

The Dead Don't Dream

written by

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FADE IN:

INT. CAR - MOVING - DAY

The day is grey and gloomy. Clouds shroud the sky.

GOD'S EYE: The car is a black 1971 Chevy Chevelle. It drives down a long street, past suburban homes.

Black gloved hands grip the steering wheel. The driver is MAX RIDLEY. Early 30s, Max has dark hair pulled back, shaved sides and light scruff. He wears a black coat. Clean, orderly, professional. His eyes are wide with anticipation.

On the passenger seat sits a closed 9x12 MANILA ENVELOPE and a BROWNING BUCK MARK .22 LR HANDGUN complete with SUPPRESSOR.

Max continues down the quiet suburban street. The neighborhood feels empty. All seems still except Max's moving car and the trees gently swaying in the wind.

Max shifts gears and pulls into a driveway. He sits in his car in a moment of hesitation. He slowly reaches over and grabs the manila envelope. Sits a little longer.. then grabs the gun and slides it into his coat's inside pocket. He exhales then exits the car and walks over to the front door.

EXT. JAMES' HOUSE

He knocks six times in a heartbeat rhythm.

JAMES FRASER (50s), an African-American man, answers the door. James, well dressed, wears all black as if to attend a memorial service. He speaks with a smooth voice.

JAMES

Ridley.

MAX

Going somewhere?

JAMES

I always dress this way.

MAX

.. Can we talk?

JAMES

(looks him up and down
with a suspicious eye)
Let's talk.

James walks away from Max. Max shuts the door behind them.

INT. JAMES' HOUSE - KITCHEN

The house doesn't feature many personal flourishes. Simple. Clean.

James leads Max into the small dimly lit kitchen.

JAMES
You in a hurry?

MAX
.. No.

JAMES
Sit down.

Max sits at the little square table while James pours himself a bowl of soup from a large pot on the stove.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Hungry?

MAX
No, I'm alright.

JAMES
No you already ate or no you're not hungry?

MAX
Aren't those the same thing?

JAMES
I got a little split pea soup leftover. I'll serve you a bowl.

MAX
I'm not hungry.

As he walks over and sets the bowl down on the table:

JAMES
Something else then. Why so tense?

MAX
Who's tense?

JAMES
"Who's tense."

James laughs a short, but infectious laugh.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Sometimes I look at you and I still see that wide-eyed kid. He's in there.. somewhere.

James can see Max's anxiousness is rising to the surface.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I had an aunt, dead now, we used to call her "Fidge." At least, my old man and his brothers did. You know why?

James pulls out the chair opposite Max very suddenly, slightly startling him.

JAMES (CONT'D)

(as he sits)

Why you got the jitters?

MAX

You're asking a lot of questions.

JAMES

You're avoiding all of them.

(beat)

Let's not keep pretending. We got places to be.. You think I don't know what's in that envelope? The moment I let my mark go, I knew what was going to happen.

MAX

(anguished)

You should have skipped town while you had the chance.

JAMES

Shoulda, coulda, woulda.. I considered it. Then I spent a lot of time just.. thinking. Feeling.. nostalgic.

Max swallows, but remains silent.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I went from smoking "foos" on the corner to invading homes in the dead of night. Black, white, didn't matter.. I'd put a bullet or two in them while they slept. Once they slipped into their dreams.. well, they never left..

Max's eyes are somehow wider than before as he grits his jaw. He slowly reaches into his coat as James sits down.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I know you have questions.. I'm just tired, kid.

CLACK!

Max shoots James center mass. James goes limp as steam from the bowl of split pea soup rises. Blood fills James' shirt.

Max grits his teeth harder, squinting his eyes as he watches the life leave James'. Acceptance in them.

Max takes a few seconds to gather himself before standing up, concealing his gun, grabbing the envelope and exiting the kitchen. He walks over to the front door, but stops midway.

He backtracks to a nearby drawer, opens it to reveal a SILVER COLT 1911 HANDGUN with the initials "DD" engraved on it. Max grabs it and slips it into the back of his pants. He leaves the house.

EXT. HOUSE

Max enters his Chevy Chevelle and pulls out. He drives back down the quiet road he came.

INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE - MOVING - NIGHT

Max drives down his street until he reaches his apartment complex.

INT. MAX'S PLACE - NIGHT

The apartment is small and claustrophobic. Much like James Fraser's home, no personal touches. Orderly.

Max sets both guns down on the kitchen table. He pours himself a glass of whiskey, picks Fraser's gun back up then slumps down into his one person couch.

As he sips his whiskey he looks over the gun. He runs his thumb over the initials while staring into a faraway place.

INT. BEDROOM

Max tosses and turns in his bed, waking suddenly in a cold sweat. He looks towards the corner of the room to see a dark shape.

James Fraser, his now-deceased mentor, breathes shallow, sitting in a chair that's not normally there. As he speaks in a sort of whisper (in voiceover form, worming it's way into Max's brain), the gunshot wound in his chest is also reflected in his raspy words.

JAMES (V.O.)
Once they slipped into their
dreams.. well, they never left..

Max continues to stare at James with a look of what might be fear.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Early morning, Max jogs down an empty street. In the distance a rooster crows a wake up call for the rest of the neighborhood.

Max stares ahead as he continues on, as if running from his thoughts.

EXT. CAR WASH

Max drives up to the car wash. He slowly pulls in.

Something in the passenger seat catches his eye. He turns just enough to see the outline of someone in his peripheral. Dead James again. Max stops himself from turning all the way and looks forward instead.

The windshield is bombarded with water and soap and flashing colors. A pretty and wet abstract painting across the front of the car. Max watches it, trying his hardest not to look over at the passenger seat.

Max finishes with the car wash, pulling out and leaving. James is gone.

EXT. MAX'S PLACE

Max, wearing a filtered mask as to not breath the fumes, spray paints his car red.

The windows are covered up, lights with masking tape, the whole deal.

Max swaps out the license plates, dropping the old ones into a stack of previously used plates.

INT. POST OFFICE - DAY

Max opens his PO box to find a light stack of mail. On top of it is a note with a number to CALL IMMEDIATELY. EMERGENCY.

Max approaches the CLERK.

MAX

Do you have a phone I can use?

CLERK

Sure.

Clerk presents the phone.

MAX

Thanks.

Max calls up the number and listens. His face drops.

INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE - MOVING - DAY

Max passes a NOW ENTERING sign. He's back in his hometown. A small Midwest town.

He takes in all the sights, seeing familiar buildings and streets. He's hit with a flurry of emotions like a machine gun spray of bullets. A nostalgic longing in his eyes. Then sadness.

INT. HOSPITAL - MORGUE

Max stands near the wall of refrigerated drawers. The CORONER reads off one of the names then opens the drawer.

CORONER

Eliza Ridley.

(looks to Max)

Ready?

Max takes a beat before nodding.

The coroner removes the sheet from the body, revealing a woman who resembles Max. Max has been hit by a tidal wave.

Max closes his eyes for a moment, trying to quiet the noise in his head. He opens his eyes and looks over at the coroner. He nods.

MAX

It's her.

Max reaches out to grab Eliza's cold hand. He holds it, his grip tightening.

INT. LAW OFFICE

Max sits in front of a desk. Behind it, a LAWYER. Max watches his lips move as he reads from Eliza's last will and testament.

INT. MORTUARY

Max sits, waiting to speak to the Mortician. He looks around at the various displays of coffins. Then the framed pictures of families on the wall.

James sits across from him against the opposite wall. James' gunshot chest wound is present. The blood spreads. Smoke rises from the wound. His eyes rolled back into his skull.

Max swallows, his expression uneasy then

is snapped back to reality when the office door swings open. He looks up.

INT. DEPARTMENT OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES (CPS)

Max is led into a room where he finds

MIKEY (9) sitting, waiting for him. Mikey is obviously distressed. His eyes puffy and purple.

He slowly looks up at Max, not recognizing him.

Max approaches him.

MAX

Do you know who I am?

MIKEY

(quiet)

Only cause they told me.

MAX

I'm Max.. Uncle Max.. Max is fine.

Max studies Mikey, looking him over. Mikey looks back down at his feet.

MAX (CONT'D)

Are you ready to go?

Mikey nods. He picks up his colorful backpack from the floor. Max leads him out.

INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE - MOVING

Max looks over at Mikey.

MAX

Are you hungry?

Mikey remains quiet, hugging his backpack.

Max turns his attention back to the road. The two sit in silence.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - INT. CAR - DAY

Max pulls into a cul-de-sac, watching the familiar houses pass him by. He parks in the driveway of the house he grew up in (owned by Eliza until her death).

EXT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME

Mikey quickly exits the car and starts toward the front door.

Max watches him go before taking a deep breath and getting out himself. By the time he's at the front door, Mikey has already let himself in, leaving the door wide open.

Max stares inside, the open door less like a "welcome home" and more like a monster about to swallow him whole. Monstro coming for Pinocchio. Max stiffens up then enters into the belly of the whale.

INT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME

The beast's innards are familiar yet different, with much of the house having been renovated over the years. Max is overwhelmed with memories. There are traces of them, faint outlines, like ghosts passing through the house. He wanders first through the living room and kitchen then towards the back of the house.

He looks at all of the framed photos up on the walls. Of Mikey. Of Eliza and Mikey. Older photos with them and Grandma. Even older photos of Eliza and Max. When their father was still alive. High school graduations. School photos.

There's life in Max's eyes that wasn't there before. As if he's remembering how to be a real person again.

Max looks out through the back room windows (itself another living room space complete with couches and a wall-mounted TV). A covered up pool in the middle of the backyard. In the back corner, Max's father's old grill. A round table with chairs near it.

More of Max's memories flood his mind. He watches as tiny versions of himself and his sister, no more than nine and seven years old, run past the windows and around the pool.

MAX'S MOTHER (O.S.)

Stop chasing your sister around the pool! How many times? How many times? Control your children, Anthony!

The voice fades, as do the kids, as do the memories..

.. as does Max's smile.

HALLWAY - EXT. MIKEY'S BEDROOM

Max has made his way back to the front of the house, stepping down the hallway, past the main bathroom and stopping at the doorway to Mikey's room.

Mikey is lying in bed, facing the wall.

Max lingers for a moment, unsure what to do. He reaches in for the door and quietly shuts the door halfway.

INT. ELIZA'S BEDROOM (MASTER BEDROOM)

Max scans over the room, noting Eliza's personal effects. He stares at the bed for a couple seconds then steps out.

LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Max plops onto the couch after shutting off the kitchen lights. He sits in the darkness, listening to the faint whispers of his father, mother, Eliza. They keep him up through the night.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Max and Mikey, both dressed in black, stand beside each other as a casket is being lowered into the ground.

A few of Eliza's FRIENDS and COWORKERS are in attendance.

Each of them say their piece then try to comfort Mikey. He's clearly uncomfortable. Him and Max might as well be on their own islands.

Max is forced to shake a few hands, receive condolences, say hellos and goodbyes. They seem to notice his coldness.. and he notices them noticing. This only makes him withdraw more.

Max's gaze is locked on Eliza's tombstone. It has her picture on it, her name above and dates below. It travels to his mother's, his father's. The many tombstones spread out across the cemetery. One in particular catches his eye. The name reads *Max Ridley*. It says nothing else. In his peripheral he can see James again. He ignores him. He can't ignore the faint cries of the dead. The cries blend into the caws of a crow.

Before he knows it, everyone else has gone. Only he and Mikey stand amongst the tombstones. Mikey is in a state between tears and not. He starts to wander off and Max takes that as their cue to go home. Max watches him momentarily before following after.

INT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME - DAY

Mikey, already dressed for school, his backpack in hand, stops at the end of the hallway. He studies Max sleeping on the couch with a curious look. Max might as well be a stranger.

JUMP CUT TO:

Max jolts awake from a nightmare. His eyes slowly find the clock on the opposite wall. Realizing the time, he gets up and hurries over to Mikey's room.

MAX

Hey, time for school.

Mikey's bed is empty, undone.

MAX (CONT'D)

Mikey?

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE - DAY

Max pulls up to the school to see Mikey standing with his friend, CHESTER. A little taller than Mikey, the sandy haired kid (9) throws his arm around Mikey, doing his best to cheer him up. Max lets out an annoyed, but relieved sigh.

A couple cars over, ALLIE (ALLISON) OAKLEY, a thirty-something Texas-bred golden haired woman stares at him with piercing green eyes. As if she's found something she lost a long time ago. She's his opposite: bright and lively. Her thoughts are interrupted as Max pulls away.

ABBY (O.S.)

Mom!

Allie snaps out of it and gives her full attention to ABBY, her "mini-me." A head-strong, unapologetic eight year old.

ALLIE

Hey don't forget after school you have a dentist appointment. Don't be late.

ABBY

I knooow, you told me already.

ALLIE

(plays back)

Well, I'm telling you again.
C'mere.

Allie leans over to kiss the top of Abby's head.

ABBY

Moom!!

ALLIE

Don't get fussy with me. Love you,
have a good day at school.

ABBY

Love you too!

Abby hurries out the car and towards her classroom.

ALLIE

Don't be late, missy!

Allie watches her go until she's out of sight. She waits another moment before pulling away, back in her thoughts.

EXT. STREETS - INT. HANDLER'S CAR - DAY

Max enters the passenger seat of a 1968 Ford Mustang GT.

In the driver seat sits Max's new HANDLER (late 30s), rough around the edges. Max notes the knife, branded *USMC*, tattooed on his left inner forearm.

HANDLER

You're a hard man to get a hold of.

MAX

.. Good.

HANDLER

(grins)

Not if you want to keep getting paid.

He puts out his hand for Max to shake it.

HANDLER (CONT'D)

Jay--

MAX

No names.

The Handler looks down at his unshaken hand then moves it away as he gives an annoyed chuckle.

HANDLER

I already know yours.

MAX

So forget it.

The handler shifts in his seat, giving another half chuckle. *The balls on this guy.*

HANDLER

You're one of those. I get it.

The Handler offers up a manila envelope to Max. Max accepts it. He opens it and pulls out a chunky stack of money, his face questioning why.

HANDLER (CONT'D)

Mister Stanton understands how difficult what he asked you to do was.. given your history together. Call it a bonus. Loyalty is king.

Max nods. He slides the money into his coat then removes the file from the manila envelope, reading up on his next target.

HANDLER (CONT'D)
(whistles)
It's a beautiful car.

Max looks up at the Handler, sees that he's eyeing his Chevelle.

MAX
.. Thanks.

HANDLER
I'll race ya for it.

Max doesn't respond.

INT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - HALLWAY - DAY

The complex is old and grungy, on the edge of town. Max makes his way down the barely lit hallway (half the lights hanging overhead seem to have either been busted or just remain unchanged).

His eyes read off each of the numbers on the doors as he passes them.

Until finally, he reaches his number: 22

Max looks both ways down the hall for any witnesses before reaching into his coat and pulling out his KILLING MASK. A black cloth mask not unlike a balaclava with a splash of white on the face that is reminiscent of a skull. Like the inverse of a Rorschach test.

He places it on, now in grim reaper mode.

He notes the "Eviction" notice taped to the apartment door. He proceeds to quietly and swiftly break the lock. He takes one last look around before slipping into the apartment and gently shutting the door behind him. As he does, he removes his silenced gun from inside his coat.

INT. APARTMENT 22

The apartment is cramped. The windows are blacked out with duct tape, making it almost totally dark, with little light slipping through uneven covered sections. The place is a mess.

Max accidentally kicks empty pill bottles. Opioids. Antidepressants.

Max's eyes begin adjusting to the dark as he looks around, not seeing any activity. A framed photograph on a nearby shelf catches his eye.

The picture is of the TARGET (a MAN) in the desert along with fellow soldiers, his Army buddies, in the shit together. For a flashing moment, Max sees himself in place of the Target and the soldiers replaced by different soldiers, his own buddies. The guys he fought with. The guys he survived with.

JOHN (O.S.)

Are you one of them?

CLICK. A revolver is cocked behind Max. He stiffens up.

MAX

(beat)

One of them?

JOHN

Turn around. Slow.. Lemme see your face.

Max does. He doesn't raise his hands, keeping them down at his side instead, trying to conceal his gun.

Max finds the shadow in the dark that he missed before.

JOHN (the Target) (30s), gaunt and strung out, sits on the couch, practically being swallowed by it. His revolver aimed at Max, but with little effort. His knee helps support it.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Lemme see your other face.

Max slowly pulls off the mask from his face with his free hand.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I don't recognize you.

MAX

Should you?

JOHN

I've been seeing them a lot these days.

Max seems to understand exactly what he means.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I don't remember killing you.

MAX
You didn't.

JOHN
.. Are you alive or dead?

MAX
Alive.

John loosens his grip on his hand cannon.

JOHN
.. You believe in ghosts?

MAX
No.. Not particularly.. I don't know.

JOHN
I didn't used to. Now they won't leave me alone.

MAX
Who are they?

JOHN
People I..
(a whispery cry for help)
They won't go away.

MAX
Maybe they want something from you.
Isn't that what they say?

JOHN
They?

MAX
.. It's just something people say..
Are they.. vengeful?

JOHN
I'm not sure. They don't say anything. They just stare at me.

Max looks to John's right to see James Fraser sitting near him, staring back at him with dead eyes.

MAX
Yeah, I know what you mean.

JOHN
When I was out there, was nothing but sand for miles. It was quiet.

John swallows, his voice breaking.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 (shaking)
 There's so much noise here.. I
 just.. I'm so fucking tired, man. I
 just want to sleep again. Just one
 more time. I--I just..

John cries.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 .. I'm so tired.

MAX
 (beat)
 I can help you.

JOHN
 You can?

Max nods.

It takes John a moment to process what Max means. Once he understands, he accepts it. He moves his revolver to his side, letting his hand drop to the couch. What strength it took to raise that thing is now gone.

Max quickly raises his suppressed gun and fires three shots into John

CLACK CLACK CLACK

two in the chest then one in the head.

He watches him for any movement. Nothing. Max looks down at the smoking gun in his hand then back at John with a look of self doubt.

Max glances at the framed photograph one more time before leaving.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

Max pulls up to the school to find a line of cars. He looks around for some parking, parks then walks over.

ALLIE (O.S.)
 Max? Max Ridley?

Max turns around to see Allie standing outside her car. It takes Max a moment to adjust his eyes as if stepping out into blinding sunlight.

ALLIE (CONT'D)
It's really you..

MAX
(without thinking)
Allie Cat.

Allie is caught off guard, not having been called that pet nickname in years.

ALLIE
Uh--

Allie gives a nervous laugh.

Max can't help but to give a slight smile, a little nervous suddenly.

MAX
Muscle memory..

Allie tries to hold back a smile, but is failing.

ALLIE
I saw you in the morning, but I thought surely I need to get my eyes checked. When did you get back?

MAX
Couple days ago.

ALLIE
You here for little Mikey?

Max's smile fades.

MAX
.. And to bury my sister.

ALLIE
(realizes)
The accident the other day.. That was Eliz--?

Allie puts her hands up to her face and shakes her head.

ALLIE (CONT'D)
(regretful)
Oh no, I'm so sorry, Max.

A brief silence.

ALLIE (CONT'D)

Gosh, I haven't seen you in something like..

MAX

.. Ten years..

ALLIE

Ten years.. It's.. it's nice to see you. I'm sorry it has to be under these circumstances.

MAX

(polite)

You don't have to keep apologizing. You didn't kill her.

Allie doesn't know how to respond to that. The school bell saves the day. Not long after it rings kids come running out.

Mikey walks out with his friend Chester. They stop and see Max staring at them.

CHESTER

Who is that guy? You know him?

MIKEY

Yeah. He's my mom's brother.

CHESTER

Ohhh.

MIKEY

Can I walk with you?

CHESTER

Yeah. You wanna come over? We can finish that level.

MIKEY

Yeah, okay.

Mike and Chester start walking. Max seems disappointed.

ALLIE

You haven't seen him since he was born?

MAX

(nods)

.. Yeah.

ALLIE

You have to give him a chance to know you. Kids get pretty set in their ways.. They learn it from the adults.

Abby runs up to them.

ALLIE (CONT'D)

(shows watch)
Pushing it close young lady.

ABBY

You could have scheduled it earlier.

ALLIE

Yeah, right, so you can miss class?

Abby shrugs.

ALLIE (CONT'D)

Hey, this is my friend, Max. He's Mikey's uncle.

ABBY

Hi, Mikey's uncle.

MAX

(awkward)
Hi.

ALLIE

I gotta go, but.. maybe we can catch up soon?

MAX

(nods)
Yeah, sure.

ALLIE

See ya later.

ABBY

Alligator!

Allie smiles and Max gives a controlled, polite smile back. Allie ushers Abby into their car.

ALLIE

C'mon, someone's got a cleaning to do.

Abby can be heard complaining as Allie drives off. Max watches them go. He drops the polite smile in exchange for an anxious look.

INT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Max sits at the kitchen table. A couple bags of fast food in front of him. He perks up as he hears a key turning the front door lock.

Mikey comes in, backpack slung around one shoulder. He shuts the door then spots Max.

MAX
Come here a second.

Mikey walks over to him, tail tucked behind.

MAX (CONT'D)
Why'd you leave like that? Where have you been?

MIKEY
At Chester's.

MAX
Who's Chester?

MIKEY
My friend. I always walk home with him.

MAX
He live around here?

MIKEY
His house is on the way.

MAX
(thinks)
Look.. You have to tell me these things. Like where you are, when you're going to be home.

MIKEY
Why?

MAX
Because I'm responsible for you.

MIKEY
Why?

MAX

.. You know why.

MIKEY

(teary eyed)

I don't even know you.

MAX

(pause)

.. Like it or not, I'm all you've got. I didn't ask for this either, you know.

(beat)

I got you some food.

Mikey wipes away tears. Max clearly doesn't know what to do.

MAX (CONT'D)

Why don't you go wash up.

Max thinks to himself while Mikey goes to wash his hands and face. He proceeds to empty the bags, setting down a couple burgers and sets of fries.

MAX (CONT'D)

Your soda's in the fridge. Wasn't sure what to get you.

Mikey digs into the fridge, sipping his soda with distaste.

MIKEY

Can you get me Coke next time?

MAX

Not a Dr.Pepper guy?

MIKEY

Tastes like medicine.

Mikey sits down at the table, setting down the drink. He unwraps his burger then stops before taking a bite.

MAX

What now?

MIKEY

There's onions.

MAX

You don't like onions either?

Mikey pouts.

MAX (CONT'D)
I'm not a mind reader.

MIKEY
You could ask.

MAX
When? Before or after Chester's?

Mikey shrugs then stares down at his burger.

MAX (CONT'D)
Just take out the onion.

Mikey begrudgingly does as he's told. He pulls the rings of onions out from his burger then takes a bite.

MIKEY
(low)
Still tastes like onions..

Max is visibly frustrated, but he keeps his mouth shut.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Max sits on the edge of Eliza's bed, half-filled whiskey glass in hand. He sips it.

MAX
You have any kids, James?

JAMES (O.S.)
Two. A son and daughter.

Max turns to see James standing some distance away. James looks out the window, watching for their target.

We're in a **memory**.

MAX
You ever see them?

JAMES
Not for a while. Hard to get around between jobs.

Max sips more of his whiskey.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Truth be told.. Their mother didn't much like having me around. Kids are like clay. You can mold them to be in your image..
(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

or something else entirely.. She preferred the second option.. Why? You planning on having a few of your own?

MAX

Not particularly.

JAMES

They're a fickle thing. If you're not there they either crumble under the weight of what they imagine to be your expectations of them.. or they learn to live without you.

There's a bitter resign to the end of that sentence. Something outside catches James' eye.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Eyes up. Here comes our mark.

Max downs the rest of the whiskey in his glass. He's back in Eliza's room. He looks over at the bottle beside the bed.

EXT. MIKEY'S BEDROOM

Max sneakily pokes his head in to check on a sleeping Mikey. He watches him a little longer then plops himself onto the living room couch.

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Mikey sits, staring down at his desk. His desk is in the middle of the class, but he's somewhere else entirely.

His teacher, MRS. NATASHA HIGHSMITH (40s), stands in front teaching her American history lesson.

Mikey continues to stare off, thinking of his mom.

INT. ELIZA'S CAR - MOVING - DAY (FLASHBACK)

ELIZA, glowing under the sun's gaze, drives, with her dark long hair straightened and her brown eyes behind big round sunglasses.

Mikey sits behind her, kicking the back of her seat.

ELIZA

Mikey, stop kicking.

He doesn't. Eliza looks at him through the rearview mirror.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
Hey, what'd I say about kicking my
seat?

Mikey stops for a moment then does it again. He chuckles.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
Okay, that's it. You asked for it.

Eliza pulls over by the sidewalk, removes her sunglasses and gets out of the car, stomping towards the back. Mikey is suddenly afraid, anticipating the worst possible punishment.

Eliza swings open his door and now he's wide-eyed.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
You think that's funny? I'll give
you something to laugh about!

Eliza springs forward, tickling Mikey. It's so unexpected he yelps, but his fear quickly turns to joy as he can't help but laugh. His laugh is infectious, making her join in.

INT. MIKEY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Mikey has just been tucked into bed and is starting to doze off. Eliza sits at his bedside, resting her head near him.

ELIZA
Somebody's birthday is next week.
What are we gonna do about that?

MIKEY
(shrugs)
I don't know.

ELIZA
You don't?

Mikey smiles as he struggles to keep his eyes open.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
Mikey--

Mikey is slipping into sleep.

ELIZA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Mikey--

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - INT. CLASSROOM (PRESENT)

MRS. HIGHSMITH (O.S.)

Mikey.

Mikey finally snaps out of his daze and looks up at his teacher through his tears. He wipes his face.

INT. COUNSELOR'S OFFICE

Mikey, his face a little puffy and red, sits across from the school COUNSELOR.

COUNSELOR

You want to talk about what's bothering you?

Mikey stares down at the ground, shrugs.

INT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Max answers the landline house phone near the couch.

MAX

Hello?

MRS. HIGHSMITH (V.O.)

Hi, is this Mister Ridley? Mikey's uncle, right?

MAX

This is him. Something happen?

MRS. HIGHSMITH (V.O.)

Oh, no, I was just hoping we could speak about Mikey.

MAX

.. Yeah, sure.

Max waits for her to continue.

MRS. HIGHSMITH (V.O.)

In person, I mean.

MAX

Oh.. Yeah. I'll be right over.

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - INT. CLASSROOM

Max stands in Mikey's classroom, looking at the various posters on the walls, the half-erased lesson on the whiteboard. The sound of children laughing and playing fills the classroom behind him then suddenly stops.

MRS. HIGHSMITH
Mister Ridley. Thank you for coming.

Max turns to meet her. He shakes her hand.

MAX
Miss..

MRS. HIGHSMITH
Mrs. Highsmith, but Natasha's fine. First off, I wanted to give my condolences. I imagine Mikey isn't the only one going through hard times right now.

MAX
(nods)
Yeah, thanks.

MRS. HIGHSMITH
Mikey's really going through it and I don't blame him, but he's a bright kid and quite capable. I worry he'll fall too far behind and end up having to repeat the year. He's having difficulty focusing. He's behind on turning in homework. Says he has no one to help him with it. Says he feels sick.. from eating the same fast food every day.

MAX
(pause)
I, uh.. I have no idea what I'm doing.

MRS. HIGHSMITH
(smiles)
I appreciate your honesty. I gather you haven't spent a lot of time with him.. or any kids for that matter.

Max shakes his head "no".

MRS. HIGHSMITH (CONT'D)

He needs guidance..

(beat)

Picture him as a bowling ball being thrown down a lane.. You could throw him a hundred times and hit gutter every time. If the guard rails were up, he's guaranteed to hit at lease one pin. And just one could make a difference.

MAX

.. Be the guard rails.

MRS. HIGHSMITH

(nods)

You just need to be one half of the rails. We'll take care of the other half.

Max processes this and nods again.

MAX

Thank you.

MRS. HIGHSMITH

If you push yourself, so will he.

Max accepts her words as truth. Something to ponder.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Max goes for his daily run. As he jogs towards the park, he notices Allie sitting at a bench, watching Abby play at the playground. She sees him. Smiles and waves. He smiles back.

She motions for him to come over. Against his better judgment, he does. She's a magnet.

ALLIE

Hey, you.

MAX

Morning.

ALLIE

Keeping in shape, I see.

MAX

I try to.

ALLIE

Why don't you sit a while? You owe me a catch up session, member?

MAX

(beat)

I suppose I do.

Max takes a seat beside Allie.

ALLIE

What are you doing for work?

MAX

(thinks)

Private security. Not really qualified to do much else.

(beat)

It pays well.. and I don't work much. But, sometimes it requires me to go out of town on short notice.

ALLIE

Anyone famous or just rich folk?

MAX

(shakes head)

Just regular people. I don't really get to know them..

ALLIE

Each one's just a job, huh?

MAX

.. Yeah.. What about you?

ALLIE

I work down at the courthouse. Answering phones, typing up memos, that sort of thing. I'd like to try my hand doing something else though.

MAX

Like what?

ALLIE

Well, I majored in criminal psychology.

MAX

Really? FBI? CIA?

ALLIE

Actually, I'm more interested in helping people than locking them away. Maybe a social worker. It's tough to make a big career change with the kid.

MAX

And.. her father?

ALLIE

Not in the picture.

(to Abby)

Abby! Get off those swings! You know better.

(back to Max)

Damn swings are busted. That playground is falling apart, but it's the only one around here. I really should stop letting her play on that deathtrap.

Allie studies Max as he watches Abby play with her friends.

ALLIE (CONT'D)

Boy, you sure give off real "man with no name" energy.

MAX

I'm not exactly a boots and spurs kind of guy.

ALLIE

(wry smile)

I just mean you're a lot quieter than I remember.

MAX

(beat)

.. Can I ask you something?

ALLIE

What's on your mind?

MAX

.. I don't know how I'm supposed to talk to this kid. How do I.. connect with him?

ALLIE

It won't happen overnight. You just have to let him in.

(MORE)

ALLIE (CONT'D)

Let him learn he can trust you,
confide in you and.. he'll grow to
love you because of it.

MAX

You make it sound easy.

ALLIE

(shakes head)

Oh, it's not. But you'll get the
hang of it eventually, "Uncle Max."

Max tries to hold up a smile as Allie teases. Concern and
doubt behind it.

ALLIE (CONT'D)

Just be there for him. That's all
he needs right now.

MAX

He needs his mother.

ALLIE

Yes, but instead he's got you.

Max considers her words.

MAX

(nervous)

Hey, uh, speaking of Mikey. His
birthday is coming up, so I thought
I'd.. throw him a party or
something. Was wondering if Abby
might want to come?

ALLIE

Look at you, already making plans.
When is it?

MAX

Next Saturday.

ALLIE

Well, I might need a babysitter
that day so that just might work
out.

Max looks at her skeptically.

ALLIE (CONT'D)

Got a date.

MAX
 (can't find the words)
 .. Oh.

ALLIE
 (squints)
 Is that a hint of jealousy I hear?
 I'm not the same girl you knew.

MAX
 (beat)
 No, you're somehow more beautiful
 than I remember.

Allie tries to hold back a smile.

ALLIE
 Well, you've still got that ol' Max
 Ridley charm.

MAX
 (stands up)
 See you around.. and.. thank you.

Allie nods then watches him resume his jog. Her smile fades.

INT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Max sits at the kitchen table wearing his black gloves. A glass of whiskey and a near finished bottle to the side.

He unrolls his weapon cleaning kit and places his Browning Buck Mark .22 on it. First, he removes the magazine, ensuring it's empty. Then, he turns off the safety so he can check the chamber. Clear. He continues to field strip the gun until all of the pieces lay out in front of him.

Max proceeds to spray then wipe down each of the pieces.

The next door neighbor's dog is barking up a storm, prompting Max to look up towards the window. Sitting near it, opposite of Max, is dead James Fraser. Blood seeps through his shirt. He stares back at Max with those dead eyes.

Max turns his attention back to cleaning his gun, now working on the barrel. He tries his best to ignore James.

The barking grows louder, clearly adding to Max's irritation. He has to drink down what's left in his glass just to stay present.

Max moves on to the frame, wiping it thoroughly.

James cackles a taunting laugh.

MAX
(low)
Bury it.

The barking seems to have gotten even louder. As does James' cackling.

Max reaches for the whiskey bottle and just when he's about to pour what's left into his glass, instead downs the rest straight from the source. He slams it down onto the table, the collective noise starting to get to him.

JAMES (O.S.)
A little liquid courage.

Max finishes putting his gun back together.

MAX
(hushed)
I'm not afraid of you.

James cackles again as Max loads a bullet into his gun.

BANG!

Max fires the single bullet towards James, who is no longer there. Instead, the bullet shatters the whiskey bottle and continues out the window.

Realizing what he's just done, Max drops his gun onto the table. It's suddenly quiet.. but it's not long until the neighbor's dog starts barking again.

Max quickly rolls his cleaning kit back up then pockets his gun inside his coat as he stands up.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Max pushes an empty shopping cart down an aisle. His head swings left to right as he tries to figure out what to get.

Max turns the corner and ends up in the booze aisle. He stares at a bottle of whiskey, contemplating. He makes his decision, grabbing two bottles and placing them into the cart. He continues into a new aisle.

CUT TO:

Max, still slightly drunk, is being rung up at checkout. His bottles of whiskey, spaghetti, a pound of beef, a jar of marinara sauce, cereal, milk, other quick to make things like mac & cheese.

CASHIER
Beautiful day today.

MAX
.. Is it?

Max, straight faced, looks up at the young cashier. She smiles at him. He looks away to pay.

CASHIER
Depends on how you look at it.

MAX
How do you look at it?

CASHIER
The way my mom taught me.

Max finishes paying and finally looks back up at her again.

CASHIER (CONT'D)
Every day I'm alive is a beautiful day.

Her pureness is too much. Max, with a look of shame, grabs his grocery bags and leaves.

MAX
Thanks.

The cashier watches Max go then smiles towards the next customer.

INT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Max cooks beef on the stove top, breaking it up and mixing it around as it browns. Next to it is a pot of cooked spaghetti.

Max turns his head when he hears a key turn in the lock and Mikey walks in. He shuts the door behind him, looking over at Max quizzically.

MIKEY
Are you.. cooking?

MAX
What's it look like, wise guy?

Mikey smirks at that.

MAX (CONT'D)
Careful what you wish for. Go wash
up.

As Mikey leaves for the bathroom, Max gives the slightest of smiles. He finishes with the meat, proceeding to mix it with the spaghetti then tossing in the marinara sauce.

Mikey sits at the table as Max finishes mixing everything together. He notices the shattered bottle at the other end then the hole in the window.

Max serves two plates then sets them down on the table, one in front of Mikey. He takes his seat.

MIKEY
What happened?

Max realizes he means the broken glass, having forgotten about it.

MAX
Oh, nothing. Just an accident. I
forgot to clean it up.

Max gets up and grabs the broom from the corner. Mikey starts to dig into his food, watching Max sweep up the pieces of glass off the ground.

MAX (CONT'D)
How was school?

MIKEY
It was okay, I guess.

MAX
And the spaghetti?

Max collects the broken bottle and pieces from the table.

MIKEY
(joking)
It's okay, I guess.

Max tosses everything into the trash, through a little door near the corner (that reaches into the garage). He puts the broom back into the corner then joins Mikey at the table.

MAX
I didn't know you were going to
clown school.

Mikey smirks again.

MIKEY

It's good. Taste like mom's.

MAX

Hers was better. I learned enough to survive, but your mom really strived to be the best at everything she did.

This seems to make Mikey proud.

CUT TO:

Their empty plates have been pushed to the side. In front of Mikey is a 4th grade math text book as well as his homework. Max still sits at his side.

MIKEY

Why do I even need math? Who uses math? Do you?

MAX

Yup.

MIKEY

When?

MAX

Every day.

Mikey sighs.

MAX (CONT'D)

Okay look, just like it says here: a perfect L is 90 degrees. Anything more is obtuse and anything less is acute.

MIKEY

I know, but I keep mixing them up.

MAX

(beat)

Think of it like this.. Someone who is obtuse has difficulty understanding things. They're not precise in what they do. They're.. well, they're kind of stupid. While someone who is acute is more perceptive. The opposite. Obtuse angles take up all this space.

(MORE)

MAX (CONT'D)
Acute angles only take what they
need.

Max points to the obtuse and acute angles on the homework
sheet as he explains.

Mikey looks over the text book then up at Max. He looks more
confused than before.

MAX (CONT'D)
.. Alright. Let's just keep
practicing. You'll get it
eventually.

HONK HONK

EXT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME - DAY

Max steps outside and walks over to Allie's car at the curb.

ABBY
Hi!

MAX
Hey. Thanks for coming.

ALLIE
You're doing me the favor.

MAX
Actually, I'm just glad somebody
showed up.

ALLIE
Just us?

MAX
He invited his whole class, but so
far nothing.

ALLIE
Poor kid. I'm sure some of the
boys'll show up any minute. I have
to go, but you behave with mister
Ridley, okay missy?

ABBY
I know.

ALLIE
Oh, you know? Just listen, ya lil'
gremlin.

Allie kisses Abby on the head.

ALLIE (CONT'D)
Have fun. I'll see you later.

Abby hugs her before exiting the car with a brightly colored giftbag in hand. Allie watches as Abby walks side by side with Max back inside. She takes off with a worried look.

INT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME - KITCHEN

MAX
Look who's here.

Mikey, sitting at the kitchen table with a bummed out look, turns to see Abby.

MAX (CONT'D)
This is my friend's daughter, Abby.
She's a--

ABBY
Third grader.

MIKEY
Oh, you're in mister Wenders'
class?

ABBY
Yup. This is for you. Happy
birthday!

Mikey accepts the giftbag.

MIKEY
Thanks.

Abby takes a seat near him at the table.

ABBY
Where's everybody at?

Mikey shrugs, disappointed.

MAX
What about your friend?

MIKEY
Chester? He's visiting his grandma
so he can't come.

MAX
.. Oh..

The three sit there in awkward silence. Max watches Mikey, trying to figure out the next move.

MAX (CONT'D)
 Alright, let's go.

Mikey and Abby look up.

INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE - MOVING - DAY

Max drives with Mikey in the passenger seat and Abby poking in from the backseat.

MIKEY
 Where are we going?

MAX
 You'll see. Somewhere your mom and I used to go with our parents.
 (to Abby)
 Your mom, too.

ABBY
 Hey, mister Ridley?

Max makes eye contact through his rearview mirror.

ABBY (CONT'D)
 How fast can this baby go?

Max says nothing, then after a moment starts to rev up, accelerating faster. He gently pushes Abby back, hand to forehead.

Mikey is starting to break out of his slump. If even just a little. He turns to see Max start to crack a smile.

Max speeds up more as Abby excitedly pokes her head in again.

ABBY (CONT'D)
 Wooooooooo!!

Max gently pushes her back again, prompting Mikey to laugh at the silliness of it all.

EXT. BOWLING ALLEY - DAY

Max and the kids exit his car.

MAX
 Don't tell your mom we did that.

Abby zips her mouth shut.

MIKEY

Bowling?

MAX

Yeah. Your mom ever bring you here?

MIKEY

No, but I remember she said she sucks at bowling.

MAX

(slight smile)
.. She did.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY

Mikey and Abby are sitting at the first lane.

ABBY

Did mister Wenders always speak German to you guys too? How did you understand him for a whole year?

MIKEY

No one did. We just pretended. We used to make up translations.

Max watches them share a laugh, glad to see them getting along. The BOWLING CLERK slaps down three pairs of bowling shoes on the counter in front of them. Max grabs them and heads back over to the kids.

Max hands each of them a pair.

ABBY

Clown shoes?

MAX

No, but you will feel funny wearing them.

The three swap their own shoes for the clown shoes.

Mikey bowls first, straight gutter. He bowls again, gutter. He walks back to his seat, embarrassed. Max watches him as Abby takes her first turn.

Abby hits gutter with the first ball then knocks down a few pins with her second.

ABBY

Yes! I got some!

Max holds out his hand. She jumps up to high five him.

MAX

Your mom was pretty good too. She used to come with us all the time.

ABBY

Really? I always wanted to come here.

MAX

Your first time too?

ABBY

My mom's always busy working.

Max gives a look of acknowledgement then gets up for his turn. He takes a moment to line up his shot then bowls a strike.

ABBY (CONT'D)

What!?

MIKEY

How'd you do that?

MAX

Math.

MIKEY

(groans)

Now I know why mom didn't like this place.

MAX

Coming here was never about winning or losing.

MIKEY

Easy for you to say.

ABBY

So what's it about then?

Max looks two lanes over. He sees remnants of a memory. Him and Eliza, nine and seven again. With their mom and dad. He only sees the backs of their heads.

MAX

It was about spending time together. As a family.

Max looks over to see the memory has faded.

Mikey gets up to bowl again. Two more gutter balls. He sits back down, more frustrated.

MAX (CONT'D)
You guys hungry?

ABBY
Starving!

CUT TO:

The kids sit at a table. Abby munches on her nachos. Max joins them, setting down two hot dogs. One is a chili cheese dog. It seems to grab Mikey's attention. Max notices.

MAX
Ten years old and you've never had
a chili dog.

MIKEY
How was I supposed to know they
were a thing?

Max swaps Mikey's plain dog with his.

MAX
Try it.

Mikey takes a bite, slowly chews then swallows before looking back up at Max in wonderment. Max, amused, grabs the plain dog as he stands back up.

MAX (CONT'D)
I'll be right back. Another?

Mikey enthusiastically nods.

Max approaches the counter.

MAX (CONT'D)
Can you make this a chili dog? And
two more.
(beat)
Also..

Max slides a twenty dollar bill onto the counter.

Mikey has downed his chili dog, hungry for another. Abby continues munching on her nachos, getting to the end of them.

Max sits back down with three chili dogs. Mikey grabs his and quickly digs in. He's halfway through it when the intercom interrupts him.

INTERCOM

*Hey, everybody! Today is a special
daaay.. cause weee have a birthday!*

Mikey sets the chili dog down, looking to Max like *what have you done?*

INTERCOM (CONT'D)

*Please join us in singing happy
birthday to Mikey Ridley on his
tenth birthday!*

Mikey looks down, seemingly embarrassed, as the clerk on the intercom and the other families in the building sing happy birthday to him. Abby and Max join in.

EVERYONE

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU! HAPPY
BIRTHDAY DEAR MI-KEY! HAPPY
BIRTHDAY TO YOU!

Mikey has come around by the end of the singing. He can't help but smile.

MAX

One more game before we go?

Mikey's face drops.

CUT TO:

Mikey grabs a bowling ball as Max messes with the game settings. Just before Mikey is about to go, the bumper rails come up. He turns to Max, recognizing his intentions. He shoots his shot, knocking down a few pins then throws his fists up in the air in victory.

INT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mikey and Abby sit on each side of Max, all three slumped into the couch. Mikey holds his new action figure (Abby's gift). They're looking through an old photo album, laughing and asking questions as Max points out the people in each picture. There are pictures of him and Eliza as kids, different ages. Of their parents. A German Shepherd.

ABBY

Hey, whose dog? She's so cute!

MAX

Yeah, his name was Conan. We must have had him a good fifteen years.

ABBY

Dang, he was an old boy. An old good boy.

MAX

That he was.

ABBY

Wait, is that my mom??

Abby points out a photo of teenage Allie and Max.

MAX

Sure is.

ABBY

Wait, were you guys boyfriend and girlfriend??

MAX

.. Yeah, once upon a time. We were pretty close.. At least until I left for the Army.

DING DONG

ABBY

Mom!

Abby runs to the front door. Max sets down the photo album and gets up. A picture of Eliza has grabbed Mikey's attention. He stares down at it.

Abby lets Allie inside then gives her a big hug.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Hi, mom!

ALLIE

Hey. What did I say about answering the door?

ABBY

Mmmm.. not to?

ALLIE

Mmhmm.

(sees Max)

Hey, how'd it go?

MAX
Good, I think.

ABBY
We went bowling!

ALLIE
You did? At the old bowling alley?

MAX
Yeah. Surprised it's still there.

Allie walks over to Mikey on the couch.

ALLIE
Hi, Mikey. Happy birthday!

MIKEY
Thank you.

ALLIE
Hope you had fun.

Mikey shyly smiles.

Allie notices the picture of her and Max. A look of recognition. She turns to Max.

ALLIE (CONT'D)
Trip down memory lane?

MAX
Oh.. yeah.. How was your date?

ALLIE
Oh God, terrible. I'll have to tell you about it another time.

MAX
(blurts out)
You know my number.. If you do want to talk..

Allie isn't sure what to say, suddenly off guard.

MAX (CONT'D)
Thanks again for bringing Abby by.

ALLIE
Of course. Glad you guys had fun. Well, time to go. Say bye, Abby.

Abby hugs Mikey.

ABBY
See ya later.

MIKEY
Bye.

Mikey waves goodbye at Allie. She waves back, smiling.
Abby runs into Max.

ABBY
Bye, mister Ridley.

Abby runs out. Allie turns to Max. There's tension in the air.

ALLIE
I should probably run after her.
Thanks again.

Max, looking a little self conscious, politely nods.

MAX
Goodnight.

ALLIE
.. Goodnight.

Max watches her go, a yearning in his eyes.

Mikey sneaks up on him from behind.

MIKEY
Uncle Max?

Max turns to face him as he shuts the door. Mikey stares up at him, unsure how to put his thoughts into words. Instead, he hugs him. Max is surprised, looking like he's never hugged someone before.

INT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Max is washing his face in the bathroom sink when he hears a soft crying. He quickly dries his face then pokes his head into Mikey's bedroom. He's fast asleep.

Max wanders back into the living room and towards the kitchen which seems to be the source of the crying. A woman's.

CRYING WOMAN (O.S.)
Please.. I didn't see anything..

Max tenses up as he nears the kitchen.

CRYING WOMAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I won't tell anyone, I swear.
Please..

Max stares into the darkness, making out a shape of a woman on her knees--when the landline phone rings nearby.

Max turns to look at the ringing phone then back at the dark shape. It's gone. He answers the phone.

MAX
Hello?

ALLIE
Hey, you. Everything okay?

MAX
Why wouldn't it be?

ALLIE
Oh, I don't know, you just sound..
Anyway.. I was pretty blindsided
when Abby asked me if you're her
father.

MAX
.. Shit, I'm sorry. Mikey brought
out the pictures, they started
asking questions.

ALLIE
Just made for an uncomfortable
conversation is all. If she hadn't
had such a fun day, I think she
would have cried herself to sleep.

MAX
I didn't mean to put you in that
position.

ALLIE
It's okay. It was bound to happen
sooner or later.

MAX
Well.. she's lucky to have you. One
day she'll grow up and recognize
you weren't just her mother, but
her father too.

ALLIE
(a proud smile)
.. Thanks.

MAX

So your date?

ALLIE

(sighs)

What a day. First, this guy picks me up in his sister's car. Says his is in the shop. Yeah, sure. Then, we go to the movies days after I specifically told him I can't do scary movies. What does he take me to watch? Dinner was a disaster too, but I won't bore you with the details of that hot mess.

MAX

So when's the next date?

ALLIE

(laughs)

Dear lord..

(beat)

It's been a long time since I've used the ol' landline. Been collecting dust. Really just have it for emergencies.

MAX

Reminds me of how we used to talk this way all the time.

ALLIE

Yeah.. My mom would get so mad that I'd hog up the phone for hours. She'd get worked up something fierce. Then by the time she finally had it to herself, you were sneaking into my window.

MAX

Ten years suddenly feels like twenty.

ALLIE

We were just kids then.. Although no cell phone is a little suspicious.

MAX

Is it?

ALLIE

Depends. Are you hiding something?

MAX

What would I be hiding?

ALLIE

A wife, a girlfriend.. Both.. Where the bodies are.

MAX

(pause)

The what?

ALLIE

.. I'm just jestin'..

(beat)

How're things with Mikey?

MAX

Better.. I think he's starting to warm up to me.

ALLIE

Sounds like progress. And how're you?

MAX

What do you mean?

ALLIE

I mean, how are **you**?

MAX

.. I'm fine.

ALLIE

It's okay if you're having a tough time. I know how close you used to be with your sister.

MAX

I try not to think about it much.

ALLIE

(beat)

.. You can hide from the pain, but eventually it'll find you.. It always has a way of creeping up when you least suspect.. Sometimes it helps to talk about it. I like to visit my parents. It's.. well, it's not the same as talking to a live person, but.. it's a good way to unburden yourself. If even just a little.

Max considers her words.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Max, hands in his coat pocket, walks up to Eliza's tombstone. He stares at the picture of her.

He can't seem to find the words. He continues to stare down at the tombstone for a bit longer then turns away. He walks back towards his car.

INT. HANDLER'S MUSTANG - DAY

Max enters the passenger seat.

HANDLER

Afternoon.

Max nods. The Handler hands Max a manila envelope. Max removes it's contents, looking over the file. He pockets the stack of money inside his coat.

HANDLER (CONT'D)

Has to be done tonight.

MAX

It's Halloween.

HANDLER

I know what day it is.

MAX

Can't be pushed to the morning?

HANDLER

(shakes head)

Has to be tonight. Dirty too.

MAX

(beat)

Dirty?

HANDLER

You seen how Michael Myers does it?

Max squints. The Handler makes a stabbing motion.

HANDLER (CONT'D)

Dirty. Can you handle it or not?

MAX
(regains composure)
I can handle it.

EXT. ALLIE'S APARTMENT - HALLOWEEN NIGHT

Allie opens her front door to find Max standing there dressed in a more goofy-than-cool cowboy costume.

ALLIE
Oh lord, nooo! You took my cowboy
comment a bit too serious. You look
more Cowboy Curtis than Manco I
hate to say.

Allie laughs.

MAX
(squints)
But I got spurs.

Max shifts his feet around so the spurs sound off. Allie giggles.

ALLIE
Where's Mikey?

MAX
Oh, he's coming. He's in the--

Max turns towards his still-running car and motions towards Mikey. Mikey sees him and comes over.

MAX (CONT'D)
.. Allie, I'm sorry to do this to
you, but I got called into work. I
was wondering if you could take
him, start without me and I'll meet
up with you guys shortly.

ALLIE
(suspicious)
.. Oh.. Work, really?

MAX
Something came up. They just need
me to pop in for about an hour.
(assures)
It'll be quick.

ALLIE
 (disappointed)
 If you have to, I suppose it's
 alright.
 (to Mikey)
 Oh wow, look at you!

Mikey rocks a samurai costume.

Abby comes to the door to see what the commotion is. She's
 dressed as little red riding hood carrying a picnic basket.

ALLIE (CONT'D)
 Look who it is, Abby.

ABBY
 Hi, Mikey.

MIKEY
 Hey.

The kids fist bump.

MAX
 Great.
 (about to turn away, looks
 back)
 What are you supposed to be?

ALLIE
 Why, I'm the little old grandma the
 big bad wolf ate up.

MAX
 (pause)
 I like it.
 (beat)
 See you soon.

Max runs off to his car and takes off. Allie watches him go.

ALLIE
 Do you have a basket?

MIKEY
 No. My uncle forgot to buy me one.

ALLIE
 That's okay. I have an extra one
 for you.

MIKEY
 Sweet.

ABBY
I like your ninja sword.

MIKEY
(defensive)
It's called a katana.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Max finds a good place to pull over and park. He avoids street lights, finding darkness instead. He shuts off his car.

He removes his cowboy hat and places it on the passenger seat. He looks up at the target's house about a block up.

People are out in flocks already trick or treating. Max removes his killing mask from the glove compartment, places it on then exits the car.

He leaves his fake toy revolver and places his real (suppressed) gun into the holster.

CLINK CLINK CLINK CLINK CLINK CLINK

Max, zoned out, gets more than halfway to the house before he realizes he's still wearing his spurs. He moves forward with his mission anyway.

EXT. TARGET HOUSE

The house is moderately decorated for the occasion. Max enters the yard then quickly slips to the side where there's a gate. He finds it unlocked so he goes through.

Sounds of people growing closer to the house. Laughing. Yelling.

Max slowly walks past each of the windows as he makes his way to the back of the house, looking through each of them to track where his target is at all times. He gets to the back door and waits.

DING DONG

The doorbell goes off. Sound of shuffling inside as the Target walks over to answer his door and greet trick or treaters. While this is happening, Max tries the back door and finds it open.

INT. TARGET HOUSE

Max listens as the Target hands out candy. He steps carefully, creeping his way to the front of the house, passing framed pictures on the wall. On his way, he spots a knife block holder/rack. He reluctantly grabs the biggest one and keeps it close to his chest.

The Target shuts his door. Max stops about five feet away from him. His last step less quiet.

CLINK

The Target gets spooked by the sound of the spur. He turns to find Max there, knife in hand. Max quick draws his gun from it's holster. The Target freezes in place.

Max notices the nearby TV playing a horror movie.

With his aim never leaving his target, Max sets down the knife on the nearest piece of furniture. He grabs the TV remote and raises it to max volume. He sets the remote back down and picks up the knife again.

The Target almost isn't breathing. He can't speak. He tries, but he just can't.

Max tries to calm, but instead begins to breathe heavy.

TARGET

Wai--

CLACK

Max fires a shot into the Target's chest. He throws up the candy bowl into the air. Candy falls all over the living room floor. He flies backward against the corner between the front door and the connecting wall.

Once Max is sure he's dead, he walks over to the Target's body. He works up his strength and raises the kitchen knife. His breathing intensifies. He stabs the dead Target multiple times throughout his neck and body, making sure he's stabbed in the same place where he shot him as well. He digs out the bullet, pocketing it. He drops the knife after finishing.

DING DONG

Max looks up at the door, caught off guard.

His breathing slows as he regains some of his composure. He waits. The TV is still at full blast. Scary music bombarding the house.

DING DONG

KID (O.S.)
We know you're there!

KID #2 (O.S.)
(obnoxious)
Caaaaandy!!

DING DONG DING DONG DING DONG

Max sticks his gun back into the holster then reaches down to scoop up a few candies. He walks over to the door and creeps it open just enough to be able to give the kids the candy. They stare up at him then open their pillow cases.

KID & KID #2 - TOGETHER
TRICK OR TREAT!!

Max drops two candies into each of their pillow cases.

KID #2
Aw, cheap!

KID
Let's go down to Mrs. Waterston's street. They give full size candy bars!

KID #2
What are we doing here??

The two kids run off, eager. Max watches them go, looks around the block then exits. He shuts the door behind him.

The TV can be heard from outside, but grows faint as Max gets closer to his car.

INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE

Max falls into the driver seat, slamming the door shut.

In a panic, he frantically rips off his mask and hyperventilates. His hair and face drenched in sweat. His eyes wide and watery. Max grips the steering wheel with both hands as tight as he can. He grits his teeth, holding his breath and closing his eyes for a moment. Unable to hold his breath any longer, Max exhales big, releasing everything. He calms down just enough, but is still in a state of distress.

MAX
(mutters)
Bury it.. Bury it..
(MORE)

MAX (CONT'D)

(beat)

Get a fucking hold of yourself.

Max slaps himself across the face until he has a blank expression. He buries it all.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD

Max, cowboy hat back on his head and toy revolver back in it's holster, meets back up with Allie and the kids.

ALLIE

About time you showed up. Don't know how many more houses are left to hit.

MAX

How are you guys making out so far?

Mikey and Abby show off their almost-full candy baskets.

ALLIE

One might say "like bandits."

They laugh and head to the next house, passing other trick or treaters.

Max's chest tightens and face drops when he recognizes

A group of his past victims (faces not seen previously).

In the center of the group is James. They each wear their death wounds, rotting, shambling past like zombies.

ALLIE (CONT'D)

Hey.

Max turns to Allie. They approach their next house. The kids run to the door.

ALLIE (CONT'D)

You okay?

MAX

Yeah, yeah.

ALLIE

You seemed far away.

MAX

.. I'm here.

MIKEY AND ABBY - TOGETHER
TRICK OR TREAT!!

DREAM SEQUENCE

Max, on his back, looks up from inside a grave. Allie pokes her head out from above, looking down at him.

ALLIE
You seem far away..

MAX
I'm her--

The ground shifts beneath him. Max tries to grab hold of something, but there is only dirt. It runs between his fingers and he loses grip then

He falls. The grave becomes deeper and deeper. Allie becoming farther and farther away. As he travels down, seemingly towards Hell, Max sees flashing images of various people he's killed over the years. Deeper, deeper. It seems endless.

ALLIE (O.S.)
(distant echo)
You seem so far away.

Max struggles to speak as he continues deeper.

MAX
I'm-I'm.. here.

Skeletal hands emerge from all around. Shooting out of the sides of dirt, trying to grab at Max. He catches one of the hands, hanging from it. More hands emerge, grabbing his legs and yanking him down. The hand he's grabbed onto disintegrates and he falls into their clutches.. down into nothingness.

INT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Max wakes. Again in a cold sweat. He has momentary paralysis, his body stuck the way it was in his nightmare, as if the hands were still there grabbing him, holding him down.

A noise from the darkness

He looks up at the figure sitting in the corner of the room. James Fraser. Smoke rises from his chest.

JAMES
Once they slipped into their
dreams.. well, they never left..

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Max looks up at the door, awaiting more terrors.

MIKEY (O.S.)
Uncle Max?

Max breaths a huge sigh of relief.

MAX
Yeah?

MIKEY (O.S.)
I think I ate too much candy.

KITCHEN

Max pours Mikey some Pepto-Bismol. Mikey grabs the little cup.

MIKEY
Ew. Smells nasty.

MAX
You want to get better?

Mikey nods.

MAX (CONT'D)
Drink it.

Mikey does slowly. Max watches him. Mikey slams down the cup.

MIKEY
It taste even worse than it smells!

Max can't help but let out a chuckle.

MIKEY (CONT'D)
You think this is funny?

MAX
Just a little.. Sorry I missed some
of the trick or treating.

MIKEY
That's OK. Abby's cool.. for a
girl. And her mom is nice. Did you
and my mom used to get lots of
candy?

MAX

Yeah, sometimes.

(thinks)

Actually, there was this one time we got so much candy that our parents took it away from us.

MIKEY

What? Why??

MAX

They rightly assumed we'd eat it all and end up sick. Not unlike you now.

MIKEY

Then what happened?

MAX

We waited. Once they slipped into their dreams..

Max stops when he realizes what he just said.

MIKEY

Uncle Max?

MAX

(snaps back to reality)

We waited.. until they fell asleep. Your mom pulled recon duty. She watched them to make sure they wouldn't wake up while I snuck around their room looking for our candy. I checked every corner of that room and didn't find a thing.. I hear my father moving around, talking in his sleep. Your mom gets spooked and runs away, leaving me to take all the blame if I were caught, but instead.. I dropped to the ground before he could see me. I lay there in fear of what punishment might come and that's when I look next to me and right there, sitting under the bed this whole time..

Mikey rubs his stomach, enthralled by the story.

MAX (CONT'D)

Two bags, fit for giants. I grabbed mine and left your mom's since she ditched me.

(MORE)

MAX (CONT'D)

I went back to my room and ate as much as humanly possible.

(beat)

I got so sick.

They share a laugh.

MIKEY

I regret it.

MAX

Yeah, I did too.. That's part of growing up. Before your life is over you'll have more regrets than you can count.. but right now, you don't have to worry about that.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Max stares at his closet. His hanging shirts, jackets and coats are all dark, either black or some variation of grey. He slides his coats over to find a NAVY BLUE COAT. He grabs it off the hanger.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

The school bell rings and soon after, kids come running out.

Mikey walks out with his friend Chester. He stops.

CHESTER

What's up? You still coming over?

Chester looks to see where Mikey is looking. They both stare across the street to find Max there waiting in his blue coat.

MIKEY

Nah, I'll see you tomorrow.

CHESTER

Okay, dude. Later.

Mikey and Chester fist bump. Mikey turns his attention to Max. They both turn and start to walk.

As they walk (on opposite sides of the street), Mikey imitates Max. He walks backward for a time, forward again, adds a skip here and there and at one point bumps into a trash can. Mikey imitates that too. Mikey laughs.

DING DONG

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mikey answers the door to find an OLDER GENTLEMAN delivering their Chinese take-out. He mumbles some stuff Mikey can't quite make sense of. The man stacks each box of food onto Mikey. One after another. The man nods and walks away, leaving Mikey to hold up the take-out like Atlas holding the world.

Max steps out from his bedroom. Mikey turns to face him. They stare at each other silently for a moment.

MIKEY

Well?

Max gives a light chuckle before coming over to close the door. He starts to grab some of the boxes in bags from Mikey. Mikey brings the rest over to the counter.

CUT TO:

BACK ROOM (2ND LIVING ROOM)

Max and Mikey sit on the couch, their Chinese take-out and half-finished plates cluttering the foldout tables in front of them. They watch Sergio Leone's *For a Few Dollars More* (1965).

MIKEY

(mouth stuffed)

I thought he was the goo--

Mikey is interrupted by Max's look.

MAX

Come on.

Mikey finishes chewing.

MIKEY

Sorry.

MAX

It's alright. What were you going to say?

MIKEY

I thought he was the good guy? That guy.

Mikey points at Clint Eastwood as he comes on screen.

MAX
He is the good guy.

MIKEY
He sure kills a lot of people.

MAX
Bad people.

MIKEY
How do you know?

MAX
Because he's a bounty hunter.
That's what he does.

MIKEY
What's a bounty hunter?

Max pauses the movie.

MAX
Are you going to ask questions the
entire movie?

MIKEY
(shrugs)
Only if I don't get something.
What's a bounty hunter?

MAX
(sighs)
A bounty hunter is somebody whose
job it is to kill bad guys.

MIKEY
He gets paid money to do that?

MAX
Basically.

MIKEY
What if they have families?

MAX
(pause)
Everyone has a family. Even bad
guys. Sometimes these people do
things that can't go unpunished.

MIKEY
I thought that's what jail was for?

MAX

.. Sometimes jail isn't enough.

MIKEY

Is there still bounty hunters?

MAX

Not in the same way.. It's not the wild west anymore.. That was a different time. The world was a lot more violent then. Things are different now.

MIKEY

Different how?

Max resumes the movie.

MAX

.. Watch the movie.

INT. HANDLER'S MUSTANG - DAY

Max enters the passenger seat.

HANDLER

You're looking spiffy.

Max looks down at his button up dress shirt and slacks. He's wearing a nicer coat than usual too.

MAX

I have a date.

HANDLER

Hell yeah, brother. That's great. You've been down to the rink before?

MAX

(thinks, then lies)

No.

HANDLER

I don't know if you got kids, but it's the perfect spot either way. If you can't get alone time with the missus, just drop those fuckers off in the snow and they'll figure out what to do with it. Heheh.

MAX

I don't think the snow's really hit yet.

HANDLER

(shrugs)

Yeah, well, for when it does.. Anyway, that's great, man. Enjoy spending those hard earned greenbacks. Or else what's the point? I've seen so many guys hoard up their money like squirrels hoard nuts in the winter. I'm not saying to flash it, but what's the point of making money if you're not spending money? Me? I spend it on my kids. I mean, I buy some stupid shit, but mostly, I spend it on my kids. You got kids?

Max stares back at the Handler, unamused. The Handler gets the idea and brings up a manila folder.

HANDLER (CONT'D)

I've been accused of talking too much before.

Max accepts it and opens it up all while ignoring him. He looks through the information and pictures on his next target.

HANDLER (CONT'D)

My platoon mates used to say it was the quiet ones who were secretly crazy.

MAX

.. I just thought it was the professional thing to do.

HANDLER

How's that?

MAX

To not say much during these things.

HANDLER

You used to be close to Fraser.

MAX

(suddenly aggressive)

That's different.

HANDLER
How is it different?

MAX
He wasn't my handler.

HANDLER
Just a friend then?

MAX
What's it to you?

Max rests his hand near where his gun is hidden in his coat.

HANDLER
It wasn't my intention to pick old
scabs.
(beat, throws hands up)
My bad.

MAX
I'm not being paid by the hour. I'd
appreciate it if you didn't waste
anymore of my time.

The Handler gives Max a dirty look. He brings up an envelope of cash and hands it to him. Max grabs it. Handler doesn't let go at first. Max is ready for a real confrontation, but the Handler releases his grip.

Max gets into his car and takes off quick.

HANDLER
Touchy mother fucker.

EXT. ALLIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Max stands outside waiting for Allie. He's about halfway down the walkway already.

Allie is at the door with a TEENAGE BABYSITTER. Mikey and Abby hovering around behind her.

ALLIE
We shouldn't be any later than 10
O'clock. Just have 'em in bed at
nine.

ABBY
Mom!

ALLIE
 (concedes)
 Nine-thirty.

SITTER
 Okeydokey, Miss Oakley. Nine-
 thirty, no later. You can count on
 me.

ALLIE
 I know I can.
 (to Abby)
 Behave, ya lil' gremlin.

ABBY
 I knooow.

ALLIE
 Don't let 'em run you rampant.

SITTER
 Just have a good time, Miss Oakley.
 We'll be fine.

ALLIE
 Alright, bye then kids, we'll be
 back before you know it.

SITTER
 Bye!

KIDS - BOTH
 Bye!

Max waves at the kids. Mikey waves back just before the
 sitter shuts the door.

Allie walks over to Max. He presents his arm. She takes it
 and they walk to Max's car.

INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE - MOVING - NIGHT

The Chevelle is dark blue now with new plates.

Max looks forward, focused on the road. Allie rests her head
 on the open window, staring out, her blonde hair blowing in
 the wind. She picks up her head and looks over to Max.

ALLIE
 You always had nice cars. You and
 your dad. That's one thing I
 remember about ya'll.

MAX

It was the one thing we shared.

ALLIE

Ya'll were both in the service.

MAX

(nods)

He didn't like talking about it..

ALLIE

You don't seem to either.

MAX

.. I guess we had that in common
too.

INT. FAMILY HOUSE (RESTAURANT) - NIGHT

An old school mom and pop restaurant that's been around
forever. Best food in town.

Max and Allie sit across each other, eyeing each other as
they eat. Max has a harder time keeping eye contact as the
conversation skews more personal.

MAX

Were you close to my sister at all?
After I left again, I mean.

ALLIE

Ya know, I mostly knew her through
you, her being two years our
junior. We crossed paths at the
school time to time. We'd talk for
a bit, but that was sort of the
long and short of it.

Max watches two kids eating at another table. He focuses in
more, realizing the two kids are him and his sister. A
distant memory that had been stored away until now. They
never turn to show their faces, only showing the backs of
their heads.

Allie notices him staring off. She clears her throat,
bringing him back to the present.

MAX

(beat)

How'd your interview go?

ALLIE

Surprisingly well. At first my nerves were getting the better of me, but I managed in the end. Hoping for a callback soon.

MAX

Congrats.

ALLIE

Thanks, but it's not mine yet. There's other candidates.

MAX

You'll get it. Would you be working at the hospital?

ALLIE

No, it's the treatment center. It's neighbors with the hospital though and I'm sure they share a lot of the same.. "clientele." I suppose that's just small town stuff.

MAX

That's great. You're finally going to do what you want.

ALLIE

(pause)

What do you want?

MAX

What do you mean?

ALLIE

If it weren't for Mikey.. would you be here now? I didn't think you were ever coming back.

MAX

.. I hadn't planned on it.. It's strange.. Ever since I came back I've been.. remembering things.

ALLIE

Like what?

MAX

Just things I forgot.. I share my dreams with ghosts..

ALLIE

Maybe you were a whole lot more
homesick than you realized...

(pause)

Where have you been, Max?

Max looks over to see the kids gone. A bittersweet look.

EXT. MAKE-OUT POINT - INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE - NIGHT

Max and Allie sit in the car, parked up at their town's
version of a make-out point. It overlooks the small town.

Max watches Allie as she stares up at the glowing moon.

He blinks and suddenly she's SEVENTEEN. He blinks and she's
normal. She begins to turn her head towards Max. He blinks
and she's seventeen again. Blinks then normal.

MAX

I was wondering if you could watch
Mikey tomorrow night? Late night
job..

It's clear the wheels are turning in Allie's head as if she's
been waiting to say these words. She speaks them softly, but
with much pain behind them.

ALLIE

When I asked you earlier what you
wanted.. I was asking about you and
me.. It's been fun going down
memory lane and all.. but I can't
just pretend you didn't walk away
from me and everyone you loved.
First, it was the Army.. None of us
understood it, but we accepted it.
I suppose I could have "Dear
Johned" you. I didn't. I waited.
Because I was deeply, hopelessly in
love with you. You came back and
even then I could tell something
changed. You weren't the same boy I
fell in love with. The one who used
to laugh and smile. The one who
used to race cars, get into some
trouble. The one who cherished his
family, was practically inseparable
from them. The one who used to make
me feel like I was the only girl in
the whole world. It was like you
died over there and someone else
came back in your skin..

(MORE)

ALLIE (CONT'D)

Then you left again..

(pause)

I hated you for a long time for that. Abby was supposed to be yours.. ours.. but you left. So I found someone else.. and then he left too. Ever since then it's just been me and her and I wouldn't trade her for anything. Not even for you.. but now here you are. I don't know what you want from me, but I won't give you anymore of myself, not without resistance. Mikey is a great kid.. but I won't just be your babysitter, your girl when you're in need.

(beat)

So tell me, Max Ridley, what is it exactly that you want?

MAX

(beat)

Right now.. I just want you.

Allie stares back at Max, searching his eyes for the truth.

MAX (CONT'D)

I don't know how to talk about.. the things in my head. I don't want to scare you away.

ALLIE

You will if you don't talk to me. And this time, I'll be the one leaving.

MAX

(nods)

I just need time to.. figure out how to put it all into words.. I spent ten years hollowing myself out.. Being here has.. I'm starting to feel full again.

Max's eyes uncharacteristically water. This makes Allie's water too, though she's fighting the tears back harder than he is.

MAX (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. For abandoning you. For breaking your heart. I never meant to.. I was just.. too broken.

ALLIE
 (dubious)
 And you're fixed now?

MAX
 No.. but I'm working on it.

ALLIE
 (beat)
 Apologies aren't enough.

MAX
 .. You tell me when and where to
 shoot and I'll raise my pistol.

ALLIE
 I don't need a cowboy. I just need
 someone who can be present.

MAX
 (beat)
 .. I'd like to be that someone.

Allie breathes a deep sigh, wiping her eyes. She stares into Max's then wipes his too.

Once more, just for a moment, Allie has become teen Allie again.

TEEN MAX (O.S.)
 My heart'll always be yours, Allie
 Cat.

Normal Allie

MAX
 (pause)
 .. My heart never stopped being
 yours.. Allie Cat.

Max brushes Allie's hair to try and relax her. They stare into each other's eyes. Deep. Deeper than before. Searching for that love that was once there. After some time.. they seem to find it. Max leans in slow. Allie doesn't, as if fighting the moment. She wants it, but doesn't. She breaks and gives in.

Allie kisses Max soft. He puts his hands through her hair. She puts hers through his. They kiss harder. They kiss as if trying to make up for ten years of nothing.

EXT. ALLIE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Max stands outside his car with Mikey. Allie emerges from her apartment and walks over to them.

MAX

Just do whatever she tells you.

MIKEY

What if she tells me to jump off a cliff?

MAX

I trust her judgment. If she tells you to jump off a cliff it's probably for good reason.

Visible confusion on Mikey's face.

MAX (CONT'D)

Just listen to her.

ALLIE

Hey, you two. Your uncle feed you yet, Mikey?

Mikey makes a face like *you're kidding me right?*

ALLIE (CONT'D)

(laughs)

We're just gonna have to remedy that then. Why don't you run inside and get ready for supper.

MIKEY

(mutters)

Okay, but there better not be any cliffs involved.

Mikey walks toward the apartment.

ALLIE

I think I missed something.

MAX

(slight smile)

Thanks again. I'll just be a few towns over.

ALLIE

Oh, guess who got the callback?

MAX

Really? That's great news. When do you start?

ALLIE

They tell me tomorrow. I expect I'll be a little busier during the day.

MAX

I can pick up Abby.

ALLIE

(smiles)

Thanks. Be careful.. and come back, mister.

Max nods. They take a beat before leaning in to kiss.

ABBY (O.S.)

Woooooo! Get a room!

ALLIE

Hey, you!

INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE - MOVING - DAY TO NIGHT

The sun has almost set. The darkness of the night continues to spread.

Max drives up a winding road (a driveway of sorts), getting closer and closer to his next target. He stops near the top of the hill, surveying around him. He parks and puts his emergency brake on.

He reaches into his glove compartment to grab his gun. Instead, two fall out. His Browning, but also James' silver engraved Colt 1911 he forgot he put there. He picks up his gun and rests it on the passenger seat then picks up James' gun. He runs his thumb over the initials (the double D's) a few times. He hides the gun inside his coat then places on his killing mask. He grabs his suppressed Browning and exits the car, leaving it running.

EXT. TARGET'S HOUSE

He makes his way up and over the top of the hill, being careful not to come over too quickly. He can see the top of the target's house now. More and more of it comes into view, lit under a single light above (with the moon still finding it's place).

His eyes focus in on the windows first. He's both relieved and bothered that they're all covered by blinds and curtains.

Max creeps up along the side of the house, his head on a swivel, checking for cameras. There are none from what he can tell. He keeps his gun pulled tight to his chest and aimed outward as he opens the side gate. No cameras. No people. He closes the gate behind him then turns the corner into the backyard.

His eyes dart around, checking out the half-lit patio in the back. A grill. A pool and jacuzzi. His eyes focus back in front of him.

He keeps close to the wall. He stops at an open window. A curtain covering the majority of it keeps Max from getting a clear look inside. Just the warm light of the lamp in the corner. He hears the mumblings of somebody lounging around in the room.

Max inches his way closer to the backdoor when it suddenly opens with him just two yards away. He quickly hugs the wall with his back. Thankfully, a tall plant (there are two, one on each side of the backdoor) conceals him some. He uses it to his advantage.

He watches as a THIN FRAMED MAN in a black suit (late 40s) steps outside. Pack of cigarettes in his hand. A miserable look on his face. He opens the pack and goes to remove a cigarette. He stops as if sensing movement behind him. He turns to look directly at Max. He also freezes.

They stare at each other for longer than Max should probably allow for. The man slowly moves as if to turn and go back inside.

CLACK

A bullet from Max's suppressed gun catches him before he does. Right in his brain. The man doesn't drop though, still standing, still alive. Max continues to watch him, trying to calm his own breathing, realizing that the man's mind is still there, although fading.

The man looks at the door then removes a cigarette from the pack, absentmindedly. He places it to his lips. He stumbles some to his left, but somehow remains standing. The cigarette falls from his mouth. He stares down at it then falls over backward, splashing into the pool, dead.

Max turns to his right when he hears the sound of somebody getting up in the room with the open window. He waits for someone else to emerge into the night, but nothing.

INT. TARGET HOUSE - INT. KITCHEN

Max creeps inside, closing the back door behind him, keeping his sights forward. He gives his eyes a second to adjust to the darkness. He can see a couple of lights coming from the hallway leading to the bedroom with the open window.

He turns to his right and is caught by surprise when he notices a figure sitting in the darkness. James. Smoke rising from the hole in his chest. James stares down at his wound. Max watches the smoke rise.

BAM!

Max is SLAMMED into the kitchen sink cabinet by a FREIGHT TRAIN of a MAN (40s), causing him to relinquish his grip on his gun. It slides across the kitchen floor towards the backdoor.

Max tries to gather himself as fast as he can, first trying for his gun. The heavysset man kicks Max in the side, dropping him again.

Max reciprocates with an uppercut to the big man's face. This gives him a chance to get back up.. but not for long.

The big man comes back around for more. He grabs Max by the neck, PUSHING him against the tall cabinet to the right of the sink. The big man's hands are all over Max's face and neck, displacing his mask to where it's difficult to see out of. He wails his arms back at the big man, but the effort is unsuccessful and the big man has now already placed both hands around Max's throat. The grip is so sudden and so tight that Max isn't able to let another breath out before it's taken hold.

The big man LIFTS Max off the ground. His feet now hover as the life is being CHOKED out of him. For a moment, Max seems to not fight back as hard, as if to let it happen. He almost wants it to happen.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

Max, barely managing to get into his coat, pulls out James' engraved gun and blind fires (unsuppressed) into the big man. The gunshots rattle through the house. The big man's grip loosens little by little. Max brings his legs up and kicks out, pushing the big man off of him. The big man releases his grip and Max drops to the kitchen floor once more.

He rips off his mask for clear sight, ready to fire again. But the big man now rests on his back, DEAD.

Max takes back control of his breathing as he stands back up. He looks back over at the hallway. Nothing. No one. Not a sound. He slides James' gun back into his coat then bends down to pick up his own weapon. He brushes his hair back off his sweaty face and fixes his coat. He takes a deep breath then places his mask back on.

INT. BEDROOM

Max slowly opens the bedroom door to find his actual TARGET waiting for him. A FRAIL OLD MAN (late 60s) lies in bed, under the covers, unable to move even if he wanted to. Max brings his gun down to his side, recognizing the non-threat. The old man speaks low, exasperated. He seems strangely present.

OLD MAN

I know you.

Max doesn't respond.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

We met once. About fifteen years ago. Do you remember?

Nothing.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

You were standing over me like you are now. Come to take me. But I wasn't ready then. They pulled me out of the wreckage.. but I..

The old man cries softly.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

.. part of me wished they hadn't.
(sadness becomes
frustration)

I was a fool to think that. More time with the people you love. It's.. it's the only thing worth living for.

(pause)

I know they're men, my boys..

INTERCUT the dead thin man floating on his back in the pool.

OLD MAN (V.O.)

.. but I still worry about them.

INTERCUT the dead big man on his back on the kitchen floor.

OLD MAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I just want to make sure they'll be
okay without me.

Max closes his eyes as if to shut the old man's words out.
Bury it.

The old man takes a few deep breathes, preparing himself.

OLD MAN
Alright, you son of a bitch. I'm
ready.

Max slowly opens his eyes.

EXT. TARGET HOUSE

Max exits the house. He rips off his mask as he gets into his still-running car. He's having a sort of panic attack as he drives backward down the windy road.

He stops not too long after taking off, slamming the breaks and throwing the car into park. He opens his door and pukes onto the road. His face flushed, his eyes watering.

MAX
Bury it.
(slaps himself)
Bury it.

Max shuts his eyes.

INT. HANDLER'S MUSTANG

The Handler sits in his Mustang waiting for Max to show. Max pulls into the parking spot beside the Handler. He steps out of his car, and instead of entering into the passenger side like usual, waits at the Handler's window. The Handler rolls it down begrudgingly.

MAX
It was supposed to be one target,
not three.

HANDLER
(looking around)
Watch what you're saying, man, get
in the car.

MAX
No.

HANDLER

Just get in the car and we can talk about this.

MAX

You never said there would be three.

HANDLER

It shouldn't have to be said. The guy couldn't leave his fucking bed. It was all in there.

MAX

And that's another thing. What's the point of hitting someone who's already on their death bed?

HANDLER

Asshole's been "dying" for the last three years. Maybe someone didn't want to take any chances. Who gives a shit? I don't pick them. I just give you the job and you carry it out. Don't act like a fucking first timer. Here.

The Handler reaches into his jacket and pulls out a wad of cash. He divides a sliver of a stack and presents it.

HANDLER (CONT'D)

There. Now you've been fully compensated. Happy?

Max stares down at the Handler, a brewing rage in his eyes. The Handler matches his look, puffing out his chest.

HANDLER (CONT'D)

We have our "laws," the way we do things. Nobody's exempt from that. Nobody. So you can stand there all pissy about the shit job you did, but it really doesn't make any difference to me. All that matters to me is that it's done. You want a job? Get in the car. You don't? Get in yours and drive away--I am not the guy to fuck with, cowboy.

Neither of them back down from the stare down.

MAX

(beat)

I preferred my last handler. He
didn't talk so much.

Max snatches the money from the Handler then gets back into his Chevelle. He quickly reverses out and peels off. The Handler watches him go, still in fight mode.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Max sits on a park bench beside Allie. He watches Mikey and Abby playing with Chester and a couple of Abby's friends.

ALLIE

It's a wonder to see the boys and
girls actually getting along.

Max turns his attention over to the bus stop across the street from where he's sitting.

The boys and girls can be heard in the background, getting into an argument.

ALLIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Spoke too soon. I'll be right back.

EXT. BUS STOP (MEMORY)

A twenty-one year old Max, wearing his dress blues (Army dress uniform) and carrying his Army duffel bag around his shoulder, steps off the bus.

A younger James Fraser (by ten years) sits there at the bus stop bench, writing in a little notebook. He studies Max as he sets down his duffel.

JAMES

Where you shipping back from?

MAX

Drum.

JAMES

New York, right?

MAX

Yeah, most people think of NYC, but
it's way north. Right under Canada.

JAMES

Brr. It's already a little cold here for my tastes.

MAX

You serve?

JAMES

Not exactly.

(beat)

Infantry?

Max nods.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Must have been hard being away. You see a lot of action?

Max shifts uncomfortably, giving James his answer. He probes Max's eyes and there's a recognition between them.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You home for good or you shipping back out soon?

MAX

I'm out. I'm not going back.

James rips the corner of a page as he stands up, pocketing the notebook in his back pocket. He extends his hand out to Max. Max looks down at it, noticing the small piece of lined paper on his palm.

JAMES

I'm James.

Max shakes his hand, accepting the piece of paper. He reads it to himself. A phone number.

JAMES (CONT'D)

If you're interested in work, give me a call.

MAX

How do you know I'm looking for work?

JAMES

I don't.. but I have a feeling you might be suited for the kind of work I do.

A car pulls up. James walks towards it.

MAX
What kind is that?

JAMES
(beat)
Call the number. And hey, thanks.

MAX
For what?

James stops as he's about to enter the car.

JAMES
For your service.

James gets into the car and it takes off, leaving young Max wondering what that was about. A twenty-one year old Allie pulls up soon after to pick him up.

Max watches a moment longer before turning his attention back to the PRESENT. He turns to find Allie watching him.

ALLIE
There you go, off in that faraway place again.

MAX
I'm here.

ALLIE
Max..

MAX
(pause)
I was just.. There was a man. His name was James Fraser. I met him ten years ago, right there at that bus stop.

ALLIE
Who was he?

MAX
He got me into my.. current line of work. He took me under his wing, mentored me.

ALLIE
Where is he now?

MAX
In the ground. He was killed.

ALLIE

Oh no, that's terrible. I'm sorry.
He meant a lot to you?

MAX

He was the closest thing I had to a friend, but.. he gave me the shovel to dig myself into a hole so deep I wasn't sure I could ever climb back out of.

ALLIE

Suppose I'm the rope to pull you up?

MAX

.. A ladder would be better.

Allie gently pushes him in jest.

INT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Darkness before the cabinet door is opened and a hand reaches in to grab a half empty bottle of whiskey.

CUT TO:

Mikey returns home from school, closing and locking the door behind him. He's about to head towards his room when he hears something from the master bedroom.

Mikey sneaks over to find the door wide open. He stops to listen.

MAX (O.S.)

.. Why did I call that number?
You.. you lied to me..

Mikey peeks into the room to see Max is clearly drunk, empty bottle in hand. He stands up from the bed, his wrath focused at the corner of the room. At someone who isn't there.

MAX (CONT'D)

You sit there, silently judging..
but we both know.. This is YOUR
FAULT!! YOU DID THIS TO ME!

Mikey is startled from the sudden yelling. He's never seen Max so angry, so out of control.

MAX (CONT'D)

STOP. FUCKING. LAUGHING!!

Max throws the bottle at the corner. It SHATTERS across the intersecting walls.

Mikey gasps without meaning to. It's enough for Max to hear him.

MAX (CONT'D)
Mikey.. Why are you home?

MIKEY
(anxious)
.. It's a half day.

Mikey can't handle Max's stare. His eyes begin to water.

MAX
Don't do that. Stop. Don't fuckin--

Max stops himself. He takes a step forward causing Mikey to take a step back. It's as if Max just took an arrow to the heart. Mikey runs away, leaving Max to wallow in his self-pity.

Max stands there a bit longer before sitting back down on the edge of the bed. He puts his face in his hands.

EXT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME - DAY

Max steps outside to find a black Lincoln Continental parked and running.

The back door opens and out steps Max's boss, MISTER STANTON (60s) (A Tom Waits type). He waits for Max to approach him.

MISTER STANTON
That's a bitchin' car you got there.

MAX
(beat)
Mister Stanton.

MISTER STANTON
Let's take a ride.

Max stares back at him for a beat then moves towards his Chevelle (which has been painted gold). He stops at the driver side, not entering the car right away. Stanton climbs into the passenger seat, waiting for Max. Max eyes the black Lincoln one more time before getting into his car.

He starts it and begins driving.

INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE - MOVING

Stanton breaks the silence.

MISTER STANTON

You're not a child so I won't speak to you like one. You have yet to fully realize your contract with me and now I hear you're being.. "difficult."

MAX

.. The jobs.. it's been one after another. It didn't use to be this frequent.

MISTER STANTON

What can I say, it gets busy around the holidays.

(beat)

What is it? You feel you're not being compensated enough, right? This is what I've been told. Or is it something else that's bothering you? Or rather, someone?

MAX

(deflects)

.. I don't..

Max sighs.

MISTER STANTON

You want out?

Max turns to Stanton, acknowledgment in his eyes.

MISTER STANTON (CONT'D)

(nods)

I understand.

MAX

.. You do?

MISTER STANTON

More than you might imagine. The terrible truth of it though.. is that I have a business to run and frankly, it's tough to find good help these days. You're one of my good ones, Max.

MAX

There has to be some way. Some kind of agreement we can work out.

MISTER STANTON

I'm sorry, kid. There's no working anything out. When you're part of my family, there's no leaving. Ask James.

A nerve has been struck in Max. He squints his eyes at the road in front of him, clenches his jaw.

MISTER STANTON (CONT'D)

And now that you have a family of your own, well, that makes them my family too.

Max turns to Stanton, not even hiding his anger.

MAX

Is that a threat?

Max begins to speed up. Stanton is amused.

MISTER STANTON

Honey, I don't make threats. I'm just letting you know how it is. And what it is, is business.

MAX

I don't want your business anymore.

MISTER STANTON

Oh, you don't?
(beat)
And your mind is made up?

Max stares back, it's enough of an answer. Stanton considers this, thinks up a solution.

MISTER STANTON (CONT'D)

(beat)
You know what? Forget it. New deal. You finish out the year. That's it.

Max looks to Stanton, not quite believing his words.

MAX

"That's it?"

MISTER STANTON

You hold up your end, I'll hold up mine. When the day is done, we go our separate ways. Capeesh?

Max continues to speed up, not taking his eyes off of Stanton. Stanton doesn't back down, but does look down to check his watch.

STANTON

3 O'Clock. Isn't that the time you pick up your kid? Or should I have my driver go around?

Max tries to hold the look, but knows he's in a shit position. He turns his attention back to the road and slams the brakes, swerves around another car then whips his around, busting a U-turn.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Mikey walks out just as Max is pulling up to the curb. He notices Stanton, unsure what to make of him. He gets into the backseat.

INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE - MOVING

Mikey instantly feels the bad energy in the car. The look on Max's face says it all. Something bad.

Stanton turns around enough to face Mikey.

MISTER STANTON

Well, well, who do we have here?

MIKEY

(hesitant)

Mikey.

MISTER STANTON

Mikey, short for Michael?

Mikey nods.

MISTER STANTON (CONT'D)

Good, strong name. Like James.

Max winces.

MISTER STANTON (CONT'D)

I'm your uncle's boss in case you were wondering.

MIKEY

.. Nice to meet you, uh-sir.

MISTER STANTON

The pleasure's all mine. Call me
Joe.

Stanton extends his hand out to Mikey which Max clearly does not like. Mikey is afraid to touch it.

MIKEY

Oh shoot, my hands are all dirty,
mister-uh-Joe.

MISTER STANTON

No more than mine or your uncle's.

Mikey hesitantly shakes Stanton's hand. Stanton returns to his original position, facing forward.

MISTER STANTON (CONT'D)

Learn a lot in school today?

Mikey nods at Stanton in the rearview mirror.

MISTER STANTON (CONT'D)

Education's important, young man.
Lest you end up like your uncle
working for a jerkoff like me.

EXT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME

Max pulls up to the house, throws the car in park. Max looks at Mikey through the rearview mirror.

MAX

Go inside.

Mikey quickly grabs his backpack and leaves.

MISTER STANTON

Take care of your uncle, Mikey.

Mikey tries to shake his goosebumps before jumping out and hurries over to the house.

MAX

One last job.

MISTER STANTON

I said "finish out the year." That can be for as many as I goddamned need you for. Am I making myself clear?

Max resentfully nods.

Stanton exits the car. Max watches him get into the back of the Lincoln Continental.

INT. LINCOLN CONTINENTAL

Stanton gets comfortable.

STANTON

The bastard doesn't live to see the New Year.

Stanton motions for the driver to drive. They take off.

INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE

Max watches them go, a fury in his eyes.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

Max and Allie walk side by side. Orange leaves litter the sidewalk signaling we're well into fall.

MAX

About Thanksgiving.

Allie turns to Max, the look on her face says she knows what's coming out of his mouth next. She stops walking, making him stop.

ALLIE

Damn, really, Max Ridley? You know, most people get the holidays off. Those seem to be the only days you work.

MAX

I know and I'm--

ALLIE

Sorry?

MAX

(beat)

I have a contract I have to fulfill.

ALLIE

Just what kind of contract is this?

MAX

One I can't break. It's just until the end of the year. Then I'm done.

ALLIE

Really, done? So what'll you do?

MAX

.. I know a bit about cars. Maybe I could go down to the Ramirez shop. It's still there, isn't it?

ALLIE

The old man passed a few years back.

A grimace on Max's face.

ALLIE (CONT'D)

His sons run it now though.

(thinks)

You, a mechanic?

MAX

Nobody ever thought of me as a soldier either.

ALLIE

And how'd that work out?

MAX

In some ways it was probably the least complicated time of my life.

ALLIE

(chuckles)

"Max the Mechanic."

Max's serious façade breaks a little.

MAX

Whatever.

(beat)

.. I know I won't be there, but I'd like for you to still spend Thursday at my parents' place.

ALLIE

It's **your** place. Are you asking me to move in with you?

MAX

You practically lived there before.

ALLIE

That was different. Don't ask me to do something like that. Not unless you're serious.

Max nods silently as he thinks of what to say.

MAX

What I feel for you is serious.

ALLIE

Good.. There's nothing wrong with us taking our time though..

Max gives a look of acknowledgement, knowing she's right.

INT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME - MIKEY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Mikey is finishing packing his backpack when Max knocks on his door. Mikey turns to face him as he enters the room.

Max takes a seat on Mikey's bed then pats the spot beside him. Mikey sits.

MAX

I wanted to apologize for the other day. You weren't supposed to see that.. but it's not your fault.. because I shouldn't have done it in the first place.

MIKEY

It's okay.

MAX

It's not okay. I'm supposed to take care of you, not the other way around. You shouldn't have to worry about me.

(beat)

Sometimes adults have a hard time expressing their selves.. so they turn to things like alcohol. But that's not a solution. It actually doesn't help at all. So I'm sorry and.. I promise to do better.

Mikey gives a look of acceptance.

MIKEY
Who was that guy?

MAX
(pause)
Just a man I work for.. but by
Christmas I won't be. Not anymore.

Mikey seems unsatisfied with this answer, but accepts it.

MAX (CONT'D)
You ready to go?

INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE - MOVING

GOD'S EYE: Max drives down a winding road.

MIKEY (V.O.)
Can we pray?

INTERCUT

INT. ALLIE'S APARTMENT - DINING ROOM

Allie, Abby and Mikey sit at the table. In front of them a good ol' fashioned Thanksgiving dinner complete with turkey, stuffing, ham, cranberry sauce, gravy, etc. They each have a full plate in front of them.

ALLIE
(surprise)
I suppose that'd be fine. Do you
know any prayers?

MIKEY
Not really. And Chester says Heaven
and Jesus aren't real anyway, but I
dunno, it just seemed like a good
idea.

ALLIE
Who's Chester?

ABBY
Dumb boy.

MIKEY
My friend.

ABBY
Dumb friend.

ALLIE
(shakes head)
Ya'll are acting like siblings
already. Okay, you start it.

INTERCUT

INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE - MOVING

Max looks forward as he drives, anxious and in his head. James, half-rotted, sits in the passenger seat. Neither says a word.

MIKEY (V.O.)
Dear God..

INT. HIGH RISE - FLOOR 22 - EXT. SUITE

Max exits the elevator and moves at a brisk pace down the hallway and towards the suite. He covers his face with a cap and is disguised wearing a maintenance outfit. He stops outside the suite, places on his killing mask (removing his cap), then knocks. The TV inside the suite can be heard (a baseball game).

MIKEY (V.O.)
.. Please watch over my Uncle Max
and keep him safe..

INT. SUITE

The door slowly opens as a SECURITY GUARD peeks through the cracked door. Max kicks it open as he removes his suppressed gun. The security guard is thrown to the ground while a SECOND one comes to his aid (from near the bathroom), going for his gun. Max is too quick for them.

MIKEY (V.O.)
.. Sometimes he has to leave
because of his work. I just hope he
likes his job. Not all grown ups
do. Like Mom. She hated her job. I
just want him to be happy, I guess.

CLACK

Max quickly dispatches him with a shot to the head then turns his attention back to the first guard, who is now coming to his feet and going for his own gun, shooting him twice point blank.

CLACK CLACK

He fires two more shots into the second guard just to be sure.

CLACK CLACK

He closes the door then grabs the TV remote and turns it up a few more notches. He approaches the bathroom, listening for any movement.

MIKEY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I hope Mom is up in heaven with Grandma and Grandpa and that one day we'll be there with them too. Me, Uncle Max, Allie and Abby. Even Chester.

INT. BATHROOM

Max quietly opens the bathroom door just as the TARGET has submerged himself under water in his hot soapy bathtub. Max puts away his gun and removes an old school razor. He creeps over behind his target and silently drops to his knees, opening up the razor. He waits for him to emerge from the water, his eyes poking out from his mask's holes, wide and anxious.

MIKEY (V.O.)

I'm thankful for my friends. For my house. I'm thankful for this delicious food.

(beat)

I really miss my mom..

The Target emerges from the water. Max grabs the bottom of his face with his free hand and yanks it up, forcing the man to look up at his killer. Max slowly slices the man's throat with the razor. The man tries to fight back, but Max is already halfway across his neck. He flails his arms and legs about. Max holds him tight to his chest, a mixture of the soapy water and squirting blood covering his outfit.

MIKEY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

.. but I'm thankful you gave me Uncle Max in return. So.. thanks, God. Amen.

ALLIE AND ABBY (V.O.)

Amen.

Max finishes the cut, his gloves covered in blood. Max's eyes water. *Bury it.* He lets the man go once there's no more fight in him. The man slides down into the tub, back under the water.

INT. DINGY MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Max sits at the edge of the motel bed in a partially bloody tank top. He smokes a cigarette, his hands with a bit of dried blood on them. He looks behind him (towards the bathroom light). Rage quietly builds inside him. We leave him and move towards the bathroom.

JAMES (O.S.)

You doing okay?

INT. MOTEL BATHROOM (MEMORY)

Twenty-one year old Max stands in front of the mirror, like his modern day counterpart his eyes are red and puffy, his face flush. He has blood on him and looks like he just puked hard.

MAX

No, I'm not fucking doing okay!

Max turns to James who is standing in the doorway.

JAMES

I thought your experiences overseas might have prepared you a little more for this.

MAX

It's not the same thing.

JAMES

Either way you're being paid to put somebody in the dirt. What's not the same about that? You were serving your country? It's all powerful white men who want someone dead. Might as well be the same thing.

Max tries keeping from getting sick again. He splashes water in his face.

MAX

And now you're gonna tell me that it gets easier with time or some bullshit like that, right?

JAMES

I am.. but only because it does-- get easier with time. The more you do it, the more you disconnect, like with any profession, and eventually you just sort of.. go on autopilot.

MAX

These aren't jobs, man, they're people's lives.

JAMES

You have money in your pocket? It's a job. They all are. You don't want to keep working? You don't have to. But there's money to be made and personally, I think you're more than cut out for this. You want to feel better about what you do? Go back to wearing a uniform.

Max looks up at James in the mirror. He turns to face him.

MAX

It's not about that. You fucking recruited me.

JAMES

What, and they didn't?

(chuckles)

In all seriousness, you're a grown man, you can make your own decisions and so far, you have. So tell me, why didn't you just stay in?

MAX

(pause)

I didn't like being told what to do.

Max stares down James, expecting a fight. James instead lets his guard down. He chuckles.

JAMES

(beat)

First guy I ever killed..

Max stiffens up.

JAMES (CONT'D)

.. That one wasn't a job. That was just life in Eastside Detroit. I grew up in a place called "the Red Zone." You had your warzone, I had mine. Back then, life was just about surviving.

(nods)

You got hit, you hit back. James Fraser was nothing but a skinny little punk who was just trying to survive. One day, one of my so-called homies put a gun in my hand and said, "it's time to pop your cherry."

James reaches into his jacket and removes his gun (with the initials DD). He places it on the counter near the sink for Max to see. Max stares down at it.

JAMES (CONT'D)

After that, James Fraser was a new man. I found something I could excel at. And make money doing. Devonte Davis had given me that. And so, for good or bad, I'll always remember him for it.. and I'll never forget the look in his eyes right before I squeezed that trigger again.

(beat)

Yeah.. it gets easier with time. Mostly, you just put on an act and pretend nothing can touch you. You take all those.. feelings.. and you fucking bury them.

James places his hand on Max's back.

MAX

Doesn't sound like a sustainable lifestyle.

JAMES

(beat)

It's more life than Devonte Davis will ever have.

EXT. MOTEL BATHROOM

Back in the PRESENT, Max still sits at the edge of the dingy motel bed. He turns his head away from the bathroom, his cigarette almost done now. His eyes focus in on the red on his hands.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - DAY

Max sits beside Mikey, Allie and Abby.

Max feels a presence behind him. He turns to see a few of his past victims (different than ones previously seen). A couple that were stabbed or cut, most killed by gunshot. They're all rotted. He turns back forward, having a difficult time shutting them out.

Max grabs Allie's hand, tightening his grip. She notices.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY

Max, Allie and Abby sit at their lane as Mikey gets up to take his turn. He bowls without the guard rails and manages to knock over a couple pins. He turns back to them, excited. They cheer him on.

EXT. TOWN CENTER - ICE RINK

The ice rink is filled with a few couples and other families. Everything is covered in snow.

Max and Mikey team up in a snowball fight against Allie and Abby. They laugh and yell at each other. Mikey takes a nose dive into some snow. Max can't help but laugh.

CUT TO:

Max struggles to balance on the ice. He trips and falls over. Mikey points and laughs at him as he passes by.

Max pushes himself up from the ice while staring down at it. He notices a figure under the ice move. He focuses his eyes at the figure and a face becomes clear. Another victim, this one staring up at Max from under the ice. They drift, sinking into the depths. Max watches them go.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Max finishes replacing the last of the swing sets. Abby cheers from the sidelines.

ABBY

Finally!

Abby runs over and straight into Max, hugging him. A smile slowly spreads across his face.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Thank you, mister Uncle Ridley! Can you push me?

MAX

Let me just move this junk.

Max grabs the old swing sets and piles them up near the park bench then goes back over to Abby. She's already seated in a swing, waiting for him.

Max gets behind Abby and starts pushing her.

ABBY

Put your back into it!

Max smirks as he picks up the pace, practically launching Abby into the air.

ABBY (CONT'D)

(screams in excitement)

Ahhh!! Wooo!!

Allie approaches Max with a concerned look. Max continues pushing Abby, but slows down.

ALLIE

I think you should have a talk with Mikey.

MAX

What's going on?

ALLIE

He was fighting, if you can believe it.

MAX

With who?

ALLIE

His friend Chester.

MAX

(beat)

Fucking Chester.

Max leaves looking for Mikey while Allie takes over swing duty. She lightly pushes Abby.

ABBY

Mom?!

ALLIE

Max is busy, I'm taking over.

ABBY

Harder!

ALLIE

You asked for it!

Max finds Mikey sitting alone, mopey, on the other side of the playground. He takes a seat beside him on the ground. Mikey wipes his face.

MAX

You know, if you fight all your friends you won't have any left.

MIKEY

Chester made a joke about mom--

MAX

Doesn't matter.

(beat)

I know words can hurt, but that's all they are. Just words. Violence is never the answer, kid.

Max hardly believes himself. Mikey finally looks up at him.

MIKEY

What about Clint Eastwood?

MAX

(beat)

Hurting bad people or people who did you wrong.. doesn't make you the good guy.

Mikey looks back down.

MAX (CONT'D)

I know you miss her. I do too.

Mikey fights tears.

MAX (CONT'D)

Trust me when I say.. it gets easier with time..

(MORE)

MAX (CONT'D)

I won't lie to you. You'll always
have a hole you'll want to fill,
but nothing will.

MIKEY

It's not fair..

MAX

No, it's not..

Mikey is bawling now. Max puts his arm around him, pulling
him to his chest.

MAX (CONT'D)

Take it from me.. Don't push away
the people you love. One day you'll
regret it..

Max lets Mikey finish crying before gently pulling him away
to look him in the eye.

MAX (CONT'D)

Your mom wouldn't want that for
you.

Mikey nods then looks over at Chester, who's sitting under a
nearby tree alone. He looks up at Max and Max nods in
acknowledgement.

Mikey takes the cue and walks over to Chester. Max watches as
they talk then shortly after hug, making up. Max looks proud.

EXT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME - NIGHT

Max stands outside the door, Allie inside the doorway, cozy
in her robe.

ALLIE

So this is it, huh? New Year, new
job.. new family..

MAX

(slow nod)
.. New start.

ALLIE

Make it back before Santa eats all
his cookies.

Max nods again.

MAX
I'll put out the gifts before I
head up to bed.

The two kiss.

Max heads towards his car. Allie looks up at the dark clouds forming in the sky. It's about to rain.

INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE - MOVING - NIGHT

Max slowly approaches his target's house, stone-faced. A light rain falls.

EXT. TARGET'S HOME

Max parks near the house, turning off his car. He reaches into his coat and removes his killing mask. He stares down at it a moment before putting it on. He exits the car.

INT. TARGET HOME

Max breaks the lock to the front door then enters. He shuts the door behind him as he removes his suppressed gun from his coat.

He walks past the present-filled Christmas tree and into the hallway. He peeks into the first bedroom. A FIVE YEAR OLD GIRL sleeps.

He continues past the bathroom and towards the last room at the end of the hall. He peers in, seeing his target fast asleep. A MAN. He enters.

INT. TARGET'S BEDROOM

Max puts his gun back into his coat as he nears the bed. He stops, seemingly in a state of crisis, hesitating. *Bury it.*

He carefully climbs the bed, mounting his mark. He places his gloved hands around the man's throat and begins to squeeze.

It takes a second for the man to wake and understand what's happening to him. He starts to flail his arms and kick out his legs. Max squeezes harder as the man stares up at his grim reaper face of a mask, trying to plead. No words come out, only cries and whimpers.

MAX

I'm sorry.

(beat)

I'm sorry.

Max squeezes harder. Until the life fades from the man's eyes. Max releases him, staring down at him.

EXT. TARGET'S BEDROOM

Max emerges from the bedroom, shutting the door behind him.

A sound from the kitchen. Max turns his head in that direction. He sneaks over as he removes his suppressed gun from inside his coat.

He pokes his head into the KITCHEN to find the little girl looking up at him. He hides his gun at his side.

The girl is standing up on a kitchen chair, halfway through the cookies and milk left for Santa.

LITTLE GIRL

Santa?

Max nods

The little girl offers the half eaten cookie in her hand.

Max slowly approaches her. He uses his free hand to accept the cookie then eats the cookie under his mask.

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)

Do you like it, Santa?

Max looks at her and nods again.

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)

I was really good this year. I promise I was.

Max thinks for a second then motions at the little girl to follow him. They go back into the living room.

Max bends down to grab a small present, guessing which might be one of hers. Squatting, he presents it to her. She accepts it, smiling, then plops down onto the floor. He watches as the little girl

opens the present. She excitedly reveals a plush animal doll. She hugs it.

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)

Thank you, Santa.

The little girl launches herself, throwing her arms around his legs. He hesitates before accepting the hug. He pats her back to get her attention.

Max points towards the hallway.

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)

Do I have to?

Max nods. The little girl yawns.

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)

.. Okay.

Max corrals her down the hallway. She passes her room, going towards her parents' bedroom, but Max stops her. He gently pushes her back towards her own room. She enters and gets back under her blankets.

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)

Goodnight, Santa.

The little girl waves goodbye, her new plush doll tight to her chest. Max waves back then shuts the door.

He looks around the living room as he passes back through it. At the tree and the presents. The family photos.

He leaves as quietly as he came.

INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE

Max, unmasked, sits mournfully, watching the house from afar. Car running. The rain is coming down hard now.

A car comes down the street and pulls into the target's driveway. Out comes a WOMAN, the mother of the little girl. She enters the house, shutting the door behind her.

Max drives away, a broken look in his eyes.

INT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mikey emerges from the hallway, catching Max from behind. Max sits in front of the Christmas tree, presents now beneath it. The rain continues to come down hard.

Mikey looks down, noticing Max's killing mask sitting on the floor. He picks it up, stretching it out to get a better look at it. The mask spooks him.

MAX

Mikey?

Mikey looks up at Max. Max hasn't turned around.

MIKEY

Yeah, it's me.

MAX

Come here a sec.

Mikey walks over.

MAX (CONT'D)

What are you doing up?

MIKEY

Bathroom. Then I wanted some water.

MAX

You know that's why you need you to use the bathroom, right?

MIKEY

Yeah...

MAX

What do you have there?

Mikey brings up Max's mask. Max's eyes widen. He reaches for it, gently taking it from Mikey.

MAX (CONT'D)

(pause)

I hope I didn't ruin your Christmas.

MIKEY

I knew Santa wasn't real.

MAX

.. Did Chester tell you that?

MIKEY

Yeah, he kind of sucks sometimes.

MAX

.. Yeah. What about Abby?

MIKEY

She's clueless.

MAX

Good, let's keep it that way. Go on back to bed. I'll see you first thing in the morning, okay.

MIKEY

Goodnight, Uncle Max.

MAX

Goodnight, Mikey.

Max hugs Mikey goodnight. Mikey runs off to his room.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM

Max undresses to his boxers and gets into bed with Allie. She turns to him and moves closer. He meets her embrace. They kiss. They become more intimate with each kiss, the passion rising.. until Max stops.

ALLIE

What's the matter?

Max gradually sits up. He moves to the edge of the bed.

ALLIE (CONT'D)

Max?

Max stands up and goes over to the window. He opens the curtain then the window. Enough to hear the rain fall. The rain reflects onto Max's face like tears streaming down.

MAX

I used to sit and listen to the rain with my mother. She'd have a bad day at work and then she'd still have to come home and cook us dinner, make sure we did our homework, did our chores. Once she finally had time to herself.. she'd sit on the porch and just listen to the rain. Sometimes I'd sit with her. I'd ask her why and she'd just say it soothed her or that she liked the way it made everything smell. One day she gave me a different answer. She said she liked the rain because it washed everything clean. Like new.

(MORE)

MAX (CONT'D)

And because it drowned out all the other noise. It was the closest she could get to "quiet." It took me a long time to understand. Now, try as I might, I can't shut out the noise. I pretend to. It's not the same. Everywhere I look I'm reminded of her. Of my father. Of Eliza.

(beat)

.. Yet I can barely remember their faces without pictures. I can hear their voices, but I can't hear what they're saying.. I spent ten years distancing myself from them. From you.. For what?

(breaking)

I found something.. I could excel at.. but it took me away from home and turned me into something.. cold blooded. I forgot myself. And then I forgot all of you.. So many birthdays and holidays and regular days that you think don't matter, that you sometimes forget about.. until it's too late.

ALLIE

(beat)

You're here now and that's what matters. You can't live your life in regret.

MAX

(softly)

My life is nothing but regrets. Sure, I'm here now.. I don't deserve to be.. They haunt me. They won't go away and I can't shut them out. No matter how much good I do, I can never offset the bad.. I wish I could just step out into the rain.. and be washed clean. Like new. I wish I could drown out all the noise.. But it's too late.. It's too late.

Max shuts his eyes.

ALLIE

You know.. where there's rain there ought to be a rainbow.

Max opens his eyes.

MAX
 (mournful smile)
 .. You and the kids are my rainbow.

ALLIE
 (smiles back)
 Come back to bed.

Max goes to her. They lay back down. She comforts him in her arms. Then something unexpected happens.. He cries.. hard. A worried look shoots across her face. She holds him through the night.

CHRISTMAS MORNING (MONTAGE)

Johnny Cash's "*Blue Christmas*" plays over. Mikey and Abby storm into the MASTER BEDROOM like maniacs, waking Max and Allie.

They run into the LIVING ROOM, going after their presents.

Mikey and Abby excitedly rip away gift wrapping and tear open boxes, pulling out toys and video games and other things. Max and Allie sit together, watching them, drinking some hot coffee. Every now and again Allie turns to watch Max, her mind still on the night before.

The four sit in the back living room, watching *Santa Claus is Comin' to town* (1970).

The four sit in the kitchen together eating Chinese food.

After clearing their plates and having seconds, some empty, some half-filled plates sit on the counter along with whatever's left of the food.

The four are out front (EXT). Max and Allie sit while watching Mikey and Abby struggle to build a snowman.

Max turns to see more fading memories, ghosts of himself and Eliza (as kids) running around in the snow. Allie can see him growing distant. She squeezes his hand then gets up to help the kids. Max watches them.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Max pulls up in his Chevelle (which is once again black). Mikey, flowers in hand, jumps out and walks over to Eliza's snow surrounded tombstone.

Max takes his time getting out.

Mikey stops in front of Eliza, staring down at her grave, silent for a moment. He works up the courage.

MIKEY

I.. I brought these for you.

Mikey bends down to set the flowers on her grave.

MIKEY (CONT'D)

You don't have to worry about me anymore. Uncle Max is here now. It's different with him, but.. he's cool. He's trying. I think he misses you a lot. He gets sad when we look at pictures of when you and him were kids. I used to wish I had a brother.. or a sister.. I guess Abby is kind of like my sister now. We're like a family..

(beat)

.. I had a dream we were all together. Grandma and Grandpa too.. I hope you're happy wherever you are. I love you, Mom.. I miss you..

Mikey closes his eyes as he begins to softly cry. He feels a hand on his shoulder. He opens his eyes and looks up at Max. Max gives him a comforting look. Mikey wipes his face then starts to walk back to the car.

Max watches him go for a moment before turning his attention to Eliza.

MAX

I..

Max seems to have an even harder time than Mikey thinking of what to say.

MAX (CONT'D)

You did great with him, you know? He's a good kid.. I'm sorry.. for not coming around.

(beat)

I'm not sure what else to say but I'm sorry..

Mikey sits in the Chevelle watching Max.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Max and Mikey are at the cash register being rung up. The Cashier is the same young girl from before.

Like always, she smiles a bright big smile. She directs it towards Mikey then Max.

CASHIER

Find everything okay today, sir?

MAX

Yeah.

(beat)

Beautiful day today, isn't it?

The Cashier is surprised, but somehow smiles even bigger.

CASHIER

It certainly is.

Max returns the smile as he grabs the grocery bags. Mikey helps out, grabbing a couple. The Cashier watches them leave, her day suddenly brighter.

EXT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME - DAY

Snow on the ground.

Max gets out of his Chevelle with half the bags of groceries. Mikey exits the passenger seat with the other half.

They walk side by side towards the house. Max unlocks the door and lets Mikey in.

INT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME

Mikey sets down his bags on the nearby kitchen counter then runs down the hall to the right (towards his room).

Max enters after him. The front door swings back, halfway to closing itself. Max takes two more steps before stopping and noticing

his bedroom door (at the other end) is open.

He looks left towards the big windows. The blinds are open.

Max listens then suddenly drops his grocery bags, food scattering across the floor. He looks over his left shoulder as a figure is coming into view. He kicks the door shut then ducks, back against it.

BANG! BANG!

Two shots rip through the door just above Max's head.

INTERCUT Mikey putting his hands over his ears, scared by the sudden deafening sounds.

MAX
(yells at full volume)
Mikey!! Stay where you are!

BANG!

Another shot into the door barely missing Max.

Max moves from the door, keeping in a low crouch, and hurries towards the hallway to his right.

BANG! BANG!

Two more shots, this time through the small kitchen window above the sink.

Max runs down the hallway and into Mikey's room, startling Mikey. Max hunches over and grabs Mikey by his shoulders.

MAX
Hey, hey, it's me. You're alright.
I need you to do exactly as I tell
you, okay?

Mikey nods frantically.

O.S. glass breaks as the assailant climbs through the large kitchen window.

Max gives Mikey the car keys.

MAX (CONT'D)
Here. I need you to run to the car
and start it. Stay low and plug
your ears. You got it?

Mikey nods.

MAX (CONT'D)
Go.

Mikey quickly opens the sliding door while Max turns his attention towards the hallway. He turns back to make sure Mikey has left, which he has, then again back towards the hallway.

Max sneaks over, removing his unsuppressed gun from inside his coat, then pokes his head out. Nothing.

He makes his way down the hall stopping at the end of it. Straight ahead the big window has been shot out. Glass everywhere. He checks his right then left.

MAX (CONT'D)

Why don't you come out and we can handle this, just you and me. Leave the kid out of it.

HANDLER (O.S.)

(beat)

Fuck you, "come out."

MAX

I figured you more for a face-to-face type, but maybe you feel safer shooting me in the back?

HANDLER (O.S.)

You're calling out my pride to goad me into a Mexican standoff with you? Is that what's happening?

MAX

Am I wrong?

The Handler swiftly emerges from behind the kitchen counters (near the big window), armed with an ASSAULT RIFLE. His sights on Max. A HANDGUN stuffed into the front of his pants.

Max knows he's done for if he tries anything cute. He keeps his gun low.

HANDLER

Maybe not. Maybe you can goad me into a one on one. Maybe I'm a cowboy just like you.

MAX

Maybe.

(eyes the assault rifle)

Not exactly a fair fight.

HANDLER

If you're any good at your job..

(shrugs)

.. shouldn't be much of an issue.

MAX

Shouldn't be.

They both stand in silence for a moment before

HANDLER

(chuckles)

OK. Let's make this fun.

(beat)

On the count of three, we raise arms. Cool?

Max nods.

HANDLER (CONT'D)

One.

BANG! BANG!

Max fires two shots with quick succession into the Handler's left foot then bolts towards the door.

HANDLER (CONT'D)

Fuck!!

PRRAAATTTT!! PPPRRRAAAATTTT!!

The Handler's machine gun fire barely misses Max, tearing through the walls.

EXT. MAX'S CHILDHOOD HOME

Max manages to make it outside, running to his car. The Handler follows, still spraying at him. Shots go along the Chevelle. Mikey screams from inside. One hits Max's door as he flings it open. Another HITS his left hand just as he's about to climb in. The bullet takes his pinky and ring fingers.

He yelps as he jumps into the driver seat. He shuts the door and peels away.

The Handler misses a few more shots as he runs to his Mustang across the street, parked in front of a neighbor's house, concealed with a car cover. The Handler rips away the cover to reveal that it's already running.

HANDLER

(mutters)

Fucking dumb mother fucker. Should have just shot him right there.

He jumps in, tossing his assault rifle onto the passenger seat, and quickly busts a U-turn before peeling away and after Max.

HANDLER (CONT'D)

Fuck!

He slams the dash.

INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE - MOVING

Max speeds down the street, watching for the Handler. He looks over at Mikey, who is shaking with fear.

Max reaches over and pulls Mikey's seat belt over him and buckles it. He turns up the radio just as Frank Sinatra's "My Way" is starting up.

MAX

Focus on the music, Mikey.

He makes a sharp turn then another.

Suddenly, the Handler, emerges from around a different street corner. Max speeds up. So does the Handler.

BANG! BANG!

The Handler fires off a couple shots at them, again freaking out Mikey. Max has to yell over the maddening sounds of the cars and gunshots.

MAX (CONT'D)

Keep your head low!

Mikey cries, everything too much for him. Max reaches into the glove compartment and pulls out his killing mask. He shoves it into Mikey's hands.

MAX (CONT'D)

Mikey. Mikey! Put this on!

MIKEY

Why?!

MAX

It'll make you strong.

Mikey does as he's told and puts on the mask. He keeps his head low.

BANG!

Another shot hits the back of the car.

Max makes another quick turn, bringing the chase into more open traffic. They speed and zip around cars.

The Handler gets close to Max a few times, but Max always manages to get ahead of him, using the traffic and parked cars as ways to throw him off. The Handler manages to keep up anyway.

They continue down the busy street, a few close calls. Max's bloody left hand is a constant obstacle as it causes him to slip and lose control of the wheel time to time (while he's shifting gears with his right hand). He manages to keep them alive.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Two of the shots take out the rear windshield.

Mikey SCREAMS

Max speeds up towards a line of parked cars. He's about to turn left to move around them, but his bloody left hand slips from the steering wheel and he accidentally goes right. He quickly grabs the wheel again and turns hard, barely managing to miss a head-on collision with the parked car in front of him. He scrapes and dents-in the driver side of his car all the way down the end and smashes away his side mirror.

CRAASSSHH!!!

The Handler goes straight into the parked car Max barely missed.

Max brakes hard before almost going into a storefront. He pokes his head out the window back at the Handler, surveying the aftermath. He tries to open his door, realizing he can't. It's stuck.

Max climbs out the window, struggling with his bloody hand, it slipping and sliding on the hood of the car.

EXT. STREET

He walks over to the Handler, gun up and ready.

The Handler is a bloody-faced mangled mess. The front end of his car is smashed in, the windshield broken all over his face. His door partially tore open.

Max struggles with his bloody left hand to open the door the rest of the way, revealing the Handler's legs are trapped and destroyed under twisted metal.

MAX

It didn't have to come to this.

HANDLER
(trouble speaking, soft)
.. Just doing my job.

MAX
(beat)
What's your name?

HANDLER
(beat)
.. Jay.. Colby..

The look in Jay Colby's eyes says he doesn't want Max's pity. His eyes move towards Max's gun. He never drops his tough guy front.

Max understands.

Max looks around, spotting Colby's gun in the middle of the street. He walks over and picks it up then walks back over to Colby.

He sets it down on Colby's lap and then they wait..

.. Colby moves to draw his gun, but is fairly slow. Max gives him a chance anyway, but of course before Colby can fire off a shot..

BANG! BANG!

.. he fires two shots into his chest.

Max goes back to his car, climbing through the window again and pulls away.

INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE - MOVING

He looks over at Mikey, who is still wearing his killing mask. He gently pulls it off of his head.

MAX
Are you okay?

Mikey nods, finally having stopped crying, but still scared out of his mind. His little body shakes uncontrollably.

MAX (CONT'D)
Everything's going to be alright.

EXT. ALLIE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Max peels onto Allie's street, pulling up outside her apartment. He has Mikey get out first so he can exit from the passenger side.

He walks Mikey over to the apartment, holding his hand. Mikey grips it hard. Once near Allie's front door, Max takes a knee to be level with Mikey.

MAX

Hey, hey. I need you to listen to Allie, okay?

MIKEY

(crying)
Why? Where are you going?

MAX

I have to do something. It's the only way to keep you safe.

MIKEY

Don't leave me.

MAX

I'm coming back for you. You trust me?

Allie comes to her window to see what's going on. She sees Mikey wailing. Max has a hurt, determined look on him.

MAX (CONT'D)

Mikey, do you trust me?

MIKEY

Yes. You promise?

MAX

I promise.

MIKEY

Why is this happening?

MAX

(heartbroken)
.. It's all my fault.. I'm sorry, kid.. I love you..

MIKEY

Love you.

They hug tight as Allie steps outside.

ALLIE

Max, what's going on?

Max holds Mikey a little longer before breaking away. He has to force him off.

Allie comes over to comfort Mikey. She sees Max's bloody hand, his missing fingers.

ALLIE (CONT'D)

Dear lord, what the hell is going on?

Max stands up to face her as she pulls Mikey to her, he sobs uncontrollably. She can feel him shaking, afraid. This breaks her heart.

ALLIE (CONT'D)

Hey, it's okay. Mikey?

She looks to Max for answers.

MAX

.. Work again..

She seems to understand.

MAX (CONT'D)

I'll be back soon. Pack a bag.

Max hurries back to his car, climbing in through the passenger side. He takes off.

Allie tries to hold together for Mikey's sake. She holds him.

EXT. MISTER STANTON'S HOME - NIGHT

Mister Stanton's modern, luxurious house sits behind a huge, gated front yard and driveway.

Stanton sits in the backseat of his black Lincoln Continental as they pull up to the gate. His driver/bodyguard lowers his window to enter the gate code. Right when it begins to open

Max's Chevelle CRASHES into the side of the Continental. Max FIRES his gun into the front and rear passenger windows, shattering them. The Driver takes two bullets to the side of his face. The flurry of shots just barely miss Stanton as he dives down onto the backseat, crawling out from the other side.

Max quickly gets out of his car, again through the passenger side, and comes around the back of the Continental, gun up and ready.

BANG!

Stanton fires a shot into Max's gut, catching him by surprise. Stanton runs away as Max regains his composure.

Max chases after Stanton, who is now halfway up the snowy driveway. Stanton turns to get another surprise shot off, but Max is ready for him this time.

BANG!

Max shoots Stanton's hand, turning it into a bloody mess while making him drop his gun.

MISTER STANTON

Argh! You son of a bitch..

Stanton looks down at his gun, but Max slowly shakes his head as if to say *don't do it*.

MISTER STANTON (CONT'D)

(pleads)

My family's inside, waiting for me.
No doubt they've heard all the
noise. Don't let them see me like
this.

MAX

You never should have come after my
family.. And you never should have
killed James.

MISTER STANTON

You did that. Let's be realistic
here. What'll you gain from killing
me?

MAX

(beat)

Might make me feel a little better.

Stanton chuckles then shrugs.

MISTER STANTON

(beat)

Worth a sh--

BANG!

Max fires a shot into Stanton's stomach, likely hitting his liver. Stanton feels his wound. He looks down at his bloody hands then up at Max.

BANG!

Max fires a second shot into him, this time hitting his knee cap. The old man begins to CRUMBLE, stumbling back then falling backward onto his back and into the snow.

Max stands over him, watching the surrounding snow turn red with his blood.

Stanton, weak, struggles to muster up words.

STANTON

.. So?... Feeling better?

MAX

(pause)

Not really.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Max fires three more shots into Stanton, two in the chest and one in the face. He stands there a bit longer until he can hear a commotion from the house.

Stanton's TWO TEENAGE SONS come running out and down the driveway. Max is gone.

SON

Dad? Dad?!

EXT. ALLIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Max bangs on Allie's front door until she finally answers. She steps outside, shutting the door behind her as Mikey peeks out. He moves to the window to watch them.

Allie, arms crossed, works up the courage to speak her piece.

MAX

You ready?

ALLIE

(pause)

We're not going with you.

MAX

What?

Allie's pain turns to anger.

ALLIE

Now it all finally makes sense.
Somehow you're both not who I hoped
you were and exactly who I thought
you might be.

MAX

.. I'm just Max Ridley.

ALLIE

(shakes head)

No. The Max I loved died ten years
ago. You've just been wearing his
skin. Trying to blend in. Trying to
pretend you didn't cause a whole
lot of people a whole lot of pain.
You abandoned your family before. I
suppose history repeats itself.

MAX

I'm not abandoning anyone. We still
have time.

ALLIE

(eyes watering)

No, we're all out.

MAX

I couldn't just walk away.. You
don't understand..

ALLIE

You're right, I don't.

They share a moment of silence. Police sirens in the
distance, the cops closing in. Max knows he's out of time.

MAX

(calls out)

Mikey?!

Allie blocks him from entering. She fights tears, her lip
trembling. She's too hurt and too pissed off.

ALLIE

Don't you think he's been through
enough? Without having a killer for
an uncle? Without having to go on
the run, living the rest of his
life looking over his shoulder?

The sirens are near now.

ALLIE (CONT'D)

You better go.. while you still
can.

Max, broken, knows she's right. He's suddenly the loneliest person in the world. He turns as his eyes fill with tears, putting his back to Allie and Mikey.

He gets into his Chevelle, looking over one last time. Allie has turned away to cry hard. Mikey is still at the window, hurt in his eyes. Mikey's look only seems to pain Max more. He drives away, breaking his promise.

INT. MAX'S CHEVELLE - MOVING - NIGHT

Max, coming in and out of consciousness from his gunshot wound, stops some distance away from the edge of town.

A barrier of cop cars sits between him and freedom while other cops close in from behind. The sirens sound close.

He looks down at his wound, his shirt drenched in blood. In his peripheral he can see dead James Fraser sitting in the passenger seat.

MAX

Once they slipped into their
dreams..

Max seems to be fading.. then springs back, holding on. He puts his car into drive and speeds forward. He SMASHES through the barrier, speeding past the "welcome to" sign, leaving his hometown behind him.

After a while, Max slowly loses consciousness. His car slows little by little until finally coming to a complete stop as it goes off the road and into the snow. He's lost too much blood.

Max slips into his dreams..

CUT TO BLACK.

CUT TO:

INT. PRISON - MAX'S CELL - DAY (ONE YEAR LATER)

Max's CELLMATE tattoos his back, writing *James Fraser* at the top, just under his neck. He wipes it clean then starts to write another name under it.

INT. VISITING ROOM

Allie sits on one side of the glass, waiting anxiously. Finally, Max comes into the room, handcuffed. He freezes when he sees her. His face is bruised.

He walks over and takes his seat then reaches for the phone. She waits a beat before grabbing the phone on her side.

MAX

Allie Cat.

Her pet nickname makes Allie wince.

MAX (CONT'D)

.. Muscle memory..

ALLIE

(beat)

What happened to your face?

MAX

There are people in here that want me to do some work for them. I refused. So they jumped me.

ALLIE

"Work.."

MAX

(nods)

How're you?

ALLIE

.. How do you think?

MAX

.. Mikey?

ALLIE

With me. He's been through too much. I couldn't make him an orphan too.. but that boy sure can eat.

Allie lets out a nervous laugh. Her smile quickly fades.

ALLIE (CONT'D)

So.. working a lot.. but the work is good.

MAX

Did you give him my letter?

ALLIE
 .. No.. Not yet.. and I'm not sure
 I will..

Max looks down, disappointed, but accepting.

MAX
 Just tell him.. I miss him.. and
 that I'm sorry.

The pain in Max's voice almost moves Allie to tears. She stiffens up, clearly wanting to say so much more, but can't. The wounds are still too fresh.

ALLIE
 (pause)
 Goodbye, Max Ridley.

Allie hangs up the phone then gets up without giving Max another look. She hurries out.

MAX
 (pause)
 Goodbye, Allie Cat.

Max hangs up. He sits a little longer before getting up.

INT. PRISON CAFETERIA

Max sits alone. He stares down into his hot coffee.

INT. JAMES' HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Max sits at James' dining table, a fresh cup of coffee in front of him. He watches the steam rise then looks up at James, standing near the coffee machine.

JAMES
 Sleep much?

MAX
 Here and there.
 (beat)
 Do you dream?

JAMES
 Everybody dreams.

MAX
 I mean do you remember your dreams?

JAMES

(shakes head)

It's always flashes of images. I tend to remember how they make me feel more than I do the actual contents.

James thinks for a moment then takes a seat across from Max. He gets comfortable in his chair, setting his coffee down in front of him.

JAMES (CONT'D)

(sighs)

There was this one job. From the moment I woke up that morning, I felt.. off. I get to where I'm going, find the mark still in bed. I creep over to him, watching his chest move up and down. Then.. he starts to wake up. He wipes away the crust from his eyes and he just stares up at me, deer in the headlights. Meanwhile, this feeling's continued to persist. Then comes the waterworks. He pleads and begs. Says "you'll never see me again." "I have a family." "I'll pay you double what they are." I tell him that I've heard it all before and that it's pointless to even try. What makes him different from the last?

(beat)

I realized that I was hesitating, for the first time in a long time. What I was feeling.. was guilt. Somehow it.. bubbled up to the surface. I remind him that if I don't do this job, somebody else will. And then I'll have a target on my head.

MAX

You're one of the OGs. They'd really do that?

JAMES

They always send someone you know. The day I let somebody go, shit, it'll probably be you.

Max gives a nervous laugh. James' face remains serious. Max's half smile drops.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Anyway, he continues to beg and now I'm becoming frustrated, but not at him, at myself. Why was I dragging this out? It wasn't fair to either of us.. and.. there was only one real option. I knew what I had to do. So I buried my feelings and told him, "All you gotta do is go back to sleep and slip into your dreams."

(beat, chuckles)

Without skipping a beat he says:
"The dead don't dream."

MAX

(waiting)

Then what?

JAMES

(beat)

I shot him.

Max looks disappointed.

INT. MAX'S PRISON CELL - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Max sits alone in his cell. His chest and back are covered in tattooed names of his victims including *Jay Colby*.

We get up close to him to see him deep in thought. Suddenly, there's noise around him. The pleads and cries of the dead. Then, there's bodies all around him, dead James sitting right beside him. The cell is packed tight. It's suffocating.

Max closes his eyes, imagining the sound of rain. Then, he tries to remember his parents, Eliza.. but their faces are fading..

Instead, he sees the faces of his victims. Clear as day.

The sounds of the dead are too loud to drown out.

CUT TO BLACK.

END