FADE IN:

EXT. CHURCHYARD - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: a word carved in stone: 'DREAMS'.

BEGIN CREDITS

PULL BACK to reveal the full inscription:

'FOR IN THAT SLEEP OF DEATH WHAT DREAMS MUST COME.'

It's carved on a large obelisk grave marker. Beneath the inscription is a name: THIBAULT, and dates: 1861-1917.

PULL FURTHER BACK: Perched on the marker is a stone effigy of the angel of death, wings spread wide, half-smile on her face.

AND FURTHER BACK: Ropes are wrapped around the marker. The ropes tighten, and the marker is suddenly PULLED OVER, the CAMERA taking off with it --

The marker is dragged along, through deep grass ... then with a bump it's on a dirt road, then over a bridge. It's dragged by a team of horses. Rain starts to fall. The marker pulls away, continuing on toward --

Burgess Manor, a dark outline against the gray marble sky --

END CREDITS

INT. BURGESS MANOR - GARAGE - CIRCA 1930'S - NIGHT

The garage was once the carriage house. Several luxury cars, circa 1930s, fill the bays. The marker lies in an empty one. Two men stand nearby.

One is RODERICK BURGESS. A commanding presence, radiating a charisma both disturbing and mesmerizing. He is in his early twenties, but his soul is much older -- and darker.

The other is SMITH. Middle-aged, face drawn, he peers out of the garage furtively. He's worried, preoccupied. A white clerical collar is almost hidden beneath his coat and scarf.
SMITH
(hopefully)
The rain will wash out the tracks ...

Burgess moves slowly to the marker.

BURGESS
I've found it. Crowley couldn't. Mathers couldn't. Only I could.

SMITH
I didn't see anybody on the road ...

Burgess isn't listening to him; he's preoccupied with the marker. He examines it gleefully, reverently.

BURGESS
Thibault had it stolen from the Vatican Library -- that's common knowledge. But then it disappeared. He told Yeats he'd destroyed it. But he didn't. He couldn't. And now -- I've found it.

SMITH
I don't think anyone saw me.

Burgess finally looks at the man. Cocks his head, amused.

BURGESS
Don't worry, Vicar. No one saw you. No one knows what you've done -- except you and me. And God.

(insinuating)
Just like your other little ... peccadilloes.

The Vicar shuts his eyes in pain.

SMITH
Please ...

(looks at Burgess)
What they say is true. You are the most wicked man alive.

BURGESS
(chuckles)
I've always liked that title.

He grabs up a sledge hammer, startling the other man -- as he
intended. He smiles, and SMASHES the hammer down on the marker. Another blow. Another --

The marker is hollow. Hidden inside is a large oilskin bundle. Burgess drops the sledge. Lifts out the bundle.

Burgess unwraps it carefully. Inside is a thick book.

BURGESS
The Magdalene Grimoire. Finally.

The book is heavy, leather bound, brittle with age. Burgess pages through it greedily. It is filled with tiny, cramped writing, arcane diagrams, drawings.

3.

SMITH
That's it then? You can do it now? You can ... capture the angel of death?

BURGESS
Death isn't an angel. She's one of the Endless ... who existed long before angels ... and will exist long after the final cherubim has sung its last hosanna.

SMITH
Heresy.

BURGESS
For your sake, hope it's not. The Magdalene Grimoire is all the Order of Ancient Mysteries needed. With it, we will summon and imprison Death.

(beat)
And I will command who shall live ... and who shall die.

SMITH
Then ... you'll keep our bargain?
(no answer)
Please -- you'll keep your promise?

BURGESS
Of course, Vicar. You have my word. You won't die. And you will never have to stand in the judgment of your God.

(clasps him on the shoulder; cheery)
Good night.

He exits the garage, for the main house. Smith looks down at
the marker, at the shattered effigy of death.

SMITH
Thank God --

He catches himself, realizing he shouldn't be praying. His eyes fill with tears; he slumps.

SMITH
What have I done?

INT. BURGESS MANOR - CELLAR - NIGHT

Candles burn in the darkness. Robed figures inscribe a large circle on the floor -- chalk white against the black stone. Runic characters decorate it.

ACOLYTE
It is midnight, Lord Magus.

BURGESS
It is time. Elspeth, love..?

A beautiful YOUNG WOMAN nods adoringly. She crouches on all fours at Burgess' feet.

Items are placed on her back: a ceremonial bowl, inside which floats a human heart. A long twisted knife. A feather. Coins. The Magdalene Grimoire. She is a human altar.

Burgess opens the book. He begins to intone, displaying the items as he names them:

BURGESS
I give you coin I made from a stone. I give you a song I stole from the dirt. I give you a knife from under the hills. And a stick I stuck through a dead man's eye. I give you a claw I ripped from a rat. I give you a name, and the name is lost.

He jabs his forearm with the knife. Blood drips onto the feather.

BURGESS (CONT'D)
I give you blood from out of my vein, and a feather I pulled from an angel's wing.

He throws the feather into the circle.
BURGESS (CONT'D)
I summon with poison, and summon with pain. I open the way and open the gates. Come.
The acolytes echo the word 'Come.'

BURGESS (CONT'D)
The acolytes chant 'Come.'

5.

BURGESS (CONT'D)
From the dark they call you ... into the dark they call you. Coin and song, knife and stick ...
In the center of the circle, the air SHIMMERS --

BURGESS (CONT'D)
Claw and name, blood and feather ... Here in the darkness ...
The air SOLIDIFIES, taking shape --
The acolytes echo 'Here in the darkness.'

BURGESS (CONT'D)
Here in the darkness, we summon you together. COME!

There is FLASH --

-- and a black-cloaked FIGURE materializes in mid-air.

His head and face are covered by a HELM that looks like the skull of some dead ancient god (which it is).

A large, vibrant heart-shaped RUBY adorns his neck.

A small leather POUCH hangs from one hand.

-- and then the figure collapses. He lies splayed on the floor, in the center of the circle.
The acolytes are hushed, amazed.

ACOLYTE
We did it. I don't believe it. We did it --

BURGESS
No. We failed. This isn't Death. Damn it to hell.

Silence from the others as Burgess considers the figure.

BURGESS
Even so ... strip him.

The Acolyte nods, reaches across the circle --

-- and SCREAMS as his arm TWISTS violently, torqued by some unseen force. Burgess shoves him away from the circle.

BURGESS
Fool! If you'd broken the circle, he could have escaped!

He grabs Elspeth by the hair, slashes with the knife --

6.

Elspeth's head lolls to one side. Burgess catches her before she collapses.

ACOLYTE
My god --

Burgess lets Elspeth fall to the ground. He holds his hands up like a surgeon. They are stained with Elspeth's blood.

Careful not to break the circle, Burgess steps close to the captured FIGURE. With bloody hands he strips off the cloak.

He takes the ruby.

He takes the pouch.

And then he removes the helm --

The face revealed is bone white, framed by jet black hair. An aquiline nose and high cheekbones, a face carved from finest marble -- save the eyes. These are obsidian, deep as the universe -- and staring directly at Burgess.

He is the personification of dream.

He is SANDMAN.

Burgess draws back, unsettled.
BURGESS

(shaken)
... I think, at day's end, this will have been a very profitable evening's work.

With a gesture, he orders the acolytes out. Burgess continues to stare at Sandman as he backs out of the room.

The door to the room pivots on an axis; the other side is brick. It is clearly a secret room. The door swings shut.

Sandman lies on the floor, unmoving. And then --

-- a single, small tear slips down his cheek --

From somewhere in the empty room comes the SOUND of water DRIPPING, slowly. In the corner, a drop of water slips from a pipe, courses down the wall to the floor.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE WORLD - VARIOUS

A scratchy recording of 'Dream a Little Dream of Me' fades in and out. We see images, drifting, dreamlike, drawn from news reels, photographs, drawings: A bread line. Gandhi. Astaire and Rogers, dancing. Flagpole sitting and dance marathons. Hitler at a rally ...

7.

INT. BURGESS MANOR - CELLAR - CIRCA LATE 1940S - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: Sandman's eyes. He's sitting up now, hugging his knees to his chest. But still unmoving.

Burgess, nearly twenty years older, sits in a chair opposite him, studying him.

BURGESS
I know you can grant me boons. Power.
Immortality. A promise you won't seek revenge.

(beat)
Well? I know you can understand me. Say something!


BURGESS (CONT'D)
Damn you.
The door pivots, and ALEX BURGESS pushes in. He's seven, and he wants nothing more than to please his father. He carries a large folio, dusty and falling apart.

ALEX
Sir! I found it!

BURGESS
Yes, Alex?

ALEX
See? Here. In the Paginarum Fulvarum.

He leafs through the folio. It is filled with old drawings and paintings. We catch quick glimpses of figures titled Destiny, Death, Desire, figures we will learn more of later.

ALEX
You said he had to be one of the Endless. But it wasn't Death. And it's not Desire, or Despair -- or Destiny. That'd been brilliant if you'd caught him -- um ...

Burgess has fixed him with a stern look, humbling him.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Uh, anyway ... Here.

He finds the drawing he's looking for, displays it:

A Heirmonyous Bosch-like portrait of Sandman in his helm and cloak. Terrifying. The drawing is inscribed 'Here is said thee Kinge of Dremes.'

8.

ALEX (CONT'D)
See? He's Dream.
(reading)
Morpheus, Lord Shaper. the Prince of Stories ... the Sandman.

Burgess takes the folio, examines it, nodding.

BURGESS
Yes. I was hoping you'd work it out on your own one day. And you have. Well done, Alex.

ALEX
Thank you, father --
BURGESS

Father?

ALEX
(chastised)
Thank you, Lord Magus.
(gathers his courage)
Sir ... Since you know his true name, can't you make him do what you want?

BURGESS
Cretin. That kind of magick is too trifling for him and his ilk. The Endless are not mortal

ALEX
But if they're gods --

BURGESS
They are not gods. Gods come and go. Gods fade away.

ALEX
But ... are we safe? What if his brothers and sisters come after us?

Burgess broods on this ... glances at a shelf. On it lie Sandman's helm, pouch and ruby. He fingers the helm.

BURGESS
Protection can be had. Deals can be struck ...
(to Alex)
You've never seen a summoning, have you, son? Tonight, you will. We'll conjure a demon of hell. And trade this --
(lifts the helm)
-- for our safety.
(more)

BURGESS (CONT'D)
(turns to leave)
Inform the acolytes.

ALEX
Yes, Lord Magus. But what about ... what about him?

BURGESS
He will not get out unless the circle is broken. And the circle will not be broken unless I order it.

He leaves, Alex trailing. Sandman watches them go.

In the corner, a DROP of water slips from a pipe, courses down the wall to the floor. Twenty years has worn a channel in the stone; the drop flows along it. And then another ...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE WORLD - VARIOUS

More time goes by, more images, dreamlike: McCarthy in the Senate. Lenin reviewing a May Day parade. Walt Disney opening Disneyland. Hula hoops, 3-D movies, Elvis. The KKK marching on Washington. All accompanied by the Everly Brothers' version of 'All I Ever Do is Dream.'

INT. BURGESS MANOR - CELLAR - CIRCA 1960S - NIGHT

The door pushes open. Burgess enters, slightly drunk. At sixty, he's still handsome and vital. With him is --

RACHEL. Beautiful in the extreme, radiating sexual heat. Dressed in the counterculture style of the day. She is giggling -- then draws up short at the sight of Sandman.

RACHEL
My God ... it's true.

She circles Sandman slowly.

Alex, now in his twenties, has followed them into the room; he watches Rachel's every step.

RACHEL
He's magnificent. And you caught him, Lord Magus?

Burgess smiles -- but it fades when Alex speaks.

ALEX
Actually, it was a mistake. He was trying to --

BURGESS
Shut up, Alex.
RACHEL
Is he a demon?

BURGESS
(shakes his head)
He's more dangerous than any demon I've known.

He scoops up the pouch from the shelf.

BURGESS (CONT'D)
Here. This is what I told you about.
(opens the pouch)
The stuff that dreams are made of...

ALEX
(to himself)
'Made on.' Quote it right, you old idiot...

He goes unheard as Burgess sprinkles some of the sand into his own hand. It sparkles. He holds it out to Rachel.

BURGESS
No matter how much you take out, there's always some left... Try it.

RACHEL
How do I...? Sniff it?

BURGESS
Sniff it, swallow it, rub it on your skin... pour it in your eyes... it doesn't matter.

Rachel considers. Puts one finger in her mouth, moistening it, rolls it in the sand. With a wicked grin, eyes never leaving Burgess', she trails her hand down toward her jeans--

Burgess stares, panting slightly--

Her fingers slips beneath the waistband. Between her legs--

BURGESS
Oh, Rachel... You are a wild one...

She smiles, shows her teeth--her eyes go wide. She is seeing something beautiful, rapturous. She is seeing life as a dream.

RACHEL
Oh... oh, my...
Roderick sets the pouch down, moves to Rachel. Begins to nuzzle her neck, undress her. She responds to him --
-- but her eyes never leave the pouch.

Alex's gaze lingers on Rachel as he backs away. Then he steps discreetly out of the room.

And Sandman continues to watch ... and wait ...

INT. BURGESS MANOR - CELLAR - NIGHT

The door opens. Alex slips in, followed by Rachel.

RACHEL
Is he really what old Roddy says he is?

ALEX
I don't know ... Stupid old Roddy should've died by now and left me in charge ... he really can work some sort of magic ...

RACHEL
That sand ... that was magic ...

Alex grabs the pouch. Considers, then takes the ruby as well. He heads for the door. Rachel catches him.

RACHEL
Please ... just a little.

Alex considers. Opens the pouch. Rachel pinches out some sand, sniffs it. It takes effect immediately, transporting her. Alex grabs her hand.

ALEX
Come on ...

She pulls against him, grabs for the pouch. He lets her take it. She clutches it. One last look at Sandman; then she allows herself to be led from the room.

Sandman gazes after them.

In the corner, a DROP of water slips from the pipe, courses down the wall to the floor. Flows along the channel, which now leads to a small pool.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE WORLD - VARIOUS
More time goes by. Nixon, victorious over McGovern. An EST meeting, slam dancing punks, a 'Star Wars' line. The Ayatollah exhorting a mob. The song is 'Dreamweaver.' It skips.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

A man -- call him DAVID -- sleeps fitfully in the one-room efficiency apartment. He wears the pants and shirt of a postal uniform; the rest is scattered on the floor.

The TV is on, volume low, showing Bicentennial celebration news footage. Traffic NOISE comes from outside, mixed with the sound of a DOG Barking.

All the sounds FADE OUT, save the Barking. It becomes rhythmic, constant.

David's eyes flutter open.

CORINTHIAN
Hello, David.

The CORINTHIAN is a young man with silver hair, whipsaw build clothed in white silk pants and T-shirt.

He wears small, round dark glasses and an amused smile.

DAVID
Hello. How did you get in here?

CORINTHIAN
I wanted to talk to you, David. To tell you that you are not fulfilling your potential.

DAVID
I'm not? Who are you?

CORINTHIAN
I'm your friend. You can call me the Corinthian. I want to show you something.

He gestures to the TV. The dog continues to BARK.

ON SCREEN: what looks like the opening credits of a mid-seventies cop show: studio backlot heroics and car chases. It lingers on a POV shot: approaching a parked red Torino. Two figures inside, one blond, one brunette -- both women. Their
hair is almost ridiculously long and straight.

David leans forward at the sight of the women. His fists clench. The Corinthian smiles.

CORINTHIAN
I've shown other people things like this, David. All through history. But none as special as you.

ON SCREEN: the POV shot continues. A .44 appears in frame, and FIRES. The windshield shatters, and the brunette's head snaps back -- a bloodless, TV killing. The blond looks up and smiles.

13.

The gun FIRES again.

David's eyes fill with tears of joy. The rhythmic BARKING continues.

CORINTHIAN
You see, David? If you can dream it -- you can be it.

David saddens.

DAVID
That's all this is? This isn't really happening? This is a dream?

CORINTHIAN
Sadly, yes. That's the only way I've ever talked to special people. But ...(David brightens)
Something has happened, David. And now you can help me. You can free me. As I can free you.

DAVID
How?

The Corinthian smiles, spreads his hands.

CORINTHIAN
Wake up, David. Just wake up.

CLOSE ON: David, sleeping fitfully. His eyes flutter open. He looks at the TV. The bicentennial footage continues. NORMAL SOUND has returned.
DAVID

Just a dream ...

A hand drops on his shoulder. The Corinthian's hand.

CORINTHIAN

Not any more.

He places something on the bed in front of David -- a .44 REVOLVER. David picks it up reverently. Heavy and real.

CORINTHIAN

Good-bye, David. Thank you.

He rises, heads for the door.

DAVID

Wait! Will I ever see you again? Will you ... talk with me some more?

14.

The Corinthian pauses.

CORINTHIAN

I'll always be here, David. I'll always talk to you. Just listen.

Once again, the SOUND fades away, isolating the BARKING DOG.

David listens, nods. The Corinthian nods back, then opens the door and leaves. The door shuts quietly -- and NORMAL SOUND returns.

David lifts the revolver. Spins the cylinder. POINTS it at the CAMERA --

CUT TO:

INT. BURGESS MANOR - CELLAR - CIRCA 1980S - NIGHT

Burgess leans heavily on a cane. He is now a withered, fragile old man. He stares at Sandman, who stares back. Suddenly, Burgess is wracked by a violent coughing attack. He gets himself under control.

BURGESS

It's your fault! Damn you!

(resigned)

You aren't Death, but you live forever.

You haven't aged a day since I caught you. You could have given me power beyond
my wildest dreams.
(chokes back tears)
I ... I didn't have to get so old. I shouldn't have had to get old.

He has another violent coughing attack. Slips to one knee.

DEATH
That's it, let it out.

Another person is in the cellar. She looks about nineteen. Long black hair, pale skin. A kinda groovy, perky neo-punk girl-next-door, dressed in black jeans and camisole. An ahnk, the Egyptian symbol for life, hangs from her neck. She looks genuinely concerned for Burgess.

And we recognize her face: it was the face of the angel of death on the grave marker.

BURGESS
Who are you?

She gestures. He looks down. Sees --

His own body. Lying on the ground near his feet. Dead.

15.

BURGESS
Are you ... you aren't Death ... are you?

DEATH smiles, half-shrugs. She knows she's not what he expected.

DEATH
Hi.

BURGESS
I tried to catch you once. Got him instead.

DEATH
I know.

BURGESS
Am I ... are you going to punish me? Am I bound for hell?

DEATH
I'm just here to take you from this world to the next ... Destinations are up to you.
BURGESS
Oh ... I am. I'm going to hell. I'm Roderick Burgess. I'm the most wicked man alive.

DEATH
(a bright smile)
Not anymore.

She takes Burgess' hand. Looks up at Sandman.

DEATH
(genuine sadness)
I'm sorry, little brother ... there's nothing I can do. I ... I miss you.

She and Burgess fade into the shadows. We hear a SOFT FLUTTERING SOUND, like WINGS.

She's gone. Just Burgess' body on the floor ... And Sandman, watching. The water still DRIPS; the pool in the corner of the room is quite deep now.

EXT. THE WORLD - VARIOUS

Images leading to the present day. A student stands defiantly in front of a tank. An evangelist breaks down in tears. A white Bronco moves slowly down the freeway. Demonstrators join hands in a field of brightly colored quilts.

16.

INT. BURGESS MANOR - CELLAR - PRESENT - NIGHT

In the corner, a DROP of water slips from a pipe, courses down the wall to the floor. Flows along the carved channel in the stone, into the pool --

The pool OVERFLOWS. A line of water trickles its way across the floor, across the faded chalk runes of the circle. It wipes the line of chalk away --

The circle is broken.

With a cry of pain, Sandman falls forward, collapses outside the circle.

He rolls over. Weak. In pain. His lips part. His voice is filled with dark mystery, a voice that can inspire dreams and command nightmares:
SANDMAN

At ... last.

He gathers himself, rises. Stands, a bit unsteady.

He looks down at the remains of Roderick Burgess, decayed and brittle with age. He picks up the skull. Regards it.

Sandman squeezes. The skull SHATTERS. There is no joy in his eyes as pieces sift out from between his fingers.

Sandman looks at the shelf that once held his belongings. Empty. He looks away. Moves toward the door --

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Sodium lamps cast a sickly yellow light on the nearly-empty lot. A WOMAN hurriedly click-clacks toward her car, keys already out. She unlocks the door, opens it --

Someone slams it shut: the CORINTHIAN. He has seemingly appeared from nowhere. He smiles at her.

CORINTHIAN
Beautiful night to be alive, don't you think?

WOMAN
Stay away from me.

She crouches slightly, flexes her fingers. Her red-painted fingernails glint. She knows self-defense. The Corinthian draws a knife lazily, steps forward.

The Woman kicks at his shin -- he avoids it. But she brings her foot down on his -- hard. She grabs either side of his head, her thumbs clawing for his eyes behind his sunglasses --

She SCREAMS, yanks her hands back. She crouches, staring down at her hands, which drip with blood.

WOMAN
What did you do?

The Corinthian straightens his sunglasses. The woman crawls under the car. The Corinthian grabs her ankle -- she SCREAMS, clutches at the pavement, grabs for the tire, as she is inexorably dragged out from under the car.
CORINTHIAN (O.S.)
Don't worry. I won't kill you. That would
draw all sorts of the wrong kind of
attention. I just want to look into your
eyes --

Suddenly, she is no longer being dragged. She twists, peers
out from under the car --

The Corinthian stands still, looking up toward the night sky.

CORINTHIAN
He's back. He's BACK. No! It's not fair!
I won't allow it. I won't go back!

He looks down at the woman.

CORINTHIAN (CONT'D)
Don't worry. I can stop him. I'm not
going back.

She cowers in terror. Opens her eyes -- the Corinthian is
gone. She blinks -- it's as if he was never there --

-- except for her hands. The Woman drags herself out from
under the car. Raises her hands --

Her THUMBS BLEED, as though bitten through by tiny sharp
teeth. She starts to cry.

EXT. BURGESS MANOR - NIGHT

Boarded up, windows broken, overgrown. Sandman stands under
the night sky. Reaches out his arms. Shadows move, and
darkness stretches towards him.

Sandman wraps the shadows around him --

-- and he is gone.

18.

EXT. DREAM REALM - DUSK

A SANDSTORM rages; there is the WHITE NOISE of the howling
wind. Shadows flow inside of it, and Sandman's dark outline
emerges, one arm raised, a shield against the wind. He peers
ahead. In front of him is:
EXT. DREAM REALM - THE GATES OF HORN AND IVORY - DUSK

Ornately carved. Flanked by gargoyles. Sandman is relieved at the sight.

SANDMAN

The Gates of Horn and Ivory. Once through, I will see my castle ... I will see --

The gates part before him. Sandman steps through --

EXT. DREAM REALM - SANDMAN'S PALACE - DUSK

SANDMAN

-- my home.

Sandman stares in horror --

Ahead of him are the remains of Sandman's Dream Palace. Beautiful, once, but now overgrown and broken -- its glass walls CRACKED, its delicate spires BROKEN. The majestic columns have fallen into RUBBLE.

Sandman slumps before it as if struck down. From nearby comes the sound of gentle weeping -- and a voice:

LUCIEN (O.S.)
Breaks your heart, my Lord, doesn't it?

Sandman turns.

SANDMAN
Lucien?

In the shadow of the gates sits LUCIEN, Sandman's librarian. He rises to his feet. Pointed ears and round spectacles, dressed as a clown might dress for a formal dinner.

He stares at Sandman, smiling, tears in his eyes. We realize he's weeping at Sandman's return.

LUCIEN
One and the same, my Lord.
(he bows)
At your service, as always.
(his voice cracks)
Welcome home.
SANDMAN
What happened here?

Lucien takes a breath. Wipes the tears from his eyes.

LUCIEN
What happened? You are the incarnation of this dreamtime, Lord. With you gone, the place ... it started to crumble ...

He takes off his spectacles, cleans them.

LUCIEN (CONT'D)
I was aware of it in my Library. Slowly, the words began to fade. Some time after you vanished, my books became volumes of blank paper. The next day the whole library was gone.

(puts on his glasses)
I never found it again.

SANDMAN
I'm sorry, Lucien.

LUCIEN
I ... I tried, sir. I did my best. We all did.

SANDMAN
Let's see how it is, then.

INT. DREAM REALM - SANDMAN'S PALACE - HALLWAY - DUSK

Sandman moves through the ruined palace, around fallen columns and past broken statues.

LUCIEN
(a sad fact)
Most of the palace servants turned back into the dream stuff you made them with --

MATTHEW (O.S.)
He's back? He's really back?

A WILD FLAPPING SOUND and a sleek black raven -- MATTHEW streaks down, hovers in front of Sandman.

MATTHEW
Where have you BEEN? Are you all right? What happened?

SANDMAN
I was detained.
MATTHEW
Ha. Detained. You haven't changed, that's good news.

SANDMAN
Nor have you, Matthew.

Sandman surveys the devastation.

MATTHEW
It's a pisser, ain't it?

LUCIEN
It hurts me, too, lord.

SANDMAN
Hurts, yes ... Some power returns to me, simply by being here. But I placed too much of myself in my tools. And they are gone.

He sits down on a broken marble stair.

SANDMAN (CONT'D)
I wonder ... I wonder if it is all even worth rebuilding.

Matthew speaks an aside to Lucien, not all that quietly:

MATTHEW
Hell, I wonder if he can.

Lucien shoots Matthew a scolding look.

LUCIEN
My Lord -- some things you should know, items that need attention right away. Many of the nightkind are missing. Lesser dreams. And ...

(he swallows)
One of the major nightmares.

Sandman cocks an eyebrow, waiting. Lucien doesn't like being the messenger.

LUCIEN (CONT'D)
The Corinthian. Escaped into the waking world, I'm afraid.

Sandman turns away. Before him is his reflection in a cracked mirror, hanging askew on a wall. He looks up into his own eyes a moment, then away -- and in the mirror, we get a
glimpse of a fat, gray face -- DESPAIR.

SANDMAN

How long?

21.

LUCIEN

Twenty years.

SANDMAN

There is no telling the harm he may have caused in that time.

(beat)

I blame myself. Had I been here, fulfilling my function ...

MATTHEW

Aww ... it wasn't your fault, boss.

SANDMAN

No? Then whose?

(beat)

And, in my absence, how much further havoc has been visited upon the waking world?

INT. STANFORD RESEARCH CLINIC - NIGHT

FACES of SLEEPING PEOPLE, as seen on a row of black-and-white video monitors. Cheap public-sector equipment -- out of date, out of focus, one of the screens flipping endlessly. Below each monitor EKGs slowly churn out reams of graph paper.

A DOCTOR moves down the line, checking the readouts with professional indifference.

ON SCREEN: A man sleeps peacefully -- his name is PAUL -- and then his legs twitch spasmodically, stop. A piece of masking tape is hand-labeled 'PLMS/nocturnal myoclonus.' NEXT SCREEN: An ELDERLY MAN begins thrashing in bed, SCREAMING, pulling out electrodes. His eyes are open but he sees nothing.

DOCTOR

(checks his watch)

Patient seventeen, night terror episode at eleven-oh-five.

The Doctor expects a response, doesn't get it. He turns, glances down the line -- where an ASSISTANT studies the length of an EKG read-out, engrossed.
DOCTOR
Did you get that?

ASSISTANT
(re: the read-out)
It's gotta be some kind of record. Three
day observation program, and she's never
made it past a level 2 sleep pattern.
Even then just for a few minutes.

The Doctor looks interested for the first time, comes over,
leaving patient seventeen behind, still SCREAMING.

DOCTOR
Three days without REM sleep? She should
see things crawling the walls by now.

ASSISTANT
No sign of hallucinations.
She's part of the benzodiazepine study
...

DOCTOR
What's her name?

ON SCREEN: is a WOMAN, lovely, her face relaxed in the
peaceful beauty of sleep -- but here eyes are wide open,
staring enigmatically INTO CAMERA, unblinking.

ASSISTANT (O.S.)
Rose Walker.

INT. STANFORD RESEARCH CLINIC - ROOM - DAY

ROSE WALKER, dressed, quickly packs a few items into an
overnight bag. The Doctor appears in the doorway. He turns an
envelope in his hands.

DOCTOR
We do appreciate your participation, Miss
Walker. Um, if we could persuade you,
we'd like to have you back for an
individual --

ROSE
(cuts him off)
Yeah, yeah, I know. Lemme guess. I'm
special. You've never seen anything like
me. You want to run blood tests and do a night-time polysomnogram. Maybe you'll do a daytime multiple sleep latency test. You'll find that my condition is non-respiratory, and not stress induced. You'll find my eye muscles lack tone because my REM sleep is so rare, but you won't know why.

(beat)
Is that the check?

DOCTOR
Yes --

23.

Rose plucks it from his hands. She slings her overnight bag over her shoulder.

ROSE
Look, no offense, but ... I've been monitored and studied and hooked up to wires since I was ten. If I thought there was any chance that you guys could get me a good night's sleep, I'd take you up on it. But --

She shrugs. A wave of the envelope, and she's gone.

EXT. STANFORD RESEARCH CLINIC - DAY

The envelope is torn open; Rose examines the check.

PAUL (O.S.)
How'd you do?

PAUL -- who we met briefly, a patient in the sleep center -- has been waiting. He wears a clean denim shirt, and one of those wispy goatees favored by sensitive-artist types.

ROSE
It'll get me through another semester. You?

PAUL
Same. Walk you home?

ROSE
... sure.

Paul notes the reluctance in her voice.
PAUL

Listen, Rose ... I'm sorry I ... Sorry that ... 

Rose glances at him from under raised eyebrows, a smile playing across her lips.

ROSE

Yes, Paul..?

PAUL

That I couldn't talk to you ... after the other night.

ROSE

Paul ... don't worry about it. We just had some kind of emotional meltdown and we ended up in bed. It's been known to happen.

EXT. BART STATION - DAY

Commuters exit the BART station. Rose and Paul pause, pull skateboards from their bags. They ride expertly downhill, winding in and out of the pedestrians.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO HILLS - DAY

Skateboards in hand, Rose and Paul trudge up a steep hill.

PAUL

I really wasn't looking for, uh, you know. I was just ... I've been blocked for so long, and you listen so easy.

(beat)

I was afraid that I'd, I don't know, seduced you --

Rose laughs. Paul looks hurt.

ROSE

I'm a grown woman, Paul ... and the whole tormented artist thing is not nearly as attractive as tormented artists think it is.

(trying to ease his conscience)

Look, this was just one of those things. One of those bells that occasionally
rings ...

They reach the top of the hill.

PAUL
A trip to the moon on gossamer wings?

ROSE
Just one of those things.

She sets her board down, pushes off --

EXT. ROSE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Brownstones converted into low-cost apartments. The tenants are young, struggling: students, artists, coffee-house employees -- sometimes all three at once.

Rose arrives at her entrance, Paul close behind. He looks uncomfortable. Rose packs her skateboard.

PAUL
Hey ... let's go have lunch.

ROSE
I'm sorry -- I've got too much to deal with in my life right now. Okay?

Paul looks even more uncomfortable.

PAUL
I was thinking ... just, maybe we should talk some more?

ROSE
Paul, no.

PAUL
Rose --

Rose shoots him a look -- she's had enough. Paul sees it.

PAUL
Okay. The truth of the matter is, I know all we're going to be is great friends -- (can't help smiling) But right now, everybody in your whole building is up with your roommate putting together a surprise birthday party for
you, and it's up to me to keep you away from there for the next two hours.

Rose is completely shocked. She glances toward her apartment.

ROSE
Really?

PAUL
Uh-huh. Act surprised, okay?

ROSE
Okay ... (back at Paul)
So, um ... pals, then?

Paul regards her ... they smile. An understanding reached.

PAUL
Pals. For now.
(off her look)
And probably forever. But I just don't like saying 'never.'

ROSE
Okay. Deal. After all, no one knows their own destiny, right?

CLOSE ON: The parchment PAGE of massive book. In beautiful illuminated script it reads:

26.

"After all, no one knows their own destiny, right?"
Rose said.

In Destiny's Garden, Destiny closed his book and went to his gallery.

The huge tome is SHUT. It is chained to the wrist of --

DESTINY. Oldest of the Endless. Tall, wearing a hooded cassock. We are --

EXT. DESTINY'S GARDEN - TWILIGHT

Destiny moves through his Garden at a measured pace, assuredly as a blind man in his own familiar home. Perhaps he is blind, as we do not see his eyes, hidden in shadow.
The garden is all Greek columns, statues and sweeping archways. Paths that diverge and branch, fork and divide. Tall hedge mazes immaculately cut --

But Destiny knows his way, walking amid the sounds of silence. He leaves no footprints. And casts no shadow.

INT. DESTINY'S GARDEN - CITADEL - TWILIGHT

Destiny moves slowly, dwarfed by the high-ceilinged hallway. Beyond, chambers lead into many rooms and further chambers. He turns a corner, disappears into SHADOW --

INT. DESTINY'S GARDEN - CITADEL - GALLERY - TWILIGHT

Six portraits hang on the wall, all painted in romantic style, all the subjects garbed in eighteenth-century fashion.

Destiny stops in front of the first painting -- an ornately-framed oil portrait of Death, she in an elegant pose. Destiny speaks, his voice dry as dust:

DESTINY
Sister. I stand in my Gallery, and I summon the family to me. It is I, Destiny of the Endless, who calls you.
(beat)
Come.

Death EMERGES from out of her portrait, into the hallway. She is her usual sunny self, casually dressed.

DEATH
Hiya, big brother. What's up?

DESTINY
I am calling a conclave of the Endless, Sister. Do you not feel you should be more appropriately attired?

Death pouts ... then spins, and is suddenly wearing a turn-of-the-century satin dress, black leather boots, black silk gloves. The effect is at once wild and elegant.

DEATH
Satisfied?

Destiny moves to the next portrait. He does not look at her.
DESTINY
Yes. I am satisfied.
(to the portrait)
Sibling, I stand in my Gallery, and I call you ...

DESIRE steps out from the portrait. Perfectly symmetrical, perfectly androgynous features. Her (or his) skin is pale as smoke, his (or her) eyes tawny and sharp as yellow wine. Desire smiles in brief flashes, like moonlight glinting from a knife-edge.

She (or he) is formally dressed: black corset, panties, garters and stockings. Desire looks around, taking the place in.

DESIRE
(to Dream)
I see he hasn't redecorated in the last three hundred years. So what's the occasion?

DESPAIR
Destiny will tell us that in his own time, Desire. He won't be rushed ...

DESPAIR emerges from her portrait, a heavy woman, naked, rolls of fat weighting her down. Grey eyes that narrow to tiny points.

DESIRE
I see you dressed for the occasion, Despair.

DEATH
Shush. Be nice. It's been years since the family was together.

Destiny passes a conspicuous gap where another painting may have hung. The next portrait is of a young girl, smiling, holding flowers in a summer field.

DESTINY
I stand in my Gallery, and I call you --

DELIRIUM steps into the Gallery -- looking not all like her portrait. Orange hair, her fishnet stockings tattered. One eye is vivid emerald green, spattered with silver flecks that
move; her other eye is vein blue. Who knows what Delirium sees through her mismatched eyes?

DEATH
Hi, sis. How are you doing?

DELIRIUM
uh. Yesterday i did some really bad stuff. I mean really bad. You know.
(beat)
but today i did some good things. I don't know --

DESTINY
Hush, little sister. There is one more to be summoned.

At the end of the gallery is the portrait of Sandman, dressed in the finery of the 17th century. Destiny pauses in front of it --

INT. DESTINY'S GARDEN - CITADEL - MAIN HALL - TWILIGHT

Sandman, dressed as he was painted, sits at a seven-sided table. The Endless gathered around. Destiny stands behind his chair. There is one extra chair, standing empty.

DESTINY
You know why I have called this family meeting.

DESPAIR
Brother Dream is back.
    (glances at the empty chair)
I thought you had gone for good.

DESIRE
Abandoned his realm, abandoned his responsibilities ... 

SANDMAN
I had no choice in the matter.

DELIRIUM
Destiny could have told you what was coming. But he wouldn't 'cause he's mean.

DESTINY
I could not turn that page until it was
time for the turning. But I can tell you what has occurred in your absence.

DESIRE
Oh, do. This could be fun.

Sandman gestures for Destiny to continue.

DESTINY
The dreams of men became chaotic. One man's dream could infect thousands. Dreams of freedom, of subjugation, dreams of equality, dreams of death. Dark or light made no matter, if the dreamer strong enough.

Delirium pays no attention. Bright butterflies emanate from her fingertips.

DELIRIUM
i juST made butter-flies. LOOK, everybody! LOOK at whaT I just DiD ...

DESTINY
Brother Dream. You must decide. Will you repair your kingdom, and return to your throne?

SANDMAN
I am not sure that I am needed. Or that I wish to resume my mantle.

Desire leans forward.

DESIRE
I could make you wish to.

Sandman frowns.

DESIRE
I am Desire, am I not? Where I touch, things want and need and love, drawn like butterflies to a candle-flame.

DESPAIR
You mean moths.

Desire's smile widens.

DESIRE
Butterflies.
One of Delirium's butterflies lands on a candle flame. It burns quickly, writhing, leaving only colored smoke. The image is at once repellent and beautiful.

DELIRIUM
those were mine. you didn't have to do that!

DESPAIR
we should not argue. we should not fight.

Sandman looks across the table at Death.

SANDMAN
you have been quiet, sister. what say you?

DEATH
what say i? well, i'll tell you. and i'm only going to say it once, so you'd better pay attention.

She rises and comes around the table to him. He waits

DEATH (CONT'D)
you are utterly the stupidest, most self-centered, appallingest excuse for an anthropomorphic personification on this or any other plane.

She sits on the table beside him.

DEATH (CONT'D)
what we do aren't just responsibilities. these aren't just jobs. we didn't answer ads in the classifieds because we wanted the health care. destiny, desire, death -- this is what we are. and you -- are dream.

Her stern attitude fades, and she takes his hand.

DEATH (CONT'D)
i'm glad you're back. i was worried about you.

She kisses his cheek, then moves back to her chair.

Sandman rubs his forehead ... decides.

SANDMAN
i will repair my kingdom. to do so i must recover my tools of power: pouch, helm, and ruby.
DESTINY
(nods)
The path is chosen, then.

SANDMAN
But I don't know where they are. Brother, could you ..?

Destiny does not respond, but pulls his book closer.

SANDMAN (CONT'D)
No. Of course not. Sisters, can you be of any assistance?

He's addressing Desire, Delirium and Despair, who are grouped together -- a tableau of Mother, Maiden and Crone.

SANDMAN
My pouch of sand, which controls dreams. Do any of you have knowledge of it?

DELIRIUM
i kNow! i kNow! TheRe's a WOman namED Rachel -- she haS IT! BuT I don'T KNoW where SHE is. NeiTHeR doeS SHE.

Delirium shuts her mismatched eyes, furrows her brow. When she opens her eyes again, they are both BLUE.

DELIRIUM
Rachel remembers another: Rose Walker. Perhaps she can lead you to your pouch. (rubs her temples) It hurts me to be this way.

SANDMAN
Then stop.

Delirium's eyes shift back to one green, one blue.

DELIRIUM
DesTINy? I'm SORry. I didn't MEaN to call you meAN. I mean, i meant to, bUt I didn't MEAN it whEN I meant To.

DESTINY
I know.

Delirium smiles.
SANDMAN
My Dreamstone, my Ruby Moonstone, which can alter the fabric of reality. Where is it?

Desire seems to enjoy answering.

DESIRE
A very desirable item, hm? Stolen from a king by a mage, stolen from a mage by a thief. And that's the last I know of it.
(a knife’s-edge smile)
Sorry.

Sandman scowls. Then turns to Despair.

SANDMAN
And my helm of office, which protects me between realms?

DESPAIR
It was traded to a demon long ago. It now abides in Hell. I am too familiar with that place.

Sandman does not like this news.

SANDMAN
Thank you.

He rises, leaves the table.

EXT. DESTINY'S CITADEL - TWILIGHT

Sandman stands on a balcony looking out over Destiny's garden. Death joins him.

SANDMAN
My ruby is missing. And I am not strong enough to face a single demon, let alone the hordes of hell.

DEATH
So ... the pouch?

SANDMAN
Yes. My sister, I pray you tell our siblings that I was needed elsewhere, and I could not stay.
He kisses her hand, and starts to fade away.

SANDMAN
Adieu.

He's gone. Death bites her lip.

DEATH
Great. Now I get to worry about him some more ...

EXT. ALEXANDER'S YACHT - EVENING

A 150-foot white yacht, sleek, huge engines, built for speed and show, a testament to ego rather than seaworthiness. Anchored far away from shore. Silent and dark, save for lights in the galley and a forward cabin.

INT. ALEXANDER'S YACHT - GALLEY - EVENING

Plush and elegant. Long center table, huge refrigerator. Quiet, cavernous and empty. A door opens --

It's ALEXANDER BURGESS. No longer the 'young' Burgess, he's in his fifties, now -- and looks older. Silk robe pajamas, unkempt hair, shuffling along, he is a shocking contrast to the opulence of his ship.

CLOSE ON: a tray, as Alexander carefully places five celery sticks in line. Each celery stick is exactly the same length.

INT. ALEXANDER' YACHT - CAPTAIN'S CABIN - EVENING

Alexander pushes into the cabin, carrying the tray. A huge bed, marble and wood appointments -- this is a yacht Donald Trump might have owned.

On the bed is the body of a muscular young man. Dead.

ALEXANDER
Carlos ... ?

CORINTHIAN
Alexander Burgess, I presume.

The Corinthian is standing to one side of the door. Alexander drops the tray, reaches into his robe, draws a gun from a
holster at his side --

The Corinthian moves swiftly, a single blow --

Alexander crumples to the deck, and SCREEN FADES TO BLACK.

INT. ALEXANDER'S YACHT - CAPTAIN'S CABIN - EVENING

FADE UP: CLOSE ON ALEXANDER, lying where he fell. His eyes open -- slightly. He shifts his eyes only, glancing around.

POV ALEXANDER -- he sees the Corinthian, moving about the cabin, searching. Photos on the walls show scenes from huge and decadent parties -- liquor, drugs, beautiful women, powerful men. The Corinthian looks at them, shakes his head.

CORINTHIAN
(to himself)
Oh my, such decadence.

He moves past, examines an empty wall. Lingers there.

CORINTHIAN
Dear Alexander ... you spent a lot of time here, didn't you? It stinks of worry ...

He glances at a trail we can't see.

CORINTHIAN
You've worn a path. And stood here for long periods of time ...

He reaches up -- a hidden switch behind a bookcase slides back a section of marble, revealing a safe. Without looking:

CORINTHIAN
(to Alexander)
Get up! You've been awake for the past two minutes. Your breathing betrays you.

Alexander opens his eyes, struggles to sitting. He begins to weep -- not in terror, but in resignation. He wipes his eyes with both hands.

ALEXANDER
I knew ... it had to happen.

CORINTHIAN
Yes, well ... you shouldn't have written the book. Led me right to you.


ALEXANDER
Stupid. But I had to ... to ...

CORINTHIAN
Pay penance? Set the record straight? Make a fortune off the movie sale?

Alexander laughs mirthlessly.

ALEXANDER
Hardly. You're probably the only one whose ever read the damn thing. (beat) Want me to sign it?

CORINTHIAN
No.

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ALEXANDER
The Ruby.

CORINTHIAN
Yes.

Alexander stands, moves to the safe.

ALEXANDER
Is Carlos dead?

CORINTHIAN
Yes. Your lover?

Alexander works the dial.

ALEXANDER
(shakes his head)
Pilot and body guard. I haven't had much interest in lovers -- male or female -- in a long time. Although I had my share of both, once ...

He pulls the safe open. It is empty, save for SANDMAN'S RUBY, set on a velvet pad. He takes it out.
ALEXANDER
This gave them to me. It gave me everything I ever desired ...  

CORINTHIAN
(mock tragic)
Except the one thing you ever really wanted. Your father's love.

Alexander makes a fist around the Ruby. Hurls it at the Corinthian -- who makes an effortless one-handed catch. He holds it up to the light, then pockets it. Draws his knife.

ALEXANDER
You're going to kill me now?

CORINTHIAN
I believe so.

ALEXANDER
With a knife. How prosaic.
(a bitter laugh)
I bought the yacht for safety. Open water, supposed to guard against magic attack.

CORINTHIAN
Your father was right, Alexander. You are an idiot.

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Alexander winces. The Corinthian moves to Carlos' body, turns the corpse's head. He works his knife as he speaks.

CORINTHIAN (CONT'D)
You had the Ruby Moonstone of the King of Dreams. Reality itself in your sway. And all you could do was feed your callow little hungers.

He holds up his prize: AN EYEBALL. He lifts it to his face -- we think he may eat it. With his free hand, he reaches up to remove his sunglasses --

CORINTHIAN (CONT'D)
Not that I take issue with indulging pleasures ...

Alexander gasps at what is revealed behind the Corinthian's sunglasses.
CLOSE ON: THE CORINTHIAN'S MOUTH. He brings the eyeball closer --

-- and past, up, out of frame. EVEN AS HE SPEAKS (CLEARLY), WE HEAR THE SOUNDS OF CHEWING --

CORINTHIAN (CONT'D)
But you never understood how to truly use the Stone. You had the power to change the whole world. And you wasted it.

Alexander is stricken. His knees buckle. He slumps to the floor. And then we see what he has seen:

The Corinthian's eye sockets DO NOT HAVE EYES -- instead, they are both MOUTHS, filled with SHARP TEETH. When he speaks, all three of his mouths speak -- three voices, overdubbed.

CORINTHIAN
But that's pretty much true of all you mortals, isn't it?

He brings his bloody knife up, and advances.

ALEXANDER
Who are you?

CORINTHIAN
(melodramatic)
I'm your worst nightmare. I'm --
(shrugs, smiles)
That's it. Your worst nightmare.

He LAUGHS --

CUT TO:

37.

EXT. OCEAN - EVENING

The Corinthian, sunglasses back on, pilots the yacht's launch across the bay.

He takes the Ruby from his pocket, holds it up, looking through it at the city.

POV - THROUGH THE RUBY. Everything is tinted red. And as the Corinthian turns the Ruby, its facets distort the city, distort reality ...
CLOSE ON - A DOZEN smiling PARTY-GOERS as they yell --

PARTY-GOERS

SURPRISE!

Rose's eyes widen, and she looks appropriately surprised; we are --

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A banner reads 'Happy Birthday, Rose.' The party-goers, mostly tenants, crowd forward. A cake with one big candle on it is proffered; Rose blows it out, pushes through, Paul behind her.

Among the guests are: KELLY, a chubby young woman with a good heart; SAMANTHA, who smokes too many French cigarettes.

KELLY
Were you surprised?

ROSE
(a la Roz Russell)
I'm a cynical old woman now. Nothin' surprises me.

Samantha holds up a little white KITTEN.

ROSE
(a mercurial change)
Oh -- oh, look at it! Is it mine?

SAMANTHA
Happy birthday, Rose.

Rose takes the Kitten, pets it, coos to it.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)
I thought you needed something in your life cute and warm and fuzzy and demanding, and I didn't know any men, so...

KELLY
I wasn't sure you'd like it --

ROSE
No, no ... it's perfect. Purr-fect. I love it.
KELLY
She needs a name.

ROSE
It's a she? That's easy. Her name's 'Dinah.'

She moves away, kitten clinging to her shoulder.

KELLY
Dinah?

SAMANTHA
Oh -- like in Alice in Wonderland. You know Rose ...

Other partygoers wish Rose happy birthday, pet the kitty. Rose smiles to everyone, thanking them, moving through the crowd --

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Tired, Rose collapses into a chair. The kitten burrows behind her neck. Someone offers a glass of wine --

Paul. Rose takes it from him. Smiles.

ROSE
So ... can I at least imagine I inspired you and you were able to get back to work?

PAUL
I wish. No, still blocked. I haven't painted in ... months, is it months? Shit. And you know about the sleep trouble. I've been having this weird dream ...

Kelly, questing for snacks, overhears this last.

KELLY
A weird dream? You gotta tell Sam ... she's a nut for this stuff. Sam, come here!

(Sam joins them)
He's going to tell us a dream.

SAMANTHA
Ragin'. So tell.

Paul hesitates -- it really wasn't for everybody to hear, but now he's on the spot.
PAUL
I dreamt I was climbing a rock face, this sheer, like, spire -- and I hate to climb. I hate high places in general. I'm an artist, and I don't even open my windows to look at the view --

KELLY
The dream ..?

PAUL
Right. So I'm climbing, and I've reached the top.

EXT. DREAM REALM - ROCKY SPIRE - DAY

It's Paul's dream: A finger of stone pushes its way into a pale blue sky. At the pinnacle, Paul maintains a perilous hold, his face white with terror.

PAUL (CONT'D) (V.O.)
I can't go higher. I can't climb all the way back down. And I can't let go. I can't fall.

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Remembering, Paul speaks nervously -- he's genuinely troubled.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I just can't. Because if you fall in a dream, and you hit the ground -- you die. Right?

KELLY
I think that's just an old wives' tale.

SAMANTHA
I tend to trust old wives.

PAUL
So ... ah ... I figure it's about being blocked. Right?

SAMANTHA
It sounds like an anxiety dream.

KELLY
It always sounds like an anxiety dream to you. Unless it's a sex dream.

ROSE
What if you dream about being anxious about sex?

KELLY
Is that what you dream about?

Rose is suddenly uncomfortable.

ROSE
I don't dream. Never have.

SAMANTHA
You mean you don't remember.

Rose takes a drink, looks away, and spots --

SANDMAN. Wearing a plain leather jacket, giving the party a detached once-over. The guests flow around him, seemingly unaware of his presence.

SAMANTHA (O.S.)
(to Paul)
So this spire ... basically long, and phallic? And you're clinging to it, huh?

Curious, Rose moves toward Sandman -- almost drawn to him.

PAUL (O.S.)
Whoa, wait a second --

Rose gazes speculatively at Sandman. She scoops up a Chinese fortune cookie from a snack bowl. Steps forward, startling him.

ROSE
Hi. So are you being lonely or just aloof?

Sandman glances around for the person she is addressing -- then realizes it must be him.

SANDMAN
You noticed me?

ROSE
Yeah ... it wasn't hard. I looked behind
the philodendron, and there you were.

SANDMAN
I am not usually noticed unless I wish to be.

Rose quickly realizes he's a weirdo, decides to bail.

---

ROSE
(turning away)
Ah ... okay, Ninja-boy. Well, have fun lurking.

Sandman catches her arm.

SANDMAN
Wait. I require your assistance.

ROSE
My assistance ..?

SANDMAN
I am searching for a possession of mine. A leather pouch, full of sand.

Rose looks afraid. She knows what he's talking about, but wishes she didn't.

ROSE
A pouch ..?

SANDMAN
A woman named Rachel stole it. I want it back.

ROSE
Then go get it. And leave me the hell alone.

She pulls away from him. She crosses to a window, and climbs out, onto the fire escape.

EXT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - FIRE ESCAPE - NIGHT

Rose nuzzles the kitten. A beat, and then Sandman moves to beside her -- although he did not seem to come out the window.

SANDMAN
My sister did not know the woman's location, nor am I able to sense the pouch. Do you know where she is?

Rose's words spill out, the venom unmistakable:

ROSE
Rachel ... is my mother. My mother the junkie.
She was stoned when I was conceived, she was stoned when I was born, she was stoned ... she is always stoned. The state finally took me away.
(more)

---

ROSE (CONT'D)
I hear from her once in a while -- when she remembers she maybe had a kid somewhere.
(a bitter laugh)
Happy birthday.

SANDMAN
Then you do know where she is.

ROSE
I know where she was a year ago.

SANDMAN
Take me to her. I will grant you a boon.

Rose stares at him -- this is absurd.

ROSE
A boon?

SANDMAN
Yes.

ROSE
Like a gift? Like in a fairy tale? That kind of boon?

SANDMAN
Yes. I am Dream, of the Endless. I am the Master of Dreams. If it is within my power, you shall have it.

Rose's expression is one of surprise -- but not quite disbelief.
SANDMAN
And ... I need your help.

Rose is skeptical -- but she is considering it.

SANDMAN (CONT'D)
(a single, desperate syllable)
Please.

Rose softens -- he is in genuine need.

ROSE
This is too weird. My mother ...

She looks down at the fortune cookie in her hand. Looks up at Sandman, into his eyes. They gaze at each other a moment, and something passes between them. Understanding. Trust.

Rose's mouth curls in a sly smile. Cracks the fortune cookie, extracts the fortune. Reads it. Shakes her head.

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ROSE
(reading the fortune)
'Be open to new experiences.'

She looks again at Sandman. Sighs.

ROSE
All right. We really don't get to choose these things, do we? I'll take you there.

Sandman nods gratefully.

ROSE
But that doesn't mean I believe you. What a line. The Master of Dreams. Yeah, right.

EXT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A very bad neighborhood. A taxi screeches away from the curb. Sandman stands on the sidewalk, Rose beside him.

The house is one step above condemned. Tall brown weeds and broken windows, flaking paint and decaying siding.

SANDMAN
The pouch is here.
ROSE
How do you know?

SANDMAN
I know.

Rose steps up to the house, rings the bell. Checks the