

Lost Art

By

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INT. BEDROOM. FLASH FORWARD.

A candlelit bedroom. Impenetrable drapes. Walls dominated by dusty bookshelves.

VLADIMIR PETROV glares with haunted eyes. Emaciated. Feral. Fiercely intelligent. His Russian-accented speech is razor sharp.

VLADIMIR

This baton is for Alison's fears.

He hands an off-screen character (Sebastian) a nightstick, the type police use in close-quarter confrontations.

Behind Vladimir stands ALISON TOWNSEND. In a skirt and jacket, her hair pulled back. Gorgeous in an understated manner. She studies an easel, her profile to the camera. Either she is unaware of Vladimir or is waiting for him to make the first move.

Light catches the blood from Vladimir's cracked nose and the cuts around his forehead and cheeks.

VLADIMIR

(directed off-screen)

Tell me you know how to use a
firearm.

He hands the off-screen character (Sebastian) a vintage pistol. Elegant wooden handle. Silver barrel.

VLADIMIR

(pointing an index finger at
his temple)

When the time comes, use the gun on
me.

The scene opens up to reveal SEBASTIAN UNGER, a mousy, middle-aged drunk. Bald up top, streaks of hair around his ears. Overdressed in a tacky suit. A look of confusion plastered to his mug.

SEBASTIAN

(voiceover, with his New York
Accent)

Before we go any further with this
high point of my day, I should back
up and explain how things grew so
bleak.

INT. OFFICE. PANDORA TOURS. DAY.

A functional office. Apathetic sheetrock walls. A coffeemaker percolates. A "Tips Appreciated" placard stands on a large desk.

SEBASTIAN appears sharper than he had in the flash forward. He surreptitiously spikes his coffee under the desk, which he sits behind, using it as a line of defense.

SEBASTIAN

(voiceover)

You know how the media burps up those doomsday scenarios? Well, something mysterious actually happened, only it wasn't an apocalypse. A shopping mall in South Carolina---of all places---became this weird fantasy-fulfillment center known as Pandora's Box. I work as a tour guide for the place, helping visitors live out their dreams, and doing my level best to make sure their tour doesn't turn into a living hell.

VLADIMIR sits opposite Sebastian, wearing the same clothes as later, only his face is intact---even majestic. Imperious eyes, defiantly unruly hair, a turtleneck swimming on his angular physique. Tight jeans extend over his boots.

VLADIMIR

(to Sebastian)

My purpose in visiting Pandora is complicated. I spent a summer with Alison, then left rather abruptly. Time passed. I returned. A trip to Pandora would allow us to pick up where we left off.

SEBASTIAN

If you're thinking romance, have you considered the Eiffel Tower?

VLADIMIR

A special conversation demands an extraordinary arena.

SEBASTIAN

It's extraordinary, alright.
Extraordinarily volatile.

(CONTINUED)

VLADIMIR

I have dealt with magic before.

SEBASTIAN

Sure you have.

VLADIMIR

You don't believe me?

SEBASTIAN

If you know what you're doing, why not go to Pandora by yourself?

VLADIMIR

Since I am bringing Alison, I require your assistance, in case something unpleasant were to occur.

SEBASTIAN

Listen, I can see you have this whole mystery thing going on. That may work back in Los Angeles, but with me, for today, for your own sake, tell me everything, and make sure you tell me the truth.

VLADIMIR

If I tell you my truth, will you attempt to believe it?

EXT. PANDORA TOURS. DAY

The morning sky is pock-marked with clouds. A trace of the moon lingers, a sliver of a ghoulish grin.

ALISON paces beneath the vines of a weeping willow, clutching a handbag to her chest. She is considerably less glamorous than she later appeared. Bangs crowd her face. Horned-rimmed glasses obscure her beauty.

SEBASTIAN approaches her, clipboard in hand.

SEBASTIAN

Hi. I'm Sebastian. Your boyfriend wants to take you to a pretty dangerous place. In order for me to protect you, I'll need you to sign this form.

ALISON

He's not my boyfriend.

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN

Excuse me?

ALISON

Vladimir never liked the word
boyfriend---even before he dumped
me.

SEBASTIAN

I'll let you two hash that out. All
I need is your signature.

He hands her the clipboard and a pen.

ALISON

(studying clipboard)
Do you even understand what
Vladimir is trying to do?

SEBASTIAN

I think I do. He broke up with you,
and now he wants to get back
together. This trip is his idea of
a romantic getaway.

ALISON

You make it sound so simple.

SEBASTIAN

In my experience, most things are.
Simple, that is.

ALISON

You've never met Vladimir Petrov.
Nothing about the man is simple.

She signs the paper and shoves the clipboard into
Sebastian's chest and storms off.

Sebastian studies the clipboard.

SEBASTIAN

(to himself)
Actually, I think I just met him in
my office, but okay.

EXT. PANDORA TOURS. PARKING LOT. DAY.

Vladimir, Alison and Sebastian stand by a converted hearse.
The dilapidated Cadillac Fleetwood serves as a roving
advertisement for Pandora Tours, its logo painted on a
placard, attached to the roof with bungee cords and duct
tape.

(CONTINUED)

VLADIMIR

Sebastian, I love this car. This is a bloody great car. The moment I spied it, I contracted a terminal case of car envy.

SEBASTIAN

(crushing a cigarette)

What can I tell you? Some guys have all the luck.

INT. CAR.

Vladimir and Alison huddle in the back seat. In sunglasses, they look like they are on a way to a funeral.

As the car moves, Alison grasps Vladimir's hand.

ALISON

Tell me. Start it off. Tell me.

VLADIMIR

Chance.

ALISON

Love.

VLADIMIR

Loss.

ALISON

Pain.

VLADIMIR

Pain?

(searches for a word)

That which supplies energy. Fuel.

ALISON

Car.

VLADIMIR

Car?

Vladimir struggles with their game of word association.

VLADIMIR

Okay. Car. Plane?

ALISON

Distance.

(CONTINUED)

Time. VLADIMIR

Fear. ALISON

Night. VLADIMIR

Quiet. ALISON

Echo. VLADIMIR

Voice. ALISON

Lips. VLADIMIR

Kiss. ALISON

They tilt their heads toward each other.

ALISON
(a second time, her word an
urgent warning)
Kiss.

Vladimir and Alison do not kiss.

Sebastian looks out the window as he drives. The car comes to a pause at a red light, just beside...

EXT. SALOON.

Lamar Martin's Bar and Grille is closed for business, but its front door hangs open. A bear of a man, LAMAR, holds a mug as he looms in the threshold. Stoic eyes protect his thoughts as he scrutinizes Sebastian's hearse.

INT. HEARSE.

Sebastian reads the open door of the saloon--and Lamar's presence--as a sign.

SEBASTIAN
We're making a pit stop.

INT. SALOON.

Sebastian parades through the open door, Vladimir and Alison reluctantly following.

SEBASTIAN
Good morning, Lamar.

Upturned chairs stand sentinel upon tables. The room is dominated by a scarred oak bar, at the end of which is perched Lamar, dressed in an immaculate shirt and vest, his sleeves rolled to the elbows.

LAMAR
What's good about it?

SEBASTIAN
(to Vladimir and Alison)
I apologize in advance for Lamar.
He takes pleasure in embarrassing me.

VLADIMIR
Why are we here?

SEBASTIAN
One second.
(to Lamar)
We're kind of in a hurry. I gotta give these pair the rundown. Could you set us up with some coffee?

LAMAR
Did you have to bring them here? I don't want no hocus-pocus in my bar.

SEBASTIAN
Let's make a deal. Gimme ten minutes and I'm out of your hair.

LAMAR
You call that a deal?

SEBASTIAN
Oh, and add a shot to my coffee. Please.

LAMAR
Liqueur, tequila or rum?

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN
Surprise me.

Lamar, resigned to the situation, fills the order.

ALISON
He doesn't want us here. We should
go.

SEBASTIAN
Wait up. Lamar, do you want us
here?

LAMAR
No.

SEBASTIAN
Then why haven't you kicked us out?

Lamar places mugs of coffee before them, along with a single
shot glass filled with thick rum.

LAMAR
(re: Sebastian)
I owe this man.

VLADIMIR
Would you care to elaborate?

LAMAR
I ain't going into it. Talking
about voodoo only invites it back.

Lamar leaves the room, disappearing down a hallway.

SEBASTIAN
Before we venture into Pandora, I
need to ask what you think you know
about the place.

VLADIMIR
Symbiosis.

SEBASTIAN
Huh?

VLADIMIR
I said, "Symbiosis".

SEBASTIAN
Did you just switch to Russian?

VLADIMIR

Symbiosis is the relationship of one dissimilar thing to another. Pandora's Box interlaces with the hearts and souls of those who enter. In effect, my will becomes its will and its magic becomes my own.

SEBASTIAN

Fascinating. Delusional, but fascinating.

(to Alison)

What about you?

ALISON

I only agreed to this trip because it's what Vladimir wants, and Vladimir always gets what he wants.

SEBASTIAN

Oh, jeez. Okay. I would like to offer a more practical set of guidelines. Call them 'Pandora's Laws'.

Sebastian pours the shot glass into his coffee and sucks down the contents of the mug in one protracted pull. Vladimir and Alison exchange a wary look.

SEBASTIAN

Are you listening? Here they are.

(listing on his fingers)

Everybody influences the place. The person with the strongest emotions becomes both the most powerful and most dangerous. Always stick together. Never talk about dying. Last but not least: get in, get what you need, then get out.

Sebastian stares down his tour, his eyes riddled with growing concern, his face lined by years of tragedy.

EXT. PANDORA. DAY.

The Fleetwood rolls onto the expansive parking lot of the former Crescent Beach Mall. The massive storefront announces brand names such as Southern Style, Big Discount Books and Dixie Pride in tall lettering.

INT. CAR. DAY.

Sebastian parks the Fleetwood.

SEBASTIAN

If things get hairy in there, just remember you're not dealing with this alone. I'll be with you, okay? I'll pull you through by any means---

His words die on his lips as he stares forward where...

A WOMAN (Pepper) stands before the car, an arm extended in a slow wave. Pepper is dressed in stockings and a button-down blouse. Sunken eyes. Gray hair. Creepy in an overly familiar way.

But what is truly creepy is how Pepper's frame shimmers, coming slightly in and out of focus.

Sebastian lights a cigarette, appraising the situation.

SEBASTIAN

Check out the way she shimmers around the edges. When people do that here, it means they're the work of the Box.

VLADIMIR

We know her. Her name is Pepper. She poses no threat.

SEBASTIAN

Don't be so sure. She ain't the genuine article. In real life, the lady might be a sweetheart, but here she could very possibly turn into a nightmare.

VLADIMIR

I assure you, Pepper is quite capable of being nosy, but is perfectly harmless.

SEBASTIAN

We're starting off on the wrong foot. Let me park somewhere else.

ALISON

I need some air.

Alison gets out of the car, much to Sebastian's horror.

EXT. PANDORA. PARKING LOT.

Alison steps out onto the pavement of the parking lot. Behind her, Sebastian's car disappears, blurring into the walls of a kitchen.

Alison undergoes a transformation, becoming mousier, more guarded and considerably more fragile. As she approaches Pepper, her handbag morphs into a bouquet.

ALISON

I hope you like tulips.

Vladimir and Sebastian stand at the far end of this kitchen. Vladimir turns to Sebastian.

VLADIMIR

What's going on there?

SEBASTIAN

This is a special case. Sometimes you tourists wander into your own scenes.

VLADIMIR

I feel as if I am stuck in place. It hurts to even speak.

SEBASTIAN

Yeah, that's our cue to wait this out. Watch what happens. It's probably important.

VLADIMIR

This is irritating.

SEBASTIAN

Hey, Pepper's a friend, right? Nothing to worry about, right?

VLADIMIR

Shut up.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

Alison and Pepper sit apart from each other across a dining table.

PEPPER

I sent you an email to see if you're still getting counseling.

(CONTINUED)

ALISON

I hate checking email. And my intuition told me I'm done with the doctor visits. It helped at one point, but I'm so over it.

PEPPER

I can't condone that decision.

ALISON

You don't have to worry about me.

PEPPER

What would I do if I didn't worry?

ALISON

Can we please talk about something else?

PEPPER

How about this?

Pepper slides a picture of Vladimir across the table.

It is a SNAPSHOT OF A YOUNGER VLADIMIR. Fuller. Broader shoulders. Far healthier. The kind of robust Slav you'd like to share a drink with.

ALISON

(studying the photo)

You know, our whole relationship had this unreal quality. Maybe that's why it was so intense.

PEPPER

If you could, would you want to see him?

ALISON

(alarmed)

Wait a second. Is he here in your house?

PEPPER

Not now, but he's staying here. And he's asking about you.

ALISON

How did you get dragged into this?

PEPPER

Listen, I haven't told him anything. I wanted to check with you first.

(CONTINUED)

ALISON

Before what? Let me tell you all about Vladimir. He's a walking horror show. The most selfish man I've ever met.

The kitchen walls begin to shake

ALISON

(with mounting emotion)

To answer your question, I never want to see him again. Whatever we had is over. I'm with Mortimer now. Vladimir is dead to me.

Alison's passion rips apart the kitchen in a wave.

EXT. PANDORA. PARKING LOT. DAY.

The concrete reality of a winter morning outside the shopping mall. Sebastian's car is parked.

Vladimir, Sebastian and Alison (now looking the same as she did before she stepped out of the car) stand in a lopsided triangle.

SEBASTIAN

Can you see now how tough my job is? One minute it's a parking lot, the next it's a kitchen, the next it's a parking lot again.

Vladimir and Alison study each other, the implications of Alison's words lingering.

VLADIMIR

(to Alison)

So you planned to never speak to me?

ALISON

Let's go inside.

She turns toward the mall. As she walks, the view expands to show the placard for INSIGHT CINEMAS.

INT. MOVIE THEATER ENTRANCE. DAY.

The mall aisles are silent. The stores are alive with light, but the entire place is deathly quiet.

Within the mall, the group stands at the ticket booth and entrance to Insight Cinemas.

SEBASTIAN

You know, it's funny. Before I started working at Pandora, I almost never went to the movies. Now I'm here on a daily basis.

Vladimir and Alison study the movie posters, outdated offerings from when the mall went magical: *Zodiac*, *Disturbia* and *Black Snake Moan*.

SEBASTIAN

Anyway, I thought it was funny.

He slides cash under the glass of an abandoned kiosk.

SEBASTIAN

Don't bother picking a film. In this theater you watch your own memories.

VLADIMIR

Is there anyone here?

SEBASTIAN

Just us, I would think.

VLADIMIR

Then why are you paying?

SEBASTIAN

It's a symbolic gesture. Around here, they're the only ones that count.

VLADIMIR

It is the same in life.

SEBASTIAN

Yeah, okay. So if there's anything from your past you'd like to revisit, it all awaits you just through this turnstile.

Alison takes Vladimir by the hand and leads him inside the theater. Sebastian trails, noting a sign above the refreshment stand:

(CONTINUED)

Guilt Free Ice Cream. All the Flavor. None of the Consequences.

Sebastian's eyes are dark with worry, his eyes lingering on the word Consequences.

INT. THEATER.

Sebastian sits alone, sneaking a sip of whiskey from his flask. Across the aisle sits Vladimir and Alison, who doodles on her forearm with a magic marker.

The lights go down in the theater, images flickering on the screen.

INT. ARTIST'S STUDIO. CINEMA PROJECTION.

Vladimir, younger and fuller, holds a palette and brush, but he's not painting, his attention focused on Alison.

She is dressed in a long shawl and nurses a glass of heated wine, speaking earnestly about the emotions that Vladimir's painting inspires in her.

The painting itself, positioned on an easel, is abstract. Clouds of angry gray fill its upper margins, while the green of Earth circle its bottom. At its core is a heartbeat of orange.

ALISON

When I was very young, I sensed connection between people. I wasn't just part of the world, I was the world. Everything felt possible.

VLADIMIR

What a wonderful way to be a child.

ALISON

My optimism didn't last. My parents killed it. Dad was a bastard and Mom just didn't care. I realized then that I was all alone.

VLADIMIR

How very wrong you are. The child in you knew the truth. You won't be alone again.

(CONTINUED)

ALISON
Oh, yeah? How's that, Vladimir?

VLADIMIR
Because I'll be here with you.

ALISON
For a while. Then I'll be alone
once more.

VLADIMIR
Wrong again. I'll be with you
forever.

She meets his gaze with hopeful eyes.

The image on the screen flickers out, the reel on the
projector spinning empty.

INT. THEATER.

From her seat in the theater, Alison shoves her forearm in
front of Vladimir. Written on her skin is 4evR, surrounded
by lightning bolts, framed by a broken heart.

ALISON
Why did you promise me that?

VLADIMIR
I had no intention of deceiving
you.

ALISON
If only that were true. You're just
like everybody else.

She tosses her magic marker at him and strides up the aisle.

SEBASTIAN
Wait up.

He starts after her, but is arrested by Vladimir's words.

VLADIMIR
(still seated)
Let her go. I don't know why I
thought this place would help.

Sebastian struggles to size up which is worse: Chasing after
Alison or leaving a morose Vladimir in the semi-darkness.

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN

Is that all you're worried about?
If we don't get after her, we're
going to have much bigger problems.

VLADIMIR

There is no problem so large as an
angry woman.

SEBASTIAN

How about a dead one? Get up.

VLADIMIR

Let her walk it off.

SEBASTIAN

That's a terrible idea. Seriously.
We better chase her down.

VLADIMIR

My father, rest his soul, taught me
to never chase a woman.

SEBASTIAN

Yeah, well, my dad told me to never
get involved in other people's
problems, so we're both breaking
the rules.

(grabs Vladimir by the arm.)

Let's go.

Vladimir cracks Sebastian in the face, breaking his nose,
sending him across the aisle. Vladimir follows by pouncing
on Sebastian, bringing him to the floor.

SEBASTIAN

Trying to help here.

VLADIMIR

How dare you touch me? I am
descended from royalty.

SEBASTIAN

Good for you.

Sebastian punches Vladimir in the ribs, sending him into a
chair, opening up a nasty scratch over his eyebrow.

SEBASTIAN

Quit screwing around. Don't you
know the first thing about women?
When they storm off, they're
testing you. It means you're
supposed to follow them.

(CONTINUED)

VLADIMIR
You could not be more wrong.

SEBASTIAN
Yeah, yeah. You're father's advice.
I remember.

Both men stay on the floor. Vladimir picks up a flask and tosses it to Sebastian.

VLADIMIR
You dropped this.

SEBASTIAN
Much obliged.

VLADIMIR
I was not thinking. I can't believe
what an idiot I am.

SEBASTIAN
(getting up, helping up
Vladimir)
If it's any consolation, I hate
being right all the time.

They go to the door. It's locked. As Sebastian turns, the projector spins back to life.

INT. BEDROOM. FILM PROJECTION. EVENING.

A seriously-ill Vladimir in bed. Pepper lords over him, frowning at a thermometer. Alison sits beside him on a chair, a novel in her lap.

In this scene, Pepper's hair is normal, the only magic found in the irony and laughter on these very real people.

PEPPER
We're taking you to a hospital,
young man.

ALISON
Oh, please. Don't feed his
hypochondria. He walked up and down
Melrose without a jacket and smoked
a pack of cigarettes.

VLADIMIR
Alison is right. All I need to
recover is more vodka.

(CONTINUED)

PEPPER

Vodka?

VLADIMIR

Sleep, tea and vodka.

ALISON

(to Pepper)

Do you want to go the store or should I?

PEPPER

I'll go.

VLADIMIR

No American or French brands, either. Can you believe anyone but Russians dare to distill vodka?

PEPPER

I'll pick up some bourbon while I'm there.

VLADIMIR

Not good for colds.

PEPPER

The bourbon is not for you. It's for us girls.

Pepper high-fives Alison and leaves.

ALISON

I don't know how you do it.

VLADIMIR

Get people to buy me vodka?

ALISON

Get women to fall in love with you.

They gaze at each other, reaching an unspoken understanding.

A hard cut follows, the scene shifting to:

EXT. OUTSIDE ART GALLERY. STREET. NIGHT

A picture window reveals that an art exhibition rages within. Vladimir and Alison sit on the curb outside the building.

Alison wears suede and cowboy boots, her hair teased into playful spikes.

(CONTINUED)

ALISON
I can't believe it.

INT. THEATER.

Sebastian waves his arms.

SEBASTIAN
Wait a second. Time out!

The film is arrested freeze-frame.

SEBASTIAN
(to Vladimir--pointing to the
screen)
Where is this now?

VLADIMIR
(ruefully)
This is the last evening I spent
with Alison. The night of my
biggest success and my worst
decision.

SEBASTIAN
Got it. Okay. Let's do this.

Sebastian snaps his fingers and the film resumes.

EXT. OUTSIDE ART GALLERY. STREET. NIGHT

Alison sits with Vladimir on the curb outside a crowded
building.

ALISON
I can't believe it. Your work sold
out in one night.

Vladimir smokes furiously. His shirt is unbuttoned, the tie
unraveled.

VLADIMIR
I spent all my cash on the
materials.

ALISON
That's like any job. You know what
they say. You gotta spend money to
make it.

(CONTINUED)

VLADIMIR

The gallery's percentage is
criminal.

ALISON

Be happy for once. Please.

VLADIMIR

Why should it matter to you how I
feel?

ALISON

Your show is a hit. What more do
you want?

VLADIMIR

(stands)

Tell Pepper I had to go.

ALISON

Don't you want me to come with you?

VLADIMIR

I need space, Alison. For my art.
It's time to try a different city.

ALISON

Without me?

VLADIMIR

I am suffocating. I need to go.

ALISON

This doesn't make any sense.

VLADIMIR

Good-bye.

Vladimir storms off. Alison stares at him with an
unmistakable look of betrayal.

The film runs out, the screen goes blank, and the lights of
the theater switch on---the universal signal that the show
is over.

INT. THEATER.

The sound of the theater doors open causes Sebastian to turn
his head.

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN

You know what it's time for? A good
old-fashioned beer run.

INT. MALL. DAY

Sebastian and Vladimir walk the deserted aisles. Stocked but empty storefronts. Beach Trends. Carolina Franks. Crescent Croissants. Well Heeled Ladies. Golden Town Antiques. Party Time Pizza. Tangled Web Toys. Fluorescent hanging lights create the impression that the mall is either about to open or very near closing time.

They reach the entrance to Dixie Pride, an oak door with elaborate steel handles.

VLADIMIR

This is a chain restaurant.

SEBASTIAN

(nodding)

Best steak in the mall.

VLADIMIR

I have no appetite.

SEBASTIAN

Well, I figured we'd poke around
inside. Never know who might turn
up.

Sebastian tentatively opens the door. A look of horror crosses his face.

INT. DECAYING RESTAURANT. DAY.

Shards of torn sunlight provide wretched glimpses of hunched skeletons. Circles of flies parade through the chaotic remains of a dining room. In the background, a rat mounts the bar.

INT. MALL. DAY.

Vladimir stands in shock.

VLADIMIR

Why would you take me here?

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN

My bad. Should have warned you.
Sometimes it starts off like this.

VLADIMIR

Meaning?

SEBASTIAN

Well, Pandora is a lot like
Carolina weather. If you don't like
the situation, give it five minutes
and it will change.

Sebastian opens the door again. It's a whole new ball game.

INT. RESTAURANT. DAY.

The same room. Windows restored. Tables cleared of all but
warm candles. The bar area pulses with a neon glow. Upbeat
rock music celebrates the change via the restaurant's
speakers.

SEBASTIAN

That's better.

Sebastian leads Vladimir to the bar area.

A bartender (BARRY) approaches. A tank of a man. Neck as
wide as his head. Buzz cut. Cauliflower ears. Wears
sunglasses.

SEBASTIAN

Hi, Barry.

BARRY

Sebastian Unger. Guide at Pandora
Tours. Shunned by local prostitutes
because of arcane contamination.
Vacillates between nervous
caretaker and hopeless drunk.

SEBASTIAN

Ain't you a kidder. Set me up with
a beer and a whiskey chaser.

(to Vladimir)

If you're going to indulge in
midday drinking, there's no point
in pulling your punches.

Barry already has the sweating beer bottle and a glass of
amber whiskey in hand.

(CONTINUED)

BARRY

Anything for your client?

SEBASTIAN

You bet. Pull down your best bottle of vodka---just make sure it's Russian.

VLADIMIR

If I want anything, I shall order it myself.

Barry tilts his head in Vladimir's direction.

BARRY

Vladimir Petrov. Deeply troubled Russian painter. Fears his girlfriend will never forgive him for leaving her.

VLADIMIR

Who are you to pronounce such sweeping judgments?

BARRY

I'm a bartender.

VLADIMIR

So?

BARRY

Bartenders know things.

VLADIMIR

Things?

BARRY

Almost everything.

SEBASTIAN

An idea where we should look for Vladimir's girlfriend?

Barry turns in Sebastian's direction. The wheels turn behind Barry's sunglasses.

BARRY

Alison Townsend. Hollywood bloodline. A storied history of mental illness.

(CONTINUED)

VLADIMIR

Where is she?

BARRY

I couldn't say.

VLADIMIR

To be clear, are you saying you don't know where to find Alison?

BARRY

That's right.

VLADIMIR

You said bartenders know everything.

BARRY

What I said was that bartenders know *almost* everything. Try that woman. Her name is Gail Woodrue. Alison's mother.

Sebastian and Vladimir turn to see...

In a patch of shadows, out of reach of the neon, a tall woman (GAIL WOODRUE) sits at the end of the bar.

SEBASTIAN

Come on, Vladimir. Let's buy the lady a drink. Time for a low-presh rap-sesh.

BARRY

(seizes Vladimir's arm)

If you find Alison, get her out of here.

Barry lowers his sunglasses, revealing eyes that have neither irises nor pupils, a set of soulless pale marbles.

BARRY

(continued)

Go someplace safe---while you still have a fighting chance.

Vladimir studies Barry, then extricates himself from his grasp and follows Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN

(sliding up to Gail)

My friend and I wondered if you might help us with a little info.

(CONTINUED)

Gail emerges from the shadows. Her face is wax, damaged by overzealous skin treatment. Her hairline begins at the center of her skull, rendering her bald from the front. The physical degeneration is laced with overbearing sexuality. An open dress shirt partially exposing leather breasts. Lipstick crossing the borders of her lips. Painted talons for nails. Her eyes are a sickly yellow and her image goes in and out of focus, indicating that she is a creation of Pandora.

GAIL

Oh, thank God. Handsome men to chat with. I feared I'd be stuck here by my lonesome all night long.

SEBASTIAN

(braving a handshake)
I'm Sebastian. That's Vladimir.

Vladimir's face contorts with disgust.

GAIL

(to Vladimir re his reaction)
What's wrong with you? Haven't you seen a beautiful woman before?

VLADIMIR

In point of fact, I have known many women of beauty---including your daughter Alison.

The name sends a storm cloud of despair over Gail's creepshow facade.

GAIL

My little flower. I should have stepped in earlier, but thought she needed to exercise her free spirit. The soul-searching makes her feel less terrible about herself. God knows nothing else does. It's all so unbearably tedious.

SEBASTIAN

If you ask me, I can't think of a better way to enjoy a few cocktails than with a deep round of soul-searching.

GAIL

All I wanted was for Alison to live up to her potential. Was that so wrong?

(CONTINUED)

VLADIMIR

The way I heard the story, you did all you could to crush Alison's fragile self-esteem.

SEBASTIAN

(upset at Vladimir's lack of tact)

Are you kidding me with this?

GAIL

(to Vladimir)

Oh, you're feisty. Momma likes that. Let's order you another drink.

VLADIMIR

I'm done talking to you.

GAIL

Don't go. Not without a kiss.

Gail presses her fingers deep into Vladimir's jacket.

VLADIMIR

(frozen with shock)

Let go of me.

GAIL

You really don't know my daughter. Alison does not forgive. You may as well move on to someone as twisted as you are. A woman who knows how to be bad.

Vladimir takes in Gail's words, then pushes her away and makes a beeline for the door.

SEBASTIAN

(to Gail)

So, you wouldn't happen to know where we could find your little flower, would you?

GAIL

Buy me a drink and we'll talk about it, loverboy.

Sebastian watches Vladimir exit, weighing the risks of letting Vladimir wander Pandora alone versus the possible rewards of pumping Gail for information.

SEBASTIAN

Wish I could, but I gotta go push a boulder uphill, only to have it

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

GAIL (cont'd)
roll downhill on top of me with no
regard whatsoever for my
well-being.

Sebastian follows Vladimir out the door, hoping he's not too late to track Vladimir down.

INT MALL. AISLE. DAY

Sebastian, sensing trouble, scans the aisles for Vladimir.

SEBASTIAN
(complaining to himself)
Why couldn't it be easy for once?
Does every single day of my
miserable life have to be torture?

Vladimir's voice is heard.

VLADIMIR
I met Alison during a most insane
period.

Sebastian turns. There is an six foot wall of masonry surrounding an elevated garden, a windmill palmetto at its center, and Vladimir perched between its thick fronds.

VLADIMIR
(continued)
At the time, I was quite lonely and
seriously doubted I was compatible
with anyone. She made the perfect
partner for my foolishness.

SEBASTIAN
You know, Vladimir, you're not the
enemy here.

VLADIMIR
Aren't I?

SEBASTIAN
Tourists at Pandora face two
outcomes. Have an enlightening
experience or be driven nuts.

VLADIMIR
In your opinion, under which
category would you place my
expectation?

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN

Which is?

VLADIMIR

To convince Alison to once again
love me.

SEBASTIAN

Why don't we find her, you win her
back, and then you let me know how
it went?

VLADIMIR

That sounds reasonable.

SEBASTIAN

Glad to hear that. Let me ask, if
you were Alison, where would you
go?

VLADIMIR

(an idea blooms in his mind)
Alison enjoys books. She is a
voracious reader.

INT. MALL. BOOKSTORE ENTRANCE.

The aisle doorway to Big Discount Books is sealed by a line
of thick yellow police tape which reads 'Crime Scene'.

SEBASTIAN

Let's take a detour.

VLADIMIR

Why? This will be easy to remove.

SEBASTIAN

Better safe than sorry.

VLADIMIR

I don't understand.

SEBASTIAN

Get what? The symbolism? The
meaning of the tape?

VLADIMIR

Both of those things. Help me
understand how this place works.

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN

Are you on a level?

VLADIMIR

Very much so.

SEBASTIAN

Okey doke.

(lights a cigarette)

First off, never blame the hard turns on Pandora. It's not out to get you. Secondly, its equally delusional to think this is some sort of wish-granting factory. Finally, the Box is just like life---only more so. What you walk in here with is what you'll find.

The crime scene tape pushes open and the door opens.

A teenage boy (COOKIE) stands in the threshold, an immaculate headband in his hair. His angelic eyes are wide with amazement. He's a walking target in a red hoodie and a loud green backpack.

COOKIE

Gosh, I'm sure glad to see some friendly faces.

SEBASTIAN

Don't tell me you're here by yourself.

COOKIE

My stepdad couldn't make it. Isn't this place exciting? I'm Cookie. What are your names?

SEBASTIAN

Sebastian Unger. Pandora Tours. Wandering around without supervision is one way to get yourself killed.

VLADIMIR

(to Sebastian)

Stop being so negative.

(to Cookie)

I am Vladimir Petrov.

COOKIE

Cool name. And I like your accent. Are you a vampire?

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN

Don't even make jokes about that.
It's like saying 'bomb' in an
airport.

VLADIMIR

Don't mind Sebastian. He suffers
from a case of toxic personality
syndrome. What do you have there?

Cookie holds out a crayon-marked map of the mall.

COOKIE

I'm embarrassed to even ask, but I
can't seem to find the cafeteria.

SEBASTIAN

Why would you want to go there?
Take it from me, kid, the food
atrium will give you nightmares.

COOKIE

But that's where the magic happens.

SEBASTIAN

Shouldn't you be in school? What
are you even doing here?

COOKIE

I read a book about being adopted.
For the first time, I saw myself as
illegitimate.

VLADIMIR

Illegitimate?

COOKIE

That's how they refer to children
whose parents didn't intend to have
them. Children like me. I came here
to find my birth mother. Maybe if I
heard her reasons for giving me up,
I'd gain a healthier outlook.

VLADIMIR

A noble effort. We will help you.

SEBASTIAN

Are you kidding me? Sorry about
this, but I am legally prohibited
from handling visitors who haven't
signed the paperwork.

(CONTINUED)

VLADIMIR

I am shocked by your callousness.

SEBASTIAN

Okay, you really wanna help this kid?

VLADIMIR

I do.

SEBASTIAN

Great. Let's take him to the exit.

COOKIE

Exit?

SEBASTIAN

Yeah, exit. As in the doors you walk through to leave.

COOKIE

(backing up)

I thought you were going to help me.

SEBASTIAN

Trust me, kid. Getting you out of here is all the help you need.

COOKIE

But I gotta find my family.

Cookie runs off, tearing down the aisle in a clumsy blur.

Vladimir starts after Cookie.

SEBASTIAN

Just what I needed.

Sebastian charges after and tackles Vladimir.

VLADIMIR

Unhand me!

SEBASTIAN

No chance in hell.

VLADIMIR

I refuse to be party to this. That child needs protection.

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN

Hey, do you even remember why we came here?

VLADIMIR

Of course I do.

But Vladimir has to think about it.

SEBASTIAN

Yeah, that's what I thought.

VLADIMIR

I came here... for Alison. How could I have forgotten?

SEBASTIAN

Welcome to my world. Helping crazy people live out their crazy dreams without letting their crazy take over.

The corridor rumbles. A kitchen booth lands before them. Decorated walls lift from all sides, re-establishing the kitchen from earlier. A stool grows from the floor, seating Sebastian at a counter removed from the breakfast nook.

INT. KITCHEN. EVENING.

Vladimir, seduced quickly into this new scene, pokes his head through the kitchen curtain.

VLADIMIR

Here she comes.

Vladimir slides into the seat and folds his hands.

A front door carves itself into the wall, an elaborate model with a stained glass heart.

At the threshold, a man in a dark suit (MORTIMER) emerges. His hair is prematurely gray, his voice both sad and controlled.

MORTIMER

Evening. I'm Mortimer Banks.

VLADIMIR

(remaining seated)

Your name is familiar to me.

(CONTINUED)

MORTIMER

Mortimer Banks Mortuaries.

VLADIMIR

A graveyard?

MORTIMER

Burials. You'll have to forgive me. I'm not quite myself. Little too much to drink. Can we talk about Alison?

VLADIMIR

You are still here, are you not? If I were unwilling to have a conversation, you would be out on your ear.

MORTIMER

I don't think it would be that easy for you.

VLADIMIR

Let me tell you a little something about me and my brother.

MORTIMER

You and your brother?

VLADIMIR

All men are competitive. Brothers more so. My brother can lift a car with his bare hands. He has done time in a labor camp. He once slaughtered a rabid bear. Yet when my brother and I wrestle, I emerge the victor.

MORTIMER

That's fine. I get the message.

VLADIMIR

It was no message. Merely a story.

MORTIMER

Yeah, okay. Now, about Alison. I know you and her share a long history. You were this epic figure in her life. Now you're back. Right now Alison says she hates you. She never wants to see you again. Never. That's what she says right now. But I'm not an idiot. One of

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MORTIMER (cont'd)
these nights she'll be sitting
right here with a nostalgic ache in
her heart.

VLADIMIR
Who exactly are you? Alison's new
man?

MORTIMER
Something like that. We live
together. Sleep in the same bed.

VLADIMIR
Are you romantically involved?

MORTIMER
Most of the time.

VLADIMIR
Most of the time?

MORTIMER
Alison has moods.

VLADIMIR
Ah, yes. Of those moods I am well
versed.

MORTIMER
Are they the reason you left her?

VLADIMIR
What a direct question. The manners
of Americans never cease to
astonish. I think you are being
very serious, so I will outline the
epic history to which you refer. I
met Alison while I was a penniless
immigrant who had all but abandoned
his dreams. She was the daughter of
a dying man. My personal
dissatisfaction spoke to her grief.
We formed a deep connection.

MORTIMER
Was this after her father passed
away?

VLADIMIR
Directly after.

MORTIMER

Go on.

VLADIMIR

I was born a painter. Alison turned me into an artist. She taught me to respect my gifts, then used her late father's contacts to get my work displayed. She helped me become a success.

MORTIMER

And you repaid her by running away.

VLADIMIR

I cannot stress to you enough how great a factor the timing played in my decision to leave. It was too overwhelming to face both my career and the love of my life. I was not ready.

MORTIMER

What makes you think you're ready now?

VLADIMIR

(evasive)

Mortimer Banks of Mortimer Banks Mortuaries. A tongue twister.

MORTIMER

It's my real name and my real profession.

VLADIMIR

Well, as long as we're being real, why don't you tell me your real reason for coming here tonight?

MORTIMER

This isn't about me. I came to see you because Alison needs looking after.

VLADIMIR

And you think you should have that honor?

MORTIMER

Somebody has to. Somebody consistent.

(CONTINUED)

VLADIMIR

But you---a man she only loves when the stars are perfectly aligned?

MORTIMER

There's so much you don't know about. Did you know that Alison has been committed to a mental health institution on more than one occasion? The last time was right after you split. She refused to eat. The room they locked her in had no bed---for fear she would bash her skull against it. What do you think of that?

VLADIMIR

I miss her.

MORTIMER

Is that all you have to say? Let me tell you, I deal with grief on a daily basis. People walk into my parlor in terrible states. I witness these people bounce back. Even in the limited time it takes to arrange a funeral, people start to heal. Not so with Alison. Our girl is shaky. There are days I leave the house and I doubt she'll be there when I return. And by 'there' I don't mean 'home', I mean 'alive'.

VLADIMIR

Enough.

MORTIMER

Enough?

VLADIMIR

There is endless conversation to have about Alison, but I believe our talk on this topic has come to an end.

MORTIMER

Oh, yeah? Okay, well, let me leave you with a parting thought. I bury people for a living, so I've seen things in my job I never bargained for. That's forced me to accept a situation for what it is. A woman

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MORTIMER (cont'd)

cries out another man's name during the act of love, it tells you something. God, listen to me. Two sips of brandy and I turn into an idiot. My point is that as much as it hurts, I can admit Alison isn't in love with me. Fair is fair. If you win her back, so be it. I'll step aside. But if you came here for kicks, to seduce her and then pull your vanishing act, I won't take kindly to it. Another disappointment would kill her. And if I have to bury her, it'll be a two-for-one arrangement. I'll cremate your pretentious ass and bury you with her.

A loud cry is heard.

ALISON

(off camera)

No! No! No!

Vladimir and Mortimer remain locked on each other. Apparently only Sebastian can hear Alison's screams.

Sebastian throws on his jacket and pushes aside his stool, clasping Vladimir on the shoulder.

SEBASTIAN

Let's roll.

Vladimir is unmoved. He studies Sebastian.

VLADIMIR

Who are you?

SEBASTIAN

Oh, jeez. Really? All right. You brought me along. Would you happen to remember why?

VLADIMIR

You must have me confused for someone else.

SEBASTIAN

Oh, you mean the other Russian painter egomaniac? Let me ask you something. If Alison were lost in a maze and only you could lead her out, would you?

(CONTINUED)

VLADIMIR
I'd like to think so.

SEBASTIAN
Then why don't you come with me for
a few minutes?

VLADIMIR
Where?

SEBASTIAN
There's a maze. It's called
Pandora. And Alison is lost in it.

VLADIMIR
I planned to wait here. It is far
easier to wait.

SEBASTIAN
This won't take long. You can come
back here later and finish your
waiting or whatever it is you're
doing.

Vladimir gets up, allowing Sebastian to lead him through the
kitchen door, which leads back into the aisles of the mall.

INT. MALL. AISLE.

Vladimir remains lost in his own world, yet because of his
robust nature, still assumes the lead.

VLADIMIR
Since you claim to know me, perhaps
we could find a pub?

SEBASTIAN
Hey, lemme ask. What time is it?

VLADIMIR
I don't wear a watch.

SEBASTIAN
Take a wild guess.

VLADIMIR
Mid-afternoon?

SEBASTIAN
Wrong. It's half-past wake the hell
up.

(CONTINUED)

Sebastian presses Vladimir against a wall and slaps him across the face.

The walls shake, Vladimir's shock expressing itself through Pandora itself.

VLADIMIR

Such audacity!

Vladimir pushes Sebastian back. Sebastian tries a punch, but Vladimir is a blur of wrists and fists. He closes in on Sebastian and locks him in a heavy duty headlock.

VLADIMIR

Where did you learn to fight?

SEBASTIAN

(struggling)

Uh... New York.

VLADIMIR

What poor soldiers Americans make, with no grasp of the five basic strategies of unarmed combat. You will soon be unconscious.

Sebastian's face is bright red. Knees buckling. On the verge of blacking out. He drops his arms and hammers a nasty fist into Vladimir's crotch.

Vladimir crumbles to the floor in pain.

SEBASTIAN

(lording over Vladimir)

We New Yorkers might not know your five basic strategies of blah blah blah, but we are ruthless sons of bitches.

INT. MALL. AISLE.

Sebastian lights a cigarette and ponders his next move.

Vladimir pulls himself to a seating position. His eyes are clear, a signal that he's back to reality.

VLADIMIR

Do you often manhandle your tourists?

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN

Only when they forget why they came here.

VLADIMIR

I don't remember a clause regarding beatings in the paperwork.

SEBASTIAN

That's included. No extra charge.
(helps Vladimir up)
Let's keep moving.

INT. MALL. FOOD ATRIUM. DAY.

The deserted interior of a food court. Popular chains such as Tokyo Cafe, Crescent Croissant and Carolina Franks.

Sebastian and Vladimir stop at a row of tables. Atop one is Cookie's open backpack. The table is splattered with blood.

VLADIMIR

What carnage.

Vladimir examines the mess. Cookie's map lays in tatters. Vladimir lifts Cookie's headband, now soaked in scarlet.

VLADIMIR

Does this mean?

SEBASTIAN

That kid is history.

VLADIMIR

Is there no chance that Cookie escaped?

SEBASTIAN

It is what it is.

Vladimir leans against a potted tree, staring past the glass walls of the food court into the vast deserted parking lot.

SEBASTIAN

Come with me. There's somebody we better talk to.

VLADIMIR

Who?

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN

His name's Larry. My boss. He has his pulse on this creep show. If anybody know where Alison is, it's Larry.

VLADIMIR

Is he clairvoyant?

SEBASTIAN

I'm not even sure what that means.

VLADIMIR

I don't want to go anywhere.

SEBASTIAN

You're upset about Cookie. Worried about Alison. I get it. Larry will be able to help.

VLADIMIR

What if he cannot?

SEBASTIAN

How about you trust me on this one?

VLADIMIR

Trust must be earned.

Yet Vladimir begins walking.

SEBASTIAN

(to himself)

Why do I even bother?

INT. MALL. HALLWAY.

Sebastian leads Vladimir, exiting the main aisle, venturing into a narrow hallway reserved for employees.

SEBASTIAN

Welcome to Larry's home turf.

An office door is marked 'Private Keep Out'. There's a handwritten note tacked on, reading 'unless you have either a six pack of beer or big tits'. And yes, there's a hand-drawn illustration of the aforementioned tits.

INT. OFFICE.

Larry Letterman's smoke-saturated headquarters. Lines of security monitors are lit up with sundry angles of the soulless mall.

The office has the vibe of a bunker. Soda machine. A small refrigerator. Liquor cabinet. Newspaper clippings strewn about the desk, surrounding an overflowing ashtray.

LARRY is throned behind his desk. Eyes masked by tinted shades. Slicked back hair. He sports a seedy varsity jacket with an obnoxious capital L stitched on the chest. He speaks in the outdated rhythm of an old school radio announcer.

LARRY

You gents have drummer's timing. I was just about to start happy hour. Figured the only company I'd have would be the filing cabinets.

He fixes himself a rum and cola.

LARRY

Have either of you seen a Hispanic gal wandering around---or maybe a wolf?

SEBASTIAN

Are you saying you led a woman in here with her pet wolf?

LARRY

It would be a case of one or the other.

SEBASTIAN

Why don't you go after her?

LARRY

Are you joshing? If a tourist wants to run off, I'm not trundling my ass after her. Not this old Jew.

SEBASTIAN

Turns out we have a similar problem.

LARRY

Wait a minute.

(approached Vladimir)

Is this the world renown artist Vladimir Petrov?

(CONTINUED)

Vladimir beams.

VLADIMIR
Are you familiar with my work?

LARRY
Who isn't?

SEBASTIAN
Well, I'm---

LARRY
You're looking at your number one fan. I caught your show when it came through Chicago. I tell you, I'm limited by the use of mere words to express what an honor it is to have you here.

VLADIMIR
Thank you, Mr. Letterman.

LARRY
(ominous)
Now I have a very important question.

VLADIMIR
What, pray tell?

LARRY
(devilish grin)
Have you eaten yet?

INT. OFFICE.

Larry lays out a spread of Russian delicacies, including pickles and pumpernickel bread. Vodka bottles with Cyrillic labels.

Larry and Vladimir clink glasses and knock back shots.

Sebastian broods in the corner.

SEBASTIAN
Is this really the best time to play Russian Tea Room? What with the missing tourists. You know, treacherous nightmares swallowing people alive. Random deaths.

(CONTINUED)

LARRY

(to Vladimir)

Don't mind Sebastian. He's a New Yorker. You know the skinny on them, don't you? Always bright, great talkers, but they have a real defensive streak. Sort of like rats that get cornered in your garage.

SEBASTIAN

I'm sitting right here.

LARRY

Sebastian means well, but he thinks he has to solve every problem on his own.

SEBASTIAN

Actually, I brought Vladimir to your office so we could ask---

VLADIMIR

(holding up a crust)

This is the first edible bread I have found since I arrived in your country.

LARRY

Don't you love it when you meet someone who shares your appreciation for the finer things?

VLADIMIR

And your taste in vodka. Quite exceptional for an American.

LARRY

Let me tell you, you are one of the most talented and creative painters of this century. I made the mega schlep through hours of traffic to catch your show. That's how much I respect your painting.

VLADIMIR

(moved)

You obviously understand fine art, but I must confess that I have behaved less than stellar as a man.

LARRY

Wait! Let me give you my undivided attention.

(CONTINUED)

Larry stands, switches off all the monitors, takes out a notepad, inches a tissue box near Vladimir.

LARRY

I'm ready. Sock it to me.

VLADIMIR

Art is not about lines or color. It is not playing pretend. If you bring your experience, your hatred, hunger and rage to your work, art becomes daring behavior. Real world immersion. When I found success, it was a hollow victory. No one understood. Not even Alison. So I left both art and Alison behind. Now, a man cannot erase his identity. Change your legal name, relocate, assume a different occupation. Such tweaks are superficial. Primal nature resurfaces. Time drove me back to the work and the lady. I brought her here because I love her and want her to see that. Now she is gone. What does it all mean, Mr. Letterman?

Larry stares at Vladimir.

LARRY

The whole scenario reminds me of something I read. It has to do with an unbreakable windshield and a dead chicken.

VLADIMIR

Tell me this story.

LARRY

Naah. You've probably heard it before.

VLADIMIR

I have not.

LARRY

Are you sure?

VLADIMIR

I know no stories regarding dead chickens.

(CONTINUED)

LARRY

Okay, you know how birds sometimes hits airplanes? Well, our engineers came up with a gun to shoot chickens at glass. The idea was to test whether a windshield holds tough. Anyway, you Russians heard about the gun and asked to borrow it so you could test the new shatterproof windshield of a high speed train. Arrangements were made, and you Russians fired the chicken gun at your train. Imagine the surprise when the chicken zipped right through the shatterproof shield, smashed the control panel, snapped the engineer's seat, then embedded itself in the back wall of the cabin.

VLADIMIR

Such power from a chicken?

LARRY

It's a mystery, isn't it? Well, you Russians were pretty worked up about it. Took photos of the debacle and sent the results to the Americans, demanding an explanation. Guess how we responded. We sent back a one line memo. "Defrost the fucking chicken."

Larry takes a bite of a pickle. Vladimir waits.

LARRY

The theme of both this story and yours is common sense. Tell me you see the connection.

VLADIMIR

I honestly don't.

SEBASTIAN

Neither do I.

LARRY

Pandora has a sense of justice. You left Alison and now want her back. It doesn't take a crystal ball to see that Pandora has been testing

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LARRY (cont'd)
you. It wanted to see just how far
you were willing to go to win her
back.

Vladimir breaks out in laughter.

LARRY
You're not upset?

VLADIMIR
How could I be upset with you, Mr.
Letterman? You are my angel of
truth.

SEBASTIAN
(to himself)
Somebody kill me.

Larry switches on a row of monitors, tosses the food in the
trash.

LARRY
This has been a complete pleasure.
Now go see your girlfriend. Take a
left at the end of the hallway.

Larry points at a monitor where Alison waits.

LARRY
Shake, rattle and roll.

INT. BEDROOM.

A cocoon of a bedroom. Hardwood floors. Oak bookshelves
built into the walls.

Alison stands by an easel in a skirt and jacket. Her hair is
out of her face and her glasses have disappeared, revealing
her understated beauty.

She studies the incomplete canvas of a woman's face not yet
endowed with color.

At this point, Alison behaves as if she is oblivious to the
presence of Vladimir and Sebastian, who wait inside the
threshold of the room.

Vladimir leans in the door frame and lights a cigarette.

(CONTINUED)

VLADIMIR
(to Sebastian)
Cigarettes will be my death. Still,
I suppose it means at least nothing
else will kill me.

SEBASTIAN
Okay, I brought you here. Let me
know how it goes.

Vladimir gesture for Sebastian to wait.

VLADIMIR
I feel quite guilty for what I have
done. More than that, I am deeply
ashamed for what I am.

SEBASTIAN
Think of it another way. It's not
what you've done, it's what you do
from here on.

VLADIMIR
For an American, you dress rather
well. Do you spend a fortune on
your wardrobe?

SEBASTIAN
You're joking, right?

VLADIMIR
I do not make jokes. Are your suits
expensive?

SEBASTIAN
The local business cycle revolves
around tourism. In the off-season I
shop at a discount.

Vladimir stuffs a wad of cash in Sebastian's shirt pocket.

VLADIMIR
You'll need this to buy a new suit.

SEBASTIAN
Why's that?

VLADIMIR
The blood.

Sebastian is genuinely creeped out.

VLADIMIR

(continued)

You promised to defend us. Are you truly capable of that?

SEBASTIAN

You didn't bring me here for my good looks.

Vladimir hands Sebastian a nasty looking police baton.

VLADIMIR

This is for Alison's fears.

Vladimir hands Sebastian a gun. An antique pistol with a wooden grip and a cold steel barrel.

VLADIMIR

Tell me you know how to handle a firearm.

Vladimir presses an index finger to his own forehead and makes a snapping motion.

VLADIMIR

When the time comes, use the gun on me.

In the background, Alison notices Vladimir. She turns away from him, stepping to the bookshelves.

VLADIMIR

(still to Sebastian)

Moments like these return all perspective. Who knows what will result?

SEBASTIAN

Good luck.

VLADIMIR

Luck? A Russian has no use for luck. He lives and dies by his faith.

Sebastian cools his heels in the shadows, assuming the role of silent watchdog, removed from the scene.

Vladimir steps into the room, but his approach is arrested by Alison's voice.

(CONTINUED)

ALISON

What made you think I still lived
in Los Angeles?

VLADIMIR

How do Americans say it? I returned
to the scene of the crime.

ALISON

An apprenticeship opened up in
another state. I almost moved

VLADIMIR

Why didn't you?

ALISON

I couldn't say.

VLADIMIR

Turn and look at me.

ALISON

(faces him)

I'm not sure why I'm here.

VLADIMIR

What if we talk now and let the
questions answer themselves?

ALISON

I heard you met Mortimer.

VLADIMIR

Ah, yes. Mortimer Banks of Mortimer
Banks Mortuaries.

ALISON

He's someone I can count on.

VLADIMIR

He told me about your breakdown.

ALISON

That wasn't because of you,
Vladimir.

VLADIMIR

Don't say that.

ALISON

My family has a long history of
emotional problems. Mom was a prime
example. The stuff I was forced to

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ALISON (cont'd)
witness. All I wanted was a normal
childhood. Instead I had a mom who
would wander around the house
naked.

VLADIMIR
Naked?

ALISON
Yes, naked. Nude. You prefer that
word, right? Mom was certifiable.
That kind of disease is infectious.
I grew up in it, so it was bound to
happen to me.

VLADIMIR
What was?

ALISON
Madness.

Alison sits at the edge of the bed.

ALISON
Medication helps, but even now I
have episodes. So don't think I
cracked up because of you.

VLADIMIR
I am terribly, terribly sorry.
Please forgive me.

ALISON
Why are you sorry?

VLADIMIR
I am quite intuitive. Of course I
could not have known the details
about your family, but I understand
enough about the mind to see that
you were ill. Despite that, I
disappeared. I left you here,
denying our bond. I am selfish,
ugly, empty. Now I step between you
and hardworking man, thinking of
nothing but my own satisfaction. I
am sorry I didn't keep you in my
life this entire time, for you are
the only one I have ever loved.

They hold each other at arm's length, staring into each
other's eyes, moving slowly into a kiss.

(CONTINUED)

Alison assumes control, shoving him to the mattress, pulling off his pants. He matches her aggression by gripping her shoulders and pinning her to the bed. These are not gentle beings rediscovering each other, but tortured thrillseekers.

Sebastian watches, somewhat alarmed by the intensity. His attention isn't held for long, as the door behind him swings open.

A skeleton stands at the threshold. Tattered dress. Hair hangs off her skull. Lipstick painted on her lipless jaw. This gruesome abomination is what remains of Alison's mother, Gail Woodrue.

Sebastian steps back in horror.

SEBASTIAN

(to the skeleton)

I'm guessing you're not here to
bless their consummation.

He whips his head around to see if anyone else has noticed the skeleton, but Alison and Vladimir continue to have sex on the bed.

The skeleton slices at Sebastian with overgrown, jaundiced nails. He ducks and strikes her spine with the police baton.

The skeleton cracks in half, which makes matters worse, as now both sections make a mad dash for the bed.

Sebastian swipes at the legs, scattering the bones.

The head and torso scurries across the floor, closing in on the bed. It climbs the bed, about to rip open Vladimir's exposed back.

Sebastian draws and aims the gun, but fears taking a shot, as he could quite easily kill Vladimir and Alison by accident.

VLADIMIR

(to Sebastian)

Save the bullet.

With only the slightest change of position, Vladimir seizes the skeletal torso and heaves it over his shoulder, shattering it against the wall.

The scattered bones give off a musty radiation, tinting of the room, providing the apt tone for Vladimir and Alison's peak.

(CONTINUED)

Hot sex shifts to love making. Alison and Vladimir lock eyes, the intimacy revealing and reaffirming their passion for each other.

The bones glow white hot, signifying the climax of their act of love.

The bones shift color once more, cooling off the room.

ALISON

Wow.

VLADIMIR

Sex works when two people have perfect chemistry. It is that simple.

ALISON

I'm really glad you came back.

VLADIMIR

So I hoped.

Vladimir and Alison are the cool kids---not the post-coital cuddling sort. They stake out opposite ends of the bed. Cigarettes. Alcohol. The occasional pulling on of clothing.

ALISON

What were you doing all of this time?

VLADIMIR

My brother went to prison. I dropped everything to visit him, then just stayed in Russia. I didn't do art. It was the end of days.

ALISON

Didn't you paint at all?

VLADIMIR

Any creative impulse I have grows from my curiosity for the world---for the heartbreaking ways we fumble about. Anything I have ever painted has been an attempt to capture that, to solve it for myself then explain it to others. When I lived apart from you, my life was devoid of cheer. That artistic spark was trapped in limbo.

ALISON

You're one of the best painters in the world and you're telling me you stopped painting?

VLADIMIR

One of the best?

ALISON

You know what I mean.

VLADIMIR

My status was irrelevant. No expression is possible when the soul is cramped.

ALISON

Don't you always talk about the enduring power of identity? It's inconceivable you went without painting.

VLADIMIR

Actually, you are correct. I painted. Houses.

ALISON

On commission?

VLADIMIR

Day labor. Very physical work.
(gestures as if working a paint roller)
Not long ago, I was assigned to strip the paint from a corridor wall. I set aside the sandblaster for gentler tools. Spent a night scratching at that surface, flake by flake, carefully uncovering the portrait of a woman.

Vladimir moves to the easel, where the color fills in the canvas as he speaks.

VLADIMIR

With the sunrise, I found her eyes, her hair, nose and lips.

The painting, as it is filled in, reveals its subject to be Alison.

(CONTINUED)

VLADIMIR

I pride myself on being an enlightened man. I can not abide with such nonsense as destiny, yet here I was, my intuition raging at me. My inner voice insisted I return to you.

He lowers himself to one knee.

VLADIMIR

I want to be with you. I wish I could describe my feelings better. I love you with all that I have. I want to make sure you know that.

He opens a jewelry box that holds a ring of gold. A diamond sparkles in its heart.

Alison sits up. Her hair suddenly grows longer, a joyous blond streak splashing down its side. On her shoulders forms a velvet shawl, which she wraps around herself with a majestic air.

ALISON

This all sounds great, but really? Marriage? You hate marriage.

VLADIMIR

Times change. Boys become men.

ALISON

Not you.

VLADIMIR

I may surprise you.

ALISON

So is this really happening? Are we really going to do this?

She extends her hand. Vladimir slips the ring on her finger.

Behind them, between Sebastian and the bed, the shape of a masculine intruder coalesces.

It stands the height of an adult male. Skin attaches itself to the outline. Dark clothes cover the body. As the long hair fills in, it assumes a resemblance to a younger version of Vladimir---only the eyes are selfish and the smile sinister.

Present day Vladimir shields Alison.

(CONTINUED)

VLADIMIR
Do it now, Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN
Do what?

VLADIMIR
The gun.

SEBASTIAN
Oh, right.

Sebastian digs through his pockets for the handgun Vladimir gave him earlier.

The doppelganger knocks down the easel and approaches the bed.

VLADIMIR
(to Sebastian)
Sooner would be better than later.

Sebastian gets hold of himself, presses the gun to the doppelganger's head and squeezes the trigger.

With a deafening boom and a sickening splash, the creature spins into nothingness---leaving Sebastian soaked in ectoplasmic goop---and none too happy about it.

SEBASTIAN
Perfect. Just perfect.

EXT. MALL. PARKING LOT. DAY.

The pavement of the parking lot shines from rain, the sun bright in the sky.

Sebastian leads Vladimir and Alison outside, exiting through a pair of glass doors.

A handicap parking post just outside the exit has fallen onto an abandoned car. Sebastian mechanically lifts the sign and sticks it back into the ground.

SEBASTIAN
(standard complaining to himself)
Of course. Why would I expect anything different?

(CONTINUED)

VLADIMIR

Is maintenance part of your duties?

SEBASTIAN

I started doing it as a newbie. No one ever told me to stop so I kept it going.

VLADIMIR

Does this sign fall down often?

SEBASTIAN

Every day.

VLADIMIR

And you fix it each day?

SEBASTIAN

Somebody has to.

(walking to his car)

What do the two of you think about stopping back at Lamar's for a cocktail? I'm sure he'd be thrilled to see us.

Parked beside Sebastian's hearse is another hearse---a classy model with a sleek finish.

ALISON

Wait. This one belongs to Mortimer. Is he inside the mall?

Vladimir defers the question to Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN

The sad looking guy with gray hair? Yeah, we bumped into him.

ALISON

What's your name again?

SEBASTIAN

(wildly offended)

What's my name?

ALISON

Lead us back inside to find Mortimer. We'll pay you for your time.

SEBASTIAN

No chance in hell.

(CONTINUED)

ALISON
Isn't that a service you provide?

SEBASTIAN
(appealing to Vladimir)
Talk to her, will you?

ALISON
If something happens to Mortimer
I'll never forgive myself.

SEBASTIAN
You don't know what we went through
just to find you. Seriously, take a
hard look at your fiance. And I'm
pretty beat up, too. I've got
bruises on my bruises.

Alison begins moving back to the mall, pulling Vladimir by the hand.

Sebastian trails behind them.

SEBASTIAN
You know, we're lucky to even be
alive.

ALISON
You're probably right.

SEBASTIAN
Probably? Probably?

In a fit, Sebastian topples the handicap sign. Its steel placard penetrates the window of an abandoned automobile. The car's battery is drained, so its alarm squeals a painful death.

SEBASTIAN
Probably.

INT. MALL. FOOD ATRIUM. DAY.

A seductively quiet food court. Immaculate steel tables. At its heart is a potted, overgrown windmill palmetto tree, housed by elevated masonry so a platform exists six feet above the tile of the mall. A garden has been added to it, the whole set-up glamorized by a tangle of roses and hanging bougainvillea.

Sebastian is on edge. He steps in front of Vladimir and Alison.

(CONTINUED)

The floor shakes.

SEBASTIAN
Do you feel that?

VLADIMIR
I do not understand what is
happening.

SEBASTIAN
What's happening is we're royally
screwed.

The aisles seal themselves with walls. From the soulless sheetrock form doors---the type of common framework that suggests closets.

A deep rumbling grows to a thunder clap.

SEBASTIAN
I warned you. Did anybody listen to
me? I mean, I've only been
conducting tours for years.

ALISON
Would you mind not talking?

VLADIMIR
Please. We would feel more
comfortable if we could
concentrate.

SEBASTIAN
Oh. Didn't mean to break your
concentration.

The doors are forced open by crowds of skeletons. Bodies lathered with rags. Shreds of lingering skin. Talons for fingers.

ALISON
Wow.

SEBASTIAN
Yeah. Wow.

ALISON
I'm sorry for dragging you into
this, Vladimir.

VLADIMIR
You did what your heart dictated.
No regrets.

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN

Not for nothing, but you really
should be apologizing to me, too.

Sebastian scans the room and makes a snap decision.

SEBASTIAN

Here goes nothing.

Sebastian charges headlong into the nearest squad of
zombies.

SEBASTIAN

(voiceover)

I'm not an inherently good person.
I try to be, but it goes against my
mental grain.

Sebastian punches out a skeleton's skull. Shoves another
into a group, clearing a path through a doorway.

SEBASTIAN

(voiceover)

Still, I do what I can.

Sebastian takes the open path, running and waving his hands,
trying to draw the herd after him.

SEBASTIAN

Yo! Over here, you creeps!

He dashes through the mall, lungs on fire, finally stopping
outside of Big Discount Books.

INT. BOOKSTORE. DAY

The doors are open, the bookstore an oasis of peace. Muzak
scents the air with placating tones.

Sebastian hobbles inside and supports himself against a
bookshelf. He dares to look back.

He wanders back into the aisle.

INT. MALL. AISLE.

The aisles are deserted. Sebastian's plan to lure away the
skeletons was a dismal failure.

Sebastian takes a deep breath, inspects the knuckles he
broke on the skeleton's skull.

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN
(to himself)
Only an idiot would even think
about going back there.

INT. BOOKSTORE. DAY

Sebastian lights a cigarette and strolls the bookstore. He finds his way to the exit.

EXT. PANDORA. PARKING LOT. DAY.

Sebastian walks by the knocked over handicap sign, its placard embedded into the smashed windshield of an abandoned car.

SEBASTIAN
(to himself)
Not my problem.

Sebastian reaches his own car. Mortimer's hearse remains waiting beside it.

Sebastian spins his keys on his fingers, an internal debate raging within him.

He unlocks his car and sits behind the wheel.

INT. CAR. DAY.

Sebastian goes so far as to start its engine.

SEBASTIAN
(to himself)
I must be the biggest idiot in the
entire world.

He opens the glove compartment and pulls out a flask. He chugs its contents and drops it on the passenger seat.

EXT. MALL. PARKING LOT. DAY.

He passes the abandoned car with the handicap sign smashed in its windshield.

SEBASTIAN
(to himself)
It's not my job. Not my job.

(CONTINUED)

But he pulls the sign out of the windshield and plants it back in the ground.

SEBASTIAN

(voiceover)

A truly good person wouldn't resent doing the right thing.

The sign once again stands tall.

Sebastian goes back inside.

INT. ACCESS STAIRWAY.

Sebastian climbs the steps of a service stairway, panting from the exertion.

SEBASTIAN

(voiceover)

I'm just a dirtbag who hopes if he helps enough people, somehow he can one day look himself in the mirror. Then maybe, just maybe, doing the right thing won't be so damn hard.

He pushes open the door to the roof.

EXT. ROOFTOP. DAY.

The late afternoon sun boils the roof. Sebastian finds the glass center of the foot atrium.

SEBASTIAN

(to himself)

Worst. Plan. Ever.

He takes a pained look below, kicks out a panel of glass, and drops through.

INT. MALL. DAY.

The food atrium is full of skeletons, which crowd the potted windmill palmetto tree at its center.

Vladimir and Alison are taking refuge in it the fronds of the tree and the surrounding garden.

The skeletons seem unable to climb the masonry surrounding the mall's tree-based garden arrangement.

(CONTINUED)

Sebastian falls through the roof, landing ugly in the palm tree.

VLADIMIR

You return at the perfect moment. I have prepared an incantation.

SEBASTIAN

What are you talking about?

ALISON

Let Vladimir focus.

Vladimir performs a series of gestures.

VLADIMIR

This site does not hold a monopoly on sorcery. At another time, I engineered a task similar to yours at a parallel location.

SEBASTIAN

If there were another Pandora, how come I never heard of it?

ALISON

Can't you see Vladimir is super busy?

VLADIMIR

I can address Sebastian's trivia and cast magic at the same time. Likely due to my intellectual superiority.

SEBASTIAN

I don't see where you're going with this.

VLADIMIR

You have a charitable heart, but lack the discipline necessary for magical craftsmanship.

Circles of light grow from Vladimir's hands, expanding as he delivers his explanation.

VLADIMIR

These bony apparitions are no doubt selections from an ugly corner of the soul. I remove all shadows, forcing their bodies to devour themselves!

(CONTINUED)

Blinding light floods the area into a white out.

ALISON
Uh, Vladimir?

VLADIMIR
Yes, my love?

ALISON
You better look at this.

Vision returns, and with it the horrifying sight of a multiplied number of agitated skeletons.

SEBASTIAN
Let me ask you something. Does
'hopeless' mean the same in
Russian?

VLADIMIR
(to Alison)
Despite our doom, I am not sorry
for coming here. Your heart was
sealed. This visit reopened it to
me.

ALISON
Our story will not end here. I
couldn't tell you how I sense this,
but I am entirely sure that you and
I are going to be just fine.

SEBASTIAN
Oh, yeah? What does your intuition
say about me?

VLADIMIR
Why so gloomy?

SEBASTIAN
Oh, I don't know. Maybe it's the
whole dying thing.

Alison steps forward. Her tone leaves no room for discussion.

ALISON
I'll take care of this.
(to Vladimir)
I didn't just cry when you left. My
nights were spent dreaming of your
return. I devoted days to planning
our time together. Even while you
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ALISON (cont'd)
were gone, I mapped out our story.
I know this is our time. This place
responds to the power of intention.
I intend for us to share a life.

She inches closer to the edge of the platform. A throng of skeletons test the limits of the masonry at her feet.

ALISON
(studying the tortured faces
below)
There is so much pain in the world.
Imagine if we took some of the
magic and put it towards ending the
suffering. We need to lead with our
hearts.

In a manner similar to Vladimir's earlier attempt, an aura builds around Alison, her glow emanating from her torso.

The color display grows intense, bubble gum pink forming into a lifesaver halo. Beams streak from her core all across the atrium, forcing back the skeletons.

Vladimir and Sebastian watch in astonishment.

Skeletons clatter to the ground, bones rebounding off the floor, dancing in the lightshow before crashing to the tile.

The light around Alison cools. She faces Vladimir, her eyes wide with anticipation.

ALISON
All that time I spent with you,
some magic was bound to rub off.

VLADIMIR
How do you always manage to dream
up such amazing ideas?

ALISON
(meaning Vladimir)
I had a great teacher. He conveyed
to me the power of symbolism.

Vladimir takes Alison's hand and fondles the engagement ring.

VLADIMIR
I trust you understand its power.

(CONTINUED)

Sebastian watches Vladimir and Alison with jaded eyes. His critical thoughts interrupted, his eyes drawn back to the atrium floor.

The scattered bones stir and reassemble into skeletons.

SEBASTIAN

Hate to disturb your moment.

Vladimir and Alison turn to face the atrium. The skeletons, limbs restored, grow brazen, crowding the asylum.

VLADIMIR

This is starting to get serious.

ALISON

Mortimer!

As skeletons rattle their bony fingers against the rock ledge, Mortimer stands at the perimeter near one of the closet door entranceways.

Mortimer peers across the field of skeletons, a puzzled look on his face.

ALISON

Turn back! It's too dangerous.

Mortimer, with an inscrutable expression, walks a revolution around the atrium, inspecting the exits with a detached air.

VLADIMIR

What do you imagine your Mortimer Banks is doing?

ALISON

I don't know and I don't care. He needs to get out of there.

The skeletons rage, pushing at the stone garden at their most threatening.

A harsh set of hanging lights switch on, leading the atrium the feel of an operating room.

ALISON

Oh, no.

On the perimeter, Mortimer is now wearing a medical apron and latex gloves.

The closet doors have been replaced by rows of empty wooden coffins.

ALISON

He's going to get himself killed.

VLADIMIR

Wait and see. Your Mortimer Banks knows what he is doing.

A gang of skeletons turn their horrifying frames toward Mortimer, their nails extended like blades.

With a graceful air, Mortimer presses an arm to his waist and performs a courteous bow.

The skeletons pause.

Classical music, an elegant waltz, plays over the mall's speakers.

Mortimer raises a gloved hand and gestures for the skeletons to head toward the coffins.

The skeletons acknowledge his leadership and file into the wooden boxes.

With a flourish, Mortimer directs them both in groups and individually, moving things along at an efficient clip.

VLADIMIR

Didn't I assure you that the gravedigger would triumph over the dead?

The last skeleton pulls the final coffin shut.

Mortimer crosses to the group, his heels trumpeting on the tile.

MORTIMER

Given what I do for a living, those pile of bones are what you might call my peeps. Skeleton wrangler is a stretch from mortician, but this is Pandora, where you can be anything you want.

(a meaningful look at Alison and Vladimir)

Well, almost anything.

The scene shifts, kitchen walls falling into place. From the floor, a kitchen booth rises. The garden lowers and disintegrates, palm fronds dripping into ether.

Vladimir and Sebastian are separated from Alison, positioned at a dining table somewhat removed from the kitchen.

(CONTINUED)

Vladimir gives Sebastian a knowing look.

VLADIMIR

It is only fitting. He has earned
the right to plead his case.

INT. KITCHEN.

Mortimer sits in the kitchen booth. His tie hangs at a nervous angle.

Alison lingers at a cautious distance from the table.

MORTIMER

You're too far away, Alison. Have a seat.

ALISON

Not yet. That's a nice suit. Have I seen it before?

MORTIMER

This old thing?

ALISON

It's very fancy. Listen, I couldn't know things would end between us so abruptly.

MORTIMER

End between us?

ALISON

That's right.

MORTIMER

How can I win you back?

ALISON

Mortimer, love doesn't work that way.

Mortimer studies her, looking for any sign of hope.

MORTIMER

Ask yourself, if Vladimir left you once, what's stopping him from disappearing again?

Alison taps her forehead.

(CONTINUED)

ALISON

When you have a history of mental illness, it is difficult to feel secure. There are no guarantees. Vladimir might run away. I might crack up. A person like me doesn't run on certainties. Never have. My world is all about what is possible.

MORTIMER

I've never understood that.

ALISON

Few people can.

She sits opposite him.

ALISON

How are you?

MORTIMER

I'm in mourning. But not in mourning over losing you. It's mourning for the way I thought my life was going to turn out.

ALISON

I have certainly felt that way.

MORTIMER

Do you love him?

ALISON

Very much.

MORTIMER

Was it all bad, being with me?

ALISON

No.

MORTIMER

If Vladimir had never come back, would you have stayed with me?

ALISON

But he is back.

MORTIMER

It's hypothetical.

(CONTINUED)

ALISON

Do these type of questions help anyone?

MORTIMER

Maybe I shouldn't have been so preoccupied. If only I handled things differently.

ALISON

Hey, you did your best. You're really great. I wish I had something to give you.

MORTIMER

Give me?

ALISON

Like a card. Or a journal. Something to tell you how much you meant to me.

MORTIMER

Meant?

ALISON

Mean.

MORTIMER

(an alternate definition--as in 'cruel')

Mean.

ALISON

I'm sorry. Can we still be friends?

MORTIMER

I don't know.

ALISON

We can't?

MORTIMER

I haven't formed an opinion just yet.

They share a chuckle.

ALISON

I have to go. Would you walk me out?

(CONTINUED)

MORTIMER

No.

ALISON

You're staying?

MORTIMER

(to himself)

I'll just sit here for a while.

She brings her hands to his face, brushing her fingers over his cheeks, then leaves.

He rests his jaw on an open palm.

MORTIMER

(to himself)

I don't know what I'm going to do.

INT. KITCHEN.

Alison joins Vladimir and Sebastian in their secluded end of the kitchen.

ALISON

I for one would like to get out of here.

VLADIMIR

We stay.

SEBASTIAN

(alarmed)

Stay? Why?

VLADIMIR

To witness the conclusion of the saga of Mortimer Banks.

SEBASTIAN

Are you mental or something?

ALISON

(taking charge)

Vladimir, I'd like to go.

SEBASTIAN

(to Vladimir)

Listen to the lady. She's talking sense for once.

(CONTINUED)

ALISON
I resent that.

SEBASTIAN
I'm trying to help.

ALISON
Let's go, Vladimir.

SEBASTIAN
Yeah. Let's get while the getting
is good.

VLADIMIR
I refuse to leave on such a dismal
note. It would curse our engagement
with a negative connotation.

SEBASTIAN
Are you serious? Connotation? What
do you do, carry around a
dictionary and look up words to
torture me with?

VLADIMIR
We stay.

ALISON
Vladimir.

VLADIMIR
I have decided. Watch.

SEBASTIAN
Last chance to listen to reason.

VLADIMIR
You will enjoy this.

SEBASTIAN
Will I now?

VLADIMIR
Don't Americans live for happy
endings?

SEBASTIAN
We're also partial to disaster
movies.

Vladimir gestures for them to close ranks. He wraps an arm
around Alison and lifts a hand in the air, his fingers
flaring.

(CONTINUED)

VLADIMIR
Extinguish your cigarette. Smoke
interferes with my spell.

SEBASTIAN
Your spell?

VLADIMIR
Indulge me.

Sebastian steals a final drag and crushes his cigarette.

Vladimir pulls Alison close to him and gestures. It is a
cloaking action, rendering the three of them invisible.

VLADIMIR
(whispering)
Remain very still.

INT. KITCHEN.

Mortimer sits at the table nursing a glass of wine.

The kitchen door swings open.

In walks a wolf. Its long ears cut regal triangles. It
approaches Mortimer and gazes up at him with piercing eyes.

MORTIMER
(sitting up)
I can't believe this.

Sebastian's narration occurs while the wolf becomes a woman
(Rhonda).

SEBASTIAN
(voiceover)
Pandora is a bad influence on its
visitors. It has a way of changing
them.

A rapid transformation takes place. The wolf sits on its
hind legs and sheds its fur, which becomes the tan flesh of
a woman.

SEBASTIAN
(voiceover)
People get reckless and forget
themselves. They get careless.

Waist-length hair covers her body as she reaches for a coat
rack for a leather trenchcoat. She slips into a waiting pair
of military boots.

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN

(voiceover)

They lose sight of right and wrong.

Mortimer lowers his wine glass, a look of concern on his face.

SEBASTIAN

(voiceover)

They slip past the point of reason.

The woman (Rhonda) pulls her hair behind her back and secures it with an elastic band, which binds it to her scalp.

SEBASTIAN

(voiceover)

They make bad choices in the heat of the moment.

She pulls a make up kit from the jacket and applies a white foundation, then paints on black lipstick and draws deep lines of mascara.

SEBASTIAN

(voiceover)

But how could I blame them? After all, everyone wants to believe in magic.

The quick-change routine complete, she plants a booted heel on the edge of the kitchen booth and taps a ringed knuckle on the counter.

RHONDA

Are you solo this evening?

MORTIMER

I'm sorry?

RHONDA

The wine. Are you drinking alone?

MORTIMER

It's a lifelong habit.

RHONDA

(points at herself)

I'm the same way. It's not that I crave solitude, only that I'd rather be alone than waste time with losers.

(CONTINUED)

MORTIMER

Sit down. I'll find another glass.
Unless you think I'm just another
loser.

RHONDA

Look at me.

MORTIMER

Yes?

RHONDA

Really look at me.

MORTIMER

I certainly am.

RHONDA

Now listen. You are Mortimer Banks.
You are anything but a loser.

MORTIMER

Have we met before?

RHONDA

Not officially. Although you must
have seen me around. I've made the
pilgrimage to your mortuary several
times. I have attended over a
hundred funerals, so I speak with
authority. Your work is truly
exceptional.

(offers her hand)

Rhonda Wildstorm.

Mortimer accepts her hand. They shake.

MORTIMER

Have you had a rough few years?

RHONDA

I don't understand your question.

MORTIMER

I'm asking if you've lost many
people in your life.

RHONDA

I have, but that's not... I live
for funerals. When the obituaries
list your place as host, I'm there.
Unless I have rehearsal.

(CONTINUED)

MORTIMER

Are you an actress?

RHONDA

Do I look like an actress?

MORTIMER

I couldn't say.

RHONDA

Well, I'm not.

(makes drumming motion)

Musician.

MORTIMER

Drums?

RHONDA

Percussion. Like I was saying, your shit is tight.

(the double entendre of a sexual invitation)

My dream is to have you bury me someday.

MORTIMER

How flattering.

(straightens his tie)

Now that you mention it, I do have the feeling that I've seen you before, although I could not specify exactly where and when. We certainly have never spoken. I would remember someone like you.

RHONDA

Someone like me?

MORTIMER

I mean, someone with such a deep interest in funerals.

RHONDA

Not just the ceremony. The preparation. Your eye for detail. The care you take in dressing the body. Your stylish selection of coffins.

(curls her lip in disgust)

Your competitors do shit work. All they do is stuff and fluff.

(CONTINUED)

MORTIMER

Stuff and fluff?

RHONDA

Your competitors smear paint on a corpse to make it look less dead. You recognize that mortuism is not hairdressing. The deceased must be presented in a specific manner. There are requirements when one is room temperature.

MORTIMER

You know a great deal about the undertaker's craft.

RHONDA

It's a dying profession. This wine is shit.

Rhonda empties her glass--and Mortimer's--into the sink. She pulls a bottle of her own from the cabinet.

MORTIMER

(settling into this chat)

You know, I have a waiting list years long.

RHONDA

Understandable. People must be dying to get in.

MORTIMER

Cut that out.

RHONDA

(pours wine)

Taste this.

MORTIMER

You know, I'm used to the jokes. I hear so many graveyard jokes, I'm practically buried in them.

RHONDA

I knew you had a lighter side. The guys in my band bet against that, but they don't understand gallows humor.

MORTIMER

Few people do.

(CONTINUED)

Mortimer's mood takes a turn for the worse, a memory triggered in him about Alison.

MORTIMER

(standing)

I don't want to offend you, but I was about to leave.

RHONDA

Wait one second. This place is tabula rasa.

MORTIMER

Tabula what?

RHONDA

Tabula rasa. It's Latin for a blank slate. Literally anything can happen. With all the possibilities, do you really think you're ready to go?

MORTIMER

Ms. Wildstorm. It is Miss Wildstorm, or is it Mrs.?

RHONDA

It's Miss. Definitely Miss.

MORTIMER

Well, Ms. Wildstorm, I'll tell you something about myself.

RHONDA

Whatever it is, you can trust me. I would never tell a soul.

MORTIMER

As you might know, my mortuary is unrestricted, meaning all walks of life are welcome. There is no denomination of a particular faith. Now, this sort of fence-sitting doesn't always work. Every once in a while, the family of the departed ask me what I believe in. They essentially want to know if I believe in God.

RHONDA

I don't. Religion is for sheep.

(CONTINUED)

MORTIMER

Given what I do for a living, what I wade through, the messes I clean up, I am challenged to believe in anything. That is my secret.

RHONDA

What is?

MORTIMER

Despite the big show, I can't believe in it. Today, more than most, I wish I could. So no, I won't linger here, because at the end of the day, life is pointless. That's how I honestly feel.

RHONDA

You and me both. Would you be available for dinner sometime?

MORTIMER

Are you playing a joke at my expense?

RHONDA

That's a jaded perspective. I'm asking you out.

MORTIMER

(leans against the table)
This is a lot to analyze.

RHONDA

Do you think this is easy for me? Say yes, or so help me I'll lose my shit.

MORTIMER

This is all so sudden. I worry that it's too soon.

RHONDA

Are you telling me no?

MORTIMER

You would be the classic rebound.

RHONDA

Listen to me. Nobody tells me no. Nobody. Not even the world's greatest mortician.

(CONTINUED)

MORTIMER

Just this morning, I hoped to win someone back. This is all too overwhelming.

RHONDA

I know all about that shit show. It's Alison's loss. Really. Sometimes the people with the best hearts get hurt the worst. Let me take you some place quiet. We'll have a drink.

MORTIMER

Dinner and drinks. That would be fine.

RHONDA

(with a goth pose)

Maybe we could go dancing after. If the mood strikes. Let's decide together.

MORTIMER

(mimics her pose)

Groovy.

RHONDA

Saturday night. I'll pick you up. Eleven o'clock.

MORTIMER

Isn't that a bit late?

RHONDA

Creatures of the night keep vampire hours. Don't worry. I'll get you back to your coffin by sunrise.

MORTIMER

What happens then? Will turn back into a dog?

RHONDA

It was a wolf, and only if the moon is full.

MORTIMER

(opens an engraved card case)

My home address is on there.

(CONTINUED)

RHONDA
Is your house haunted?

MORTIMER
(flirting)
Not yet.

RHONDA
I like your card.

MORTIMER
It's my personal card.

RHONDA
Black. Nice touch. And you try to
act like you're not twisted.

MORTIMER
Listen, we really need to give the
mortuary thing a rest.

RHONDA
Oh, should we put it to rest?

Mortimer and Rhonda gaze at each other, a romance blooming
between them like a black orchid.

INT. KITCHEN.

Vladimir holds a hand above his head, maintaining the spell
of invisibility.

Alison claps her hands together, pleased by Mortimer's good
fortune.

ALISON
How marvelous.

Sebastian tugs Vladimir's sweater.

SEBASTIAN
Let's get the hell out of here.

EXT. MALL. PARKING LOT. DAY.

Sebastian leads Vladimir and Alison out of the mall.

A weird magical gore cakes Sebastian's suit with a
combination of ectoplasm and blood.

(CONTINUED)

VLADIMIR
(to Sebastian)
Sunlight is the best disinfectant.

Alison steps away from Vladimir, arresting their progress.

VLADIMIR
(to Alison)
What is it? Didn't we have an
amazing time?

ALISON
It was great, but it's not real
life.

VLADIMIR
I thought we agreed on no more
doubts.

ALISON
I believe you're here to stay,
Vladimir. It's only that, well,
you're placing your trust in me.

VLADIMIR
Yes. So?

ALISON
What I have to say will sound weak
to you.

VLADIMIR
Speak your truth. Let me decide my
own mind.

ALISON
(aware of the irony)
Today was one of my good days. Most
of the time, I'm a catastrophe.
Just walking around trying to feed
myself and get through it all, I'm
one bad thought away from an
episode. I'm probably to let you
down. That thought terrifies me.

VLADIMIR
How do you expect me to react to
this?

ALISON
If I were you, I would make a run
for it.

(CONTINUED)

VLADIMIR

Been there, done that. Give me your hand. We are different, you and I. You hope for unlimited possibilities, while I imagine my path into understanding the world. Varied approaches, but each of us, in our unique way, perform the intimate act of diving into every single moment. You inspire me, Alison. The fierce effort you put forth. I identify with your courage. So if one morning you refuse to get out of bed, I will join you there until we find the motivation to challenge our waking hours together.

ALISON

Can we play our game?

VLADIMIR

The word association?

ALISON

Yes. One round.

VLADIMIR

Why do you like this game so much?

ALISON

(delighted by the question)
We trade words. And in the spaces between them is a middle zone, a rainbow edge where our words mingle and blur to provide something more. Your art comes from that middle zone, Vladimir, like all magic.

VLADIMIR

I am convinced. Let's play.

ALISON

You don't mind?

VLADIMIR

Alison, I am willing to spend a lifetime whispering with you back and forth.

Sebastian inserts himself into their discussion.

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN

How about you two get on with it,
so you'll actually have a lifetime?

VLADIMIR

(to Sebastian)

My mother, rest her soul, taught me
never to interrupt a talk between
lovers.

SEBASTIAN

Yeah? Well, my mother told me never
to hang out with idiots. Now we're
both breaking the rules.

VLADIMIR

Wait for us.

SEBASTIAN

The longer we stay here, the worse
are odds are of getting out.

VLADIMIR

Only a few minutes longer.

SEBASTIAN

(muttering to himself)

Why do I even bother talking?

Sebastian pulls open the trunk of the hearse. There is no
coffin, so he stretches out in the back and sulks.

Vladimir and Alison cast their eyes at each other, their
word association resonating with reassurance.

ALISON

Desire.

VLADIMIR

Fire.

ALISON

Water.

VLADIMIR

Paint.

ALISON

Sunlight.

VLADIMIR

Ocean.

(CONTINUED)

Motion. ALISON

Travel. VLADIMIR

Escape. ALISON

Adventure. VLADIMIR

Night. ALISON

Passion. VLADIMIR

Laughter. ALISON

Love. VLADIMIR

Love. ALISON

VLADIMIR
Yes, my love. Everything is going
to be fine.

SEBASTIAN
(from the belly of the hearse)
Will you two get in the car
already?

INT. CAR.

Sebastian is behind the wheel. Through the rear-view mirror, he sneaks a peek at the back seat, where Vladimir and Alison huddle together, gazing out the window as the forest zip by.

EXT. HIGHWAY.

Approaching a crossroads where two major intersections meet, Sebastian's hearse pauses at a red light.

INT. CAR.

Alison notices something outside. She points out the rear passenger side window.

ALISON
How about that?

VLADIMIR
Sebastian, tell me that we are seeing the same thing.

EXT. HIGHWAY.

Directly across the highway, a teenage boy (Cookie) walks with two adults (the spirits of Cookie's birth parents).

An amber glow surrounds the adults's bodies, which shimmer in and out of focus.

Cookie lacks his backpack and some of his gear, but otherwise appears healthy.

INT. CAR.

The hearse remains stopped at a light.

SEBASTIAN
That's Cookie all right.

VLADIMIR
Are you absolutely certain?

SEBASTIAN
If I'm lying, I'm dying.

VLADIMIR
Pull over to the side.

SEBASTIAN
What?

VLADIMIR
Right there. Pull over. There is something I must do.

SEBASTIAN
We have a toilet at Pandora Tours. It's only a few minutes away.

(CONTINUED)

VLADIMIR

Pull over right now. This surprise must be showcased by an appropriate display.

SEBASTIAN

(to Alison)

Do you have any idea what he's talking about?

EXT. HIGHWAY.

The hearse pulls over to the side of the road, on the opposite side of the highway as Cookie and the spirits of his birth parents.

Vladimir steps out.

VLADIMIR

Keep the engine running. This will only take a few glorious moments.

Sebastian swings open his door and jumps out, waving and hollering in Cookie's direction.

SEBASTIAN

Cookie! Good to see ya, kid!

VLADIMIR

You have a penchant for rising to the occasion, Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN

How do you figure?

VLADIMIR

Only a minute ago, you were reluctant to even stop the car. Look at you now.

SEBASTIAN

Forget about me. Look at him.

Across the road, Cookie waves. He shouts something, but his voice is muted by the sound of passing cars.

SEBASTIAN

What did he say?

Vladimir turns toward the hearse and pulls himself onto its long roof.

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN

Hey! You're leaving a dent!

Alison, still inside, warps on the roof of the car.

ALISON

Is this really necessary?

VLADIMIR

How many times do people come back
from the dead?

SEBASTIAN

We jumped to conclusions. Cookie
probably wasn't even---

VLADIMIR

My point, Sebastian, is that we
believed that young man was lost to
us, and we have been rewarded now
with a miracle.

SEBASTIAN

Yeah, it's awesome, but you're
wrecking my car with those boots.

Vladimir brings his hands across his chest. Fingers flared,
he spreads his arms, casting a whopper of a spell.

The sky fills with the towering image of Cookie's radiant
smile. Eyes the size of moons blaze with wild joy.
Mountainous dimples carved of light testify to the power of
today. The projected face is a globe atop the forest.

The real Cookie, standing alongside the road with the
spirits of his birth parents, presses his hands against his
cheeks in astonishment, then starts jumping up and down in
glee.

Vladimir and Sebastian gaze across the highway.

VLADIMIR

"Thank you."

SEBASTIAN

Uh, you're welcome.

VLADIMIR

No, Sebastian. That was what Cookie
was saying before. He was thanking
you for all your help.

EXT. HIGHWAY. SUNSET.

The late sun collapses over the horizon. A neon circle from Crescent Beach's Ferris wheel switches to life. The hearse zips by.

INT. CAR.

Vladimir fills the cab of the hearse with his robust laugh.

VLADIMIR

Excuse me for the non sequitur, but I must reassert how much I appreciate your automobile.

SEBASTIAN

Is that why you left footprints on the roof?

VLADIMIR

It is amazing. This vehicle. Once used to cart bodies, now employed to deliver dreams.

ALISON

Can we give the hearse thing a break?

VLADIMIR

Does it remind you too much of your last boyfriend?

ALISON

Not funny.

VLADIMIR

(caressing the arm rest)

Is it not a strange ritual? The one time we all get to ride in a car that we equate with luxury and excess is when we mourn the death of a beloved?

SEBASTIAN

You're confusing a hearse with a limo.

VLADIMIR

To the passenger on his final drive, is there any difference?

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN

I never looked at it that way.

VLADIMIR

You are a fortunate soul. To have a career in magic.

SEBASTIAN

Lucky me.

VLADIMIR

(a big idea)

Ah! What inspiration!

(to Alison)

Do you know what I think? We should return to Pandora to celebrate our honeymoon.

ALISON

You think so?

SEBASTIAN

Come back here? You two? Let me tell you, both of you made this trip uglier than it had to be. I officially ban you from Crescent Beach.

VLADIMIR

Are you serious?

SEBASTIAN

You better believe it. If you come back, I won't be the one taking you on tour, dragging your fat out of the fire. I'll be the one you'll have to watch out for. What do you have to say about that?

(cranes his neck to see their expression)

What?

Vladimir and Alison gaze at Sebastian in awestruck disgust.

VLADIMIR

(gesturing at Sebastian's face)

Quite a lot of blood still. And that nasty discharge.

SEBASTIAN

How do I look?

(CONTINUED)

ALISON

When we first met, you seemed defensive, yet eager to please. Now you're full-on bad ass---and a little frightening.

SEBASTIAN

Frightening?

VLADIMIR

Truly.

SEBASTIAN

Well, after everything I've been through, I'd better be.

Sebastian's face is a tale of wondrous gore, a mask of disaster. A grin plays on his chapped lips, a skeletal smile of ownership.

INT. PANDORA TOURS. BATHROOM. DAY.

Several weeks later, Sebastian faces the bathroom mirror at Pandora Tours. A stranded light bulb flickers and whines, but the gloom of a March afternoon peeks through a barred window, supplementing the light just enough for him to arrange what's left of his hair.

His tie zips straight down his chest, the buttons of his shirt securely fastened. For a lifelong drunk, this is as clean as it gets.

He lights a cigarette and strolls into the hallway.

INT. HALLWAY.

Sebastian passes through the hallway, which is littered with purses and luggage of tourists who never made it back from Pandora.

Larry Letterman is stretched out on the couch, nursing a hangover, the shifting of his bony knees the only evidence of his semi-conscious state.

LARRY

It's a slow day. List these bags online.

SEBASTIAN

(not the first time they've discussed this)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN (cont'd)
Conflict of interests, Larry.

LARRY
How so?

SEBASTIAN
Come on. We've been over this.
There's too much of a temptation to
profit from tourist misfortune.

LARRY
They don't need this stuff where
they went.

SEBASTIAN
Do it yourself then.

LARRY
I would, but I can't make heads or
tails of those online auctions.

SEBASTIAN
(ignoring Larry)
I hate my life. I hate my life.

INT. OFFICE. PANDORA TOURS. DAY.

The picture window of the office is a sheet of rain.
Sebastian looks out into the monotonous storm. Through the
doorframe behind Sebastian, Larry's feet are seen hanging
off the hallway couch.

Sebastian pours a shot of booze into his coffee.

There is a hard knock at the door. Sebastian looks out the
window, where a postal truck speeds off the lot, barreling
onto the highway with zero regard for cross traffic.

SEBASTIAN
(muttering)
What's the hurry? Why don't you
stay and, what's the word for it?
Oh, yeah, why don't you stay and be
polite?

He opens the door and two packages fall in.

He cuts away the wrapping of the first package, which is
addressed to Larry. Cyrillic letters adorn an imported
bottle of vodka.

(CONTINUED)

SEBASTIAN
(projecting his voice into the
hallway)
Larry?

LARRY
(still in hallway, where he
will remain)
What?

SEBASTIAN
The Russian sent you a bottle of
vodka.

LARRY
A Russian? Who's that?

SEBASTIAN
The painter. Your best friend.

LARRY
Right. Just leave the bottle beside
the rum.

SEBASTIAN
Do you want to read his note?

LARRY
He wrote me a note?

SEBASTIAN
Do you want to read it?

LARRY
It's a closed account, son. Now let
an old man sleep.

SEBASTIAN
Whatever you say.

Sebastian reads the note.

VLADIMIR
(voiceover)
Dearest Mr. Letterman. Every great
favor demands its speedy return.
Your superior service exceeded our
expectation. Had it not been for
you and you alone...

SEBASTIAN
Gimme a break.

(CONTINUED)

A jealous Sebastian crushes the note into a ball and tosses it at the trash container. It misses.

Sebastian sizes up the second package---a larger one addressed to him. He tears through a bulletproof shield of wrapping, pausing to read a note with his name on it.

VLADIMIR

(voiceover)

An artist takes pains to prepare his work before diving in, but I produced this painting in one session. If I may speak directly, I strongly feel that this belongs in your capable hands.

Sebastian peels away the last armor of wrapping and finds a cinematic portrait of the Crescent Beach Mall.

Lines of stores carve a tower into a crowded sky, where palm fronds and the extended arms of spreading oaks compete with clouds for air space.

Sebastian's rundown hearse idles by the entrance to the food atrium.

The camera enters the painting.

EXT. PARKING LOT. PANDORA.

Leaning against the hearse, in painstaking detail, is a figure of Sebastian himself.

The picture comes to life, Sebastian within the frame. His eyes challenge the viewer to step inside the mall, smoke rising from his cigarette in the line of an exclamation point.

A sugar touch of sunshine lands on him. The day, along with everyone, is attempting a fresh start.

THE END