FRESH BLOOD SELECT
AN OCTOBER WEDDING

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FADE IN:

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - LIBRARY - SUNSET

TIME CARD: 3 Years Ago

A modern, empty reading room. 
Autumnal light falls on dusty bookshelves. 
A large window frames a back yard by the woods. 
A table sits out back with streamers twisting in the wind. 
Voices SING HAPPY BIRTHDAY from just around the corner and--

We do not cut away. 
We do not move outside. 
We are trapped here for one long take.

OUTSIDE, in the window, parents carry a cake to the table. 
They look around. Walk away. Searching.

   CORA (O.S.)
   Joan? Joan, where are you?

INSIDE, JOAN WHITMAN (20s) slinks out of the curtains. 
Bright-eyed. Bookish. A shrinking violet about to bloom. 
In a modern shirt-dress with Runic Tattoos on each wrist. 
She hides under a desk, holding a small Globe. 
She spins the globe. Taps on it. 
The door OPENS.

   CORA (O.S.)
   There you are!

Her sister CORA LEE WHITMAN (20s) walks in. 
Same modern shirt-dress. Same runic tattoos.

   CORA
   I've been looking all over for--

   JOAN
   You didn't find me. I'm not here. 
   Go away.

Joan spins the globe. Taps on it again. Sulking. 
Cora shuts the door and sits with her.

   CORA
   Where's the globe sending you today?

   JOAN
   Switzerland.

   CORA
   Oo, can I come with?
JOAN
Only if you can keep up. As soon as I get off the plane, I'm climbing the Matterhorn.

CORA
Then can we ski down the mountain? And go get Swiss hot chocolate?

JOAN
With you, of course.

Cora puts her head on Joan's shoulder. Joan smiles. 
While OUTSIDE...
In the window behind them...
The woods move... Something is coming...

JOAN
Mother and Father are giving me the deed to the homestead, aren't they?

CORA
...Yes. They are.

JOAN
So you got a car for your fiftieth birthday and I get to run the family ranch. You go wherever you want but I'm stuck here. (off Cora's look)
What is it?

Cora goes to speak-- then pulls out a gift-wrapped BOX.

CORA
Happy birthday.

JOAN
Cora! You shouldn't ha--

CORA
Open it.

Joan opens it as...
OUTSIDE...
In the window...
In the distance...
A row of cloaked figures emerges from the woods...
Red robes... identical white masks... watching...

INSIDE, Joan opens the box to find a DSLR camera.
JOAN
Oh my gods! How did you--

CORA
For our trip to Switzerland.

JOAN
But I was just talking, we're not really--

CORA
Look in the box.

Joan looks as...
OUTSIDE, the row of cloaked figures walks toward them...
INSIDE, Joan pulls out a ROLL OF CASH and PASSPORTS.

JOAN
Cora Lee, where did you--

CORA
We can go anywhere you want--

JOAN
Where did you get this?

CORA
I got a job in town, saved up, paid a counterfeiter--

JOAN
You got a job in town? That's against the edicts! What if Mother saw you--

CORA
Listen to me! If you ever want to see the world we have to leave now!

JOAN
What are you talking about?

CORA
I-- I eavesdropped on the Council of Elders and they're going to--

AUGUSTUS (O.S.)
There's my birthday girl!

AUGUSTUS and OCTAVIA WHITMAN (50s) enter.
A boisterous man at war with his mind-- Lear in the storm.
A fierce queen of the home-- reminiscent of Lady Macbeth.
Their FATHER and MOTHER bearing the same wrist tattoos.
Bringing a present.
OCTAVIA
Did you two start opening presents without us?

Cora jumps to her feet-- kicking the box behind her--

CORRA
Oh, no, it's nothing much, just--

AUGUSTUS
Well, I can't wait anymore-- Here!

He shoves his PRESENT at Joan. She takes it-- but he won't let go.

AUGUSTUS
You know how much I love you, Joanie?

JOAN
Yes, Father.

AUGUSTUS
You know you're my compass, my North Star, and I'd be lost without you?

JOAN
Father!

OCTAVIA
She knows, Augustus! Let her open it.

AUGUSTUS
Alright-- but act surprised, okay?

Joan tears the wrapping as...
OUTSIDE, the cloaked figures come halfway across the yard...
INSIDE, Joan opens the present to find...

A white MASK with hands over the mouth-- THE SILENT ONE.

JOAN
What is it?

AUGUSTUS
I know it's early. I didn't get mine until my Hundred-and-First birthday.

OCTAVIA
But you've been such a good and faithful daughter, so we decided--

AUGUSTUS
It's your Masking Day today!
Joan stands.  
Turns.  
Looks--  
OUTSIDE, the **cloaked figures** are right at the window--  
INSIDE, Joan stifles a scream--  

    **JOAN**  
Father, I-- I don't think I'm ready--  

    **AUGUSTUS**  
Nonsense! Of course you're rea--  

    **CORAL**  
We can still go, Joan. We can--  

    **OCTAVIA**  
Go? Go where?  

    **JOAN**  
But Cora, I--  

    **CORAL**  
Right now, Joan--  

    **AUGUSTUS**  
What are you girls--  

    **CORAL**  
Now!  

The sisters RUN FOR IT AS--  
**THE KINSMEN** enter.  
Seven figures in red robes and identical masks.  
Blocking the door.  
Finding Cora's box.  
Handing it to Augustus.  

    **AUGUSTUS**  
Cora. Oh, Cora. How could you--  

    **CORAL**  
I hate you! I hate you! Don't make  
Joan do this! Don't you--  

Augustus flicks his hand--  
Two Kinsmen DRAG CORA AWAY-- out the door-- out of sight--  

    **CORAL (O.S.)**  
No! Let me go! NO! JOAN! JOA--  

    **JOAN**  
Cora! Stop it! Let her g--  

Octavia SLAPS Joan--
OCTAVIA

Today is the day you become a woman,
Joan Marie Whitman. Now kneel.

Joan kneels.
The Kinsmen HUM in unison.
Circling Joan.
Blindfolding her.
Passing around a staff and two masks--
A mask with hands over ears for Augustus-- THE DEAF ONE--
A mask with hands over eyes for Octavia-- THE BLIND ONE--
Augustus SLAMS DOWN THE STAFF.

The HIGH ELDER (60s) enters.
Everyone bows their heads.
He makes his way to Joan.
Looming over Joan's reddening face.

HIGH ELDER
(low, thick, menacing)
Who kneels before the True Family?

JOAN
A child who seeks her inheritance:
the Three True Gifts.

THE KINSMEN
True Sight, True Hearing, True Touch:
the gifts of the powers of the mind.

HIGH ELDER
Do you swear on your blood, on the
blood of your father and of the first
fathers, that you will hold sacred
and secret these Three True Gifts?

JOAN
I s-swear.

The High Elder unsheathes a DAGGER--
Joan hears it-- moves to flee--
Octavia and Augustus hold her down--
The High Elder raises the dagger--
Joan struggles and--
The High Elder cuts his own hand.
The Kinsmen produce a BOWL to collect his blood.

HIGH ELDER
You were a child who seeks. Now you
are a woman who is found. Drink.

The bowl is handed to Joan.
Joan swallows hard... then sips the blood.
The staff SLAMS down--
The Kinsmen take away the bowl-- rip off her blindfold--

HIGH ELDER
Rise! Rise and take your rightful place among us as... the Keeper.

The High Elder hands Joan her birthday gift mask.

JOAN
High Elder, what does the Keeper do?

The High Elder points over to--
The Kinsmen dragging in A BLOODY, BEATEN MAN.
This is EMMETT, 40s. Brilliant. Tough. Half-dead.

EMMETT
Please... I'm sorry...

JOAN
Oh my-- Are you alright? What-- What happened to him? Who is he?

The Kinsmen pass around a photo of Emmett-- A PRESS BADGE--

HIGH ELDER
He is an Outsider. A journalist.

EMMETT
I won't... tell anyone... if you... let me go I--

Emmett grabs onto Joan’s shoe--
Octavia kicks Emmett-- HARD-- shutting him up--

OCTAVIA
We caught him taking pictures of us. Writing about us.

THE KINSMEN
The silence must be kept.

JOAN
...What do you want me to do?

HIGH ELDER
Earn your birthright. Empty his mind.

THE KINSMEN
The silence must be kept.

JOAN
No! That could kill him! I can't--
OCTAVIA
Hush. You're a woman now. You'll make a fine Keeper just like your Father.

JOAN
Father, you've done this before? You've... killed people?

AUGUSTUS
I kept this family safe. Now you will too.

The Kinsmen HUM... lay hands on one another...
Revealing the same RUNIC TATTOOS on their wrists...
Their left hands touching their left neighbor's tattoo...
Their right hands clasping their right neighbor's throat...

JOAN
What is this? What are you doing?

HIGH ELDER
Endowing you with your inheritance.

THE KINSMEN
True Sight, True Hearing, True Touch: the gifts of the powers of the mind-- Seythra!

A circle of hands link to touch the High Elder...
As Augustus and Octavia lay hands on Joan...
And Joan moves against her will...

JOAN
What-- what's happening to me?

Joan fights it but her hands reach out...
Her left hand touches Emmett's wrist...
Her right hand grabs Emmett's throat...

JOAN
Stop! Don't make me do this! Please!

THE KINSMEN
Blood of my blood. Hand in my hand.
Thoughts in my mind-- Drekkag!

The Kinsmen press thumbs into each others' RUNIC TATTOOS...
Both Joan and Emmett gasp... rolling their eyes back as...
A hazy image becomes SUPERIMPOSED OVER THEIR BODIES...
Flashes of Emmett hugging HIS SON at graduation...
More of his memories flit by...
Making Emmett convulse.
Each memory a paroxysm of pain.
He spits up blood-- shaking-- dying--
JOAN

No!

Joan snaps out of it--
Shoves Emmett away--
The hazy image vanishes--
Emmett catches his breath--
The High Elder grabs at Joan and--

JOAN

I said NO-- *Hrinda*!

Joan slides her thumb between RUNES on her WRIST TATTOO--
Everyone FLIES BACK as if pushed by an invisible force--
They all stare in awe.

OCTAVIA

Joan, what are you doing?

AUGUSTUS

Maybe she's right. Maybe she's not ready and we should--

HIGH ELDER

No! She must finish the ceremony! She must empty the Outsider's mind or--

CREAK-- all heads turn--
Joan is already at the door-- camera in hand--
Suddenly sick-- her ears bleeding-- her health drained--

HIGH ELDER

Walk out that door and you are cast out of the True Family.

A beat.
They step toward Joan--
She RUNS-- and for the first time WE MOVE--
Trucking back on Joan and following her out to--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Joan careens down the hall-- feverish-- off-balance--
Kinsmen chase behind her--

AUGUSTUS (O.S.)

Wait, Joanie, don't go! Please--

Joan rounds a corner-- wincing-- doesn't stop--
The Kinsmen behind her TRIP on their robes--
She bolts out to--
EXT. WHITMAN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Joan keeps running--
Disoriented-- lurching--
Pushing herself forward--
Clutching her camera--

  CORA (O.S.)
  Joan! Don't leave me, Joa-- No! NO!--
  JOAN COME BACK PLEASE THEY'RE--

Her voice is cut off by--
A loud CRACK--
LIGHT FLASHING out of the house--
Joan doesn't look back--
Uncontrollable tears streaming down her face--
Running and running and running and running and--
THIS HAS ALL BEEN ONE LONG, UNBROKEN TAKE UNTIL WE--

  CUT TO BLACK.

  JOAN (V.O.)
  Dear Cora Lee.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Joan points her camera through branches.
Watching the Whitman House through the lens.

  JOAN (V.O.)
  I'm coming back for you.

She gathers her courage--
Strides toward the house--
Kinsmen emerge ten yards ahead--

  THE KINSMEN
  We hear you, Joan Whitman.

Joan stifles a cry--
Ducks behind a tree--
Silence.
Joan inches her neck around to see--
The Kinsmen stand still. Their heads cocked to the side.

  JOAN (V.O.)
  But they won't let me near you.

  THE KINSMEN

Hleetha!

The Kinsmen slide their thumbs across their wrist tattoos--
Snap their heads in her direction--
They lope after her--
Joan RUNS--

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Joan walks now.
Tired and alone.
Stops at a stream.
Drinks deep.
Takes a beat.
Turns to head back--

JOAN (V.O.)
Every time I tried to come back,
every time I thought about you--

Twigs SNAP ahead of her--

THE KINSMEN (O.S.)
We will hunt you. We will catch you.
We will become you.

Joan sprints into the trees--

JOAN (V.O.)
They found me. They pushed me back,
farther and farther away from you.

EXT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Joan stands at the forest's edge.
Grave eyes fixed on a glowing police station.

JOAN (V.O.)
I went to the police.

She walks to the station.
Hands shaking.
Heart pounding.
Reaching for the door--

JOAN (V.O.)
But I knew. I knew if I told them
anything they would come to our home,
our family would run off with you,
and I'd never see you again.

She walks back into the night.
EXT. ROAD - DAY

Joan hikes beside a highway.
Getting to know her camera.

    JOAN (V.O.)
    So I had to go away. I had to go
    where they couldn't follow me.

The skyline of an urban metropolis sprawls out before her.
She takes a picture.

INT. GUN STORE - NIGHT

HANDGUNS glisten in a glass case under buzzing lights.
Joan places a hand over the glass.

    JOAN (V.O.)
    Where they couldn't stop me.

She focuses on a handgun's price tag: $375.00.
Her eyes narrow, determined.

INT. RESTAURANT - KITCHEN - DAY

Joan pushes a mop at dawn.
A COOK leaves her something on the counter: a few $20 bills.

I/E. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

A LANDLORD walks Joan past sketchy rooms to--
A shitbox. She hands the Landlord cash and shuts the door.

    JOAN (V.O.)
    Where I could plan.

She tapes up a MAP-- BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE WHITMAN HOUSE.
She writes on it-- sketching ways to sneak inside.

INT. RESTAURANT - BATHROOM - DAY

The Cook watches Joan scrub a nasty toilet bowl.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Joan puts money behind her lens cap.

    JOAN (V.O.)
    Where I could get stronger.
She does PUSH-UPS.
Prison-level intensity.
Dripping sweat.
Falling down.
Fire igniting in her eyes.
Forcing herself back up.
Muscles shaking.
Doing one more push-up.
Then another.
And another.
Unstoppable.

INT. RESTAURANT - KITCHEN - DAY

Joan cleans stacks of dirty plates.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

More money gets stuffed behind the lens cap.
Joan PUNCHES the wall-- again and again--
Hitting a life-size drawing of a CLOAKED MAN.

      JOAN (V.O.)
      Where I could prepare.

She sews something with pins in her teeth.
Holds up a newly sewn RED ROBE--
Lays it down by a WHITE FACE MASK.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Joan wipes down tables.

INT. GUN STORE - NIGHT

Joan takes out a thick wad of cash from her lens cap.
Approaches the glass case full of HANDGUNS.
Tingling with anticipation.

TIME CARD: 2 1/2 Years Ago

      JOAN (V.O.)
      And in a few short months, I had
      almost everything I needed to come
      back for you. But...

      SALESMAN (O.S.)
      How can I help you?

A gruff SALESMAN, 30s, walks up behind the case.
Joan points at the handgun marked $375.00. He slides over paperwork.

SALESMAN
You need to fill out this form and pass a firearms safety test.

He hands her a pen--
Their fingers touch--
A HAZY IMAGE TAKES OVER THE SCREEN... A spotlight on The Salesman unzipping Joan's hoodie...
Joan snaps her hand back--
The image evaporates--

SALESMAN
(oblivious)
I need to see some government ID. You're twenty-one right? I can't sell you a handgun if you're under--

She backs away.
Too much for her.
Rushing out.

JOAN (V.O.)
But our family changed me. After the first time a stranger touched me...

EXT. GUN STORE - CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Joan hurries outside--
Bumps into a PEDESTRIAN--
A HAZY IMAGE FLASHES OVER THE SCREEN... The Pedestrian standing on a chair with a noose...

PEDESTRIAN (V.O.)
Maybe I'll do it tomorrow or maybe--

The Pedestrian shuffles away--
The image fading with each step--
Joan stares at her hands as more pedestrians pass by. She hears the thoughts of everyone around her.

JOAN (V.O.)
They appeared. The Three True Gifts.

I/E. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Joan hurries down the sketchy row of rooms. INNER VOICES bubble up from behind every door... She slams into her apartment... but the voices follow her...
JOAN (V.O.)
True Sight, True Hearing, True Touch:
the gifts of the powers of the mind.

I/E. RESTAURANT - KITCHEN / BACK ALLEY - DAY

Joan tosses leftovers in the trash.
Waiters walk past.
She jerks out of their way.
Still hearing their INNER VOICES...

JOAN (V.O.)
And I couldn't make them stop.

The voices crescendo...
She takes the trash outside to a dumpster...
The inner voices are LOUDER OUT HERE...
She keels over...
Looks ready to burst...
When she sees something...

JOAN (V.O.)
I needed help.

A LIQUOR BOTTLE by the dumpster..
Inner voices rising to a fever pitch...
She grabs the bottle...
Takes a sip...

The voices go away.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

The camera sits with its lens cap off, no money in sight.
Joan sips a new liquor bottle in sweet silence.
She tries punching the wall.
Trips.
Falls.
And stays down.
A drunk mess.

JOAN (V.O.)
But I was alone.

INT. RESTAURANT - KITCHEN - DAY

Joan washes dishes, half-drunk--
Tries to sneak a swig from a bottle--
And drops dishes that SHATTER on the floor--
JOAN (V.O.)
I had run away from home but...

The Cook yells at Joan, pointing her to the door.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Joan staggers back to her place to find--
The Landlord and REPO MEN taking all her stuff--
They shout and run after her--
She careens away--

JOAN (V.O.)
I couldn't run away from myself.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT/DAY

Joan roams the city.
Downing bottles.
Shirking away from people.
Wandering through different neighborhoods.
Passing through different seasons.

JOAN (V.O.)
I tried though. I tried to lose
myself. For months, I tried to shed
this sick person I had become.

EXT. BACK ALLEY - NIGHT

TIME CARD: 1 Year Ago

Joan paces.
Waiting. Hands shaking.
A DEALER walks over with a bag.
He opens it to show her a HANDGUN.

JOAN (V.O.)
And I always thought of you. I
always planned to come back for you.

She takes cash from her camera's lens cap when--
He DECKS her--
Takes her money and her camera--
Running off into the night--
Leaving her with nothing.
EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

Joan howls.
Drifting.
Drinking.

JOAN (V.O.)
I lost everything.

All the pedestrians ignore her.
Just another crazy, homeless woman.

EXT. PAWN SHOP - DAY

In the window, the Dealer sells Joan's camera.
Joan watches from across the street.

JOAN (V.O.)
And I have to get it back. I have to
get you back. Please... forgive me.

INT. PAWN SHOP - NIGHT

Darkness.
SMASH--
A back door opens--
Joan bursts in--
Scouring the counter as--

BILLY (O.S.)
Hey!

A silhouette stands at the door--
Joan scrambles to find another exit--
The silhouette hits the lights to reveal--

BILLY, 20s, a gentle giant in new agey clothes.
A man who's gone through hell and come back with clear eyes.
He watches her.
Sees something in her.
And relaxes.
He tidies up the store and puts down a NOVEL.
HOLD on that novel: American Warlock by Augustus Whitman.

BILLY
Sorry, I didn't see I had a customer.

He turns his back on her.
Going through a ring of keys.
She watches him, confused.
He opens a case and takes out his most expensive items.
Placing JOAN'S CAMERA in front of her.
BILLY
Take whichever one you'd like. Free thirty-day trial.

She reaches for her camera--
Pulls her hand back--

BILLY
It's okay. I'll be alright.

She watches him, unsure--
Then GRABS the camera--
Goes for the door--

BILLY (O.S.)
Wait a minute, you forgot something.

Joan turns back to see--
Billy taking out a professional CAMERA BAG. 
Packing it with batteries, memory cards, and a cleaning kit. 
He offers it to her.

BILLY
If you're willing to risk your life 
for a camera, then you better take 
good care of it. Here.

JOAN
...Why? Why are you doing this?

He looks at her. 
It's like a warm hug without making a move.

BILLY
Someone did the same thing for me. 
When I was homeless.

JOAN
You were homeless?

BILLY
My name's Billy. What's yours?

JOAN
Joan.

BILLY
Joan... Are you hungry, Joan?

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Billy sips coffee, sitting across from--
Joan wolfing down a Philly Cheesesteak sandwich.
BILLY
Hit the spot?

She nods, chewing happily, as--

DANA (O.S.)
Excuse me, miss, but is this man bothering you?

DANA, 60s, nudges Billy as she refreshes their coffees. Sporting a wry smirk, an apron, and a cane. Billy squeezes her arm. Old pals.

BILLY
Good to see you too, Dana-- Dana, I'd like you to meet Joan.

DANA
Joan! Good to meet you, darling. You two heading to a meeting?

Joan doesn't know what to say.

BILLY
We'll see-- But in the meantime, could you get us two slices of your world-famous pumpkin pie?

JOAN
Oh, thank you, but I'm so full--

DANA
Then I'll box it up for you, dear, don't you worry. Back in a flash. (pointing at Billy) And don't you bore her to tears with one of your stories!

Dana kisses Billy on the forehead and walks off. Leaning on her cane in a slow, uneven gait. Joan and Billy smile at each other.

JOAN
Well, thank you so much, Billy, but I should go, I--

BILLY
Go where?

Joan doesn't have an answer for that.

BILLY
Do you have a place to stay? A friend you can call or maybe your family--
JOAN

NO. I mean... No.

Joan tenses up.
Her hands shaking.
Looking around, paranoid.

BILLY

Hey. Hey. I didn't mean to pry,
only... it's warm here. It's dry. And
you have fresh pie on the way. You
can stay as long as you like, okay?

Joan takes a deep breath.
Looks Billy in the eye.
No judgment in him.
She nods.

BILLY

Okay. What do you want to talk about?

She shrugs.

BILLY

Want to hear how I first met Dana?

DANA (O.S.)

(from the kitchen)
Billy, what did I just tell you?

Billy puts a hand over his mouth.
Like a boy caught cursing.
Joan smirks.

JOAN

It's fine, go ahead.

BILLY

I'll make it quick-- I first met Dana
three years ago when I held her up at
gunpoint.

That snaps Joan to attention.

BILLY

I was drunk, homeless, and broke. I
was yelling at Dana to open the
register when she took one look at
me... and walked away. A moment later
she came back with all the money in
the safe, a steak dinner in a doggy
bag, and the coat off her back.

(MORE)
BILLY (cont'd)
The only reason I'm not in jail right now is because she sat me down in this booth three years ago and she gave me a choice: I could go back out there and drink until I die... or I could stay here, sleep on a cot in her back room, and go to my first Alcoholics Anonymous meeting.

Dana returns, serving up two plates of pie. Resting her hand on Joan's shoulder.

DANA
You have a choice too, dear. I already have that cot set up for you.

BILLY
Joan, are you ready to stop drinking?

EXT. DINER - NIGHT
A window framing Joan's booth. Billy and Dana wait on her answer. She stares down at her pumpkin pie. Then buries her face into Dana, crying, hugging her. Finding refuge at last.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - DAY
Coffee percolates. ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS pamphlets on a table. Members sitting in a block of Sunday School chairs. Joan sitting in the back, a changed woman, wearing GLOVES. Gloves she will wear for the rest of the film.

TIME CARD: The Day Before
Inner voices start to rise up around Joan-- She opens a prescription bottle-- Pops a BLUE PILL-- The voices fade away.

Up front, Billy leads the meeting.

BILLY
Even though my father molested me... even though he deserves a lifetime of hatred, I deserve more than to live with that hatred all my life. I had to learn to let go and I couldn't've done that without A.A.
Nods and murmurs of agreement.

BILLY
On to closing business. We have a birthday: Joan is one year sober.

Whoops and applause.
Joan walks up front.
Billy offers her a ONE YEAR CHIP.
She takes it with her gloved hands.
He goes to hug her, remembers, and steps back.

BILLY
I'm proud of you. You got this.

Billy leaves the floor to Joan.
She unfolds a letter, hands shaking.

JOAN
H-Hi, I'm Joan, an alcoholic.

EVERYONE
Hi Joan!

JOAN
Today, I am one year sober--

Ripples of applause.
A DONATION BASKET passes around.

JOAN
--and with the help of my sponsor,
Billy, I'm now on the Fifth Step, so
I'd like to admit to myself, to you,
and to... someone else... the exact
nature of my wrongs.
(reading the letter)
Dear Cora Lee, I'm coming back for--

VOICE (O.S.)
Kala-Ayvi.

Joan looks up--
Everyone is frozen in time as--
A LONE KINSMAN walks toward her--

LONE KINSMAN
Come home.

She turns to run--
The Kinsman stands behind her--

LONE KINSMAN
Come home and we will not hurt you.
She spins around--

NOW HE HAS HER CORNERED--

**LONE KINSMAN**

*Come home or your sister will suffer.*

*Sveetha-Ayvi!*

*He scrapes his thumb across his wrist tattoo--*

*She SCREAMS-- time returning to normal and--*

**BILLY**

Joan!

She opens her eyes.
The Kinsman is gone.
Everyone stares at Joan, dismayed.
She stares at the donation basket--
GASPS-- and runs out--

**BILLY**

Joan! Wait! Where are you--

Billy looks in the donation basket to find--
A RED ENVELOPE with a wax seal resembling The Keeper Mask.

**EXT. LIQUOR STORE - DAY**

Joan marches.
On a warpath to self-destruction.
Billy races up behind her.
Gets in her way.

**BILLY**

Joan, stop-- Stop! You're better than this. You're stronger than--

**JOAN**

They're stronger! They found me! I don't know how but they--

**BILLY**

Who found you? Who sent this?

He brandishes the RED ENVELOPE.
She won't look at it.
Tries to get past him.

**JOAN**

Just give up on me, Billy, I'm no good, leave me--

**BILLY**

NO! I'm never giving up on you.
Joan looks into his eyes.  
Sees the fierce loyalty there.  
Maybe even something more.  
Her drive to drink fades.  
She takes the envelope.  
Opens it.  
Reads it.  
Cries.

BILLY  
What is it?  

JOAN  
My sister's getting married.  

She shows him a wedding invitation.  

BILLY  
That's a good thing. Right?  

JOAN  
She's asking me to come home-- but I can't! They know I'm coming now--  

BILLY  
I'll come with you. Together, we--  

JOAN  
No. You don't understand. My family-- they'll kill me, they'll kill you--  

BILLY  
My dad tried to kill me. I put him in the hospital. I put him in prison and I never saw him again-- but I wish I had. I wish I had the chance to confront him before he died.  

(beat)  
Joan, whatever happened between you and your family, you owe it to yourself to face them one last time.  

She looks at the invitation, her resolve mounting and--

INT. BILLY'S CAR - CITY STREET - NIGHT  

Billy waits in an idling CAR-- SLAM!--  
Joan gets in with a backpack, wearing all black.  

JOAN  
You're going to see some strange things tonight.
INT. DINER - STORAGE ROOM - NIGHT


JOAN (V.O.)
Twisted things. Unnatural things. Things you should never see.

INT. BILLY'S CAR - INTERSTATE - NIGHT

Yellow sodium lights whoosh overhead. Billy cruises down a dark road, sneaking glances at-- Joan studying a MAP WITH PICTURES OF THE WHITMAN HOUSE.

JOAN
But you can't ask questions. Not now. Now all you need to do is drive.

BILLY
But when we get there, I'm going to the wedding with y--

JOAN
We're not going to the wedding.

INT. DINER - STORAGE ROOM - NIGHT


JOAN (V.O.)
We're going to rescue my sister.

INT. BILLY'S CAR - WHITMAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Billy pulls over. Looking at the Whitman House in the distance. All their lights are out. He turns to Joan--

BILLY
Are you really going t--

His eyes widen in shock at--
KINSMEN stepping out of the woods.
Approaching the car.
Surrounding them.
Billy freezes.
Joan SLAMS the invitation against her window.

A long beat.

The Kinsmen walk backwards.
And slip back into the woods.
Billy turns back to Joan--
She's drawing RUNIC TATTOOS on his wrists in sharpie.

BILLY
What are you--

JOAN
For your own safety: stay in the car.

Joan puts on a kinsman's RED CLOAK and a WHITE MASK.
She gets out.

EXT. WHITMAN HOUSE – NIGHT

Festive red sashes hang from the roof.
The house looms over Joan.
She straightens her disguise.
Clenches her fists.
Exhales.
And walks into--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE – FOYER – NIGHT

The door pushes open.
Joan's eyes peer out from behind her mask.
Scanning a long, dark hall.
Emptiness.
Silence.
She moves quietly to--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE – BEDROOM – DAY

A double bunk bed.
Too dark to see much else.
Joan creeps in, her eyes adjusting.

JOAN
Cora?... Cora!

No response.
Joan goes to the bunk bed.
No one there.
But her fingers trace the covers.
Lost in a memory.
Reaching under the mattress.
Pulling out a CHILDREN'S STORYBOOK.
Her eyes smile.
She flips to where TRAVEL GUIDES were stuffed between pages.
Tourist brochures with hand-written notes.
She touches the notes, moved.

INT. BILLY'S CAR - WHITMAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Billy fidgets in the driver's seat.
Scanning the woods, nervous.
He thumbs through a novel.
The cover: American Warlock by Augustus Whitman.
The back: a picture of AUGUSTUS.
Billy looks up from the novel.
Staring at the house.

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joan reminisces over her sister's notes when--
Floorboards CREAK down the hall.
She eases back against a wall.
Returns the storybook.
Peeks out into--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - LIBRARY - NIGHT

Joan steps into the murky dark.
Squinting to see through her mask.
She takes it off.
And freezes in shock.
This is the room from the first scene.
Her heart beats in her ears.
Her eyes dart to the windows.
No one in sight.
But she's breathing fast.
She can't take this--
She spins around and--
Slams into CORA.

CORA

...Joan?

The sisters stare.
Joan looks over Cora's prim attire.
Cora looks over Joan's disguise.
They're years older.
And worlds apart.
Tears come to Joan's eyes.  
She reaches for Cora--

    JOAN  
    Cora, it's so good to--

    CORA  
    What are you doing here?

    JOAN  
    I'm here to save you. I have a car out front, we can finally--

    CORA  
    (cold)  
    You didn't find me. I'm not here. Go away.

Joan is blindsided.  
Cora goes to walk away--

    JOAN  
    Wait! Where are you going? I came all this way for--

Cora advances on her-- fierce--

    CORA  
    You came all this way for nothing. This is who I am now. This is my home. Or did you forget that when you ran off and--

A GROAN upstairs.  
Cora's face slackens.  
Her eyes fix on the ceiling.

    CORA  
    You are not welcome here. Go.

    JOAN  
    B-but Cora-- You invited me--

Joan shows her the invitation--  
Cora SNATCHES it from her--

    CORA  
    Where did you get this?

    MASON (O.S.)  
    We sent it to her, honey. Remember?

MASON BLY, 20s, steps in with a candle and a handshake. A sunny, upstanding boy next door.
Hi, Mason, pleased to meet you! Cora told me so much about--

Did you invite her? I told you--

She's your sister. You can't--

A threat.
Cora storms off.

If you will excuse us for a--

Mason hurries after Cora.
Violent whispers from another room.
Joan slumps into the wall.
Fighting a panic attack.

No, no, no, no, no-- what have I done, what have I--

That does it-- Joan flees into--

Joan turns the corner--
Her mother OCTAVIA blocks the way out.
Holding a candelabra in this dark passage.
Eyes of granite locked on Joan.

Dinner is served.

Octavia turns around.
Stands still.
OCTAVIA
Oh, and please do invite that man waiting in the car to come join us.

A chill runs down Joan's spine.

OCTAVIA
He is one of our kind, is he not?

Joan nods.
Octavia walks away.
Leaving us in darkness.

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Joan enters with Billy.
Throwing him a look of Follow My Fucking Lead. 
As they walk into a luxuriant, Southern Gothic scene.
Joan's family sits at a dark, feast-laden table.
Candles flickering between five grim faces.
All eyes on Joan and Billy.
MASON gets up.

MASON
We are so delighted you could join us. Please allow me to show you to your seats, Joan and dear Cousin...

JOAN
Billy. Cousin Billy.

MASON
Right! That's right. Here you are.

Mason seats them at one end of the table.
Name cards before them in calligraphy.
Porcelain plates of sumptuous food.
Sitting across from CORA AND MASON.

MASON
How was your trip down here?

JOAN
Fine. Just fine.

CORA
Although you won't be staying long.

Before Joan can speak--

OCTAVIA
Cuts in, sitting regal at the other end of the table--
OCTAVIA
Oh, no? And why is that, Joan?

CORA
Urgent matters with your photography business-- isn't that right, Joan?

Joan squirms under their demanding gaze.

JOAN
Th-that's right-- but I was just thinking I could stay and photograph the wedding-- as my gift to you.

BILLY
Joan, that is a beautiful--

OCTAVIA
This is a private affair. We have no need for any pictures.

BILLY
But Joan is a talented photographer--

JOAN
Billy, stop--

BILLY
Don't you want a keepsake? Memories fade but pictures last forever.

CORA
Some memories never fade.

Cora stares at Joan.
Octavia stares at Billy.
Nervous, he goes to eat--

OCTAVIA
Not yet, Cousin Billy. We're waiting for Augustus to join us.

Octavia gives a swan-like nod to--
An empty armchair at the head of the table.

OCTAVIA
Although, I must admit this smells extraordinary. Thank you, Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN WILKES
Sits at Octavia's side in chef's garb, pouring her wine.
A wiry man in his 20s with a loyal smile.
SEBASTIAN
Anything for the Whitman family.

OCTAVIA
So, Cousin Billy, how long have you been dating my daughter?

BILLY
Me? No-- we're not-- I'm her spons--

JOAN
We're just friends, Mother.

OCTAVIA
And how did you two... friends meet?

BILLY
Well, we first met when I caught her breaking into my store--

OCTAVIA
Your store? You don't work on your family's land?

JOAN
A feed store. His family runs a co-operative with others like us. Billy found me after I... left and since then he's helped me find my way.

OCTAVIA
I see.

She gazes at Joan.

Dropping her hands under the table with a quiet whisper.

And Joan hears Octavia's INNER VOICE.

OCTAVIA (V.O.)
What are you hiding from me, Joan? I can tell when you're lying, what--

Joan whispers back-- sliding her thumb over her tattoo and--

She blocks out Octavia's inner voice.

Octavia shifts her gaze to Billy.

Listening for his thoughts.

Hearing only silence.

Joan presses her thumb deeper into her wrist tattoo when--

BILLY
So, Cora, Mason, how did you meet?

Joan seizes Billy's hand.

He throws her a confused look.

As a small, fresh trickle of blood drips from Joan's ear.
CORA
Why, Sebastian introduced us. We were having a hard time with the harvest about three years ago.

SEBASTIAN
That's right. 'Round then, I... lost my parents and the Whitmans took me in-- even though I was terrible with the livestock! Just terrible!

OCTAVIA
But you are marvelous in the kitchen.

SEBASTIAN
Only under your tutelage, Octavia. But you still needed a hard-working stable boy-- so I recommended Mason.

MASON
Cora interviewed me and, well, she scared the daylights out of me!

CORA
I did not! We Whitmans demand a high threshold of rigor and I merely--

MASON
You see that? She put the fear of the First Fathers in me, by Gods! But I guess I answered her questions right or else I wouldn't be here.

LAVINIA (O.S.)
Let's not forget the other reason you're here, Mason.

LAVINIA BLY
Mason's mother, 40s, sitting at his other side. A frail, intense woman toying with her food.

LAVINIA
You came looking for work because your father passed, bless his soul.

MASON
Mother, please not now. Where was I?

SEBASTIAN
Cora was gonna marry the stable boy.
CORA
Sebastian, hush! I did not see him that way, not at first, until... I was breaking in a new mare. I thought I had her under control when she ran at full gallop for the trees. I swear I was going to die when Mason appeared at my side on another horse. He calmed the mare down, he saved our lives, and I knew right then that I--

Cora gazes into Mason's eyes--
Taking his hand in hers--
Showing true joy when--

AUGUSTUS (O.S.)
I'm here!

AUGUSTUS

Lurches into the dining room. Straining from a recent stroke or trauma. Aided by the HIGH ELDER in his black robes and crimson mask. Everyone stands abruptly. The High Elder waves them all to sit. Everyone returns to their seats. Augustus settles into an armchair at the head of the table.

AUGUSTUS
My girls! All my girls are here!

He reaches to Cora and Joan at his sides. Clasping both their hands. Fresh tears in his eyes. Sweet like that.

The High Elder bows his head in prayer. They all follow suit.

HIGH ELDER
Be present at our table, O Father of the First Fathers. By thy blood, grant us that we may feast in fellowship with thee. Amen.

EVERYONE
Amen.

Everyone starts eating. Billy casts a look at Joan-- she ignores it.

AUGUSTUS
Joan! It's so good to see you! Have you come to stay with us at last?
CORA
No, Father. Just for dinner.

AUGUSTUS
Oh, no. Why can't she stay?

OCTAVIA
You know perfectly well, Augustus.

AUGUSTUS
Why?

HIGH ELDER
Must I remind you, Augustus Whitman, what was done unto you the last time she was here?

The High Elder wraps his fingers around Augustus' shoulder. Like claws sinking into prey. Augustus shakes his head.

BILLY
Wait, you're Augustus Whitman?

AUGUSTUS
That I am.

BILLY
You wrote American Warlock?
(deathly silence)
Your novel is amazing! How brave of you to share your life story and how brilliant using magic as a metaphor--

AUGUSTUS
That book was banned.

BILLY
Sure, but you can find it online.

AUGUSTUS
On what?

Billy looks around the table at blank faces. No one here has heard of the Internet.

Joan shoots to her feet--

JOAN
We need to go. Thank you all so--

MASON
Wait, please don't go!
SEBASTIAN
You haven't even touched your supper!

AUGUSTUS
Yes! Stay!

CORA
No, Father, she cannot stay. The Council of Elders already decided--

OCTAVIA
But before you go, Cousin Billy, do tell us more about your relations.

JOAN
I'm sorry, we really ought to--

OCTAVIA
Let the man speak, Joan. What branch of the family are you, Cousin Billy?

BILLY
I, uh, I'm from, uh--

JOAN
Father, please let us stay--

CORA
Father, don't listen to her--

OCTAVIA
Augustus Whitman, if you dare--

AUGUSTUS
ENOUGH-- BROTEA!

He POUNDS HIS FISTS on the table with a THUNDEROUS CRACK--
The High Elder carries him off--

HIGH ELDER
Time for you to repose, Augustus.

AUGUSTUS
No! NO! I want her to stay! I want--

JOAN
Billy, go! You have to--

BILLY
What's going on? Joan, what's--

Octavia takes Joan away--
Everyone scatters--
And Billy is left alone.
He stares at the empty dinner table. 
Noticing a SYMMETRICAL CRACK in every wine glass.

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Octavia brings Joan into a corner--

OCTAVIA
Who is he?

JOAN
H-He's our cousin. I told you--

OCTAVIA
Did you bring an Outsider into my house?

JOAN
No, Mother, I would never--

OCTAVIA
Does he know who we are?

JOAN
Mother, don't you trust--

OCTAVIA
Does he know who we are? Seythra!

And in the moment she speaks... 
Her thumb drags across her wrist tattoo... 
Her hair stands on her head... 
And every drawer in the kitchen slides open one inch.

JOAN
He doesn't know!-- I didn't tell him a thing, I-- I swear, please don't--

OCTAVIA
I want you gone tonight.

JOAN
But Mother--

An inaudible whisper-- 
A blur of Octavia's hands-- 
All the drawers SLAM SHUT--

OCTAVIA
Is that clear?

Joan manages a nod. 
Octavia storms off-- then stops.
OCTAVIA
Your father sent the invitation.
(beat)
I was against it, but he hasn't been well since he wrote that Gods awful book and the High Elder... crippled him for it. Your father thought if you came home, maybe he'd get better. Maybe Cora could forgive you. Maybe we could be a family again.

On Octavia, hiding the sudden weariness on her face. Blood slowly trickling out of her ear.

OCTAVIA
But you failed us again.

Octavia walks out--
Joan goes after her--
Octavia slides a thumb down her wrist-- whispering and--
The door SLAMS in Joan's face.

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Octavia leans against the other side of the door. Then drops to the floor, a sweaty mess.

CORA (O.S.)
Mother, what did you do?

Cora appears and helps Octavia to her feet.

CORA
You pushed yourself too far.

OCTAVIA
No. It was you.

Octavia shoves her away. Staggering off by herself.

OCTAVIA
You pushed this family too far.

Cora watches her go, biting her tongue.

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Joan tiptoes down the dark hall, searching.

JOAN
Billy... Billy?...
Her footsteps slow.
Faint SOBBING nearby.
She follows it to--

EXT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BACK PORCH - NIGHT

Joan comes to a screen door to find...
A man sitting on the porch with a glass of whiskey, crying.

  JOAN
  Billy? Is that--

The man turns--
It's MASON.
Jumping up.
Wiping away tears.
Hiding it all with a smile.

  MASON
  Joan! Hey! Sorry, I was just getting
  a breath of fresh air and I, uh... (voice cracking)
  Who am I kidding?

He sits back down and knocks back whiskey.
Joan watches him, deciding.
Steps outside.
Sits with him.

  JOAN
  You sure you want to marry into this
crazy family?

That makes him laugh.
He offers the glass.
She stares at the whiskey.
Stares at it too long.
Then shakes her head.
A beat.
He goes to talk, stops himself--

  JOAN
  Go ahead. Say it.

  MASON
  Did Cora tell you how long I spent
  planning that dinner? (off her reaction)
  A month. Thirty days of going over
  the linens, the seating arrangement,
  the menu-- and this is embarrassing--

He takes out index cards from his jacket.
MASON
I made Dinner Conversation flash cards.

JOAN
(smiling)
No...

MASON
I researched everyone's hobbies and wrote them down, see? Here's you--
travel and photography--

JOAN
Oh my Gods.

MASON
I know. But tonight was the night our families first met. I wanted it to be perfect... but I ruined everything.

JOAN
Mason, honestly, you didn't--

MASON
Yes, I did. I ruined Cora's dreams of a fairy tale wedding. Now she'll probably call it off.

He takes a long draw of whiskey.
When Joan snorts.

JOAN
Sorry-- Cora told you about her first boyfriend, right?

MASON
(excited for gossip)
No!

JOAN
Oh! Well, it didn't really count so I shouldn't--

MASON
No, now you have to tell me!

JOAN
Okay, okay! So-- Our parents raised us very strict. No Outsider movies or TV, only True Family literature--

MASON
Me too. Not until I turned eighteen--
JOAN
Right, but when Cora was six, she crept into our Aunt Aurelia's room, found a bunch of old Disney movies--

MASON
No!

JOAN
And thought they were true stories.

MASON
Nooo!

JOAN
So naturally, being the wise older sister I was, I told on her--

MASON
Naturally.

JOAN
And she ran away. I looked all over our land... and I couldn't find her.

Joan holds a hand over her mouth.
Mason leans in, his smile fading.

MASON
Was-- Was she okay, what happ--

Joan giggles behind her hand--

JOAN
Father found her in a pumpkin patch, smacking a big, fat pumpkin with a stick. He shouted at her, "Cora, what are you doing?" and she said--

(through laughter)
"I'm turning this pumpkin into a carriage so I can go see my Prince Charming."

Joan tips over, belly laughing.
Mason can't help but laugh with her.

MASON
She didn't!

JOAN
She did! And every harvest, I'd leave a baby pumpkin on her pillow and tell her to go have a nice date with her boyfriend Prince Charming.
MASON
My gods, you're the worst sister!

Mason keeps laughing.
But his words struck a nerve with Joan.
She gets up and heads inside.

MASON
Hey Joan... thank you.

JOAN
You still sure you want to marry into
this family?

He looks at Joan.

MASON
I'd do anything for Cora.

They nod good night.
Joan walks back inside.

HOLD on Mason.
Waiting.
Then his face falls slack.
He buries his head in his hands.
And howls a MUTED SCREAM into his palms.

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joan rushes in--

JOAN
Billy! There you are! We need to...

Billy is curled up in bed, asleep.
Joan sits beside him.
Gently wakes him.

JOAN
Billy... Billy, get up.

BILLY
...hm? Joan! Sorry, I looked for you,
I waited here and... where were you?

JOAN
We need to go. Get dressed, come on.

BILLY
Now? What time is it?
JOAN
It's late and we can't stay.

BILLY
Why, what happened?

JOAN
I'll tell you later. Now get up--

She pulls his covers back--
He grabs her gloved hand--
She stops.
Leaning over his shirtless body.
Her long hair framing his face in curtains.
A charged moment.

BILLY
I'm not going anywhere... not until you tell me what the hell is going on with your family.

That kills the moment.
She storms off.
Pacing.
Fidgeting.
Taking a deep breath.
Walking back over to talk.

JOAN
Billy, I...

He's fast asleep.
She marches over to her bed.
Sits down, furious.

Whispers of INNER VOICES bubble up--
She rummages through her pockets--
Whispers build into a murmur--
She pulls out her pill bottle--
Murmurs build into a cacophony--
She pops a BLUE PILL and--

The voices fade away.
She sighs.
Peace at last.
Places the pill bottle on the night table.
Leans back to rest her eyes for just a moment--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Joan's eyes flutter open on--
The empty night table.
HER PILL BOTTLE IS GONE.
She jumps out of bed.
Looks all over the floor.

JOAN
Shit, shit, shit...

BILLY
Joan? What is it?

She looks to Billy, waking up--
Sees warm sunlight streaking in through billowing curtains.

TIME CARD: Today

JOAN
Shit! Billy, get up. You have to get up, we have to go--

BILLY
Slow down. Talk to me. What--

She grabs his shoulders--

JOAN
If we don't leave now, something bad will happen to us. We need to go--

BILLY
No, Joan. You need to stop running--

He puts a hand on her arm--
His fingertips brush her skin and--

A BRIEF FLASH OF IMAGES from the first scene--
Joan alone in the library--
Augustus barging in--
His rough hand grabbing Joan--

Joan jerks away from Billy--
Stopping the images.
Billy gets out of bed.

BILLY
Joan... what just happened?

She palms her mouth.

BILLY
What was that?

JOAN
Go to the car. You'll be safe there. Wait for me there and I'll--

She runs out--
INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Joan rushes forward--
Hits a CREAKING FLOORBOARD--
A GROAN from a nearby room--
She freezes.
Hears snoring.
Keeps moving.
Navigating a minefield of old floorboards.

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BRIDAL SUITE - DAY

Joan opens the door to--
Flickering red candles everywhere.
A bathtub full of milk and rose petals.
CORA sits at a vanity.
Brushing her hair.
She notices Joan in the mirror.
And continues brushing.
Joan shuts the door.

JOAN
Come with me.
(no response)
They're asleep-- I still have a car out front-- We can go wherever you want but we have to go now.
(no response)
Cora?

CORA
Are you finished?

JOAN
What?

CORA
You're finished. You tried. Now you can leave.

JOAN
I'm not leaving without you!

CORA
You left without me three years ago.

She puts down her brush.
Places it within an orderly arrangement of beauty supplies.
Picks out a shimmering red ribbon.
Starts braiding her hair with it.
Joan steps toward her--
CORA
Now you walk in here and expect me to run off with you? Today of all days?

JOAN
I tried coming back-- I tried many times but every time they--

CORA
They named me The Keeper.

Like a gut punch to Joan.

JOAN
Cora... I had no idea.

CORA
The day you left, The High Elder gave me your mask and ordered me to finish the ceremony.

JOAN
...Did you kill that Outsider?

CORA
I kept our family safe. Year after year. I had to be the responsible one while you traipsed around the globe--

JOAN
No, I didn't! I--

CORA
You were cast out, declared an Outsider, and now you stand before The Keeper of the True Family.

Cora stands.
Picks up THE KEEPER'S MASK.
Treads slowly toward Joan.

JOAN
What are you doing?

CORA
The silence must be kept. Kala-Nipt!

Cora slides a thumb across her wrist--
And Joan freezes on the spot--
Struggling to move-- but stuck in place--
Her hand inching A WRINKLED LETTER toward Cora--
JOAN
Wait I... wrote this for you... Tried to sending it to you ever since--

Cora casts the letter aside--

COR
A letter? You think you can fix everything with a letter?

JOAN
I'm sorry... Please... Don't empty my mind I... I can't bear to forget you.

Cora raises her hands over Joan like twin weapons. Looks into Joan's quivering eyes. Cora's face softens.

COR
Do you want to make things right?

JOAN
Yes! I'll do anything, I--

COR
Then repent. Stand before our kin, beg their forgiveness, and declare that I belong to the True Family now. Will you do that for me?

JOAN
Cora, I... Can't we go back to the way we used to be?

Cora flinches. Somewhere between tears and rage. She lowers her hands.

COR
No-- Sveetha-nipt-hrinda-KAERR!

Cora's hands blur--
All the candles wink out at the same time as-- WHOOSH!-- the door swings open-- HURLING JOAN OUT TO--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Joan tumbles out across the floor and-- SLAM!-- The door is suddenly thrown shut.

JOAN
Cora, no--
Joan is moving again--
Twisting the knob--
But it's locked--

JOAN
No! Don't! Please, Cora! Please!

Joan knocks on the door when-- from outside--

BILLY (O.S.)
Joan?

Joan turns around as...
She hears people rousing out of bed from nearby rooms...

BILLY (O.S.)
Joan, where are you?

She creeps back--
As fast as she can--
Stepping around old floorboards until--

BILLY (O.S.)
Joan!

She looks up.
A RED ROBE flits past a window--
And the INNER VOICES return--
Joan books it--
Fast and loud--
Careening down the hall--
Heading for the front door--
INNER VOICES rising--
THEN SHE TURNS INTO--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Joan scours the room--
Searching the night table--
Tearing the bed apart--
INNER VOICES overwhelming her--
Fuck it--
She races out of there--
Grabbing her camera on her way to--

EXT. WHITMAN HOUSE - DAY

Joan sprints outside--
INNER VOICES dogging her--
Billy's car just a few feet away but--
JOAN
Billy?... BILLY!

Billy is nowhere to be seen--
INNER VOICES crescendoing--
She jumps in the car--
Checks her pockets--
Finds the keys in the ignition--
How in the hell--
INNER VOICES almost deafen her--
She turns the key--
VROOM!--
Ready to drive off when--
A ROUGH INNER VOICE cuts through everything--

ROUGH INNER VOICE (O.S.)
Kill them. Kill them all.

Joan stops.
Looks at the house.

ROUGH INNER VOICE (O.S.)
And save the bride for last.

Joan exits the car.
Faces the house.
Clutching her camera.
And goes back inside.

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

No soul in sight.
Joan creeps in.
Shallow breaths.
CAMERA shaking in her hands.
Listening to the inner voices.
ROUGH TONES rising as she approaches--

INTERCUT - DOOR TO KITCHEN / HALLWAY

A vertical line of sight through a doorjamb.
Two figures whispering in the kitchen.
SEBASTIAN is the one facing us.
Joan watches, fidgeting with her camera.

ROUGH VOICE (O.S.)
Is everything ready?

SEBASTIAN
All here. See?

ROUGH VOICE (O.S.)
Not enough. Double it.
SEBASTIAN
But that would... No! No, that's not what we planned--

ROUGH VOICE (O.S.)
Fuck the plan. They deserve to die. They all deserve to--

SEBASTIAN
No! I won't do it. I'm out.

ROUGH VOICE (O.S.)
You can't walk out on--

Sebastian turns--
HANDS grab him--
He hits someone--
HANDS shove him back--
He slips--
His neck hits a granite counter and--
CRACK!
Sebastian hits the floor, DEAD.

Joan GASPS.

Silence so quiet we hear a pin drop.
Then movement in the kitchen.
Joan panics-- steps back--
AN ANGRY EYE APPEARS AT THE DOOR JAMB--

JOAN
Runs for her life--
Banging on doors--
Yanking on locked doorknobs--

JOAN
Help! Someone help--

The KITCHEN DOOR slams open--
Joan dashes away--
Reaches the end of the hall--
Slams her fists on the last door--

JOAN
HELP! Please! Let me in! You have t--

OCTAVIA - IN THE BRIDAL SUITE
Opens the door a crack--

OCTAVIA
I thought I made it clear--
JOAN
You have to stop the wedding! Someone is trying to kill every--

OCTAVIA
How DARE you! Coming all this way just to ruin--

JOAN
I'm not lying! You have to believe--

CORAN (O.S.)
Mother, could fasten the back please?

Octavia looks back--
Cora stands with her back to us.
A stunning silhouette in her wedding dress.

OCTAVIA
But Joan--

CORAN
Ignore her. She'll be gone soon.

JOAN
Cora, wait! Listen to--

Octavia SLAMS the door on her--

VOICE (O.S.)
Are you ready, Joan?

She spins around to see--

AUGUSTUS
Standing before her in formal clothes with his arm out.
The hall is empty behind him.
Joan shudders relief.

JOAN
Father, thank gods.

AUGUSTUS
I know. Big day today.

He takes her arm.
Guides her away.

JOAN
I... I need to show you something.

AUGUSTUS
But it's time to go outside.
He leads her into--

**INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - LIBRARY - DAY**

Augustus ushers Joan to the site of the first scene.

JOAN
Where are you taking me?

AUGUSTUS
Outside. To walk you down the aisle.

JOAN
Father, I'm not the one getting married. Cora is.

She looks at him.
He didn't know that.

AUGUSTUS
I knew that. And you know I'd walk you down the aisle, Joan.

JOAN
Yes, Father.

AUGUSTUS
Why aren't you getting married? You're so beautiful.

He traces a knuckle down her cheek when--

**BILLY**

Walks in on them.

BILLY
Hey! What are you doing to her?

JOAN
Billy! Where did you go?

BILLY
I went to the car like you-- Get your hands off of her!

AUGUSTUS
She's my daughter! Don't you--
BILLY
You get away from her or I'll--

JOAN
Billy! Enough!

She pushes them apart--
Taking Billy out to--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Joan turns the corner with Billy--

JOAN
What's the matter with you?

BILLY
This morning when you-- you showed me-- I saw him touching you and--

A NOISE DOWN THE HALL.
The kitchen door is wide open.
Joan raises a finger to her lips.
Leads Billy down the hall.
Holding her breath.
Creeping into--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Joan inches in to find--
The kitchen appears spotless.
Sebastian's body is gone.
She scours the place.
Hold on A LAPEL PIN on the counter that they do not find.

JOAN
No... no, no, he was here. I saw him!

BILLY
Saw who?

JOAN
Sebastian! The Chef! He was...

She cocks her head.
Listening to something faint.

BILLY
He was what, Joan?

She raises a hand.
She hears WEDDING MUSIC now.
EXT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BACK YARD - DAY

A sunlit arch of roses.
Mason stands in a dashing tux.
Cora in a breathtaking gown.
True love in their tear-rimmed eyes.
THE HIGH ELDER presides over them in his mask and robes.
As a gramophone plays an old record.
A fairy tale wedding indeed.

HIGH ELDER
...will now say their vows.

Cora and Mason fasten their hands in the medieval fashion.

CORÁ
You cannot possess me for I belong to myself.

MASON
But while we both wish it, I give you all that is mine.

CORÁ
You cannot command me for I am a free person.

MASON
But I shall serve you in all the ways you require.

Joan and Billy rush out to witness--

CORÁ AND MASON
You are blood of my blood, hand in my hand, thoughts in my mind. I give you my body that we two may be one. I give you my spirit 'til our life is done. This I vow and thee I wed.

HIGH ELDER
You may seal the pact with a kiss.

Everyone applauds--
Cora and Mason lean in for a kiss--

JOAN
Wait!

Everyone stops.
Staring at Joan.
Silence.
They all move to the arch.
They all pose for a picture.
Joan freezes.
One of them is the killer.
She goes to speak--
All eyes on her--
She hesitates--
Panics--
And just takes the picture.
CLICK.
On her numb face as--

HIGH ELDER (O.S.)
I now pronounce you husband and wife.

OFF SCREEN applause.
All sound fades.
All we hear is Joan's shaky breathing.

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BACK YARD - LATER

Joan sits at a table.
Wearing the same numb expression.
As everyone else drinks and mingles at other tables.

BILLY (O.S.)
Well?

Joan looks up.
Billy has been sitting with her.

BILLY
Are we safe here? Can we stay?

Joan looks across the tables at Cora.
Laughing in her wedding dress.
Holding hands with Mason.
So happy.

BILLY
If you don't want to face your family
alone, I can do it with you. We can--

JOAN
We can't stay. You can't stay.

Joan grabs him by his sleeve--
Taking him off to--

EXT. WHITMAN HOUSE - FRONT YARD - DAY

Joan trudges to the car with Billy in tow.
Carrying her camera with her everywhere.
She opens the driver's side door.
JOAN
Get in. Go home. When this is over, I'll find my way back--

BILLY
Joan, I can't--

JOAN
You have to! Trust me--

BILLY
No, look--

Billy lifts the hood of the car.
The engine is a mess.
Lines have been cut.

BILLY
I tried to start the car this morning but it wouldn't go. Joan, I-- I think someone tampered with it.

Joan looks down.
A STEAK KNIFE sticks out of the front tire.
Her mind races a mile a minute.

BILLY
There is something very wrong here. Let me help you. I can talk to your family, I can find out who is--

JOAN
Give me your phone.

BILLY
What, why--

JOAN
I don't have a phone! Just give me--

She rummages through his pockets--
Takes his phone-- dials--

911 OPERATOR (OVER PHONE)
Nine-one-one, what's the nature of your emergency?

She looks at Billy-- Can she trust him?

BILLY
Joan, I can help--

She marches into the house.
Can't deal with him right now.
Billy watches her go.
Exhales a sigh.
Doesn't know what to do when--

AUGUSTUS (O.S.)
Hey you!

Augustus stands by the back of the house.
Wiping his dirty hands with a towel.

AUGUSTUS
Gimme a hand with this.

Augustus walks around a corner.
Billy makes a decision.
And goes after him.

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

AUGUSTUS and BILLY work back to back.
Billy serves food fresh out of the oven and onto plates.
Augustus washes something at the sink.
Scrubbing grime off his hands.
As Billy finds A LAPEL PIN.

BILLY
Happy to help, Mister Whitman-- say, have you seen Sebastian?

Billy watches Augustus from behind.
Augustus stares at the wall.
Water running.

BILLY
I haven't seen Sebastian all day and I thought he'd be here. Do you know where he is?... Mister Whitman?

Augustus doesn't move.
Water still running.
Billy is about to tap his shoulder--

AUGUSTUS
Women's work!

BILLY
What?

Augustus goes back to scrubbing pots.
Then scrubbing his hands.
Scrubbing them raw.
AUGUSTUS
That's what she wants. Told me to stay in the kitchen. Cook. Clean. Do nothing but women's work. All because I wrote that book.

BILLY
You mean American Warlock? I'd love to hear about...

Billy sees the fear in Augustus' eyes.
Like a boy about to get a spanking.

AUGUSTUS
I'm not supposed to talk about that.

Billy looks around.
Steps in closer.

BILLY
It's okay, Mister Whitman. This stays between us. No one else will know.

Their eyes meet.
Augustus inhales sharply.
Let's out a ragged breath.
And whispers.

AUGUSTUS
It's not a novel... It's my diary.

As Billy digests this, we PRE-LAP-

911 OPERATOR (OVER PHONE)
What's the address of your emergency?

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Joan paces on the phone-- whispering--

JOAN
I-- we don't have an address-- Can't you track my phone or--

911 OPERATOR (OVER PHONE)
No, ma'am, we cannot. What's your exact location?

Joan ransacks the room for a road map-- no luck--
JOAN
It's-- I'm down the road from the
Tyrone farm-- near-- right off
Interstate Ten and-- Eugene Road.

911 OPERATOR (OVER PHONE)
Okay... does that road dead end at...
a white house in Heirloom Forest?

JOAN
Yes! That's us! Get here as soon as--

911 OPERATOR (OVER PHONE)
We will. What number can I call y--

JOAN
When will you get here?

911 OPERATOR (OVER PHONE)
Ma'am, I need your number--

JOAN
There's a killer in the house! When
will you get here?

911 OPERATOR (OVER PHONE)
...fifty minutes. You're over fifty
miles from the nearest city--

JOAN
Fifty minutes? That's too late! Tha--

OCTAVIA (O.S.)
I was wondering what had become of
you.

Joan spins--
Hiding the phone behind her back as--

OCTAVIA

Lets herself in.
Making Joan back into a wall.
Muffling the phone behind her.

OCTAVIA
With whom were you speaking just now?

JOAN
With... myself.

As Octavia levels an acute gaze...
Her hands going to her wrists with a whisper...
Her inner voice rising in a sea of questions...
OCTAVIA (V.O.)
You don't have to lie to me, child--
What are you hiding?-- Who were you--

JOAN
Mother, stop!

Joan's voice rattles the room--
Sending a subtle gust of wind through Octavia's hair--
Octavia grins.
Sits on a bed and takes out her purse.
Pulling out a compact and a handkerchief.

OCTAVIA
Why are you here?

JOAN
I, uh-- Car trouble. The car won't--

OCTAVIA
No. You're not hearing me. Why-- when
you could be surfing at the beach,
drinking at bars, or going to rock
'n' roll show-- why are you here?

JOAN
...How do you know about rock music?

OCTAVIA
Same as you. I was young and foolish.

Octavia dabs at the flop sweat now beading on her face.
Cleans the fresh blood trickling from her ears.
Applies make-up to hide her sudden fatigue.

OCTAVIA
Before I met your father, I thought
it would be fun to go into the city.

She snaps her compact shut.

OCTAVIA
When I came back, I found the Council
of Elders had slaughtered my parents
and siblings for my insubordination.

Joan gasps.
Octavia rises to her feet.
Wobbling as she advances on Joan.

OCTAVIA
When you left us, I fought with all
the power within me just to keep this
family alive, day after day, and...
She grabs Joan by the shoulders. Octavia's immaculate face stained by tears.

OCTAVIA
It was all worth it knowing you were happy. That you were out there living your life. So why are you here?

Joan doesn't know what to say. Then it comes effortlessly.

JOAN
...I'm here for my sister.

Joan grabs her CAMERA off a table.

JOAN
I'm here to photograph my sister's wedding, starting with you.

Joan marches off. Octavia follows her, curious. CRANE DOWN to show Billy's phone left under a pillow. The 911 call still going.

911 OPERATOR (OVER PHONE)
Ma'am? You still there? Please stay with us, police are on their way...

The SCORE rises-- CLICK, CLICK, SNAP-- The rhythm of a camera wheel turning-- The drumbeat of a camera shutter firing-- The music of camera gears building and taking us to--

MONTAGE - JOAN SHOOTING WEDDING PHOTOS

SUBJECT 1) OCTAVIA - IN THE DINING ROOM

Joan sweeps in with her camera and Octavia--

OCTAVIA
Here? So far away from--

JOAN
There.

Joan points at the head of the table. Glowing with warm, curtained light. Octavia sits in her armchair. A queen on her throne.

OCTAVIA
Like this?
**SUBJECT 2) MASON – AT THE BRIDAL TABLE**

Joan orbits Mason with her camera.
Finding the right angle out of the sun.
Framing Mason's face in both light and shadow.

MASON
Do you want Cora in the--

JOAN
No. Leave her out of this.

**SUBJECT 3) LAVINIA – AT A BACK TABLE**

Lavinia stares at the house.
Arms crossed over a full plate.
Ignoring Joan as she frames a shot.

LAVINIA
Sure, snap away.

**SUBJECT 4) AUGUSTUS – IN THE KITCHEN**

Joan throws open a side door.
Casting hard light on Augustus, alone at the sink.

AUGUSTUS
That's awfully bright, are you sure--

Joan presses a palm into his chest.
Taking control.

JOAN
Stand still.

**SUBJECT 1) OCTAVIA – IN THE DINING ROOM**

Joan circles Octavia--
Adjusting her camera settings--

OCTAVIA
My dear, what is taking so--

Octavia squirms--
Joan SHOVES her back into her seat--

JOAN
Don't move.

Octavia nods.
Power shifts.
SUBJECT 2) MASON - AT THE BRIDAL TABLE

Mason sweats in the sun's glare.
Goes to wipe his brow--
Joan SWATS his hand down--
GRABS his chin and looks him in the eye.

      JOAN
      Like a statue. Got it?

Mason makes the tiniest nod.

      JOAN
      Now I'm going to ask you a question.

SUBJECT 3) LAVINIA - AT A BACK TABLE

Lavinia rolls her eyes--

      LAVINIA
      Just take the damn picture already--

Joan grabs Lavinia's chair--
YANKS Lavinia in closer--
Getting her attention--

      JOAN
      And I need you to answer my question
      as honestly as possible.

SUBJECT 4) AUGUSTUS - IN THE KITCHEN

Augustus stands rigidly still.
Clenching his fists like a boy holding his breath.

      JOAN
      Ready?

He blinks an "okay."
Joan frames up--
Gets into position--
Finger on the shutter and--

      JOAN
      Are you planning to kill Cora?

INTERCUT - ALL FOUR SUBJECTS' REACTIONS

A wave of emotions hits all four--
Too fast to catch them but--
SNAP-- SNAP-- SNAP-- SNAP--
Joan captures all their reactions.
SUBJECT 1) OCTAVIA - IN THE DINING ROOM

Octavia stands bolt upright--

    OCTAVIA
    How could you ask such an impudent--

She marches at Joan--
Gets right in her face--
Joan braces for violence--

    OCTAVIA
    The only one here heartless enough to get Cora killed is you.

And Octavia storms out--

SUBJECT 2) MASON - AT THE BRIDAL TABLE

Mason stares right back at Joan.
His face a blank slate.

    JOAN
    I would never hurt Cora.

SUBJECT 3) LAVINIA - AT A BACK TABLE

Lavinia shrugs, cuts up her food--

    LAVINIA
    No. Why would I? I only met the girl today. What kind of question is that?

SUBJECT 4) AUGUSTUS - IN THE KITCHEN

SMASH!-- Augustus sweeps plates to the floor--
Putting his back to Joan--

    AUGUSTUS
    No. NO. What makes you think I would ever do that?... Answer me!

    JOAN
    I... I was just--

He turns to face her.
His cheeks wet with tears.

    AUGUSTUS
    Everything I've done, I did it for you girls. I wrote that blasted book hoping you'd read it and come home. I did other things... terrible things.
JOAN
What did you do, Father?

AUGUSTUS
You're my compass, Joanie. You're my North Star. I was lost without you.

He pulls Joan into a hug.
Caressing her hair.

AUGUSTUS
And now you're home.

On Joan's concerned face we END INTERCUT.

EXT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BACK YARD - DAY

Everyone having a wonderful time.
Except for JOAN.
Sitting alone.
Fixated on--

HER CAMERA

Sliding through PHOTOS.
A wedding portrait of each subject.
All of them look GUILTY.

JOAN

Drops her camera on the table.
Running fingers through her hair.
Frustrated.
Until.
She picks up her camera again.
Eyes widening at--

HER CAMERA - A VIDEO FILE

She hits play.
A low angle on her feet walking.
Footage taken by accident--
When the angle tilts up--
Peering into the kitchen--
Revealing Sebastian's murder.
The final frame: his fingers reaching for A LAPEL PIN.

JOAN

Watches in horror.
Hand over her mouth when--
INNER VOICES bubble up--
She spins in her seat--
Seeing a carousel of cruel eyes watching her--
Vicious whispers coming from all around her--
Getting louder-- angrier-- SCREAMING--
She holds her throbbing head--
Spots a WINE BOTTLE at her table--
A moment's hesitation--
She GRABS IT--
Pours a glass--
Knocks it back--
Down in one--
Wincing as--

The voices fade.
She exhales.
Then the shame hits her.
She grabs the bottle again.
Shaky hands pour another glass.
Goes to knock it back--
As her eyes meet--

OCTAVIA

At the next table.
Wearing a similar dress.
Wearing a similar expression of shame.
Holding a similarly full glass of wine.
The mirror image of Joan as an older woman.

OCTAVIA
   You can't escape who you are, Joan.
   There's no use in fighting your fate.

Octavia sips her wine.
Sways to her feet, drunk.
And joins the party.

JOAN

Glass of wine shaking in her hand.
She raises it to her lips--
A HAND grabs her shoulder--

   BILLY (O.S.)
   Joan, stop!

BILLY

Sits beside her.
Lets go of her shoulder.
Leaves the choice up to her.
BILLY
Don't throw away three years of sobriety. Don't throw away your life.

JOAN
Billy... I... oh Gods...

BILLY
Stop. Don't fall down that spiral. You're okay. You're with me. But I need you to come clean:

He reaches into his coat.
Pulls out JOAN'S PILL BOTTLE.

BILLY
How long have you been taking these?

JOAN
My pills-- Where did you--

BILLY
How long have you been using? How long have you been lying to me?

Her eyes widen.
She touches his jacket.
Pulls something off of it.
THE LAPEL PIN FROM THE VIDEO.

JOAN
Where did you get this?

BILLY
I found it in the kitchen. But don't you change the subject on--

Joan shoots to her feet.
Backing away from him.
Billy follows her.

JOAN
It was you.

BILLY
What?

JOAN
You killed Sebastian. You're trying to kill my family.

BILLY
What are you talking about?
JOAN
That's why you came here-- Why you kept disappearing--

BILLY
Joan, you're not making sense. I think you need to sit back--

JOAN
Where were you this morning?

BILLY
I-- I went to the car, like you--

JOAN
Liar! You weren't at the car when I got there!

BILLY
I was looking for you, but--

JOAN
Prove it.

BILLY
I can't, I--

JOAN
Syna-GETH!

Joan LUNGES at him--
Whipping off a glove--
Touching her wrists then his face and--

INT. PAWN SHOP - [BILLY'S MIND] - NIGHT

Joan touches Billy's face in his shop...
Only this place looks surreal now...
Everything cranked up brighter...
Joan lets go...
Gazing around...
As Billy freaks out...

BILLY
What th-- How-- Wait, this can't be my shop. Where are we?

JOAN
Your mind. Now show me where you were this morning.

BILLY
Show you? I don't know how to--
She pushes past him...
Because playing over the wall behind him is a...

**PROJECTION - BILLY OUTSIDE THE WHITMAN HOUSE**

Billy in the car...
Turning it over...
The engine whirring and dying...
Getting out and popping the hood...
Hearing something...
Looking into the forest...
A KINSMAN stares back at him...
Billy sprints...
Into the house...
Into the library with Joan and Augustus...
And that scene repeats on the wall...

**JOAN**
You didn't kill anyone. You were telling the truth.

**BILLY**
Of course, I was. I would never do anything to hurt you.

Then all the images on the wall change to...

**PROJECTIONS - BILLY LOOKING AT JOAN**

Alternate takes of every scene with Billy...
Every moment Joan looked away from him...
But now we hold on Billy watching her...
A tender longing in his eyes...

**JOAN**
Because you love me.

**BILLY**
No, I-- I never said-- you weren't supposed to see any of this.

Billy tries to block the projections...
But the images play over his body...
Joan can't help but smile...

**JOAN**
Why didn't you tell me?

**BILLY**
I'm your sponsor. I can't date you. Not yet.

**JOAN**
Not until I finish all twelve steps?
BILLY
Not until you to open up to me.
Joan... who are you?

JOAN
What do you mean?

BILLY
I mean what is all this? Since when could you do this? And what happened between you and your sister?

JOAN
I-- I'm not allowed to talk about--

BILLY
I have been patient. I have told you everything about my past but you haven't told me a thing about your...

CREAK...
They both look at...
A door opening to...

AN ADJOINING ROOM - BILLY'S CHILDHOOD MEMORY

The back of Billy's shop transformed into a '90s bedroom...
A boy watches TV there... LITTLE BILLY (12)...
BILLY'S FATHER (40s) shambles in drunk...
Keeping his back to us...

BILLY'S FATHER
Billy! Why're you still up? Bed! Now!

LITTLE BILLY
But--

A SLAP across the boy's face...

BILLY'S FATHER
Do as you're told.

He grabs Little Billy...
Wrenching him off screen as...
WE PUSH IN ON the empty door frame...

BILLY'S FATHER (O.S.)
You can't sleep in that. Off. Off!

LITTLE BILLY (O.S.)
Dad, please don't-- ACK--

BILLY'S FATHER (O.S.)
Don't speak.
Choking noises...
Billy's clothes are thrown across the room...
His underwear lands in front of us...

BILLY'S FATHER (O.S.)
Shh, don't speak. Don't you ever--
EVER. Do you hear me? Do you--

BILLY
Slams the door on his childhood memory...
Shaking... crying...

JOAN
Billy, I didn't mean for that to happen. I didn't know--

BILLY
I told you, didn't I? I told you that he... abused me.

JOAN
I didn't know he... I am so sorry.

BILLY
Now you know. Now you know everything about me. So why can't you be honest with me?

JOAN
I-- I can't--

BILLY
Try.

She shudders...
Steps forward...
Looks into his comforting eyes...
Touches his face and... A BRIEF FLASH...
Billy steps back... blinking rapid-fire at...

PROJECTIONS - THE FIRST SCENE

Joan's flight from her family flickers over every wall...
Different moments playing on different walls...

BILLY
Oh my god, Joan...

JOAN
I don't know what to do. I never should've left. I never should've come back or brought you here or done any of this!
BILLY

No, Joan--

He takes her hands...
His face in beatific wonder...

BILLY

This ability... this is a gift.

JOAN

What? No! This ruined my life. This is why I ran away, why I drank, why--

BILLY

This can help so many people.

JOAN

This will get me killed! It will get both of us-- all of us--

Billy turns and marches into...

THE ADJOINING ROOM - BILLY'S CHILDHOOD MEMORY

BILLY

Hey! HEY! You get away from him!

BILLY'S FATHER (O.S.)

What the--

Billy lunges off screen...
WE HOLD ON the empty door frame...
Sounds of a scuffle... CRACK!... his father groaning...

BILLY (O.S.)

I never want to see you again, you got that? SAY IT.

BILLY'S FATHER (O.S.)

You're never going to see me again.

The sound of a decisive blow...
Then out comes...

BILLY

Holding LITTLE BILLY in his arms...
Rescuing his inner child...
Tear-rimmed eyes on Joan...

BILLY

This is how you help people. This is how you help your sister. And we're going to do it together.
Billy reaches out...
Little Billy does too...
Joan takes both their hands as it all FLASHES TO WHITE.

EXT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BACK YARD - [REALITY] - DAY

Joan lets go of Billy's face.
No time has passed here.
Until their eyes open.
A look from Billy.
A nod from Joan.
She turns to--

CORAL - AT THE BRIDAL TABLE

Fifty feet away, spoon-feeding Mason.
Booping him on the nose with food.
Making each other laugh.
As THE HIGH ELDER watches over them.
Keeping an eye on--

JOAN

Coming their way.
Walking fast.
Passing other tables--
Rousing judgmental stares when--

INNER VOICES rise up...
Vicious thoughts ready to overwhelm her...
But this time she locks her sights on Cora...
Everything else falls out of focus as she whispers...
Swiping her thumb across her wrist tattoo and...

The inner voices fade away.
We hear only her heartbeat.
And one looping thought.

JOAN (V.O.)
I'm coming back for you. I'm coming
back for you. I'm coming back for
you. I'm coming back for you...

Joan marches.
Suddenly weary.
Breaking out in a sweat.
Blood dripping from her ears.
Not giving a fuck and pressing on.
Just a few feet away from Cora.
Reaching out to touch her as--
THE HIGH ELDER

PULLS Joan away--
Lifts up a glass--
CLINKING it and--

All sound returns.
All attention on The High Elder and Joan.
Her moment ruined.

HIGH ELDER
The time has come to celebrate this
union with a toast-- but first-- Joan
must be on her way.
(cutting Joan off)
Yes, urgent business takes her away
so say your farewells while you can.

Joan looks around.
Stony faces stare back.
Cora won't look at her.
No one says goodbye.
Joan walks off.

HIGH ELDER
Now, raise your glasses to--

CLINKING.
All heads to turn to--

JOAN
Tapping her own glass with a knife.
All cleaned up and smiling.
Facing a tough audience.
Holding up the PIN.

JOAN
Public service announcement: Who left
this pin in the kitchen? Anyone?

She scans the party--
Catches movement at a back table--
But her vision is blurring in and out--

HIGH ELDER
Child, it's time for you to--

JOAN
I'd like to make a toast: To my
sister on her wedding day.

She raises a glass.
No one else does.
JOAN (cont'd)
Cora, I remember the day you were born. I remember holding you in my arms and never wanting to let you go.
I told you stories, I gave you my toys-- Mother said you were too young for all that-- but I said, "That's okay, I'll teach her everything."

A few chuckles.
Cora starts to smile.

JOAN
From that day on, I always had you by my side. I took you to school with me. I took you to harvest with me. We shared the same room for fifty years and I wouldn't have wished for it any other way. You were my best friend, my constant companion, and I never wanted to let you go but...

Joan fights back tears. 
Everyone is listening. 
Cora is leaning in.

JOAN
But here is this handsome man by your side who loves you-- he loves you so much he married you even after he met all of us--

Now they all laugh. 
Cora brushes away tears with a giggle.

JOAN
So I have nothing more to teach you. 
I guess I have to let you go now. 
Here's to Cora and Mason--

Joan raises her glass higher. 
Now everyone follows suit. 
Moved and grinning. 
Ready to toast--

JOAN
But one last thing I'd like to say to my newlywed sister and to all of you: I repent. I beg your forgiveness for all my wrongs. And I declare...

Joan looks at Cora. 
Takes a deep breath. 
Then this whole scene turns on a dime--
JOAN
Someone here is trying to kill Cora!
Kill all of us! I have proof! I can--

THE HIGH ELDER
Grabs at Joan--

HIGH ELDER
That is enough! No more--

Joan SHOVES him back--

JOAN
Get off me! All of you, listen--

AUGUSTUS - A FEW TABLES OVER
Rushes at Joan--

AUGUSTUS
Joan, stop it! Don't you disrespect--

JOAN
Father, I can prove it! I can show--

He SLAPS her.
Shocking her--
And he drags Joan off her feet--

JOAN
Wait, no-- Let me go! You have to believe-- Billy! Help!

BILLY - AT A BACK TABLE
Stands-- goes to run as--

OCTAVIA
GRABS Billy's shoulder with an iron grip--
Sits him right back down--

OCTAVIA
Do not interfere.

BILLY
He can't do this to her, you can't--

OCTAVIA
She is our child and we do what we want with our children.

That strikes a fucking nerve with Billy as--
JOAN - DRAGGED BY AUGUSTUS

Sees Billy struggling with Octavia-- turns to face--

    JOAN
    Cora! Talk to Billy! He can prove it!
    HE CAN PROVE THEY'RE TRYING TO KILL--

Augustus hauls her inside.
Pained silence.

CORA - AT THE BRIDAL TABLE

Really looking at everyone now.
What if Joan is right?
She locks eyes with--

BILLY - AT THE BACK TABLE

Looking right back at her.
Nodding. Joan is right.
As Cora reacts--

    OCTAVIA
    Have you any inkling what she was
    raving about, Cousin Billy?
    BILLY
    Sorry?
    OCTAVIA
    Can you really prove that someone
    here is trying to kill us?

Billy hesitates as--
They both turn to look at JOAN'S CAMERA in front of them.

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Augustus drags Joan kicking and screaming--

    JOAN
    Let go of me! Please! Don't make me
    go! Don't send me away--

He THROWS her into a door--

    AUGUSTUS
    I'm not making you go.
    JOAN
    You're not?
AUGUSTUS
I'm making you stay.

He opens the door-- PUSHING Joan into--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Augustus SLAMS the door on Joan as--

JOAN
No, no, no, NO--

CLICK!-- Joan yanks on the knob--
She's locked in--

JOAN
No! Let me out! Open the door!

INTERCUT - AUGUSTUS & JOAN

AUGUSTUS
I'm not opening the door until you come to your senses.

JOAN
Please! You have to protect Cora! You have to get her out of--

AUGUSTUS
No one is leaving this house, you hear me? I made sure of that when I dismantled your car.

Horror dawns on Joan--
Turning back to see--
OILY TOOLS in the sink.

JOAN
You did what?

AUGUSTUS
I won't lose you again. You'll stay with us and we'll be a family again.

Augustus tenderly puts his hand on the door--
Joan BANGS HER FISTS on the other side--

JOAN
NO! They're going to kill her! You have to let me out! You... Father?

On that silence we--
END INTERCUT – ON JOAN

Whipping around--
Seeing two more doors--
Rushing the first door--
Yanking on the knob--
It's locked--
Now the second door--
SWINGING IT OPEN AND--

Finding stairs that go down, down, down to a DARK BASEMENT.
Fuck no.

Going back to the first door.
Noticing two SCREWS there.
Rummaging through drawers.

    JOAN
    Screwdriver, screwdriver, screwdriv--

FOOTSTEPS from down the hall.

    JOAN
    Father? Is that you?

The footsteps stop.
A shadow hangs over the door sill.

    JOAN
    Billy?... Mother?.. Could you please
    let me ou--

    WHAM!-- someone rams into the door--
    Joan screams--
    WHAM!-- the door rattles again--
    Joan searches all the cabinets--
    WHAM!-- the door begins to crack--
    Joan finds a screwdriver--
    WHAM!-- the door’s frame splinters--
    Joan rushes to the other door--
    WHAM!-- a door hinge pops off--
    Joan starts unscrewing the other door's knob--
    WHAM!-- the other hinge pops off--
    Joan almost finishes--
    SHE DROPS THE SCREWDRIVER--

THE DOOR SLAMS OPEN--

Joan shrieks--
No options left--
She runs into--
INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY

Joan descends the steps.
Down, down, down.
Into darkness.
Pitch black.
Eyes adjusting.
Surfaces appearing.
Her feet fumbling.
Hands tracing the walls.
Finding a switch.
Flipping it.

A BLINDING LIGHT BULB.
Swinging over a concrete storm shelter.
Joan squinting among stacks of dusty boxes.
She searches for another way out.
Finding only more boxes.
FOOTSTEPS.
Heavy and slow.
Coming down the stairs.
Joan panics.
Crouches.
Where the hell can she hide?
FOOTSTEPS come closer.
Then she finds it.
Behind her.
A CRAWLSPACE.
Joan scoots in--
Pulling a box with her--
Covering up the crawlspace from sight--
When she looks over at--

SEBASTIAN

His DEAD BODY lies in the crawlspace beside her.

JOAN - IN THE CRAWLSPACE

Gasps--
The FOOTSTEPS STOP.
She slaps a hand over her mouth.
Controls her breathing.
Calm down.
Peers around her box.
Looking out at... an empty basement.
Silence.
THEN HER BOX IS KICKED AWAY AND--

LAVINIA BLY

Mason's mother steps into the light.
Kneeling over Sebastian's body.
Sneering in disgust.
JOAN
You... You're the--

Lavinia whips out a KNIFE and holds it to Joan's throat.
A spider toying with its prey.

LAVINIA
I'm going to enjoy gutting you.

Lavinia drags the blade's tip across Joan's neck--
Drawing a bead of blood--
A MUFFLED MOAN--

LAVINIA
Don't be shy, dear. You got something
to say, you come and tell her.

Out of the shadows steps--

EMMETT BLY

The beaten journalist from the first scene.
His face disfigured as if from a stroke.
His hair a shock of white.
His jaw locked shut.
His crooked feet shambling.
His shaky hands reaching out.
Going through Joan's pockets.
And pulling out THE LAPEL PIN.

LAVINIA
Oh, dear, you found it! Here, let me
get that for you.

Lavinia sticks the pin on Emmett's lapel.
Kisses his cheek.

LAVINIA
There! Now you look like your old
self back when you won the Pulitzer.

JOAN
You-- You're that journalist! But I
thought they--

LAVINIA
Killed him? No. But you should have.
The agony you put him through, trying
to empty his mind-- but he didn't
forget. We will never forgot.

Emmett corners Joan--
Eyes blazing with fury--
Hands touching her face and FLASHING US TO--
EXT. WHITMAN HOUSE - [EMMETT'S MIND] - DAY

Moments after the first scene...
Joan running and running...
Only everything looks surreal now...
Shimmering... desaturated... almost black and white...

CORA (O.S.)
Joan! Don't leave me, Joa-- No! NO!--
JOAN COME BACK PLEASE THEY'RE--

This time her voice is cut off by a VIOLENT GASP--
Joan STOPS--
Turns around--
And runs back into--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - HALLWAY - [EMMETT'S MIND] - DAY

Joan twists down dark, empty corridors--
Her feet slapping in disjointed echoes--
VIOLENT GASPS getting closer--

JOAN
Cora! Cora, what happened! What--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - LIBRARY - [EMMETT'S MIND] - DAY

Joan turns the corner to find--
Her parents on the floor, DEAD.
EMMETT HOLDING A KNIFE TO CORA'S THROAT.

JOAN
Wait! Please don't--

EMMETT
Do you know how long your sister tortured me?

JOAN
She never meant to hurt you! She was only trying to erase your--

EMMETT
Twenty seconds. No more than half a minute. But in here...
(gesturing around)
It lasted fifty years. Fifty years imprisoned in my own mind.

JOAN
Our parents forced her to! Please, just put down th--
EMMETT
Now I have you here and I'm going to put you through the same hell.

Emmett slits Cora's throat.
Joan CRIES OUT--
Cora falls-- bleeding--
Joan scoops Cora into her arms--
Watching Cora's last gurgling breaths--
Hugging Cora tight as--
Joan finds herself hugging THE KEEPER'S MASK--
Cora and Emmett have vanished.
The room is empty.
An infant WAILS.
Joan goes to--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BEDROOM - [EMMETT'S MIND] - DAY

Joan stops in to see--
LITTLE JOAN (8) same hair and clothes, holding--
BABY CORA in her arms, rocking her gently, as--
OCTAVIA, radiant and tired, lies in bed.

LITTLE JOAN
(all in one breath)
Hi I'm your sister Joan and I'm going to teach you to play hide and seek and read you bedtime stories like Snow White and Rose Red which is my favorite story so let's read it together: "Once upon a time--

As Little Joan sits down with a CHILDREN'S STORYBOOK... Showing the pages to Baby Cora...

OCTAVIA
Joanie, she's too young for all that. Here, give her back to--

LITTLE JOAN
That's okay, I'll teach her everything. Now, "Snow White and Rose Red went for a walk in the woods..."

As our Joan smiles at this memory...
EMMETT APPEARS behind Little Joan...

JOAN
No!-- Don't--

EMMETT
Fifty years.
He swings down a KNIFE--
Joan SCREAMS--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BRIDAL SUITE - [REALITY] - DAY

Cora's empty room.
Hold here for a beat.

CORA (O.S.)
...back in just a minute!

Cora walks in.
Shuts the door.
Looks around.
Searching on top of dressers.
Shuffling through papers until--
There-- on the floor-- she finds it--

A LETTER

Unfolding it to reveal shaky handwriting.
This is Joan's Letter.

CORA

Reads it, hand on her hip.
When a change comes over her.
Fresh tears spring to her eyes.
She has to sit down.
She reads it faster.
Believing in Joan.

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - HALLWAY - [EMMETT'S MIND] - DAY

WHAM!-- Joan slams into a wall--
Exhausted-- years older-- streaks of white hair--
She plods on.
Dead on her feet.
Marching into--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - LIBRARY - [EMMETT'S MIND] - DAY

Joan slumps into the door frame--
Resting to catch her breath--
Seeing a familiar sight--
EMMETT HOLDING A KNIFE TO CORA'S THROAT.

EMMETT
You can't save her. I'm going to kill her again and again and--
JOAN

No.

EMMETT
Then get down on your hands and knees and beg me. Go on, beg.

Joan doesn't move.
Fucking fed up.

EMMETT
Suit yourself--

He goes to slit her throat--
Joan SMASHES her fist into the wall--
CRAAAACK!-- the whole house quakes and rumbles--

JOAN
I said NO!

The house vanishes.
Nothing left but a black void.
A spotlight hits Joan and Emmett.
The tables have turned.

JOAN
What's your plan?

He turns to run--
And bumps into JOAN suddenly behind him--

JOAN
How are you going to do it?

EMMETT
I-- I don't know! I--

JOAN
You knew I had nothing to do with this yet you tortured me. But I know you're trying to kill my family--

A CIRCLE OF KINSMAN step out of the dark--
Surrounding Emmett--

JOAN
So tell me your plan or I'll make you relive your worst nightmares.

KINSMEN reach out for Emmett--
Swarming him--

JOAN
Tell me!
EMMETT
Poison! We're using poison!

The Kinsmen vanish into the dark.
Joan GRABS Emmett.

JOAN
How?

EMMETT
Two separate chemicals. Tasteless, harmless-- but put them together--
(a sick grin spreads)
They should be enjoying it right now.

JOAN
Enjoying what? What did you poison?

EMMETT
The wine and-- Do you think they're cutting the cake about now?

As Emmett laughs--
All this FLASHES TO WHITE--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BASEMENT - [REALITY] - DAY

Joan slides out of the corner--
Lavinia lunges at her--
WHAM!-- Joan socks her good--
Soars up the stairs--
Slamming out--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Joan skids over the floor and out to--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Joan sprints down the hall--
A terrifying sight-- sweaty-- dirty-- bloody--

JOAN
Cora! CORA!

EXT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BACK YARD - DAY

Joan rushes out to find--
A slow song playing and no one dancing.
Cora's table is EMPTY.
JOAN
Cora! Has anyone seen--

MASON (O.S.)
She'll be back soon.

Joan spins--
MASON pulls her to him--
Taking her gloved hand in his--
Hooking his arm around her back--
And now they're dancing face to face.

JOAN
Let go of--

MASON
Shh, don't make a scene.

JOAN
I'll scream, I'll--

MASON
You'll get dragged away only this time you won't come back. So relax.

JOAN
Why are you doing this?

MASON
Dancing? I thought maybe we could get to know each other.

JOAN
No, not-- Why are you planning to--

MASON
Wrong question. And you know why.

JOAN
Then why did you kill Sebastian?

MASON
I didn't-- Wait, Sebastian is dead?

Mason stops dancing.
Face dropping in shock.

JOAN
I have it on camera. His body is lying in the basement.

MASON
No-- No, that wasn't the plan, that wasn't supposed to--
JOAN
What was the plan?

Mason hesitates--
Joan turns to run--
He pulls her back into dancing--

MASON
Ah, ah. Try another question.

JOAN
Where's Cora? What have you done to--

MASON
Getting colder.

JOAN
If you hurt her, I swear--

MASON
Okay, here's a hint: the question starts with "How."

JOAN
I already know how: poison.

MASON
Who told-- You heard that from my mom, didn't you?

Joan stonewalls him.
Mason smirks, impressed.

MASON
You're close! But the real question is: "How did I get to marry Cora?"

JOAN
(dawning on her)
...My parents don't know who you really are. But they must have tested you, made you prove you're one of us.

MASON
Oh, they did. But Cora helped me.

JOAN
No... No, she wouldn't have--

MASON
Cora lied about my past. Cora blocked out my thoughts. Cora made everyone think I had gifts but it was all her.
JOAN
You're lying! She would never--

MAISON
She did all that and more-- because Cora is in love with me.

JOAN
You sick sonuvabitch, I'll kill you--

Joan tries to hit Mason--
He wraps his arms around her--
Pulling her in for a closer dance--

MAISON
No. You won't. Here's what you'll do: In three minutes, you'll leave-- leave your camera, leave Cora, leave all of us-- and never come back.

JOAN
No! You can't make m--

MAISON
If you leave, Cora will live. If you stay, everyone here will die.

Joan looks up at Billy.

JOAN
How do I know you won't kill Cora as soon as I leave?

MAISON
You know. You can hear my thoughts. So am I telling the truth?

Joan closes her eyes...
His inner voices whisper...
Warm, resonant tones emanate...

JOAN
Yes... You'd do anything for her.

MAISON
And so would you.

He stops the dance.
Half-bows to her.

MAISON
Three minutes.
Mason walks off.
Joan stands still, breathless.

**EXT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BACK YARD - MOMENTS LATER**

Joan hurries over--

**JOAN**
Billy! Billy, I need to talk to...

LAUGHTER drowns out her words--
As she comes upon--

**AT A BACK TABLE - BILLY, AUGUSTUS, AND OCTAVIA**

Chuckling together like old friends.
Talking over plates of CAKE.

**AUGUSTUS**
...and, I swear, she said, "But I need to turn this pumpkin into a carriage to find Prince Charming."

Augustus and Octavia giggle, wiping away tears--
Billy goes for a bite of CAKE--
Joan grabs his wrist--

**JOAN**
Don't eat that. It's poisoned, it--

**AUGUSTUS**
Joan, I tried to make you see reason, but you have taken full leave of your senses. Sit down.

**JOAN**
Thank you, Father, but if you pardon us, I really must speak with Billy--

**OCTAVIA**
Anything you have to say to Cousin Billy you can say to us. Have a seat.

**JOAN**
I would much rather--

**AUGUSTUS**
Sit down, child.

Augustus stares her down.
Billy squirms between Octavia and Augustus.
Clearly their captive.
Joan looks past them at--
BACK PORCH ENTRANCE - LAVINIA

Stumbling out of the house.
Talking to Mason.
Pointing at--

JOAN - AT THE BACK TABLE

Taking a deep breath.
And sitting between Billy and Octavia.

OCTAVIA
Now what is it you want to say?

BILLY
Actually, it's something we both want to say.

JOAN
Billy, what are you doing?

BILLY
Augustus, Octavia... you touched Joan as a child and you need to apologize.

Like a bomb going off--
Everyone talking at once--
Augustus jumping up-- outraged--

AUGUSTUS
How dare you! You have no right to--

BILLY
You took advantage of her! You abused your own daughter--

Augustus almost flips the table--
Octavia holds him back--

OCTAVIA
Augustus, calm down-- just calm--

JOAN
Billy, stop! We need to leave, we--

BILLY
Tell them! Tell them how much they hurt you!

AUGUSTUS
You keep your mouth shut! We do not talk about--
BILLY
You talked all about it in your book,
how guilty you felt when you--

Augustus tries to throw his chair--
Octavia stops him-- turns on Billy--

OCTAVIA
You never speak about that book!
Don't you speak a word of--

BILLY
I'll tell everyone about that book
and who you really are you-- witches!

That word echoes.
They stop fighting.
Augustus pulls up Billy's sleeve.
Revealing Billy's wrist tattoo is SMUDGED AND FADED.

AUGUSTUS
You're an Outsider.

JOAN
Billy, run! Get out of--

AUGUSTUS
OUTSIDER!

JOAN
RUN!

Billy bolts--
Gunning for the trees as--

THE KINSMEN

Rows of them emerging from the woods.
Encircling the house.
Surrounding Billy.

JOAN
No!

She screams as--
A RED BAG IS PULLED OVER HER HEAD--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BRIDAL SUITE - DAY

Cora sits on her bed.
JOAN'S LETTER in her hands.
Staring into the middle distance.
A portrait of remorse.
JOAN’S SCREAM REPEATS--

CORA
Joan! JOAN! Where are--

As she heads out--

MASON

Bursts in.
Gripping JOAN’S CAMERA.
Cora motions to get past.
Mason matches her movement.
Blocking her exit.

CORA
We need to talk.

She hides the letter behind her back when--

LAVINIA AND EMMETT

Walk in and join Mason.
The trio advances on Cora.
Pulling the door closed behind them.
WE HOLD on Cora as the door shuts over her face.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

THROUGH CLOTH – JOAN’S POV

Joan coming to...
Everything fuzzy and red...
Crimson gauze over the world...
Dark silhouettes towering over her...
Low whispers deciding her fate...

VOICE (O.S.)
Hey, shh, she's awake--

The cloth is pulled away-- establishing us in--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE – LIBRARY – NIGHT

Right back where we started.
Moonlight cascades in from the window.
Joan lies on the floor in a white dress.
KINSMEN surround her in red robes but no masks.
Revealing their faces to show PERFECTLY ORDINARY PEOPLE.
Augustus, Octavia, Lavinia, and Mason among them.
All of them watch Joan.
All of them eat cake.
Except Lavinia and Mason pointedly do not eat cake.

JOAN
What is this? Why are you all here?

CORA
Pushes through the ranks.
Looms over Joan in red robes.
Her hands trembling.

JOAN
Cora! You're alive! Oh thank gods--

CORA
Do you want to be sisters again?

JOAN
Yes, of course I--

CORA
Then repent.

Cora takes Joan by the hand.
Lifts her up.

CORA
Stand before our kin, beg their forgiveness, and declare that I belong to the True Family now.

Joan swallows hard.
Says it for Cora.

JOAN
I repent. I beg your forgiveness. And I declare you now belong... here.

HIGH ELDER (O.S.)
Then it is decided.

All the cake is put away.
All the masks are put on.
Because here comes--

THE HIGH ELDER
Resplendent black robes.
Macabre crimson mask.
Presiding over Joan and Cora.
The Kinsmen circle around all three.
Passing around a DAGGER.
HIGH ELDER
The ceremony was cut short. But now it may begin anew.

CORA
We can pick up where we left off.

JOAN
You... want me back?

The High Elder hands Joan a mask-- THE KEEPER.

HIGH ELDER
Become The Keeper once more.

JOAN
Wait-- You want me to--

WHUMP!-- A body hitting the floor--

BILLY
Now lying at Joan's feet, BEATEN AND BLOODY. Like Emmett all over again.

BILLY
Joan! What's going on? Why are they--

JOAN
Billy! Billy, it's okay, it's going to be o-- What did you do to him?

AUGUSTUS
He is an Outsider. He saw too much.

THE KINSMEN
The silence must be kept.

JOAN
Then empty his mind and and let him go! You don't have to--

BILLY
Empty my-- No, don't--

OCTAVIA
He killed Sebastian. He's murdered our kind.

THE KINSMEN
The silence must be kept.

JOAN
No! It wasn't him! He didn't--
MASON
You swore to protect this family.

JOAN
YOU! You killed them! You and your--

LAVINIA
And protect this family you will.

The High Elder hands Joan a DAGGER.
They all HUM around Joan and Billy--
Left hands touching their left neighbor’s wrist--
Right hands touching their right neighbor’s throat--

JOAN
No! NO! Don't do this! Don't--

BILLY
What are they doing? Joan, what is--

THE KINSMEN
Blood of my blood. Hand in my hand.
Thoughts in my mind-- Seythra!

Joan tries to rush out--
Augustus and Octavia GRAB Joan--
And Joan moves against her will--

JOAN
No! Please! Don't make me do this! I don't want to--

Joan fights it-- but her hands lift up--
Pointing the DAGGER at Billy--

BILLY
What are you doing?

JOAN
Run, Billy! Get out of--

Billy turns to flee--
But Kinsmen grab him too--

BILLY
Let go of me! Get off-- Joan, put that down! Stop!

JOAN
I'm trying, I-- I can't!

STEP.
Joan lurches forward.
Only four feet away from Billy.
BILLY
I'm sorry! I'm so sorry! If you let me go I promise I will never--

STEP.
Joan resisting with all her might.
Three feet from Billy.

BILLY
Please! You don't have to do this!

JOAN
I'm sorry! I never should have brought you, I--

STEP.
The dagger shaking in her hand.
Two feet from Billy.

BILLY
I don't want to die! Please. Please!

JOAN
Billy, I-- I--

STEP.
Raising the dagger up.
Inches from Billy's heart.

BILLY
I love you! I love you Joan and I don't want to die. Please, please, please--

JOAN
I love you too! I-- No, no, no--

One last step--
The dagger pressing into Billy's chest--

JOAN
NOOO-- HRINDA!

Joan barely scrapes a thumb across her other wrist tattoo--
Everyone is FLUNG BACK--

The High Elder rushes at Joan--
But she holds the DAGGER up to his throat--

HIGH ELDER
You petulant cur! You will pay for--
JOAN
No. I do not repent. I seek no forgiveness. And my sister belongs to no one but herself! Syna-GETH!

Joan slides a thumb across her tattoo--
Dropping the dagger-- TOUCHING HIM--
Now everyone in the circle gasps--
Like an electrical current coursing out of Joan as--
A SPLIT-SECOND MONTAGE PLAYS OUT OVER THEIR WHITE MASKS--
Every moment of murderous conspiracy flitting by--
Joan releases the High Elder and--

They all step back.
A Mexican standoff.
One last beat of calm.
THEN ALL FUCKING HELL BREAKS LOOSE--

THE HIGH ELDER

Lunges like a wolf at--

LAVINIA

Fighting back with all her might--
But Kinsmen grab her-- go for her throat--

MASON (O.S.)
No!

MASON

Charges across the room for Lavinia--
Only to get pulled back by--

CORA

Yanking on Mason's collar--

CORA
Mason, stop! We--

MASON

Turns on Cora-- WHAM!--
Pinning her against the wall and--

JOAN

Rips Mason away--
SOCKS HIM ACROSS THE JAW--
About to sock him again and--
A whisper and-- WHOOSH!-- Joan soars across the room--
THROWN into the wall by an invisible force--
Looking up at--

CORA

**Holding a thumb on her wrist**--

CORA
Don't touch him!

JOAN
He's trying to kill you! He--

MASON

Breaks away--

JOAN

Runs after Mason but--

CORA

TACKLES Joan--
Joan slugs Cora--
Starting a vicious brawl--

AUGUSTUS (O.S.)
Girls, stop it! Girls--

AUGUSTUS

Go to intervene--

OCTAVIA

Holds him back--

OCTAVIA
Not now-- The Outsiders!

She points him toward--

MASON

Finally getting to Lavinia but--

THE HIGH ELDER

Grabs Mason too--
Holds him down--
CHOKES HIM AND LAVINIA WITH BOTH HANDS WHEN--
He stops.  
Stumbles back.  
Drops to his knees.  
VOMITS BLOOD on the floor.  
And keels over onto a plate of CAKE.  

THE KINSMEN  

Realize all too late--  
And STAMPEDE out the door--  

BILLY  

Huddles in a corner--  
Trapped-- Overwhelmed--  
When a dying Kinsmen lurches after him--  

      BILLY  
Help! Joan, HELP!  

JOAN AND CORA - ACROSS THE ROOM  

Can't hear Billy--  
Fighting tooth and nail--  
Letting out years of pent-up anger--  

      AUGUSTUS (O.S.)  
That's enough!  

AUGUSTUS  

Barrels through the Kinsmen--  
Reaching Joan and Cora--  

      AUGUSTUS  
Stop it, you two! Stop--  

He pulls them apart--  
GASPS--  
Eyes widening--  

      AUGUSTUS  
Stop fighting.  

He falls over with THE DAGGER IN HIS BACK--  

      JOAN AND CORA  
Father!  

LAVINIA  

Now standing behind Augustus--  
YANKING out the knife--  
Advancing on--
JOAN AND CORA

Pressed up against a wall--
Panicking when--

OCTAVIA (O.S.)

Hrinda-Vik!

LAVINIA

Flies into a wall and-- WHOOSH!--
SLIDES UP the wall as if possessed--

OCTAVIA

Stands with a thumb digging into her wrist--
Tears lining her furious face--

LAVINIA

Please don't--

OCTAVIA

Brotna!

Octavia twists her hand around--

LAVINIA - UP THE WALL

Her head suddenly twisting--
Her neck SNAPPING--
Her body dropping to the floor, DEAD--

BILLY (O.S.)

JOAN, HELP!

BILLY - IN A CORNER

Fights off a trio of Kinsmen--
Slobbering blood all over him--
Reaching for his throat--

JOAN

Sprints across the room for Billy--
Pushing Kinsman out of her way--
Dropping like flies all around her as--
A MOURNFUL CRY RINGS OUT--

MASON

Bum-rushes Octavia--
An icy whisper--
He FREEZES--
OCTAVIA

Kneels beside Augustus' body--
Squeezing her wrist-- CHOKING MASON--
Another whisper and-- WHOOSH!-- she stumbles back--

MASON

Falls over-- breathing again--

CORA

Now stands between Octavia and Mason--
Fingers poised on a wrist tattoo--

CORA

Mother, let him be--

OCTAVIA

If you dare push me again, I swear to
the First Fathers I will--

A BLOODCURDLING SCREAM--

JOAN AND BILLY

Shove over the last Kinsman--
Backing away in terror from--

EMMETT

Limping into the room--
Plunging down a KITCHEN KNIFE--
WHOOSH!-- he spins around against his will--
Now turning to face--

OCTAVIA

Lifting her wrist to her neck--
Digging a fingernail into her wrist tattoo--

MASON (O.S.)

No! Don't! Please--

OCTAVIA

Skera.

EMMETT

Lifts the knife to his neck and--
HE SLITS HIS OWN THROAT--

MASON (O.S.)

NO!
OCTAVIA

Turns on Mason--

CORA

Pulls her mother into a fierce hug.

OCTAVIA

Let go of me! Child, don't make me--

CORA

Wait.

OCTAVIA

Struggles then--
Her whole body relaxes.
SHE COUGHS UP BLOOD.
Looks at Cora.
A sad smile.

OCTAVIA

I only wanted to protect y--

She chokes--
Tips forward--
Her hand streaks blood down Cora's cheek as--
Octavia slides down and collapses on the floor, DEAD.

Silence.

Stillness.

Blood everywhere.

Cora sinks to her knees as--
WHUMP!-- her legs are yanked out form under her by--

THE HIGH ELDER

Still alive--
On death's door but--
Crawling on top of Cora--
Grabbing her throat-- STRANGLING HER--

HIGH ELDER

The silence... must... be... KEPT!

CORA

Can't speak--
Clawing at his hands--
Eyes bulging-- gasping-- dying--
JOAN

Kicks the High Elder off Cora--
Stabs him in the fucking heart with the dagger--

THE HIGH ELDER

Slumps over--
Still reaching for Cora and--
The death rattle echoes out of him.

JOAN AND CORA

Help each other up.
Watching each other.
A KNOCK at the front door.

VOICE (O.S.)
OPEN UP! THIS IS THE POLICE!

The survivors stand.
Peek down the hall at--

THE FOYER - OUT THE WINDOWS

Two silhouetted POLICE OFFICERS approach.
Their guns drawn.

INSIDE - JOAN, CORA, BILLY, AND MASON

Panic washes over them--
Looking at this bloodbath--

OFFICER (O.S.)
WE'RE COMING INSIDE IN THREE-- TWO--

CORA

Syna-geth--

Cora touches her wrist-- then touches Joan's arm and--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - BEDROOM - [CORA'S MIND] - DAY

Cora lets go of Joan now in their childhood room...
Everything is warmer here... brighter... softer...
Golden light beaming out of the curtains...

CORA
Don't let them take Mason.

JOAN
But he tried to kill you! He killed
Mother and Father and--
CORA

I did.

JOAN

What? No, you didn't--

CORA

I killed our parents.

JOAN

It wasn't your fault. You didn't know--

CORA

I did know. I planned this. I killed our parents.

A FLICKERING behind her and we see a...

PROJECTION ON THE WALL - CONSPIRACY IN THE KITCHEN

Lavinia, Emmett, Mason, and CORA huddle over the counter...
SEBASTIAN showing them all two red vials of POISON...
Pouring one into the wine...
Pouring one over the cake...

CORA

You don't know what it was like after you left. What Mother and Father made me do. I had to escape but I didn't know how... until I met Mason.

JOAN

Steadies herself against a dresser...

CORA

I knew who his parents were, but Mason-- he never wanted to hurt a soul. His parents kept pushing him, making him do terrible things-- like our parents did. Both our families wanted to kill each other, so...

JOAN

So you had them kill each other. You orchestrated all of this to... to get rid of our parents?

CORA

To break free. And after that, we were going to come find you. (tears coming)
I never gave up on you.
Joan sways down to the floor...
And all the images on the wall change to...

PROJECTIONS - LITTLE JOAN AND BABY CORA

Reading a children's storybook...

LITTLE JOAN (PROJECTION)
"Snow White and Rose Red." Once upon a time, Snow White and Rose Red went for a walk in the woods...

Baby Cora coos... Little Joan turns the page as...

CORA

Sits on the floor beside Joan...

CORA
Joan... Can't we go back to the way we used to be?

JOAN
No.

Joan turns her back on Cora...
Then faces her holding an ANTIQUE GLOBE...

JOAN
But we can go forward.

CORA
Joan... I...

JOAN
Do you want to go on that trip?

CORA
But where would we go?

JOAN
Wherever the globe sends us... Go on. Give it a whirl.

Cora spins the globe-- FLASHING TO WHITE--

INT. WHITMAN HOUSE - LIBRARY - [REALITY] - DAY

Cora lets go of Joan as--

OFFICER (O.S.)

TWO-- ONE!
WHAM! -- we hear the FRONT DOOR KICKED IN--

JOAN
WAIT! We're coming out!

Joan looks to everyone.
Solemn purpose in her eyes.
They all nod, following her out to--

I/E. WHITMAN HOUSE - FOYER - NIGHT

The front door is wide open.
Red and blue flash over everything.
Silhouetted officers stand with THEIR GUNS AIMED AT--

JOAN, CORA, MASON, AND BILLY

Walking out the front door.
High-beams blinding them like deer.
Shining on their BLOODY CLOTHES.

OFFICER (O.S.)
Put your hands over your heads and--

Joan and Cora wave their hands -- WHOOSH--
Both officers fly back as if thrown--
Knock into their car--
And pass out--

EXT. WHITMAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Joan and Cora move on.
Stepping over the unconscious officers in the grass.
Billy and Mason stare, then jog to catch up to--

JOAN AND CORA

Walking side by side.
Marching into the dark.
Holding each others' hands.
Snow White and Rose Red going for a walk in the woods.
Together.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END