

He's Easy To Like

Written by

Sarantos (Stage Name)
Sam Speron (Real Name)

October 30, 2025

Version 2

This script is the confidential property of
Sarantos Melogia, LLC. Pictures and no portion of
it may be performed, distributed, reproduced, used, quoted or
published without prior written permission.

Sarantos Melogia, LLC
7157 W. Howard St.
Niles, IL 60714
© 2025
All Rights Reserved

Cell: 847-757-5399
Email: samsperon@gmail.com

EXT. ST. BASIL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - MORNING

The early sun glistens on dew-covered grass. Birds chatter in the chill. Suburban peace.

A pair of well-polished shoes step into frame. Black slacks, pressed. White dental coat under a long wool overcoat.

This is TOM MARSHALL (45), clean-shaven, crisp shirt, steady posture. His smile feels almost kind, but his eyes hold no temperature at all. Calm, precise, and watchful, like a man who's learned how to blink at the exact right time.

INT. ST. BASIL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Tom steps inside with quiet confidence, the kind that comes from routine. He dips his fingers in holy water, traces the cross with mechanical grace, and nods to the ELDERLY USHER at the door.

ELDERLY USHER
Morning, Doc Marshall.

TOM
Morning, Charles.
(smiling)
You've outdressed the saints again.

ELDERLY USHER
Flattery always gets you to heaven.

TOM
Then I'll see you there.

INT. ST. BASIL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - LATER

Tom kneels in the hush of the vast sanctuary. A few parishioners dot the pews. His fingers glide over the rosary with surgical rhythm, beads slipping through practiced hands. Not devotion. Discipline.

Two pews ahead, a FAMILY unravels: kids bicker, dad drifts, mom scrolls.

Tom watches, still and expressionless. A quiet study, not judgment. Observation. He closes his eyes.

TOM (V.O.)
...Forgive us our trespasses, as we
forgive those who trespass against
us...

His eyes open mid-prayer. The words stall. A flicker of tension in his jaw – forgiveness catching on the way out.

INT. ST. BASIL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - SIDE HALL - LATER

A folding table carries the aftermath of fellowship – half-empty coffee urn, cold donuts, paper plates curling at the edges.

Tom stands among the parishioners, gracious and easy, the man everyone trusts.

PARISHIONER #1

Thank you for fixing my molar last week, by the way. You're a saint.

TOM

Just a guy with pliers.

The group laughs – warm, harmless.

PARISHIONER #2

If my son turns out half as decent as you, I'll consider it a success.

Tom smiles, modest to the point of perfection. A man who's learned humility as performance.

Across the room, CARA MARSHALL (40s) leans against the wall – elegance wrapped in frost. Coffee in hand, posture pristine. She doesn't look at him.

PARISHIONER #2 (CONT'D)

You and your wife... what a beautiful couple.

Tom glances over just as KYLE (30s), Cara's loud brother, enters. Cara laughs – a sound Tom hasn't heard in months.

TOM

Yeah... beautiful.

He keeps smiling. Inside his coat pocket, a styrofoam cup buckles under the slow pressure of his hand – the faint crackle swallowed by polite conversation.

CUT TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD: HE'S EASY TO LIKE

INT. MARSHALL HOME - GARAGE - NIGHT

The garage hums with quiet order – every wrench, cord, and clamp in perfect alignment. The kind of precision that doesn't forgive mistakes.

Kyle lies passed out on a pile of laundry, vape pen on his chest, pizza box open like a crime scene.

Tom steps in, still as a held breath. His gaze travels from the neat wall of tools to the mess at his feet.

Cara enters behind him, arms full of groceries.

TOM

You said he was staying with a friend.

His tone isn't angry, it's measured. Surgical. He looks down at the suitcase beside Kyle – dirty socks, crushed cigarette butts, and an ashtray full of half-burnt joints.

CARA

You're overreacting.

Tom studies Kyle again – the slack jaw, the noise of wasted breath. His stare is calm as anesthesia.

CARA (CONT'D)

Would you take these groceries? My arms are about to fall off.

Without a word, Tom steps forward, takes the bags. His movements are clean, deliberate – like erasing a mistake. He leaves without another word.

Cara kneels, slips a few folded bills into Kyle's suitcase. She lingers a moment – guilt, or habit – then leaves him to his sleep.

The fridge hums on, steady and indifferent.

INT. DINER - LATE MORNING

Plates clatter. Forks scrape. A family laughs too loudly. Tom and Cara sit cornered in a booth packed with her family:

JOAN FRANKLIN (70s), her acid-tongued mother; WALTER (70s), grizzled patriarch, full of scotch and cynicism; LORI (38), smug; NICK (45), smirking; and KYLE (30s), running on caffeine and charm.

JOAN

You're not still doing those free cleanings at the church, are you?

TOM

Just the ones who need it. Mostly veterans.

LORI

Isn't that... illegal or something? Taxes? HIPAA?

NICK

Pretty sure that's fraud, pal. Hey, where are the kids?

TOM

Friend's house.

CARA

Outta my hair.

KYLE

Tom's got that God complex. Leave him be.

The table bursts into laughter. Tom just smiles, polite, unbothered – or maybe too practiced.

TOM

I log everything. It's above board.

CARA

You don't have to defend yourself. They're just teasing.

JOAN

Still, you charged me full price for my implant. My bridge club couldn't believe it!

TOM

I gave you my cost, Joan. I thought you appreciated that.

JOAN

Well maybe next time I'll just go to Mexico.

WALTER

Hell, I could've done it with Krazy Glue.

Nick nearly spits his coffee laughing.

NICK

You remember that one time Dad
actually glued Kyle's braces back
on?

KYLE

I was high as shit. Didn't notice
till my gums bled.

TOM

I remember.

Cara elbows Tom sharply under the table. He barely reacts,
just a flicker in his eyes.

CARA

Don't be weird.

A brief silence folds over the table. The WAITER slides in
with plates.

WAITER

One veggie skillet, egg whites
only?

TOM

That's me.

LORI

Ugh, of course. You're still on
that no sugar, no fun, no life
diet?

TOM

Just trying to stay healthy for the
kids.

JOAN

You look pale. Eat something real.

NICK

Leave him alone, Ma. If he drops
dead, Cara can finally trade up.

More laughter. Cara joins in – too fast, too bright. Then
catches herself.

Tom watches her. Calm. Taking notes only he'll read.

TOM

This coffee will do.

Everyone ignores him. They've already moved on.

KYLE

Hey Tom, I got this new business idea. It's like a vape... but it cleans your teeth. Shark Tank gold.

TOM

Sounds... unique.

KYLE

It'll kill, man. You should invest.

Tom nods once, eyes drifting toward Cara. She's smiling – not at him – at her phone. Typing something that makes her smirk.

TOM (V.O.)

I keep setting the table. They keep spitting in the soup.

He folds his napkin neatly. A small act of order amid chaos.

TOM

Excuse me a sec.

He rises, smooth, invisible, and walks toward the restroom. No one looks up. No one notices.

INT. DENTAL OFFICE - EXAM ROOM - DAY

Bright. Cold. Every surface gleams like it's been scoured of sin. A framed photo on the wall – Cara, the kids, the picture of contentment.

INSERT - PHOTO

A family caught mid-laugh. The kind of smile that expires once the flash fades.

Tom, immaculate in his scrubs, tightens his gloves with the slow precision of a ritual. Calm. Centered. Dangerous in his stillness.

RONNIE (40s), slick hair and louder watch, lounges in the chair like he owns the room.

RONNIE

So what's the damage, Doc? You gonna bankrupt me today?

TOM

Just a cleaning.

RONNIE
That's what you all say — then I
get a bill that reads like I
crashed a Bentley.

Tom lowers the chair smoothly.

TOM
Nice and still for me, alright?

Ronnie opens wide, sighing through the gesture.

RONNIE
You still with that woman?

TOM
My wife?

RONNIE
Yeah. Cara, right? Back in college
we called her the Ice Queen. She
ever smile?

Tom's hands pause. The suction tube hisses faintly, like
breath through clenched teeth.

TOM
She has her moments.

RONNIE
Mmm. Tough break, pal.

Tom inserts the suction, picks up the scaler, begins to work
— each stroke measured, methodical, rhythmic.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
Hnnn you knuhh...

TOM
It's easier if you don't move.

More scraping fills the silence. Tom's eyes flick to the
tray.

INSERT - TRAY

A gleaming set of tools. One — slightly misaligned. He
adjusts it with his pinky. Perfect symmetry restored.

TOM (CONT'D)
There we go.

He hums softly — low, reverent, unsettling in its gentleness.

Ronnie's eye – twitching, uncomfortable. The hum continues.

RONNIE
'Sssh sssppssh...

TOM
You alright?

Ronnie tries to nod, eyes watering.

TOM (CONT'D)
A little stillness and we're done.
Promise.

His grip never wavers. The suction whirs, the hum continues – a duet of control and surrender. His gaze lingers – studying Ronnie the way a surgeon studies a specimen, long enough for it to feel wrong.

Then he moves again – quick, efficient, gentle. A final dab of cotton. A faint smear of blood.

TOM (CONT'D)
All done. Rinse and spit.

Ronnie blinks then grins weakly.

RONNIE
You should teach a class. That was
painless.

TOM
Careful work isn't weakness. It's
control.

RONNIE
Man, Cara never knew how lucky she
was.

Tom's smile holds. His eyes – still as glass.

TOM
Go on. Enjoy your blessed day.

Ronnie rises, wiping his mouth, oblivious. Behind him, Tom resets the tray. The same crooked tool – misaligned again. He leaves it that way this time.

INT. DENTAL OFFICE – HALLWAY – MOMENTS LATER

Tom walks as the corridor hums – mint, antiseptic, and the illusion of peace.

DEE, his hygienist, leans out of the staff room, waving a clipboard.

DEE
Got a few late cancels. You want me
to call to fill them?

TOM
No. That's alright. I'll catch up
on notes.

His tone is warm, unthreatening - the kind that reassures people right before the drill starts. He continues down the hall, turns into his office, and shuts the door.

INT. DENTAL OFFICE - TOM'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A pristine space - tidy desk, minimalist décor, nothing accidental. A photo of his family sits perfectly centered, like proof of normalcy. A desk drawer labeled "Family Files" sits slightly ajar. Tom opens it.

INSERT - DRAWER

Color-coded folders, each tabbed neatly: Joan. Lori. Kyle. Walter. Cara.

He pulls out Kyle's, writes with surgical neatness.

INSERT - NOTE

Brunch. Requested more money. Again.

He slides it back. Pulls another: Ronnie.

INSERT - NOTE

Former hookup. Aware of Cara's nickname. Close watch.

He closes the drawer slowly. The click lands heavy.

On his computer screen's black reflection, his face stares back - calm, orderly, unbothered. The ghost of a smile that's forgotten what joy feels like.

His phone buzzes on the desk - screen lighting the glass: CARA - CALLING. He watches it vibrate, lets it time out. A voicemail appears. He taps play.

CARA (V.O., THROUGH PHONE)
It's Kyle. County ER. They think
it's an overdose. I'm already here.
Don't wait up.

He watches the waveform dance across the glass. Then stops.
Locks the phone. Aligns it with the edge of the desk.

TOM (V.O.)
I told him the dosage.
(beat)
He thought I was helping.

He opens the drawer again.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - KITCHEN - EVENING

Warm light softens the edges of quartz counters and a too-perfect kitchen. Everything gleams — except the wilted flowers on the counter, clinging to decay.

Tom stirs a pot of chili. Every motion is measured — the rhythm of someone who's learned control as survival.

Cara sits at the island, scrolling, half-drunk on red wine and detachment. Her silk lounge set shines like armor.

CARA
You remembered Kyle's birthday,
yes?

TOM
I sent a card. Amazon gift. Fifty.

CARA
(eyes still on screen)
That's it?

TOM
He still owes me three hundred from
last time.

CARA
So? He's family.

Tom keeps stirring — a steady rhythm, like counting to ten. The silence feels polite, and dangerous.

TOM
How long's he been here?

CARA
Who?

TOM

Kyle.

CARA

Oh. Just a few nights. He needed somewhere to crash.

TOM

And you didn't tell me?

CARA

He didn't want to make it a thing.

TOM

It's my house.

CARA

Our house.

TOM

You're hiding him in the garage like a raccoon.

CARA

Don't be dramatic. He's family.

TOM

You gave him money too?

She doesn't answer.

TOM (CONT'D)

From the joint account?

CARA

Don't be petty.

TOM

That money was for Lily's field trip.

CARA

You always act like you're the only one who sacrifices.

TOM

I'm the only one who works.

Beat.

CARA

You're unbelievable.

(beat)

(MORE)

CARA (CONT'D)

And Mom says you never text her back.

TOM

She sends me memes about root canals.

CARA

Well, at least she tries.

Tom turns off the burner, moves the pot to the counter. Cara doesn't look up.

TOM

Can you set the table?

CARA

I'm on a call.

She's not.

TOM

Just two bowls.

CARA

Why are you always so intense about dinner? Jesus.

He sets the table himself – two bowls, two spoons, napkins folded with surgical symmetry.

They eat. The clink of silverware the only conversation. Cara keeps scrolling.

TOM

The kids called today.

CARA

Yeah?

TOM

Lily's TA'ing for her chem professor. That's huge.

CARA

Huh.

TOM

You didn't want to talk to her?

CARA

I've been working all day.

TOM

You haven't worked in years.

Silence spreads between them – thick, fragile.

CARA

I'm talking about the house. The errands. My schedule's full too, Tom.

He nods once.

CARA (CONT'D)

And I'm sorry I'm not all giggles and blowjobs when you walk in.

TOM

That's not what I-

CARA

No. It's just... everything's a lecture with you lately. Everything's heavy. I can't breathe.

TOM

I'll work on that.

She drains the last of her wine, stands. Leaves her bowl.

CARA

I'm going to lie down. Don't come in. I have a headache.

She leaves without looking back.

Tom sits alone. Steam curls off the chili. He reaches across the table and straightens her spoon until it's perfectly parallel with the bowl – a small act of order in the wreckage of their affection.

TOM (V.O.)

This is where people pray they'll change.

(beat)

Then they don't.

(beat)

Or something in you does.

TOM (V.O.)

Institutions need prayer to stay pure. I just need precision.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Muted light filters through the blinds - a room that smells of ink, dust, and quiet judgment.

A LAWYER slides a stack of papers across a mahogany desk.

LAWYER

Durable Power of Attorney gives you control if he's incapacitated.

LORI

And Cara's the sole agent?

LAWYER

Correct.

LORI

Good.

She signs with a decisive flick, the confidence of someone accustomed to control.

LORI (CONT'D)

He's sweet, but... weak men collapse when they're older. Better to be ready.

CARA

You're always looking out for me.

Lori smiles faintly - pride, not affection.

INT. PARENTS' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Holiday music plays faintly under the low roar of overlapping chatter, clinking glasses, and forced laughter. The fake Christmas tree twinkles with precision - nothing out of place except the people.

Joan, heavy makeup and sugary charm, sets a tray of cookies down like a bribe.

JOAN

I made your favorite, Tommy.
Oatmeal raisin, with Splenda.

TOM

That's thoughtful, Joan. Thank you.

JOAN

You're welcome, Dear.
(calling out)
(MORE)

JOAN (CONT'D)

Lori, be sure to ask Tom about his generous pricing model.

Lori, flawless in a courtroom suit, sips her wine like evidence.

LORI

Oh right. Didn't you charge Mom for that implant?

TOM

At cost. Just the lab fee.

JOAN

(faux innocence)

I mean, I raised her. Fed her. Breastfed her – that's free, by the way.

The family bursts into laughter. Nick, in a sanitation department hoodie, raises his beer.

NICK

Man, if I did what you do and still squeezed pennies from my family... whew.

Kyle leans back lazily vaping through his grin.

KYLE

That's capitalism, bro. He's just an ambitious little tooth elf.

More laughter. Tom sips water and doesn't speak. The quiet man they can't stop poking.

Walter, red-eyed in his recliner, grumbles.

WALTER

In my day, men paid bills and shut their damn mouths.

LORI

Dad. Come on.

WALTER

No, no. This guy? He needs a backbone, not another tax write-off.

Tom's eyes flick briefly to Cara. She leans against the chair, swirling her wine, smirk cutting just deep enough.

TOM
These are good cookies, Joan.

JOAN
Aw. You're just saying that.

TOM
I'm really not.

KYLE
Hey, you ever think about
expanding? Franchising? Like a
traveling dental van – pull up,
boom, pop-up mouth clinic.

NICK
Jesus Christ, Kyle.

KYLE
Hey, I'm just saying, innovate or
die, Man.

TOM
I'll give that some thought.

COUSIN (O.S.)
Hey, Uncle Tom! You still doing
teeth for free at the church?

TOM
Sometimes.

COUSIN
My mom said you're trying to be a
priest or something.

NICK
Saint Tom! Man's been dying for
sainthood since the '90s.

The laughter hits harder this time. It sounds like applause
at a hanging. Cruel, meaningless. Tom rises, calm.

TOM
Excuse me. Bathroom.

He leaves the table. The laughter follows, distant and
hollow.

INT. PARENTS' HOME/HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Tom steps into the hallway. The noise fades, replaced by the soft whir of the furnace and the flicker of the Christmas tree.

In the hallway mirror, his reflection waits – polite, neutral, lifeless. He studies himself. Doesn't blink.

From the other room:

WALTER (O.S.)
Somebody tell the dentist dinner's
not a damn therapy session!

More laughter – jagged, relentless. Tom stares at his reflection until the sound blurs into static.

TOM (V.O.)
Remember every word. Every look.
Every silence.

EXT. MARSHALL HOME - EARLY MORNING

A small SUV sits loaded to the roof with luggage. The air carries that early morning chill that feels like an ending.

LILY (18), sharp and warm, checks her list one last time. BEN (17), nerves hidden behind his grin, grips his guitar case like it's his lifeline.

Tom moves between them – pressed shirt, steady hands, the look of a man already missing the noise.

LILY
Got everything. I think.

TOM
You'll text when you get there?

LILY
Promise. Sorry Ben and I didn't go
to the family thing, it's just—

TOM
It's okay.

BEN
Sorry, Dad. Lily and I feel awful.
I'm already leaving you alone a
year early.

TOM
Don't apologize for graduating
early. Just... remember to eat
breakfast. Even geniuses need fuel.

Ben smiles, shoves the last bag into the trunk, giving them
space. Lily smirks.

LILY
I will.

She hugs him – real, tight, no pretending.

LILY (CONT'D)
Thank you. For everything.

The front door opens. Cara – hoodie, slippers, coffee in hand
– voice flat from sleep.

CARA
We're gonna be late if we keep
auditioning for Hallmark.

Lily pulls back, wiping a tear before her mother notices.

TOM
Be good to each other, alright?

LILY
We will. Don't let Mom drive tired.

TOM
I'll keep an eye on her.

She climbs into the car. Cara hovers by the door, eyeing him
like she's checking a box.

CARA
You sure you don't want to come?

TOM
You said you didn't want me to.
Said the car'd be too cramped.

CARA
Well... it will be.

She gets in, slams the door. The engine starts. Lily waves
through the glass – hopeful. Tom lifts his hand, not waving,
just holding the image still. The car disappears down the
quiet street.

EXT. MARSHALL HOME - DRIVEWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Dawn settles. No sound but the whisper of tires fading down the street.

Tom stands alone, motionless. Then turns. Walks back slowly toward the house, as if each step erases something.

INT. GARAGE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Dim light. The hum of the small fridge.

Kyle lies sprawled on a makeshift bed of laundry, vape pen loose in his fingers, the picture of someone who's never feared consequence.

Tom kneels beside him. He takes the vape pen, sets it neatly on the nightstand. Straightens the blanket over him. Watches the rise and fall of his chest.

TOM (V.O.)

One of the last times I helped him.

(beat)

I think I knew it even then.

He flips the light off. Darkness swallows the room. Kyle's snoring fades into the hum - then nothing.

INT. DENTAL ASSOCIATION BOARDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

A sleek, glass-walled room. Cold light. A table too shiny to touch - water bottles lined like soldiers, untouched muffins sweating in plastic wrap.

Tom sits midway down - charcoal suit, crisp tie, perfect posture.

At the head, DR. RICHTER (60s), silver charm and authority, flips through a file.

DR. RICHTER

Dr. Marshall's pro bono hours are the highest in the region. Again.

Light applause. The kind that's more about acknowledgment than admiration.

DR. RICHTER (CONT'D)

If this were a contest, Tom, you'd be untouchable.

TOM
Just doing what I can.

DR. RICHTER
You're doing more than that.

He scans the next page.

DR. RICHTER (CONT'D)
We got a lot of letters – veterans,
single parents, other dentists. All
saying the same thing.
(reading)
He listens. He makes you feel
human. He never talks down to
anyone.

Tom nods, humble smile, hands folded perfectly.

DR. RICHTER (CONT'D)
Gentlemen like you are rare, Tom.
Too good, honestly.
(chuckles)
People walk all over guys like you.

Laughter ripples around the table. Tom smiles with them,
polite, unbothered – but under the table, his fist tightens
once, knuckles pale.

DR. CHENG
He's got that priestly patience.
Makes the rest of us look like
butchers.

DR. RICHTER
You ever think about teaching?

TOM
I've thought about it.

DR. RICHTER
Let's talk after the meeting. We're
building a mentorship program.
Needs someone with your...
temperament.

TOM
I'd like that.

The conversation shifts into the drone of budgets and board
minutes. Tom's reflection in the glossy table stares back at
him – expressionless, symmetrical, hollow.

The perfect face of patience.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The echo of footsteps against concrete. Fluorescents hum overhead - pale, endless, unblinking.

Tom moves between rows of parked cars, each one still, immaculate, identical. He stops beside his sedan. Doesn't open the door. Just sets down his briefcase and leans against the cold metal.

TOM (V.O.)

Too good - like it's a flaw.

He stares at his reflection in the driver's side window - warped, doubled, almost unrecognizable.

TOM (V.O.)

You try to make peace... and they use it to disarm you.

His reflection blinks back - a man trying to recognize himself.

FLASHBACK - INT. MARSHALL HOME

Tom listens from the next room. Ben (15) sits at the kitchen table, brow furrowed, glancing at his uncle's laptop.

Kyle leans close, eager and cocky, showing a messy chart full of rising numbers.

KYLE

Look, you don't need to go to college. Real money's in crypto. I got this startup brewing, called WeedStocks.

BEN

Mom said you needed a loan...

KYLE

It's an investment. Big difference, kid.

Ben hesitates - innocence caught between trust and instinct.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

Dim light. Only Tom's bedside lamp glows, soft against the neutral decor.

He lies back in bed, glasses on, a paperback open in his hand but unread. He glances at the clock: 11:12.

The bathroom door opens. Steam drifts out as Cara steps through – robe, towel around her hair, perfume mingling with fatigue. She looks at the bed, hesitates.

CARA
You're still up?

TOM
Just unwinding.

She opens her drawer, pulls out pajama pants, turns away to change.

TOM (CONT'D)
You look nice.

CARA
No I don't.

TOM
I think you do.

CARA
Don't start.

TOM
I'm not starting anything. Just...
saying what I see.

She turns – eyes dull, voice sharp.

CARA
What is this, foreplay?

TOM
I was just trying to connect.

CARA
Connect? Jesus, Tom.

TOM
It's been a long time.

CARA
Maybe if you weren't so boring all
the time.

Silence. Tom doesn't move. Doesn't blink. The air between them holds, then cracks.

CARA (CONT'D)
Sorry. Long day. I'm just tired.

TOM
I know.

CARA
Goodnight.

She kills her lamp and turns away. Tom keeps staring at the ceiling, motionless - the shadows painting patterns across his face.

TOM (V.O.)
I used to reach for her in the
dark.
(beat)
Now I stay still. So she doesn't
flinch.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - GARAGE - NIGHT

The single bulb buzzes overhead. Dust hangs in the air.

Tom stands surrounded by boxes, holding a small shard of glass or maybe a broken frame - hard to tell anymore. He turns it in his hands gently, as if trying to remember what it once was.

He searches through a stack of old boxes until he finds a small, wrapped photo. He unwraps it.

INT. MARSHALL HOME- KITCHEN - NIGHT

Rain taps at the window. Lightning flares briefly across the glass. Cara stands at the counter, slicing vegetables too hard, the blade hitting wood with clipped precision. Red tomato juice pools under the knife. Tom enters quietly, holding the photo.

INSERT - PHOTO

Tom's late mother - smiling, warm, alive.

TOM
Found this in the garage. Thought
maybe-

CARA
Can you not?

TOM

What?

CARA

Bring her into everything.

TOM

It's just a picture.

CARA

It's never just a picture with you.

(beat)

Your mom died eight years ago and somehow I still feel like she's in this house.

TOM

That's not fair.

CARA

No? Every time we argue, it's "She used to say this" or "Mom always did that." You know what that does to a person?

TOM

She was important to me.

CARA

And I wasn't?

TOM

That's not what I'm saying.

CARA

No, but it's what you *do*.

She slams the knife down – hard enough to make him flinch.

CARA (CONT'D)

I think she *broke* you, Tom.

(beat)

And I've spent our whole marriage trying to glue the pieces back together.

TOM

She supported us. Came to every recital, helped with down payments—

CARA

Yeah, and then she died and left you a half-shadow chasing approval from a ghost.

(MORE)

CARA (CONT'D)

(beat)

Every time we had problems, it was
"Maybe Mom would've known what to
do."

TOM

I never said that.

CARA

You thought it.

TOM

You stayed away from her funeral.
It's a choice we'll both remember.

CARA

Because I didn't want to pretend. I
hated her, Tom. She made me feel
like I was never good enough for
you.

(softer)

And maybe I wasn't.

The knife rests beside the tomatoes. The rain grows heavier.
Tom sets the photo down on the counter – carefully,
reverently – between them like a peace offering no one will
accept.

TOM

I loved both of you.

CARA

Yeah. But only one of us loved you
back.

Lightning floods the room – bright, soundless – then fades,
leaving only the rain and what's left of them.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - GARAGE - NIGHT

The lights buzz in the cold air, relentless. Tools hang
neatly along the pegboard. A space heater hums softly – the
only warmth in the room.

Tom sits on a metal stool by his workbench. Nothing in front
of him. No task to focus on. Just the sound of his breathing
and the faint whir of a space heater.

A mug of tea sits half-empty beside him, the steam long gone.
He stares at it, still as stone.

TOM (V.O.)
I always thought patience was the
holiest virtue.
(beat)
Turns out, it's just... silence
with manners.

He exhales, long and quiet. The tears come quietly, tracing
clean lines down his face. No tremor. No shame. Just release.

He wipes them away with his sleeve – not ashamed, not frantic
– just tired of pretending it matters who sees.

INSERT - PEGBOARD

Dental tools in perfect alignment. Scalers. Syringes.
Forceps. Every one capable of precision – or pain.

Tom studies them.

TOM (V.O.)
Everyone thinks breaking points are
loud.
(beat)
Mine felt... clean. Like breath
held underwater.
(beat)
And then... the surface.

He rises. His fingertips brush the metal edges – slow,
reverent, like reading Braille.

A small dental mirror catches his eye. In it, a fractured
reflection – one eye visible, steady, resolved.

FLASHBACK - INT. MARSHALL HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ben scrolls through his phone at the counter while Tom
reviews numbers on a tablet, calm but coiled.

TOM
You still waiting on that payment
from Kyle?

BEN
Yeah. He said he'd "Venmo me next
week."

TOM
Did he say which week?

Ben shrugs.

BEN
It's not a big deal, Dad. It's just
a few hundred bucks.

Tom nods but stares at the screen longer than he should - the
kind of quiet pause that means it's a big deal to him.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - HOME OFFICE - LATE NIGHT

A tight, orderly room. Framed diplomas line the wall, a
single cross centered on the wall.

The soft glow of a monitor lights Tom's face. His glasses
glint as he leans in. Onscreen: his son's bank account,
balance nearly zero.

\$2,000 - gone.

TOM (V.O.)
He took from my son. Told him
dreams were a joke.
(beat)
I sent him something stronger.

INSERT - SCREEN

Transactions scroll by: transfers, Venmo blurbs - "🎁❤️," "For
Kyle," "Gas money."

TOM (V.O.)
I used to check this weekly.
(beat)
Then I stopped. Trusted her.

He clicks View Statement History. A spreadsheet opens. His
fingers move with quiet precision - copying numbers, one by
one.

\$500. \$1,200. \$3,000.

TOM (V.O.)
Twenty thousand, six hundred
seventy-two dollars.
(beat)
Gone.

He highlights entries marked: "CashApp - Lori," "Wire - Joan
M," "Zelle - Nicholas"

Tom's fingers stop moving. His face doesn't.

TOM (V.O.)
Lily asked for new tires last
month.
(beat)
I told her to wait.

The cursor blinks. The balance glows. Nothing changes..

INT. MARSHALL HOME - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

The fridge door swings opens. Pale light spills across the tile. Tom stares inside – searching for something that isn't food.

On the counter: Cara's purse. He glances at it, then opens it – no hesitation, calm.

INSERT - INSIDE THE PURSE

A boutique receipt: \$85 candle. A spa package receipt: "To: Joan" – \$350.

TOM (V.O.)
They take and take and take.
(beat)
And I hand them the knife.

He refolds each receipt neatly, places them back in the same order. The fridge hums behind him.

The microwave door – his reflection warped in the curved glass. The smile is gone. Only calculation remains.

INT. ST. BASIL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONFESSIONAL - NIGHT

The church is nearly empty. Red votive candles flicker along the wall, their glow trembling against dark wood. A janitor's mop slides faintly in the distance – a rhythm beneath the silence.

Inside the confessional, Tom kneels in shadow. Hands folded. Eyes closed. The air smells of wax, incense, and secrets.

On the other side of the lattice, the PRIEST waits – only a breath, a silhouette.

TOM
Bless me, Father, for I have
sinned.

PRIEST (O.S.)
When was your last confession?

TOM
Two years ago. Right before Lily's
graduation.

PRIEST (O.S.)
Go on.

A long pause. The kind that makes sound feel intrusive.

TOM
I don't lie. I don't steal. I
haven't been unfaithful.
(beat)
But I think about things.

PRIEST (O.S.)
What kind of things?

TOM
Violent things.

The priest stays silent – not judgment, just listening.

TOM (CONT'D)
I imagine... endings.

PRIEST (O.S.)
Endings?

TOM
Of conversations. Relationships.
People.
(beat)
I imagine what it would feel like
if certain voices finally stopped.

He breathes in – steady, almost peaceful.

TOM (CONT'D)
I picture quiet. They call it
peace. I call it the finish line.

PRIEST (O.S.)
God hears our thoughts, even when
we don't act them out.

TOM
I hope He's listening now.
(beat)
Because I don't want to be angry,
Father.
(long beat)
But I am. I really am.

The silence thickens – too heavy for prayer.

PRIEST (O.S.)
Anger is not a sin. It's a signal.

TOM
What if I've been ignoring that
signal for too long?

PRIEST (O.S.)
Then it's time to listen to it. And
decide what to do with it.

Tom opens his eyes. Candlelight slices across half his face –
shadow on one side, revelation on the other.

TOM
That's what I'm afraid of.

EXT. MARSHALL HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

Suburban stillness hums beneath the sun. No birds – just the
slow drone of cicadas.

Tom kneels by a crack in the patio, coffee mug in hand.
Sleeves rolled, eyes quiet, he studies the small chaos at his
feet: An ant colony. Hundreds moving in perfect rhythm –
purposeful, tireless, beautiful in their efficiency.

One ant, larger than the rest, drags a crumb twice its size.
It stumbles, rights itself, keeps going.

TOM (V.O.)
They say ants can carry fifty times
their weight.
(beat)
But nobody asks if they want to.

The ant slips again. Strains. Keeps pulling. Tom watches,
eyes narrowed. Then, slowly, he lowers one finger – and
flicks. The ant disappears into the breeze.

TOM (V.O.)
Sometimes... mercy looks like
cruelty.
(beat)
Or maybe the other way around.

He looks back at the colony. Order resumes instantly, perfect
and unbroken, like nothing happened. A faint smile crosses
his face – not joy, not guilt. Just recognition.

INT. COUNTRY CLUB - LOUNGE - DAY

Sunlight spills through tall windows onto the hushed hum of privilege. Women sit in a perfect circle, bridge cards scattered between glasses of iced tea.

At the center - Joan, posture regal, lipstick sharp, every hair, every pearl in place. She leans in with the grace of someone who never whispers unless it's poison.

JOAN

I shouldn't say anything, but honestly... Tommy charged me for my implant.

WOMAN #1

No!

JOAN

Oh yes. Full price. Well, his "cost," whatever that means.

WOMAN #2

My son-in-law's a dentist. They mark everything up. It's like wedding cakes - legal robbery.

JOAN

And this is family. I practically raised him, you know? He's been in our lives since Cara was twenty-three.

WOMAN #1

Some people never learn gratitude.

JOAN

Mmhmm. I told Cara, if he's that tight with money, imagine what else he's hiding.

The laughter is soft, cultured, venomous.

JOAN (CONT'D)

But of course, I smile and say thank you like a good little patient. God forbid I hurt his feelings.

She sips her drink, savoring the applause that follows. Her smile doesn't falter - it gleams, polished and practiced, like a weapon disguised as charm.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - KITCHEN

Tom's phone lights up on the counter – a missed call notification flashes briefly: "CARA – 2:14 A.M. (1 voicemail)."

He swipes it away without listening.

TOM (V.O.)
Hospitals call at odd hours.
(beat)
But some lessons need to be
repeated before they're learned.

He turns the phone face down.

INT. KYLE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bass-heavy music pulses from a Bluetooth speaker. Pizza boxes. Sticky beer cans. Vape clouds.

Kyle, stoned and slouched in sweats, stirs instant ramen with a vape pen. His hoodie bears the stains of a man who's long stopped caring.

A handful of FRIENDS lounge across the couch, glassy-eyed and weightless.

FRIEND #1
Yo, this weed's insane.

KYLE
Top-shelf. Friend of a friend. Got
it delivered. Can't beat that.

He grabs a Ziploc bag from the counter, flashes pre-rolled joints like treasure.

KYLE (CONT'D)
Pure. No bullshit.

They all cheer. Lighters click. Smoke builds.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Kyle rifles through a drawer, searching for a lighter. His eyes land on an unmarked envelope on the counter.

He opens it. Inside – crisp bills. \$600.

KYLE
Finally. Somebody appreciates the
hustle.

He pockets the cash, smirking to himself.

INT. KYLE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

The room is slower now. Heavier. Everyone sunk into their own haze. Kyle leans back on the couch, smiling at nothing – until the smile fades.

FRIEND #2
Dude. I'm spinning.

KYLE
That's... how you know it's good.

He laughs weakly – stops. Rubs his jaw. His hands tremble.

KYLE (CONT'D)
Wait...

His breath shortens. Panic cracks through the high.

KYLE (CONT'D)
My heart's–

He lurches forward, trying to stand – collapses.

FRIEND #1
Yo... KYLE?!

FRIEND #2
Someone call 911! What the fuck?!

Kyle's body jerks once – then goes still. The music keeps playing.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - GARAGE - SAME NIGHT

Silence. Tom sits at his workbench, gloved hands steady. He reseals a small glass vial, labels facing outward.

INSERT - LABEL

Fentanyl - 100 mcg/mL - High Potency - Hazardous.

He places it into a box marked DENTAL COMPOUNDS - TRAINING USE ONLY. Locks it. Slides it beneath the false floor of the cabinet.

He removes the gloves, folds them carefully. Turns off the light. Darkness claims the room.

INT. KYLE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

The party's gone. Flashing police lights paint the walls red and blue. Paramedics work quickly, methodical. A white sheet covers Kyle's body. An officer scribbles notes.

OFFICER
Another bad batch.

EMT
They're dropping all over the
county.

OFFICER
You'd think someone would stop
trusting these dealers.

He looks down at the body - expressionless, almost bored.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
Damn shame. Guy was probably just
dumb.

Outside, the sirens fade. Inside, the Bluetooth speaker keeps humming - low, steady, and cruelly alive.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - GARAGE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Soft light. The hum of the space heater. Tom stands at his workbench, wiping his mug in small, deliberate circles. A faint hymn drifts from a radio - gentle, unthreatening, too clean for this room.

His face is calm. Composed. Almost gentle.

TOM (V.O.)
First one was always going to be
easy.
(beat)
He'd been dying slowly for years. I
just finished it.

The hymn continues, unbroken - mercy set to melody.

INT. POLICE STATION - NARCOTICS UNIT - MORNING

Fluorescent light hums overhead. A clock ticks. The room smells like burnt coffee and defeat.

DETECTIVE SOTO (40s), sharp-eyed, understated, flips through a file marked "KYLE WESTOVER - OD"

Across from him, OFFICER LAM (30s), good cop, exhausted and overworked, underpaid, nurses a vending machine cappuccino that tastes like regret.

LAM

House party. Vape cartridges laced with fentanyl. Everyone else just got sick. He died.

SOTO

Where'd it come from?

LAM

Some anonymous delivery service. Cash drop. No traceable account. This shit's happening all over the county.

SOTO

Anything unusual?

LAM

Besides him being the family parasite? Nope.

Soto closes the file. Taps the cover once, thinking.

SOTO

Toxicology?

LAM

Confirmed. Straight spike. No prints on the bag. No one saw him use anything different.

SOTO

Any enemies?

LAM

You've seen his record. Nobody liked him enough to hate him.

Soto lets that sit.

SOTO

Next of kin?

LAM

Sister filled out the paperwork. Cara Marshall. Married to some dentist.

Soto looks down. Pen moves once.

SOTO
Marshall...

He underlines the name once. Just routine.

SOTO (CONT'D)
File it as accidental for now.

LAM
You want me to notify narcotics?

SOTO
Not yet. Let's see if another one
turns up.

Soto studies the file one last time, eyes narrowed – not convinced, not dismissive. Then he drops it into the "CLOSED" bin.

The folder lands with a soft thud. The sound lingers longer than it should.

INT. DENTAL OFFICE - SAME MORNING

A young boy reclines in the chair, sneakers kicking. The hum of suction fills the space like white noise.

Tom works with quiet precision – steady hands, unshakable rhythm.

TOM
All done. Easy as brushing.

The boy grins wide, gap-toothed and proud. His mother exhales, relieved.

MOTHER
You're so good with kids, Dr.
Marshall.

TOM
They deserve to be heard.

He removes his gloves, smooths the creases on his coat, and walks to the front desk. Signs a chart, opens a small drawer.

INSERT - DRAWER

A faintly dusted photo of his family sits tucked in the corner, half-hidden by paperwork. A perfect life trying to stay out of sight.

TOM (V.O.)
The world looks the other way when
men like Kyle die.
(beat)
I knew they would.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

Pale light filters through blinds. The coffee maker gurgles, forgotten.

Cara sits at the table - silk robe, phone in hand, a tissue twisted in her fingers. Eyes red, dry - grief managed like everything else in her life.

CARA
I know... it's just surreal.
(beat)
No, we didn't speak that often. But
still... he was my brother.

Tom leans in the doorway, watching. She sees him, and turns slightly away.

CARA (CONT'D)
No, don't post anything yet. Let me
write it. I want it to sound...
classy.

She hangs up. The silence returns.

TOM
You okay?

CARA
Don't ask that.

TOM
Why not?

CARA
Because if you have to ask, it
means you don't know.
(beat)
I was up all night trying to draft
something for Facebook. People are
going to judge how we handle this.

TOM
He's gone, Cara.

CARA

And people are going to say we didn't do enough. That we weren't close. That we let him slip.

TOM

Weren't you?

CARA

That's not the point.

She presses her palms to her face.

CARA

Mom's already spiraling. Dad's yelling at everyone. Lori says we need to call a lawyer in case his debts hit the estate.

(beat)

And everyone's looking at me like I'm the glue. Like I'm supposed to hold this family together.

Tom studies her – detached but intent.

TOM

Maybe that's how they see you.

CARA

I didn't ask for that.

TOM

You never do.

The jab is soft but surgical. She looks up sharply, but he's already pouring himself coffee.

CARA

You didn't even like him.

TOM

I didn't need to.

(beat)

But he's a part of you.

For a brief flicker, she meets his gaze. There's something there – confusion, maybe shame or guilt. Then it's gone.

CARA

I'm going to write something tasteful. Nothing dramatic. Just... respectful.

TOM
That's what he would've wanted.

She doesn't hear the irony.

He leaves the room, his footsteps silent over tile. Cara stares at the blank post on her screen. The cursor blinks – steady, patient, waiting for her to decide what kind of grief looks good online.

INT. PARENTS' HOME - JOAN'S BATHROOM - MORNING

A pristine vanity, cluttered with luxury skincare and prescription bottles arranged like trophies.

Tom's gloved hand enters frame – steady, sure.

He picks up a capsule separator, twists open a blood pressure pill with surgical precision. Adds a fine dusting of colorless powder. Re-seals it. Perfect. He places the pill back into the organizer – beneath "Wednesday."

TOM (V.O.)
She always said routine kept her
alive.

He closes the drawer without sound.

INT. PARENTS HOME - JOAN'S KITCHEN - LATER

Joan, overdressed for a casual morning, fusses with her pearls while pouring orange juice. She's on speakerphone with Cara.

JOAN
Honestly, I don't even think he
likes this family and I've been
nothing but gracious.
(beat)
Do you know he didn't even call me
after Kyle died?

She downs her pills with a sip of juice.

JOAN (CONT'D)
And I told the ethics committee he
was a fine man – then he bills me
for that implant. Like I'm some
walk-in.
(laughing)
He's lucky to be married to you,
sweetheart.

She hangs up, humming to herself, and turns toward the living room. Then freezes. Her eyes glaze. A faint tremor runs through her hand. The glass slips. The orange juice hits the carpet a split second before she collapses.

INT. HOSPITAL - ER - LATER

A frenzy of doctors. Monitors beep, staff rush, the air reeks of antiseptic and adrenaline.

Cara bursts through the door, hair unbrushed, panic raw – as a DOCTOR works over Joan's still body.

DOCTOR
Stroke. Basal ganglia. Severe
bleed. No clotting factor. We're
stabilizing her now.

CARA
What happened?! She was fine
yesterday!

DOCTOR
She may have missed a dose... or
reacted to her meds.

Cara stares, frozen.

INT. ST. BASIL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Tom stands before the flicker of votive candles. Stained glass light paints his face in fractured color.

He lights one candle, steady flame meeting steady hand.

TOM (V.O.)
She called me weak.
(beat)
But her heart gave out first.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Half a bottle of wine breathes on the counter. The room smells of cork and grief.

Cara leans against the island – robe loose, bare feet on cold tile. Her face glows in the blue light of her phone.

CARA
She always looked so strong. Now
she just... folded.
(MORE)

CARA (CONT'D)
What if it's genetic?
(beat)
No, I'm not being dramatic.

Tom enters quietly, watching her before he speaks.

TOM
Who were you talking to?

CARA
Lori.

TOM
She say anything helpful?

CARA
She sent me an article about grief
cycles. Said I should try
journaling.

TOM
That doesn't sound like her.

CARA
It's performative. She wants me to
post some big "my mother was a
warrior" tribute so she can reshare
it.

(beat)
I can't sleep. I can't eat. I keep
smelling her perfume. I swear I
hear her walking down the stairs.

TOM
Maybe it's just stress.

CARA
Or maybe we're cursed.

She says it offhand, but something in it sticks.

TOM
Cursed?

CARA
First Kyle. Now my mom. This
family's always been dysfunctional
but...

She trails off, refills her glass.

CARA (CONT'D)
There's something wrong. I feel it.
Like something's circling us.

TOM
What would you do if it was?

CARA
What?

TOM
If something was circling us. Would
you run? Fight? Surrender?

CARA
What kind of question is that?

TOM
Just curious.

CARA
Don't get weird on me right now.

TOM
I'm not.

She studies him – the calm, the detachment. Then takes
another drink.

CARA
Everyone's acting strange lately.
(beat)
Including you.

TOM
You said we were cursed.

CARA
I didn't mean it literally.

TOM
I know.

He kisses her forehead gently – soft, careful, distant.

TOM (CONT'D)
You should get some rest.

CARA
Maybe.

He leaves. She watches him go. Her hand trembles. The wine
ripples – small circles widening into silence.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

A family sits under the brittle light of a too-perfect afternoon. Tom passes plates to Ben and Lily, calm as ever.

TOM
Here, grab napkins too, yeah?

NICK
You're raising them soft, Tommy.

TOM
They're just being respectful.

NICK
Nah. Respect's earned. They gotta learn to push back.

He claps Ben hard on the back - too hard.

NICK (CONT'D)
You ever wanna learn how real men work, come ride garbage with me one night. I'll show you what real sweat smells like.

BEN
I'm okay, besides now's not the time, Uncle Nick.

NICK
Yeah, you're probably too busy polishing dad's drills.

The table laughs - brittle and performative. Tom doesn't bite. Just keeps passing plates, eyes on the food.

NICK (CONT'D)
Don't worry, Tom. Some men build empires. Some clean teeth.

Tom finally looks up - a faint, unreadable smile.

TOM
Then I suppose we both deal with trash.

The laughter dies faster than it should.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Dim lighting. The remains of dinner - untouched spaghetti, a half-empty wine bottle.

Cara stirs cold spaghetti without eating. Tom sits across from her, hands folded under the table. His voice lands softly, like a cut that doesn't bleed yet.

TOM
How long?

CARA
(beat)
It didn't mean anything.

TOM
That's not what I asked.

She drains her glass, unflinching.

CARA
About a month.

TOM
Who?

CARA
It doesn't matter.

TOM
It does to me.

CARA
It was someone from the gym.

TOM
But you don't go to the gym?

CARA
Then maybe ask why I started.

She pushes her plate away.

CARA (CONT'D)
You were never home. Always tired.
Always quiet. And what kind of man
brings up an alleged affair at a
funeral? Psycho.

Tom flinches, a blink more than a wince.

TOM
I was working. For us.

CARA
You think showing up with groceries
and a paycheck makes you a husband?
No, Tom. Being there does.

TOM

I think not cheating makes me one.

CARA

You want me to beg? To cry? It's not gonna happen. I'm not the only one responsible here.

TOM

You slept with someone else. He came by to give condolences. Did your mother actually know him?

CARA

You made me feel lonely.

He doesn't answer.

CARA (CONT'D)

I told you because I didn't want to lie anymore.

TOM

No.

CARA

What?

TOM

You told me because it was over – and you wanted me to carry it.
(beat)

Like I carry everything else.

The silence that follows is absolute. She grips her phone like a shield. He never blinks.

INT. LAW OFFICE – CONFERENCE ROOM – DAY

A polished table. Leather chairs. Legal folders spread out.

Cara sits beside Lori – composed, cold. Tom sits across, flipping through a manila folder like he's checking X-rays.

The ESTATE ATTORNEY (60s), calm, practiced, adjusts his glasses.

ATTORNEY

Joan amended her will approximately three months ago.

LORI

Without consulting me?

ATTORNEY
She consulted me.

CARA
What changed?

The attorney glances at the paperwork.

ATTORNEY
Several asset reallocations.
Jewelry and bonds previously
divided among the children were
consolidated.

LORI
To whom?

ATTORNEY
To you, Cara.

Cara blinks, absorbing. Lori's jaw tightens.

LORI
And the rest?

ATTORNEY
A trust fund. For your children.
Executor: Thomas Marshall.

The air thickens. Tom writes something slowly in his notebook
— deliberate, neat.

LORI
She hated Tom.

ATTORNEY
That's not how it appears on paper.

CARA
Mom wouldn't do that without
telling us.

ATTORNEY
Her signature's on file. There's
video confirmation. Witnesses.

TOM
Maybe she just wanted to do the
right thing.

Lori glares at him.

LORI
You expect us to believe she
suddenly changed her mind?

TOM
Not suddenly.
(beat)
People reflect on legacy near the
end.

The attorney closes the folder – crisp, final.

ATTORNEY
I assure you, this was her
decision.

CARA
She didn't trust you, Tom.

The attorney gathers his notes.

ATTORNEY
Funds will be disbursed next
quarter. You'll receive
notifications per installment.

Tom stands, smooth and polite.

TOM
Thank you. You've been very
helpful.

He nods once – courteous, detached – and leaves the room.
Lori's glare stays fixed on the door long after he's gone.

LORI
She hated him.

The silence that follows feels almost like proof.

EXT. NICK'S HOUSE – BACKYARD – DAY

A perfect suburban afternoon. Lawnmowers hum, birds gossip,
sunlight pretends nothing bad ever happens here.

Nick's backyard is chaos – tools scattered, gloves tossed
aside, a half-empty beer sweating into the grass.

Nick, shirtless and loud, stands on the roof, scooping out
gutters.

NICK

I don't need no stinkin' harness!
OSHA doesn't live here!

A big smug belly laugh – then starts down the ladder. The wind shifts. The ladder creaks. One rung – the middle – flexes under weight, loosened.

Nick descends. One step. Two. CRACK. The ladder lurches. His body twists midair – arms flailing, gravity merciless.

THUD. The sound is sharp, final.

A dog barks. A neighbor screams. A phone fumbles for 911.

Nick lies crumpled on the patio bricks. Neck bent wrong. Eyes wide, glassy, gone.

INT. DENTAL OFFICE - SAME TIME

Quiet. Sterile. White light. Tom runs a scaler across a whetstone – slow, methodical strokes.

TOM (V.O.)

Gravity never needed help.

(beat)

Just a little... suggestion.

He sets the tool down with precision, opens a drawer.

INSERT - DRAWER

Nick's business card: Nick D'Ambrosio - Waste Systems Specialist.

Tom studies the card for a long moment. Then folds it. Once. Twice. Again. He drops it into the trash bin. No ceremony. No hesitation.

INT. ST. BASIL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Stained glass spills crimson and sapphire across the pews. Organ chords hang in the air – weightless, mournful.

Tom sits fourth pew from the front, posture perfect, eyes tired but dry. Hands clasped, not praying – just enduring. The priest steps beside him.

PRIEST

May I?

Tom nods. The priest sits. Silence stretches between them, soft as confession.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
You're carrying a lot.

Tom wipes a tear that barely forms.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
You don't have to say anything.

TOM
I'm not sure words would help.

PRIEST
Sometimes the soul speaks louder without them.

Tom nods faintly.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
When grief comes in waves, the worst thing we can do is try to swim against it. Let it carry you.

Tom looks toward the stained glass — Christ kneeling in Gethsemane, haloed in color and pain.

TOM
Some waves don't stop. They just get smarter.

PRIEST
Then we anchor to faith.

TOM
Or we become the storm.

The priest studies him — uncertain whether to comfort or retreat.

PRIEST
Would you like to talk?

TOM
I'm not ready to talk.

PRIEST
Then I'll be here when you are.

He rises, touches Tom's shoulder gently, and walks away.

Tom sits still — surrounded by the echo of the organ and haloed in candlelight, framed by color and shadow.

TOM (V.O.)
 They think I'm breaking. I'm not.
 (beat)
 I'm blooming.

INT. POLICE STATION - DETECTIVE SOTO'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A room that mirrors its occupant: precise, unadorned, quietly obsessive. Files line the shelves in order. A single corkboard hangs on the wall. Detective Soto sits at his desk, glasses low, flipping through a folder labeled: D'Ambrosio, Nicholas - Accidental Death.

INSERT - PHOTOS

A shattered ladder. Blood sprayed across brick. EMT reports stamped "NO FOUL PLAY." Toxicology: CLEAN.

He sets the file aside and opens another: Westover, Kyle - Overdose. Then another: Franklin, Joan - Stroke.

He lays the photos out carefully in a triangle, the geometry of coincidence.

SOTO
 All unrelated.

He picks up his pen, hesitates, then writes:

INSERT - YELLOW PAD

Pattern? Proximity? Intent?

His phone buzzes.

INSERT - CALLER ID: LAM.

SOTO (CONT'D)
 Soto.

LAM (O.S.)
 Just got off with the M.E. Joan Franklin's heart meds checked out - right doses. But she had trace alkaloids in her system. Stuff that shouldn't be there.

SOTO
 Illegal?

LAM (O.S.)
 No. Just... odd.

Soto's eyes drift back to the photos – the quiet symmetry of the dead.

SOTO
Keep it quiet. Run it against
dental school pharmacology.

LAM (O.S.)
Dental school?

SOTO
Gut feeling.

He hangs up.

The files stay open – watching him like witnesses. Soto leans back, the weight of patterns settling in.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Warm golden light filters through gauzy curtains. The house hums with the soft quiet of a place trying to stay peaceful.

Tom sits on the couch in scrubs, shoes off, a dental journal open but untouched. He turns the same page again and again – movement without purpose.

The front door opens. Lily steps in, backpack slung over her shoulder, smile small but warm.

LILY
Hey, Dad.

Tom looks up. His whole face lights up, unguarded, human.

TOM
Hey, Peanut.

They hug – tight, unhurried, longer than usual.

LILY
You okay?

TOM
Better now.

She drops her bag. Sits beside him, scanning the still room.

LILY
Mom's not here?

TOM
Grocery run. Said she needed "air."
What about Ben?

LILY
At school. Honestly, the house
feels... weird lately. Can't blame
him for staying out.

TOM
It's been... a hard season.

LILY
Yeah. First Kyle, then Grandma,
then Uncle Nick...
(beat)
I'm sorry. I know they weren't
always kind to you.

Tom blinks – the truth catches him off guard.

TOM
That's not... they were family.

LILY
That's not the same as kind.

She takes his hand – gentle, grounding.

LILY (CONT'D)
I've been thinking a lot about who
I want to be.

TOM
You don't have to figure it all out
yet.

LILY
I know. But I keep thinking about
you.
(beat)
You've always held everything up.
Worked late. Took us to school.
Said sorry even when it wasn't your
fault.

TOM
That's what fathers do.

LILY
No. That's what *you* do.

He looks at her – something fragile cracks open behind his
stillness.

LILY (CONT'D)
I'm proud of you.

He swallows hard, his voice barely steady.

TOM
Thank you.

He squeezes her hand.

TOM (CONT'D)
You have no idea how much I needed
that.

She leans against him. His breath softens, the air loosening
in his chest.

TOM (V.O.)
Sometimes, mercy comes disguised as
love.

The curtains lift in the breeze. For the first time, the
house feels almost alive.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - GARAGE - NIGHT

Darkness hums. The lone lightbulb overhead flickers,
stuttering against the silence.

Tom stands at his workbench, motionless. Breath steady. Eyes
empty. He punches the wood once – hard but contained, a muted
confession. Then slides open the hidden drawer.

Inside: his instruments. Cold. Precise. Waiting.

TOM (V.O.)
I could've stopped.
(beat)
She almost made me stop.
(beat)
Almost.

He closes the drawer. The bulb flickers again – once, twice,
then holds.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - BASEMENT - LATE NIGHT

Cool air. The hum of the water heater. Shadows pressed into
corners. Tom sits in a wooden chair beside the washer, scrubs
still on, body stiller than silence. His hands fold like
prayer, but his eyes stay on the floor. A photo album rests
open on the dryer beside him.

INSERT - PHOTO ALBUM

Lily and Ben. Toothless smiles. Birthday candles. Science fairs. Laughter trapped in time.

He turns the page. Cara and the kids, sunlit and smiling. Tom in the background – blurry, half out of frame, half forgotten.

Stares at it for a long moment. Then closes the book gently.

TOM (V.O.)
Maybe there's still time.
(beat)
Maybe the wound can close.

He moves to the workbench, opens the hidden drawer. Inside: a small black notebook – the kind used for measurements, not memories.

INSERT - NOTEBOOK

Names. Dates. Dosages. Methods. Neat, deliberate.

His hand trembles. The notebook slips – THUD. The sound echoes through the basement like judgment. He drops to his knees, hands on the cold concrete.

TOM (V.O.)
But if I stop... they win.
(beat)
Again.
(beat)
And I don't think I have another
lifetime in me.

Tears fall – silent, furious, unwanted. He wipes them away, picks up the notebook, opens it again.

INSERT - PAGE

A single new name, freshly written: LORI.

The flickering bulb steadies – just for her.

TOM (V.O.)
Mercy died three funerals ago.
(beat)
Now it's just math.

He closes the notebook. The hum of the water heater fills the silence – mechanical, rhythmic, alive.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - EARLY MORNING

The world is quiet, washed in soft gold. Sprinklers hiss across manicured lawns.

Lori — immaculate even at dawn — slides into her gleaming SUV. Designer blazer, travel mug in hand, sunglasses that cost more than rent.

INT. LORI'S SUV - MOMENTS LATER

She clicks her phone into the mount, hits play.

PODCAST HOST (V.O.)
Power isn't about force. It's about control. The calmest person in the room always wins.

Lori smirks, adjusts her mirror.

LORI
Preach.

She throws the car in reverse, backs out.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - CONTINUOUS

Her SUV glides down the block. The world looks balanced — too balanced.

INT. LORI'S SUV - MOMENTS LATER

Stopped at a red light. She taps the steering wheel, impatient. The light shifts green. She accelerates — fast, confident.

Then — brake lights ahead. She presses the pedal. Nothing. Harder. Nothing.

LORI
What the—?!

She slams both feet. The pedal sinks to the floor. The SUV rockets downhill.

EXT. LORI'S SUV - CONTINUOUS

The tires SCREAM. The SUV fishtails, clips a guardrail, then flips — a violent ballet of steel and glass.

The sound cuts to silence. Steam rises. The podcast still plays faintly:

PODCAST HOST (V.O.)
...and control is the illusion that
keeps us alive.

INT. DENTAL OFFICE - TOM'S OFFICE - SAME MORNING

Tom stands by the window, a porcelain mug steaming in his hand. On his laptop screen: Prominent Attorney Dies in Brake Failure Accident.

He stirs his tea, steady, rhythmic.

TOM (V.O.)
She used the law to bind me.
(beat)
So I used science to unbind her.

He takes a slow sip.

TOM (V.O.)
Clean lines. No prints. No rush.
(beat)
Just pressure... and timing.

He sets the mug down. The teaspoon spins – slows – and stops.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rain needles the windows – soft, steady, waiting for thunder.

Cara lies awake, eyes tracing cracks in the ceiling like they might spell out a warning. Tom steps from the bathroom, towel around his neck, hair damp, calm.

TOM
You're up late.

CARA
Couldn't sleep.

TOM
Another glass of wine might help.

CARA
I don't want to blur anything
tonight.

He raises an eyebrow, subtly, reading her.

TOM
Something on your mind?

CARA
Lori's dead.

TOM
I know.

He sits on the edge of the bed, back turned.

CARA
That's four.

TOM
Hmm?

CARA
Four deaths. In six months.
(beat)
All on my side of the family.

He doesn't move.

CARA (CONT'D)
Kyle overdoses. Mom strokes out.
Nick falls off a ladder. Lori's
brakes fail.
(beat)
You ever heard of that much
coincidence?

TOM
Life isn't symmetrical.

CARA
Don't patronize me.

She sits up – sharper now, voice edged.

CARA (CONT'D)
It's too clean. Too... measured.

TOM
What are you asking?

CARA
Nothing.

TOM
You're asking something.

CARA
I'm scared.

He turns to her, calm – almost tender.

TOM

Of what?

CARA

I don't know. Maybe... maybe something's circling us.

TOM

You said that after your mom.

CARA

Yeah, and I'm still saying it. Doesn't that tell you something?

TOM

Maybe it tells me you want an explanation. Even when there isn't one.

(beat)

People die. Tragedy clumps together. It's just chaos, Cara.

CARA

Is it?

She studies him now – really studies him – like she's seeing a pattern too late.

TOM

You know what chaos really looks like?

(beat)

It looks exactly like this.

Cara pulls the covers up slowly, her eyes never leaving him.

CARA

I don't feel safe.

TOM

Then maybe you should try sleeping closer to me. I'll keep you safe.

He turns off the lamp. Darkness and thunder roll in together.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - GARAGE - NIGHT

The single bulb hums with the rhythm of the storm. The garage is immaculate – everything in its place, every surface wiped clean.

Tom stands at his workbench, rearranging objects already in perfect order – order as ritual.

FLASHBACK – INT. MARSHALL HOME – LIVING ROOM – NIGHT (YEARS EARLIER)

A younger Tom, cross-legged on the carpet, building a small wooden model with obsessive precision.

Across from him, a younger Walter (40s), half-drunk in a recliner, watches him.

WALTER
Jesus, you're quiet. You gonna
build your whole life outta scraps
and silence?

Tom doesn't answer – tightens a screw instead.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Say something, boy.

Tom looks up – mouth opens, then closes again.

WALTER (CONT'D)
That's what I thought. Patience,
huh? Must've got that from me.

He laughs, cruel and sloppy – the kind of laughter that bruises. The sound echoes into the present.

INT. MARSHALL HOME – GARAGE – NIGHT

The bulb's reflection cuts across metal as Tom pauses mid-motion, hand resting on a wrench.

TOM (V.O.)
Some lessons stick. Even when they
shouldn't.

He moves tools from left to right – meaningless, ritual.

TOM (V.O.)
I took my time. They used to call
it patience.
(beat)
But what they meant was silence.

He sets down a dental scaler, blade gleaming.

TOM (V.O.)
I thought silence was mercy.
(beat)
Turns out it's just another way to
let people hit you.

Tom opens a lower cabinet.

INSERT - DRAWER

A small metal tin sits inside, labeled and dated - neat,
discreet.

TOM (V.O.)
I planned.

His phone buzzes. BEN - VOICEMAIL (0:32). He presses play.

BEN (V.O., THROUGH PHONE)
Hey, Dad. Uh-sorry to bug you. I'm
kinda short this week.
(beat)
Kyle borrowed a little from me
before he... well, you know. Said
he'd pay it back, but - Anyway,
just wondering if you could spot me
a hundred? I'll pay you back
Friday. Promise. Thanks, Dad.

Silence. Tom stares at the phone - expressionless, listening
to the last breath of his son's voice before the message
ends.

TOM (V.O.)
He took because he could.
(beat)
They all did.

He locks the phone, aligns it perfectly beside his notebook.
Pulls out a label printer, its faint whirr slicing the
silence. He types.

INSERT - LABEL

LORI - THERMAL CUT - VERIFIED

He affixes the label to the tin with careful pressure.

TOM (V.O.)
I made it painless.

He exhales and leans back against the bench.

TOM (V.O.)
 Not for them. But for me.
 (beat)
 Now, I think adding a touch of pain
 is in order.

Opens a small black notebook.

INSERT - NOTEBOOK

In precise, surgical handwriting: "4 down. 2 to go."

He crosses it out. Writes instead: "Phase transition imminent. Remaining variables: two. One unaware. One approaching recognition. Window for correction - closing."

He studies the words - the corners of his mouth twitch, not quite a smile, more like acknowledgment. Pressing the pen harder, he adds one final line in smaller, tighter script: "Containment must precede collapse."

TOM (V.O.)
 God forgives.
 (beat)
 But He also flooded the earth once.
 (beat)
 Sometimes cleansing looks like
 murder.

The bulb above him flickers, once, twice. Then steadies - burning bright over the calm precision of a man who's already decided what comes next.

INT. DENTAL CLINIC - OPERATORY ROOM - DAY

A pristine, sunlit space hums with calm jazz. Everything gleams - stainless steel, white tile, precision.

A YOUNG PATIENT (8) grips the armrests, trembling. Tom adjusts the overhead lamp with a gentle touch, his tone measured, soothing.

TOM
 Let's make a deal. You count to three... and I'll make the pain disappear before you finish.

The boy swallows, nervous, then nods.

BOY
 One... two-

Before he reaches three, Tom's already done. He withdraws the tool, calm, efficient.

MOTHER (O.S.)
You're a miracle, Dr. Marshall.

Tom peels off his gloves, smiling faintly – polite, practiced.

TOM
Just patience. That's all it takes.

The boy grins, a new gap shining where the ache used to live.

Tom watches him go – then his eyes drift to the tray beside him. Every tool perfectly aligned, every edge gleaming. The same neat symmetry we've seen before.

TOM (V.O.)
They said I make pain disappear.
(beat)
They never ask what that costs.

He shuts off the lamp. Jazz fills the silence he leaves behind.

INT. VEHICLE FORENSICS GARAGE – DAY

Halogen lights hum above the wreck of Lori's SUV – a twisted carcass of metal and precision undone.

Detective Soto stands beside a FORENSIC TECH, both gloved, both squinting at the undercarriage hoisted on a lift. The tech angles a flashlight across the brake line, slicing light through dust.

TECH
You asked me to look for tampering?

SOTO
Anything that says this wasn't bad luck.

TECH
Brake line's ruptured. But...

He crouches, gestures at a section of tubing – clean, blackened at the center.

TECH (CONT'D)
No cuts. No punctures. Not even abrasion.

SOTO
Degradation?

TECH
That's what I thought. But this
wasn't wear and tear. It's... heat.
Controlled heat.

SOTO
Controlled how?

TECH
Localized. Like someone hit it with
a micro-thermal beam – just long
enough to weaken it from the
inside. Wouldn't show up on the
surface until it failed under
pressure.

Soto studies the mark, jaw tightening.

SOTO
Would it leave residue?

TECH
Not unless you were looking for it
with a microscope – and knew where
to look.

SOTO
That kind of tool – common?

TECH
Not really. Maybe in a dental lab.
They use thermal tips like this for
resin shaping. Sterilization. That
kind of thing.

Soto straightens, pen clicking softly.

SOTO
You ever hear of Thomas Marshall?

TECH
The dentist?

SOTO
Yeah.

TECH
(shrugs)
Had a root canal there once. Nice
guy. Calm.

Soto doesn't answer. Just steps closer to the burned line – the ghost of a clean, controlled failure.

SOTO (V.O.)
 No prints. No fibers. No
 fingerprints.
 (beat)
 Just intent.

He stares at the wreck like it's whispering something he can almost hear.

SOTO
 The quiet ones always talk in the
 end.
 (beat)
 You just have to learn how to
 listen.

The tech frowns, not sure if that was meant for him. Soto doesn't look away from the brake system. The lights hum – sterile, relentless.

SOTO (CONT'D)
 Just... silence.

INT. DENTAL CLINIC - BREAK ROOM - DAY

A cozy, sterile oasis: muted tones, humming coffee machine, motivational poster about "Smile Ethics." Two hygienists sip coffee mid-laughter.

Detective Soto stands by the fridge – polite, patient, unreadable. A man who listens more than he speaks.

SOTO
 Appreciate your time. Just trying
 to get a sense of Dr. Marshall's
 habits.

HYGIENIST #1
 Habits?

SOTO
 Any recent changes. Absences. Mood
 shifts. Anything unusual.

HYGIENIST #2
 Honestly? He's the most consistent
 man alive.
 (MORE)

HYGIENIST #2 (CONT'D)
I've worked here six years – same
schedule, same lunch, same
playlists.

HYGIENIST #1
Polite to a fault. Bakes us cookies
every quarter.

SOTO
Cookies?

HYGIENIST #1
From scratch. His lemon shortbread
should be illegal. Melts in your
mouth. He's kind of a legend.

Soto notes it anyway, pen scratching quietly.

SOTO
Any tension with the dental board?
Patients? Complaints?

HYGIENIST #2
None. The board practically
worships him. He teaches ethics
seminars.

Soto looks up.

SOTO
Ethics.

HYGIENIST #1
Yeah. He says moral structure keeps
the work clean.

A pause.

SOTO
And does it?

They share a nervous laugh.

HYGIENIST #2
Cleaner than most places I've
worked.

Soto nods once.

HYGIENIST #1
Why? Did something happen?

SOTO
Just routine. That's all for now.
Thanks for your time.

They exit. Soto stays, scans the room - the tidy counter, precisely stacked coffee pods, chairs aligned like a geometry lesson.

The clock ticks, even and steady.

He closes his eyes for a moment, listening - to the fridge's hum, the faint suction whirl from down the hall, the silence shaped by control.

SOTO (CONT'D)
Sometimes silence tells you more
than noise ever could.

He opens his notebook. Jots a single line:

Control is a kind of noise.

INT. DENTAL CLINIC - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

The lobby hums with polite order - antiseptic and eucalyptus woven into the air.

Soto steps out, closing his notebook. The elderly RECEPTIONIST looks up from behind the counter, smiling.

RECEPTIONIST
You a patient?

SOTO
No, ma'am. Just asking a few
questions.

RECEPTIONIST
You should be.

SOTO
Why's that?

RECEPTIONIST
Because he makes pain disappear.

She nods toward a framed photo on the wall.

INSERT - PHOTO AND PLAQUE

Tom shaking hands with a smiling child. Beneath it: Dr.
Thomas Marshall - For Outstanding Compassion in Practice.

Soto studies it – the perfect posture, the measured smile, the performance of kindness made permanent.

SOTO (V.O.)
A man like that doesn't make
enemies.
(beat)
He makes my job harder.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - OFFICE - NIGHT

Only the desk lamp glows. The rest of the room breathes in shadow. Tom sits before an open drawer – everything inside aligned like an equation. Among the precision: one folded note.

INSERT - NOTE

Kyle - \$280 (IOU) – written in Ben's handwriting.

Tom smooths the creases flat, the motion almost reverent. Then he takes his black pen, draws a single clean line beneath the number, and writes with surgical care: PAID IN FULL.

TOM (V.O.)
It's never about the money.
(beat)
It's about the lesson they think
they can teach.

He closes the drawer. The click lands like punctuation.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

Muted morning light. The quiet hum of the refrigerator. Cara pours cereal into a chipped porcelain bowl – almond milk, measured. She leans against the island, scrolling her phone between spoonfuls. Two chews per bite. Scroll. Two more.

Just outside the doorway, Tom stands motionless – mug in hand, back against the wall – watching. Listening.

TOM (V.O.)
Left hand holds the spoon. Phone in
right. Two chews per bite, then a
scroll.

INSERT - WALL CLOCK

7:36.

The ticking is the only sound between them. Cara glances toward him – that still figure framed by the doorway.

CARA
I found a therapist. Couples or solo.

TOM
Solo would be simpler.

CARA
You'd love that – less talking.
(beat)
Maybe if you weren't so boring, I'd eat faster.

She moves past him to rinse her bowl. He doesn't respond, only shifts his stance – subtle tremor of irritation.

TOM (V.O.)
People mistake silence for calm.
(beat)
Sometimes it's just waiting your turn to speak.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Morning light spills across the room in thin, deliberate lines.

Cara stands before the open closet, pulling blouses and tossing them onto the bed – each soft thump like punctuation in an argument she's having with herself.

Tom appears in the doorway. Silent. She doesn't see him in the mirror until the floor creaks.

CARA
Jesus! Say something.

TOM
Just passing through.

CARA
You hover like a ghost sometimes.

TOM
Old habits.

She pulls on a blouse, frowns, rips it off. Another. Still wrong. She doesn't look at him, but his reflection lingers in the mirror – patient, watchful.

TOM (V.O.)
She changes outfits twice. Never
irons. Always chooses the third
option.

Cara steps into the bathroom, still adjusting her sleeves.

TOM (V.O.)
7:41. Right on cue.

He watches the empty doorway, eyes steady – the quiet pulse
of a man who knows every variable in his house, and how long
each one takes to break.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - MASTER BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Bright mirror light. Cara leans close, applying foundation
with quick, impatient dabs. Her face is careful but her hands
are tired.

Tom stands in the doorway, watching her reflection.

TOM (O.S.)
You are beautiful, you know. It
suits you.

CARA
Sure.

TOM
I mean it.

CARA
Stop being weird.

Their eyes meet in the mirror – a reflection of distance.

CARA (CONT'D)
You've always been patient with me.
Too patient, maybe.

A flicker crosses Tom's face – not anger, not sadness. Just
something soundless breaking under glass.

TOM (V.O.)
Compliments fall into a well. No
echo.
(beat)
She only hears praise when it comes
from someone else.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - HOME OFFICE - DAY

Cara sits at her desk, hunched over the laptop, half-finished thoughts glowing across her laptop screen.

INSERT - SCREEN

Online carts. Hotel listings. An unsent email blinking in draft form: Family Therapy?

Tom stands in the doorway - silent, unseen.

TOM (V.O.)

When she's angry, she shops. When she's unsure, she writes drafts she never sends. Her chaos has a fingerprint.

She sips from a glass of white wine - always white.

TOM (V.O.)

Two glasses and the afternoon disappears.

He takes out his small leather notebook, noting something down. The scratch of his pen sounds like breathing.

EXT. MARSHALL HOME - BACKYARD - DUSK

Golden light bleeds across the quiet yard. Cara waters her succulents, the hose curling around her bare feet. She moves slowly, thoughtless.

From inside, Tom watches through the glass door.

TOM (V.O.)

She forgets the hose running every time. Every. Time.

She sets the nozzle down and walks back inside, never looking behind her.

A beat. Then Tom steps out from the garage. He bends, shuts off the valve, and coils the hose into perfect, symmetrical loops. Each circle identical.

He stands for a moment - the only sound, the gentle drip of the last drops falling onto the concrete. Then he turns and walks back into the house, disappearing like a shadow retreating from its source.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - BASEMENT - NIGHT

The single bulb above sways, its chain trembling in the faint draft. A low hum from the furnace mixes with the faint click of a label maker.

Tom sits cross-legged on the floor before a low shelf. Metal tins gleam beneath the dull light – each labeled, evenly spaced, immaculate.

He slides one free: OBSERVATIONS - CARA - SPRING.

He opens it.

INSERT - TIN

Inside: neat stacks of notecards, receipts, printed screenshots. A torn Post-it on top, written in Cara's handwriting: Do you still even love me?

Tom runs his thumb across it like a relic. Then he takes a new notecard from his breast pocket and begins to writing:

Day 15 - Observation nearing threshold. Pattern stable enough to proceed. Night cycle: ideal. Trust decaying on schedule. Subject unaware. Initiate correction before deviation sets in.

His pen lingers on the word "correction" – the hesitation tender, almost human. Then he closes the tin and reaches for the label maker beside him.

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

INSERT - LABEL

SUBJECT: PATIENT - OBSERVATION CONTINUES

He studies it, admiring the symmetry, then presses it onto the lid with surgical precision.

TOM (V.O.)
Patience is the most dangerous
word.
(beat)
It means you're still waiting for
permission.

He exhales through his nose. Calm. Centered. Closes the tin and presses PLAY on a small recorder beside him.

CARA (RECORDED)
I don't feel safe.

He rewinds. Plays it again.

CARA (RECORDED) (CONT'D)
I don't feel safe.

Tom closes his eyes. A faint, chilling smile.

TOM (V.O.)
Good.
(beat)
That means you're finally seeing
me.
(beat)
I wonder what else you'll see...
once the mirror breaks.

He stops the tape. Silence returns, heavier than before.

FLASHBACK - INT. MARSHALL HOME - LIVING ROOM - YEARS EARLIER

The air is thick with TV glow and stale beer. Walter sits in his recliner, belly forward, eyes sharp.

Young Ben and Lily sit on the couch, small and stiff. Cara watches from the armchair, trying not to move. Tom stands quietly in the corner, not looking at anyone.

WALTER
You think your dad's strong? Wait
'til you're older. You'll see.
(beat)
Nice guys break the worst kiddos.

Tom doesn't move. Not even a blink.

WALTER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Your kids'll hate you, Tom. It's
just math.

The flicker of the TV paints his face - one heartbeat of emotion, then nothing.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - BEDROOM CLOSET

Tom unlocks a small metal box from the top shelf. His movements are steady, ritualistic. He opens it.

INSERT - BOX

Inside, a folded, yellowed slip of paper. He unfolds it carefully, as though it might crumble.

In her handwriting: I forgive you for not being what I needed.

TOM (V.O.)
I forgave you too.
(beat)
And then I realized forgiveness
isn't the same as forgetting.
(beat)
And forgetting... is a luxury I
unfortunately don't offer anymore.

He folds the paper, tucks it back into place, and clicks the box shut.

FLASHBACK - INT. MARSHALL HOME - LIVING ROOM - 1 YEAR AGO

The glow of the TV flickers over empty beer bottles and half-eaten chips. Football hums in the background. The family sprawls around - Joan, Nick, Lori, Kyle, and Cara - all talking over one another.

Walter paces, red-faced and unsteady, a drink sloshing in his hand.

Tom stands near the doorway - pressed shirt, composed posture, eyes that keep scanning for exits. Trying.

WALTER
You trying to embarrass me in front
of my own family?

TOM
I just said maybe we don't yell at
the waitress. She was a kid.

WALTER
Don't fucking tell me how to talk
in a restaurant I paid for.

TOM
I didn't mean it that way.

WALTER
You always mean it that way. Like
you're better than everyone.

Tom steps back, palms open.

TOM
I'm just saying - respect goes both
ways.

WALTER
You want respect?

Walter grabs a glass ashtray and hurls it across the room.

SLOW MOTION - the ashtray spins, glints in the TV light, then shatters against the wall inches from Tom's head.

Silence. Just the low hum of the TV.

LORI
Jesus, Dad.

JOAN
It didn't hit him.

CARA
You provoked him, Tom.

NICK
He's had a rough week.

KYLE
You always have to make things worse, Bro.

Tom looks at them all - the same chorus of excuses. He crouches and picks up a jagged shard of glass.

TOM (V.O.)
He tried to break me.
(beat)
The rest of them just laughed while
I learned to bleed quietly.

He drops the shard into the trash. The clink echoes longer than it should.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The long table dressed like a peace treaty. Candles. Polished silver. Roast chicken cooling untouched.

Cara moves between chairs, hosting through muscle memory. Walter, older but still sharp-edged, sits at the head - already half-drunk. Tom at the far end - posture perfect, eyes patient.

WALTER
Never thought I'd say this, but...
it's been too damn quiet without
Nick around.

Soft laughter. Even Cara manages a polite smile.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Hell, if he were here, he'd be
three glasses in and telling me I
carve a bird wrong.

Cara forces a toast.

CARA
To family.

ALL
To family.

WALTER
Nah, nah - hold on.

He rises clumsily. Glass in one hand, other hand gripping the chair to steady himself.

Tom watches him struggle to stand - the same posture, the same sneer he's seen for years.

TOM (V.O.)
I tried therapy. I tried prayer.
(beat)
None of it made them stop laughing.
(beat)
You learn, after a while, that
forgiveness is just another word
for permission.
(beat)
So I stopped forgiving.

WALTER
You know, I always said this clan
was thick as thieves. Even when the
boys fought, even when the girls
screeched, we stuck together.

The table grows still. He's getting nostalgic, dangerous territory.

WALTER (CONT'D)
And Tommy boy down there? He stuck
too.

Tom nods politely.

FLASH MEMORY - Walter's hand slapping younger Tom across the face. Everyone in the room laughing.

WALTER (CONT'D)
The punching bag of the family.
Dentist Jesus. Didn't say boo even
when we steamrolled him.

More laughter, uneasy this time.

WALTER (CONT'D)
But you know what? That's strength
too. Quiet strength. I respect that
now.

He raises his glass.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Come on, Tom - tell us what keeps
those perfect teeth in line. Fear?
Floss?

Laughter. Tom half-smiles, slow to answer.

TOM
Patience.

WALTER
Patience, he says!
(to the table)
You hear that? He learned that from
me - the art of waiting your turn
to speak, even when no one's
listening.

More laughter, harder this time. Cara looks away. Tom's smile
barely moves. His jaw flexes once.

TOM (V.O.)
It's funny - what they call
patience.
(beat)
Sometimes it's just paralysis.

Walter claps him on the shoulder, too hard.

WALTER
That's my boy. Always calm.

Tom inhales slowly through his nose, steadying himself.

TOM (V.O.)
They laugh because they think I'm
still waiting.
(beat)
But waiting time is over.

WALTER

I mean, shit, I told Cara not to marry you. But hell - you proved me wrong.

He lifts his glass again.

WALTER (CONT'D)

To Tom.

ALL

To Tom.

They drink. Walter blinks. A smile that falters mid-breath.

WALTER

Whew... that's... tight in the chest...

He gasps. His hand claws his shirt. Then he crumples - chair, glass, everything crashing down in one violent silence.

CARA

Dad?

TOM

(rising, calm)

I'll call 911.

He steps out with his phone already to his ear. From the kitchen - panic. Screams. Movement.

TOM (V.O.)

No bitterness. No violence. Just a glass raised... and a pulse slowed.

(beat)

Sometimes the final blow is disguised as a compliment.

He ends the call before anyone answers.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - GARAGE - NIGHT

The hum of the space heater. Rain faint on the roof. Tom sits at his workbench. The light hums overhead. His movements are exact, ritualized. He feeds a strip into the label maker.

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

INSERT - LABEL

WALTER - CARDIAC FAILURE - CLEAN

He peels it off - crooked. He frowns, removes it, reprints. The second one is perfect. He smooths it flat with both thumbs.

TOM (V.O.)
Order brings peace.
(beat)
Peace brings silence.
(beat)
And patience keeps the silence
clean.

He turns off the lamp. The click lands like the end of a sentence - or the end of a man.

EXT. MARSHALL HOME - FRONT YARD - NIGHT

The sirens fade into the distance, swallowed by the quiet neighborhood. The porch light hums, casting a faint yellow halo over Tom as he stands by the mailbox, phone still in hand - composed, finished.

From across the street, his NEIGHBOR (60s, kind-eyed, robe wrapped tight) shuffles toward him.

NEIGHBOR
Tom? Is everything all right?

TOM
Just a scare. My father-in-law
collapsed.

NEIGHBOR
Oh no... you poor things. Need me
to stay with Cara?

He gives her that soft, trustworthy smile - the kind that makes people feel safe.

TOM
That's kind of you to offer, but
it's under control.
(beat)
It always is.

She places a hand on his arm - motherly, reassured.

NEIGHBOR
You're such a steady one. Everyone
says so.

TOM
Just patience... and gentle
control.

She nods and drifts back across the street. Tom watches her door close. The smile drains away, leaving only stillness – a man who's done exactly what he meant to do. The wind stirs. The street holds its breath.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

The clock ticks, steady and loud. Cara sits at the table, her wine glass untouched, tracing the rim with her finger. Tom moves behind her, sleeves rolled, chopping herbs with surgical rhythm.

CARA
I can't do this.

TOM
Do what?

CARA
Pretend we're normal.

TOM
Who said we ever were?

She turns, startled by the truth in his tone. He doesn't look at her, continues chopping.

CARA
We should be grieving.

TOM
We are.

CARA
Then why don't you look like it?

TOM
Because I don't have the luxury of
wearing it.

He sets the knife down with care. Wipes his hands.

TOM (CONT'D)
Do you want pasta or salmon?

CARA
What?

TOM
I defrosted both.

CARA
Jesus, Tom.

She stands, pacing, her voice trembling under the veneer of control.

CARA (CONT'D)
Three people. Three. All dead. From
my side. In under a year.

TOM
Four.

She freezes.

CARA
What?

TOM
Walter. That makes four.

He turns back to the sink, rinsing herbs. The faucet runs – a steady hiss of indifference.

TOM (CONT'D)
Funny how grief makes people
forget.

CARA
Don't.

TOM
Don't what?

CARA
You're not going to gaslight me
into thinking this is normal.

TOM
I didn't say it was.

CARA
You're acting like nothing's
happened!

TOM
Things happen every day.

CARA
You used to be so patient. What
happened to that?

She raises an eyebrow.

CARA (CONT'D)
You're scaring me Tom.

He finally turns, voice low, almost tender.

TOM
Good.
(beat)
It means you're paying attention.

She steps back, breath quickening.

CARA
Did you—

She can't finish it.

CARA (CONT'D)
I want to go stay with my sister's
kids. Just for a few days.

TOM
She had no kids.

CARA
I mean—

TOM
They didn't like you. Remember?
They called you "that brittle one."
(beat)
Who do you think taught them that?

Her lips part, but no sound comes.

CARA
What do you want?

TOM
A peaceful dinner.

He sets the table — two plates, two glasses, napkins folded like origami. Every movement is ritual.

TOM (CONT'D)
You once told me you wanted
stillness. Quiet. Less chaos.
(beat)
So I gave it to you.

CARA
You're insane.

TOM

No.

(beat)

I'm awake.

He pulls out her chair — calm, expectant.

TOM (CONT'D)

Sit. It's salmon.

She doesn't move. The clock ticks louder now, like a pulse counting down.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - DINING ROOM - LATER

The table is immaculate. Dinner untouched.

Tom eats slowly, each bite mechanical. Across from him, Cara trembles, eyes fixed on the plate like it might reveal the truth she's terrified to name. The sound of cutlery against porcelain fills the silence.

TOM (V.O.)

The house doesn't echo when it's empty.

(beat)

It echoes when there's only one voice left.

INT. POLICE STATION - DETECTIVE SOTO'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A flickering desk lamp. Takeout containers, cold coffee, the hum of exhaustion.

The corkboard on the wall — faces, dates, fragments of order disguised as chaos. Soto scrolls through tabs on his computer, eyes sunken from too many nights awake.

INSERT - SCREEN

Medical reference sites, obituaries, and one open tab:
Marshall Dental Clinic - Official Site.

He sips stale coffee, scrolling. Then he stops. Something catches.

SOTO

...got you.

INSERT - SCREEN

A dental professionals' forum, dated a year ago.

SUBJECT: Rare polymer degradation in tubing – failure under heat stress? USERNAME: HonestMolars93 “Has anyone ever seen microfracture failure in PVS tubing after direct thermal application? Not melting – just delayed failure after re-pressurization?”

Soto leans closer. Clicks the username. Anonymous profile. No name, no location.

SOTO (V.O.)
IP mask... rerouted twice... but
one sync slipped through the cache.

He clicks again. A beat. Loading cursor. Then—

ON SCREEN: Marshall Dental Solutions – Account Admin.

Soto stills. Pen mid-tap.

SOTO
You asked the question. Then waited
a year to use the answer.

He prints the page. Pins it beneath Lori’s photo. Steps back, studying the grid – Kyle. Joan. Lori. Walter. Then at Tom’s business card, pinned in the corner like a quiet dare.

SOTO (CONT'D)
Let’s make some noise.

INT. MARSHALL HOME – KITCHEN – MORNING

Soft rain drizzles down the window, blurring the world.

Tom cooks eggs at the stove, precise motions in soft light. Butter hisses. Cara enters – slow, unsure – like stepping into a dream she doesn’t trust.

TOM
Coffee?

CARA
Sure.

He pours without looking at her. The simple domestic rhythm feels familiar – almost comforting.

CARA (CONT'D)
You’re... cooking?

TOM
Couldn’t sleep. Thought I’d make
something decent for once.

CARA
This looks... nice.

TOM
It's just eggs.

She sits. Fork trembling slightly.

CARA
Still. Thanks.

They eat. The silence almost feels safe.

TOM
You've lost weight.

CARA
Haven't been sleeping much.

TOM
Neither have I.

A flicker of warmth passes between them – fragile, almost human. For a second, they almost look like the couple in the framed photo above the counter – younger, unbroken.

CARA
Maybe... we should get away. A weekend somewhere.

TOM
That might be nice.

He smiles, soft and convincing.

TOM (V.O.)
Forgiveness always starts small.
(beat)
Breakfast. Coffee. Hope.
(beat)
Then it spoils. Quietly. From the inside.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Rain again. Softer now. Cara folds laundry on the bed. Socks, shirts, underwear – her hands on autopilot. One of Tom's button-downs slips through her grip.

Something falls from the pocket – a small black notebook. It lands without a sound.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Cara sits on the edge of the bed. The notebook in her lap. Breath tight. Her fingers hover like she's touching a weapon. Then — she opens it.

INSERT - PAGE

LOG - PERSONAL

KYLE - substitution successful - 18mg fentanyl bonded to resin tab. Reaction window < 6 mins. Observed from deck.

JOAN - beta-blocker capsule replaced. Dose stress-tested in rabbit study. Timeline held.

LORI - brake failure thermal vector confirmed. No traceable evidence. Podcast timing matched. No deviation.

The notebook slips from her hands. She stares. Frozen. Then — forces herself to pick it up again.

INSERT - NEXT PAGE

WALTER - wine dosage masked with tannin compound. Slight chest clutch predicted. Execution: flawless.

CARA - Pattern nearing endpoint. Trust fracture confirmed. Emotional deviation consistent with final-phase trigger. Initiate containment protocol before external interference.

Underneath the final line — faint indentation marks, like he pressed too hard writing a word that's since been torn out. The outline of a single missing word is still legible: Tonight.

Her breath catches. The notebook hits the floor again. Rain thickens outside. The house feels like it's holding its breath. Cara covers her mouth to stifle a sound — part gasp, part prayer. Then, from down the hall—

A floorboard creaks. Slow. Careful. She freezes. Not daring to breathe.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - GARAGE

Tom sits alone at his workbench. The same ritual — quiet, measured, precise. He feeds a new strip into the label maker.

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

The machine stutters, whines — then spits out a warped strip, blank and curling like scorched skin.

Tom holds it to the light. His reflection bends across the metal – distorted, inhuman. He studies it, unmoving.

Then, gently, he sets it beside the others. The machine hums on, empty, a sound without purpose.

TOM (V.O.)
Some things stop working when
they've served their purpose.
(beat)
Others... when they realize they
shouldn't.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Cara splashes cold water on her face. The mirror shows her reflection pale, trembling.

CARA
You sick bastard...

She grips the sink until her hands shake. A sob breaks free, sharp, guttural – then she swallows it, forcing stillness.

CARA (CONT'D)
You wanted stillness?
(beat)
Then I'll give you silence too.

She snatches the black notebook and hides it inside the vanity drawer. The soft click of the drawer feels final.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Soft lamplight glows warm but wrong. The air feels staged. Cara lies in bed, pretending to read. A glass of wine waits untouched beside her.

From the bathroom, Tom brushes his teeth – the mirror catches him watching her without turning his head.

He steps into the room. Cara watches through lowered lashes, forcing a yawn that sounds rehearsed.

CARA
I'm going to sleep soon.

TOM
You've said that before.

He crosses to the dresser. Socks. Ties. Calm order. Then – the vanity drawer.

He opens it. The black notebook sits inside.

TOM (V.O.)
Not where I left it.
(beat)
But exactly where it belongs.

He opens it, sees the page marker shifted – barely a breath.
Enough. He closes it. Returns it exactly as it was.

TOM
Goodnight, Cara.

CARA
Night.

His gaze drops to her untouched wine glass.

TOM
You didn't drink your wine.

CARA
I wasn't thirsty.

TOM
Hm.

He walks to the light switch. Pauses.

TOM (CONT'D)
I used to talk in my sleep, you
know.

CARA
What?

TOM
Years ago. You said it scared you.
(beat)
So I stopped.

He flicks off the light. The room drowns in darkness.

TOM (V.O.)
She knows.
(beat)
But knowledge isn't power.
(beat)
Not if I'm already ten moves ahead.
And not when I've already mapped
the ending.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - GARAGE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Tom slips the notebook into a sealed bag — another trophy in a growing archive. He tucks it neatly into a box beside others, all labeled, all precise.

He closes the lid. Turns off the light. Darkness.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The table is set immaculately for two. Candles flicker. Cloth napkins folded into sharp triangles.

The faint strings of a classical piece drift through the room — too elegant for what's coming.

Tom carries the plates — salmon, lemon rice, asparagus lined in perfect order. Cara stands in the doorway, wary, still.

CARA

What's the occasion?

TOM

Just wanted to make something nice.

(beat)

You deserve nice.

She sits slowly, posture tight.

CARA

It smells good.

TOM

It's all in the timing.

(beat)

Heat... duration... pressure.

She eyes the plate, then him.

CARA

Did you poison this?

He smiles softly, almost amused.

TOM

No.

(beat)

If I were going to do that, I wouldn't serve it with lemon rice. That'd clash.

CARA

Good to know.

He sits across from her.

TOM
The last time we had dinner alone
like this was in Mexico.

CARA
I had food poisoning.

TOM
And still drank more than the
locals.

CARA
We were happy back then.

TOM
No, we were distracted.

A beat. She watches him take a bite. Then, tentatively, eats.

TOM (CONT'D)
I don't blame you.

CARA
For what?

TOM
Any of it.
(beat)
I used to. But then I realized...
it was never personal.

CARA
What wasn't?

TOM
The way your family treated me. The
jokes. The whispers. The coldness.
(beat)
I used to think I was singled out.
But I wasn't.
(smiles)
It's just who they were.

CARA
And what does that mean?

TOM
It means they didn't deserve to
win.

Silence. Her fork trembles faintly against the plate.

CARA
Is this your confession?

TOM
No.
(beat)
This is our anniversary.

CARA
It's not our anniversary.

TOM
It is for something.
(beat)
It's the day I stopped pretending I
didn't see the truth.

He lifts his glass.

TOM (CONT'D)
To clarity.

She doesn't toast, but she drinks.

CARA
Why me?

TOM
You weren't the worst.
(beat)
You were just the last.

CARA
I can call the police.

TOM
You can.
(beat)
But they'll find a dinner, a
husband, and a house full of
recordings — everything since
Christmas.
(leans in)
Guess whose fingerprints are on the
notebook.

She jolts up.

TOM (CONT'D)
Cara—

CARA
I'm done.

TOM

Sit down.

CARA

You're not in charge of me.

TOM

No. But I am in control of tonight.

He steps into the doorway, blocking her path.

TOM (CONT'D)

Let me ask you something.

CARA

Get out of my way asshole!

TOM

Did you ever love me?

CARA

Maybe. I don't know.

A small, broken smile crosses his face.

TOM

That's the only honest answer
you've ever given me.

(beat)

Thank you.

He steps aside. She runs – her footsteps thunder up the stairs. Tom looks down at the table – the perfect plates, the folded napkins, the two empty chairs.

TOM (V.O.)

I didn't poison the dinner.

(beat)

That's not how this ends.

(beat)

That's not how she'll remember it.

He lifts her glass, carries it to the sink, and pours it out. The soft rush of wine against steel is the only sound left alive in the house.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Cara bursts from the bedroom, barefoot, shaking. The phone slips in her sweaty grip as she fights the locks – deadbolt, latch, chain – each click louder than her pulse. The door swings open.

Tom is standing there. Already outside. Already waiting.

CARA

Jesus!

TOM

That's not my name.

CARA

What the hell are you doing out here?

TOM

Thought you might run.

CARA

I'm going to the police.

TOM

You won't.

CARA

Don't tell me what I will—

TOM

I said you won't.

He's not angry, not even forceful. Just... certain.

TOM (CONT'D)

Because you know they won't believe you.

(beat)

They'll see what I show them.

CARA

You're not God.

TOM

No. But I've met Him.

(beat)

Or at least, the silence where He should be.

She tries to shove past him. He steps gently in her way.

TOM (CONT'D)

No violence. I promised myself.

(beat)

I won't hurt you, Cara.

CARA

You already have.

The door hangs half open – caught halfway open between escape and surrender.

CARA (CONT'D)
I could scream.

TOM
Then scream.
(beat)
But before you do, let me ask you something.

She doesn't move.

TOM (CONT'D)
Do you really believe any of them deserved to live more than I did?

CARA
What kind of question is that?

TOM
An honest one.

CARA
They were horrible, sure, but–

TOM
But what?

CARA
You killed them.

TOM
Slowly. Painlessly. Precisely.
(beat)
I was cleaner than they ever were.

Her phone trembles in her hand. The fear in her eyes curdles into something darker – recognition.

TOM (CONT'D)
You saw it. Over the years.
(beat)
You just didn't stop me because deep down...
(beat)
You wanted peace too.

CARA
That's not true.

TOM
Then why didn't you run when Kyle
died?

CARA
I didn't know—

TOM
When Joan died?

CARA
I thought it was stress—

TOM
And Lori?
(beat)
Walter?

She can't speak.

TOM (CONT'D)
You knew. You always knew.
(softly)
You just liked not being the one
who did it.

Her tears come quietly, one at a time.

TOM (CONT'D)
This was never about murder.
(beat)
This was about... subtraction.

CARA
You're insane.

TOM
No. I'm refined.

He steps back. The doorway open behind him — like a dare.

TOM (CONT'D)
If you want to leave, go.
(beat)
But understand, there's a story
waiting for you if you do. Police.
Trials.
(beat)
Our kids finding out.
(beat)
Or you stay.
(beat)
Say nothing.
(soft)
(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)
And this house stays quiet.
Forever.

She looks at him — at the doorway, at the world outside —
both ways lead to ruin. Her grip on the phone loosens.

CARA
I need... time.

TOM
You've had years.
(beat)
But I'll give you one more night.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - GARAGE - PRESENT DAY

Tom sits on his stool, motionless. The framed photo of his
mother glows under a candle flame — her face tender, almost
proud.

TOM (V.O.)
You always said I was too soft.
(beat)
Maybe you were right.
(beat)
But I've hardened.
(beat)
And she'll never hurt me again.

He blows out the candle.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - KITCHEN - LATE NIGHT

The house is silent. The clock ticks steady. The rain has
stopped. Cara sits at the table, hollow-eyed, barefoot.
Across from her, Tom pours tea.

TOM
Chamomile.

CARA
You trying to help me sleep?

TOM
Trying to help you rest.

She doesn't touch it. He sits across from her, steady, still.

TOM (CONT'D)
You know, I remember the first time
you touched me.

CARA
Why are we doing this?

TOM
Because you've forgotten. But I
never did.
(beat)
You brushed my hand when I dropped
my key at the bookstore. You
smiled... like it was nothing.
(beat)
But it changed everything.

She looks down. He keeps his eyes on her.

TOM (CONT'D)
You were lightning. Not the bolt,
the hum before it.

CARA
Please stop.

TOM
That's the thing about people like
me. We don't forget kindness.
(beat)
Or cruelty.

She pushes the cup away, voice barely a whisper.

CARA
Just do it.

TOM
Do what?

CARA
Whatever you're going to do. I know
I'm not walking away from this.
(beat)
I just want to see it coming.

TOM
No.
(beat)
That's not how this ends.

He stands and walks slowly around the table, circling behind her. Cara stiffens. Breath catching.

He leans down, close enough for her to feel his calm. He kisses her forehead – soft, terrifying.

TOM (CONT'D)

I can't wait to see you in hell.

He steps back into shadow. Cara sits trembling, a tear breaking free and glinting in the low light. Her lips part – a broken whisper.

CARA

Neither can I.

She closes her eyes. The clock ticks once. Twice. Then the house goes still.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - KITCHEN - LATER

Cara's head rests on the table, cheek pressed to the wood, eyes closed. Still. The teacup beside her is empty – not spilled, just finished.

Tom stands at the sink, washing dishes in calm, circular motions. The rhythm is soft, almost musical.

TOM (V.O.)

Some endings aren't explosive.

(beat)

Some just... fade.

(beat)

Like a song you didn't know you
loved until it stopped playing.

He dries his hands and turns off the light. The kitchen falls into perfect, soundless darkness.

EXT. MARSHALL HOME - EARLY MORNING

A pale fog hangs over the neighborhood. Sprinklers hiss, birds wait to sing. Police radios crackle softly. Two coroners guide a stretcher down the steps. A black body bag lies atop it – zipped, final.

Across the street, the neighbor watches from her porch, coffee trembling in her hands.

NEIGHBOR

Oh God...

Detective Soto stands nearby, still and watchful, eyes heavy with knowing.

Tom sits calmly on the porch steps – slacks, cardigan, slippers – a mug of tea steaming in his hands.

TOM
Thank you for being prompt. It matters.

SOTO
No problem, Mr. Marshall. I'm sorry for your loss.

TOM
She hadn't been herself lately.

The neighbor edges closer, sympathy softening her face.

NEIGHBOR
Tom? I'm so sorry... she was such a lovely woman.

Tom turns to her, expression measured, grief perfectly composed.

TOM
Thank you. That means a lot.

NEIGHBOR
If there's anything I can do... just say the word.
(beat)
You've always been so steady. The kind of man who makes people feel safe.

Tom offers a polite, almost tender smile.

TOM
Just patience. And gentle control.

The neighbor nods, comforted – completely missing the chill behind the words. But Soto catches it. Says nothing. Just watches.

SOTO
Is that what you told the 911 operator?

Tom nods slowly.

TOM
Said she hadn't slept in days. I made her tea. She said thank you.
(beat)
That was the last thing she said to me.

Soto studies him.

SOTO
You think it was suicide?

TOM
I hope not.
(softly)
But hope isn't a strategy.

The coroner's van doors close. The stretcher disappears inside. Soto walks toward his car. Stops. Hand on the door.

SOTO
You're a hard man to read.

TOM
It's the quiet ones you have to worry about.

Soto nods once, half-smiling, and gets in.

EXT. MARSHALL HOME - FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

The fog thickens. Soto's car hasn't left yet. He steps back out, voice low.

SOTO
One thing still bothers me.

TOM
Just one?

SOTO
You labeled everything in that clinic. Every drawer, every file.
(beat)
You ever label your mistakes?

Tom meets his gaze, calm and unflinching.

TOM
Only once.

SOTO
And what did you call it?

TOM
Marriage.

Soto exhales, a trace of grim amusement covering unease.

SOTO
Guess we file that under motive, then.

Tom's smile barely lifts.

TOM
File it wherever you like,
Detective. Just make sure the edges
line up.

The fog swallows the street, muffling the world to a hum as he steps back into his car.

From inside the house, the steady tick-tick-tick of a clock carries through the open door.

TOM (V.O.)
No witnesses. No weapon. No
struggle.
(beat)
Just patience.
(beat)
Patience is what God forgot. So I
remembered it for Him.
(beat)
Gentle control. And silence – the
purest ending of all.
(beat)
And then, finally... they all
stopped laughing.

Tom steps inside and closes the door. The sound of the latch clicking is almost kind.

EXT. MARSHALL HOME - FRONT YARD - NEXT MORNING

Soto stands beside his car, hand on the roof, watching the house in the gray morning light. He wants to knock. Doesn't.

A breeze shifts the trees. The sound is faint – the kind of silence that feels alive.

SOTO
The quiet ones always talk in the
end.

He looks at the closed door a moment longer, then gets into his car. The engine hums. The fog swallows the house whole.

INT. POLICE STATION - EVIDENCE ROOM - DAY

Rows of cardboard boxes. Fluorescent lights buzz like restless insects.

Soto sits at a metal table buried under files – photos, autopsies, receipts – a storm of paper he somehow commands. He flips through a folder, stops on one page.

INSERT – RECEIPT PURCHASE DATE: 13 MONTHS AGO ITEM: POLYESTERENE-COMPOUND BLEND (RED-LABELED) STORE: PHARMA-KLEEN SUPPLY, WHEATON, IL BUYER SIGNATURE: T. MARSHALL

Soto exhales, low and certain.

SOTO
There you are... no residue, no
trace, no accident.
(beat)
But you left your rhythm.

He taps the table twice – like the pulse of a label maker. Then jots the address, grabs his coat.

FLASHBACK MONTAGE – VARIOUS MOMENTS

- Kyle high and laughing, flicking a lighter in Tom's garage.
- Joan whispering about Tom at a fundraiser, smug behind her champagne.
- Nick shoving a beer into Ben's teenage hand when Tom's back is turned.
- Lori smirking beside Cara at the lawyer's office.
- Cara turning away from Tom's touch in bed, her silence colder than rejection.

TOM (V.O.)
I lived on scraps. Scraps of
affection. Scraps of peace. I made
myself so small to keep them large.
(beat)
But small things... slip through
cracks.

INT. PHARMA-KLEEN SUPPLY – BACK ROOM – DAY

A fluorescent wasteland of mops, solvents, and unlabeled boxes.

A bored CLERK (30s), greasy ponytail, flips through a battered sci-fi paperback as Soto throws something onto the counter.

CLERK
That's old. Like... pre-COVID old.

SOTO
Just tell me if you remember the
guy.

Soto slides over Tom's driver's license photo. The clerk
squints.

CLERK
Dentist, right?

SOTO
Yeah.

CLERK
Yeah, yeah, I remember him. He came
in asking about micro-blends. Said
he was testing compounds for
training molds or something.

SOTO
What else?

CLERK
He had this voice. Polite. Kinda...
apologetic?
(beat)
Like he was always sorry for taking
up space.

SOTO
That's him.

CLERK
I remember because he tipped me ten
bucks. I told him we don't take
tips. He said, "Maybe that's not
how this works here."
(beat)
Then he said... "But that's how I
work."

SOTO
Son of a bitch.

CLERK
He kill somebody?

SOTO
Maybe.

The clerk shrugs, half-impressed.

CLERK
Wouldn't have guessed.
(beat)
He was... easy to like.

Soto stops cold. That phrase again. Same words, same chill.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - FOYER - LATE AFTERNOON

The golden light filters through clean windows. Dust drifts like ash. The doorbell rings.

Tom, crisp in slacks and a pressed shirt, opens it.

TOM
Detective Soto. I was wondering
when you'd come back.

SOTO
Mind if I step in?

TOM
Always.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Two teacups steam on the coffee table. Soto stands. Tom sits, relaxed, calm, a man who has mastered posture and tone.

SOTO
You remember a supply store in
Wheaton?

TOM
I remember most things.

SOTO
Clerk remembers you. Said you asked
about thermal-sensitive compounds.

TOM
I was experimenting with new mold
trays. Some of our resin
overheated. Total failure.

SOTO
And brake lines?

TOM
You think I tampered with brake
lines?

SOTO
I think the timing's convenient.

TOM
I think coincidence is the only
honest God.

SOTO
Thing about coincidence—
(leans in)
—it never leaves residue.

TOM
Neither do I.

A beat. Their eyes hold.

SOTO
That right there... that's the kind
of answer I write down.

TOM
Then write neatly. I value clean
records.

Soto wanders the room — the books, the framed photos,
everything arranged like a confession of order.

SOTO
Where were you the night Lori died?

TOM
Eating leftovers. Watching a nature
documentary.

SOTO
Alone?

TOM
Always.

Soto picks up a photo frame.

INSERT - PHOTO:

Tom and his children on Christmas morning. Smiles too bright,
too perfect.

SOTO
You really don't leave anything to
chance, do you?

TOM
I'm a dentist.
(beat)
If I left things to chance, people
would lose their molars.

SOTO
You're clever.

TOM
No. I'm careful.

SOTO
There's a difference?

TOM
One gets caught. The other keeps
his license.

Soto sets the photo down. They hold each other's gaze — two
predators in polite conversation.

SOTO
You ever make a mistake?

TOM
Once.
(beat)
I married into the wrong family.

Soto chuckles, but it doesn't reach his eyes.

TOM (CONT'D)
Systems fail the same way families
do — too many people pretending
order means virtue.

SOTO
You're either the luckiest man
alive...
(beat)
Or a fucking genius.

TOM
I'm also a good listener.

SOTO
That's not a crime.

TOM
Not yet.

A heavy silence.

SOTO
If I find anything else, anything
at all, I'll be back.

TOM
I hope you do.
(beat)
It gets quiet around here. I'm all
alone.

Soto's eyes drift toward a floor vent. A faint click... then stillness. He tilts his head, listening.

Tom notices immediately.

TOM (CONT'D)
Old ductwork. Expands when the heat
cycles.

Soto nods, pretending to accept it. But he writes something in his notebook. Then heads toward the door.

SOTO
You know what the clerk said?

TOM
What's that?

SOTO
Said he's easy to like.

TOM
I work hard at it.

Soto smiles faintly, opens the door, and leaves. Tom watches him go. Then slowly, deliberately, turns the lock. The deadbolt slides home with a clean, final click.

The house exhales – quiet, orderly, waiting.

INT. MARSHALL HOME - GARAGE - NIGHT

Tom opens a new notebook and writes with his usual surgical precision, the ink dark and deliberate.

INSERT - PAGE

Visit: Soto - assessment complete. Observation: composure maintained. External curiosity level: rising. Containment: necessary soon.

He pauses, thumb resting on the edge of the page – as if waiting for permission from himself.

Then, with surgical steadiness, he adds one final line beneath the others: Phase Seven: Initiate secondary silence.

He closes the notebook, slides it into a sealed bin marked ARCHIVE 6, and presses the lid until it clicks shut. The drawer glides in with a quiet finality. Tom stands. Turns off the light.

INT. BANQUET HALL - DAY

Applause erupts. A sea of white light and champagne sparkle. A "JUST MARRIED" banner hangs above the crowd, elegant and sterile. Everything is expensive, polished, bloodless.

Tom stands beside his new bride, VICTORIA (42) – striking, self-assured, perfectly made-up. Her smile is PR-trained, not heartfelt.

The guests cheer as they raise their glasses.

VICTORIA
To second chances and to never
settling again.

Laughter. Toasts. Flashes. Tom nods graciously and kisses her cheek. The picture is flawless.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
They say you can tell a person's
soul by the way they handle pain.
(smiles at Tom)
I told Tom I've had enough of men
who make pain look beautiful.

More laughter. The crowd eats it up. Tom's expression doesn't move – serene, unreadable.

TOM (V.O.)
Some people mistake warning labels
for vows.

INT. BANQUET HALL - LATER

Tom glides through the crowd with quiet charisma. Every gesture rehearsed, every smile earned.

Across the room, Victoria's Botox polished FRIENDS (40s) whisper, wine-drunk watching him like tourists at a miracle.

FRIEND #1
He's so... composed.

FRIEND #2

And that voice? Like a therapist
with good teeth.

FRIEND #3

I told her – he's easy to like.

They giggle, glasses clinking.

From across the room, Tom looks up – his smile flickers for a
fraction too long. Not at them. Through them.

INT. BANQUET HALL - LATER

Tom sits beside Victoria's BROTHER (38, finance), who's mid-
ramble about stocks – loud, red-faced, all cufflinks and ego.

BROTHER

Real estate's a graveyard, man.
Crypto's the move. You're losing
money if you're not in it.

TOM

I'll look into that.

BROTHER

Dad would've liked you. Always
called me the chosen one – till I
screwed up. Then?
(grins)
Whiskey glass, right to the face.

Something in Tom's expression tightens – barely. A flicker of
an old bruise under the skin.

TOM

Sounds... familiar.

He takes a slow sip of champagne. Calm. Centered. Watching.

INT. BANQUET HALL/POWDER ROOM - NIGHT

Tom adjusts his tie in the mirror. The reflection – centered,
flawless, still. Then, a faint smirk slips through.

TOM (V.O.)

New names. New games.
(beat)
Same rules.

He smooths his collar and walks out.

INT. TOM & VICTORIA'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A curated dinner party hums with the sound of expensive laughter. Ten guests. Wine glasses half-full, smiles over-rehearsed.

Victoria dominates the table – radiant, cutting, adored. Her friends orbit her like obedient planets.

VICTORIA

And I told her, if you're wearing
Chanel, at least know the season it
came from!

The table bursts into laughter. Tom sits at her side, quiet, steady. He pours water, slices bread, smiles when required – invisible and essential all at once.

FRIEND

He's so easy to like.

VICTORIA

Isn't he perfect?

FRIEND #2

No, really – where did you find
this man?

VICTORIA

Church. Can you believe it?

FRIEND #2

Of course. The good ones always go
to church.

Tom lifts his glass, the picture of calm civility.

TOM

To kindness.

Everyone joins.

ALL

To kindness.

INT. TOM & VICTORIA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

The laughter continues in the other room, muffled and meaningless. Tom stands at the sink, washing dishes with the devotion of a ritual. One plate at a time. Each motion is measured. Each plate, spotless.

The reflection in the microwave door watches him – alive, deliberate. He studies it. A smile curls.

TOM

I love it when they're mean to me.

(beat)

When they show their worst. It's... clarifying.

(beat)

But maybe one day...

(beat)

I'll get tired of it.

He sets the final plate aside. Perfectly centered.

INT. TOM & VICTORIA'S HOUSE - GARAGE - NIGHT

Dim light. The same sterile order we've seen before – every tool labeled, every shelf immaculate. A faint tick... tick... tick breaks the silence.

Victoria's silhouette appears in the doorway, barefoot, silk robe brushing the concrete.

VICTORIA

Tom?

No response. She steps inside. Her eyes drift across the workbench: every item arranged like evidence in a shrine. Then – a faint glow.

INSERT - LABEL MAKER

The red display flickers: FEED EMPTY. It clicks, whirs, and a strip begins to spool out – half-printed, half-jammed.

CLOSE ON LABEL: VICTORIA - OBSERVATION BEGUN.

She stares. Cracks a jagged smile and whispers–

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

You almost had me fooled.

She steps back – not terrified, but calm, calculating.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

You think you're the only one who studies people?

A low hum rises beneath her voice – mechanical, steady, pulsing like a heartbeat.

TOM (V.O., SOFT, OVERLAPPING)
Patience, Victoria.
(beat)
That's all it takes.

A faint creak behind her – weight shifting on the garage floor.

She turns. Nothing.

The hum grows louder... then stops. A single click in the dark.

TOM (V.O.)
Patience always ends the same way.
(beat)
Someone stops waiting first.

Silence.

VICTORIA (V.O.)
(calm)
I'm not waiting, Tom.

CUT TO BLACK.