dips the baby.

FATHER JIM (CONT'D)

...the Son...

The drum booms again.

Father Jim raises the baby from the water and holds it before him in disbelief as its wailing face glitches into a man's blurred head, all in shadow.

Father Jim quickly plunges the baby into the water

FATHER JIM (CONT'D)

...and the Holy Spirit!

He holds the baby underwater for several seconds. Little splashes spill from the baptismal font.

Father Isaac grabs Father Jim, and the mother gasps as her husband pulls their child from the water.

FATHER JIM

I'm so sorry, I didn't-

Horrified, Father Jim instinctively tries to help, but Father Isaac restrains him.

FATHER ISAAC

Get out, Jim.

The parents cradle their bawling child and the other congregants gather around. The scene looks like a baroque painting of the Gift of the Magi, only all eyes are on Father Jim as he walks out of the church in a daze.

29. EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Father Jim continues walking away from the church, the Gift of the Magi tableau receding through the open doors as he walks across the parking lot and into traffic.

30. INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - DAY

A grungy room with a coffeemaker and folding chairs in a circle: a room for 12-step meetings. The room is empty except for Leo, who sits in one of the chairs, head in his hands. When he looks up, he sees GRACE, 40s, sitting across from him, calm and happy. She flickers like an image on a badly tuned station.

GRACE

Come back.

Leo shuts his eyes and clenches his fists, willing the vision to disappear. When he opens his eyes, the chair is empty.

He studies the slogans that shellac the walls: *One Day At a Time. Acceptance is the Answer. Easy Does It.* One of these maxims catches his eye and he steps closer: *Let Go and Let God.*

LEO

Been there. Done that.

He peels it off the wall and sets it facedown on the counter. He riffles through a drawer, finds a magic marker, and scrawls a message across the back:

*Sound Survivors
Discussion + Recovery
7pm*

Then he takes down *Easy Does It* and *Acceptance Is the Answer.*

31. WALKING MONTAGE - EXT. ROADS - DAY

- Leo walks down a miracle mile, stapling his signs for the *Sound Survivors* meeting to lampposts.

- Kay walks along a road, the city dwindling behind her. She's in fugitive mode, her face obscured by a hoodie and sunglasses. A billboard catches her eye: a square-jawed man with silver hair raises a flute of champagne above cursive letters that say *Live the life you deserve!* And ahead in the distance, a Gas 'n Go.
- Father Jim stumble-staggers down a desert road, cutting a stark figure in his black outfit against the bleached landscape. A minivan pulls up and Father Isaac calls out to Father Jim. But Father Jim does not look up. Instead, he veers away from the blacktop and walks into the desert towards the mountains on the horizon.

32. EXT. SUPERSTORE PARKING LOT - EVENING

The parking lot around the superstore teems with people, and there's a festival atmosphere: drum circles, religious groups holding services, and vendors hawking protective headphones, prayer rugs, and glo-sticks.

A man in his 40s watches the scene. Dressed in a crisp shirt buttoned to the collar and a cowboy hat, he has the glow of money, his power conveyed by the way he watches the chaos with anthropological detachment. This is THE MANAGER.

He shoulders his way into the scrum. Happy families photograph themselves in front of the big-box ruins while others gape in reverence as if approaching Calvary or Mecca. Bearded men press their palms against the scorched cinderblocks like they belong to the Western Wall.

From a distance, The Manager pauses to watch Gold interview a middle-aged couple selling t-shirts that say *Let Freedom Ring*.

When Gold notices The Manager, a look of recognition flashes across her face. Then fear.

The Manager tips his hat and keeps walking.

Near the front of the store, a crowd presses around a rectangular space, where a dozen people dressed in black boots, black jeans, and black t-shirts lay on their backs, looking at the sky. Glittery black paint streaks their faces.

Two boozy men step into the rectangle. One of the men snaps his fingers in a Shadow Woman's face.

MAN #1

Hey girl, you in there? You okay?

MAN #2

Is she even alive?

They laugh. The man draws closer to give the woman a little shake. Just before his fingers make contact, she grabs the man's fingers and twists until something snaps. Everyone jumps back and moans.

As he walks away from the scene, The Manager smiles to himself, making a decision.

33. EXT. GAS 'N GO - EVENING

Face obscured by hoodie and sunglasses, Kay stands in the empty lot of the gas station near a trashed payphone. Her screaming face plays on the screens over the pumps.

She checks her watch. Waits ten seconds. Checks again.

A whining engine punctures the silence and a red motorcycle pulls up to a pump, its small driver dressed in red leather and helmet with a tinted visor.

Kay stares at the biker. Is this her guide?

The biker looks at Kay. She digs into her purse, pulls out a handful of bills, and waves them at the biker.

The biker cocks his head, then turns and gasses up while Kay watches, still hoping. Then he peels out of the Gas 'N Go, leaving Kay alone in the silence.

She pulls three pieces of nicotine gum from her purse, struggles to unwrap them, and tosses them away with a yelp of frustration.

It's time for that cigarette.

34. INT. GAS 'N GO - EVENING

Kay stands before the bulletproof glass with a fistful of cash, waiting behind RUBY, a leathery woman in an ancient sundress, counting pennies for a tallboy of High Life.

RUBY

Forty-three. Forty-four.

Kay taps her foot, sucks her teeth. She needs that cigarette now.

Ruby looks back at Kay and grins. She eyes the cash in Kay's hand and grins a little more. Then she returns to her calculations.

RUBY

Forty-fifteen. Eleventy-sixteen. Sorry, I gots confused. Lemme start again...

Kay shoves up to the counter, pushing Ruby aside.

KAY
I'll buy her stupid beer.

RUBY
Well, bless your heart.

Ruby dumps the pennies back in the *Give-a-Penny, Take-a-Penny* tray. She cracks her tallboy and beams at Kay as she gives a little curtsy out the door.

The clerk is a clean-cut young man.

KAY
And a pack of Pall Malls.

CASHIER
Ma'am?

KAY
Pall Malls. Soft pack, if you have it.

CASHIER
Can't hear you, ma'am.

KAY
(shouting through the glass)
Pall Malls. Soft pack, if you have it.

The cashier flashes a nasty look while he digs through the rack of cartons. Kay fidgets. Eventually he summons a hard pack and slaps it on the counter.

CASHIER
That'll be nineteen-fifty altogether.

Kay slides a crumpled twenty under the glass. She points out the window.

KAY
Is that Echo Cliff?

CASHIER
Sure, I guess.

KAY
Is it or not?

CASHIER
Another gawker looking for the show, huh?
Think you're gonna solve the mystery?

KAY
I don't understand.

CASHIER

Because you're a parasite. Get out of my store.

35. EXT. GAS 'N GO - EVENING

The door jingles behind Kay as she exits, soothed by the box in her hand, the ritual of unwinding cellophane and removing gold foil.

As she lights up, she sees Ruby beneath the glow of the pump island, drinking her beer.

Kay points at the shadows on the horizon.

KAY

Is that Echo Cliff?

RUBY

You want a tour, lady? Gonna be a big show out there tonight. Good place to scrape some cash.

(extends a hand)

Name's Ruby.

Kay does not reciprocate. Ruby slips her arm through Kay's as if they're going somewhere fancy.

RUBY

Easy there. I ain't gonna bite, I'm here to help. People only care about them mountains if they're looking for the show, and it can be a trick to find it. Not like they can advertise what they're doing out behind that barn.

KAY

What is this show?

RUBY

Now, I know some folks think the whole enterprise is ghoulish, but if you ask me, I think it's rather sweet 'cause if something gives somebody any kind of solace nowadays, no matter how off the wall, it's a blessing, don't you think?

(smiles)

So long as nobody gets hurt, of course.

She stops, looks around.

RUBY (CONT'D)

Where's your car?

KAY

No car. Not anymore.

RUBY

Not a problem. I am a full-service guide, m'lady. Gimme fifty dollars, and I'll make sure we get you there for the opening credits. Tips are appreciated.

Kay hands her some cash. Ruby counts it, looks pleased, and shoves it into the folds of her dress.

RUBY

Wait here.

She walks behind the gas station. We hear the groaning of metal, scraping and clatter, followed by the kerchunk of a car door closing. A moment later, Ruby pulls around in a shiny red pickup.

RUBY

Hop in! I'd hurry if I was you.

Kay climbs in and Ruby guns it as the clerk comes racing outside.

36. INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - EVENING

Leo sits alone in a circle of a dozen folding chairs. He eyes the clock on the wall: 7:06pm. He returns to looking at his feet.

The door slowly opens and floods the dim room with light. Leo looks up, expectant, and sees a woman's silhouette. She moves towards the chairs, slow and uncertain: it's Silver, and she's almost unrecognizable, dressed in jeans and t-shirt, no makeup, hair in a ponytail.

LEO

Welcome. I'm Leo.

They sit in silence for a moment.

SILVER

I'm Silver, and I don't know what...

Another stretch of silence, only the ticking clock.

LEO

Are you okay?

She gives a bark of crazed laughter.

LEO (CONT'D)

Yeah, I get that. Me too.

SILVER

Does it feel like you're spinning?

LEO

Out of control? Yes.

SILVER

I'm not being metaphorical. We say the wind is blowing, but we're the ones moving, even if we don't notice it. But I do. Everything is spinning around me, and it's making me sick to my stomach—

Dev enters, still wearing his tailored suit from the night before. He moves across the room like he's about to broker a deal. He lifts a chair, spins it around, and sits with his arms across its back.

DEV

What's with the long faces? Is this some kind of pity party, or are we putting together a class action suit? I dig the name, by the way. *Sound survivors*. That'll play with the press.

SILVER

I remember you. You're the guy who cries into bath towels.

Dev leans back and smiles.

DEV

And you're the girl who gives shitty investing advice when she's not filming herself in the middle of a psychotic breakdown. Yeah, I saw your latest *movie*.

(inspects her face)

You still have a clump of mayonnaise behind your ear.

(turning to Leo)

And you, big guy, aren't you the cashier who tried to—

LEO

Strangle a small lady. But we're friends now.

Silver stifles a giggle. Then another. She can't help it, and soon she's laughing. Dev and Leo join her. Their laughter grows like a pressure valve has been released.

SILVER

But I have this feeling, like I need to go back to where it happened. Like I'm meant to be there. Back at that store.

DEV

Me too.

LEO

Same here.

37. EXT. DESERT - EVENING

Sunset in the desert: no sign of human interference, save for a small black dot. As we draw closer, the dot becomes a figure: Father Jim kneels with his forehead touching the ground. He is sunburnt and mumbling.

FATHER JIM

Oh Cary Grant and Robert Redford, yes, I firmly repent my sins and renounce my faith in false idols. I call upon you, the desert fathers, Saint Antony and Paul the Simple, help me wake up energized, get more done, and avoid temptation.

Father Jim's head jerks up, his voice rising.

FATHER JIM (CONT'D)

Please hear me, Tom Cruise and my lord who art in heaven, give me a signal or a sign, tell me what I need to do to keep the darkness at bay—

As the sun's last rays fade, a fire blooms into life at the foot of the mountains, followed by a ring of spotlights that sweep across the sky.

FATHER JIM (CONT'D)

Thank you.

38. INT. PICKUP TRUCK - NIGHT

Ruby drives Kay along a sandblown road, sipping her beer. Kay's face is still obscured by a hoodie and sunglasses, and she grips the armrest tight; she does not like being a passenger.

RUBY

So what's a lady like you doing in that get-up? Running from the law? Got yourself a manifesto?

She eyes Kay and laughs.

RUBY (CONT'D)

Well, I suppose this stolen vehicle ain't helping matters.

KAY

(mutters in Mandarin)
You lice-ridden twat.

RUBY

Yea, I catch your drift, but darling,
that virgin at the gas station's not
gonna do nothing. I know how folks work.
Got you to buy me a beer, didn't I?

KAY

I paid you to drive. Not talk.

RUBY

Well, I ain't some halfwit cab driver
who's here to take orders.

Kay bites her lip.

RUBY (CONT'D)

And I don't give a hoot what you're mixed
up in. We all go down crooked roads.
Never thought I'd be out here ferrying
people to that neon barn, but I got new
skills and old jokes. Oh yeah, a long
time ago I was an actress, an up-and-
coming comic. I was in magazines, even
scored a minor role on a major show.

Kay lowers her sunglasses and studies Ruby, who giggles.

RUBY (CONT'D)

Stop lookin' at me like that. You ain't
gonna guess.

KAY

If you were a comedian, tell me a joke.

RUBY

Not that kind of comic. But alright. How
do you make holy water?

KAY

How?

RUBY

Boil the hell out of it.

Kay gives the faintest chuckle. Ruby shrugs.

RUBY (CONT'D)

Your turn.

KAY

Never said I was a comic.

They ride in silence as the road narrows and mountains
loom before them, eclipsing the sky.

RUBY

Anywhile, everything's gone a bit sideways, hasn't it? Like this ultrasound or whatever they're calling it. You think it's a god thing like folks are saying?

Kay shakes her head.

RUBY (CONT'D)

Me neither. Oh, I'd like to believe in magic. But we're a stone's throw from how many secret military bases? Of course we're gonna experience weird shit from time to time.

Ruby drains her beer, rolls down the window, and tosses the can.

RUBY (CONT'D)

Or maybe those people in that store were plain nuts. All in their heads, right?

Kay stifles a laugh.

RUBY (CONT'D)

That made you chuckle?

KAY

I thought the same thing once.

RUBY

Is that so? Well, they could be lying. And *believing* those lies. People can convince themselves of anything under the moon. You're gonna see that for yourself in a minute.

The headlights pick out a pair of rutted tire tracks on the side of the road.

RUBY (CONT'D)

Here's our exit.

Ruby hits the turn hard. Then she punches the brakes.

RUBY

Now before we go any further, I gotta know: what's with that wad of cash you're carrying?

From the folds of her dress, Ruby pulls a straight razor that she twirls like a magician. Kay flinches.

KAY

My daughter died. I never really knew her. Somebody said I might find answers

out here. And I was told it could get expensive.

RUBY

Poor baby. You lost somebody you loved. Yeah, I reckon that's never happened to anyone before.

(twirls the blade)

You still owe me a joke.

Kay stares at the blade twirling in Ruby's hand.

RUBY (CONT'D)

Come on. Everyone's gotta have a good joke in 'em. It's a matter of survival.

Kay thinks for a moment.

KAY

Did you hear the one about the baby with cancer? It never gets old.

RUBY

Fuck, sister, that's dark.

KAY

I've spent a lot of time on the internet.

Kay looks at the razor again.

RUBY

Don't worry, this ain't for you. Hell, I think you're nifty.

Ruby jabs the blade at the dark road in the windshield.

RUBY (CONT'D)

But down there, people can be scary. Which is a shame, because I like people. I believe cheerfulness and laughter are forms of service, and I try to be useful, like how I'm helping you tonight. I follow the example of Christ. The real deal, not that choir and steeple horseshit. I'm talking 'bout the Jesus who lived with the junkies and leopards.

(folding the razor)

But safety first.

Ruby starts the pickup and crunches over the gravel. A chaotic scene comes into view. Dozens of cars are parked at ugly angles near a barn illuminated with neon lights. Night markets sell food and trinkets. Nearby, there's a semi-truck that says *Hi-Lo Meat Packing* on the side.

Bodies press around the bonfire, some chanting, others bowed in prayer. In the glow of the flames, Ruby's grin flickers like Halloween.

RUBY

Welcome to the show, darling.

She hops out of the truck and disappears into the crowd.

39. EXT. BARN - NIGHT

Greeted by a bonfire and complimentary s'mores, Kay follows a rope fence that leads to a neon-lit barn, shuffling past merchants hawking *Family Therapy* DVDs, bumper stickers that say *We Know What Time It Is*, and deflated airbags bearing a ghostly image of a face.

Nailed to a dead Joshua tree, a hand-painted sign says:

Welcome to
THE LAST RIDE OF TANNER WHITNEY

Photography is absolutely forbidden.

Due to the graphic nature of the performance, children will not be admitted.

Tuxedoed ushers lead the crowd into the barn.

40. INT. BARN - NIGHT

A film plays on the wall: a documentary of Whitney's life. There he is as a toddler, flickering in black-and-white while running in circles before falling facedown in the grass.

NARRATOR

In six years, this clumsy little boy would become the breakout star of the acclaimed sitcom *Family Therapy*, the last network show to win its primetime slot against cable news and pornography.

A mischievous grin as Whitney delivers his catchphrase:

YOUNG TANNER WHITNEY

You'll never know what time it is!

The crowd joins along with the laugh track, but their laughter is muted, wistful, as if watching footage of a grandson who died too soon.

Now we see Whitney as a grown man, mugging his way through car chases and green-screened explosions. The crowd applauds, briefly drowning out the narrator.

NARRATOR

Then came his role as a beleaguered father struggling with kleptomania, a performance that earned him an Academy Award nomination for best supporting actor and transformed him into a prime property with licensing deals.

(solemn)

But Whitney's response to his success surprised everyone.

The film on the barn wall zooms into Whitney on the gangway to a Catalina sailboat.

WHITNEY

I will circumnavigate the world alone.

The narrator's voice returns, his tone ominous.

NARRATOR

Some called it a publicity stunt. Others sensed the troubling signs of yet another young talent lost to a belief in their invincibility. Ignoring the misgivings of those closest to him, Whitney set sail alone, refusing to communicate with anyone during his journey.

WHITNEY

—and I'm going to read the classics and get a better sense of myself.

NARRATOR

Whitney's personal development, however, was soon challenged as he approached the dangerous waters of Cape Horn.

Squall footage fills the screen.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

A category seven capsized Whitney's boat. The five sailors who rescued him off the Patagonia coast became overnight celebrities, two of them going on to host the long-running reality show called *The Sailors' Graveyard*.

Kay considers the people on either side of her while the narrator drones in the background.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

He became a rising star in the political arena, where he delivered populist speeches that changed his fortunes forever.

Whitney booms before a raucous crowd.

WHITNEY

Just think about the nine-figure sums I was offered for make-believe compared to a teacher or firefighter's meager pay. Or the brave sailors who rescued me! They know what time it is!

Whooping applause.

NARRATOR

He was sent to Washington in triumph, but his first term in the House came to a shocking end the night he crossed paths with a controversial musician named Carly Dee.

A cheer from the corner of the barn. Someone else hisses.

Cut to an image of an album cover, the snapshot we saw in Kay's car of a young woman howling with a strip of glittery black paint streaked down her face.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The daughter of a disgraced Olympic diver, Carly Dee scored an unlikely hit in her youth with a two-minute song called 'Black Sunshine', but she was quickly forgotten after her album, *Cosmic Membrane*, failed to find an audience. Years later, she resurfaced in the public eye, this time in Whitney's arms, just hours before his death.

And there they are: Carly Dee and Tanner Whitney kissing on the Vegas Strip.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The final moments of Whitney's life remain shrouded in mystery.

The atmosphere in the barn shifts, tightening with anticipation. Shoulder to shoulder with sawdust on their shoes, the audience straightens their spines, renewed by the promise of scandal and blood.

A montage of tawdry paparazzi photos: Whitney and Carly Dee caught in the glare of flashbulbs in front of neon-soaked clubs. She shields her face in each photo—except for one, where she's giving the photographer the finger.

Kay smiles at this picture.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Despite the lurid allegations about his private life, Whitney's populist platform captured the hearts of the American public, and the news that he was on the

shortlist as a vice presidential nominee electrified the Beltway. Yet we'll never know what he would have made of this opportunity. On the twelfth of August, he vanished from our lives, leaving behind a burning car where you now stand. Together, we shall return to that fateful night.

The back doors of the barn swing open, revealing a walkway that leads towards a large boulder.

41. EXT. DESERT - RITUAL SITE - NIGHT

The crowd moves with the reverence of Catholics venerating the cross. Elderly men shuffle with hands clasped behind their backs. Young couples hold each other close. Kay lags behind.

As the crowd gathers before the boulder, a spotlight bursts to life, throwing a pool of light onto the HOST, a man in a slim grey suit, slicked hair, and a smirk—an echo of Rod Serling in *The Twilight Zone*.

HOST

Ladies and gentlemen, four years ago on the night of August 12, the authorities found Whitney's beloved 1974 Cadillac Fleetwood with a pool of blood in the driver's seat. They also discovered three tarot cards in the backseat, which I shall name for you now: the Chariot, the Lovers, and—

(a showman's pause)

The Devil.

The crowd flutters. More spotlights bloom, revealing a scorched Cadillac with its hood wrapped around a boulder.

HOST

Was this an accident? Perhaps.

HOST

But what was Whitney doing on this lonely road? Six forensic teams have reconstructed the accident, calculating the speed and angle of impact, and all have concluded that Whitney should have been killed instantly by a broken neck.

(beat)

So what do we make of the amount of blood in the vehicle? The human body contains 1.2 gallons of blood. At least three gallons were found in the car. Yet no lacerations on his body—if that was his

body. No footprints were found near the car, no paw prints or drag marks.

The host moves to the driver's side of the car, and the audience stiffens, ready.

HOST (CONT'D)

And of course, there's the mystery of the airbag, which is why I suspect many of you are gathered here tonight. Somehow untouched by the fire, the airbag bears an imprint of Whitney's face, an expression some have called the smile of a saint. But what created this image? We know it was neither blood nor ash, neither heat nor paint. This airbag has been studied in laboratories across the globe, yet none have been able to determine the origin of this face.

The host beseeches the sky, hands pressed in prayer.

HOST

Is Whitney still with us? Or is he someplace better, watching from above?

Several people in the audience bow their heads.

MAN IN CROWD (O.S.)

Whitney, we need you to guide us, brother! Things are getting mighty strange down here.

A few murmurs of assent as faint music swells, a psychedelic folk song that begins with a woman's voice cooing *ba dum baybee*.

The host gestures at the car's melted dashboard.

HOST

Despite the damage sustained to the car, 'Black Sunshine' was still playing when the police found the vehicle—

A lone voice cheers. The woman behind Kay boos.

HOST

—Whitney's lover and, as we all know, a worshipper of the occult.

Someone in the crowd hisses. Kay looks around, baffled by these people who seem to hate her daughter.

HOST

Why did she lead him here? What magic took place? Was that noise last night

some kind of sign? Ladies and gentlemen,
do you believe in curses? Or miracles?

CROWD

We *know* what time it is.

HOST (CONT'D)

Perhaps together we can figure out what
happened to Tanner Whitney that fateful
night. Tonight we present a story of
faith...

The crowd begins to chant in liturgical tones:

CROWD

We *know* what time it is. We *know* what
time it is. We *know* what time it is...

Kay can't take it any longer.

KAY

But they *found* Whitney's body! You know
this. They showed his funeral on TV!

Whispers of "deep fake" and "fake news" as the crowd
stops chanting. Dozens of heads swivel towards Kay.

HOSTILE WOMAN

Shut your mouth.

KAY

It was just a stupid accident. My
daughter died in that car, too.

VOICE IN CROWD (O.S)

Get her out of here!

A woman points at Kay.

WOMAN

She's responsible! *She's* with *them*!

The crowd forms a threatening circle around Kay.

Suddenly several members of the crowd are thrown to the
ground by people with faces streaked with glittery black
paint. They lift Kay into the air and hustle her away.

The crowd is rowdy, looking for other traitors, and the
Host struggles to regain control.

HOST

Ladies and gentlemen, please. Let's get
back to our program.

But the crowd isn't listening.

From the shadows, a gaunt figure emerges and steps into the spotlight, windswept and haggard.

FATHER JIM
 (to the Host)
 Step aside, brother, I can handle this lot.

He claps his hands once and his voice booms.

FATHER JIM (CONT'D)
 Silence! I have a message from Tanner Whitney.
 (smiles)
 But you're going to need to behave yourselves.

The crowd goes quiet.

FATHER JIM (CONT'D)
 Tonight I come to you from the wilderness, where I've been talking with God, who delivered Tanner Whitney's gospel to me. And I'm here to share the good news.

42. EXT. DESERT PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Kay looks down at the six women and men who silently carry her towards the Hi-Lo Meat Packing truck at the edge of the lot. One of the women gives a sharp whistle, and the door of the shipping container scrolls up.

They toss Kay inside and roll down the door.

43. INT. SHIPPING CONTAINER

Darkness. A sliver of light under the door.

KAY
 Hello? Let me out!

A padlock snicks into place. Kay beats at the door.

She pants in the dark. Slowly, her breath drags back to normal. Then, from the back of the shipping container, a voice, soft and low, impossible to determine whether male or female, young or old:

VOICE
 Are you ready to apologize?

44. INT. CAB OF SEMI-TRUCK - NIGHT

Two of the Shadow Women hop in the cab. The radio blinks on, a hand tunes the signal, and a voice flickers through the static:

CARLY DEE (O.S. RADIO)
 -for years I've been telling you a great
 big noise was coming, a noise that
 rewired me when I was just a little girl,
 standing barefoot in the road-
 (static)
 -and I told you it would return.

45. EXT. DESERT PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Carly Dee's broadcast continues as we zoom out from The Last Ride of Tanner Whitney: the semi-truck, the bonfire and barn, the wrecked car and a crowd facing a priest in a pool of light.

CARLY DEE (V.O. CONT'D)
 And it will change us. Because we can't
 keep going on like this, not knowing why
 we're here, suffering from all this noise
 in our heads.

The bonfire and spotlights dwindle to specks in the desert night as the truck drives away.

CARLY DEE (V.O. CONT'D)
 Now's our chance to understand why we're
 built this way, why we're conscious-
 (static)
 -because the Great Frequency is coming
 for all of us. And it will keep ringing
 until we atone.

"Don't Save Us From the Flames" by M83 plays.

FADE TO BLACK

SCENE INDEX

1. SERIES OF SHOTS - INT. SUPERSTORE - NIGHT1

2. EXT. VEGAS STRIP - NIGHT1

2. INT. KAY'S CAR - THE STRIP - NIGHT1

4. EXT. HIGHWAY EXIT - NIGHT4

5. INT. CAR - NIGHT4

6. EXT. SERVICE DRIVE - NIGHT6

7. INT. SUPERSTORE - NIGHT7

8. EXT. SUPERSTORE PARKING LOT - NIGHT12

9. PHONE VIDEO - PORTRAIT MODE - INT. SUPERSTORE - NIGHT13

10. INT. SUPERSTORE - NIGHT14

11. EXT. SUPERSTORE PARKING LOT - NIGHT14

12. INT. KAY'S CAR - NIGHT17

13. EXT. SUPERSTORE PARKING LOT - NIGHT17

14. PHONE VIDEO - PORTRAIT MODE - EXT. SUPERSTORE - NIGHT18

15. INT. KAY'S CAR - NIGHT20

16. INT. FATHER JIM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT22

17. EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT23

18. EXT. FITZY'S ALL-NITE YUM-YUM DINER - NIGHT24

19. INT. DINER - NIGHT24

20. PHONE VIDEO - PORTRAIT MODE30

21. EXT. DINER PARKING LOT - NIGHT30

22. INT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT31

23. INT. CHURCH - NIGHT34

24. INT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT37

25. EXT. SUPERSTORE PARKING LOT - NIGHT40

26. NEWS BROADCAST - INT. STUDIO40

27. NEWS BROADCAST - EXT. SUPERSTORE PARKING LOT - DAY42

28. INT. CHURCH - DAY43

29. EXT. CHURCH - DAY45

30. INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - DAY45

31. WALKING MONTAGE - EXT. ROADS - DAY45

32. EXT. SUPERSTORE PARKING LOT - EVENING46

33. EXT. GAS 'N GO - EVENING47

34. INT. GAS 'N GO - EVENING47

35. EXT. GAS 'N GO - EVENING49

36. INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - EVENING50

37. EXT. DESERT - EVENING52

38.	INT. PICKUP TRUCK - NIGHT	52
39.	EXT. BARN - NIGHT	56
40.	INT. BARN - NIGHT	56
41.	EXT. DESERT - RITUAL SITE - NIGHT	59
42.	EXT. DESERT PARKING LOT - NIGHT	62
43.	INT. SHIPPING CONTAINER	62
44.	INT. CAB OF SEMI-TRUCK - NIGHT	63
45.	EXT. DESERT PARKING LOT - NIGHT	63