

TRAMP

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Thérèse Dreaming (1938)
-Balthus

OVER BLACK

A modem SCREAMS, all teeth and static.

INT. XANDER'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

An orderly layout. A cross hangs over a neatly-made twin bed.

At a small desk, XANDER (16, effortlessly handsome) slowly downloads a JPG on a desktop computer.

Line by line, a painting emerges.

-A flat, brown wall, soft in the dim light.

-A pair of thin arms, raised and bent behind a young girl's head, her hands resting with casual ease across the crown of her chestnut hair.

-The hint of her languid, almost careless expression.

KNOCK KNOCK.

Xander rushes to click off the monitor.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. MANSION - GALLERY ROOM - NIGHT

At 24 inches square, the red and yellow squares of a *Piet Mondrian* painting commands a massive wall.

Admiring the piece is Xander (now looking like he's in his 20s, but his true age is uncertain).

His black T-shirt and jeans are just tight enough. His blonde hair is short and perfectly tousled.

The TAP TAP of approaching high heels announces TAMMY CLAYPOOL (50s, designer everything). She holds a glass of red wine and stops in front of Xander.

Without even looking at the Mondrian--

TAMMY

Like it? Won it at auction last year. \$5 million.

(sips her wine)

Sure you don't want to break your rules? Have a drink?

The look he gives her says it all. She smirks and sets the glass on a side table.

A lustful stare is all the instruction Xander needs--

He pulls off his shirt. His frame is chiseled but lean, veins pushing the skin in all the right places.

Then, his boots and socks. He stretches the anticipation.

Tammy's eyes drift down as he peels off his jeans and boxers. A slight stutter of breath as she steps forward.

Xander steps forward, too, piercing the Mondrian.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

If my enemies knew about you--
 (the danger excites her)
 They'd ruin me. Not for the sex.
 But for wanting it. Taking it.
 (beat)
 Lust is such a masculine trait.

Their lips are a millimeter apart.

TAMMY (CONT'D)

Treat me how they wish they could.

He grips her hair. Tight.

She moans, relishing the power of voluntary submission. He guides her head down his body.

As she pleasures him, Xander looks back at the Mondrian.

INT. SUV - NIGHT

A FEMALE DRIVER (20s) cruises down a dark highway.

In the back, Xander clutches a backpack and stares out the window. The city gives way to the suburbs.

DRIVER

You're getting older, Mr. Voss.
 (beat)
 She's starting to look around for a
 -- younger collaborator.
 (beat)
 Nothing imminent. Just thought
 you'd appreciate a heads-up.

A billboard passes. An American flag in the shape of Texas. It reads: *"Don't Mess with Texas . . . or ME!" -- GOD.*

EXT. STRIP MALL - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Dingy buildings contrast the opulence of Tammy's mansion.

The SUV pulls up and parks in the empty lot.

INT. SUV - NIGHT

The driver turns around and hands Xander a thick envelope of cash and a flip phone.

Xander turns the phone over to find masking tape with A PHONE NUMBER WRITTEN IN BLACK SHARPIE.

Xander puts the items in his bag and gets out. Before shutting the door, he leans in--

XANDER

Tell the Senator she hung her
Mondrian upside down.
(off driver's confusion)
The painting.

He shuts the door. The SUV drives off.

Xander looks across the street at a modest apartment complex.

INT. XANDER'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Pitch-black, save for a GLOWING ALARM PANEL.

BEEP.

Xander enters and flicks on the lights: tasteful furniture curated for comfort rather than style.

A hallway leads to two rooms. Xander heads for the first.

ART STUDIO

Xander enters. Fluorescents flood the room with white light, illuminating multiple easels and art stations.

Blank canvases and newsprint pads are piled everywhere alongside brushes and jars of powdered pigment.

He walks to a closet in the back, where he enters a code into ANOTHER ALARM PANEL.

BEEP.

He opens the closet, revealing a walk-in safe.

SAFE

Several shoebox-sized boxes of cash, some jewelry, and A LARGE, CAREFULLY STORED PAINTING, which we cannot see.

Xander pulls the new phone from his bag and swaps it with an identical one that is charging among a row of other phones.

He transfers the cash from the envelope to a half-full box, then grabs a ledger and pen.

Below deductions for *insurance, rent, and utilities*, he adds a *six-digit number*, then +\$7,500.00.

In the balance column, he notes \$2,001,402.65.

His eyes find the ledger's bookmark -- a folded-up paper.

He unfolds it: A PROPERTY LISTING for a villa in Portugal. On it, 3 *MILL* is written in black Sharpie and circled.

With a frustrated sigh, he closes the book and turns to the carefully stored painting.

ART STUDIO - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Barefoot and dressed in a white t-shirt and jeans, Xander sets the painting from his safe up on an easel.

PAINTING: In muted tones, a young girl, no older than fourteen, is slumped sideways in a wooden chair. Her wrinkled dress hangs loose, socks bunched at her ankles.

Eyeing the painting, Xander grinds powdered pigments into acrylic medium on a glass slab, working them smooth with a palette knife until they form thick, vibrant paint.

He places a blank canvas on another easel. Closes his eyes. Inhales. Lifts his brush.

His brushwork is fractured with memories:

- Wet paint. A palette knife carves through layers of color.
- The Mondrian on Tammy's wall.
- Paint strokes grow bolder. More confident.
- The JPG slowly downloads on Xander's childhood computer.

Finished and breathless, Xander looks over his creation: an impressive mixture of vivid colors and fluid brushstrokes.

He gets lost in the painting until one final memory slashes through the moment:

- Pages of a sketchbook are thrown into a fire. Hand-drawn copies of sensual master works. Shiele. Balthus. Bacon.

His passion curdles to disgust. He slathers on dark paint. Heavy. Violent.

The palette knife rips the canvas. Rage takes over.

He tears the canvas apart and snaps the frame.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. POST OFFICE - DAY

Gym bag slung over his shoulder, Xander (shorts and a tank top) hands stacks of cash to a FEMALE TELLER (20s, bored).

As he places each stack down--

XANDER
Insurance. Utilities. Rent.

MOMENTS LATER

Xander unlocks a P.O. Box and takes out two envelopes.

Each one has a cellphone inside it.

One is a PINK RAZR.

He flips the RAZR over to find a piece of masking tape on the back with "IVY" written in red Sharpie.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREETS - DAY

As Xander walks down the street, he notices a speck of red paint under his thumbnail.

He stops to pick at it. It won't budge.

RING!

Xander flinches before tracking the sound to the PINK RAZR in his bag. He answers it.

XANDER
Voss Wellness.

IVY (V.O.)
Yes, I'd like to book a session.

Picks at the red paint--

XANDER
I'll need two weeks for testing.
And a copy of your results, before--

IVY (V.O.)
No. I want to see you tonight.

XANDER
That's not how it works.

IVY (V.O.)
I'll double your rate.

XANDER
You don't know my rate.

IVY (V.O.)
\$5,000 an hour.

The quick response takes Xander aback. After a pause--

XANDER
Why the rush--
(checks back of phone)
Ivy.

IVY (V.O.)
Time only moves in one direction.

Xander considers her answer. Curious--

XANDER
What type of services are you
looking for?

IVY (V.O.)
I want you to assess me.

XANDER
Assess you for what?

IVY (V.O.)
Market viability.

XANDER
I don't offer that service.

IVY (V.O.)
Shame. Dale said you were the best.

A heavy sigh and a slight smirk.

XANDER
Dale referred you.

He squeezes his eyes shut. Thinks hard. Finally--

XANDER (CONT'D)
Assessment. No touching. \$10,000?

IVY (V.O.)
Yes, yes, and -- yes.
(beat)
But it has to be at your place.

He shakes his head.

XANDER
I never work from home.

A disappointed sigh.

IVY (V.O.)
How very on-brand of you.

XANDER
That's non-negotiable. I'm sorry.

IVY (V.O.)
Everything's negotiable, Mr. Voss.
(beat)
Call me if you change your mind.

A CLICK as she hangs up.

Xander lowers the phone and looks around at his lifeless suburban surroundings.

INT. MASADA - MAIN GYM - DAY

Matted flooring. Wall-to-wall mirrors.

STUDENTS (of mixed genders and ages) perform a burst drill, where one person furiously hammers a pad held by another.

Xander works with DALE (late 40s, yoked with great hair). Xander hammer punches. Dale struggles to absorb the blows.

XANDER
Who is she? Why'd you give her the address to my PO BOX?

DALE
Just -- some -- chick, man. Wants to -- get in the -- game.

XANDER
You train her, then.

A FEMALE ISRAELI COACH barks from the front of the gym--

COACH
Switch!

As they swap pads--

DALE
I specialize in gutter dolls and chewed-up bubble gum.
(catches his breath)
She's a knockout. She needs you.

XANDER
I'm not looking for an apprentice.
(raises the pad)
Go!

Dale starts fast but quickly loses stamina and stops.

XANDER (CONT'D)
Those muscles just for show?

DALE
Fuck -- you -- man.

LOCKER ROOM

Dale showers. Xander, clean and dressed, talks to him from behind the shower curtain.

DALE
Met her on the boards a couple months ago. She was asking all sorts of "how does this work", "how does that work" type of shit.
(beat)
I didn't want some creep to turn her out, so I called her.

XANDER
She a junkie or a runaway?

DALE
Nah. She's some rich asshole's kid. Dude knows everyone from Dallas to Laredo. So she thinks, anyway.
(beat)
I told her there're ways to stay hidden, which is how you came up.

XANDER
That why she'll only meet at my place? Afraid Daddy'll find out?

DALE
Bingo.

XANDER
If she doesn't need the money, what's her angle?

DALE
Says she loves fucking. Wants to get paid for it.
(beat)
(MORE)

DALE (CONT'D)

I think she's trying to stick it to
the old man, know what I mean?

A SHORT WHILE LATER

Dale stands nude and hairless by his locker, surrounded by
tonics, lotions, and overpriced cologne.

Xander cracks open a bottle of Dale's cologne. It hits him
like mace.

Dale grabs it and pulls the trigger three times.

XANDER

Slant?

(off Dale's surprise)

You always wear this shit when
you're breaking in a new John.

DALE

Do I?

XANDER

Going solo?

(off Dale's nod)

What if he tries to stab you, or
shit in your mouth?

DALE

That's why I'm here, man. To learn
how to defend MYSELF.

XANDER

Can't do a groin strike with your
hands bound behind your back.

DALE

I'm a biter.

Xander laughs, then nods towards a gym bag in Dale's locker.

XANDER

No good. I'm going. But you're
sitting for me after. Deal?

DALE

Always, brother.

Dale smiles and smacks him on the shoulder.

He pulls the gym bag from his locker and takes out a PINK
RFID BRACELET and a .22, not caring who sees.

DALE (CONT'D)
Bracelet gets you in the club. The
.22 gets me out of trouble.

XANDER
(re: the .22)
What, no fly swatter in there?

DALE
Would you rather Joe Pesci the guy
in the throat with a pen?

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

Dale and Xander dodge a gauntlet of HOMELESS PEOPLE.

DALE
We'll be in room five. It'll be
locked, but one good shoulder
should bust the frame.

They sidestep a JUNKIE. Dale softens his tone--

DALE (CONT'D)
Listen, Z -- I think you should
call Ivy. Chick's got cash, and she
wants to spend it on you. Let her.
(beat)
Teach her a couple tricks. Take a
cut. What's the risk?

XANDER
I'm not a pimp.

DALE
You ain't 19 no more, either.

The truth hits Xander hard.

DALE (CONT'D)
Dick, ass, pussy, toes. The longer
you stay in the game, the less
control you have over what you put
in your mouth. Think about it.

They reach an alley, stopping at an unassuming grey metal
door with a black bracelet scanner next to it.

Without warning, Dale pins him in a tight hug.

DALE (CONT'D)
I fucking love you, man.

He releases. Xander is slightly unmoored by the sudden show of emotion. He pats Dale on the arms in return.

XANDER
I got you, brother.

Dale clears his throat and lifts his wrist to expose his RFID bracelet. He scans it.

A bolt THUDS. Dale opens the door.

DALE
See you in thirty.

INT. SLANT - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Dark. Grimy. Thumping bass and neon lights. MALE STRIPPERS grind on stage for a FEW SPECTATORS.

At the bar, Xander checks his watch, then peers through the musk to a hallway in the back.

He checks his watch again.

With resolve, Xander stands and removes his shirt, revealing the .22 tucked into his waistband.

He heads through the club and wraps the shirt over his face -- A DIY ninja mask. He gets a firm grip on the .22.

He counts the doors as he passes: two, three, four -- FIVE!

Through the door: GRUNTS. PANTING. SKIN SLAPS AGAINST SKIN.

Xander readies himself as the GRUNTS grow more dire.

SLAM!

He RAMS his shoulder into the door. Wood CRACKS.

SLAM!

The frame SNAPS.

SLAM!

Xander BURSTS through, splinters flying.

ROOM FIVE

Bed. No windows. LED lights flicker in different colors.

NAKED BDSM MAN (age unknown due to a hood) is bent over Dale, who is gagged, with his hands and ankles bound.

A leather belt is wrapped around Dale's neck like a leash, choking him.

BDSM Man's hood covers everything but his eyes and mouth. Thick glasses fit loosely over the leather.

XANDER

Pull out and back up.

Xander spins the man around.

Terrified but aroused, the man drops the leash, and Xander shoves him up against the wall.

The man pushes his glasses up onto his nose. His eyes find something out of frame. Xander tracks the man's eye line--

A MASSIVE DILDO on the nightstand.

INT. XANDER'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Dale laughs, his mouth full of lettuce.

Xander sits across from him at the dining room table, picking at a takeout box of salad and smiling.

XANDER

You said thirty minutes.

DALE

Must've lost track of time.

(beat)

I thought for sure you were gonna fuckin' kill him.

XANDER

Came pretty close.

DALE

Well, good thing you didn't. Dude gave me a massive tip. Said he hasn't been that hard since the first time he snapped a rubber band around his balls.

Xander chuckles and wipes his hands.

XANDER

Ready?

DALE

Let's do it, shooter.

ART STUDIO - LATER

Dale sits in a chair in the center of the room, the painting from the safe propped up on an easel behind him.

Xander puts the finishing touches on a pastel portrait of Dale from another easel set up by the door.

He steps back, prompting Dale to come over and look at it. It takes his breath away.

Xander gives a half-assed smile and goes to tear the page out of the pad. Dale stops him.

DALE
Nuh uh. Wait.

Dale takes his cellphone out of his pocket and snaps a photo.

He steps aside so Xander can crumple it up and add it to the garbage bag, where he put his painting from the night before.

DALE (CONT'D)
You're killing me. Throwing out a masterpiece but keeping that creepy Balls-Ass looking thing around.

XANDER
Balthus.
(beat)
I am impressed you half-remembered the name, though.

DALE
I listen.
(points to the painting)
Dude. How old do you think that girl is? Twelve? People see that, they'll call you a pedo.

XANDER
It's not about sex, Dale. It's about -- fleeting purity.

DALE
Whatever.
(beat)
You should sell it. Get some sick fucker to fork over enough cash to get you to Portugal.

XANDER
You know I can't do that.

DALE
How close are you, anyway?

XANDER
I don't know. A year or two. COVID
really set me back.

DALE
COVID? Shit. I charged triple
during COVID.

XANDER
How'd that turn out?

DALE
Got COVID.

They both laugh. Dale's smile dips.

DALE (CONT'D)
Call Ivy, Z. Do whatever you gotta
do to get out of here before--
(beat)
You end up like me.

HOLD ON Xander.

ART STUDIO - NIGHT

Xander covers the painting and tucks it away in the safe.

RING.

It's the PINK RAZR, charging along with the other phones.

BEDROOM

Xander looks out his window to the parking lot across the
street as the phone continues to RING.

A FEMALE FIGURE is silhouetted underneath a streetlight,
alone and holding a phone to her ear.

Finally, Xander answers as he watches the figure--

XANDER
You have my fee?

IVY (PHONE)
Forgot that I'm broke.

Xander pins the phone against his shoulder, uncertain.

He stares at Ivy under the streetlight for a moment, then puts the phone back to his ear--

XANDER
See that bag by the light?
(off her nod)
Change.

IVY (PHONE)
Think I'm wearing a wire?

XANDER
I don't know what to think.

Xander watches her put the phone down and disrobe.

Nude, she bends to open a plastic bag and take out clothes. She doesn't even flinch when a car drives by.

XANDER (CONT'D)
There's a card in your pocket with
an apartment number on it.

She finds the card and packs everything into the bag, leaving it by the light. He watches her cross the street.

LIVING ROOM - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Sitting at the dining room table, Xander stares at the front door. Two glasses, garnished with lime, rest on the table.

KNOCK KNOCK.

XANDER
It's open.

The front door slowly opens to reveal--

IVY (20, slim and gorgeous). Thick eyeliner and natural blonde hair with an underlayer of vibrant purple.

She takes in her surroundings, gently closing the door and teasing the lock until it CLICKS.

She saunters to the dining room table and sits across from Xander. Sips her drink. Surprised--

IVY
Ginger ale.

XANDER
Alcohol ages you.
(beat)
And youth has a shelf life.

She toasts him and takes another sip.

IVY

Why'd you let me in if I didn't
have your money?

XANDER

Why'd you feed Dale a load of shit?

IVY

Because money trumps loyalty.

(off his confusion)

Dale brags about you all the time.

About how smart you are. How you
have the whole thing figured out.

(beat)

But when I asked to meet you, he
shut me down.

Xander sips his drink. Ivy never blinks.

IVY (CONT'D)

I told him I was loaded because I
was betting that he couldn't resist
hitting you up for a hefty finder's
fee. Looks like I bet right.

XANDER

He didn't hit me up for anything.

IVY

Hmmmm.

(beat)

Still, all it took for you to break
your rules was \$10,000. Why?

XANDER

A moment of weakness.

IVY

Should I leave?

XANDER

Probably.

BEDROOM

Ivy sits on the bed. Xander leans against the wall.

XANDER

You'll need an endgame. Otherwise,
you'll lose track of time and end
up in room five with a belt around
your neck and a gimp up your ass.

IVY

What's your endgame? Let me guess.
A farm in Oklahoma.

XANDER

Close. A villa in Portugal.

IVY

Random.

XANDER

No more than a farm in Oklahoma.

IVY

Very true.

XANDER

Every penny that doesn't go towards
your endgame is a penny wasted. So,
avoid anything that charges a fee.
Banks. Cellphones. Internet.
(takes a step closer)
Always use cash. Even for taxes.

XANDER (CONT'D)

Taxes. You serious?

XANDER (CONT'D)

You don't pay your taxes, someone
might want to know why.

She puts her hands on the back of his thighs, pulling him in.

IVY

Ok, Mr. Voss.

(beat)

Tell me what I'm worth.

MOMENTS LATER

Xander lets Ivy set the pace. Soft and sensual at first, her
hips doing most of the work.

Slowly, she tests his boundaries and appetite for mixing
pleasure and pain.

Nails.

Teeth.

Her mouth and fingers probe his body.

He bites at A SMALL FADED APPLE TATTOO over her left hip.

He flips her over and bends her arm behind her back. She arches her neck and relaxes into him.

For a moment, he believes her moans.

LIVING ROOM

Hair still wet from a shower, Ivy sits alone at the table in one of Xander's T-shirts, gently spinning her glass of ginger ale around as she stares ahead at Xander's.

Xander (sweatpants and hoodie) enters, also showered. He sits. She lifts her glass.

Synchronized, they both sip.

XANDER

\$1,500. With practice, you can get to three. In time -- five.

IVY

Practice. With you?

(off his nod)

Should I masturbate for homework?

XANDER

Yes.

(off her smile)

We'll start small. Build your brand. I like the hair, but don't get any more tattoos.

(beat)

I get 50% for the first six months. 20% the next six. If that's not--

IVY

Deal.

She holds up her glass for another toast.

They both finish their drinks.

Ivy leans forward--

IVY (CONT'D)

Now, Mr. Voss -- show me what real intimacy looks like to you.

ART STUDIO

The door opens, and they enter. Ivy looks around.

IVY

Jesus. This is NOT what I thought
you had in here.

Xander sets up a chair while Ivy looks around. She runs her
finger across the alarm panel and closet.

He steps aside as she reaches the chair.

IVY (CONT'D)

On or off?

XANDER

Off.

She pulls off her shirt as she sits, assuming a pose similar
to the girl in Balthus' painting, *Thérèse Dreaming*.

The pose takes Xander off guard for a moment as he stands at
the easel. He rolls a piece of charcoal in his fingers.

He exhales and draws a long, confident stroke in black.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

- Xander sketches Ivy in several positions.
- The JPG downloads on his childhood computer.
- While sketching, his vision blurs.
- Sketches of nudes are consumed by fire.
- Xander's motor functions fail.

Xander drops the charcoal and reaches out for balance.

He stumbles, then collapses, knocking over the easel.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. XANDER'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Teenage Xander sits on his bed with a TEENAGE GIRL, her eyes
pink from crying. The cross above his bed divides them.

INT. XANDER'S APARTMENT - ART STUDIO - DAY

Xander is passed out on the floor.

Slowly, he regains consciousness and puts a palm to his
forehead, pushing back a headache.

He looks around at the sketches of Ivy scattered around the
room and the toppled easel.

He gets to his feet, dizzy.

XANDER
The fuck?

HALLWAY

Xander zig-zags his way to the bedroom.
As he gets closer, he sees a figure lying in his bed.

BEDROOM

Vision coming in and out of focus, Xander enters.

XANDER
Ivy. What happened last night? I--
He circles to the other side of the bed. Under a mop of blonde and purple hair--

IVY'S EYES ARE OPEN AND LIFELESS.

Xander jumps back.

XANDER (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ.
He puts his hand against her mouth and nose. No breath.
Checks her wrist. No pulse.
Indecision momentarily paralyzes him.
He snaps to and rushes out.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. TEXAS PRISON - CHECK-IN DESK - DAY

Items are placed one at a time on a metal tray:
-Police-issued GLOCK 19.
-Handcuffs.
-Wallet with a DETECTIVE BADGE and an ID that shows:
-Photo: EMILIA MENDOZA (30s, hair pulled tight)
-Name: Emilia Marie Mendoza
-Rank: Detective/Vice
-Badge No: 2087

REVEAL: EMILIA MENDOZA. Hair pulled back tight, just like in her ID photo.

A bulletproof glass partition separates her from the MALE CHECK-IN OFFICER. She slides the tray back, then lifts up a thin, hardbound TASCHEN book about the artist PIET MONDRIAN.

EMILIA
For the library.

CHECK-IN OFFICER
(takes the book)
Mon-dree-on.
(beat)
I'll add it to the others, but he's
the only one who checks them out.

EMILIA
(hopeful)
He checks them out?

Another MALE OFFICER passes, staring daggers at Emilia. Not quite under his breath--

OFFICER 2
Fuckin' rat.

CHECK-IN OFFICER
(swivels and chastises)
Shut the fuck up, Larry.

The officer flips him off as he rounds a corner.

CHECK-IN OFFICER (CONT'D)
(to Emilia)
Sorry about that.

She shakes him off as if to say, "Don't worry about it". He buzzes her in.

VISITOR WAITING ROOM

Plastic chairs face a locked steel door. A muted religious program plays on a wall-mounted TV. Vending machines hum.

Behind a window, a MALE CORRECTIONAL OFFICER (CO) watches.

Emilia sits, stoic, among OTHER VISITORS of varying age and gender. A couple have TODDLERS. Most of the visitors look exhausted and pale under the fluorescents.

CORRECTIONAL OFFICER
Mendoza.

Emilia rises and tightens her shirt into her slacks. She fixes her hair and approaches the glass.

CORRECTIONAL OFFICER (CONT'D)
Hector still won't see you.

She clears her throat.

EMILIA
Tell him I'll be back next month.
With the Rothko book.

She leaves, flinching slightly when the Correctional Officer belts out the next name.

PUBLIC BATHROOM

Leaning against the closed stall door, Emilia softly cries.

MOMENTS LATER

Emilia washes her hands, struggling for air.

She looks in the mirror: her buttoned-up shirt feels like it's strangling her. She undoes the top two buttons.

She catches her breath and tilts her head to inspect her frame -- she's inadvertently exposed her cleavage.

A SQUEAKING DOOR alerts her to someone entering the bathroom.

She quickly rebuttons her shirt and exits.

INT. XANDER'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Teenage Xander sits with the teenage girl on the bed, like before. Only now, they stare at a pregnancy test.

It's positive.

He smiles and gently kisses her.

INT. XANDER'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Xander sits where Ivy sat hours earlier: same chair, same table, same soda glasses.

A MALE UNIFORMED OFFICER stands beside him. Watching.

The apartment is being processed:

- A FIELD INVESTIGATOR follows a trail of evidence flags.
- VICTOR (evidence custodian) logs everything into an iPad.
- A CRIME SCENE TECHNICIAN dusts for fingerprints.
- A GERMAN SHEPHERD sniffs around, led by a K9 OFFICER.
- A MEDICAL EXAMINER inspects Ivy's body in the bed.

The front door opens. Xander turns to find--

Emilia.

She enters, sizing Xander up as she heads for the bedroom.

Even obscured, Xander can see the Medical Examiner swabbing Ivy with a Q-Tip. He prepares a test kit.

Xander looks down at his hands, finding charcoal remnants staining his fingers.

The red paint from two nights ago is still lodged under his nail bed.

SNAP!

The ampoule inside the test kit releases reagent onto the sample. The Medical Examiner shakes the pouch gently. Slowly, the COLOR TURNS A DEEP PURPLE.

Emilia shoots a look to the officer next to Xander. The officer shifts to take a more tactical position.

Emilia exits the bedroom, heading to Xander, when--

BARK!

The dog's found something in Xander's studio. Xander cranes his neck to try and see into the room. No luck.

Emilia detours into the studio. Xander holds his breath. After a tense moment, she reemerges, hand on her waist.

Her shoulder holster accentuates her frame. Another look at the officer. Another shift in position.

XANDER

What'd they find? Powder? It's just pigment. For paint.

EMILIA

K9 units aren't trained to sniff out pigment, Mr. Voss.

(beat)

And you can't make paint with ketamine. Or fentanyl.

XANDER

(true shock)

What?

The honest reaction surprises Emilia for a moment.

An OFFICER takes two baby food jars out of the studio.

XANDER (CONT'D)

I've never seen those jars before.

At the same time, OTHER OFFICERS carry out boxes of cash, stacking money on the kitchen counter for Victor to log and place into an evidence bag.

Victor pushes his thick glasses up onto his nose.

EMILIA

Mr. Voss--

She reaches for the handcuffs on her belt, letting the weight of them sit heavy in her hand.

Xander flinches at the sight of them.

Her voice remains even--

EMILIA (CONT'D)

You're under arrest for possession
with intent to distribute a
controlled substance. You have the
right to remain silent--

The words echo and trail off--

INT. POLICE STATION - BOOKING ROOM - DAY

Still dressed in his hoodie and sweatpants, a FEMALE DEPUTY takes Xander's front and profile pictures.

Afterwards, his fingerprints are taken.

SEARCH ROOM

Another FEMALE DEPUTY stands by a table with a plastic bucket and a pile of folded clothes (orange jumpsuit, t-shirt, underwear, socks, and slip-on shoes).

DEPUTY

Remove your clothes. One item at a
time. Place them in the bin.

Xander complies, putting each article of clothing in a plastic bin.

Uninterested in his physique, the deputy checks the pockets and barks more commands--

DEPUTY (CONT'D)

Run your hands through your hair.
(he does)

Open your mouth.
(he does)

Lift your genitals.
(MORE)

DEPUTY (CONT'D)
(he does)
Bend over and cough.

He does.

INTERROGATION ROOM

A windowless room with a two-way mirror on one wall and a security camera mounted in the corner by the door.

Seated at a metal table and dressed in his orange jumpsuit, Xander's vacant gaze is fixed on the empty folding chair across from him.

An untouched cup of water rests before him. One hand is handcuffed to the table.

He notices his knee bouncing. Stares at it. Forces it still.

The door opens for Emilia. She walks over to the table, holding a case file and Xander's ledger under her arm.

She sits and flips through the ledger with one hand, brushing her lips with her other.

EMILIA
I made sure Victor wrapped your
Balthus properly before moving it.
Our evidence room is climate-
controlled. It'll be safe.

Xander's brow ticks upward at her knowledge of the artist.

XANDER
How'd you know it was a Balthus?
There's no signature.

EMILIA
I know a Balthus when I see one.
(glances at him)
My -- brother -- took me to see
Thérèse Dreaming in New York once.

XANDER
What'd you think of mine?

EMILIA
Haunting.

The corner of Xander's mouth lifts slightly.

Emilia opens the file and reads through it.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

Xander Voss. You've been filing federal taxes for ten years. Before that? No W-2s. No school loans. No birth certificate. Nothing.

(beat)

I assume you changed your name before moving here, so I can't track down where you came from. You could tell me, of course.

Silence.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

(deep breath)

Homicide wants felony murder because of the fentanyl we found in your studio. It's as good a circumstantial case as you can hope for. And the jury? They'd salivate at the chance to lock up a good-looking white boy like you.

(beat)

But I said no. I can't in good faith say the drugs that killed Ivy were the same drugs we found in your apartment. They probably were, but maybe they weren't.

XANDER

Why would you help me?

EMILIA

It's not about you. I don't let my feelings cloud my judgment.

Xander's shoulders dip. Slight relief.

Emilia taps the ledger, emphasizing each fact--

EMILIA (CONT'D)

Still -- fake name. Blue chip piece of art squirreled away in a safe.

(beat)

Dead girl in the bed. Ledger filled with account numbers. Box of busted cellphones in the closet.

(beat)

And \$2 million in cash.

She slides the ledger to the side so that there is nothing between her and Xander.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

Every single part of this screams
Joe Trafficker.

(beat)

Except for you.

(beat)

I saw your sketches. Honestly, I've
never met a trafficker with a home
art studio and the talent to make
Egon Schiele jealous.

Again, her knowledge of art puts him on tilt.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

So -- convince me, Mr. Voss. Why
shouldn't the DA add human
trafficking to your charges?

The silence stretches. Xander sips his water.

XANDER

I sell flesh. But only mine.

Her eyes narrow. She's not convinced. She consults his file.

EMILIA

Thirty-seven?

(beat)

I'd have said twenty-four.

She registers a slight shift in Xander's demeanor. A flicker
of bruised ego.

She takes out the property listing from the ledger.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

Portugal. Why? Because of how hard
it is to get extradited?

XANDER

No.

(beat)

It feels like Italy, but for a
fraction of the price.

She nods, accepting the answer -- for now.

EMILIA

You calculate the move at \$3
million. But you're a million shy.
How do you expect to hit the mark?

XANDER

I'm very good at what I do.

There's pride in his answer. That isn't lost on Emilia.

EMILIA

I'm sure you are. But -- almost forty? Maybe you realized that selling OTHER people's flesh was the only way to get you across the finish line.

Xander clenches his jaw. Looks over to the one-way mirror, then back to Emilia.

XANDER

Ok. Yes, I'm behind. So, I agreed to meet Ivy. To -- assess her.

EMILIA

Assess her?

XANDER

I slept with her. So I could tell her how much she should charge.

EMILIA

And you were going to what -- take a percentage?

XANDER

Yes, but I'm not a pimp. She's the only one. And she came to me.

EMILIA

Why not just sell the painting? I've never seen it before. A newly discovered Balthus? Could be worth--

XANDER

I like looking at it.

EMILIA

Is it stolen?

XANDER

No.

EMILIA

Was it a gift? Who gave it to you?

He doesn't answer.

Emilia runs her finger across one of the *six-digit numbers* in the ledger.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

Right. Client confidentiality. Ok,
let's talk about the phones.

XANDER

Each one has a matching burner. A
client. When our business is done,
I drill a hole through the
motherboard and get rid of it.

EMILIA

The pink one. Hers?

XANDER

Yes. Came in the mail yesterday.

(beat)

You'll find its match across the
street with a bag of clothes.

(slight hesitation)

I had her strip and change into
some things I left for her.

(getting ahead of Emilia)

I wasn't trying to humiliate her. I
was protecting myself.

EMILIA

From what?

Xander swallows hard. He tries to move his hand, forgetting
that it's handcuffed. It jars him a bit. He recenters--

XANDER

She was the first person I ever let
into my apartment who wasn't Dale.

EMILIA

Who's Dale?

XANDER

A friend. Look--

(beat)

I had her strip because I needed
total control over everything she
brought inside.

EMILIA

Like fentanyl?

XANDER

Exactly. If she had something with
her, I'd have seen it. She must've
taken it before she came over.

EMILIA

And the fentanyl we found in your studio? That's a coincidence? Personal use? Like the ketamine?

XANDER

Personal use? I don't even take aspirin, Emi -- Detective Mendoza.
(beat)
You don't know how much discipline it takes to stay desirable because God graced you with natural beauty.

Her breath catches a bit, but she doesn't look away.

XANDER (CONT'D)

I don't know how those drugs got into my studio.
(beat)
Or into my bloodstream.

He squints, a question occurring to him--

XANDER (CONT'D)

Why go all the way to New York to see *Thérèse Dreaming* when you can see it online whenever you want?

The sudden shift in topics throws her off.

EMILIA

Umm -- well, I wanted to see for myself what all the fuss was about.

XANDER

What do you think?

EMILIA

I think people can become unimaginative and simple when they feel uncomfortable.

XANDER

So, you didn't see it as some sort of vulgar exploitation?

EMILIA

No. I saw it as reality. The unsettling space between innocence and eroticism.

XANDER

Balthus thought interpretation said more about the viewer than it did about the painting.

Her lips are suddenly very dry.

XANDER (CONT'D)

You have great instincts, Emilia.

(beat)

Which is why you know this is a setup. You can feel it.

She stands and presses her shirt down as she collects the ledger and case file.

EMILIA

I told you. My feelings are irrelevant. The only things that matter are what I know. And what I know is this--

(beat)

Your door was locked from the inside. There were no signs of forced entry. And there wasn't a single thing stolen.

(beat)

But I've dealt with all kinds of traffickers from here to Laredo.

(beat)

And I don't think you're running girls. Still, there's no way to explain those jars of drugs.

She stops at the door. Looks back--

EMILIA (CONT'D)

You're being indicted tomorrow for possession with intent to distribute. I won't ask the DA to add any charges. But, if I were you, I'd be thinking about a plea.

Emilia maintains Xander's gaze for a long beat, then leaves. The THUD of the door closing makes Xander flinch.

OUTSIDE THE INTERROGATION ROOM

Emilia pauses outside the closed door and rests her back against the wall, Xander's ledger and her case file pressed tightly against her chest.

INT. VALENTINE'S - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

A classy strip club. The PATRONS are well-behaved. The DANCERS are talented. Money flows.

On stage, ALICE (20s, glitter all over) graces the pole and floor before tapping her hip and squatting in front of--

Emilia, seated up against the stage.

She slips a \$20 into Alice's G-string.

PRIVATE ROOM

In a sports bra and athletic shorts, Alice eats cucumber spears out of a bento box next to Emilia on a plush couch.

Emilia has her phone out and shows Alice one of Xander's sketches -- zoomed in on Ivy's face.

ALICE
Got any real pics?

EMILIA
Not the kind you want to see.

ALICE
Looks like half the girls who come through here.

Emilia swipes to Xander's mugshot.

EMILIA
What about him?

ALICE
No, but--
(flashes a sly grin)
He's sexy. One of us?

EMILIA
He tricks, yeah. Made a small fortune doing it, actually.
(beat)
Which is fine. No one's forcing him to do anything against his will. As far as I know. And he's clean. Like, really clean. So, he's not spreading disease.
(beat)
But I don't get it. Why doesn't he just do porn? Or OnlyFans.

The straightforwardness surprises Alice. She laughs and takes a bite of a cucumber stick, then offers one to Emilia.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

(taking the cucumber)

I mean, it's legal. There's money there. And it's gotta be safer than tricking, right?

(bites the cucumber)

How one sex act is different than another. Is it power? Control?

Alice puts the container down.

ALICE

For some. For others--

(beat)

It's intimacy.

She puts her hand on Emilia's thigh. She gently shifts away.

A sad truth--

ALICE (CONT'D)

Intimacy is like, Em.

Emilia shakes her head and looks around the gaudy room at all the velvet and mirrors.

EMILIA

After the hell you endured--

(beat)

How can you still do this?

Alice softly puts her hand back on Emilia's thigh. This time, she lets her keep it there.

ALICE

You may have saved my body, but it was up to me to save my soul.

(beat)

Those animals took something from me that wasn't theirs to take.

(beat)

This is how I took it back.

Emilia looks back at Xander's picture on her phone, then clicks it off, smiles, and stands, pressing her shirt down.

EMILIA

I'll text you the sketch of the girl. Show it around for me, yeah?

ALICE
Will do, Detective Mendoza.

She starts to leave, but stops for a second.

EMILIA
Have you -- taken it back?
(beat)
What they took from you?

ALICE
Working on it.

A genuine smile between friends.

Alice leaves.

INT. POLICE STATION - HOLDING CELL - NIGHT

A coffin of concrete and steel.

Xander stands at a communal payphone, ear to the receiver.

DALE (V.O.)
Yo, this is Dale. Leave a message.
Make it as clean or dirty as you
desire. Peace.

He slams the phone down, hanging up.

INT. EMILIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Tasteful, but on a budget.

Exposed brick. Dim lighting. A full bookshelf.

Notably, there aren't any family photos or traces of a personal life.

A stack of TASCHEN ART BOOKS like the one she brought to the prison is stacked up on a table by the door.

Hair still pulled back tight, Emilia sits on her couch in an oversized T-shirt and sweatpants, reviewing Xander's case file on her department-issued laptop.

LAPTOP: A dashboard connects Emilia to different areas of the file (crime scene photos, evidence logs, etc.).

She scrolls past photos of cash and busted cell phones.

Pauses on the painting of the girl. Studies it.

Moves on to a series of powders in containers.

Stops at a photo of the baby food jars.

INT. POLICE STATION - HOLDING CELL - NIGHT

Xander lies on a steel bunk bed bolted to the wall. No sheets. No pillow.

Eyes open, he listens to the muffled mix of voices and mechanical noise.

INT. EMILIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Emilia scrolls through the crime scene photos. The images document every part of Ivy's lifeless, naked body.

She advances to a photo of Ivy's APPLE TATTOO. Pauses. Touches the screen.

Swipes to Xander's drawings. His quick sketches capture Ivy's vivaciousness perfectly.

With a sigh, she sits back for a moment before returning to the dashboard.

She rubs her fingers together, then finds herself drawn to Xander's mug shot.

She clicks on it but looks away.

His face fills the screen.

She turns back to the computer to stare into his eyes as if he were staring back into hers.

BEDROOM

Emilia enters, settling in front of a full-length mirror.

She inspects herself, then takes off her shirt, leaving her in only her bra and sweatpants.

Her bronze body is thick, sculpted.

She tilts her head. Runs her hand down her throat. She undoes her bun and lets her hair fall around her shoulders.

A pause before she unclips her bra and removes it.

She pushes her chest out, tracing her nipples with her fingers before stepping out of her sweatpants and panties.

Standing tall, she locks eyes with herself.

Something's missing.

She exits frame.

After a beat, she re-enters, wearing her shoulder holster.

The leather tugs her shoulders back, forcing poise and accentuating her breasts.

She traces her body heat down to a small tuft of pubic hair.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The courtroom is bustling with activity.

Rubbing his wrists against his handcuffs, Xander sits in the front row of the gallery along with a small group of INMATES.

An overworked PUBLIC DEFENDER and PROSECUTOR manage stacks of files at their tables. A JUDGE (50s, female) presides.

Hidden in the back, Emilia sits, her eyes locked on the back of Xander's head. Her hair is down.

The BAILIFF steps forward.

BAILIFF

State of Texas vs. Xander Voss.
Case number 24-J-35792.

Xander stiffens as he's led to the defense table. The public defender quickly scans his case folder.

JUDGE

Xander Voss, you are charged with
possession with--

MAYA (O.S.)

Your Honor, Maya Sinclair, entering
my appearance for the defense.

MAYA SINCLAIR (40s, impeccably dressed) strides to the defense table. The public defender, relieved, steps aside.

JUDGE

Ms. Sinclair.

MAYA

Permission to approach, Your Honor?

JUDGE

Granted.

Maya approaches the clerk with her entry of appearance and a sealed envelope. She holds up the envelope.

MAYA

This is for Your Honor on an unrelated matter.

JUDGE

Thank you, counselor.

Emilia narrows her eyes. The prosecutor looks on, bewildered. Maya returns to Xander at the defendant's table.

He whispers to her--

XANDER

What's happening?

MAYA

It's an election year. Shut the fuck up and try not to smile.

Suddenly--

JUDGE

The Court finds that continued prosecution of Mr. Voss is not warranted in this matter. Accordingly, all charges are dismissed with prejudice.

Maya stands at attention, emotionless. Xander is stunned. He turns to the gallery just in time to see Emilia slip out.

INT. HOLDING CELL AREA - DAY

Xander, still in his orange jumpsuit, is back on the phone--

DALE (V.O.)

--or dirty as you desire. Peace.

He hangs up and rests his forehead on the receiver.

INT. POLICE STATION - PROPERTY ROOM - DAY

Xander (back in sweats) is in a secure, windowless area with a caged-in counter that separates the public from Victor, the evidence custodian who processed his apartment.

Xander doesn't recognize him.

Behind the counter, shelves are stacked with sealed plastic bags, bins, and lockers. An armed OFFICER stands close by.

Victor gives a tube of rolled-up sketches to the Officer. The Officer hands them to Xander.

XANDER
Where's the rest?

VICTOR
(pushes up glasses)
That's everything.

XANDER
Everything? Where's my money?

VICTOR
It's not -- I'm not -- authorized
to release it.

XANDER
What about my painting?

The Officer senses Xander tensing and immediately steps between him and the wire mesh protecting Victor.

XANDER (CONT'D)
(to the Officer)
There's been a mistake.

OFFICER
Take it up with your lawyer.

Xander bites his tongue. Backs away.

Victor is so rattled, his glasses nearly fall off his face.

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Maya eats an apple while she waits for Xander outside the station. He storms out in his hoodie and sweats, furious.

XANDER
They stole everything.

MAYA
Not stolen. Seized.

XANDER
The case was dismissed.

MAYA
The criminal case. Forfeiture is a civil matter. You want your stuff back, you'll have to file a civil complaint and take it to hearing.

XANDER

Ok. Do it.

MAYA

I'm not your lawyer, Mr. Voss. I'm here as a favor to our mutual friend. She felt it was in her best interests to get you out of jail.

(beat)

A *thank you* for services rendered.

XANDER

At least tell me how to get started. I'll do the rest myself.

Maya rolls the apple around in her palm.

MAYA

Look, fighting a civil forfeiture takes years, not months. AND you'd have to come clean about how you made the money, which may compromise our mutual friend. So -- I'd suggest you drop it.

XANDER

Drop it? What happens to my stuff?

MAYA

They sell the painting. Spend the cash. A sheriff in Oklahoma used forfeiture money to buy a margarita machine. All completely legal.

(slightly annoyed)

Mr. Voss, you just drew a *get out of jail free* card. Whatever you lost, consider it a bargain.

XANDER

That was everything I owned.

Maya rolls her eyes.

MAYA

I'm sure you'll figure it out.

(tosses apple in trash)

This officially ends your relationship with our friend.

Mention her to anyone, I won't be the one visiting you.

(beat)

Understood?

He nods. Maya walks to the open door of Tammy's Suburban SUV, held by the same female driver who chauffeured him home.

The driver looks at him -- an unspoken threat -- then gets in the driver's seat.

The SUV drives off, exposing Emilia parked in a nondescript sedan across the street, watching.

Xander doesn't see her. She tracks him as he tosses his sketches in the garbage and walks in the opposite direction.

EXT. DALE'S CONDO - DAY

Keeping a low profile, Xander briskly heads towards a collection of middle-class condos.

He reaches Dale's front door, clocking a few Amazon packages left abandoned on the porch. Black curtains are pulled shut tightly in the windows. No lights are on.

Pounds on the door--

XANDER

Dale! Open up!

Nothing. Pounds again--

XANDER (CONT'D)

Dale!

(to himself)

Goddamnit.

He moves to the side of the condo, keeping his head on a swivel. Once he's sure he's alone, he takes off his hoodie and wraps it around his arm.

A swift elbow to the window breaks the glass.

He uses the hoodie to clear away the jagged shards.

INT. DALE'S CONDO - LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - DAY

Tacky leather furniture. Drugs left out in the open. A mirror on the living room table with cocaine residue on it.

Xander climbs in through the window and looks around.

It's a mess -- like Dale left in a hurry.

He pauses at a picture frame face down on the kitchen's pass-through counter.

Turns it over--

PICTURE: A YOUNGER Xander and Dale, smiling and looking dapper at an exclusive party.

Betrayal mixes with nostalgia.

Xander slams the frame back down, leading him to find several empty boxes of Narcan piled up on the floor.

He picks one up, confused.

Then, something on the other side of the room catches his eye: a reproduction of Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss*, hanging on the wall of his bedroom.

It's hung poorly and slightly cockeyed.

Xander puts the Narcan box down and approaches the painting.

He straightens it.

Something shifts behind it.

He takes the painting off the wall.

A TABLET falls to the ground.

KNOCK KNOCK!

EMILIA (O.S.)

Open up, Xander. It's Detective
Mendoza. I saw you go in there.

Xander picks up the tablet and looks at the broken window in the living room. A momentary thought of escape.

XANDER

Shit.

He tucks the tablet into the back of his waistband.

EXT. DALE'S CONDO - DAY

Emilia waits, constantly checking her surroundings.

She unclips her gun from her holster. A tense pause, until--

XANDER (O.S.)

I'm going to slowly open the door.
I'm not armed, and I'm not looking
for trouble.

Another beat as the door is unlocked.

Slow and deliberate, Xander opens it.

EMILIA

You walk on a slam-dunk possession charge, and the first thing you do is commit a B&E?

(beat)

Think that fancy lawyer of yours has enough envelopes to keep you out of jail forever?

XANDER

That envelope cashed in all my favors. So--

EMILIA

If I arrest you now, no one's coming to save you.

He puts his arms out, wrists together, for her to cuff him.

One hand close to her gun, the other creeps toward the cuffs on her belt. She shifts her stance to fold her arms.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

Where are we?

XANDER

Dale's condo.

EMILIA

Dale? Your friend.

XANDER

Best friend.

(beat)

And the guy who set me up.

Xander puts a hand behind his back, making Emilia reflectively reach for the gun in her holster.

Eyes wide and calm, Xander keeps one palm up for reassurance while the other hand comes back with the tablet.

Emilia exhales and takes her hand off her holster.

XANDER (CONT'D)

Found this hidden behind the Klimt.

EMILIA

Another art fan?

XANDER

Dale hates art. I got it for him at IKEA as a joke.

(MORE)

XANDER (CONT'D)

(beat)

Come in, and I'll explain.

Unsure, she looks around. There's no one around. She re-clips her holster and enters.

Xander closes the door behind her.

INT. DALE'S CONDO - LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - DAY

Emilia takes inventory of all the drugs, protein powders, and leather scattered around while Xander looks through the kitchen cabinets.

The tablet rests on the pass-through counter, next to the turned-over photo and a collection of scented candles.

Xander finds a box of power bars and celebrates. He grabs two and tears one open, taking a large, satisfying bite.

EMILIA

You break in here for lunch?

XANDER

Your people took all my money, and I'm starving. If there's one thing I can count on with Dale, it's protein bars and Red Bull.

(beat)

You gonna arrest me for theft?

EMILIA

Can't -- you ate the evidence.

Xander puts the bar down. Chews.

XANDER

The case is closed, Detective. What are you doing here?

EMILIA

Dead girl. Planted evidence.

(beat)

Can't just walk away.

XANDER

So, you believe me.

EMILIA

I didn't say that.

XANDER

So the case is back open?

EMILIA

No. This is for personal closure.

Xander sips a Red Bull to wash down the power bar. Solemn--

XANDER

Dale's not capable of killing anyone. Especially not a girl.

EMILIA

Everyone is capable of everything, Xander. Don't kid yourself.

They share an intense look. Finally--

XANDER

A while back, I was outside the Gagosian in LA. Blue chip exhibition. I'd run away from home.

(beat)

I was minding my own business. Sketching whatever I could glimpse through the window. Until a couple of cops came over.

(beat)

Told me to leave.

(beat)

I didn't argue. But one of them didn't like the way I looked. He was a -- pudgy, forgettable man. Probably couldn't get it up for his wife anymore.

Walks the tablet around the other side of the pass-through.

XANDER (CONT'D)

The other one was wiry. Got his bravado from his badge and gun.

(beat)

Anyway. I could tell I had an ass-beating coming my way.

(beat)

And that's when Dale showed up. He was there as an escort. Dressed to the nines. Walked away from his client to intervene. Didn't even know me. Told me later that he recognized me from Skid Row.

EMILIA

Why'd you run away from--

XANDER

He punched the pudgy cop right in the face. Before the wiry one could reach his gun, I grabbed him. We got them on the ground and ran off.

He takes a step closer to her.

XANDER (CONT'D)

After that -- he took me in. We had to get out of LA. That was obvious. So we changed our names. Moved here. He taught me how to trick the wrong way. I taught myself how to trick the right way.

(beat)

Is it possible Dale sold me out for money? Yes. He was getting older. Taking on more risks. It's only money, right?

(beat)

But murder? No.

She nods, understanding. Looks around the apartment.

EMILIA

Ok. So, tell me -- why would a guy who keeps cocaine and syringes out in plain sight be hiding a tablet behind a painting?

XANDER

Wish I knew.

(holds up hands)

Wrong prints.

She tightens her hair in her bun and unbuttons the top button of her shirt.

EMILIA

Look around for superglue, baking soda, and cotton balls.

(nods at the candles)

I'll need that candle, too

QUICK SHOTS: Emilia finds cotton balls in the bathroom. Xander finds superglue in a kitchen drawer, baking soda in the refrigerator.

Emilia tilts the cocaine mirror under the light of a lamp, revealing a perfect oily fingerprint.

Xander is impressed.

Emilia scatters baking soda over the mirror. Next to it, she drops a cotton ball into a small glass bowl, saturating it with super glue.

She places a plastic container over the mirror and bowl.

The superglue reacts to the cotton ball, creating fumes.

She lifts the container, revealing a solidified milky-white fingerprint on the mirror.

Smiling, she presses the mirror into a pool of warm candle wax on a sheet of tinfoil. After ten seconds, she lifts it up: A PERFECT REPLICA OF DALE'S FINGERPRINT.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

¡Y voilà!

XANDER

Very sexy, Detective Mendoza.

EMILIA

Emilia.

XANDER

Very sexy -- Emilia.

She blushes, not sure if he's just turning a phrase.

A SHORT WHILE LATER

Sitting on the living room couch, Emilia gently presses "Dale's" fingerprint onto the tablet.

It immediately comes to life.

Xander exhales as she navigates to the settings to disable the privacy features.

Then, she looks on the desktop for folders.

TABLET: One of the folders stands out -- "TAXES".

EMILIA

You teach him how to pay taxes?

(off his head shake)

Didn't think so.

She clicks on it, and a large list appears with dates and names. She clicks the first one.

TABLET: Grainy. The view is from the corner of the ceiling of a hotel room. Empty. Until -- the door opens.

A BUSINESSMAN (50s) enters with a girl. Looks like Ivy, but it's hard to know for sure. They're drinking liquor.

Xander's jaw tightens.

TABLET: The girl seduces the man, gently pushing him onto the bed and dancing. Grinding. Suddenly, she stops, leaving him needing more. She takes out a condom and directs him to the bathroom. The man quickly obeys.

XANDER

What's she up to?

TABLET: While the man's in the bathroom, the girl takes a bottle of powder out of her purse and drugs his drink.

EMILIA

Jesus.

TABLET: The man comes out, and the girl hands him the drink. He downs it, tosses the glass, and pulls her close. She lets him flip her over. The drugs act quickly. Before he can do anything, he collapses to the floor.

XANDER

She didn't fuck him.

EMILIA

Didn't have to.

Xander's eyes are locked on the tablet.

TABLET: The girl fixes her hair and goes to the door. She lets in ANOTHER GIRL. Through the low-quality footage, they look like twins.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

Holy shit.

TABLET: The new girl takes a drink from the first girl, strips nude, and lies in the bed. She lets the drugs wash over her, losing consciousness. The first girl leaves.

Emilia fast-forwards to when the man wakes up.

TABLET: The man's dizzy. Confused. He finds the other girl in the bed. Panics. Checks her pulse. Panics more. Then, a KNOCK at the door. The man opens it a crack, and it's kicked in. Enter Dale, dressed as a detective and flashing a fake badge.

XANDER

That's Dale.

TABLET: Even without sound, it's obvious that Dale is saying the girl is dead. The man cries. Pleads. Dale pushes him against the dresser. Threatens him. But then he eases off.

XANDER AND EMILIA

It's a shakedown.

TABLET: Dale takes the man's driver's license and kicks him out. Dale takes Narcan out of his pocket, sprays it in the girl's nose, and wakes her up. After making sure she's ok, he gives her a wad of cash, and she leaves.

Emilia pauses the video -- looks over to the empty Narcan boxes scattered around.

EMILIA

How many times can you bring
somebody back to life?

XANDER

Could be a different girl each
time. Boards are filled with
sketchy ads for cash jobs.

EMILIA

As long as they're blonde, roughly
the same color, age -- the guy
would never know. Too busy dealing
with the shock.

Xander nods his head, feeling played.

XANDER

How many videos are there?

EMILIA

A lot.

(beat)

Were either of those girls Ivy?

XANDER

Too blurry to tell.

(beat)

I need to see the body.

INT. MORGUE - COLD STORAGE - DAY

A sterile, industrial cold room lined with stainless steel
body drawers.

Xander stands with his hands in his pockets, showing respect
for the dead while Emilia works a wall-mounted terminal
beside the body drawers.

-DOE, JANE / IVY (UNCONFIRMED ID)
-TIME OF INTAKE: 9:42 PM
-CAUSE OF DEATH: ACCIDENTAL OVERDOSE - FENTANYL

A few keystrokes later and a tray unlocks with a soft beep.
Emilia grips the handle.

EMILIA

Ready?

Xander nods, jaw tight.

She pulls the tray fully out, the metal groaning slightly under the weight. She peels back the white sheet with practiced detachment, exposing the girl's still, pale body.

Lips faintly blue. Purple underlayer of her hair still vibrant. The Y incision stitches from the autopsy.

He keeps a slight distance. Clinical, detached--

XANDER

Pull it back.

Emilia peels back the sheet, revealing Ivy's hip and lower abdomen. Xander focuses on the APPLE TATTOO.

XANDER (CONT'D)

It's not her.

EMILIA

What?

XANDER

The tattoo. It's new. You can see the irritation around the line work. Ivy's was -- older.

(beat)

Like something she got on her eighteenth birthday.

Xander gets closer. He swallows hard and examines her features more thoroughly. A revelation--

XANDER (CONT'D)

This girl's nose is slightly wider.
Eyes, further apart.

He continues down her body, pausing at her chest. He holds out his hands and cups them slightly.

XANDER (CONT'D)
Ivy's breasts are smaller.
(looks back to Emilia)
Close. But she's not Ivy.

He steps away, turning his back to the body. He struggles to process this new reality as Emilia gently pulls the sheet over Ivy's head and closes the tray. Soft--

EMILIA
Girls come off the bus all the time. Get jobs at shady clubs. Get paid cash. No background checks. No prints. Unless they get arrested, there's no way to ID them.
(beat)
And we don't have the money or the resources to tap into the state and federal databases.

XANDER
So, she just -- disappears?

He turns to her, eyes red from holding back tears.

XANDER (CONT'D)
What happens next?

EMILIA
They'll hold her for thirty days. If no one comes looking for her, she'll be cremated.
(beat)
Like the others.

Emilia shakes her head, a question nagging--

EMILIA (CONT'D)
Why the body swap? Why not just have the girl do the whole thing?

XANDER
A junkie wouldn't have the skills to pull off the seduction.
(beat)
Only Ivy would.

Uncharacteristically, and nearing panic--

XANDER (CONT'D)
(grabbing chest)
Air.

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Forcing back sickness, Xander rushes out of the station, grabbing the railing of the stairs and chugging the air.

Emilia comes out soon after. All the while, OFFICERS and CIVILIANS enter and exit, half-eyeing them both.

She puts her hand on his shoulder.

XANDER
I need to go home. Shower.
(beat)
Think.

She keeps her hand on him. He cups it with his own hand.

PRE-LAP: The harsh HISS of a shower.

INT. XANDER'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

Xander leans against the side of the shower, eyes closed. The water fights to wash off the past twenty-four hours.

ART STUDIO

Emilia stands before the open closet door.

Everything is gone. The chair in the middle of the room has been turned on its side.

She looks out towards the hall for a beat before picking up the chair and sitting in it. She assumes the same pose as Ivy did in the sketches.

Feeling dirty, she only keeps the pose for a moment, then stands and tucks her shirt into her pants.

LIVING ROOM

Emilia exits the studio.

The entire apartment feels violated -- fingerprint dust has left grimy black residue everywhere. Remnants of yellow police tape still stick to the door frames between rooms.

XANDER (O.S.)
I know how they did it.

She turns.

He's in a towel, still wet.

Emilia fights to maintain eye contact.

From the threshold of the living room, he walks her through his hypothesis--

XANDER (CONT'D)

She showered first, then waited for me in here.

EMILIA

Before you moved to the studio.

XANDER

Exactly. So, while I was in the shower, she could have easily--

EMILIA

Opened the door, been given the ketamine, and drugged your drink.

XANDER

All they had to do was wait for me to pass out. Then they'd have had all the time in the world to plant those jars and swap the bodies.

He takes a step forward.

She puts a hand out to stop him.

EMILIA

Can you get dressed, please? It's--
(beat)
Distracting.

Xander lets slip a reflective smirk.

A SHORT WHILE LATER

Back in a black T-shirt and jeans, Xander sits opposite Emilia at the table, exactly where he was the other night.

EMILIA

Still doesn't make sense. Their grift was working. Why change things up?

XANDER

Dale was getting desperate. Scared about time slipping away.
(beat)
Scared I'd run off to Portugal and leave him alone.

The reality hits hard. But it's still not enough--

EMILIA

No. Too many things needed to be changed. For one, Dale couldn't do the whole fake-cop thing. And if you're right about him, he wouldn't just leave that girl to die.

XANDER

He'd have known I'd call the cops even if she wasn't dead.

(beat)

Which means Ivy gave her too much.

EMILIA

I can buy that. But still -- nothing was stolen.

Xander looks up--

XANDER

You're wrong. Something WAS stolen. Just not right away.

EMILIA

Your cash is secured in evidence. No one can get to it.

He puts his finger up for her to stop talking. He concentrates. Looks around. Remembers--

VARIUS LOCATIONS (FLASHBACK)

XANDER'S APARTMENT: Victor bags his cash into an evidence bag, pushing his thick glasses up onto his nose.

POLICE STATION: Victor pushes his glasses up when turning over Xander's sketches.

ROOM FIVE: The Gimp pushes his glasses up onto his nose when Xander busts in.

BACK TO SCENE

Xander spells it out--

XANDER

The Custodian.

EMILIA

Victor? No. He bagged and sealed that money and painting right here, in front of everyone. Including me.

(beat)

(MORE)

EMILIA (CONT'D)
Then he took it straight to
evidence and logged it in.
Everything's on camera.

XANDER
You sure about that?

INT. POLICE STATION - EVIDENCE ROOM DESK - DAY

They approach a YOUNG OFFICER manning the desk, cutting in front of a LINE OF MEN waiting to get their belongings back.

EMILIA
Where's Victor?

YOUNG OFFICER
Called out with a sick kid.

EMILIA
We need to see the evidence from
the Voss case.

YOUNG OFFICER
The cash?

They both nod.

YOUNG OFFICER (CONT'D)
Civies can't go back there. I'll
need to escort you.

EMILIA
(to Xander)
I'll be back in a minute.

The men behind them groan.

EVIDENCE ROOM

Accompanied by the young officer, Emilia walks through the aisles of evidence to a shelf marked with Xander's case number. There are several bags on the shelf.

YOUNG OFFICER
All here. Still sealed.

EMILIA
Open them.

The officer takes a bag down and breaks the seal on it. He takes out a stack of cash. At first, everything looks fine.

But when he flips through it--

ONLY THE TOP TWO BILLS ARE REAL.

The rest is Monopoly money.

YOUNG OFFICER
Holy shit!

EMILIA
You said Victor called out sick?

YOUNG OFFICER
Yeah. Why, what's going on?

INT. EMILIA'S CAR - DAY

Emilia speeds through the suburbs, followed by a flock of police cars, lights and sirens blaring.

They run red lights and speed around curves.

EXT. VICTOR'S HOUSE - DAY

A small rancher.

The grass is overgrown, and the yard hasn't been tended to.

Emilia reaches Victor's house with a TEAM OF OFFICERS IN SWAT GEAR. Xander is forced to stay in the car.

They knock, but no one answers. They burst in and fan out.

INT. EMILIA'S CAR - DAY

Xander stares at the house through the windshield.

Several police cars for a perimeter around the house.
OFFICERS guard the entrance and circle around the back.

INT. VICTOR'S HOUSE - DAY

Guns drawn, Emilia and other officers move through the house.

There are baby toys scattered about, and a general sense of first-child mess and chaos.

Emilia clocks a baby food jar near a high chair -- it's the same brand and type they found in Xander's apartment.

They open closets and cupboards as they move through the unit. They find a bunch of BDSM toys and clothing, including the hood Victor wore in room five at Slant.

BEDROOM

An officer finds an evidence bag. IT'S FILLED WITH CASH.

Emilia pushes forward.

BATHROOM

Emilia is the first to cross the threshold. She finds--

VICTOR, sitting naked in a half-filled bathtub, both wrists slashed vertically. A bloody razor blade on the ground.

Loose money is scattered around the floor.

EXT. VICTOR'S HOUSE - DAY

A buzz of activity as the house is processed.

Emilia stands at her car with Xander as the Medical Examiner walks a gurney out of the house with Victor's body on it.

EMILIA

You were right. Victor was heavy
into BDSM. Looks like he was in a
lot of debt.

(beat)

And his wife left with the kid a
while back.

XANDER

How'd he swap the cash?

EMILIA

Dummy bag. Pre-sealed and labeled,
and left in his van. He logged the
dummy into evidence and took the
real one home.

(beat)

No one would've known a thing until
it was logged back out for the
forfeiture action.

XANDER

And by then, he'd be long gone.
(nods toward the house)

Now he's dead.

EMILIA

But the money's all accounted for.
It doesn't make any sense.

(remorseful)

(MORE)

EMILIA (CONT'D)

I tried to get it back for you, but
the Chief has his eye on a shiny
new Gas Chromatograph.

Xander sneers, unsurprised.

XANDER

Guess it's better than a margarita
machine. Wait--
(a realization)
Maybe it was never about the money.

OFF Emilia's confused expression--

INT. POLICE STATION - EVIDENCE ROOM DESK - DAY

Emilia and Xander approach the young officer again.

EMILIA

Take us back.

YOUNG OFFICER

He can't--

EMILIA

(forceful)
Just do it, Carl.

EVIDENCE ROOM

Xander stands with Emilia. She has the young officer unwrap
the painting.

A replica of *The Kiss*.

Xander smirks.

INT. EMILIA'S CAR - DAY

Emilia drives, Xander in the passenger seat.

XANDER

The only way she'd have known about
the painting is through Dale.

EMILIA

How would he know what it is, let
alone what it would be worth?

XANDER

Because I told him.

(beat)

He used to sit for me. I'd--

(laughs at himself)

(MORE)

XANDER (CONT'D)
I'd take the painting out of the
safe as inspiration.

INT. XANDER'S APARTMENT - ART STUDIO - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Dale takes a snapshot of the pastel portrait Xander drew.

This time, we see the phone -- the painting is clearly in
frame and in focus, while the portrait is out of focus.

XANDER (V.O.)
He'd take pics of the portraits
before I destroyed them--

BACK TO SCENE

Emilia turns to Xander as she drives--

EMILIA
Destroyed them?

XANDER
Not important.
(beat)
What's important is that he took
pictures. With the painting in the
background. I didn't even notice.

EMILIA
And he passed the photos to Ivy.

XANDER
Yeah.

EMILIA
To an underground buyer, a newly
discovered, unsigned Balthus would
grab what -- \$10 mill?

He doesn't respond. Emilia exhales--

EMILIA (CONT'D)
So, she leaves the \$2 mill. Stages
Victor's suicide.
(beat)
And since the cash is all the Chief
cares about, she gets away with the
painting, knowing the fake will sit
in a crate, unopened, forever.

Silence for a beat.

XANDER
I need to find Dale. He has no idea
what she's capable of.

EMILIA
Is he smart?

XANDER
(laughs)
He can be.

EMILIA
Then he won't meet her in private.
That was Victor's mistake.

XANDER
Why would he meet her at all?

EMILIA
What other choice does he have?
Escape to Portugal?

XANDER
Stop the car.

EMILIA
What?

XANDER
Stop the car.

She pulls over and parks.

XANDER (CONT'D)
Thank you for everything. I
appreciate your help. I really do.
But I have to finish this alone.

EMILIA
That's really my choice, isn't it?

XANDER
The money's been recovered. The
case is closed. Why do you care?

EMILIA
She killed that girl. Probably
killed a dozen more.

Biting--

XANDER
What, were you molested as a kid?

Emilia is taken aback but doesn't flinch--

EMILIA

No. Were you?

(off his shock)

Why'd you run away from home?

Xander breaks eye contact. A long pause.

XANDER

We're incompatible, Emilia.

(beat)

I'll do whatever it takes to keep

Dale safe and get my painting back.

(beat)

You want Ivy arrested.

Another long pause.

EMILIA

No. You're wrong. Some people don't
deserve to be arrested.

He looks back at her. He can tell she means it.

EXT. KINK - DAY

Xander and Emilia stand before an unassuming storefront wedged between a barber shop and an accountant's office.

The sign simply reads "KINK".

XANDER

If Dale's gonna meet her, it'll be
somewhere he feels safe. A club.

(beat)

Simon'll know which one.

She holds her breath, way outside her comfort zone.

INT. KINK - DAY

The interior isn't your typical BDSM hole in the wall. No black curtains or mannequins with gimp masks. No shelves stacked with dildos.

Rather, everything is white, from the tile to the walls. Minimalist and very clean. This is the type of place that doesn't need to display its inventory.

No one is inside, not even at the counter. But as soon as Xander and Emilia enter, a buzzer sounds, and SIMON (20s, debonair) emerges from a back room to greet them--

SIMON
Xander -- and friend.

XANDER
Hey Cy. Been a minute.

Simon immediately starts sizing Emilia up, walking around her, and infringing on her personal space. She handles it like a pro, but tenses.

SIMON
Thought you swore you'd never dip
your nob in the bondage pool.

XANDER
I need to find Dale. He's in
trouble. The biggest kind.

Simon sniffs Emilia's hair.

EMILIA
We were hoping you'd know where
he'd be tonight.

SIMON
It's Thursday.
(beat)
Sanctum.

XANDER
Fuck.

SIMON
That's the idea.

Simon eases off of Emilia.

EMILIA
What's Sanctum?

SIMON
Can't describe the indescribable.

XANDER
Got bracelets?

SIMON
To help Dale? Of course.

XANDER
You dress him?

Simon grabs his phone out of his back pocket. Emilia steps closer to look.

PHONE: A minimalist glow-in-the-dark Chinese dragon mask. The green and blue flames of the mask transition to stripes of color, mixing in with leather straps and buckles.

SIMON
Sick, right?

Simon looks Emilia over, not shy about staring at her chest.

SIMON (CONT'D)
You go in there looking like that;
they'll pin you as a cop the second
you walk through the door.

EMILIA
How did you--

SIMON
Good thing you got a bangin' bod
hidden under all that fabric.
(sucks his teeth)
I can work with this.

Emilia clears her throat and instinctively pulls on her collar. Simon turns to Xander--

SIMON (CONT'D)
You know she's a Domme, though,
right? Which makes you--

Big smile. Xander inhales deep--

LATER

Alone, Xander sits and waits by the dressing area.

He's wearing a leather vest with no shit underneath it, leather pants and gloves -- and a leather choker with a silver ring in the front.

He's holding an expressionless silver mask in his hands.

SIMON (O.S.)
Ready, Z?

Xander sits up straighter, the anticipation almost too much.

XANDER
Let's see it.

Whispers of insecurity and reassurance from behind the curtain. Finally--

EMILIA (O.S.)

Fine!

The curtains part and Emilia walks out in a sleeveless, high-necked black leather bodysuit with the zipper undone to her navel. Over it is a sharp, cropped leather jacket.

Thin leather gloves go up to her mid-forearm, and the chunky block heels of her knee-high leather boots add three inches to her height.

The silver metal feather design on her full-face mask adds another two.

Xander stands, speechless.

SIMON

What'd I tell you? Bangin' bod.

EMILIA

I feel very insecure.

XANDER

You shouldn't.

Emilia almost looks away, but decides not to.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

Emilia parks in an alley across the street from what appears to be a collection of dilapidated offices.

She's in her leather outfit, but the zipper is pulled all the way to her neck. The mask sits in the back seat.

Xander is in the passenger seat, also dressed. He has his mask in his lap.

XANDER

These clubs are all about submission, but not how you think. It's submission to your most carnal self. Limitless. Unashamed. Free.

(beat)

When we go in there, you've got to be open to everything. You judge, even for a moment, they'll sense it. And your cover'll be blown.

With that, he leans in and unzips her chest piece back down to her navel. Her chest heaves underneath the leather.

He keeps his hand on her for a prolonged beat.

EMILIA
I won't lie -- wearing all this
feels pretty powerful.

XANDER
Like holding a gun.

A breathy pause.

EMILIA
More.

XANDER
Good. Then it's working.
(nods to the alley)
Look--

They watch as a FIGURE IN AN ORNATE GOTHIC OUTFIT turns the corner and heads down the alley across the street.

The figure stops at a door and holds an RFID bracelet. A moment later, the door opens, and the figure enters.

XANDER (CONT'D)
Ok. You ready?

She nods.

EMILIA
If he's there, I'll cover the exit
while you go get to him.

XANDER
And if she's there?

EMILIA
I'll cover the exit.

She takes a deep breath and grabs the mask from the back seat. She puts it on and starts to leave.

XANDER
Emilia--

She turns to him in the mask.

XANDER (CONT'D)
You don't look powerful.
(beat)
You ARE powerful.

He can't see her reaction under the mask. She exits and closes the door. Xander puts on his mask and exits, too.

We stay in the car and watch as they cross the street. One at a time, they lift their ID bracelets to a scanner and enter.

PRE-LAP: Bass-heavy techno.

INT. SANCTUM - NIGHT

The air is thick with sweat and desire. The music vibrates through the floor, the walls, the bodies. Guests melt into each other in an undulating rhythm.

A writhing tide of flesh and leather. Sex is on full display. Some join. Others watch. Some pleasure themselves.

They enter. Emilia's posture stiffens, intimidated to the point of near hyperventilation. Xander gets ahead of her insecurities and places himself behind her.

He presses into her, forcing her to arch her back and expose her neck. He runs his hands up her body, her chest heaving.

He whispers--

XANDER

Unashamed.

A dim red glow washes over her black leather and metal accents. She can feel the exposed skin of her chest and torso immediately bead with sweat.

She tenses. But the mask gives her a sleek anonymity and the confidence to push forward.

Moving further into the sea of flesh, she catches glimpses:

- A DOMME drags a whip over the bare chest of a SUB.
- A WOMAN IN SILK RESTRAINTS, suspended mid-air, twists as a MASKED PARTNER explores her spine with a feather.
- A COUPLE grind against a padded wall.

The touches come naturally -- a hand trailing down Emilia's arm. A brief press of fingers against her lower back. A body grazing her as it passes.

The same is happening to Xander. Slowly, they're pulled apart, becoming one with the undulating crowd.

She inhales. Her pulse quickens to match the music. She can't resist the seduction. She's enjoying it. Almost forgetting why she's there. Then, without even meaning to, she sees him--

DALE.

The red and gold of his dragon mask glows under the club lights. He moves with ease, slipping between bodies as though the space is his. Bare-chested, his sweat-slicked skin reflects the red lights.

He's heading toward a private room near the back of the club.

Emilia shifts, struggling against the masses to reach Xander, anonymous hands probing them all over. With a tilt of her head, she directs him towards Dale.

Xander starts to seductively free himself from the groping when a FIGURE brushes past him--

BLACK CLOAK, TRICORN HAT, AND DOUBLE-SIDED BLACK MASK -- an exact replica of the costume Solieri wore when he commissioned Mozart to write a requiem in *Amadeus*.

The figure glides through the crowd, headed towards Dale.

The figure disappears with Dale into the private room, closing the door behind them.

Xander moves closer and closer to the room; bodies continue to consume Emilia. Hands drape themselves over her midsection. Between her legs.

WITH XANDER

He reaches the closed door. The music blares and drowns out most of the noise coming from inside the room.

He presses his ear to the door, only picking up fragments--

DALE (THROUGH THE DOOR)
Fuck the money! You fucking swore
that all you wanted was the
painting.
(muffled response)
No one was supposed to die!

Then, whispers, too muffled to make out.

Xander slowly tries the doorknob -- locked.

WITH EMILIA

Trapped in a human Chinese finger cuff -- the more she resists, the tighter the crowd gets around her.

She stops resisting so she can keep an eye on Xander at the door of the private room.

WITH XANDER

He presses harder into the door. The sounds from within grow more frantic.

A struggle. Dale shouts--

DALE (THROUGH THE DOOR)
Stay away from me!

XANDER
Dale!
(more struggling)
Dale!

Xander aggressively tries the doorknob again. No use.

He puts his shoulder into the door, hard -- just like he did at Slant.

Again.

Again!

WITH EMILIA

She watches Xander slamming himself into the door.

She pushes body parts away and surges forward.

WITH XANDER

He hits the door again. The frame is starting to splinter.

The fighting from within stops. Gasping now. Dale's cries grow weaker. More desperate.

XANDER
Dale!

Xander kicks at the door. The crowd behind him starts trying to pull him back onto the dance floor.

He pushes them off.

The crowd turns on him, sensing his anger.

WITH EMILIA

Closer.

Closer.

But not fast enough to help. She's pulled to the floor. Bodies tighten above her. She struggles to stand.

WITH XANDER

Fighting against the mounting aggression of the crowd, Xander's mask is pulled off.

He shoves the culprit backward, hard enough to make space for one last slam into the door--

IT BURSTS OPEN, and Xander falls inside.

PRIVATE ROOM

As soon as he enters, Xander is confronted by the figure.

It immediately lunges at his face with a push dagger, SLICING HIM diagonally across the forehead and bridge of his nose.

Another slash to his opposite cheek.

His training kicks in. He deflects the third blow with his forearm just in time to absorb the hit.

He tries to counter, but another slash catches him across the back, and he falls forward. The figure storms past him. As it does, Xander stretches to grab at its cloak.

The cloak pulls off along with the mask.

Blood running down his face and clouding his vision, he can still make out the figure's face--

IVY!

She locks eyes with him for a beat and gives a sly smirk before running off.

WITH EMILIA

Almost free of the crowd, she spots Ivy's distinctive purple underlayer of hair glowing under the blacklight.

She's had enough of the handsy crowd now. She rips off her mask and shoves her way forward, knocking club-goers aside to try and chase after Ivy.

It's no use.

Ivy disappears into the anonymity of the club.

WITH XANDER

Bloody and beaten, Xander turns back to the room to find--

Dale, on the ground. His femoral artery cut.

He's bleeding out. Still alive, but barely.

Xander cradles him in his arms.

Dale's eyes are rolling over white. Xander slaps his cheeks, trying to keep him conscious.

XANDER

Stay with me, Dale. Come on.

Barely audible, Dale pushes out--

DALE

I love you.

Through tears and blood--

XANDER

Love you, too, man.

(beat)

Stay with me.

Dale's eyes roll over white. Emilia finally reaches them.

Blood pools beneath Xander and his friend.

A CLUBBER sees the scene and screams.

Chaos immediately erupts.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE SANCTUM - NIGHT

Stillness for a moment before--

The door flies open, and half-naked bodies wrapped in leather pour out, flooding into the street.

Screaming.

Running.

Xander and Emilia are among them, using the fleeing crowd as cover to get back to the car. Xander's arm is wrapped in a bedsheet from the private room.

He's lost a lot of blood. He's fading. The sounds and lights blur. Distort.

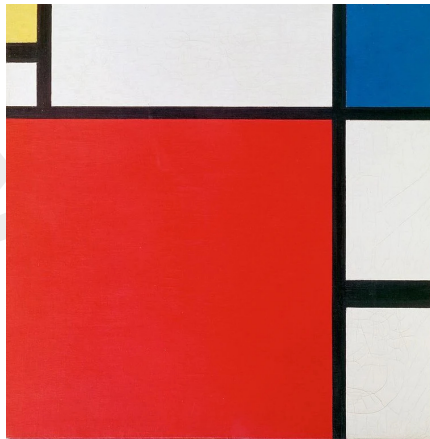
EMILIA
I've got you.

She helps him into the passenger seat and rushes around to the other side. As Xander loses consciousness, the neon glow from Sanctum flickers behind.

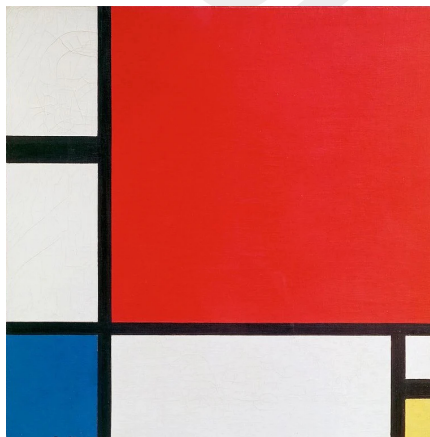
Emilia speeds off into the night.

FADE TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK



The Mondrian painting from Tammy's mansion rotates and fills the screen until it is right-side-up--



INT. EMILIA'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

Xander's eyes slowly open.

His face is a patchwork of blood-soaked gauze and bandages, purple bruises already spreading from the edges.

He's got a killer headache, and his entire body is sore. His arm and back are also cleaned and bandaged, and he's undressed, down to his boxers.

Confused, he sits up, wincing through the pain of his wounds. He takes in his surroundings.

On the dresser are folded sweatpants, clean boxers, t-shirt, and a hoodie.

From the other room, the faint BUZZ of a blender.

LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN

Xander opens the door to find Emilia at the stove, making a smoothie and drinking coffee.

She's wearing linen pajama pants and a loose-fitting t-shirt. She doesn't turn to look at him.

EMILIA

Assumed you wouldn't want to go to the hospital.

(beat)

Grabbed some stuff from your apartment after I patched you up.

He touches the bandages on his face.

XANDER

How bad?

Emilia looks over from the stove--

EMILIA

Didn't hit bone, thank God. But you'll have scars.

He tenderly lowers himself into a chair at the table. She places a cup of coffee in front of him.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

Cuban coffee. Sip. Don't gulp.

He sips. The shock of caffeine takes him by surprise.

Back at the counter, Emilia pulses the blender a couple more times to finish the smoothie.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

His femoral artery was cut.

(beat)

You couldn't save him.

Xander pushes the coffee away.

Emilia comes back with the blender and a cup. She pours in the concoction, then a straw.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

Eating would hurt too much. But
your body needs food to heal.

She places the blender down, then sits across from him.
Xander caves and takes a small sip. It's a effort.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

Homicide's still processing the
club, but getting a lead on Ivy is
slim. Places like that--
(beat)
No one talks.

Xander forces down another sip.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

They're analyzing the tablet,
though. Trying to pin down the
hotel. Maybe ID some of the marks.

XANDER

Wait -- you told them what you did?

EMILIA

I'm -- on leave.
(beat)
Pending an investigation.

Xander pushes the smoothie away. Fuming--

XANDER

I TOLD you to walk away!

Emilia stays calm.

XANDER (CONT'D)

This some sort of fetish fucking
fantasy for you? Too scared to be
what you wanna be, so you latch on
to me as some kind of fucked-up
fucking thrill?

He pushes his chair out and stands, angry.

XANDER (CONT'D)

How fucking stupid you must be to
think I could satisfy you.
(leans forward)
(MORE)

XANDER (CONT'D)

You ruined your life for nothing!
All THIS, what you think is so
alluring. So mysterious--
(gestures to himself)
It's two-inches deep, Detective.
Under that, nothing but shit.

He swipes the blender off the table in a rage, nearly collapsing from the pain and weakness.

Turns the rage inward--

XANDER (CONT'D)

I let the only person in the world
I loved -- die.
(fighting pain and tears)
If he needed help, he should have --
maybe he did, and I didn't listen.
I was too obsessed with--
(touches bandages)
And now? The only thing God gave me
that made me worth a shit is gone.

He stands there, frozen in self-loathing.

Emilia stands now. Walks off to the bedroom, leaving Xander alone. He stares at the blender on the floor, the remnants of the slushy spilling out of it like brains.

Moments later, Emilia returns with a sketchbook, a pencil, and a handheld mirror. She places the items on the table.

EMILIA

Grabbed these from your place, too.

XANDER

(confused)
You want me to sketch you?

EMILIA

No.

She nudges the mirror.

He stares at her for a long beat, then turns to the table.

XANDER

I can't.

EMILIA

You can.

HOLD ON Xander's bandaged face.

A SHORT WHILE LATER

Emilia delicately peels the bandages off Xander's face.

The damage is significant. She's stitched up his gashes, but his wounds are swollen. The skin purple.

She sits across from him as he grabs the mirror. Studies his face. First, with disgust. Then, with an artist's eye.

He puts down the mirror.

Picks up the sketchbook.

FADE TO BLACK.

LATER

Kitchen cleaned, Xander still sketches, alone in the room.

Finally, he puts the pencil down and turns the sketchbook over so the drawing faces down. He rubs his eyes.

Emilia enters from the bedroom in her buttoned-up shirt and pants. Hair pulled back tight once more.

They say nothing as she sits.

He looks away, trying to hide his face as much as he can.

He nearly stops her from turning the sketchbook over, but doesn't. She looks at the drawing. We can't see it.

She swallows. Shuts the cover of the book.

He looks to her, scared but curious.

EMILIA

The thing God gave you that makes
you special -- no one took it.

He sits up straighter. Lets her see him.

Scars and all.

BEDROOM

They delicately kiss in bed -- the stitches on Xander's face, arm, and back add tenderness to the passion.

He traces her body. Absorbs her heat. She leans into it. It's not clinical, like with Ivy, but soft -- a slow exploration of each other's bodies.

She pulls on him to bring him in closer. The bandage on his back starts to bleed through. He winces.

EMILIA

Sorry.

XANDER

It's fine.

She thinks about her next move. Then she turns him on his back. Rides him. Her hands pressed hard against his chest.

She catches her reflection in her full-length mirror.

She holds her own gaze.

FADE TO BLACK.

LATER

Xander on his back, Emilia in his arms. They stare at the ceiling. No regret or shame. Just a shared moment.

Then, a thought--

XANDER

You said some people don't deserve
to be arrested. What did that mean?

Emilia turns over, placing her back to him as she talks.

EMILIA

Back in Laredo, I caught my brother
taking bribes to stay out of a
dealer's territory.

(beat)

He said addiction was a sickness,
and junkies needed a safe space to
get high.

(beat)

I didn't care. Hector broke the
law, and that's all I saw. I
brought him in myself. Handcuffed.

Xander looks at her back.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

The Chief couldn't fire the
"honest" cop who refused to
compromise her morals, so--

(beat)

I was promoted to Vice Detective,
and he hasn't spoken to me since.

(MORE)

EMILIA (CONT'D)

(beat)

He didn't deserve to be arrested.

A long pause.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

Vice made me sick. Cold. Angry.

(beat)

I didn't want to be looked at.
Touched. Desired. All I wanted was
to hurt the people responsible for
the things I saw.

Her eyes begin to water.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

One day, I was leading a raid.
First through the door. The others
fanned out, but I continued to the
back room. Alone. I burst in.

(clears throat)

A man had five girls handcuffed to
a bedpost. He was going down the
line, on-by-one, slitting their
throats. Destroying the evidence.

Xander's gaze remains locked on her back.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

He'd killed four. Alice was next.

(beat)

He saw me. Dropped the knife. Put
his hands up. And smiled.

She turns to face him now.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

I shot him in the face.

(beat)

Alice covered for me. Said the man
had the knife to her throat.

(beat)

That piece of shit didn't deserve
to be arrested either.

She finds his eyes with hers.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

Truth is, if anyone deserved to be
arrested, it's me.

(beat)

After, I transferred here. Alice
followed. Sure, there was bad shit
here. There's bad shit everywhere.

(MORE)

EMILIA (CONT'D)
 But it would never be Laredo.
 (beat)
 It was manageable. I avoided
 intimacy by working long hours.
 (beat)
 But then I met you.

XANDER
 I can't walk away from this.

EMILIA
 Neither can I.

He moves hair away from her face.

CUT TO BLACK.

LATER

Back in his sweatpants and hoodie, Xander stands in the doorway watching Emilia get dressed.

XANDER
 I know how to find her.

INT. MANSION - GALLERY ROOM - DAY

Alice and Xander stare at the same Mondrian as the last time he was here, only now -- it's right side up.

The aggressive TAP TAP of approaching high heels announces Tammy, but this time, Maya (the lawyer) and the Female Driver are with her.

TAMMY
 Whatever this man told you,
 Detective, it's a--

The sight of Xander's injuries stops her in her tracks.

She clears her throat and stands taller--

TAMMY (CONT'D)
 (working herself up)
 I want this -- I want this man
 arrested for harassment and
 attempted extortion. I will not--

EMILIA
 Senator--

Tammy looks to Maya, who nods -- a sign to shut up.

EMILIA (CONT'D)
You need to listen.

Xander continues to stare at the painting.

XANDER
The only Mondrian sold at auction
last year went for over \$40 mill.

Maya takes a step forward as Tammy tries to figure out what
Xander's game is.

MAYA
Mr. Voss, if you're implying that
my client, in any way, was--

EMILIA
In possession of stolen goods?

MAYA
Careful, Detective.

XANDER
(looks around)
Everything in here was acquired
illegally. Statues. Paintings --
People. A menagerie of illicit
beauty that only you can enjoy.
(beat)
It's the danger that gets you off
the most, isn't it?

MAYA
That's enough.
(to Emilia)
I don't think you realize how close
the Senator is to the Commissioner.
She can bury you.

Maya takes out her phone and starts navigating it as a show
of force. Emilia stares at Tammy.

EMILIA
But you won't, will you Senator.

Tammy swallows hard. She puts her hand on Maya's to stop her
from texting whomever she was texting. To Xander--

TAMMY
What do you want?

XANDER
First, get your broker here.
Second, I'll have that drink.

LATER

Seated on a couch, Xander and Emilia talk to GREG (60s, slick). Maya sits next to him. Tammy and the Driver are gone.

Xander swirls whiskey around in a crystal glass, not quite ready to sip it.

GREG

An unsigned Balthus no one's ever seen before popped up in the Red Room a couple days ago. No catalog listing, no auction records.

(beat)

Word is, it was stolen from some European estate but was never reported. Owner's into some weird shit, so he didn't want anyone poking around.

Xander focuses more on the whiskey than the man.

EMILIA

How much?

GREG

\$20 mill.

(takes off his glasses)

Ghost piece like that? Buyers line up because they can name their own price once it's cleaned.

EMILIA

How do we find it?

GREG

That's easy. These boards are very exclusive. No need to hide behind aliases or codewords.

(cleans glasses)

Only reason I'm telling you is, I know whatever you're planning, it won't end with an arrest.

Xander finally takes a deep sip, relishing the liquor's texture and warmth. Still savoring the drink--

XANDER

She'll move it through Mexico.

GREG

That's correct. The exchange is being set up by a man named Paloma.

The name hits Emilia like a freight train.

GREG (CONT'D)

Out of Laredo. But--

(pushes glasses up again)

Don't ask me if I know when or where. Logistics like that are handled by the broker.

Maya stands.

MAYA

Which means our business is done.

(to Emilia)

Do I need to continue worrying about my client's collection?

EMILIA

No. We're--

(still unnerved)

We're done here.

Xander clocks her change in demeanor.

INT. EMILIA'S CAR - DAY

Xander watches Emilia as she drives.

XANDER

Why'd you get spooked back there?

Emilia pulls over and parks on the shoulder of the highway. She turns to Xander. Puts her hand on his thigh.

EMILIA

Rafa Paloma. Used to be Rafa Moreno. Changed it because Paloma means "dove".

(beat)

But he's no dove. He's a sadist.

Xander absorbs the description.

XANDER

You can still back out.

She takes her time debating the offer internally. After a moment, she shakes her head.

EMILIA

No.

(beat)

But I need to make a stop first.

INT. TEXAS PRISON - CHECK-IN DESK - DAY

Alone, Emilia places her remaining stack of art books, bound with rope, on the counter for the Check-In Officer.

She hands him a note: *"For Hector"*.

EMILIA

Tell him I'm sorry.

Before the Check-In Officer can respond, she turns and exits.

INT. EMILIA'S CAR - DAY

Seated in the passenger seat, Xander is finally able to dislodge that pesky red paint from under his thumbnail.

He looks up to see Emilie leaving the prison.

LONG DISSOLVE:

INT. MOTEL - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Both naked, Xander sits across from Emilia at a small table in a dingy motel room.

Xander is opening a bottle of whiskey. Two plastic cups rest on the table between them.

EMILIA (V.O.)

A few years ago, two CBP agents tried a sting operation on Paloma.

(beat)

He tied them to chairs and made them watch as he slit their children's throats.

(beat)

Then he filled a bathtub and leaned the chairs backward.

INT. EMILIA'S CAR - DUSK

They pass a JESUS SAVES billboard.

XANDER

He know who you are?

EMILIA

Don't think so. I never dealt with him directly. Just his -- capos.

XANDER

The man in the motel.

Silence.

INT. MOTEL - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Xander pours the whiskey into the cups.

EMILIA (V.O.)
Alice called her friends who still
work in Laredo.

Without toasting, they both slam back the shots.

INT. EMILIA'S CAR - DUSK

They continue down the highway.

EMILIA
They say he still lights a black
candle at a *Santa Muerte* shrine
every night at 10pm, rain or shine.
Under a bridge near the Rio Grande.
(scoffs)
It's his way of ensuring his
continual safe passage.

They pass a sign: "Welcome to Laredo".

EMILIA (CONT'D)
We'll have to make him feel like
he's coming to us.

INT. MOTEL - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Xander pours another shot of whiskey for both of them.

XANDER
My real name is Michael.
(beat)
My town was -- they said I was a
deviant after they caught me
downloading art off the internet.
Balthus. Shiele. Bacon. I drew
copies in a sketchbook.
(beat)
My mother set them on fire.

He touches his face.

XANDER (CONT'D)
When I was 17, I got the Pastor's
daughter pregnant.

He takes the shot. She doesn't.

XANDER (CONT'D)

I wanted to keep the baby. I wasn't scared or embarrassed.

(beat)

But they killed it.

(beat)

For all their so-called beliefs and rhetoric, when push came to shove--

(beat)

They killed it.

He winces from his bruises a bit before continuing.

XANDER (CONT'D)

Human beings are only good at two things. Hypocrisy. And destruction.

(beat)

Purity only exists on the canvas.

EMILIA

So, that's what Portugal is. A way to escape -- to chase the purity.

XANDER

Alone. Far away from all the hypocrisy and destruction.

Emilia takes her shot.

EMILIA

Hector got me into art. He was always talking about traveling the world to see his favorite pieces.

(beat)

I think that's the real reason he was on the take. So he could save enough to do it.

XANDER

Maybe in some alternate universe, he ended up in Portugal with me and we became friends.

She smirks. It's a nice thought.

EMILIA

When he got locked up, I started donating an art book every month to the prison library, hoping he'd read them. Forgive me.

(beat)

Most great artists are the bastard children of tragedy and pain.

(beat)

(MORE)

EMILIA (CONT'D)

I don't know -- maybe a little
tragedy and pain is what separates
the hobbyists from the masters.

(looks at him)

Now, you have both.

That makes him chuckle, which hurts.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

Xander is way better than Michael.

(beat)

I like Xander.

(soft, but unshakable)

I'm ready.

Xander's smile dips.

He stands and slowly walks over to her. She stares straight
ahead. He places a hand on her chin. Leans forward. Gently
lifts her head so she's looking at him.

He kisses her.

Then--

BAM!

He PUNCHES her in the face, sending her to the floor. She
cries out, her head facing the floor.

Xander straddles her and turns her on her back. Her hair is
in her face. Her right eye is already swelling.

He PUNCHES her again, sending her head to the side and
splitting her lip. Blood mixes with sweat.

He grabs her hair and turns her face to the center again.

PUNCH!

More blood splatters on his face and bare chest.

BATHROOM - A SHORT WHILE LATER

The HARD RUSH of water from the faucet.

Xander scrubs the blood off his hands.

He looks up at the mirror -- his mangled face is speckled
with blood.

His eyes well up.

He holds a hand over his mouth to mask his crying.

It only lasts a moment before his stoicism returns.

MAIN ROOM - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Dressed in an oversized white shirt and jeans, Emilia sits on the chair, head down, bleeding onto a bedsheet.

She's working to catch her breath.

Xander is getting dressed. Keeps his distance. He stretches his fingers out. The knuckles are bruised.

She spits more blood onto the bedsheet.

EXT. UNDER THE PUENTE NEGRO BRIDGE - NIGHT

Beneath the rusted steel of Puente Negro, a semi-broken terracotta Santa Muerte statue leans against a bridge pillar, its jagged, fractured face broken off long ago.

Around the statue are votive candles, rosaries, and scattered offerings (tequila bottles, cigarettes, wilted marigolds).

The bridge trembles from passing trains.

Bloody bedsheets shielding her from the elements, Emilia leans in front of the shrine and lights a candle--

EMILIA

*Santa Muerte, protectora de los
olvidados, te ofrezco esta luz como
guía en la oscuridad. Sé mi sombra
en la noche, mi refugio en la
tormenta, mi escudo contra el mal.*

(beat, sniffle)

*Con humildad te pido fuerza,
justicia y camino seguro—por los
vivos, por los muertos, por los que
aún no han cruzado.*

(beat)

Amén.

A train passes overhead.

PALOMA (O.S.)

Muñeca.

She turns to see RAFA PALOMA (50s, white linen suit with a thin mustache) silhouetted under a street light.

Paloma takes a step forward.

EMILIA

Please, Mr. No -- I don't want trouble. Please.

PALOMA

Let me take a look at you.

Emilia remains on the ground. She scoots away from Paloma as he advances. Terrified and bloody.

PALOMA (CONT'D)

It's ok. You're ok.

EMILIA

Don't kill me. I am nothing.

He takes another step closer. She wedges herself against a concrete wall. He bends and takes her face in his hand.

He inspects her bruises. Her busted lip--

PALOMA

These are fresh.

He reaches into his pocket. and takes out a handkerchief.

PALOMA (CONT'D)

Hold this tight against your lip.

With shaky, filthy hands, she takes it and holds it to her lip, wincing.

EMILIA

Thank you.

A sweet smile as Paloma stands and turns to the shrine.

He finds a semi-melted black candle among the offerings and lights it with a Zippo. He kneels and closes his eyes.

PALOMA

*Santa Muerte, Señora del Silencio,
toma esta luz como mi ofrenda.
Cuídame de los traidores, de los
envidiosos, de los que murmuran mi
nombre con veneno en la boca.*

(beat)

*Que mi sombra sea más grande que mi
enemigo, que mis pasos sean firmes
y mi mano rápida. Déjame ver el
peligro antes de que me vea a mí.*

(beat)

Si me toca morir, que sea de pie.

(MORE)

PALOMA (CONT'D)

*Y si me toca vivir, que sea con
respeto. Tú que todo lo ves, tú que
todo lo callas, no me abandones.*

(watches flame, exhales)

*Que se haga tu voluntad... pero que
no me toque a mí.*

He opens his eyes and turns to Emilia. She's still there,
pressing the cloth to her lip, eyes wide.

PALOMA (CONT'D)

Why are you here? Running from a
Gringo or praying for safe passage?

EMILIA

Both.

PALOMA

Hmmmm.

EMILIA

I paid a man to take me across.
Back to my mother in Reynosa.

PALOMA

(impressed)

Reynosa?

(laughs)

Your mother must be some tough
bitch to live there.

EMILIA

Yes, sir.

He approaches her again.

PALOMA

And you think returning to Reynosa
is better than staying here?

EMILIA

Yes, sir.

PALOMA

Who is to take you across?

EMILIA

I don't know his name. A friend of
mine at the shelter set it up.

PALOMA

Your friend -- what's her name?

She shakes her head, not wanting to say. Paloma nods.

PALOMA (CONT'D)
I understand. I won't ask again.
(beat)
How much you pay this man?

EMILIA
\$1,500. It was all I had.

Paloma sighs and sits next to her.

PALOMA
I cannot let you do what you have
planned to do. Men who take money
from women at shelters have other
plans for them.
(beat)
Men like that are worse than all
the Gringos in the world. Men like
that -- I kill for fun.

As he talks, we MOVE IN on Emilia's messed hair -- to a thin
braid behind her ear -- to a microphone.

INT. MOTEL - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Bloody and raw, Emilia sits, facing away from Xander as he
braids a thin microphone into her hair.

BACK TO SCENE

Paloma brushes loose strands of hair away from Emilia's eyes.

PALOMA
If Reynosa is where you want to go,
I can get you there.

EMILIA
I have no more money.

AROUND THE SIDE OF THE BRIDGE

Xander stays hidden behind garbage cans and debris, listening
through an earpiece--

PALOMA (V.O.)
Please, don't insult me.

EMILIA (V.O.)
How can I trust you?

WITH EMILIA

Paloma reaches under his jacket and pulls out an ivory-handled pistol.

Emilia tries to push herself even harder against the wall behind her.

PALOMA
What is your name?

EMILIA
Emilia.

She holds her breath until he flips the pistol upside down and holds it out to her. Fatherly--

PALOMA
Emilita.
(re: the gun)
Take it. It's loaded, so don't
point it at me, ok?

She isn't sure. But Paloma continues to hold it out for her, maintaining his smile the whole time.

She takes it.

PALOMA (CONT'D)
There. See? If I try something, you
can shoot me in the balls. Deal?

The vulgarity makes her laugh.

PALOMA (CONT'D)
I have a beautiful place near the
border and an understanding with
the local border agents.
(beat)
Perfect for crossing.

EMILIA
This is a trick.

PALOMA
What would it take to convince you?

EMILIA
You have a phone?
(he nods)
Then you would have pictures.

PALOMA

Smart. I think you must get that
from your mother.

This time, he reaches into his pocket and takes out his
cellphone. He navigates to a listing on a rental app.

PALOMA (CONT'D)

You see? It's a rental property.
Nice. Clean. Open floor plan.
Beautiful view of the sunrise over
the desert. Five-star reviews.
(chuckles)
People love that it's stocked with
Cafe Bustelo.
(beat)
It's also my safe house.

EMILIA

This place? No.

PALOMA

Yes. Better than a roach-infested
shack, right?

WITH XANDER

Xander presses the earpiece into his ear to block out the
ambient noise around him.

WITH EMILIA

Emilia looks at the listing. There's no address on it.

EMILIA

You're lying. This is -- what, A-I.
A real place has a real address.

PALOMA

It's a rental app, *mija*. No address
till you book.

Feigning embarrassment--

EMILIA

I've -- never used one.

Paloma smirks and pushes buttons on the phone until his
profile picture pops up.

PALOMA

See -- that's me. Rafa Paloma.
(beat)
A super host.

EMILIA
Super host?

PALOMA
It means the people love me. I'm
telling you, it's the *Bustelo*. I
take you there in a couple days.

WITH XANDER

Xander flexes his right hand. Massages his bruised knuckles.

EMILIA (V.O.)
A couple days?

PALOMA (V.O.)
It's currently -- occupied.

WITH EMILIA

EMILIA
What do I do until then?

PALOMA
Come home with me. To keep you safe
from junkie Gringos and Godless
coyotes. But--
(leans away to give room)
I understand why you have no trust
for me. Like I said, you're smart.
(beat)
Again, how do I convince you?

Emilia takes her time to think -- really milking it. She
keeps her finger on the pistol's trigger and cocks it.

She aims it at Paloma.

His smile doesn't even dip.

EMILIA
I will give you five seconds to
describe who is at your rental. If
you can't, I'll know you are lying.
And I will shoot you in the balls.

Paloma laughs.

PALOMA
Ok. Ok. A white woman. Your age.
Maybe a little younger. Thin. Has --
purple under her blonde hair.

WITH XANDER

Xander's eyes light up.

EMILIA (V.O.)
Her name. Five. Four. Three.

PALOMA (V.O.)
Ivy.

EMILIA (V.O.)
Ivy. Sure.

PALOMA (V.O.)
If I were to make up a white girl
name, I'd have said Jenny or
Tiffany or something.
(laughs)
But Ivy? I'm not so creative.

Xander presses the earpiece into his ear.

XANDER
Come on. Gimme an address.

WITH EMILIA

Emilia takes her finger off the trigger.

EMILIA
And this "Ivy" -- she's in trouble,
like me?

PALOMA
Like you? No. But she pays well.
(beat)
Well enough to let me help women
like you from time to time.
(puts his hand out)
So? I give you enough detail? Give
it to you fast enough?

Emilia slowly returns the pistol.

PALOMA (CONT'D)
You'll come with me. We'll get you
cleaned up. So your mama can
recognize you. Is that ok?
(holds pistol out again)
Would you like to hold on to this?
(she nods)
Smart girl.

He hands her back the gun.

INT. PALOMA'S PENTHOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Minimalist but very tasteful and expensive.

Hung prominently on the wall is Yve's Klein's *IKB 92*.

LED lights line the floor and are triggered when the door opens. Paloma lets Emilia enter first.

She's floored by her surroundings and the painting.

PALOMA

You like it? \$10 million.

(off her nod)

The artist spent his whole life trying to create the purest shade of blue on earth. A perfect mixture of art and science. When he finally mastered it, he got a patent.

EXT. PALOMA'S PENTHOUSE COMPLEX - NIGHT

Xander hides in the shadows beside the apartment, listening in. The reception cuts in and out due to the distance.

PALOMA (V.O.)

Named it after himself --

International Klein Blue. Now, his name will live forever as part of something so beautiful, it cannot be described in words.

(beat)

Not a bad legacy, no?

EMILIA (V.O.)

No.

INT. PALOMA'S PENTHOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Paloma leads her towards the bedroom.

PALOMA

Come.

(off her hesitation)

There is only one bathroom. I will stay out here. You can lock the door. There are women's clothes in the closet. Many sizes.

(smiles)

Pick whatever you like.

EMILIA

Women? You have a wife?

PALOMA

No, no. Nothing like that. Just clothes. Collected over the years and kept for situations like this.

(warm laugh)

Keep the gun with you. I'll make us drinks. If you're from Reynosa, I assume Tequila is ok?

She nods, and he stands with his hand out for her to enter the bedroom alone. She does, closing the door and locking it.

Once alone, Paloma heads to the bar and pours two drinks of top-shelf Tequila.

He looks back at the closed door and sucks his teeth.

Returning to the glasses, he takes a baggie of powder out of an ornate box and empties it into one of the glasses, stirring it until it dissolves.

BATHROOM/BEDROOM

Emilia washes up, the dirt and grime speckling the white porcelain countertop. She looks herself over.

Black eye. Busted and puffy lip. Bruised cheekbone.

Then she checks the microphone in her hair -- still there.

KNOCK KNOCK.

She swings towards the bedroom door.

PALOMA (O.S.)

I've got our drinks. A quick toast to your safety before you shower?

She's unsure about opening the door.

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

Emilia?

She hardens. Staring at herself in the mirror--

EMILIA

You are very kind, Mr. Paloma

She psyches herself up and heads for the bedroom door, tucking the pistol behind her back.

When she opens the door, Paloma greets her with a smile and two drinks.

PALOMA
Rafa, please.
(hands her the glass)
To a safe return.

They toast and sip their drinks. Paloma's eyes betray nothing. He enters the bedroom and puts his glass down on a small table.

He gets close to her. She lets him.

PALOMA (CONT'D)
I think you are very pretty under
all those bruises.

He pushes her hair away from her face, keeping his hand behind her neck.

She tenses.

EXT. PALOMA'S PENTHOUSE COMPLEX - NIGHT

Xander struggles to listen through the static--

PALOMA (V.O.)
Women these days like to keep their
hair short. Or died purple.
(chuckles)
I like yours. Long. Natural. It
reminds me of the women I grew up
with in Juárez.

INT. PALOMA'S PENTHOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Paloma runs his hand through her hair. It gets caught on her braid. His expression changes, as does hers.

PALOMA
What is--

He feels the braid and the wired microphone within it.

PALOMA (CONT'D)
Traidora!

He pushes her away with enough force to launch her backward over the bed.

The drugs from the drink begin to cloud her vision.

Paloma is screaming and charging toward her.

EXT. PALOMA'S PENTHOUSE COMPLEX - NIGHT

Xander panics.

He tries the large glass doors. Locked.

He finds a large rock and heaves it at the doors, shattering them and setting off an alarm.

He runs inside.

INT. PALOMA'S PENTHOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alarm blaring, Emilia tosses a lamp at Paloma.

He dodges it.

He gets to her and throws her across the room. Her head hits the wall, leaving a dent in the drywall.

Cursing and gesticulating, Paloma is on her feet -- he lifts her up by her throat.

Her feet hover over the floor.

INT. STAIRS TO PALOMA'S PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

Xander races up the stairs towards the penthouse.

INT. PALOMA'S PENTHOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

The blood is draining from Emilia's face. Her eyes are beginning to roll over white.

Paloma smiles, enjoying the fight.

BANG!

Paloma drops her and backs up, looking down in horror.

Emilia has shot him in the groin.

The blood quickly spreads over his white linen pants.

Emilia coughs as she stands, holding the ivory-handled revolver. He looks at her in total shock.

Hazy from the drugs but still functioning, Emilia straddles him, finds his phone in his pocket, and holds it up to his face to unlock it.

She opens the rental app and clicks on his smiling profile -- there, she finds it. THE SAFE HOUSE ADDRESS.

She stands. Finds his eyes with hers. Raises the pistol--

BANG!

She finishes him off with one shot to the head.

KNOCK KNOCK!

XANDER (O.S.)
(winded, terrified)
Emilia! Open up! Emilia.

LIVING ROOM

She stumbles to the door and opens it, nearly collapsing in Xander's arms.

XANDER
I'm so sorry.

EMILIA
The -- phone.

She passes out in his arms. With Emilia still in his arms, he picks up Paloma's phone and pistol.

INT. MOTEL - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Xander enters, Emilia unconscious in his arms.

He lays her on the bed.

Heads to the bathroom.

Re-enters with a wet towel and gently wipes the dirt and blood off her face.

Takes Paloma's phone out of his pocket and looks at it--

HOLD ON the picture of the safe house.

EXT. SAFE HOUSE - NIGHT

The same angle as the photograph, except there are TWO ARMED GUARDS posted at either end of the property.

Ivy can be seen through the glass windows at the stove in the kitchen, preparing fish and pouring wine.

Xander enters the foreground, hidden behind dry brush and mesquite trees. He watches.

Ivy pours oil into a cast-iron skillet.

Headlights illuminate the only road that leads to the house. Xander turns to find a BLACK SUV pull up, drawing the two guards' attention.

Xander grips Paloma's pistol in his hand.

The SUV DRIVER stays in the car, engine idling.

A THIN MAN (50s, floral shirt) exits the passenger seat with a medium-sized canvas bag and a walkie-talkie. A SHORT MAN (60s, balding) gets out of the back with a leather satchel.

Xander watches as the thin man gives instructions to the guards, who look around and nod.

Xander makes himself smaller behind branches and bushes.

He peeks through the branches as the two men approach the house. The guards stay close to the car, facing the road and scanning the area.

In the kitchen, Ivy sips her wine and seasons the fish.

The men enter. We can't hear them, but their body language screams "all business".

Ivy is relaxed and welcomes them, offering them a drink.

They refuse.

The short man disappears down a hallway while the thin man puts the bag on the island where Ivy is preparing the fish.

He unzips the bag. To Ivy's delight, he lifts a few stacks of cash out as he talks to her.

She toasts him, then checks the oil in the pan with a few drops of water -- it's hot.

Xander leans in, accidentally snapping a branch, which gets the attention of Guard 01.

Guard 01 swings his rifle towards the horizon and turns on a light. Panning the rifle around, he gets close to Xander's position when the eyes of a COYOTE are caught in the light.

The animal is only a few yards from Xander.

Guard 01 says something into his walkie-talkie. In response, the thin man picks up his walkie-talkie and gives a command.

Guard 01 aims his rifle at the coyote, tilts it up, and--

BAM!

The gun's blast echoes through the night, scaring the coyote off. Satisfied, the man returns to his post.

Back in the house, Ivy schmoozes with the thin man while pouring another glass of wine.

Ivy places the fish in the pan. It sizzles.

It doesn't take long for the short man to return and whisper to the thin man.

Xander's breath quickens as he watches.

Immediately, the thin man stands. His expression sours to frustration and anger.

Ivy is suddenly in a panic, talking fast and trying to explain herself.

The thin man speaks into the walkie-talkie.

Guard 01 gets the message and motions to Guard 02 to cover the area while he enters the house.

Ivy desperately tries to calm the thin man down.

Guard 01 enters, rifle gripped tightly in his hand. He advances on Ivy. As soon as he gets close enough--

Ivy TOSSES THE PAN OF FISH AND HOT OIL at him, scalding him! He SCREAMS and clutches at his skin.

The SCREAM gets Guard 02's attention.

He moves toward the house.

Ivy grabs a knife from a chef's knife block and keeps the men at a distance with it as she continues to talk.

The moment she gets free of them, Guard 02 is upon her. She swings the knife at him, slashing his arm.

She's quickly subdued and is forced to drop the weapon.

Guard 02 holds her tight in a bear hug from behind. She thrashes, but the man's grip is strong.

The thin man places the pan back on the stove and adds more oil. Guard 01 is in tremendous pain as the thin man directs Guard 02 to bring Ivy over.

Meanwhile, the short exits to smoke a cigarette, unfazed by what is happening in the house.

Xander considers the pistol in his hand as he watches Guard 02 drag Ivy back to the stove.

Desperate, she slams her head back against Guard 02's nose, shattering it. But the man is disciplined and doesn't let go.

Outside, the short man smokes and stares into the distance.

At the stove, the thin man tests the oil with water -- hot.

Guard 02 positions Ivy over the pan. It's a struggle, but he overpowers her and PRESSES HER FACE INTO THE HOT OIL.

Her SCREAM is loud enough for Xander to hear.

Her face is held against the pan for a good five seconds before Guard 02 releases her, and she falls to the ground.

Guard 02 checks his nose. Busted and bloody.

He swings his rifle around, but the thin man stops him.

Guard 02 protests, but the thin man is the boss. Guard 02 nods, lowering the weapon.

The thin man grabs the canvas bag, and the men exit the house to join the short man. Within moments, they're all in the car and driving away from the house.

Xander watches the car disappear down the road.

He stares at the house for a long beat before leaving the trees. He passes the short man's smoldering cigarette butt on his way inside.

INT. SAFE HOUSE - NIGHT

Pistol in hand, Xander enters through the glass doors behind the living room.

He slowly makes his way toward the kitchen.

He passes the cast-iron skillet and the fish, spread out over the floor along with oil and butter, now cooled.

Xander sneers at the smell of seared flesh in the air.

He kicks the knife away as he passes the island.

Reaches Ivy.

Curled up on the floor.

Shallow breaths between immense bouts of pain.

She's still alive.

XANDER

Now we're a matching set.

She looks up, revealing the damage -- the entire left side of her face has suffered third-degree burns. Some of her flesh is still stuck to the burner on the stove.

Even through the pain, she looks for an exit. But there's nothing within reach.

And Xander has Paloma's gun pointed at her.

She smirks.

IVY

It's fake.

XANDER

I know.

(beat)

I painted it.

Ivy's smirk fades to shock.

XANDER (CONT'D)

And Dale knew, too.

Shock turns to rage.

XANDER (CONT'D)

He spent a year watching me paint it as I droned on and on about its influence -- Balthus.

(beat)

My guess is, he told you it was real. Showed you the photos.

(beat)

Let you "assess" its worth.

While talking, he moves to the counter and clocks a bucket of Café Bustelo coffee pods.

He finds a second empty glass of wine. He pours two glasses.

In massive pain, Ivy gets to her knees. Then her feet.

Xander directs her to sit at the kitchen table with his gun.

She does.

He follows with the glasses in one hand, gun in the other.

Sits across from her. Slides her the glass.

XANDER (CONT'D)

Bet you'd be up for last score. The big one. Looks like he bet right.

(beat)

Thought you'd sell it. Give him a hefty finder's fee.

(beat)

And be free of you.

Ivy downs the wine even though it causes considerable pain.

IVY

I gave them your name. Your address. Told them you were behind the scam. This man, Paloma, he'll--

XANDER

Paloma's dead.

Xander sips his wine, gun still trained on Ivy.

XANDER (CONT'D)

The goons who turned your face inside out -- if they were killers, you'd be dead, too.

(beat)

They won't risk coming after me.

Ivy laughs. Holds up the wine glass.

IVY

Mind if I--

XANDER

Go ahead.

She stands. Takes a wide path around Xander, who follows her with the gun. She takes her time. Keeps her hands up.

Takes the bottle back to her side of the table.

Sits. Pours a glass.

IVY

If you knew it was a fake, why risk coming here?

XANDER

It's mine.

(beat)

And you killed that girl. Probably others. Victor, the custodian.

(MORE)

XANDER (CONT'D)

(beat)

My best friend.

She chuckles and nods.

XANDER (CONT'D)

Why?

IVY

I told you when we met. Time only moves in one direction, Mr. Voss.

(beat)

And unlike you, I don't have any rules holding me back.

Subtly places her hands under the table.

XANDER

You should have left Dale alone.

IVY

If I had to do it all over again--

(beat)

I would.

WHAM!

Ivy flips the table up, sending the wine everywhere and forcing Xander to tilt up the gun, which he fires--

BANG!

The bullet hits the ceiling.

The wine bottle and glass shatter on the tile floor.

In an instant, Ivy is screaming and grabbing the jagged bottle, rushing for Xander and knocking him to the floor, and sending the pistol across the room.

She straddles him. Pins him down.

Takes the broken bottle by the neck and slowly slices it across his face, further destroying who he used to be.

He SCREAMS!

Ivy gets inches away from his bloody face--

IVY (CONT'D)

The world doesn't care about you, people like us, Xander.

(beat)

(MORE)

IVY (CONT'D)
Those girls meant nothing! Victor
meant nothing! DALE MEANT NOTHING!

Within Xander's reach is his broken wine glass. He paws for it as Ivy slices his face again.

IVY (CONT'D)
YOU -- MEAN -- NOTHING!

Xander SCREAMS again as she gets even closer to his face.

The glass is an inch too far away.

So he BITES!

Xander lunges his head forward and bites into her mangled cheek. He holds onto her as she SCREAMS and pulls back.

Once he releases, she falls off him, grabbing her face.

It's just enough time for Xander to spit out the flesh and grab the glass.

He JABS THE GLASS STRAIGHT INTO IVY'S THROAT!

The blood arcs out of her neck as she grabs for it.

She thrashes around, sending blood all over the white tile and cabinets.

Xander scrambles for the pistol.

Finds it.

Stands.

Ivy collapses in the kitchen, her back against the cabinets.

Eyes wide, she stares at Xander. She's bleeding out.

Xander doesn't care.

He lifts the gun.

Waits long enough for Ivy to know what is going to happen next. Then--

BANG!

He shoots her in the head.

Flaccid, she drops to the floor.

Dead.

He stares at her lifeless body for a long beat before grabbing the knife off the floor and turning to the hallway.

Face covered in blood, he heads for it.

BEDROOM

Knife in hand, Xander enters a nicely decorated guest room to find a painting covered by a bedsheet.

He pulls back the sheet to reveal his painting.

He stands back to admire it.

INT. EMILIA'S CAR - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Parked on the side of the road--

XANDER

We're incompatible, Emilia.

(beat)

I'll do whatever it takes to keep
Dale safe and get my painting back.

(beat)

You want Ivy arrested.

Another long pause.

EMILIA

No. You're wrong. Some people don't
deserve to be arrested.

He looks back at her. He can tell she means it.

A slight hesitation before--

XANDER

I painted it. The Balthus.

(beat)

That's why it's not signed.

Her jaw drops, shocked.

XANDER (CONT'D)

The second Ivy tries to get it
authenticated, they'll know the
truth, and--

(beat)

They'll probably kill her.

Emilia processes the info, looking back through the windshield at the endless suburban world before her.

EMILIA
So let them.

XANDER
I want the painting.

EMILIA
Why?

XANDER
It's the best thing I've ever done.
It -- reminds me that I'm not just
chasing the purity.
(beat)
I'm capable of creating it.

EMILIA
Xander--

XANDER
And, betrayal or no betrayal, Dale
is still the closest thing I have
to family. He needs me.

She averts her eyes.

EMILIA
Why are you telling me this now?

XANDER
To give you a choice.

She looks at him.

EMILIA
I've made my choice.

BACK TO SCENE

Xander looks down from the painting to the knife in his hand.

Cuts the painting out of the frame.

Rolls it up.

Walks out, leaving Ivy's corpse spreading blood all over the
white tile.

LONG DISSOLVE:

INT. EMILIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The apartment is filled with Xander's art.

The "Balthus" is reframed, but leaning against a wall, nearly covered by other paintings and sketches:

Self-portraits, portraits of Emilia and Dale, landscapes of Portugal and Los Angeles, and abstract works.

Xander works on a piece we can't see.

His wounds have healed, but the scars are permanent.

Emilia enters from the bedroom, dressed for work. She's wearing her shoulder holster and her hair is pulled back, just as we saw her in the beginning.

She comes up behind Xander and looks at what he's painting.

Without commentary, she looks away, tucking in her shirt.

EMILIA

I'm going to dinner with Alice
after my shift ends.

(beat)

I'll bring you back something.

Xander nods, only half there.

She stares at the back of his head for a moment, unsatisfied, before leaving and locking the door.

Once she's gone, we reveal the painting Xander is working on--

PAINTING: Ivy, sitting on a chair in his art studio, mimicking the pose in *Thérèse Dreaming*.

Faintly heard over the soundtrack is Xander's childhood modem kicking to life.

CUT TO BLACK.