

EBENEZER

a screenplay by

Duncan Ralston

based on characters

created by Charles Dickens

FADE IN:

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Snow falls on a wet city street. A MAN IN BLACK waits for a cab to pass, then crosses to an old brownstone.

TITLE CARD: CHRISTMAS EVE, 2007

EXT. BROWNSTONE - CONTINUOUS

The Man in Black shivers, huddling up in his jacket, breath visible as he thumbs a button on the intercom. The tag beside it says APT 4 - J. MARLEY.

The door BUZZES. The Man opens it and steps in.

INT. MARLEY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A London gangster-type in his mid-50s, dress shirt and suspenders and slick receding hair, sits behind a cluttered mahogany desk in deep concentration, shuffling papers, making notes. This is JAKE MARLEY. He looks up at a KNOCK.

The Man in Black stands among the shadows in the doorway.

Marley grins like he knows the score.

MARLEY

Got you working on Christmas, have they, Ebenezer?

The Man in shadow nods, raising a hand holding a PISTOL. He screws off the silencer and tucks it into a pocket.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

Only a matter of time before you're the one behind the desk, innit? And somebody younger, willing to do the job cheaper, he'll be greetin' you on Christmas Eve like you done me.

Marley unbuttons his shirt. Jabs a finger at his hairy chest.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

Right. You shoot me right here then. Might as well. You already tore out my bloody heart.

The Man steps out of the shadow, FIRING three times. Muzzle flashes emblazon his features: face like a pit bull, with rich black mutton chops, black peacoat and black leather gloves. This is EBENEZER SCROOGE (30).

INT. EBENEZER'S CONDO - BEDROOM - NIGHT

EBENEZER (41) bolts upright in bed, the ALARM BUZZING. His hair has grayed, wrinkles and dark circles. Face and torso drenched in sweat. Haunted by his recurring nightmare.

He shuts off the alarm and grabs the bottle of Jack off the nightstand. Swigs greedily. Wipes his mouth.

TITLE CARD: THANKSGIVING, 2018

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ebenezer stands under the shower. Scalding hot water cascades over his face, his muscular arms and chest riddled with old scars and puckered bullet wounds.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ebenezer eats cereal in silk boxers at the kitchen island, watching the NEWS on a massive TV. The condo tastefully furnished with ultramodern decor.

FEMALE ANCHOR (O.S.)

Well, it's the most wonderful time of the year, the day we all wait for with baited breath. That's right, tomorrow is Black Friday. Analysts predict this year will crush 2017's estimate of over *three billion dollars* in online sales, while out there in the real world, you can expect to see at least a fist fight or two.

On the TV, a mob breaks out at an ELECTRONICS STORE. Pushing, shoving, punching. Mass pandemonium.

MALE ANCHOR (O.S.)

You know as awful as it is, you just have to laugh at all those videos.

Ebenezer flicks off the TV in disgust. Gets up and dumps the rest of his cereal in the sink.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ebenezer unfurls a black knife roll with knives, two pistols and an array of lock picks in slots. He rolls it back up.

Standing before his mirrored closet, he buttons up a tweed vest over a black tie and white dress shirt.

Beside him on the dresser, a torn in half FIFTY-DOLLAR BILL is kept under Lucite.

EXT. LONDON FLATS HIGHRISE - NIGHT

The glass doors open and Ebenezer steps out into the chill. He strides up to the LIMOUSINE idling at the curb.

The driver - a tall, slim black woman (early-20s) in a dark uniform - steps out and hurries around to open his door. Her nametag, now that she remembers to clip it on, says TINY.

TINY  
Evening, Mr. Scrooge.

Ebenezer grunts as she opens the door. He flops into the spacious leather backseat.

Tiny closes the door behind him. She goes around the front and opens her door, muttering:

TINY (CONT'D)  
Happy Thanksgiving, Tiny. How's your dad? Oh, just great, Mr. Scrooge. But you know, he could really use a new television to watch the game on this year. Well, let me see if I can make that happen.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

She slips into the driver's seat. Zips down the partition and clocks Ebenezer in the rearview mirror, looking out the window in thought. Her tight grin says she's used to this.

TINY  
Where to tonight, Mr. Scrooge?

The limo cruises wet streets. Junkies and hookers loiter.

In a park, a TENT CITY has been erected. Protesters stand and sit around a fire, trying to keep warm. Protest SIGNS read "WE ARE THE 99%" and "OCCUPY EVERYTHING" and "PEOPLE NOT PROFIT" and "THE DREAM IS OVER."

With a sneer, Ebenezer watches all of this pass by.

TINY (CONT'D)  
You ever see a lazier bunch of people?

Ebenezer chuckles but doesn't answer.

TINY (CONT'D)  
Can I ask you a personal question?

He nods for her to proceed. She considers how to start.

TINY (CONT'D)

How do I get to be like you? Someone who, you know, provides the kind of service you do?

Ebenezer considers it, looking out the window.

A young mother and father hold a boy's hand, strolling along the sidewalk. Happy.

Ebenezer turns back to Tiny. Voice bitter. Gruff. American.

EBENEZER

Murder everything you love.

TINY

I'll be sure and remember that, Mr. Scrooge.

Tiny rolls her eyes and drives on in silence.

EXT. DYNATECH BUILDING - NIGHT

The limousine drives past the parking lot entrance. Parks alongside the dumpster.

Ebenezer gets out, knife roll slung over his shoulder.

He looks up at the skyscraper, a chrome and glass knife blade against the night sky. Dark, aside from a few lighted offices.

He spots a back door with a SECURITY CAMERA above it. Points a HANDHELD DEVICE at the camera and its red light turns off.

He gives a "thumbs up" toward the limo. Tiny pulls out of the back alley into the street.

Ebenezer gets close to the door and holds the device up to the CARD READER. A little red light flashes. When the light turns green, it BEEPS.

He runs a KEY CARD through a slot in the device. He pockets the device and taps the key card against the reader.

The card reader BEEPS, flashing green.

He backs away and aims the device at the camera. The red light flicks back on.

Ebenezer strides around and up to the front doors. Through the glass wall, a SECURITY GUARD sits behind a long desk and a row of SECURITY MONITORS, oblivious.

Ebenezer uses his key card on the door. It BEEPS, flashing green. He opens the door and steps in.

INT. DYNATECH - CONTINUOUS

The Security Guard rises from behind the desk, curious.

EBENEZER  
Forgot my briefcase.

Appeased, the Guard nods and sits back down.

Ebenezer continues to the elevators. Thumbs the UP button. He hears laughter and peers out at the Guard, who's watching a video on one his phone.

The elevator doors open. Ebenezer steps in. They close.

INT. DYNATECH - PROGRAMMING FLOOR - NIGHT

Oversized refrigerator magnet letters spell out DYNATECH. The workspace looks like a cross between a kindergarten class and an office party. Cubicles festooned with beanbag chairs, stuffed animals, toys and posters, basketball nets and games. Glass-walled offices surround the perimeter, one lighted.

The elevator DINGS and Ebenezer steps out, immediately ducking into the shadows.

In the lighted office a FRAZZLED MAN with dandruff flakes on his glasses and shoulders looks out, curious. He sees nothing and continues typing lines of code. This is CARSTONE.

Screwing the silencer on his COLT .45 AUTO, Ebenezer creeps alongside cubicles lined with idiotic motivational posters. He pauses at a photo of a group in paintball gear, "CODE WARRIORS" written underneath. Shakes his head in derision, and moves on to Carstone's office.

INT. DYNATECH - CARSTONE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Carstone's fingers race over the keys, his back to the door. Scrolling lines of code reflect on his glasses.

Ebenezer steps into the doorway, silent as a whisper.

Carstone stops typing and jerks erect in his chair at the sight of Ebenezer's reflection on his monitor. He calmly takes off his glasses and rubs the lenses with his sleeve.

CARSTONE  
So this is the end.

Ebenezer breathes through his nose. Says nothing.

CARSTONE (CONT'D)

I must really terrify them to send you. And on Black Friday Eve. Oh, the Powers that Be must be quaking in their boots.

Carstone reaches for a THUMBDRIVE in the USB port.

Ebenezer flicks the pistol toward Carstone.

EBENEZER

*Don't.*

Carstone freezes, fear finally registering in his eyes.

CARSTONE

Did they tell you who I am? Tell me they told you that much, at least.

EBENEZER

Richie Carstone, software developer.

CARSTONE

Software *genius*.

(beat)

And that's not my real name. You ought to know that before you do anything rash. Jesus, you really don't know anything, do you? The perfect tool for Bleak House. Greedy, soulless and ignorant.

Ebenezer doesn't react.

Carstone surreptitiously reaches behind himself for the thumbdrive and Ebenezer FIRES. Blood bursts from Carstone's shoulder and he slumps over his keyboard.

CARSTONE (CONT'D)

*Please...!* This is my life's work! Just... just let me upload it. Then you can -

(swallows hard)

- you can kill me. If you have to.

Ebenezer smiles amusedly.

EBENEZER

Why wouldn't I just kill you now? Pitch it to me as if I'm an investor. Sell it like your life depends on it. Which it does.

CARSTONE

"Sell it."

He pushes himself up with a sneer, cradling his injured arm.

CARSTONE (CONT'D)

Look at the world we've made for ourselves. Give it a real hard look and tell me with a straight face we haven't been *begging* for a big old Biblical Flood to wipe the score clean. This thumbdrive... I upload this, everything goes bye-bye. The global market will be worthless in the span of hours. Cripple the economy and reset the clock. A whole and total redistribution of wealth. A *Black Friday miracle*.

(smiles in wonder)

If the meek want the earth, I say *let them take it*.

EBENEZER

You're a God-fearing man, are you?

CARSTONE

I fear death. How about you, hey, Scrooge? What do you fear?

EBENEZER

Me?

Ebenezer FIRES three shots.

Carstone dances like a man on strings and sprawls over the desk, his face pressed against the toppled monitor, code reflected on his glasses.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)

The same thing Bleak House fears.  
Men like you.

Ebenezer crosses to Carstone. He plucks the thumbdrive out of the computer. Examines it, then slips it into a pocket.

He unravels the knife roll. Takes out a long thin tool and inserts it into the first bullet wound. Withdraws it after a metallic CLINK, the mangled slug stuck to its magnetic end.

He does the same for the rest. Collects them into a baggie. Picks up the shells and deposits them with the slugs. Seals the baggie, tucks it into his pocket.

With one last look at Carstone's lifeless body, he leaves the room, vanishing into the darkened offices.



INT. LIMOUSINE - NIGHT

Tiny's reading a paperback crime novel when the back door opens. She looks in the rearview as Ebenezer slips in. Dog-ears a page and puts the book on the passenger seat.

TINY

Bills tonight, Mr. Scrooge?

Ebenezer pulls out his CELL PHONE, ignoring her. Tiny watches the partition close and starts driving, muttering:

TINY (CONT'D)

Not tonight, Tina. It's Thanksgiving.  
Why don't you go home? Be with your  
dad?

Ebenezer opens a faceless message window labelled "BH" and types: *COMPLETE*. He waits. The typing notification appears. After a beat, a message pops up: *PAYMENT IN PROGRESS*.

Smiling, Ebenezer opens a laptop and clicks on the BANK ICON. "NEW DEPOSIT \$100,000." Several million in the account.

He closes the browser. Curious, he takes out Carstone's thumbdrive from his pocket. He hovers it close to the USB port. Thinks better of it and returns it to the pocket.

Tiny drives the wet streets through a light snow.

Ebenezer scowls and takes the thumbdrive back out again. He studies it a moment. Then pops it into the USB port.

The DRIVE ICON pops up on the desktop. He double-clicks it. A single executable file, labelled "EYE\_OF\_THE\_NEEDLE."

He hovers the mouse pointer over it. Considers it. Then he pulls the drive and puts it back in his pocket.

He's about to close the laptop when it makes a discordant *BOOOOOOOOOOP!* from the internal speaker.

He scowls as his banking window pops up. Beside "ACCOUNT BALANCE" the numbers begin counting down from the millions, dropping a hundred-thousand per second.

EBENEZER

*What what what no no NO!*

He SLAMS a fist on the keyboard, sending a key flying. In sheer panic he watches his account drop to zero.

An 8-BIT IMAGE of three moldering skulls on a black background fills the screen, eye sockets obscured by rusty, RATTLING CHAINS. A message appears below:

**YOU HAVE BEEN VISITED BY 3 GH05T5  
ALL YOUR MONEY  
WON'T CLOTHE YOU IN HELL...**

Ebenezer pitches the computer from his lap. It clatters on the floor and the screen goes black, a thin ribbon of smoke rising from the keyboard.

He SLAMS his fist down on the bar, rattling the glasses.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)

FUCK!

The limo stops and the partition zips down. Tiny looks at his angry face in the rearview mirror.

TINY

Everything all right, Mr. Scrooge?

Ebenezer opens the door and lunges out into the snow squall, leaving the back door open.

EXT. LONDON FLATS HIGHRISE - CONTINUOUS

He strides to the front doors, bundled up against the cold.

Tiny gets out and closes the back door. She looks up at the building as Ebenezer enters the lobby through the glass doors.

TINY

(mutters)

Happy Thanksgiving, Tina.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

On the TV, a sparkly FAIRY flutters through a dark electronics store, lowering prices with his magic wand.

COMMERCIAL ANNOUNCER

'Twas the Eve of Black Friday and  
all through the store, every item  
discounted, ten dollars or more...

Ebenezer raises a hand mirror in front of the television already adorned with two lines of brown powder. He places a rolled fifty-dollar bill against a line and snorts it up.

He snorts the second line with the other nostril, then inhales deeply through both, alternately pinching and opening them.

He reaches back blindly with the mirror. Almost misses the coffee table, but manages to set it down. Finally he allows himself to lie back on the carpet, spreading out his arms like a snow angel.

*DING-DONGGGGG!* Ebenezer opens a single eye.

*DING-DONG DING-DING-DONGGGGG!* He opens the other eye, upset.

*THUMP! THUMP-THUMP-THUMP! DING-DONGGGGG!* He sits up angrily.

*THUMP-THUMP-THUMP!*

He yanks open the door, ready for a fight.

Nobody there.

Ebenezer leans out, looking up and down the empty hall. The elevator and stairwell doors are closed.

He frowns. Closes his door and locks it.

*THUMP-THUMP-THUMP!*

Ebenezer tears open the door. Steps out and looks both ways. Down the hall, the stairwell door *CLUNKS* shut.

He grabs the pistol off the entry table and dashes out into the hall in his sock feet.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

An OLD WOMAN opens her door, cradling a small dog in her arms as Ebenezer rushes by.

EBENEZER

Go back to bed, Mrs. McCloister.

The Old Woman startles at the sight of his gun and quickly shuts herself inside.

Ebenezer continues to the stairs, popping out the magazine, checking his ammunition. Three bullets left. Satisfied, he reloads and primes it, leaning against the stairwell door.

INT. STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

As he steps in, a shadow passes over the next flight up. *FOOTSTEPS ECHO* from above.

EBENEZER

You're gonna wish you never pissed me off, whoever you are!

He rushes up two by two, sock feet *THUDDING*.

The door above *CLICKS* open and *SLAMS* shut.

Ebenezer bounds onto the next flight. Reaches the final floor. Stares at the door, labeled "EXIT TO ROOF." He kicks it open.

EXT. ROOF - CONTINUOUS

At the far end, a LARGE MAN stands in silhouette near a coop filled with COOING PIGEONS.

Ebenezer looks at the inch of undisturbed snow on the rooftop. Not a single footprint.

EBENEZER

I've got a .45 ACP pointed at your head! Turn around with your hands in the air or the birds will be wearing bits of your face.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Are these your pets?

Ebenezer flinches at the voice.

EBENEZER

Show your face, damn you!

MARLEY'S GHOST

Already damned, mate. And so are you... Ebenezer Scrooge.

MARLEY'S GHOST turns, his face illuminated by moonlight, dressed in the same outfit as the night Ebenezer killed him.

For the first time, Ebenezer registers fear. He sneers. FIRES his last three shots.

The bullets whip through Marley. The big man doesn't flinch.

MARLEY'S GHOST (CONT'D)

Not gonna work this time, boy. Kind of impervious, what with being dead already and all.

Ebenezer lowers the pistol.

EBENEZER

You're not here. The... the computer virus... Th-three Ghosts... an-and the heroin...

(angry)

You're a hallucination!

MARLEY'S GHOST

Maybe I'm a bit of underdone potato. Gonna do your nut in either way, ain't I?

Ebenezer ROARS in confused rage and lunges at Marley.

Marley grins and stands his ground.

Ebenezer throws his shoulder into Marley but the man vanishes like a wisp of smoke.

The realization hits Ebenezer as he bounds off the roof. Wide-eyed, he pinwheels his legs in mid-air, a silhouette against the moon and falling snow.

Blindly reaching out, he grabs the railing of the fire escape on the opposing building. His body SLAMS against it and his fingers slip on its icy surface.

He drops like a sack of pennies. Strikes the next railing on his way down. His slackened body flips.

He lands on his back in a pile of snow heaped against the wall alongside a Dumpster.

Looking up he sees Marley leaning over the edge of the roof.

His eyelids flutter. A snowflake lands on his nose and melts.

He blacks out.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

A pile of snow begins to writhe. A moment later Ebenezer emerges from it, sitting up with a desperate gasp.

He stands, teeth chattering, hugging himself against the chill. He exhales. No vapor. Exhales harder. Again, he can't see his breath. He wiggles his toes. His sock feet are dry.

He stops shivering. Lets his arms drop from his chest.

EBENEZER

(to himself)

Am I dead?

He trudges through the snow. Looks around himself. Trees. The backs of houses. Confusion registers.

Finally he spots a BOY huddled up behind a tree, gripping a plastic AK-47 - a toy that hasn't been made since the '80s.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)

You there, boy! Am I dead?

The boy ignores him.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)

Hey!

He steps up to the boy, waving his hands.

The boy looks up but not at him. Just enough that Ebenezer can see his face: 11 years old, blond hair under his toque, glasses frosty. Snot frozen from nostrils to quivering lips, his teeth chatter. This is SIMON LACHANCE.

Ebenezer staggers back in shock.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)

No, that's not possible. This is *not possible!*

MARLEY'S GHOST (O.S.)

No one can hear you, boy!

Ebenezer whips around, feet crunching in the snow.

Marley stands in the path, grinning from ear to ear.

EBENEZER

You! You did this?

MARLEY'S GHOST

I said you was damned, didn't I?  
Welcome to Hell, Ebenezer. December  
21st, 1988, to be precise.

EBENEZER

(backing away)

No. No, please, I can't...

Frantic, Ebenezer backs into the tree and startles.

MARLEY'S GHOST

No turning back, mate. Gonna play  
all the platinum hits from your  
childhood, we are.

THREE GUNSHOTS startle Ebenezer.

Marley looks toward the sound with a reminiscing grin.

Simon looks over his shoulder toward the backs of the houses as a MAN comes running out, his peacoat flapping behind him.

JAKE MARLEY laughs, blood flecks on his wild-eyed face as he runs in their direction. Pistol in hand. He stops a few yards from the boy, realizing he's been seen.

Nervous, Simon FIRES the machine gun. Jake chuckles.

JAKE

Fearless, eh? Yeahhh. Where are all  
your mates, then?

Simon says nothing.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Left you in the lurch, have they?  
 (off Simon's nod)  
 Well, that's lucky for them. Afraid  
 it's not so lucky for you.

Jake raises the pistol.

Simon flinches. Ebenezer steps between them, raising his hands to protect the boy.

EBENEZER

No, you leave me alone!

MARLEY'S GHOST

You already know how this turns out,  
 Ebenezer. You can't change the past.  
 Can't take back what you done to me  
 or anyone else.

Marley pulls down his shirt collar, revealing a festering bullet wound. Ebenezer winces at the sight.

Jake reconsiders, and lowers the gun.

JAKE

Maybe we can make a deal, eh? You  
 old enough to carry a wallet?

SIMON

I'm e-eleven!

JAKE

Speckies and a stutter. Jesus wept.  
 (gestures)  
 Hand it over then. C'mon, don't make  
 a dog's knob out of it.

Simon gets up reluctantly. He pulls the wallet out of his back pocket and holds it out.

Jake snatches it. Flips it open. Grins again.

JAKE (CONT'D)

One quid. How fucking adorable.

Jake takes out the dollar and slips it into his pocket.

SIMON

H-hey, that's mine!

JAKE

Quick lesson, boy: no man owns money,  
 they just holding it until some other  
 punter nicks it, right?

Jake pulls out a birth certificate. Takes a pair of bifocals out of his coat pocket and looks it over.

The boy snickers.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
You having a bubble? You four-eyed little toss...

SIMON  
What's a b-bubble?

JAKE  
Bubble bath. A laugh. Nevermind.  
(reads)  
Simon Lachance. Is that French?

Simon shrugs.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
You don't know.  
(beat)  
All right, Simon Lachance. First thing I do when I get out of this fucking dog's toilet, I'm gonna find a phonebooth and suss out where you live. And if I catch a whiff of bacon over what I done here, I'm gonna come round your house and put an hole in your head, understand?

Simon shakes his head, confused.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
I'll shoot you in the head if you tell your mum and dad.

The boy's eyes widen in fear. Jake tosses the wallet back. Simon fumbles it. The machinegun falls from his hand but he manages to catch the wallet before it hits the ground.

When Simon looks up again Jake's already walking past Ebenezer and his older self toward the path.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Name's Jake, by the way. Jake Marley.

SIMON  
L-like the movie?

Still walking, Jake looks over his shoulder and winks.

JAKE  
Exactly like that.



Simon tucks his wallet back into his pants. He picks up the machine gun and looks off toward the open door of the house Jake had come out of.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY (1988)

A cherry red Camaro IROC-Z RUMBLES by Ebenezer and Marley as they appear on the sidewalk. Guns N' Roses's "Welcome to the Jungle" plays on crappy car speakers.

Ebenezer startles. He sees Marley's Ghost at his side and realizes where they are. *When they are.*

EBENEZER

I used to walk home from school this way.

He looks up the street, sees Simon trudging along.

MARLEY'S GHOST

And from the park, when you didn't want to get your skinny arse kicked. But them boys still managed to get you today, didn't they?

The IROC-Z screeches to a stop alongside Simon.

EBENEZER

I didn't recognize the car. It was his brother's.

Simon hurries his step, not daring to look.

KID (O.S.)

Hey, it's the four-eyed faggot!

Ebenezer squeezes his eyes shut.

EBENEZER

I don't want to see this.

MARLEY'S GHOST

The wheels are already in motion, geezer. Keep your hands inside the vehicle at all times.

Reluctantly, Ebenezer opens his eyes. He and Marley have reappeared curbside near Simon and the car.

Simon won't turn to look, walking even faster now. As he passes between Ebenezer and Marley, Ebenezer tries to grab the boy's shoulder.

EBENEZER

Turn around and run. Run!

His hand passes right through Simon. Curious, he holds it up in front of his eyes. It looks solid enough.

MARLEY'S GHOST

I told you, you can't change nothing.

A small kid with a pompadour haircut, a large brown birthmark on his cheek and a letterman jacket gets out of the passenger side. This is ADAM COULTER.

Adam hurries to catch up to Simon. The car RUMBLES alongside them until he steps into Simon's path, stopping him. The driver stops the car with a SQUEAL of tires.

ADAM

Nice mittens! Your mommy sew them for you?

Simon's red wool mittens hang from his sleeves. He tucks them into the sleeves self-consciously.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Speaking of your mother...

In the car, the driver laughs. GRANT COULTER (16) has a rat-tail haircut and an acid-washed jean jacket with a Judas Priest back patch.

ADAM (CONT'D)

We need cigarettes. And you're gonna help me get 'em, aren't you, Simon?

Simon pouts. Adam smacks him on the forehead.

Ebenezer flinches along with Simon.

ADAM (CONT'D)

I said *aren't you*?

EBENEZER

Little shit.

Simon nods, his lower lip beginning to quiver. Adam puts an arm around Simon's shoulders. The boy cowers and lets him. Adam gives him a noogie.

Grant laughs. Adam lets go of Simon, who steps back rubbing his scalp in pain.

ADAM

Now c'mon, Simple Simon. Let's go.

Adam walks ahead. He looks back.

ADAM (CONT'D)

I said *let's go*.

Simon catches up reluctantly. The car rumbles alongside them.

INT. CORNER SHOP - DAY

Ebenezer blinks at his surroundings. He sees ALBIE LACHANCE standing behind the counter. Mid-40s, salt-and-pepper hair, bifocals hung on a lanyard over his checkered cardigan.

KIDS count candies into small paper bags from the racks full of treats. Behind Albie, the cigarettes are in full view.

ALBIE

All right, kids, one at a time. Make a line.

EBENEZER

Dad...!

Ebenezer approaches the counter. Marley watches him.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)

He looks exactly the same.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Death does that to a man.

Ebenezer shoots Marley a dour look. The bell above the door DINGS. All three men look toward it.

Adam steps in with Simon in tow, looking morose. Adam nudges Simon toward the counter. Simon approaches it reluctantly.

ALBIE

Oh, hey, Simon!

SIMON

Hi, Dad.

Adam watches money exchange hands with obvious avarice. Albie places a bill in the till and a kid walks off with a mouth full of candy.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Can I, um, talk to you for a sec?

ALBIE

Gimme a minute here, son.

Albie takes another bill, makes change, and another kid walks off with a bag of candy.

The store empty now except for a boy playing a *Gauntlet* arcade machine, Albie dusts his palms and looks over Simon's shoulder to Adam, who's looking at the VHS rack.

ALBIE (CONT'D)

Can I help you with something, son?

Adam picks up a tape at random. He holds it up for Albie to see: *Wall Street*.

ADAM

Is this any good?

ALBIE

That one's probably a little too sophisticated for you, my friend. Something on the lower shelves might be a little more your speed.

Adam looks at the kids movies and narrows his eyes.

ADAM

Thank you for your help, sir.

He puts *Wall Street* back in the wrong spot.

Albie looks down at Simon.

ALBIE

Now, you wanted to talk?

SIMON

(glances at Adam)

In, uh, in private?

Albie nods and comes around the counter. He ushers Simon into the back room, past a portable black-and-white TV playing *It's A Wonderful Life*, Jimmy Stewart running around shouting greetings at stores in his hometown.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Aren't you gonna follow 'em?

EBENEZER

And watch me debase myself for this little shit? No thanks.

The two men watch Adam creep over to the counter. He steps around it. Peers into the back, where Albie and Simon have a hushed discussion by the stairs.

He reaches up and grabs a handful of cigarette packs, tucking them into the waistband of his pants.

Then he sees something. His eyes widen and narrow again. He glances in the back, then creeps over to the till.

ALBIE (O.S.)

That's why it's about greed and the evils of capitalism, and *not* goodwill to all men, even though at the end of the movie George Bailey realizes he does have a wonderful life.

Adam snatches the SPARE KEY. He hurries out from behind the counter as Albie and Simon return.

EBENEZER

He took the spare key. That's how they got in.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Clever little rat, he is.

ALBIE

Now is that really what you wanted to ask me, or was there something else?

Simon makes to say something, but Adam interrupts.

ADAM

Is this more my speed, sir?

He's back at the movie rack, holding up *Red Dawn*.

Albie raises his glasses to see.

ALBIE

That's PG-13.

ADAM

It's for my brother. He's 17.

ALBIE

Come back with your brother then.

ADAM

(devilish)  
Yes, sir.

Adam puts the tape case back and heads for the door.

ADAM (CONT'D)

See you in school, Simon.

SIMON

B-bye.

The bell DINGS as Adam leaves. Simon watches him go with building trepidation.

ALBIE

Regular Eddie Haskell, that kid.

With a thunderous BOOM, all the LIGHTS GO OUT.

Ebenezer looks up in confusion as the sky darkens through the storefront windows, leaving them in PITCH DARK.

EBENEZER

What's happening?

Marley nods toward the counter as it reappears under the glow of a desk lamp. Albie and CONNIE LACHANCE stand behind it, Albie's hand on her back as she counts the till. Dressed in a green sweater, her chestnut hair tied back, she counts the last few bills onto the counter.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)

I don't want to see this.

Marley shrugs it off.

Ebenezer grabs him by the shoulders, shaking him madly.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)

I DON'T WANT TO SEE THIS, GODDAMMIT!

MARLEY'S GHOST

Then don't look. But they'll just keep repeatin' it until you get the message. Trust me. They done it to me. Over and over, like a fuckin' skipping record.

Ebenezer lets Marley go. Bitterly, he turns to watch.

CONNIE

Three-hundred and eighty-three dollars. How much change?

ALBIE

Six dollars, seventy-eight cents. Think we'll have enough this year, Connie?

CONNIE

After the heating bill and back pay on the rent, that leaves us with... what? Fifty bucks?

ALBIE

Give or take.

He picks up the solitary FIFTY-DOLLAR BILL and examines it. Ebenezer groans pitifully. Marley gives him a sidelong look.

CONNIE

Just enough to go toward that bike  
Simon wanted. With a little change  
leftover.

Albie puts his arm around Connie's shoulders. She hugs him.

ALBIE

He'll be thrilled.

Connie smiles, nuzzling into Albie's chest.

ALBIE (CONT'D)

Why don't you go upstairs and draw  
yourself a bath. I'll sweep up.

They kiss briefly and she heads for the back. Albie grabs the broom and begins sweeping the floor.

The door lock CLICKS and the bell DINGS. Albie looks up.

Adam saunters in with a shit-eating grin, followed by Grant, and a lanky skinhead in a bomber jacket and tight jeans, with the gaunt, wild-eyed look of a junkie. This is TANNER.

ALBIE (CONT'D)

How did you kids get in here? We're  
closed.

ADAM

I brought my older brother.

Adam picks up *Red Dawn*.

ADAM (CONT'D)

But I'm not interested in violent  
movies anymore, sir.

He drops it on the floor. Tanner steps on it, giggling wildly.

Albie grips the broom in both hands, holding back his fear.

ALBIE

I don't want any trouble.

GRANT

We don't want any trouble, either.  
Just that money.

ALBIE

C'mon, fellas. It's Christmas.

GRANT  
 How come you didn't say "Merry  
 Christmas" when we come in if it's  
 Christmas?

ALBIE  
 W-well, M-merry Christmas. If you  
 like.

Adam and Grant share an amused look. Tanner studies the can  
 of potted meat he's picked up.

TANNER  
 Who eats this shit?

Before Albie can raise a hand to protect himself Tanner  
 SMASHES the can down on his head. Albie drops the broom and  
 falls to his knees, blood spilling down his forehead.

Connie cries out, half in the door.

Albie staggers to his feet, holding his bleeding head.

ALBIE  
 Fellas, please -

GRANT  
 We just want the money, old man.

Tanner eyes up Connie.

TANNER  
 Speak for yourself.

ALBIE  
 Okay. Okay, just take the money and  
 go then.

Grant starts grabbing the money, tucking it into his jeans.

Tanner swaggers closer to Connie, eyeing her heaving bosom  
 beneath her sweater. She looks away in fear and disgust.

Ebenezer doesn't want to look but he can't turn away. Marley  
 squeezes his shoulder in support.

ADAM (O.S.)  
 Your movies suck.

Adam swipes an entire shelf of VHS cases to the floor.

One of them skitters across to stop at Ebenezer's feet. A  
*Christmas Carol*. Alastair Sim's smiling face on the cover.

Marley and Ebenezer share a troubled look.



ALBIE

*Please...*

One last bill on the counter. The fifty. Grant snatches for it but Connie reaches it first.

ALBIE (CONT'D)

Don't you haggle over that money,  
Con.

CONNIE

But Simon's -

ADAM

Fuck Simon! Take the money, Grant!

Grant pulls. The bill tears in two. Connie cries out.

Grant sneers, quick-drawing a .38 Special from the back of his jeans and aiming it at her.

GRANT

Make a wish, bitch.

ALBIE

Connie!

EBENEZER

Mom!

The BARREL ERUPTS, the deafening gunshot muffling all further sound. Time stretches out as EVERYONE REACTS IN HORROR - all but Marley, whose eyes narrow down to slits.

Connie's eyes remain wide as she collapses on the floor.

Ebenezer hurries to her side, dropping to one knee. Blood red spreads across her green sweater. He tries to touch her face but his hand goes right through her. All he can do is kneel beside her in muted horror.

Albie rises with a MUTED ROAR, swinging the broom at Tanner.

Grant whips around, FIRES blindly. A can of beans explodes behind Albie. The third SHOT hits Albie in the chest.

Albie's eyes widen. Time speeds up and the broom CLATTERS on the floor. He drops beside it with a thud.

Ebenezer looks up from his dead mother, tears in his eyes.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)

Dad...

(to the boys)

You greedy fucking maniacs! I'll  
kill you! I'LL FUCKING KILL YOU ALL!

GRANT  
Jesus... Jesus Christ!

TANNER  
What the fuck did you do, Grant?

ADAM  
The old man's still alive.

Albie desperately tries to drag himself across the floor to Connie, blood oozing down his forehead and from his lips.

ADAM (CONT'D)  
You gotta shoot him again.

GRANT  
Are you nuts? I didn't *mean* to -

ADAM  
You wanna leave a witness? You want to go to jail?

Grant gives Tanner a desperate look. Tanner nods solemnly.

GRANT  
Goddammit...

He FIRES again.

Albie slumps to the floor, one hand nearly touching his wife, the two pieces of the torn fifty-dollar bill between them.

Grant turns and runs for the door. Tanner follows.

Adam lingers a moment longer. A smile spreads over his face.

ADAM  
Merry Christmas, Simple Simon.

With that he turns. The BELL DINGS as he leaves the store.

SIMON (O.S.)  
Mom...?

Marley gives Ebenezer a pitying look.

Simon comes down the stairs in his pajamas, holding a glass of milk. As he steps into the store his eyes go wide. He drops the glass. It shatters on the floor.

SIMON (CONT'D)  
MOM!

Simon rushes to his mother. Stepping in the glass. Leaving a trail of bloody footprints.

Ebenezer watches Simon hug his mother's lifeless body. Both of them weeping openly now. Marley watching them with pity.

Another thunderous BOOM and the LIGHTS GO OUT again.

Red and blue lights flash over the windows, flickering over the shelves, the bodies, the tape cases and broken glass. A UNIFORM COP tucks the TORN BILL into an evidence bag.

The bell DINGS. A redheaded man in a trench coat steps in and surveys the scene grimly, chewing gum. This is DETECTIVE MINKUS (30). He steps around the marked evidence. Crunches down on a piece of glass.

DETECTIVE MINKUS  
Bit of a warning might be nice.

UNIFORM COP  
Watch the glass?

DETECTIVE MINKUS  
Yeah, thanks.

Minkus continues to the back. Sighs and trudges up the stairs.

INT. LACHANCE APARTMENT - NIGHT

Simon sits on the couch, an EMT wrapping his foot in gauze.

DETECTIVE MINKUS  
Give us a minute?

The EMT nods and heads for the door. Detective Minkus sits down beside Simon. Ebenezer and Marley watch the scene from beside the window.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)  
Simon, my name is Detective Minkus.  
You can call me Mike.  
(beat)  
You like Bazooka Joe?

He offers Simon a piece. Simon takes it. Doesn't unwrap it.

On the television, *A Christmas Carol* plays, Scrooge dancing and singing through his living room. His housekeeper runs away screaming with a towel over her face.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)  
I love this scene.

Minkus laughs and blows a pink bubble.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)

Simon, you were up here watching a movie the whole time, is that right?

Simon doesn't answer. He stares at the TV throughout.

SCROOGE (O.S.)

*Hello there! You, boy! Yes, you!*

DETECTIVE MINKUS

Do you have any idea who might want to hurt your parents?

SIMON

Jacob Marley did it.

Marley narrows his eyes at Ebenezer.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

In the movie, he did. He sends the three ghosts to help Scrooge, I guess. But here. Tonight. Who could have done this to your parents?

SIMON

*I told you.*

DETECTIVE MINKUS

All right. Okay, Jacob Marley did it. Any idea why Jacob Marley would want to hurt your parents?

SIMON

Because I saw him. He came out of that house this morning with blood all over his face.

While Minkus blows a bubble and parses this, Marley gives Ebenezer a look of disdain.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Finked on me. You little rat.

EBENEZER

You said you'd shoot me in the head. I was eleven. What did you expect?

DETECTIVE MINKUS

What house, Simon? Was it the, uh... the Waltons? Shit.

(snaps his gum)

The Washing - Wadlingtons?

Simon stares blankly at him.

DETECTIVE STANLEY (O.S.)  
Give the kid a break, Minkus.

DETECTIVE STANLEY stands in the doorway, a slim 50-year-old woman in an tan overcoat, a lit cigarette pinched between her lips.

DETECTIVE MINKUS  
I think he might know someth -

DETECTIVE STANLEY  
He's in shock. You heard him. Jacob Marley? C'mon, Minkus. You can't be that green.

Minkus scowls. He gives Simon a pitying look, then stands.

DETECTIVE MINKUS  
All right. We'll talk again, huh, Simon?

Simon ignores him, his puffy red eyes on the movie.

Minkus approaches Stanley, speaking in a hushed tone.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)  
Get a hold of the relatives?

DETECTIVE STANLEY  
No luck.

DETECTIVE MINKUS  
Where's the kid gonna go?

DETECTIVE STANLEY  
Into the system, I guess.

Minkus sighs heavily, looking off at Simon.

DETECTIVE STANLEY (CONT'D)  
You gotta be kidding me. Doesn't Holly have enough to take care of around the house without you bringing home strays?

DETECTIVE MINKUS  
It'd just be for Christmas.

DETECTIVE STANLEY  
Hey, it's your funeral. Don't say I didn't warn you.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CORNER SHOP - NIGHT

Minkus leads Simon into the front passenger seat of his sedan, the dome light flashing, Marley and Ebenezer already in the back.

INT. MINKUS'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Minkus gets in and adjusts the mirror.

Ebenezer notices it doesn't reflect himself or Marley. He waves a hand in front of Minkus's face. Nothing.

Simon stares out at the store. Detective Minkus starts the car. They drive in silence.

EBENEZER

What's this about, Marley? Why are you showing me all this?

MARLEY'S GHOST

I'm in the dark here too, mate. I thought I was done with you when you shot me in the fucking chest. Guess the Powers That Be got bigger plans for us.

EBENEZER

Minkus knew about the Wadlingtons.

MARLEY'S GHOST

So he did.

Minkus turns to Simon.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

You like music?

He flicks on the radio. Bobby McFerrin sings "Don't Worry Be Happy." Minkus looks at Simon and flicks off the radio.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)

I hate that song.

Minkus drives in awkward silence.

INT. MINKUS'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A cramped, filthy apartment. The front door opens. Minkus steps in with Simon in tow.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

Welcome to Casa di Minkus.

He ushers Simon inside.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)

I'll tell you a secret. Mrs. Minkus left me for her boss in the lingerie department a month ago. I haven't told anybody at work yet. So it'll just be you and me until the ladies at social services find you a new place to live.

Simon looks around. He scowls.

SIMON

You don't have a TV?

DETECTIVE MINKUS

Sure I do. Right here.

Minkus approaches a shelf full of books, paperbacks all heaped on top of each other.

SIMON

Books aren't TV.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

They're *better* than TV. Books are television of the mind. Look here.

He pokes through the mess, finds a dusty old hardcover and hands it to Simon. Simon blinks at it. A *Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)

The movies are great, but have you ever read the book?

Simon shakes his head.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)

I promise you, you'll love it. Just give it a chance.

Simon shrugs.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)

You hungry? There's an all-night Chinese place down the block.

INT. MINKUS'S APARTMENT - LATER

Minkus and Simon slurp noodles out of takeaway boxes on the messy kitchen table.

Minkus gets a mouthful of noodles and lets them hang from his mouth while he speaks.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

You want soy sauce?

Simon giggles.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)

What? I got something on my face?

Simon slurps up noodles and smiles, despite himself.

Minkus laughs.

EBENEZER

He was one of the good ones. I always wondered if they'd let me stay here... if things might've been better.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Aww, you and me had some good times.

(considers)

At least I had clean plates.

EXT. FOSTER HOME - DAY

Minkus pulls the car up to a large Victorian home, like something out of a Christmas card, piled with snow, lights on the windows and the eaves, a snowman by the porch.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

I'll come check in on you soon as I get a minute. Okay?

Simon nods.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)

You know, I grew up in foster homes. They can be tough, sometimes. Just keep your chin up. Don't let anyone push you around. You hear me?

Simon nods again.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)

You're a good kid. Don't forget that. Bad things happen to people all the time. It's how you choose to deal with it that makes you who you are.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Cheesy prat, this one.

Minkus ruffles Simon's hair. Simon scowls and fixes it.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

All right, you go get 'em, kid.



Simon gets out of the car.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)  
Hey, Simon?

The boy pauses in closing the door.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)  
Merry Christmas, kid.

SIMON  
Merry Christmas.

Minkus offers him a sad smile. Simon smiles back and closes the door. He trudges up the walkway.

A woman with curly white hair and a shawl stands just inside the front door, waving cheerily. This is GRANDMA TRUDY (70).

INT. FOSTER HOME - FOYER - DAY

Ebenezer and Marley stand on the carpeted steps above FIVE CHILDREN, as Grandma Trudy ushers Simon inside.

GRANDMA TRUDY  
Young ladies and gentlemen. Meet  
your new foster brother Simon.

A 12-year-old girl with auburn pigtails and freckles steps out of the group, sticking out her hand. Her name is ARIA.

ARIA  
Nice to meet you, Simon. I'm Ariadne.  
Everyone calls me Aria. Like the  
music.

Simon shakes her hand.

SIMON  
I'm S-simon.

ARIA  
(grins)  
I heard.

GRANDMA TRUDY  
Ariadne is my granddaughter. Recently  
orphaned, like yourself.

SIMON  
I'm s-sorry.

ARIA  
Me too.

GRANDMA TRUDY

These are my children. Not "my" children in the sense that I didn't bear them myself. But in this house we are all family. Isn't that right, children?

CHILDREN

YES, GRANDMA TRUDY.

GRANDMA TRUDY

You see? They call me Grandma Trudy, and you may call me that as well.

Simon looks over the kids' smiling face.

A pimpled beanpole of a boy towers over the others halfway up the stairs. He sneers at Simon. This is TROY.

INT. FOSTER HOME - TROY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Gobots and G.I. Joes and other toys litter the dresser, posters of girls in bikinis line the walls of the unmade bottom bunk.

Simon looks from the bunk to Troy, who stands by the dresser slamming a baseball into a glove.

GRANDMA TRUDY

You'll be bunking with Troy.

TROY

You're on top.

Simon looks up at Grandma Trudy. She nods for him to enter. He steps in reluctantly, slinging the knapsack off his shoulder and up onto the top bunk. He climbs up after it.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Just like prison, innit?

Grandma Trudy smiles at the boys.

GRANDMA TRUDY

I'll leave you two to get acquainted.

She lingers a moment, then leaves the room.

Troy SLAPS the ball into the glove and approaches the bed while Simon takes out *A Christmas Carol* and begins to read.

TROY

What's with the book? School's not back for another week, browner.

Simon looks up for a moment and resumes reading.

The baseball SLAMS into the wall near Simon's head. Simon startles, dropping the book.

TROY (CONT'D)

You better answer me when I ask you something. I'm Top Gun in this house, got that, squirt?

SIMON

Who's Goose?

TROY

Nobody's Goose. Maybe I should call you Ducky. How'd you like that?

SIMON

Not m-much.

TROY

"Not m-m-much"?

(laughs)

Then stop t-t-talking smack. Now throw me the ball.

Simon grabs the ball and lobs it to Troy. Troy fumbles it. The ball bounces to the corner of the room and Troy looks up in anger and embarrassment.

TROY (CONT'D)

I meant to do that.

He throws the glove, knocking the toys off the dresser, and storms out of the room, almost bumping into Aria standing in the hallway.

TROY (CONT'D)

Out of my way, Hairy-Ass-Knee.

Aria scowls after him, her cheeks turning red.

ARIA

I'm pretty sure the pus from all his pimples went straight to his brain.

Simon chuckles. Aria smiles and retreats from the room.

ARIA (CONT'D)

See you at dinner.

SIMON

(calls after her:)

S-see you... l-later.

## MARLEY'S GHOST

What a shit age. Old enough to fall  
in love, too young to have a wank.

## EBENEZER

You're a real sentimentalist.

Marley grins and claps Ebenezer on the shoulder.

Simon stares at the door a moment longer. Then sighs and  
picks up his book.

## INT. FOSTER HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The kids sit around a large table covered with all kinds of  
food, chattering and laughing. Simon sits beside Aria, the  
two of them talking in hushed tones.

Grandma Trudy enters with a big crispy turkey on a platter.  
Everyone quiets as she places it at the head of the table  
and begins to carve.

The kids pass their plates in turn. Grandma Trudy ladens  
them with white and dark meat according to preference.

## GRANDMA TRUDY

Light or dark, Troy?

## TROY

I'm a boob man, Granny.

Grandma Trudy fixes him with a look of death as the other  
kids try to hide their giggles.

Simon glances sidelong at Aria, watching her unfold a napkin  
into her lap - until Troy elbows him.

## TROY (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Pass your plate, dumbass.

Simon snaps out of it, embarrassed. He hands his plate to  
Troy. Troy passes it to Grandma Trudy.

## GRANDMA TRUDY

What would you like, Simon? Light or  
dark?

## SIMON

Uh... it doesn't matter.

## GRANDMA TRUDY

Well, which would you prefer, dear?  
It's entirely up to you.

He looks at Aria's plate, white meat with a little splash of gravy. She gives him a brief smile.

SIMON

Uh, w-white meat, Missus -  
 (catches himself)  
 - I mean Grandma Trudy.

Grandma Trudy smiles and places a few slices on his plate. Troy hands it back, but not before popping a pimple over it.

Ebenezer grimaces.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Aww, fucking Hell! Tell me you didn't eat it.

Simon stares at his plate in horror.

GRANDMA TRUDY

Now. Who wants to say Grace?

EXT. FOSTER HOME - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Ebenezer and Marley stand before a gigantic spruce covered in ornaments and tinsel and blinking lights, a mound of wrapped gifts below.

Simon wanders in, looking up at the tree. He breathes in deeply through his nose as he approaches it.

ARIA (O.S.)

Sure beats the smell of Troy's bed farts, doesn't it?

Simon whirls around to see Aria lying on the couch with her feet in the air and her head hanging over the cushions. She gets up and wobbles a moment.

ARIA (CONT'D)

Whoa. Head rush.

She approaches. They stand side by side, staring at the tree.

SIMON

We never had a real tree at my house.

ARIA

Me neither. We didn't have a lot of money, not like Grandma Trudy. She never liked my dad, so she when my mom married him, Grandma Trudy cut her off.

(MORE)

ARIA (CONT'D)

My mom liked to say they were star-crossed lovers, but they were just two people who had a kid too young and tried to make it work.

SIMON

I'm sure they l-loved you.

ARIA

Of course they did.

(smiles)

You know what I love?

Simon shakes his head, nervous to hear her answer. Aria gets down on her hands and knees. He looks down at her, curious, as she crawls under the tree.

ARIA (CONT'D)

Come on!

Simon hunkers down. Sees Aria lying under the tree near the back corner, all smiles, lights flashing on her face.

He crawls under and lies down beside her. She watches him. He doesn't dare to look at her now that he's so close.

Ebenezer and Marley crouch down to watch.

ARIA (CONT'D)

When I was little I used to do this every year. I don't know why. I guess it was the one place I could always feel happy, no matter what.

SIMON

Are you h-happy now?

ARIA

No. I'm sad. But if I've learned anything from Christmas, it's how to pretend to be happy.

SIMON

M-me too. I miss my mom. Dad too, but mostly Mom.

ARIA

They're in Heaven now. If you believe in that.

SIMON

You don't?

ARIA

(shrugs)

I used to. But what if this is all we get? What if we have to make Heaven or Hell for ourselves while we're here?

SIMON

L-like that Belinda Carlisle song?

ARIA

Oooh! You like Belinda Carlisle!

SIMON

N-no, I don't.

ARIA

Yeah, you're probably a Tiffany fan.

Simon snorts laughter.

SIMON

Yeah, right!

They look at each other in silence. Smiles fading. Aria glances up at the tree.

ARIA

You're under the mistletoe, you know.

Simon looks up anxiously.

ARIA (CONT'D)

Made you look.

She giggles. Simon laughs too, relieved.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Be still my beating heart.

Ebenezer gets to his feet.

EBENEZER

Great. Stuck in my memories with the world's most sarcastic prick. This really is Hell.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Aww, you love me. Not as much as Tiffany, mind.

Ebenezer slugs Marley in the chest.

MARLEY'S GHOST (CONT'D)

Ow, my fucking tit! You prat!

Marley punches him back. They laugh.

MARLEY'S GHOST (CONT'D)  
Just like ol' times, eh? You remember  
that night we reunited?

EXT. CORNER SHOP - NIGHT

The windows have bars on them now. A sign in one says "UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT." All the lights out on both floors.

The front window SMASHES, a brick hurtling through it.

Ebenezer and Marley stand by the road, watching the KID in the black hoodie breathe heavily in the parking lot.

The lights come on in an upstairs window. The pane slides up and an Asian man, the new STORE OWNER, leans out.

The Kid in the hoodie bolts.

STORE OWNER  
Hey, you! You get back here!

The Kid dashes between Marley and Ebenezer. They turn to watch as he slams into Jake's chest across the street. Jake grabs him, holding the Kid while he struggles.

JAKE  
Well well, the prodigal son returns.

He tears off the Kid's hood. Simon looks up at him in fear and rage and tries to pull away.

SIMON  
Let me go!

JAKE  
Just hang on, boy! I'm not gonna  
grass on ya.

Simon stops struggling. Jake lets him go.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Now what did them nice Chinese ever  
do to you? Besides leave you hungry  
an hour later.

He grins at his own terrible joke. Simon doesn't respond.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
You're angry. I understand that. But  
you ought to focus your rage on the  
right target.



SIMON

You killed my parents!

Simon beats his fists against Jake's chest. Jake just lets him, taking the blows until the boy wears himself out. Simon flops down on a cement wall, weeping.

JAKE

I didn't do in your mum and dad. But I know who done it.

(he sits)

See, I felt a touch guilty nickin' your last quid so I come back that night hoping to tuck it under your pillow like the fucking Tooth Fairy. Only when I got here I heard them shots, and these fucking kids come running out of the shop screamin' bloody murder.

SIMON

Kids?

Jake nods.

JAKE

Driving this really shitty American knob extension. Blood red, it was.

SIMON

Kids. In a red car.

JAKE

That's right. You don't believe me?

SIMON

How many kids?

JAKE

Three of 'em. Two older blokes and a young nipper.

SIMON

And you just let them get away?!

JAKE

What was I supposed to do, chase after 'em on foot? I'm genteel. Only time I run is from the cops.

Simon squints off down the street, toward the store.

JAKE (CONT'D)

If I was you, I'd be going mental about now. Fantasizing revenge.

Simon looks up at him.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Tell you what. You know the old  
warehouse on Chancery Court?

(off Simon's nod)

You wanna make them kids pay for  
what they done to your parents, you  
find me there.

SIMON

"Pay"? You mean...?

JAKE

Eye for an eye, yeah? Murder.

SIMON

You'd *kill* them for me?

JAKE

Not me.

SIMON

What, m-me? No, I couldn't -

JAKE

Your mum and dad deserve justice, do  
they not?

Simon nods uncertainly.

JAKE (CONT'D)

So you wanna see them lads get a few  
years in juvie, out on the streets  
again in a wink? Wouldn't you rather  
know they're somewhere they can't  
hurt no one again? Wouldn't you rather  
them dead?

Simon looks off. Sees the Store Owner sweeping up glass out  
front of his old place.

SIMON

If I kill them... I-I'd go to Hell.

JAKE

"The mind is its own place and in  
itself can make Heaven of Hell, and  
Hell of Heaven." Clever bloke named  
Milton wrote that, he did.

Simon considers it. Jake claps his hands together in finality  
and stands.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Right. When you've decided the price  
of death, you come pay me a visit.

Jake wanders off into the night. Simon watches him for a  
long moment.

EBENEZER

You should have been a salesman.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Only thing I ever knew how to sell  
was murder. Look where it got me.

They watch Simon walk off in the opposite direction as someone  
plays "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" on a piano.

INT. FOSTER HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Aria stands aside the piano while Grandma Trudy plays. Aria's  
voice and Grandma Trudy's playing show they've practiced.

The other kids sit cross-legged between the tree and the  
piano, listening in silence. The youngest boy picks his nose  
absently. Simon sits beside him, enraptured by Aria's singing.

On the sofa Troy rolls his eyes, loudly flipping through the  
pages of a sports magazine.

Ebenezer watches Aria sing, growing maudlin.

When she gets to the part about "God and sinners reconciled,"  
Marley puts an arm over Ebenezer's shoulders.

MARLEY'S GHOST

God bless us, everyone, eh?

Ebenezer shrugs his arm off haughtily.

Once the song ends, Grandma Trudy begins "The Little Drummer  
Boy." Troy gets up with a huff.

TROY

This song is so gay!

Grandma Trudy PLUNKS a discordant note and Aria stops singing.

GRANDMA TRUDY

Troy, if you must be an ignoramus  
please do so elsewhere!

TROY

Gladly!

As he storms out of the room, he stops to fart on Simon's head. Simon rears back in disgust as Troy backs out of the room, giving him double middle fingers.

As Grandma Trudy and Aria start over, Ebenezer follows Troy out of the room. Marley realizes Ebenezer's gone after a moment and follows him.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Hey, wait for me, you prat!

INT. FOSTER HOME - TROY'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ebenezer steps in. Troy's already going through the drawers, searching for something.

He removes Simon's book from the drawer. Starts tearing out pages one at a time.

Simon wanders in. His eyes widen in shock.

SIMON

Hey! That's mine!

He rushes Troy, slamming his shoulder into the taller boy's chest. Pages scattering, Troy strikes his head on the top bunk and lands on his mattress. Simon leaps on him, pounding him with his small fists and SCREAMING in rage.

Troy grabs Simon's fists and flips him over, pinning him against the wall.

GRANDMA TRUDY (O.S.)

LET HIM GO THIS INSTANT!

Both boys turn to see Grandma Trudy in the doorway, the other kids behind her, Aria wearing a look of disappointment.

TROY

He started it!

GRANDMA TRUDY

I don't care who started it, it ends now!

Simon struggles in Troy's grip, beginning to cry.

GRANDMA TRUDY (CONT'D)

Let him go!

Troy reluctantly lets go. Simon gets up, streaming tears.

SIMON

He ripped my book.

TROY

He's lying!

GRANDMA TRUDY

I can see the evidence plain as day, Mr. Lawry. I want every single page glued back in that book the way they were. We don't defile literature in this house, young man.

Troy sulks.

GRANDMA TRUDY (CONT'D)

Do it now!

TROY

Yes, Grandma Trudy.

Troy begins picking up the pages one by one.

GRANDMA TRUDY

Simon, come to me.

Simon shuffles over.

GRANDMA TRUDY (CONT'D)

Did he hurt you? No bruises to speak of?

Simon glances at Aria, embarrassed. She looks down at her feet as Simon shakes his head.

GRANDMA TRUDY (CONT'D)

Good. Then stop your crying. No one benefits from tears.

SIMON

Y-yes, Grandma Trudy.

GRANDMA TRUDY

Come with me, please.

The children watch as Grandma Trudy ushers him into the hall.

Troy looks up, staring daggers at Aria, who lingers in the doorway a moment before catching up with the others.

INT. FOSTER HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Grandma Trudy eases herself onto the piano stool. She beckons Simon over. He approaches the piano.

GRANDMA TRUDY

Do you know the story of Ariadne's labyrinth?

Simon looks over his shoulder to where Ebenezer and Marley stand in the doorway.

GRANDMA TRUDY (CONT'D)

Not *my* Ariadne. From Greek mythology. Ariadne and Theseus.

Simon shakes his head.

GRANDMA TRUDY (CONT'D)

Well, in Greek mythology, Minos, the King of Crete, created a labyrinth -  
(off his confusion)  
- a large maze, with a Minotaur dwelling at its heart. Do you know what a Minotaur is?

SIMON

Y-yes.

GRANDMA TRUDY

You do? Good. Now, scholars differ on the meaning of the story, but to me it's always been quite clear. The Minotaur, a creature both man and bull, represents the beast within men's hearts. The *dualism* of good and evil. Light and dark.

The boy doesn't seem to get it.

GRANDMA TRUDY (CONT'D)

Ariadne, daughter of the king, gave Theseus a sword and a ball of twine, one to smite the Minotaur, the other to find his way back to her. To be *worthy* of her love he needed to vanquish the beast within himself. He had to do away with the evil innate to him. Do you understand what that means?

Simon considers it. Shakes his head.

GRANDMA TRUDY (CONT'D)

You struck Troy because of what he did to your book.

Simon shakes his head more vigorously. Grandma Trudy turns his hands over. His knuckles red.

GRANDMA TRUDY (CONT'D)

You did. I don't blame you.

(MORE)

GRANDMA TRUDY (CONT'D)

But if you want to become a *good* man, a man worthy of *love*, you mustn't let your anger control you. You must *smite* the beast that dwells here, within the labyrinth of your heart.

She pokes a finger at his chest.

SIMON

Yes, Grandma Trudy.

GRANDMA TRUDY

(smiles)

Good. Now, run along and play.

Simon runs off, glad to be done with the lecture, passing Marley and Ebenezer.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Clever old bird, that one.

EBENEZER

She was one of a kind.

Grandma Trudy plucks out the chorus to "Angels We Have Heard on High," on the piano.

INT. FOSTER HOME - TROY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Simon sits on the top bunk, reading. He flips a page and it falls from the book. A KNOCK startles him. He looks up.

Detective Minkus stands in the door in a cheesy Christmas sweater. He smiles.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

You know, you don't have to tear the pages out when you're done with them.

Simon puts the book down. He smiles, glad to see his friend.

EXT. FOSTER HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

Simon and Minkus sit on a porch swing, swaying back and forth, overlooking a wide snowy yard with a giant oak tree.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

I thought you might want this.

Minkus removes a baggie from his pocket and hands it to Simon. Simon looks at it.

SIMON

Fifty dollars?

DETECTIVE MINKUS

From the store. There were so many fingerprints on it we couldn't get any solid leads. I figured... it might be more useful to you in your pocket rather than collecting dust in an evidence locker.

Simon tucks it into his jacket.

SIMON

This was with them?

DETECTIVE MINKUS

(nods)

Whoever did it took the rest.

The boy processes this.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)

Look, I want you to know we're not gonna give up finding who did this. *I'm* not gonna give up. But if you've got any ideas, any at all, who might've wanted to hurt your folks... you let me know, okay?

Simon thinks it over. Nods.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)

What about this Marley character?

SIMON

There wasn't any M-Marley. I m-made it up.

Minkus gives him a serious look.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

You made it up. And the story about the guy with blood on his face?

SIMON

I lied. I'm sorry.

Minkus covers his devastation, looking off at the big tree where Ebenezer and Marley watch them.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

No, I... It's my fault. I shouldn't have prodded you. I should have known better.

He stands abruptly, stops just short of the back door.



SIMON

Mike?

Minkus looks back.

SIMON (CONT'D)

I hope you find them.

Minkus nods.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

Thanks, kiddo. So do I.

(sad smile)

I'll be in touch.

He heads back to the house. Simon looks over his shoulder, watching him leave. After a moment, he follows.

MARLEY

You didn't tell him.

EBENEZER

I guess what you said to me struck a chord, even if I hadn't realized it at the time.

MONTAGE - THE KIDS GROW UP

Ebenezer looks up as the gutters begin to drip. Time speeds up. Snow melts from the roof and the big tree and the lawn. The sun crosses the sky until its directly over their heads. Birds flutter by and splash in the birdbath.

The younger kids chase each other around the backyard, laughing and shouting, circling the house in their Big Wheels, climbing the tree. Troy appears, throwing the ball up in the air. When he catches it he's grown a teenage mustache.

Ebenezer and Marley marvel at this.

Gathered around the picnic tables, the children all older now. Grandma Trudy comes out with a birthday cake, 15-YEAR-OLD ARIA in tow. Time slows to normal speed.

Aria sings "Happy Birthday to You." The others chime in - all except Troy, who mouths along badly. Grandma Trudy sets the cake down in front of 14-year-old Simon as they sing, "...*dear Simon, happy birthday to you.*" Simon smiles and blows out the candles.

END OF MONTAGE

Simon and Aria sit on the swing with glasses of lemonade. Aria gives Simon an anxious look. She sucks up her courage and kisses him on the lips.

Surprised at first, Simon immediately warms to it. He puts a hand on her shoulder. Finally their mouths part. She licks her lips, excitement in her eyes. He takes a deep breath. Holds her hand. Smiles.

GRANDMA TRUDY (O.S.)  
Children! Suppertime!

Simon and Aria turn to each other with nervous giggles. They get up and saunter into the house.

A baseball strikes Simon on the back. He stops, rubbing his back in pain while Aria keeps going into the house.

He sees the baseball on the ground. Sees Troy sneering, ball glove on one hand.

TROY  
Throw me the ball, Ducky.

Simon bends, picks it up. He pitches it over the fence.

TROY (CONT'D)  
You little shit...

Troy chucks his baseball glove at Simon and chases him into the house.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

Simon and Aria walk alongside each other in summer clothes, carrying school bags. Dogs BARK and lawnmowers GROWL.

ARIA  
Do you have Mrs. Stabler for homeroom next year?

SIMON  
Y-ye - uh-huh.

ARIA  
Me too. High school is gonna be great.

Simon looks off.

ARIA (CONT'D)  
You're not scared, are you?

SIMON  
Of course n-not.  
(shrugs)  
M-maybe a little.

ARIA

Don't worry. I'll make sure you don't  
get into any trouble.

Simon turns to her and smiles. She smiles back.

An engine RUMBLES. Ebenezer turns to see Grant's IROC-Z drive  
up the middle of the road, blasting Danzig's "Mother."

Simon turns. Sees the car. Stops dead.

Aria keeps walking for a moment before realizing he's no  
longer at her side. She looks back.

Simon locks eyes with Tanner in the passenger seat. Tanner  
registers recognition. Then shock. He turns to Grant and  
smacks his shoulder.

Grant looks over as the car passes Simon. He narrows his  
eyes. The engine ROARS and the IROC speeds up the street,  
peeling around the corner and out of sight.

Aria comes back to Simon's side. He's breathing heavily,  
still watching the empty intersection.

ARIA (CONT'D)

Who was that?

Simon snaps out of it.

SIMON

What? No one. It's nothing.

Hands balled into fists, he relaxes them and follows Aria.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Cheeky cunts. Cruisin' around like  
they done nothing wrong.

EBENEZER

This was the day I came to see you.

MARLEY'S GHOST

At Chancery Court. I remember that  
day well.

EBENEZER

So do I. You almost killed me.

Ebenezer walks off.

Marley's smile falters. He chases after Ebenezer.

MARLEY

Hold on, that's not how I -

EXT. FACTORY DISTRICT - DAY

A rundown neighborhood. Marley follows Ebenezer a few steps until both men stop with quizzical looks around themselves.

MARLEY'S GHOST

- remember it.

(wide grin)

Ah, here we are! The old stompin' grounds!

A bicycle BELL grabs their attention. Simon pedals close by them and dumps his bike against a chainlink fence.

He looks up at the street sign. CHANCERY CT. and LABOR ST.

His gaze falls on the CONDEMNED sign on the fence. He looks through the fence at the rundown warehouse.

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Simon steps warily through a wide doorway into the warehouse. The walls drip. A rat skitters under a pile of broken kitchen fixtures. He squints into the dark, gutted bowels.

SIMON

Hello?

From the darkness, a GUN FIRES. The bullet strikes a column near Simon's head and a cloud of cement rains down on him.

JAKE (O.S.)

Fucking Hell! You all right, boy?

Jake emerges from the darkness.

Simon shakes dust out of his hair and off his t-shirt.

SIMON

You almost k-killed me!

JAKE

Bollocks. If I was aiming for you you'd be dead, trust me. Just putting the fear of the devil in you, I was.

Jake chuckles nervously and tucks the pistol into his waistband as he approaches. He lays a gentle hand on Simon's back, ushering him inside.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Come in, come in. Consider yourself at home.

EBENEZER

You always were terrible with a  
pistol.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Lucky for you, innit, you prat?

Jake leads Simon up a dangerous set of stairs, while the boy looks around himself anxiously.

INT. WAREHOUSE - JAKE'S APARTMENT - LATER

Jake holds a glass under a beer tap and pours a Guinness in his surprisingly posh studio apartment.

JAKE

Care for a bevvie?

He holds out the glass to Simon. Simon sneers. Jake shrugs and guzzles from it.

JAKE (CONT'D)

So. Made up your mind, have you?

Simon approaches him cautiously. He takes something out of his pocket and slaps it onto a steel chef's table.

Jake looks at the torn fifty-dollar bill, taped together.

JAKE (CONT'D)

What's this for?

SIMON

To kill them.

JAKE

(laughing)

Is this a wind up? First off, I'm not the sort of man whose services can be procured by some bloke off the street, let alone for a pathetic fifty quid.

(picks it up)

Is that Scotch tape? Bloody hell!

Simon looks off in embarrassment.

Jake sets his glass down and comes around the table. He kneels down. Squeezes Simon's shoulder.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Aw, come on, boy. Just taking the piss.

(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)

Listen, I won't kill them lads for you but what I will do is offer you my services. I'm willing to impart my wisdom, three days a week. Be your Obi Wan Kenobi, yeah? Your Mr. Miyagi. I'll teach you what it takes to kill a man. Not just here -

(taking Simon's hand)

- but here.

(touches Simon's chest)

If you can kill a man in your heart, you can kill him with your hands, yeah? You'll be my apprentice, like. All you have to do in return is a bit of cleaning. What do you say?

Simon considers it. He snatches the fifty from Jake's hand.

SIMON

W-when do we start?

Jake downs the pint and lets out a satisfied gasp.

JAKE

How 'bout right now? You ever kill anything before?

SIMON

Just b-bugs.

JAKE

Bugs.

SIMON

You know, like ants, spiders...

JAKE

I know what fucking bugs are, you muppet.

(shakes his head)

Right then. I'm a posh cunt and my flat's got a bit of a pest problem. So today, you're gonna kill a filthy, scummy little rat. Think you can handle that?

Simon nods eagerly.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Good. Grab yourself a weapon and get started.

Simon looks around. He opens a drawer and his eyes widen.

It's filled with well-sharpened knives, sharp forks, and other utensils. He picks up a meat mallet.

Jake pauses in pouring himself another Guinness.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Wise choice. Go on then.

Simon feels its heft and wanders off.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Simon stalks the abandoned building, mallet raised.

A rat SQUEAKS. He traces the sound to the pile of kitchen fixtures. The rat sits on a broken toilet, licking its paws.

He creeps over and SLAMS the mallet on the toilet. The porcelain cracks. The rat skitters down inside. Simon jabs the handle into the bowl as the tail slips down the drain.

JAKE (O.S.)

Smarter than they look, eh?

The boy glances back over his shoulder and stalks onward.

Another SQUEAK. Simon looks up. A rat's gotten up on a rusted girder, nibbling a scrap of bread.

EBENEZER

You were feeding them?

MARLEY'S GHOST

Me? Nah.

Jake reaches into his pocket and tosses a bread crumb into a pile of copper wire.

MARLEY'S GHOST (CONT'D)

All right, I was feeding 'em. But they weren't *pets*.

Simon bends and picks up a chunk of concrete. He aims, hauls back and chucks it.

The concrete shatters against rusted metal and the rat scurries along the girder out of sight.

SIMON

Sh-shit!

JAKE

Patience, grasshoppa.

SIMON

Patience? I've been chasing them for  
t-two hours!

JAKE

You think that's long? I once stalked  
a man in Amsterdam for a month.  
Granted, most of that time I spent  
chasing birds 'round the Red Light  
district. Nevertheless.

SQUEAK. Simon hurries off into the gloom.

Jake leisurely follows, munching on bread crumbs.

Simon leaps down onto the pile of copper wire. He cries out  
in pain, hands covered in small slashes. He swings the mallet.  
It strikes the wire with a musical sound. SQUEAK. He strikes  
again, the rat's head popping up like a Whack-A-Mole.

Another miss. Simon collapses on the pile, exhausted. The  
rat skitters out from underneath.

Simon pushes himself up. He chases along behind it, fervently  
stomping whenever he gets near.

JAKE (CONT'D)

(laughing)

Doing a fucking jig, he is!

Simon leaps up and stomps both feet down hard. His reaction  
to the SQUEAK that follows shows he wasn't expecting success.  
He steps back to study the rat's twitching corpse.

JAKE (CONT'D)

How do you feel, boy?

SIMON

I don't feel anything. Should I?

JAKE

(shrugs)

Still got a metric ton of them filthy  
buggers to kill. Maybe tomorrow, eh?

Simon CRUNCHES the twitching rat underfoot. He smiles at  
Jake, looking for encouragement.

Jake tousles his hair and Simon scowls.

INT. FOSTER HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

The door opens quietly and Simon creeps into the dark room.

The lights flick on, startling him. He's caught.



Grandma Trudy sits in a chair beside the wall phone, her finger on the light switch, disappointment in her eyes.

GRANDMA TRUDY  
You missed supper.

SIMON  
I lost track of t-time.

GRANDMA TRUDY  
What happened to your hands?

Grandma Trudy pushes herself up and approaches him. He hides his hands behind his back.

GRANDMA TRUDY (CONT'D)  
Let me see them.

Simon reluctantly shows her. The palms crisscrossed with fresh scars. Guilt on his face.

GRANDMA TRUDY (CONT'D)  
Out picking berries, were you?

SIMON  
I didn't do anything.

GRANDMA TRUDY  
Perhaps not. But I want you to stay away from whomever it is you've been gallivanting with late into the evening, Simon. That sort of behavior leads to nowhere but trouble.

Simon looks at his feet.

GRANDMA TRUDY (CONT'D)  
Well?

SIMON  
Yes, Grandma Trudy.

GRANDMA TRUDY  
Good. Now brush your teeth. It's straight to bed with no supper tonight.

Simon shuffles out with a hangdog look. Grandma Trudy stays behind a moment, then flicks off the light.

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Simon watches as Jake hauls an old recliner out of the middle of the room. Jake returns, kicking away a circle of dust.

JAKE

You've got a lot of rage in you,  
Simon, my boy. Rage is good. But you  
need to learn how to harness it.  
Chain it up and muzzle it, like a  
dog. Only when you need it do you  
let that mangy mutt loose.

(beat)

Hit me.

Simon gives him a suspicious look.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Come on, you wee punter. Hit me!

The boy approaches Jake and hits him weakly in the chest. Jake grabs Simon's wrist, pulls him forward and trips him, sending the boy sprawling.

Simon looks up from the floor, hurt and angry.

JAKE (CONT'D)

You're weak. You're puny and pathetic.  
You really believe you can avenge  
your parents? You can't even take a  
noogie without crying. Now come on  
and *let that fucking dog loose!*

Simon leaps to his feet with an ANIMAL GROWL and rushes at Jake. The man sidesteps, grabbing Simon in a headlock. Simon struggles, kicking out, prying Jake's arms off his neck.

JAKE (CONT'D)

(laughing)

Down, boy! Down!

MONTAGE - JAKE TRAINS SIMON

Jake throws a weak punch. Simon tries to block it but gets hit in the chest and rears back in pain. He lunges at Jake.

Jake stands behind Simon, helping him aim a pistol. Simon squeezes off a shot. The bottles remain unmoved. The fuse box beyond them EXPLODES and the lights go out.

Jake throws a punch. Simon blocks it. Surprised, Jake lets his guard down and gets slugged in the gut. He doubles over laughing. Holds out a hand. Simon takes it, and Jake pulls him into a headlock. Simon taps out.

Simon sits at his desk with a lamp on, doing math. He nods off. His chin slips off his hand and his head thumps on the desk, waking him. Grandma Trudy looks in, shaking her head.

Simon FIRES three shots. One of the bottles SMASHES. Jake pats him on the back. Simon smiles pridefully before Jake snatches the gun out of his hand and aims it at him.

Jake throws a punch. Simon dips out of reach and kicks Jake in the thigh. Jake drops to a knee and Simon leaps onto his back, getting him in a headlock. Jake rises and runs backwards, slamming Simon into the wall.

Simon FIRES three shots. All three bottles SMASH. Jake claps a hand on Simon's shoulder and Simon points the gun at him. Jake puts up his hands, laughing.

Jake punches Simon in the face. Simon staggers back and rushes him, leaps up in a flying kick to Jake's chest. Jake falls to his knees and shakes off the pain.

Simon sits down to dinner with a black eye. Already seated, the other kids watch him in awe. Grandma Trudy glowers. Aria leaves the table and Simon looks longingly after her.

Simon throws a knife. Hits a rat dead-on, skewering it to the graffiti-covered wall.

Simon FIRES. A bottle SMASHES. He whips around and FIRES blind. A trashcan lid with a target painted on it GONGS. He drops, rolls and FIRES. Stuffing explodes from the punching bag. Jake applauds.

Simon breathes heavily with a pleased smile.

JAKE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Well fucking done!

END OF MONTAGE

INT. WAREHOUSE - JAKE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jake and Simon watch his large wood cabinet television, troops stomping through Iraq and fighter jets dropping bombs. Oil fields on fire. Simon is mesmerized. Jake sips his Guinness with mild disgust.

JAKE  
War. What is it good for, eh? Besides lining the pockets of wealthy cunts.

Simon says nothing, unable to take his eyes off the TV.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Got word of another rat. A big one, this nutter. Junkie. Goes by the name of Tanner Holden.

Now he's got Simon's attention. Jake grins.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Found him hiding out in a shithole  
down the docks. Think you're ready?

Simon hides his elation.

SIMON  
I'm ready.

JAKE  
Tomorrow night then. Be here midnight  
sharpish, yeah?

EXT. HARBOR STREET - NIGHT

Jake and Simon stalk past houseboats and sailboats swaying  
alongside docks, masts CLANGING.

They approach a boarded-up house. On the second floor a window  
glows with flickering candlelight.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The door CREAKS open, letting light into the foyer. Cartoon  
genitals drawn in marker on the walls, excrement smeared on  
torn wallpaper, plaster cracked, bare lath in places.

Ebenezer and Marley stand by the stairs, the wall behind  
them spray-painted with the words "THE DREAM IS OVER."

Jake and Simon enter, wincing at the smell. They hold their  
noses and weave through the junk on the floor to the stairs.

The stairs GROAN as they rise.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Empty picture frames on the stairwell wall. A spider eats a  
fly in its enormous cobweb in a high corner.

Simon follows Jake onto the second-floor landing. Candlelight  
flickers through a doorway, drawing their shadows long.

On the landing, Simon slips on a metal oven tray that CLANGS  
all the way down the stairs.

JUNKIE (O.S.)  
Who's there?

They freeze. Jake holds Simon's shirt sleeve to keep him  
from bolting.

JUNKIE (CONT'D)  
Stupid fucking rats.

Jake looks back at Simon with a predatory grin. He draws a buck knife from his belt and hands it to the boy.

Simon looks up at him. A nod of encouragement from Jake.

Nervously, Simon creeps toward the doorway, knife held out before himself. Jake follows.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ebenezer and Marley stand in the corner of the room as Simon steps in. Fat candles gutter on the floor in pools of wax.

A female JUNKIE sits cross-legged on a filthy mattress in a dirty pair of panties and a tank top, ribs and nipples protruding. Tanner lies with his head in her lap, asleep. Heroin paraphernalia lies scattered on the floor nearby.

JUNKIE

Who the fuck are you?

Jake steps up beside Simon.

JAKE

Get the fuck out of here unless you wanna get topped along with your boyfriend.

JUNKIE

What the fuck are you talking about, man? We don't have any money.

JAKE

The hell you say!  
(pushes Simon forward)  
You see this boy? Your sweetie and his mates left him an orphan three years ago, three fucking days before Christmas.

The Junkie's eyes widen in drug-dulled horror.

JUNKIE

Shit - you're that kid? Wow. Oh, wow.

She shakes Tanner. He doesn't wake.

JUNKIE (CONT'D)

Baby, wake up. That kid's here - the one you told me about? Babe? Baby?

His head rolls off her knee and THUMPS on the floor.

JUNKIE (CONT'D)

Oh no. Oh no no no...

JAKE  
Fucking Hell.

SIMON  
What? Why won't he wake up, Marley?

Jake flinches at the sound of his name.

JAKE  
Because he's dead as a fucking  
doornail!

SIMON  
What?

Jake kicks a hole in the wall.

JAKE  
Fucking wanker topped himself!

JUNKIE  
Tan! Tanner!

Simon steps closer to the candle.

Realization dawns on the Junkie's face.

JUNKIE (CONT'D)  
Is that a knife? What? You were gonna  
kill him? Huh? Get out! Get out of  
here, you little freak!

She lunges at him over Tanner's lifeless body in her lap.

Without thinking, Simon flicks out with the knife. It slashes the Junkie's palm and she draws back, clutching her hand to her breasts, blood soaking her tank top.

Simon staggers back, looking at the bloody knife in horror.

Jake grabs his sleeve.

Simon can't take his eyes away from the Junkie as she weeps, smearing blood on Tanner's chest and face.

JAKE  
Come on!

Jake yanks him out of the room.

EBENEZER  
I always thought you were angry with  
me that night. When I said your name  
I saw you flinch.

## MARLEY'S GHOST

Angry? I was proud. You stood your ground, like a good boy. The cops never touched me. Never worried for a moment.

Red and blue lights flash through the grimy curtains. Ebenezer and Marley turn as Detectives Minkus and Stanley step in, surveying the scene grimly.

## DETECTIVE STANLEY

Is he dead?

The Junkie looks up, still weeping. She nods.

## DETECTIVE MINKUS

You hurt?

## JUNKIE

He cut my hand.

## DETECTIVE STANLEY

Your fella cut you and you killed him in self-defense, that right?

## JUNKIE

No. Uh-uh. It was that kid.

## DETECTIVE MINKUS

Kid? What kid?

The woman clams up, realizing her mistake.

## DETECTIVE STANLEY

What happened then? He overdose?

The Junkie snuffles. Wipes her nose on her forearm.

## DETECTIVE MINKUS

Look, you don't have to talk to us if you don't want to but -

## JUNKIE

Marley! He said his name was Marley.

Minkus and Stanley share a look.

## DETECTIVE MINKUS

A man named Marley cut you.

## JUNKIE

No, the kid did. Marley was with him. Had like an accent. I think he was like British, or something.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

This kid... do you have any idea why he'd want to hurt you?

JUNKIE

Not me. Tanner.

DETECTIVE STANLEY

Lady, we're gonna need to take your statement.

She hugs Tanner's pale corpse to her bosom.

JUNKIE

No, I won't leave him.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

The ambulance will be here any minute now. This isn't about drugs, okay? We just need to know everything you can remember about this Marley. Hair color, height, build. That way we can bring him in for questioning. Find out why he wanted to hurt Tanner.

She wipes her nose with her blood-stained tank top. Nods.

Minkus and Stanley glance at each other skeptically. They leave the room, speaking quietly to not be overheard.

EBENEZER

We weren't here when this happened.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Your point?

EBENEZER

Can we follow them? Does it work that way?

MARLEY'S GHOST

Who am I? Eamonn Andrews? Does this look like *This is Your Bloody Life*?

Ebenezer glances down at Tanner and the Junkie. Then he walks out of the room. Marley shrugs and follows.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

They step into the bustling police office, momentarily fazed. Marley looks around himself warily and hurries to catch up to Ebenezer, weaving between the desks of busy DETECTIVES.



## MARLEY'S GHOST

Fucking cops. Smells like fucking  
bacon!

Nobody hears him. He grabs his crotch and thrusts it at a  
bald detective on the phone behind a cluttered desk.

## MARLEY'S GHOST (CONT'D)

Which one of you fucking pigs wants  
to suck my fat English cock, eh?

Ebenezer looks back as Marley laughs uproariously.

## MARLEY'S GHOST (CONT'D)

Always wanted to do that.

Ebenezer shakes his head and continues on, weaving through  
the desks. Marley hurries to catch up.

They reach Minkus's desk, where the detective sits going  
through a stack of notes. Ebenezer peers over his shoulder  
at the MUG BOOK as Minkus flips through it.

Detective Stanley lays a cup of coffee down on a decent POLICE  
SKETCH of Marley beside the book.

## DETECTIVE MINKUS

Whoa! Hey!

Minkus grabs the coffee and moves it aside.

## DETECTIVE STANLEY

Sorry. Still on this "Marley" thing,  
huh?

## DETECTIVE MINKUS

This is our mystery killer. It can't  
be a coincidence.

(risks it)

Hey, what if the kid she mentioned  
is Simon Lechance?

## DETECTIVE STANLEY

Kid says this Marley killed his  
parents because he witnessed him  
killing John and Nora Wadlington,  
then he backtracks. Now this Marley  
guy pops up again *with* a kid, and  
you think it's the same one? Does  
that make sense to you?

Minkus tapes his pencil on his teeth. He stands abruptly.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

I gotta show the kid the sketch. See how he reacts.

He grabs the police sketch. Looks back over his shoulder. Stanley just eyes him skeptically.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)

You're not coming?

DETECTIVE STANLEY

Listen, Minkus, I've got a finite amount of energy in the day to give to this job. I'm not gonna waste it on your Hail Mary pass.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

The Wadlingtons were working on a breakthrough technology that would have revolutionized how people connect with each other all over the globe. Dan Keaton, Dr. Maitlin, Jesse Sinclair - all of them mavericks in their fields, on the edge of a breakthrough of their own. Each of them murdered, execution-style. Just like the Wadlingtons. No slugs, casings or fingerprints left at the scene. Our perp is a *ghost*, Stanley.

DETECTIVE STANLEY

Your point, Scoob?

DETECTIVE MINKUS

Ghost? Jacob Marley?

(off her shrug)

What if this Jacob Marley is tied to Bleak House? They're both Dickens.

DETECTIVE STANLEY

(sputters)

The Bleak House Syndicate is an urban legend. Something we tell rookies, get 'em full of beans.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

But what if it isn't?

Stanley shrugs. Minkus throws on his jacket.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)

Fine. Just keep looking through those mug shots, huh? Bleak House or not, we're gonna bring this guy in.

Minkus strides past Ebenezer and Marley.

EBENEZER

He never came to see me. He could have blown the Syndicate wide open. You were as good as caught. What the hell happened?

MARLEY'S GHOST

You know as well as I do he never would have gotten close to Bleak House. Problems like him have a way of "disappearing," know what I mean?

Ebenezer eyes Marley a moment as Stanley flops down into Minkus's chair with a heavy sigh. She picks up his desk phone and dials a number. Waits as it RINGS. Someone picks up.

DETECTIVE STANLEY

We have a problem.  
 (nods)  
 That's right.  
 (beat)  
 Okay. I'll take care of him.

She hangs up the phone and looks around the office, paranoid.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Friends in low places.

Ebenezer reacts as Stanley puts on her overcoat and heads for the door.

EXT. FOSTER HOME - DAY

Simon sits on the front porch, slipping flyer inserts into newspapers, one after another.

ARIA

Can I help?

He glances up at her, harried. Smiles briefly.

SIMON

Sure.

She sits beside him. Watches a moment, then mimics his movement until it looks like it's a dance. He glances over without pausing. Smiles genuinely.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Took me forever to get the rhythm.

ARIA  
I'm a natural.  
(warily)  
Grandma Trudy is worried about you.

Simon tries to hide his anxiety.

SIMON  
Yeah?

ARIA  
*I'm* worried about you.

He stuffs a stack of newspapers into a messenger bag.

SIMON  
You don't have to worry about me.

He slings the hefty bag over his shoulder and heads down the steps to his bike.

ARIA  
Are you coming to the talent show tomorrow?

SIMON  
It's not gonna bug your boyfriend?

ARIA  
He's *not* my boyfriend.

Simon shrugs and gets on his bike.

SIMON  
Yeah, I'll be there.

ARIA  
Good.

Aria looks after him as he pedals away.

INT. MINKUS'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Ebenezer and Marley sit in the backseat as Minkus pulls away from the sidewalk a good distance from Simon, and follows.

He takes a corner, spots Simon heading into an alleyway.

Minkus stops by the mouth of the alley. At the far end, Simon hands the bag to a KID. He slips the kid some money. The kid takes off with the newspapers.

Simon turns toward Minkus's car. Minkus ducks. Simon frowns, then pedals off. Minkus sits up and drives down the alley.

The sedan turns onto a residential street. Minkus clucks his tongue, looking around. Lost.

DETECTIVE MINKUS  
Shit. Lost him.

Up ahead, Simon pedals through the intersection.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)  
Ha! Gotcha.

He speeds up and takes the corner.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - AFTERNOON

Simon rides his bike up to the fence and dumps it. He strides up to the warehouse like he owns the place.

Minkus pulls up. Clocks the CONDEMNED sign. He watches from inside his sedan as Simon enters the building.

DETECTIVE MINKUS  
What are you doing here, kiddo?

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Simon works the heavy bag, kicking and punching with finesse.

JAKE  
Guess who finally popped his head  
round his mum and dad's house?

SIMON  
Grant? Where is he? Did you follow  
him?

JAKE  
Too right, I did. Tomorrow night you  
and I will pay him a visit.

SIMON  
Tomorrow's Aria's concert.

JAKE  
Aria. She the girlfriend?

Simon glances back and flubs the punch. The bag swings back and he catches it, breath whooshing out of him.

SIMON  
Not even close. Why not tonight?

JAKE  
Got business of my own.

SIMON

How about Thursday?

JAKE

It has to be tomorrow. I'm out of town for a fortnight after that. He could be moved on by the time I get back. Don't wanna lose him, do ya?

Simon thinks it over.

INT. MINKUS'S CAR - LATER

Minkus opens a Bazooka gum and pops it in his mouth. Reading the comic inside, he chuckles at the corny joke.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

Man, that Mort kills me.

Simon emerges from the building.

Minkus spots him and ducks down.

Jake steps out behind Simon. Says something to the boy.

DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)

Whoa - hey now. What the heck's going on here, kiddo?

Simon gets on his bike and speeds off. Minkus ducks as the boy pedals obliviously past the car.

EBENEZER

Did you know he was onto you?

Marley shrugs but says nothing, eyes narrowed.

Jake hangs a moment by the doors, then shuffles back inside.

Minkus gets out of the car. He closes the door softly. Heads up to the warehouse.

INT. WAREHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Drawing his sidearm, Minkus steps in.

Standing by the door with Ebenezer by his side, Marley calls out to the empty building:

MARLEY'S GHOST

Oi! We don't need to see this!

(beat)

I said *that's* enough!

EBENEZER

Who are you talking to? What did you do, Marley?

Marley opens his mouth to reply but a GUNSHOT from the darkness silences him. Both men flinch.

Concrete explodes off the wall beside Minkus. He drops, crouch-running to the pile of fixtures to duck behind them.

JAKE (O.S.)

That was a warning shot! I didn't have to miss!

DETECTIVE MINKUS

I believe you!

(beat)

Is Marley your real name?

Emerging from the dark, Jake cocks his head inquisitively.

JAKE

You a cop?

DETECTIVE MINKUS

I am.

JAKE

Then only one of us is walking out of here alive. If it's you, I reckon you'll piece it together on your own. If it's me... then it don't matter what my name is, do it?

DETECTIVE MINKUS

No. I don't suppose it does.

Minkus FIRES blind.

Jake ducks back behind a pillar as it BURSTS.

Minkus crouch-runs to the closest pillar and flattens himself against it. Jake FIRES. The bullet punches a hole in the concrete near Minkus's head.

EBENEZER

You didn't. Tell me you didn't.

Marley makes to reply. His younger self interrupts:

JAKE

Oi! You're the copper on the Lachance murders, eh? Simon Lachance? You followed him here?

DETECTIVE MINKUS  
Lachance? I'm here about John and  
Nora Wadlington.

JAKE  
Ah. Yeah. I done them.

DETECTIVE MINKUS  
And Dan Keaton? Dr. Elizabeth Maitlin?  
Jesse Sinclair?

JAKE  
I reckon some of them sound familiar.

Minkus squints. A track light hangs from a protected cable  
above and to the left of Jake's position.

DETECTIVE MINKUS  
You work for them, don't you? The  
Bleak House Syndicate.

Jake utters a dry chuckle.

JAKE  
I don't envy you, the kind of shit  
you stepped in, mate. You don't know  
fuck all about Bleak House and you  
never will.

Minkus grins slyly.

DETECTIVE MINKUS  
We've all heard the rumors. A cabal  
of assassins, controlling world events  
like pieces on a game board. But who  
calls the hits? Nobody knows. Do you  
even know who you work for?

Jake makes to answer. Minkus silences him with a GUNSHOT.

The bullet hits the track light. It plummets in a shower of  
sparks. Jake dives out of the way as it crashes to the floor.

Minkus rushes Jake. Tackles him, hurtling them both to the  
floor as a cloud of mercury vapor rises behind them.

Jake rolls Minkus over and SLAMS a fist into his face. Again.  
Minkus avoids the third punch, his nose bloodied, and Jake's  
knuckles strike the concrete floor. He roars in anger.

Minkus thrusts a knee into Jake's groin. Jake rolls off of  
him, clutching his testicles in agony. Minkus rises and kicks  
Jake in the gut. Jake topples to his side.



DETECTIVE MINKUS (CONT'D)

Why was Simon here? What are you doing to him?

Jake smiles up at Minkus with blood-stained teeth.

JAKE

To him? *For* him. I'm teaching him to focus his rage. I'm showing him how to mold the fucking world to his whim.

Jake sweeps a foot, catches Minkus off guard. The cop staggers back and Jake launches to his feet, running at him, **SLAMMING** him into a pillar. Pins him with a forearm against his throat.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

(choking)

He's just a kid!

Jake rears back and headbutts him. Minkus shakes it off.

JAKE

And he deserves justice! Not like you coppers done anything for him!

DETECTIVE MINKUS

Tanner Holden! The junkie. He was one of them! And his friend? Was Grant Coulter there too?

JAKE

Sharper than I thought, you are. But it's too fucking late.

DETECTIVE MINKUS

It's not too late! Let me bring him in! We can put him away -

Jake draws the buck knife from his belt sheath. Minkus spots it and struggles to get free.

JAKE

Too late for you, mate.

EBENEZER

No!

Jake rams the blade through Minkus's ribcage. Into his heart.

Ebenezer winces. Marley bows his head in shame.

The light dims in Minkus's eyes. His body goes slack. Sighing relief, Jake lets him go. The detective slumps to the floor. Jake grabs his limp hands and drags him off into the gloom.

Ebenezer rounds on Marley, grabbing him by the throat with both hands, growling as he squeezes.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)

Why? Why did you kill him? He wanted to help me!

Red-faced, Marley lets Ebenezer choke him.

MARLEY'S GHOST

And put me in prison! I loved you like a son. I did everything I could for you and how did you fucking repay me? With a shot of hot lead in my cold black heart!

Ebenezer's anger lessens. He lets Marley go. Marley adjusts his collar and tie.

MARLEY'S GHOST (CONT'D)

We got the little shit anyway, didn't we? Better than prison. *Dead.*

EBENEZER

At what cost?

MARLEY'S GHOST

You didn't care too much about the cost when you were pulling in fifty-grand a hit. Didn't bat an eye.

EBENEZER

I meant my *soul*. *Our* souls.

Marley shakes his head derisively.

MARLEY'S GHOST

"Then I saw there was a way to Hell even from the gates of Heaven." You know what that means?

Ebenezer storms off.

MARLEY'S GHOST (CONT'D)

Where are you going?

EBENEZER

To the talent show.

He walks out into the night.

INT. SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

A KID in an Adidas tracksuit and big gold chains breakdances badly to Kool Moe Dee's "I Go to Work."

His big finish is a poorly executed version of The Worm.

Confused adults clap and the Kid walks to stage right. The PRINCIPAL ushers him off and approaches the microphone.

PRINCIPAL

Thank you, Grandmaster Tim. Next up  
we have Ariadne Wadlington -  
(checks his cards)  
- performing Wagner's "Leebs-toad."

The Principal walks off and Aria steps into the spotlight to a smattering of applause. She adjusts the microphone.

It WHINES. The audience winces.

ARIA

Sorry.

Light chuckles from the crowd. Aria clears her throat as the background music begins.

Grandma Trudy sits with the other children. A seat remains empty for Simon. Grandma Trudy scowls over her shoulder at the doors, where Ebenezer stands. Marley walks through the wall to his side to meet him.

INTERCUT WITH: INT. BILL'S STRIP CLUB - NIGHT

Grant sits in front of the stage, nursing a beer, staring up at the middle-aged dancer. He's aged ten years in half that, but he's still wearing his old jean jacket with the Judas Priest back patch.

Jake stands at the bar with a Guinness, watching him. BILL, a brawny bald guy, sidles up to him and nods. Jake nods back.

YOUNG BILL

Charity's not in tonight. If you're wondering.

JAKE

Not tonight. Just popped in to take  
in the view.

Grant gets up, wobbles toward the back.

Jake sets his pint on the bar.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Later, Bill.

Bill nods. Jake follows Grant to the back.

In the school gym, ARIA BEGINS HER SONG.

Grant reaches for the men's room door and Jake rushes him, pushing him toward the door marked EXIT. The door crashes open and the two men stumble out into the PARKING LOT.

Grant staggers to his feet. Looks up bleary-eyed at Simon, who's standing in the dark beyond the streetlight, fists clenched. Grant looks back at Jake as the door swings shut.

He makes to run but Simon leaps on him. Pushes him into the DARKENED ALLEY. Headbutts him. Grant stumbles back. Simon punches him in the gut, the face. The face again.

While Aria sings, Simon grabs Grant by the throat and chokes him. SLAMS his head against the brick wall. Grant scrabbles at Simon's shirt. Jake watches from under the streetlight as Simon chokes harder, tears streaming down his face.

Grant's hands fall lifelessly away and Simon lets him go. Grant slumps down into a heap of trash bags. Simon stands over him, catching his breath. No relief in his expression. Only rage.

Jake approaches him. Tensed, Simon wheels around when the man lays a hand on his shoulder. He relaxes. Jake pulls him into a hug and Simon weeps.

They toss Grant's body in the backseat of his IROC-Z.

Jake speeds through the city, swerving through light traffic.

Jake sits Grant up in the driver's seat. SLAMS Grant's head into the windshield, CRACKING the glass.

Simon and Jake push the car down a sloped boat launch. It picks up speed until it hits the water.

The IROC sinks, water GLURPING into the opened windows, Simon and Jake watching until all that's visible are the taillights rippling red underwater.

Then they walk off. Past Marley and Ebenezer. Out of sight.

The song ends. The audience APPLAUDS.

END INTERCUT

EXT. FOSTER HOME - NIGHT

Simon slinks up the stairs and enters quietly.

INT. FOSTER HOME - TROY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Troy's girly posters adorn the wall along the top bunk now. Troy - 17, pimples cleared up but he's still the same height - roots through the top drawer when Simon steps in.

SIMON

Hey! That's my drawer!

Troy shuts it, fear in his eyes. He scurries to the bunk stairs. Simon grabs him and jerks him back down.

SIMON (CONT'D)

I'm sick of you touching my shit!

He punches Troy in the gut. Troy doubles over.

Marley and Ebenezer watch from the doorway. Ebenezer wears a look of shame.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Ooh! Nice one!

TROY

I'm sorry! I was looking for a pen!

Simon grabs him and throws him onto the lower bunk.

SIMON

Who's the squirt now, huh? Who's Ducky now, you piece of shit?

He slugs Troy in the jaw. Troy cries out.

GRANDMA TRUDY (O.S.)

STOP!

Simon holds his fist poised over Troy's bloodied face. He looks back over his shoulder.

Grandma Trudy and Aria stand in the doorway with horror in their eyes. The others behind them, wearing similar looks.

GRANDMA TRUDY (CONT'D)

I have given you... we have given you... *so many* chances. But it's as if you're a different person. What happened to the boy we knew?

Simon's lower lip quivers as he holds back tears.

SIMON

He's dead.

He gets up and opens a drawer. Troy cowers behind him as he stuffs clothes into his messenger bag.

ARIA

Simon...

SIMON

It's for the best, Aria.

He grabs the baggie with the torn fifty-dollar bill in it and lays it on top of his clothes.

SIMON (CONT'D)

I have to leave.

Simon throws the bag over his shoulder and approaches the door. Grandma Trudy and Aria block his path.

GRANDMA TRUDY

You can't run away your whole life.

SIMON

Get out of my way.

She doesn't budge.

SIMON (CONT'D)

*Please.*

Grandma Trudy steps out of his way. Aria lingers, holding his gaze with tears standing in her eyes.

SIMON (CONT'D)

I don't want to have to lie to you anymore.

As Aria steps aside, a tear falls. She wipes it away.

Simon steps out between Aria and Grandma Trudy. They turn to follow his progress as he leaves. Forlorn, Grandma Trudy ushers the children to their rooms.

His back turned to them, Simon finally lets his tears fall.

MARLEY'S GHOST

And you came to me.

EBENEZER

Death was the only life I knew.

MARLEY'S GHOST

You were good at it.

EBENEZER

That doesn't mean I had to do it forever.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Bleak House lined your pockets. They gave you a future when no one else would.

EBENEZER

That's not true. These people, they were my family. They wanted a better life for me but all I ever wanted was to wallow in self-pity.

MARLEY'S GHOST

And when did a little self-pity hurt anyone, eh?

EBENEZER

Tell that to the people we've whose lives we've taken.

Ebenezer turns his back on Marley.

A CUL-DE-SAC lined with brownstone apartments drenched in evening light lies ahead of them, a Romanesque gray limestone building looming at the end where the upstairs bathroom should be. Behind him, Marley stands in Grandma Trudy's second floor hall, giving him a sore look.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)

Bleak House.

Dressed in black cloaks like they're on their way to a Halloween bash, Simon and Jake walk by on either side of Ebenezer and continue down the middle of the road.

EXT. BLEAK HOUSE - NIGHT

Ebenezer steps into the street.

As Simon and Jake approach the graystone building, they adorn white faceless masks and raise their hoods.

Jake CLANGS the lion's head door knocker. He turns to Simon.

JAKE

Not a word until you're asked.

SIMON

I know.

The door opens. In the doorway, the BUTLER steps aside to usher them in.

INT. BLEAK HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A palatial foyer. Marble floors. Statuary. A fountain. Massive paintings in gilded frames. A masked man (PICKWICK) saunters down the curved staircase, hand on the baluster.

MARLEY

Allo, Pickwick. You all right?

PICKWICK

Marley! So good to see you! And this must be your young initiate. Welcome to Bleak House.

Simon nods respectfully as Pickwick meets them by the fountain. The man ushers them toward a set of French doors.

PICKWICK (CONT'D)

Come. The Dickensians await us.

Ebenezer and Marley follow. The Butler lingers, dusting a statue.

INT. BLEAK HOUSE - GREAT HALL - CONTINUOUS

Pickwick leads them into a room filled with masked and hooded DICKENSIANS. Torches burn along the walls.

Voices hush and the crowd parts to allow them passage. At the far end of the room stands an altar holding several objects: An empty bowl with a spoon, alongside a plate heaped with burnished coins. A top hat. A length of chain. A portrait of Dickens.

PICKWICK

Fellow Dickensians. On this auspicious evening our brother, Jacob Marley, presents our youngest Initiate to the Bleak House Syndicate!

Pickwick picks up a saber. He points at a footstool.

PICKWICK (CONT'D)

On your knees.

Simon kneels against the stool.

PICKWICK (CONT'D)

Do you swear to uphold the sacred duties of Bleak House with honor and without question?

SIMON

I-I do.

PICKWICK

Speak up, please.

SIMON

I do!

PICKWICK

This pleases us. And who advocates for the Initiate? Let him speak now.



JAKE

Me. He's a good wee punter, he is.

The Dickensians chuckle.

PICKWICK

Then as Director it is my duty and great honor to present our youngest Dickensian...

Pickwick lays the blade edge on Simon's right shoulder, then the left.

PICKWICK (CONT'D)

Arise, young Ebenezer Scrooge!

The room erupts in APPLAUSE as Simon stands, turning to face them. Jake claps him on the back and Pickwick shakes his hand vigorously. Behind the mask, Simon's eyes smile.

MONTAGE - SIMON BECOMES EBENEZER

A FAT MAN eats lobster in a posh hotel, a PROSTITUTE going down on him while another dances beside the king-sized bed. The door KICKS in and Simon, wearing his black hoodie, shoots the man three times. The prostitutes run screaming.

A FAMOUS WOMAN in a fur coat and jewelry steps out of a limo to the flashes and jeers of the paparazzi. Simon shoots her and runs. In an alley YOUNG EBENEZER (20) tears off his hood. No glasses. Mutton chops.

A REALTOR tours Young Ebenezer around his future condo, devoid of furniture. He shakes her hand. His BEEPER beeps and he looks at the number on the screen: 1843.

An INDUSTRIOUS MAN in a yellow hard hat on an unfinished office tower yells at CONSTRUCTION WORKERS. He takes the elevator up to the roof and lights a smoke. Young Ebenezer rushes him, thrusting him off the roof. He grabs a rope and zips down the side of the building. Walks away from the site with workers gathering around the man's crumpled body.

Young Ebenezer places the fifty-dollar bill in Lucite on his dresser. He takes down the book page in its frame: the "*Stave 5 - The End of It*" chapter title page from *A Christmas Carol*.

Two GREEDY MEN sit in a board room with a row of televisions, laughing. Simon steps up behind them and SHOOTS them in the head. Blood splashes on the monitors, showing stock quotes.

Young Ebenezer dances with a YOUNG WOMAN on his balcony, drinking champagne. Fireworks explode above the skyline. BEEP-BEEP. He checks the beeper: 1843.

A CHEF's throat slashed, blood on his whites.

A POLITICIAN shot in her campaign office.

Young Ebenezer falls back on the rug beside a comatose topless STRIPPER, a tie still on his arm and a syringe still in his vein. His beeper BEEPS.

He drowns a RICH MAN in his tub, a portrait of the man in the background. The man's flailing hand knocks his champagne flute off the tub. It shatters on the marble floor.

Marley and Young Ebenezer laugh, driving a sports car through downtown streets. BEEP-BEEP. Marley tries to get a peek as he glances at the flip phone: 1843.

Hands scrabble at a garroted throat.

A bullet-riddled corpse dances.

A tongue wriggles in an agonized mouth.

In a white bathrobe, Ebenezer looks at his BANK ACCOUNT on a clunky laptop. At well over \$1M, he leans back and smiles.

EXT. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - NIGHT

A light dusting of snow on everything. YOUNG WOMEN giggle as Ebenezer staggers by, tipping his hat with a smile that's half grimace. He limps to a building and enters.

INT. SURGICAL LAB - NIGHT

A white mouse lies unconscious under a lamp. ARIADNE (25) wears a surgical mask and cap, sewing a tiny incision on the mouse's shaved belly with a needle and thread.

The doors burst open and Ebenezer (24) staggers in. His eyelids flutter and he sprawls over a surgical table, scattering instruments.

Ariadne cries out in surprise, dropping the needle.

INT. SURGICAL LAB - LATER

Ariadne locks the doors. She returns to Ebenezer, who sits on the surgical table.

ARIADNE

I could get in a lot of trouble for this.

YOUNG EBENEZER

I didn't know where else to go.

ARIADNE

A hospital maybe? Just an idea.

YOUNG EBENEZER

No insurance.

She nods and helps remove his coat. Blood has soaked through his shirt at the chest, still glistening. He winces, tugging the shirt from his waistband.

ARIADNE

Let me help.

She helps raise it over his head. His lean, muscular physique momentarily surprises her. The wound gouts blood and she regains her composure, leaning down to inspect it.

ARIADNE (CONT'D)

This is a gunshot.

YOUNG EBENEZER

Thanks. How much'll that be, doc?

ARIADNE

Still a smart ass, I see. What happened to those cute glasses?

YOUNG EBENEZER

Contacts.

She studies his eyes a moment, then injects a local anesthetic near the wound. Picks up the scalpel from the tray.

ARIADNE

This might sting a little.

He inhales sharply as she makes a slight incision. Blood spills out onto the bib on his lap. She reaches into the wound with tweezers. CLINK! She pulls out the bullet.

ARIADNE (CONT'D)

You're lucky this didn't hit an organ.

YOUNG EBENEZER

.22 caliber. Just bounces off bone.

She eyes him with suspicion and begins sewing up the wound. He manages to smile through his grimace.

YOUNG EBENEZER (CONT'D)

You know, when we first met, Grandma Trudy - how is she, by the way?

ARIADNE

She lost the house last year. But she's fine. Living in a home now. She likes it there.

YOUNG EBENEZER

(smiles)

That's good. That time Troy and I got in a big fight after he ripped up my book, your grandma set me down by the piano and told me the story of Theseus and Ariadne.

Ariadne smiles wistfully.

YOUNG EBENEZER (CONT'D)

She said a boy - a *man* - has to tame the animal in his heart to be worthy of love.

ARIADNE

Did you ever tame yours?

YOUNG EBENEZER

Just learned how to manage it.

ARIADNE

(re: his gunshot)

Doesn't look that way to me.

YOUNG EBENEZER

Accidental discharge.

Ariadne expresses doubt. She snips the thread. Wipes the wound clean and places a large adhesive bandage over it.

ARIADNE

All done.

Young Ebenezer eases himself off the table. Gingerly puts his shirt back on.

YOUNG EBENEZER

Good as new, doc.

ARIADNE

Still a few years before you can call me that.

YOUNG EBENEZER

I won't tell anyone if you don't.

She studies his face. His grin falters.

ARIADNE

Were you ever happy with us?

YOUNG EBENEZER

Aria, of course I was. What happened to my parents, it changed me.

ARIADNE

My parents died too.

YOUNG EBENEZER

You never did tell me what happened to them.

ARIADNE

(shrugs)

Someone broke into the house while I was at vocal lessons with Grandma Trudy. Shot them both point-blank. The detective said they had a few leads but when he went missing, they put someone else on the case... and nothing ever came of it.

YOUNG EBENEZER

No leads?

ARIADNE

He said they were looking into some guy who might've been involved with a few other recent murders.

YOUNG EBENEZER

Hmm.

(beat)

Hey, do you want to grab a drink? We really should catch up.

ARIADNE

Exams tomorrow. Maybe Thursday?

YOUNG EBENEZER

Thursday. Yeah, that sounds good.

He smiles. She joins him.

ARIADNE

Thursday it is, Simon Lachance.

YOUNG EBENEZER

I'll see you then, Ariadne Trudy.

ARIADNE

It's Wadlington. Trudy's my mother's name. I thought you knew that?

Young Ebenezer's face goes ashen. He grips the table.

ARIADNE (CONT'D)

Are you all right?

YOUNG EBENEZER

Yeah. I'll be fine.

(heads for the door)

S-see you Wednesday.

Ariadne watches him leave. Her smile fades.

MARLEY'S GHOST

You knew then... And you never told her.

EBENEZER

I never got the chance. We were supposed to meet up at this crummy college pub -

EXT. PUB - NIGHT

Ebenezer and Marley appear outside a faux-Irish pub and look in through paneled windows. Crowded with college kids. Young Ebenezer steps into view and stops at the window.

The door opens. Oasis's "Wonderwall" trickles out as a young couple exits into the cold, hugging each other.

Young Ebenezer sees Ariadne seated at the bar. She smiles at the BARTENDER who asks her something. She shakes her head, motioning to the stool beside her where she's put her purse.

The Bartender smiles and pours a beer. Ariadne tucks a strand of hair behind her ear self-consciously and pulls her flip phone out of her purse. Checks it. Nothing.

Young Ebenezer reaches for the door handle. BEEP-BEEP. He hesitates and checks his phone. Same message: 1843.

Ariadne slips her phone back into her purse and looks up at the window expectantly.

But Ebenezer is gone.

MARLEY'S GHOST

You chose your career over love.  
Made the same mistake I did.

EBENEZER

I keep asking myself if I had it all to do over, would I make the same choice? If I'd known -

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

An INVENTOR, a black man in his 30s, welds parts onto a circuit board. Diagrams spread out around him. Books on thermodynamics, Tesla, Bill Gates and others.

The radiator RATTLES. Curtains billow in an open window, where Ebenezer and Marley stand.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)  
- what would happen, would I have  
left her sitting there waiting?

Young Ebenezer slips through from the fire escape. He creeps up behind the man. Slips the garrote out of his pocket, winds it tight around his gloved hands.

The Inventor sits up. Raises his goggles. Makes to turn.

Young Ebenezer loops the garrote around the man's neck and twists, pulling him out of his chair.

The soldering iron rolls off the table. Burns a hole in the carpet.

The Inventor struggles, grasping weakly at the garrote. He lurches backward, slamming Ebenezer into the wall against a CLINTON GORE '96 poster. Ebenezer growls in pain.

The carpet smolders. Several diagrams catch fire. The Inventor gurgles, trying to cry out, reaching toward the door.

There's a CRACK! and the Inventor stops struggling, slumping against Young Ebenezer. The killer lays him on the floor and grasps his bullet wound, gazing at the fire. He dashes to the window and slips out halfway.

LITTLE GIRL (O.S.)  
Daddy...?

A LITTLE GIRL, hair in cornrows, stands in the doorway looking down at her father. Her eyes widen when she sees the fire.

YOUNG EBENEZER  
Shit...

He steps back in. Crosses the room, stepping over the man.

YOUNG EBENEZER (CONT'D)  
Come on.

He scoops up the Little Girl. She reaches over his shoulder as he carries her to the window.

LITTLE GIRL

Daddy!

YOUNG EBENEZER

He'll be right behind us.

He lifts the girl through the window before following. She stands looking in, wet eyes reflecting the fire as it engulfs her father. Marley and Ebenezer stand over the man, themselves in the flames.

Pity wells in Young Ebenezer's eyes as he looks down at the girl. He picks her up and carries her down the stairs.

INT. APARTMENT FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

Young Ebenezer enters with the girl in his arms and sets her down in the vestibule. The FIRE ALARM begins blaring. He kneels down to look her in the eye.

YOUNG EBENEZER

I'm sorry. I wasn't told about you.  
Someone will come along.

He looks her over. Then he slips out into the night.

A WOMAN in a bathrobe steps out a moment later and crouches to look the girl in the eye.

WOMAN

Tiny? Where's your daddy at?

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - NIGHT

Young Ebenezer hurries away from the building, huddled up against the cold. He passes between Marley and Ebenezer.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Lucky she didn't grass you up.

EBENEZER

I couldn't just leave her to burn.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Soft touch, eh?

The surroundings fade away and fade up on -

INT. MARLEY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Marley sits at his desk. He licks the tip of a pencil and writes. Marley's Ghost and Ebenezer stand over him.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Allo. Who's this handsome devil?



The still-living Marley chuckles and writes quicker.  
A KNOCK disturbs them. The three men look toward the door.  
Young Ebenezer stands in shadow in the doorway.  
Behind his desk, Marley grins.

MARLEY  
Got you working on Christmas, have  
they, Ebenezer?

Young Ebenezer nods and raises the pistol. Screws off the  
silencer and tucks it into a pocket.

MARLEY (CONT'D)  
Only a matter of time before you're  
the one behind the desk, innit? And  
somebody younger, willing to do the  
job cheaper, he'll be greetin' you  
on Christmas Eve like you done me.

Marley unbuttons his shirt and jabs a finger at his chest.

MARLEY (CONT'D)  
Right. You shoot me right here then.  
Might as well. You already tore out  
my bloody heart.

Young Ebenezer FIRES THREE SHOTS.

Marley's thrown back in his chair. He reaches out and slaps  
a bloody handprint on pages filled with typing and pencil  
scrawls. The chair topples and he sprawls dead on the carpet.

EBENEZER  
There's your soft touch.

Marley's Ghost nods in acknowledgement.

Young Ebenezer comes around the desk. He moves the pages  
aside and picks one up to examine it. Typed on it: "I AM  
JACOB MARLEY: CONFESSIONS OF A KILLER by *Thomas Lazenby*."

Young Ebenezer chuckles bitterly. He takes out a lighter,  
sets the manuscript ablaze. Then he steps away from the fire  
and crouches beside Marley.

YOUNG EBENEZER  
A wretched end for a wretched man.

He closes Marley's eyes.

YOUNG EBENEZER (CONT'D)  
Goodbye, Marley.

He stands and leaves the room as the manuscript burns.

EBENEZER

You'd planned to expose them.

MARLEY'S GHOST

And you were too much a coward to let me. Would it have made any difference at all? You think anyone would have come close to Bleak House if my memoirs got published?

EBENEZER

They must have thought so.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Nah. They sent you to kill me 'cause I considered the *possibility* of betrayal. Step in line. 'Nother brick in the wall and all that, yeah?

EBENEZER

You think they're unstoppable? I think your book scared them. I think Carstone's virus *terrified* them.

Marley turns and steps through the fire toward the doorway Simon just left. He looks back.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Coming then?

EBENEZER

Where are you going?

Ignoring him, Marley opens the door. The cul-de-sac lies beyond. Bleak House at the end. He steps out into the road.

Ebenezer gingerly crosses through the fire and follows him through the door.

EXT. BLEAK HOUSE - NIGHT

Ebenezer looks around. Spots Marley ascending the stairs to Bleak House. He hurries along through the fresh snow.

INT. BLEAK HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

As Ebenezer enters the dark foyer, Marley is already bounding up the stairs two-by-two to the second floor.

EBENEZER

What year is this?

MARLEY'S GHOST

The present.

EBENEZER

Why are we here, Marley?

MARLEY'S GHOST

Just playing out an hunch.

Ebenezer hurries up the stairs.

INT. BLEAK HOUSE - DINING HALL - CONTINUOUS

A mahogany table with several dozen chairs stretches the entire hall. Paintings of old white men stare sternly down as Ebenezer passes. Marley pauses at one.

MARLEY'S GHOST

This bloke looks just like me mum.

Ebenezer chuckles as Marley continues toward the door.

INT. BLEAK HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ebenezer steps in. At the end of a corridor lined with closed doors a light burns in an open room. Marley creeps up to it and peers in.

A BALD MAN sits behind a desk, pouring through papers and green leather ledgers while pecking keys on an accountant calculator. He turns to lick his pencil and the lamp illuminates the birthmark on his cheek. His old letterman jacket lies behind glass on the wall. It's ADAM COULTER.

EBENEZER

Adam Coulter.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Yeah. Always wondered how the lad evaded me for so long. Almost like he'd been erased. Figured he must have worked for Bleak House. Who else could erase someone so well?

Ebenezer looks ill. He approaches the desk cautiously, studying the man.

EBENEZER

He's their accountant. He's been working alongside me all this time. Probably stood with me during initiations. How long have I eaten dinner with my parents' killer sitting across from me? They must have known.

## MARLEY'S GHOST

Aye, they knew all right. And they protected him. Now why would they do that, you think? A good accountant's a dime a dozen.

## EBENEZER

They kept him around to use against me, didn't they? In case I considered your "possibility of betrayal."

Adam's phone BUZZES. A photo of a pleasant-looking woman and two pudgy kids. The name says KIMBERLY. He lets it ring.

## MARLEY'S GHOST

Got a wife and kids. More than either of us ever had.

Ebenezer storms out of the room.

## INT. CRAMPED APARTMENT - NIGHT

Tiny closes the fridge door holding a jar of cranberry sauce. Ebenezer and Marley stand behind it.

## MARLEY'S GHOST

Who's the bird?

## EBENEZER

She's my driver.

## MARLEY'S GHOST

Well, la-di-dah, Lord Ebenezer. Got yourself a driver and all.

Tiny scoops cranberry sauce onto two plates with turkey, potatoes and green beans. She lays utensils on them and carries them out into the dim, cramped living room.

An old man sits in a wheelchair, a blanket over his legs. It's the INVENTOR Simon shot and left for dead. Tiny sits beside him and cuts small pieces off the leg.

## MARLEY'S GHOST (CONT'D)

Oh, hang on... isn't that...?

## EBENEZER

I botched the hit.

## MARLEY'S GHOST

You botched the hit.

Her father turns to open his mouth. Half his face is burned.

MARLEY'S GHOST (CONT'D)

Christ, you done a number on that bloke. Felt guilty, I guess. Put her on the payroll. Yeah. Soft touch, you are. She'd betray you if she knew what you done, you know.

EBENEZER

Maybe she should.

Marley eyes him. On the counter her phone BUZZES. Marley looks at it.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Allo, what's this?

Ebenezer looks. A text message from UNKNOWN, just four numbers: 1843. He and Marley eye each other.

MARLEY'S GHOST (CONT'D)

How long has she been with Bleak House?

EBENEZER

I had no idea.

MARLEY'S GHOST

So all this time you thought you were keeping tabs on her, she was keeping her eye on you.

Tiny sets the plate down and comes over. Ebenezer eyes her suspiciously as she passes to pick up the phone.

TINY

I gotta go, Dad.

Her father chews noisily, looking up at her. She crosses to him and kisses him on his scarred forehead. Then she slips into her coat and driving gloves and out the door.

EBENEZER

Can we follow her?

MARLEY'S GHOST

We'll bloody well try, yeah?

They step through the closed door into room so bright they have to shield their eyes.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Ebenezer lies on the bed, his forehead swathed in bandages. He's unconscious. The heart monitor BEEPS steadily, strongly. A trickle of crusted blood has oozed down over his eye.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Christ. You look like kaka.

The conscious Ebenezer ignores Marley, moving cautiously toward the bed.

EBENEZER

I'm alive?

(to Marley)

I'm still alive!

MARLEY'S GHOST

D'you feel alive, mate?

Ebenezer reaches out to touch his own face. An almost magnetic repulsion pushes his hand away, prickling his skin.

Behind them, a metallic SQUEAK grabs his attention. He turns to look.

Tiny slips into the room quietly. Rage twists her features. She closes the door gently, tugs a compact Beretta from the waistband of her jeans and approaches the bed.

MARLEY'S GHOST (CONT'D)

Only a matter of time before you're the man behind the desk.

(shrugs)

Not technically a desk, I s'pose, but still apt.

Ebenezer nods, watching as Tiny reaches the bed and presses the barrel against his temple. The metallic parts rattle as her gloved hand quivers. She pulls away, cursing herself.

TINY

Fucking coward! Come on!

She pushes the barrel into the flesh of his temple.

TINY (CONT'D)

Fuck you, Ebenezer Scrooge.

She FIRES. His brains paint the pillow.

ARIADNE (O.S.)

*Omigod!*

The scream startles Tiny and she wheels around, raising the pistol, FIRING instinctually.

Ebenezer turns in time to see Ariadne (42), her eyes wide in shock. The slug has punched a hole in the chart she's holding. Her fingers quiver and she drops it, revealing the blossoming red on her doctor's whites.

Ariadne gasps and tumbles to the tiles beside the chart.

EBENEZER

No no no!

Ebenezer crosses the space between them in an instant.

Tiny tosses the gun and bolts from the room, rushing past Ebenezer as he drops to his knees beside Aria.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)

Oh God. Oh God, did this happen? *Did this really happen?*

He looks up at Marley, whose only response is to shrug.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)

That's it? That's all you've got? Everyone I've ever loved is dead, Marley! Because of you. Because you corrupted me.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Bollocks. You let yourself be corrupted, you pathetic minge. But what the fuck are you gonna do about it, eh? Sit there whinging like you done when you were a wee lad? Or are you gonna make a fucking change?

EBENEZER

Are you saying I can change all this? I can prevent it from happening?

Marley nods grimly.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)

Yes! I'll do anything!

Ebenezer clasps his hands together, looking around in sheer desperation.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)

I'll do whatever you want. I'll... I'll upload the virus! That's what you want, right? Anything, just please, send me back!

Marley looks toward the blank wall with a shrug.

MARLEY'S GHOST

You were right, mate! Guess I owe you a quid!

Ebenezer follows the dead man's gaze.

EBENEZER

What? Who are you talking t - ?

Before he can finish the question, his whole body seizes. He SCREAMS, squeezing his eyes closed in agonized terror.

The overhead lights flicker and the bulbs POP, showers of sparks falling around them like fireworks.

Marley's face smiling down on him, half in and half out of the light, is the last thing he sees.

MARLEY'S GHOST

See you soon, you dodgy cunt!

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

*BEEP... BEEP... BEEP...*

NURSE (O.S.)

We've got a heartbeat!

Ebenezer's eyes flutter open. Head swathed in bandages.

He sees the room in hazy glimpses. Heart monitor. Doctors and nurses hovering.

He closes his eyes. Dark.

When he opens them again, Ariadne sits at his bedside in surgeon scrubs, a halo of white light surrounding her. The halo dims. She comes into focus. Smiles.

Ebenezer licks his lips. Blinks.

EBENEZER

I'm alive?

ARIADNE

You're alive. The attending physician said you fell off a roof?

It hurts him to nod.

ARIADNE (CONT'D)

Careful. You have a concussion.

EBENEZER

Was I... did I die?

ARIADNE

They say your heart stopped beating for a minute and a half. Just thought I'd stop by on my break to see how you were doing.



She stands. Picks up his wallet off the bedside table.

ARIADNE (CONT'D)  
 Why does all of your ID say "Ebenezer  
 Scrooge"? Is that a joke?

Ebenezer smiles.

EBENEZER  
 Maybe I'll tell you sometime.

ARIADNE  
 I'm still mad at you. I waited hours  
 for you that night.

EBENEZER  
 I'm sorry for that. I just... You  
 were always too good for me, Aria.

ARIADNE  
 Couldn't you let me decide that for  
 myself?

EBENEZER  
 You're right. And I'm going to make  
 it up to you. I'll make it up to  
 everyone.

Ariadne looks at him like he's lost his mind.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)  
 Was there a thumbdrive in my pocket?

She picks up it up and holds it up for him to see, the plastic  
 cracked. He takes it from her.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)  
 Great. I'm gonna fix everything,  
 Aria. You'll see.

ARIADNE  
 What's gotten into you? Did three  
 ghosts visit you last night?

He chuckles, sits up and tries to swing his feet over the  
 edge of the bed. Swooning, he falls back against the pillow.

ARIADNE (CONT'D)  
 Careful now. You need to rest.

EBENEZER  
 I don't have time to rest. There's  
 still a chance to make things right.

ARIADNE

Is this a twelve step thing? Are you  
an alcoholic?

It hurts him to laugh.

EBENEZER

You'll know when it happens. If it  
works.

She gives him another strange look and heads for the door.

ARIADNE

You're a strange man, Simon. Or should  
I say, "Ebenezer Scrooge"?

He smiles. She returns it and backs out into the hall.

Ebenezer pushes himself up with pained grunts. He spots his  
clothes folded on the dresser. Slips his pants on under the  
gown. Takes off the gown and tries to pull his shirt over  
his head but it hurts too much. He slips the gown back on  
like a shirt and ties it at the front.

He passes the muted television, showing the PRICE-LOWERING  
FAIRY COMMERCIAL. He pauses by the TV as the logo comes up:  
"TECH MART - *Your Electronics Store.*"

Ebenezer staggers out into the -

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

He stops for an ORDERLY pushing an old woman on a gurney.  
Glances down the hall, where Ariadne speaks with a DICKENSIAN  
in a black peacoat. She points toward Ebenezer, sees that  
he's out of his room and reacts. The man follows her gaze.

Ebenezer steps back into the -

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

- and presses flat against the wall.

The Dickensian steps in, weapon drawn.

Ebenezer SLAMS his fists down on the man's wrist. The gun  
CLATTERS to the floor. The Dickensian elbows Ebenezer in the  
face, knocking him into the wall.

Ebenezer grabs the man's wrist and spins him around, slamming  
him face-first into the wall.

The Dickensian pushes away but Ebenezer kicks him in the  
back, then dashes for the gun.

The Dickensian lunges. Lands on Ebenezer's back. The gun skitters away from Ebenezer's fingers, under the bed.

He grabs a foot pedal and lowers the bed, CRASHING it down onto the man's head as he flattens himself to reach the gun. The Dickensian rolls out of the way.

Ebenezer snatches the gun as the man stands, grabbing for the cafeteria tray laden with Ebenezer's uneaten lunch.

Ebenezer sits up and aims as the man raises the tray.

A FRIGHTENED CRY startles the Dickensian. He turns.

Ariadne stands in the doorway, shocked.

Ebenezer FIRES TWICE.

The Dickensian shakes like a ragdoll and Ariadne yelps. The man drops to the floor, dead.

Ariadne closes the door behind her.

ARIADNE

Simon, what the hell is going on?  
*You killed a cop.*

Ebenezer gets to his feet with a pained grunt.

EBENEZER

He's not a cop.

ARIADNE

He showed me his badge.

EBENEZER

Whatever he showed you, it's a lie.  
Like my ID.

ARIADNE

How can I trust you?

EBENEZER

You don't need to. Just let me walk  
out of here. Say I had a gun. I was  
going to shoot you.

The fear in her eyes shows she's not sure he wouldn't.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)

I would never. On my life. But I  
have to leave right now.

He leans in to kiss her. She rears back in fear. He steps back with a look of realization at the gun in his hand.

Ariadne slips passed him to the dresser. She takes out a SCRUB TOP and tosses it to him.

ARIADNE

We sleep in here sometimes.

He shrugs out of the gown and tries to get the top over his head. Winces.

ARIADNE (CONT'D)

(re: the gun)

You're gonna have to put that down.

He sets the gun on the dresser. She moves in close and pulls the top down gently over his head. They both look at the gun between them. He picks it up.

Ebenezer moves past her - close - to the door.

EBENEZER

Aria...

ARIADNE

I know. Go.

He opens the door. Gives her one last longing look over his shoulder before slipping out into the hall.

She stands there a moment, frightened and confused. She looks down at the body, emotionless.

Then she SCREAMS.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Ebenezer turns the corner, tucking the gun in his waistband under the scrub top. He flinches at Ariadne's SCREAM. A couple of NURSES, heading his way, rush past him.

He dashes down the hall and backs into the exit door, then bolts down the stairs as the EMERGENCY ALARM BLARES.

EXT. HOSPITAL - MOMENTS LATER

Ebenezer steps through the revolving door as a black sedan SCREECHES up to the entrance. Two more DICKENSIANS step out: one shaved bald (FAGIN), the other with a suave hairdo (PIP).

Ebenezer dashes for the street.

The Dickensians chase him. An AMBULANCE peels in and blocks them. Fagin SLAMS a fist against it in anger.

Ebenezer runs down the sidewalk, putting distance between himself and the hospital.

EXT. GAS STATION - MORNING

Ebenezer texts four digits to TINY: 1843.

EXT. GAS STATION - LATER

The limo pulls up. Ebenezer opens the passenger door and climbs in.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

Tiny gives him a peculiar look as he sidles in next to her.

TINY

Doctor.

EBENEZER

You have no idea how good it is to see you, Tiny.

TINY

Did you have a lobotomy?

Ebenezer laughs uproariously. Tiny eyes him curiously.

EBENEZER

I'm *fine*. In fact I feel better than I have in a long time.

TINY

Mr. Scrooge -

EBENEZER

Call me Simon. That's my name.

TINY

What the fuck is going on, Simon?

EBENEZER

Tiny - *Tina* - I did something awful to you when you were young.

Tiny shakes her head. She won't hear it.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)

Yes. And I'm sorry, I can't take that back. Your father was a great man. I took the man you knew away from you. I took away your future. But the people I did it for, we can pay them back. The two of us. You don't have to forgive me -

Tiny's fighting back tears. She's been holding them back for years, working at his side, knowing what he's done.

TINY  
I will never forgive you.

EBENEZER  
How could you? I haven't forgiven myself. But maybe... maybe we can set things right.

TINY  
*How, goddammit?*

Ebenezer shows her the thumbdrive.

EBENEZER  
With this virus. We upload it on the computers at Bleak House, it'll bankrupt them in less than a minute. I just have to get in there.

TINY  
Why would I help you do that?

EBENEZER  
Because you know the system is rotten. From the bottom all the way to the top, it's a rigged game. The house always wins.  
(beat)  
You don't want to be like me, Tina. You *hate* people like me. I hate people like me. Let's do something good. For your family. For the people.

Tiny searches his eyes for the truth.

EXT. BLEAK HOUSE - MORNING

Tiny pulls the limo up in front of the building.

Ebenezer climbs out. Tiny steps out on the other side and meets him at the stairs. He hands her a pistol. She gives him a curious look.

EBENEZER  
Have you ever shot someone?

Tiny shakes her head.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)  
It's just like online shopping.  
(off her look)  
Point and click.

Tiny raises the gun and regards it.

TINY

Like this?

She raises it and FIRES in one swift movement. Ebenezer startles, raising his own weapon to defend himself while a man CRIES OUT behind him.

He looks back to see a Dickensian crumpled on the sidewalk.

TINY (CONT'D)

I can't forgive you. But I believe what you're doing is right.

A black sedan SCREECHES up to the curb. Two more DICKENSIANS step out with AR-15s. They spot Tiny and drop into defensive stances as she FIRES.

Tiny and Ebenezer take cover alongside the limo.

The Dickensians OPEN FIRE. Dents riddle the limo's chassis. Glass dust bursts from the bullet-resistant windows.

TINY (CONT'D)

Run!

Ebenezer thanks her with a nod. Tiny FIRES blind over the back of the limo. He dashes in the opposite direction and straight down the cul de sac, leaving Bleak House and Tiny behind him in a hail of bullets.

EXT. TECH MART - DAY

A MASSIVE CROWD stands dozens-deep outside the doors, tents and lawn chairs discarded. A REPORTER stands near a TV remote van, holding a mic while the CAMERAMAN shoots her.

REPORTER

We are just moments away from opening here at Tech Mart's Westvale Avenue location and customers have been waiting days to be the first to get big savings.

Behind her, a few CUSTOMERS wave at the camera.

REPORTER (CONT'D)

Now so far the crowd has been peaceful but we are expecting once we're allowed inside that this will be a Black Friday to remember.

(listens to earpiece)

That's right, Natalie. Last year *several dozen* people were trampled, a pregnant woman had to be taken away *in an ambulance* -

The doors open. CHEERS ERUPT. The crowd surges into the store. Ebenezer enters frame behind her. He edges into the crowd.

MAN IN CROWD  
Hey! No cutting!

A WOMAN elbows him. He pushes her away.

WOMAN IN CROWD  
Don't touch me, perv!

As they approach the doors, Ebenezer glances back over the heads and shoulders of the surging crowd.

A black sedan idles near the TV van, Fagin and Pip already pushing their way toward Ebenezer to the displeasure of eager customers.

Ebenezer raises his gun and FIRES it into the air.

The immediate crowd reacts in absolute terror. SCREAMING. Pushing people to get out of the way. Trampling the fallen. Some keep pressing toward the store, too close to turn back.

Fagin and Pip try to remain upright while men and women pummel them from all sides.

The Reporter startles. The Cameraman follows as she rushes into the crowd, customers fleeing around her.

REPORTER  
Stay on me! Stay on me!

INT. TECH MART - DAY

Ebenezer enters the store. Pandemonium's already broken out. CUSTOMERS grab televisions off a stack, one after another, as Ebenezer moves past. A MAN stands in front of one to protect it from people trying to take it from him.

A horde surrounds a box of headphones while the EMPLOYEE counts down from three. He pulls off the lid and backs away in amusement as the horde dives into the box.

Ebenezer blends into the swarm of people.

Two TEENS in hoodies fight. One grabs the other's sleeve and hurls him to the ground. A couple of other DUDES surround the guy on the floor and pummel him. Someone videos it on his phone. A WOMAN tries to break it up and gets an elbow in the face. People laugh. Someone SCREAMS.

The Dickensians fight off the crowd. They've lost him. Pip points and they move in opposing directions.



Two women throw a man to the ground while he cries for help.

Two men fight over a drone.

A woman steals a toy from a child in front of his mother.  
The boy WAILS.

While fighting people off of his television, the man's pants fall down. A KID shooting on his phone laughs. The Reporter swats the kid's phone out of his hand with her microphone.

REPORTER

This is my story, amateur!

The better fighter wins the drone. Rather than run off with his spoils, he beats the other man over the head with it.

The crowd spits Ebenezer out into Electronics, a long desk of computers. He rushes to one of the laptops. Wakes it with the touchpad.

He plugs the thumbdrive into the USB port. Taps his fingers impatiently on the keyboard. A wheel spins on the screen with the words "CONNECTING USB."

EBENEZER

Come on, come on...

He looks up from the monitor. Sees CAMERAS lining the other side of the table. A small video camera pointed directly at him, the Record light on.

He whips around to see his image displayed on a wall of massive televisions behind him.

EBENEZER (CONT'D)

Shit!

The crowd fights and shouts and grabs, oblivious. Pip turns toward the televisions. He clocks Ebenezer.

PIP

There!

Fagin fights to get his arms free of the customers pressing around him. He draws the AR-15 out of his peacoat and FIRES at the ceiling.

The Cameraman gets a shot of the panic. Customers drop boxes so eagerly fought over and run SCREAMING in all directions.

REPORTER

Get a shot of the televisions!

The Cameraman pans to a dozen Ebenezers on the televisions as Ebenezer tries to pull the laptop from the desk.

Ebenezer curses as it snags, having reached the limit of its cable. He jerks the pistol from the waistband of his pants, hugging the computer to his chest.

Fagin steps out from the churning sea of people, death in his eyes, rifle in hand. He spots Ebenezer.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

Tiny drives slowly through a mass exodus of SCREAMING, flailing customers fleeing the store. She brakes and leaps out the passenger door, entering the throng.

INT. TECH MART - CONTINUOUS

Ebenezer FIRES.

Fagin hits the ground and tucks into a roll. He FIRES back.

Cameras and computers explode into shards of plastic and circuitry as Ebenezer dives behind the table.

The laptop hangs over the edge from its cable. The DRIVE ICON pops up. Ebenezer grabs the computer and opens the folder. Double clicks the EYE\_OF\_THE\_NEEDLE file.

Sparks and plastic rain down as bullets blast the televisions behind him.

EBENEZER  
Come on, you prick!

A message appears: "UPLOAD TO NETWORK? Y/N"

Ebenezer's about to hit the Y key when a SHOT rings out. His finger retreats from the key as he slumps against the table, a red rose of bloodblooming on his back.

PIP (O.S.)  
Game over, Ebenezer. No Black Friday miracles for you.

Ebenezer turns. Coughs up blood.

Pip looms over him, pistol aimed at Ebenezer.

EBENEZER  
Bah... humbug.

Ebenezer hits Y. The laptop utters its discordant BOOOOOOOOOP!

Pip glances at the laptop and Ebenezer SHOTS him in the kneecap. SCREAMS erupt from the crowd as the Pip drops to the floor, gripping his leg in agony.

The 8-BIT skulls pop up, the chains, the message:

**YOU HAVE BEEN VISITED BY 3 GH05T5  
ALL YOUR MONEY  
WON'T CLOTHE YOU IN HELL...**

Bullets SMASH the screen. Keys scatter. Ebenezer takes a hit in the shoulder, the stomach, the leg.

Fagin stands at the end of the computer table, the barrel of his rifle smoking.

The Cameraman gets a shot of Ebenezer showing his bloody teeth in a smile. Ebenezer's eyes flick to the left and briefly register recognition.

Tiny has just stepped out of the crowd. She's reaching for the gun in her waistband.

Ebenezer shakes his head. Barely perceptible.

The camera whips around but Tiny has vanished into the crowd.

Fagin flinches at a GUNSHOT.

Holding the smoking pistol, Ebenezer's hand falls away from his chest, leaving a smoking, bloody wound.

Heavily armed POLICE swarm Fagin.

**COP  
DROP THE GUN! DROP IT!**

Fagin spins and FIRES. The cops BLAST him, riddling him with bullets. The rifle falls from his hands and he drops to his knees, the image repeated on a dozen TV screens, before he falls face-first on the tiles.

**EXT. TECH MART - CONTINUOUS**

Tiny wedges out of the crowd. The limo blocked in by police vehicles, she strides down the street, away from the chaos. Walking past a trash can, she tugs the gun from her waistband and tosses it in.

**INT. TECH MART - LATER**

The Cameraman zooms in on Ebenezer. In death, Ebenezer looks almost at peace.

REPORTER (O.S.)

On me.

The camera pans to a medium shot of the Reporter.

REPORTER (CONT'D)

Three... two... one... Bloodshed at Tech Mart's Westvale Avenue location where today's Black Friday chaos ended in a gunfight. Details are still coming in, but it appears the victim -

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Ariadne stands in the hall, her hands clasped over her heart, watching the news on a wall-mounted screen along with several hospital staff and patients.

REPORTER (CONT'D)

- may have been involved in what cyber police are calling the single most devastating targeted attack against the banks and corporate America in history. We'll have more details as this story develops.

INT. CRAMPED APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Back in the STUDIO, the MALE ANCHOR sits against a still shot of dead Ebenezer with the caption "WHO IS THIS MAN?"

Tiny sits beside her father, the glow of the muted television flickering on theirs faces.

She frowns and raises up from the sofa, grabbing something unfamiliar from her back pocket and pulling it out.

It's an envelope. Thick. "Happy Thanksgiving" written on it, signed with an E.

Curious, she opens it. A key falls out. The number 1843 is stamped on it. A bus station key fob hangs from a loop.

INT. BUS STATION - DAY

Tiny enters, looking around warily at all the bustling people. The TV screens showing replays of the scene at Tech Mart.

A man in a trench coat ruffles a newspaper. A woman in a jacket and skirt glances up from her phone and looks away.

Tiny narrows her eyes and strides resolutely toward the wall of lockers at the back of the station. Past the man in the trench coat, who looks up briefly.

Past a man with a ponytail, holding a violin case.

She stops in front of 1843. Takes out the key.

She breathes deeply in and out.

It could be *anything* in there.

Finally she puts the key into the lock and twists it. She draws the door open and her eyes pop at what she sees.

A glance over her shoulder, left and right.

Then back at the contents of the locker.

TINY

Bless you, Ebenezer Scrooge.

Behind her, the still image of Ebenezer's face fills the television screens.

FADE OUT.