

NO GAME LIKE FOXES

Created by
Raphael Arkera

PILOT
"IT'S MAGIC"

Script by
Raphael Arkera
William Day
Todd Casey

Second Draft
V 3.0

(4/18/2023)

No Game Like Foxes LLC
(434) 466-1352
RaphaelArkera@gmail.com

BLACK

SUPER: "THERE IS NO HUNTING LIKE THE HUNTING OF MAN, FOR THOSE WHO HAVE HUNTED MEN LONG ENOUGH, NEVER CARE FOR ANYTHING ELSE THEREAFTER."

A woman GASPS and BREATHES heavily, running for her life.

EXT. COLORADO FOREST - NIGHT

Swirling storm clouds obscure the moon, casting an eerie glow on gnarled trees that sway under the heavy wind.

On a grassy hill a RED FOX stands watchfully. A light dusting of water droplets hang upon her rich fur coat.

The fox steps quietly through the underbrush. Her eyes glisten and reflect the moonlight. She stalks an unsuspecting prey...

In a nearby clearing, a RABBIT nibbles at a newly sprouted patch of clover, unaware of the danger.

A soft CRUNCH. The fox raises her ears in alert. Deep within the woods... QUIET FOOTSTEPS... CRUNCH.CRUNCH...

CUT TO:

EXT. PINE GROVE - CONTINUOUS

NADIA KELLERMAN, 20s, a woman with almond skin, white 1940s dress, and covered in fresh blood -- runs through the snow with terror in her eyes and a numerical TATTOO -- branded on her forehead. She hasn't slept in days.

Naida THROWS HERSELF behind the shelter of a looming pine, catches her breath and listens. Something is close.

The rabbit BOUNDS past with the scarlet blur of the fox in pursuit. Nadia clutches her mouth -- startled.

A sharp SIGH of relief. Nadia rests against the jagged bark. Her hands SHAKE from the cold as she breathes on them, clutching a blood stained small cloth package.

There is a heavy footed STEP. A gloved hand GRIPS the tree, disturbing the bark. A MAN'S SHADOW is cast...

Nadia holds her breath. *She is hunted.*

The man's dark shape moves amongst the trees, pausing to investigate Nadia's bloody footprints on the leaves.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nadia painfully slides backwards into the refuge of the densely wooded grove.

A branch SNAPS under her foot. Nadia FREEZES...

Her heart POUNDS. BANG. A bullet flies past, grazes her shoulder and drops her.

She lets out a SCREAM of pain and immediately pulls herself up and sprints into the forest.

Thunder RUMBLES. Rain starts pouring down.

Nearby, the fox chases the rabbit through a maze of trees. From the fox's point of view we see Nadia run.

EXT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Sharp branches LASH her skin, and she bats them aside. The shadow of THE HUNTER follows, not far behind.

SLIDE CLICK. The hunter reloads. BANG. The rifle fires.

A tree right next to her SPLINTERS near her head. Nadia almost falls and bites her lip, her ears ringing.

Nadia steadies herself on a nearby tree and keeps going.

SLIDE. CLICK. The bolt action gun reloads again.

EXT. FOREST LAKE - MOMENTS LATER

She bursts from the tree line into a clearing by a lake. Nadia glances at the surface and back behind.

FLUTTER. A flock of FINCHES, ascend from the trees.

Nadia steps out into the water. Frozen ice floats by, displaced by her movement.

Nadia makes a determined INHALE and DIVES below.

The tree branches sway on the edge of the forest.

THE HUNTER IS HERE.

NOTE: We do not yet reveal the hunter's full appearance.

The hunter's eyes scan the desolate lake.

Broken ice floats back to the surface, settling just in time.

EXT. UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Nadia holds her breath, waiting under the freezing lake.

The storm from above echoes around her. Nadia looks up.

Lightning FLASHES, and illuminates the Hunter's looming shadow.

He stoops down and peers with a heavily obscured FOX MASK... into the ice.

The low RUMBLE of a distant vehicle causes the hunter to look up in alarm and leave. His footsteps dissipate.

Nadia waits, unable to hold in her breath any longer, and ascends.

EXT. FOREST LAKE - MOMENTS LATER

Nadia breaks the surface and GASPS for air. She pulls herself up onto the shore under the boring rain, cuts her fingers on the ice, and clutches the small package.

She curls into a ball and shivers. The HUM of the distant engine catches her attention.

On the horizon, a car's headlights cut the snowy darkness like a hunting knife.

Nadia stands, descends the hill and painfully reaches out to signal the distant car.

EXT. COUNTRY HIGHWAY - SECONDS LATER

On the forest highway, by the pines, a 1940s FAMILY CAR travels. It's headlights illuminate the dusty white air.

INT. SOFIA'S CAR (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

SOFIA HERNANDEZ, (64) grey hair, a green dress, half circle spectacles, and the look of a hard working mother.

Grocery bags sway in the back and her favorite song plays on the radio. The passenger seat contains pop culture magazines of Vera Lynn and other famous people.

Including a magazine of actress NADIA KELLERMAN... The headline reads "NADIA KELLERMAN?! WHERE IS SHE NOW?"

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She sings along to a song in poor English. The barely functional radio fills the air with static.

SOFIA

Dance ballerina dance! Do your
pirouette...

The radio sputters out. Sofia curses under her breath.

SOFIA

(in Spanish)
Son of a BITCH!

She looks at her rosary and photo of Jesus hanging from the mirror, repents and makes a sign-of-the-cross.

Sofia's attention snaps to the road.

Nadia emerges from the forest and SLAMS into the car.

SOFIA

Dios mio!

Sofia SLAMS on the breaks -- skidding left and right.

Sofia fully stops the car, adjusts her glasses and grips her weak heart. She fears a heart attack has come on.

She inches forward, to see who she hit. THUD. Nadia pulls herself up on the front of the car, leaving bloody finger prints. She slowly staggers over to the passenger side.

Nadia tap. Tap. Taps the window. Sofia rolls it down.

She sets the package inside.

NADIA

Please... I need to...

The Hunter grabs Nadia from behind, and drags her away.

Sofia SCREAMS.

Sofia looks up at the rearview mirror in horror. The hunter vanishes into the rainy haze, pulling Nadia by her hair, kicking and screaming.

Sofia's hands shake as she drives away.

NADIA

Help! Come back!!!

EXT. FOREST ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

The scarlet tail lights of Sofia's car briefly illuminate the outline of a dark hunter in the heavy rain...

He drops Nadia down, stoops down and gently takes her chin in his hand, raising her face to meet his eyes. Nadia looks into the eyes of the his mask with defeat.

He quietly raises a HUNTING KNIFE to her frozen skin -- cutting the side of her face, just enough to draw blood.

NADIA

Please...

The hunter EXHALES and like a puff from a cigar, his breath drifts from behind the mask.

The car lights vanish leaving them in darkness.

INT. SOFIA'S CAR - SAME TIME

CLOSE ON: In the passenger side on the floor, blood drips from Nadia's mysterious package on the floor, revealing a music box peeking out from under the cloth.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Illuminated by the moon, an imprint of blood is imprinted on the grass with a trail leading into the forest.

EXT. FOREST HILLTOP - SECONDS LATER

On the forest's edge and hilltop overlooking the road the hunter watches Sofia's distant car speed away. Unbothered, he drags Nadia's corpse into the forest.

From a nearby perch, the red fox watches with curiosity. The blood from the rabbit's neck drips into the snow.

A crimson flare ascends over the mountains and into the night sky -- reflecting in the fox's eyes.

SONG. *IN MY ROOM* by Nancy Sinatra

SUPER: NO GAME LIKE FOXES

TEXT: CHAPTER ONE: IT'S MAGIC

FADE TO WHITE:

INT. WOLF ENCLOSURE - DAY

The woods are unnaturally dense and thick, carefully planned out to replicate a wolf's natural habitat.

CRUNCH. CRUNCH. Footsteps echo in the light snow.

A FEMALE TIMBER WOLF, BITES into an animal's rib bone, licking it for any leftover marrow.

The hand of, ANTHONY ADAMS, (28) zookeeper uniform, strong, dark hair, a weariness in his eyes, runs his hand against the claw gashes in the bark.

NOTE: The upper half of Anthony's face will be obscured by his hat, until noted later.

Anthony's shadow passes across the wolf. Alarmed, she turns her head up to look at him, lowers her ears and gives a low warning growl.

Anthony raises a bag of fresh meat with a silly grin. The wolf makes a happy sound and Anthony tosses the meat in a SILVER BOWL.

ANTHONY

Compliments of the chef.

Anthony cracks a smile. DINK. A rock wizzes in and hits the wolf. She turns and GROWLS. Anthony's smile vanishes.

Children's laughter comes from a viewing area at the edge of the enclosure.

RYAN (O.S.)

(distant)

DID YOU SEE THAT? HAAAAHA!

EXT. WOLF ENCLOSURE - DAY

From the safety of fenced space. FIVE BOYSCOUTS, laugh and take turns throwing rocks. RYAN (12), NICK (13), HARVEY (10), MASON (11) and EARNEST, (12.)

Ryan toys with a fresh rock in his hand, preparing to throw another. The boys laugh and chant together.

RYAN

(singing)

Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?
The big bad wolf. The --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

From the nearby shadows, Anthony's hand GRIPS Ryan's wrist and stops him from throwing the rock.

RYAN

Hey!? Let go!

Anthony twists Ryan's wrist so he drops the rock.

ANTHONY

What's your name kid?

RYAN

R-ryan...

ANTHONY

Ryan. A rock can be a dangerous weapon in the right hands. If large enough and thrown with enough force it could've seriously hurt, or even killed that wolf.

Ryan indignantly sniffs up snot with an eye roll.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

But in the wrong hands?

GROWLLL... A hot breath comes across Ryan's face. He turns to see the wolf, inches away from him behind the fence.

The twelve year old quivers with fear, his eyes wide. His friends begin to edge away from the pair.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

In the wrong hands you end up with an apex predator and nothing between it and your future pitching career but a shoddily built cage and one underpaid zoo employee.

Ryan SOBS in terror and struggles. Anthony doesn't let him leave.

ANTHONY

So how about it Ryan, why don't you pick that rock back up and give it another try? Maybe you'll get lucky this time?

Anthony relaxes his grip. Ryan falls backwards, glances at the stone on the ground in front of him, and back up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Anthony pulls off his hat, revealing the upper left side of his face is marred by horrible burn scars. He gives a wild, menacing grin to Ryan.

ANTHONY

Or maybe you really are afraid of
the big... bad... WOLF!

The wolf SNARLS and pushes its head against the chain-link fence, trying to reach Ryan.

The boys SCREAM and run away. Anthony gives a hardy laugh and tosses another piece of meat over the fence.

ANTHONY

(laughing)
Good girl.

A stout, RICHARD, (30s) wearing a scout leader uniform talks with the scouts as they cry to him and a nearby... ZOO MANAGER, (50s) with a knowing "YOU'RE FIRED" glare.

Thunder rumbles, and rain sprinkles.

ANTHONY

Shit.

CUT TO:

INT. LAVISH HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

BOOM. Thunder rumbles. Rain falls, and lightning flashes - further illuminating the softly lit lavish home.

We pull back from a large family photo of CHUCK JACKSON, his wife and kids with an ornate gold frame.

The surrounding wall is filled with family photos across the fireplace and mantle.

On a nearby dresser sits a small snow globe with the Golden Gate Bridge.

TEXT: SAN FRANCISCO

INSERT -- A record CLICKS into place, on an antique 1920s record player by a man's rough hands.

It begins to spin... static. The track hasn't begun yet.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON: AN ORNATE KITCHEN KNIFE.

It rises, catching the light. AND... SLICE! SLIDE! SLICE!
Its sharpened with care on a hand-held whetstone.

CLICK. The song begins.

MUSIC. EVERYBODY EATS... BY CAB CALLOWAY

CHUCK JACKSON, (45) a family man, unimposing physique with prematurely greying hair, wears a suit with rolled up sleeves, round glasses and a nervous smile.

He stands with his back to the room, intensely focused.

SLICE. A flick of the wrist, and Chuck effortlessly guts the raw chicken on the cutting board below him.

Some SPICE and TENDERIZING. Like a scene from a classy cooking show. Chuck is like a painter at work.

Periodically he vigorously tosses a piece of gristle on the floor. Once. Twice. Three. Four. Five times.

Fresh carrots are CHOP. CHOP. CHOPPED. SWISH. Added to the pan.

The oil and spice blend are added to the top.

He takes a long drag on his cigarette.

KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK.

Chuck looks up in surprise and quickly places his cigarette in the sink, moves to leave and tosses the piece of chicken in his hand.

It PLOPS into a rusty bowl on the polished floor, overflowing with scraps and bones.

EXT. LAVISH HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The outside of Chuck's home is the picture of upper middle class wealth, standing out in the already posh neighborhood with its large silhouette.

On the front porch in the rain, a woman releases the home's brass knocker.

The distant music switches off inside.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLOSE ON: MARIA CORTEZ, (20s) a young Hispanic woman with a floral dress, tan raincoat and a dower expression. She lets out a breath like an actor before a tense monologue.

Determined, Maria KNOCK KNOCK KNOCKS once more.

INT. LAVISH HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Chuck opens the door to the pouring rain. He raises an eyebrow curiously as she lowers her hood and a massive smile and an overflowing bubbly-ness in her voice.

MARIA

Hi, I'm sorry to call on you so late. You wouldn't believe how hard it is to catch a cab.

CHUCK

I'm sorry... Who are?

MARIA

Rosa Mendez. Here about the ad?

Maria extends a soaking wet hand for a handshake.

Chuck's confusion turns to a warm smile. He accepts her hand.

CHUCK

You're just in time for dinner.

INT. DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

SLIDEEEE. Chuck pulls out a chair from the table.

Maria notices the many framed photos of Chuck and his family. They line the walls of the candelabra-lit room.

Maria looks from the photographs of the man, his wife and two daughters - then back to the table. It's set for two.

Chuck holds the chair and smiles at her expectantly.

MARIA

(taking a seat)

Will your family be joining us Mr. Jackson?

CHUCK

I'm afraid you've caught me at an awkward time as they're away visiting my wife's mother.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Chuck makes an exaggerated face of disgust.

MARIA
Not too fond of her?

CHUCK
Is any man ever fond of his mother
in law? If so, please inform him
that I would gladly trade places.

They both share a hearty laugh at the joke, followed by
an awkward pause. Chuck SNAPS his fingers suddenly.

CHUCK
I think, its time for roast
chicken and some hot tea.

MARIA
Tea sounds splendid.

Maria begins to get up. Chuck waves her back down.

CHUCK
Ah ah ah! Hold it right there
young lady. Your work starts
tomorrow, but for tonight you are
my guest. I insist. I INSIST.

Maria sits back down with her hands folded at the table.

CHUCK (CONT'D)
Superb. Don't go anywhere.

He leaves the room. Maria notices the bowl of scraps on
the floor before the kitchen door swings shut.

MARIA
What kind of dog do you have?

CHUCK (O.S.)
A dog?

MARIA
I noticed the bowl. What's the
breed?

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Chuck has frozen in place with the tea kettle in his
hands. His knuckles go white as he squeezes it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He stares coldly past the wall in front of him into nothingness. His expression doesn't change as his normal jovial voice responds.

CHUCK

Oh, of course. She's just an ordinary mutt. I have this pesky habit of taking in the strays.

As he speaks his eyes turn to look at the basement doorway next to him. A large padlock bolted on it.

The kettle comes to a BOIL and he SWITCHES off the stove.

Chuck taps a vial of white powder into one of the cups.

MARIA (O.S.)

What's her name?

A smile creeps across his features.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

CHUCK (O.S.)

Sylvia.

The color drains from Maria's face upon hearing the name.

She manages to compose herself just before Chuck enters the room carrying the tea tray.

MARIA

Your girls. They're very beautiful.

CHUCK

From their mother's side. I'm the first to admit. I'm a lucky man Miss Mendez. Yes, a lucky man...

MARIA

Mind if I use your phone?

CHUCK

The phone? W-Why?

Maria raises an eyebrow curiously.

CHUCK

I mean. WHY... not. Go right ahead. Just down the hall.

Maria smiles and gets up.

INT. CHUCK'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Maria walks down the hallway and notices a PAD-LOCKED door. Scratches are next to it. She gives it a final glances and spins the phone's dial.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Chuck waits at the set table, he looks intensely at the two identical tea cups. Maria's voice breaks him out of his trance.

MARIA

No answer. You'd think my mother would be worried sick.

CHUCK

It's not a worry.

Maria takes a seat in chair.

MARIA

Oh dear.

Maria drops her golden bracelet on the ground and begins to bend down to get it. Chuck raises his hand, in a gentlemanly manner.

CHUCK

Please, allow me.

Chuck bends under the table and eyes Maria's legs nervously. He picks up the bracelet and gets back up.

Maria looks at Chuck with a warm smile and accepts her bracelet back.

CHUCK

From a special someone?

MARIA

Special to me, so something like that.

He raises her glass and so does Maria.

CHUCK

To something like that.

They both drink their tea. Chuck stops, and smiles as Maria takes a long SIPP PPPP.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They both stare at each other. Maria's smile vanishes, replaced by an intense glare.

MARIA

You really have a lot of photographs. You know you can learn a lot about a person from just how they appear in them.

Maria reaches into her nearby pack and passes some photos to Chuck. She passes him one.

MARIA

Like where they keep their strays.

He looks at the photo and LAUGHS between words.

CHUCK

So Observant and still... you drank the tea.

Maria raises her eyebrows and spins her cup. It's the one with the chip on it. She switched the cups.

CHUCK

Fuck.

Chuck VOMITS BLOOD all over the table. Like a geyser that just won't stop. Maria stands up in shock.

He CRAWLS across the table, and reaches out. A beat.

CHUCK

You...

Chuck coughs and VOMITS blood. He crawls across the table at Maria and collapses. Foam gurgles from his mouth.

Maria reaches and snatches a key from Chuck's pocket.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Red lights flash through the windows and the dial tone comes from the phone in the hallway.

Maria walks up to the locked door and uses the key.

INT. CHUCK'S HOUSE - CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

The light from upstairs cuts through the darkness of the cellar. THREE WOMEN, (30s) with almond skin, huddle in a corner, naked, gagged and in chains.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

On a nearby table is a crude table with a tattoo gun.

Maria rushes up to undo the bindings. The women shiver from the cold of the cellar. Strange tattoos of numbers are on each of their foreheads.

Maria looks in horror as they move aside, revealing they were shielding ONE YOUNG GIRL, (13) huddled in the back.

Maria quickly takes off her sweater and wraps it around the young girl. She shivers in her arms.

MARIA

It's okay. It's okay. I got you.

Maria glances at her forehead tattoo.

TEXT: MCMXLVIII

Maria turns and looks as TWO POLICE OFFICERS, (30s) point flashlights down the stairs. They look down in confusion.

EXT. CHUCK'S HOUSE - LATER

Maria stands outside of the house, she has her coat back and observes the key in her hands. It has a small golden fox head on it. She studies it closely.

POLICE JR DETECTIVE (O.S.)

Sir you can't be back here. SIR.

Maria's attention snaps to the noise.

CLOSE ON: A can of coke. It FISS POP'S open.

DUKE WILLIAMSON (30s) a large man with curly hair, fedora, glasses, a scruffy chin and pronounced mustache; dressed like someone who would sell you the Brooklyn Bridge for half a dollar.

He eyes the nearby POLICE and confidently steps underneath the CRIME SCENE tape.

He CHUGS down the coke and lets out a short AHHH.

The JR DETECTIVE APPROCHES him.

POLICE JR DETECTIVE

Who let this clown over here?

Duke hands the can to the Detective, and shakes his other hand. Flashing a badge from his wallet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DUKE

Chief needs you back at the station, I'll take it from here.

POLICE JR DETECTIVE

I uh --

Duke PATS the rookie on the shoulder and walks past him.

DUKE

I'll have a word with the witnesses.

Maria approaches him as the detective leaves.

MARIA

You're going to get in trouble one of these days.

DUKE

Look who's talking. I take it things didn't work out with your gentleman caller?

Click FLUME. Duke lights up a large cigar. Maria looks at the house with a distant stare.

MARIA

Chivalrous men are hard to find.

PARAMEDICS wheel a restrained Chuck Jackson out of the house in a medical stretcher. He foams at the mouth.

DUKE

The good ones tend to run at the smell of arsenic.

A beat.

DUKE

You know he'll be harder to question now.

MARIA

I thought it would sleeping powder.

DUKE

Guess you must have spooked him.

Two POLICE OFFICERS, escort out the four women in blankets into an ambulance. Maria is crestfallen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MARIA

This isn't over. I finally get a major break, and now they're telling me it'll be at least a month before I can interview him.

DUKE

Assuming his lawyers don't get him off the hook by then.

MARIA

(groans)

Don't even joke about that. I'm going to need a vacation before this is over.

DUKE

Y'know, I have just the thing. Tall trees, blue rivers and a mountain view. Courtesy of a wealthy benefactor looking for his lost star.

MARIA

I said a vacation. This sounds like another job.

Duke hands Maria a copy of the entertainment magazine with Nadia on the cover with a mischievous grin that says "You're going to want this one."

DUKE

How about we Talk somewhere more private.

Maria follows Duke to his car.

Two passengers in a dark parked car watch the pair as they enter Duke's car.

INT. PARKED CAR - CONTINUOUS

Inside the dark car, NORA, (30) red hair, suspenders, rolled sleeves wearing a newsboy cap grips the wheel of her car. Her knuckles are tattooed with Celtic runes.

Next to her is MARTIN, (30s) a tattooed man with an open bag of M&Ms. He flicks them into his mouth one by one.

INT. DUKE'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Maria lets out a sigh.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARIA

You can't just show up and poke
your nose into the Kellerman case
Duke. You'll be arrested before
you can say "How do you do?"

DUKE

This is an entirely legitimate
request. Everything above-board.

MARIA

And this is where your
"benefactor" comes in?

DUKE

Twenty large just for information,
and that's just to start.

Maria bites. She lets out a sigh of acceptance.

MARIA

When do we leave?

DUKE

We're not quite travel ready yet.

MARIA

Are you going to tell me what we
are waiting for?

DUKE

Someone... chivalrous.

Duke turns the keys in the ignition.

INT. ANTHONY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

MUSIC. BOOGIE WOOGIE BUGEL BOY BY THE ANDREWS SISTERS

CLOSE ON: A WWII photograph of Anthony, in uniform
looking heroic and badass.

We pull back revealing, a medal of honor, a tipped over
purple heart and other pictures covered in dust.

TRAILER NARRATOR (V.O.)

After being lost at sea ELLEN
played by the enrapturing Eliza
Darling returns home to find her
husband JOHN ARDEN has been wed to
another.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A TV in the messy living room plays a trailer for a new romantic comedy.

INT. HOTEL - DAY (IN BLACK AND WHITE)

ELIZA

I don't want to see you with your arms around my husband again.

NADIA

Maybe you should have considered that before being lost at sea. A man's not going to wait you know.

CARRY GRANT

Now girls, I'm sure we can come to some sort of arrangement.

Canned laughter.

TRAILER NARRATOR (V.O.)

Starring CARRY GRANT as John Arden in, "MY FAVORITE DARLING," With a love affair for the ages. Who will he chose?

TV TEXT: SCANDALOUS. MYSTERIOUS. HILARIOUS. ROMANTIC.

ANTHONY (O.S.)

No sir. Yes sir, well no I haven't before...

Anthony paces behind a tattered sofa in his apartment.

The room is messy. On the coffee table is an unfinished ship in a bottle.

ANTHONY

My last job? Well it was at the zoo... Well, yes, but I figure if I can wrangle a Grizzly or two then I can... Hello? Hello?

No answer. Anthony SIGHS... annoyed and stifling his anger, he gingerly places the receiver, it slips. He SLAMS it down.

Anthony crosses out the wanted ad for a nanny in the newspaper. The ad is surrounded by others that have already been marked. He tosses it.

A bicycle bell RING RINGS. He gets up and SIPS his coffee.

EXT. ANTHONY'S HOUSE - DAY

TEXT: PASADENA, CALLIFORNIA - 1948

Anthony exits his house.

He notices his newspaper -- soaking up a muddy puddle.
Anthony lets out a SIGH.

He reaches down and grabs his paper as kids on bikes go
by and SPLATTER him with mud kicked up by their tires.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. MUD FILLED TRENCHES - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

SPLASH. Mud from the trenches covers Anthony with filth.

A GRENEDE tumbles in front of him. His eyes go wide and
he grips it without hesitation... stands and chucks it.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. ANTHONY'S HOUSE - DAY

THWACK. The newspaper hits the bike kid in the back of
the head -- sending him violently to the ground.

Anthony grits his teeth and marches back inside. He SLAMS
his door behind him.

INT. ANTHONY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Anthony uses an old shirt to clean his face, muttering
under his breath.

KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK.

ANTHONY

Oh, back for more?

Anthony pulls his door open, revealing a grinning Duke
holding the paper.

DUKE

I see old age hasn't thrown off
your ai-

THUD. Anthony shuts his door.

INT. ANTHONY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK.KNOCK.KNOCK.

Anthony sighs and leans his forehead against the door.

ANTHONY

God dammit.

INT. ANTHONY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SOME TIME LATER

Duke sits in an arm chair, across from Anthony on the couch. He checks his watch in the dimly lit, and cluttered room.

DUKE

This is uh... a place.

Anthony rummages through his nearby small kitchen.

ANTHONY (O.S.)

Uh huh.

DUKE

So uh, still single?

INT. ANTHONY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Anthony pushes aside the scraps of food inside his fridge and grabs a beer for himself.

ANTHONY

Duke. The answer's no.

INT. ANTHONY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

DUKE

I haven't even told you what it is yet!

Duke checks his watch again, and gives a look of feigned hurt to Anthony as he takes a seat across from him.

DUKE

Aren't you going to bring your guest one of those as well?

ANTHONY

You don't drink.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DUKE

You still could've offered...

ANTHONY

Seeing as you won't be staying, I don't think it's necessary.

Duke kicks up his feet and makes himself at home.

DUKE

Ye of little faith, have I yet to lead you astray?

Anthony raises his eyebrows in surprise.

INT. RECRUITER'S OFFICE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Anthony waits in line at the recruiter's office. Duke stands in line behind him.

DUKE

Come on, what's the worst that could happen. I wager we won't even see the front lines.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAY

Anthony and Duke climb a Nazi battlement. Duke slips and Anthony catches him with one arm and GRUNTS. Duke grins.

INT. GERMAN BAR - NIGHT

Anthony and Duke disguised as Nazis share a drink in a dimly lit German bar.

DUKE

(in drunken English)
Two more!

Every single Nazi turns and point guns at them both.

INT. ANTHONY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

ANTHONY

Do you want me to answer that?

DUKE

(shrugs)
It's not like anyone keeps score.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A black and white animated FREDDY FOX refrigerator commercial plays on Anthony's TV. Duke eyes Anthony waiting for a response.

FREDDY FOX (O.S.)

...Darling Industries only makes the best in class, with an ice box built to last, you'll soon find that your cramped space is a thing of the past!

DUKE

Come on. I've got something really big here. An unsolved disappearance of a beautiful damsel in distress. It's straight out of one of those films you're always watching.

Duke picks up one of the fallen photographs from the mantle place and BLOWS the dust off it.

He taps the photograph. Its a newspaper clipping that reads, "HERO SERVICEMAN SAVES THE LIVES OF MISSING SQUAD."

ANTHONY

The pictures and pulps, they're fiction. Real life is always... messier.

DUKE

Look. This is... a big case, life and death. We could really use your help. Besides...

Anthony considers for a moment.

DUKE

What's the worst that could --

ANTHONY

God dammit, don't say it.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

Duke gives a cheeky grin. Anthony eyes him suspiciously.

Anthony gets up.

ANTHONY

Great. More visitors.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Anthony opens to door to reveal Maria, she wears a leather jacket and a messenger hat.

Time slows down for Anthony as she approaches, memories rushing back to him in a flurry.

INT. USSO BALLROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Maria arrives in a stunning dress at a warmly lit army dance event. Anthony is in his army dress-uniform.

MARIA

Hey soldier, buy a girl a drink?

ANTHONY

Wow, you look -

Maria steps up and takes his hand.

EXT / INT. ANTHONY'S HOUSE - DAY

Anthony is at a loss for words.

ANTHONY

-Maria.

MARIA

Good morning Mr. Adams, may I come in?

She walks past Anthony and avoids eye contact.

DUKE

Now that we're all here, let's get you caught up on the details.

ANTHONY

S-sure.

Anthony turns and shuts the door behind them.

We pull back to reveal the car that was watching Duke and Maria before. Martin hands papers over to Nora.

MARTIN

Williamson's leaving on a flight tomorrow morning. Make sure he actually delivers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORA
 (looking through the
 papers)
 Where are my tickets?

MARTIN
 It's a private flight, so you're
 gonna have to get... creative.

Nora smiles and cracks her neck.

EXT. SAN BERNARDINO AIRPORT - LATE AFTERNOON

The airport buzzes with morning air traffic and employees hurrying about their jobs. Shuttles hurry around and a yellow taxi waits on the strip.

Anthony, wears a Hawaiian shirt and picks up heavy suitcases from the back of the taxi.

TEXT: SAN BERNARDINO AIRPORT

Anthony GRUNTS, easily hoists up the heavy bags and nods to the DRIVER. He walks forward a few steps and rejoins Duke and Maria. He takes off his sunglasses.

In front of them rests a PRIVATE PLANE the words -- SERVA AIRLINES -- written on the side. It is *top-of-the-line*.

From the inside of the plane steps: WALLACE CUTHBERT, (60s) grey hair with a pencil moustache and just as rich as he is devilishly handsome, dressed in a white suit.

He smiles with a glass of bourbon in one hand and a pearl handled cane in the other.

WALLACE
 Welcome super sleuths to my humble
 carriage!

Duke grins. Anthony and Maria look a bit lost.

EXT/INT. PRIVATE PLANE - DOORWAY

Inside the lavishly decorated plane Wallace holds out his hand and helps Maria aboard.

WALLACE
 Miss Cortez - a pleasure to have
 you aboard. Please, as they say in
 Uruguay, mi casa es su casa.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Wallace politely kisses her hand as she steps inside.

Duke follows behind and reaches for a handshake.

DUKE

Duke Williamson, we uh. We spoke
on the phone the other day.

WALLACE

Ah yes. Charmed I'm sure.

Wallace pats him on the back and gestures him inside.

Duke looks mildly annoyed and joins everyone inside.

Wallace sits in a luxury seat. Anthony enters the plane.

WALLACE

Ah yes you can put those in the
baggage compartment above. Have
you already been tipped?

Anthony gives a wry grin.

ANTHONY

Not nearly enough.

DUKE

This is Anthony, my- OUR
assistant.

Anthony raised his eyebrows at Duke, who ignores him.

WALLACE

You failed to mention another
assistant. What skills do young
Arnold bring to our venture?

ANTHONY

(motioning with the
suitcases)
Just here for the heavy lifting.

WALLACE

Marvelous.

CLOSE ON: The pilot flips switches inside the cockpit.
Her hands reveal Nora's tattoos.

EXT. AIRPORT - MOMENTS LATER

The plane takes off from the runway and soars into sky.

INT. PRIVATE PLANE - LATER

Wallace sets down the entertainment Magazine with Naida.

WALLACE

I had almost given up hope -- the police already have, though they certainly won't admit it. So thank you all for coming, in my hour of need.

ANTHONY

So Nadia. Is she your... wife? Girlfriend?

WALLACE

Alas, were it so. She was my STAR. My main attraction, a siren in a sea of sorrow until she was stolen from me, as Prometheus stole fire from the gods upon Mt. Olympus. No one has seen or heard from her in over a month. Vanished without a trace.

Anthony raises an eyebrow and looks at Wallace contemplatively.

MARIA

That was until three days ago, when Colorado police received a call from a woman named Sofia Hernandez. She reported seeing a woman whom she claimed to be Nadia along the road outside the town of Paradise Falls, Colorado.

Anthony SNAPS his fingers with realization and points at Wallace.

ANTHONY

I've got it! You're The Masked Blade of Santa Cruz!

Wallace turns and looks at Anthony, delighted.

WALLACE

Now that is a name I've not heard in a very long time...

EXT. CLIFFSIDE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

It is a black and white film, a terrified actress, DULCINEA 20s, a Caucasian woman, wearing a torn white dress, is tied to a post at the side of the cliff.

The dastardly COUNT FERNANDEZ, 40s sports a sinister mustache with a goatee and eyepatch -- holds his sword at the ready, and stands between her and the approaching -

-- MASKED BLADE who strides confidently to him. He brimms with bravado and fire in his eyes.

What you are about to witness is implied to be the greatest sword fight in the history of 1930s film.

FERNANDEZ

Who are you Masked Blade, who has bested all of my men so easily?

The Masked Blade dramatically tears off his mask to reveal Wallace Cuthbert 15-20 years younger with a spray tan and pencil thin mustache on his upper lip.

THE MASKED BLADE

It is I Carlos Montoya!

DULCINEA

Carlos my love! You're alive!

THE MASKED BLADE

I am my darling! And I am here for REVENGE!

FERNANDEZ

You are here for YOUR DEATH!

The swords CLASH. *It is beautiful.*

INT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

We pan from the screen in a movie theater to...

YOUNG ANTHONY, 10 years old with wide eyes and mouth agape. He watches with a bucket full of popcorn, eyes fixed to the screen, he takes a big bite.

INT. PLANE - EVENING

Wallace pours Anthony a glass and extends it to him with a sparkling grin.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WALLACE

Always a pleasure to meet a fan.

Anthony takes the glass with a nod and picks up the magazine, studying it intently as he sips his drink.

WALLACE

Though I do most of my work behind
the camera these days and leave
the spotlight to the new breed,
like my beloved Nadia.

A single tear falls from his eye and he pulls the handkerchief out of his jacket pocket to dab it away.

Maria places a reassuring hand on his shoulder.

MARIA

If she's out there we'll find her.

Duke nods in agreement and Wallace pats Maria's hand with his own. He gives her a small smile with his eyes.

WALLACE

Of that my dear, I have no doubts.

Wallace goes to pour another two glasses. Duke refuses politely. Wallace raises his own glass.

WALLACE

To your success.

Anthony quickly stops drinking and raises his now mostly-empty glass to Wallace and Maria. CLINK.

EXT. COLORADO VISTAS - NIGHT

MUSIC. SUMMER WINE BY NANCY SINATRA & LEE HAZELWOOD

The moon illuminates the opening vistas of Colorado.

TEXT: PARADISE FALLS, COLORADO: 1948

INT. PRIVATE PLANE - SUNRISE - SOME TIME LATER

Maria awakes with her head leaning against the window. She blinks groggily as the view below comes into focus.

The morning sun appears over the great Colorado mountain range. The view is stunning.

The plane descends.

EXT. PRIVATE AIRFIELD - SOME TIME LATER

Duke, Anthony and Maria exit the plane as the early morning sun glows dimly through a thick blanket of mist.

There is a black Rolls Royce parked nearby on the runway. Anthony loads the luggage into the trunk. Maria turns to look at Wallace as he leaves the plane.

The makeshift dirt airstrip is deserted with only one light on in a nearby building.

WALLACE

I've arranged transportation for the three of you. I'll see to the accommodations at the local lodge and have your things brought to your rooms.

DUKE

Some of that equipment is delicate, be sure your people handle it with care.

WALLACE

(opening the rear door)

With kid gloves, I assure you.

Duke gives Wallace an apprehensive salute. Wallace returns it with flair and steps into the car.

WALLACE

(out the window)

Happy hunting.

The car speeds away down a nearby road and out of sight.

The three companions head towards the small building at the edge of the runway.

A painted sign with a cartoon Freddy Fox head reads: "Welcome to Paradise Falls, Home of The Darling Estates Grand Lodge!". A fenced-in vehicle lot waits nearby.

Duke KNOCK KNOCK KNOCKS on the steel window shutter.

ANTHONY

Doesn't look like we're expected.

DUKE

So what then, we're supposed to walk to paradise?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Duke KNOCKS on the shutter with increased vigor.

DUKE
(to himself)
"Arranged transportation" my ass.

Maria looks down at the bell, labeled with a small sign that reads: RING BELL FOR ASSISTANCE.

DING. Maria lightly taps the bell.

Duke and Anthony turn to look at her. A beat. After a moment the shutter is partly raised.

THE OLD CLERK (80s), an ancient, gnarled figure dressed in an unkempt uniform, blinks groggily at them.

OLD CLERK
(angrily)
What do you want?

Duke exchanges befuddled looks with Anthony and Maria.

DUKE
We were told you have a car for
us?

The old man pauses and considers this for a moment. He leans down and rummages under the counter. A moment later he tosses a set of keys at Duke.

OLD CLERK
Green van!

He angrily SLAMS the shutter back down and LOCKS it.

Duke looks back at Maria, who shrugs, and turns toward the lot. Anthony follows behind with the luggage.

The three round the shack's corner and see the lot's lone occupant, a faded green van. Chipped white lettering on the side reads: "Paradise Falls: Experience the Magic!"

INT/EXT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

They pile into the van. Anthony turns the keys. A beat and the vehicle sputters to life.

The van's headlights pierce through the mist and reveal AN OMINOUS FIGURE who leans against the shack, a cap pulled low over his obscured eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DUKE

Christ!

The figure walks over to a nearby gate topped with barbed wire and opens it.

ANTHONY

Jumping at shadows pal?

Anthony gives a nod to the figure as he drives past and checks the rear-view mirror.

DUKE

Can you blame me? We must've walked right past the guy and never knew he was there.

Anthony smiles to himself knowingly. Maria chuckles in the back seat, looking through documents.

MARIA

You two never change, do you?

As the tail lights pull away into the distance, Nora steps silently into the road and watches them leave.

She puts on a jacket, revealing a gun in a back holster and walks down the deserted road after them.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROADS - DAY

The sun finishes rising over the nearby mountains. The van winds its way through the empty mountain roads.

INT. VAN - MOMENTS LATER

Anthony paws at the dark circles under his eyes, his gaze pans to reveal Duke nervously fiddling with his camera. Maria is asleep in the back seat.

Duke chews on another cheap cigar and blows a puff in the van. Anthony coughs and waves away the smoke as he manually rolls down his window.

ANTHONY

You may as well come out with it.

DUKE

Out with what?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANTHONY

Whatever it is that has you so on edge right now. You've been spooked since you showed up on my doorstep.

DUKE

(grumbles)

I don't have any idea what you mean.

ANTHONY

So you normally polish your lens with the cap still on?

Duke looks down at his camera, and then back to Anthony, who gives him a raised eyebrow. He sighs in resignation.

DUKE

All right, I'll level with you...

CUT TO:

EXT. HORSE TRACK - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Duke, wide grin across his face with a cigar between his teeth, slides a small stack of bills across the counter to a bookie. He receives a ticket in exchange.

DUKE (V.O.)

You see, it all began when I got that call about this case and I was thinking about the stakes...

Duke looks onward at the track, his cheering turns to dismay before he finally tears his ticket in frustration.

DUKE (V.O.)

A case this big, maybe I've bitten off more than I can chew.

Martin and Nora sit down on either side of Duke. Duke looks worried and tries to leave but they grab him.

DUKE (V.O.)

That's when it hit me!

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

POW, a taped fist strikes Duke across the jaw. He falls to his knees and pleads with a man in a fine suit and hat with rings on his fingers.

Martin stands against the wall eating M&Ms. Nora walks away, and unwraps bloody tape from her knuckles.

DUKE (V.O.)

I really can't afford to come back empty-handed here. There's a life on the line after all.

Martin and Nora toss Duke out onto the street.

CUT TO:

INT. VAN - DAY

Duke looks up at Anthony as he finishes his explanation. Anthony gives him a look of disbelief.

ANTHONY

So just got some big-case jitters?

DUKE

Well yeah. I mean come on, we're talking about the most famous missing dame in the world here.

ANTHONY

And you really think some sweet little old lady just happened to come across her, out here?

MARIA

We won't know until we ask.

Anthony and Duke look back to see Maria, now awake, stretching in the backseat. They all look at a sign.

EXT. PARADISE FALLS - CONTINUOUS

TEXT: WELCOME TO PARADISE FALLS. CULTIVATING NATURE'S BEAUTY SINCE 1943.

Their van continues down the main street lined with small rustic shops on both sides. Throughout the town smiling workers arrange decorations and raise colorful banners.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Atop distant cliffside sits the Darling Estates Grand Lodge, the centerpiece of the entire town and high enough that gondolas travel to and from the town below.

INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

Anthony, Maria, and Duke lean forward to look up at the huge banner stretched across the town's main street which proclaims: PARADISE FALLS - FOUNDERS FESTIVAL.

EXT. PARADISE FALLS - TOWN CENTER - CONTINUOUS

The van drives past the town square where tables and booths are placed in preparation for the festivities.

Most of the workers are shabbily-dressed and are unfamiliar with the town. They are directed by more well-kempt residents.

The van exits the town center and continues into a nearby residential area.

EXT. CLAMBERT ESTATE - LATER

The van turns down a winding gravel driveway and comes to a stop in front of a pristine white colonial house.

In a rocking chair on her front porch sits, MARTHA CLAMBET, (40s), wearing her Sunday best with a neatly tied updo.

With a focused expression, she ties off a needle and thread on something we cannot see.

Anthony rolls his window down and before he can speak Duke leans across him and calls to the woman.

DUKE

Excuse me ma'am! We're looking for the Hernandez residence. Is this the right place?

Martha looks up from her sewing and smiles at them.

MARTHA

Why hello there. You folks must be here to give your condolences.

ANTHONY

(to Duke)
Condolences?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Maria makes a concerned face.

MARTHA

You'll find the help house back behind our little patch of heaven here. Can I tempt any of you with something to drink?

DUKE

Another time perhaps. Thank you.

MARTHA

You're most welcome. I do hope you all will be joining us for the festival tonight. Paradise Falls magic is unlike anything else.

She gives them a wink and goes back to her needlework.

The van continues along the gravel driveway as it wraps around the house. It reveals a small dwelling behind the spacious backyard.

We focus on Martha, who hums to herself as she puts the finishing touches on the fox-shaped mask in her hands.

EXT. FOREST MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

Nora walks down the rustic highway, and wipes some sweat from her brow. The sound of a distant bus catches her attention.

She steps to the side of the road and holds out her thumb.

HISSES. The bus comes to a stop and the door opens.

A friendly looking DRIVER, (50s) with a grey mustache and a blue uniform waves with a smile.

DRIVER

Howdy you heading to paradise falls Miss?

NORA

Yeah, could use a lift.

DRIVER

Well come on in!

INT. BUS - MOMENTS LATER

Nora steps inside the bus she nods to the driver.

She glances at the passengers. Most look like they haven't had a good meal in awhile, wearing tattered clothes and workmen's uniforms.

She takes the only empty seat.

MR. PALIN

You here for work young lady?

Nora's eyes snap to MR. PALIN, (30s) a pale man with a shark-like grin, a pinstripe suit and a briefcase on his lap. He sits in the row across.

NORA

Business.

MR. PALIN

And no time for pleasure? Shame.
Especially when all these fine
folk are gonna work so hard to
give us a show tonight.

Nora ignores him, glancing out the window. He shrugs to himself.

MR. PALIN

Well, if you find yourself in need
of some extra coin, we could
always use another hand. It's a
fair day's wages, and we'll even
put you up for the night in the
finest accommodations in town.

Nora glances suspiciously. *She doesn't buy it.*

Mr. Palin chuckles to himself.

MR. PALIN

Well, you've already come this
far, why not see for yourself?

Nora gazes out the window at the mountians.

EXT. HERNANDEZ RESIDENCE - DAY

The van comes to a stop in front of the humble house. A small family car is already parked there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Our trio exit the van and stretch out their cramped legs. They look around at their surroundings and Duke snaps some photographs.

The three of them make their way to the front of the house and Maria knocks on the door, it opens and reveals:

ISABELLE HERNANDEZ, (9) dark skin, with a lollipop in her mouth, a floral dress and curly hair.

ISABELLE
(garbled)
Hello?

Overcoming her initial surprise, Maria smiles sweetly and stoops down to Isabelle's eye-level.

MARIA
Hello there, we're looking for
Sofia. Does she live here?

Isabelle looks crestfallen as her eyes turn to the floor. Before she can speak, another voice comes from inside.

VANESSA (O.S)
Isabelle! What did I tell you
about answering the door?

Isabelle's eyes go wide. SLAM! She quickly slams the door and runs back into the house.

Maria stands back up, confused. Anthony rolls his eyes. Duke tries to stifle a laugh.

The door reopens to reveal VANESSA HERNANDEZ, (32) a tall black woman with long curly hair, an athletic build and caution in her eyes. She looks exasperated.

VANESSA
Can I help you?

MARIA
We're trying to find Sofia
Hernandez. If it's not too much
trouble I'd like to follow up with
her about a phone call she made to
the Colorado Springs Police
Department. We believe it may be
related to an ongoing missing
persons case.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

VANESSA

Missing Persons? I'm sorry to disappoint you but My mother died in an automobile accident three days ago. Now if you'll excuse me I need to finish packing up her belongings. Hope you all find who you're looking for.

Vanessa starts to close the door. Maria holds it open.

MARIA

I'm so sorry, I had no idea, but maybe you can help us. I'd just like to ask you a few questions. It'll only take a minute of your time.

Vanessa pauses and studies Maria's face contemplatively.

MARIA

It could save a life.

Vanessa opens the door and motions for them to enter.

VANESSA

I don't know how I can help, but I'll do what I can.

MARIA

Thank you.

Maria and Duke begin to enter the house, but Anthony puts a hand on his shoulder and gives him a concerned look.

ANTHONY

Sorry to ask, but do you know where we could find your mother's vehicle?

VANESSA

Out back, left by the towing company. Why?

ANTHONY

There may be something related that the police could have missed. Would you mind if we look at it?

VANESSA

Sure... I don't see the good in it, but you're fine to.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Anthony nods with gratitude as Vanessa and Maria enter the house. The door shuts.

Anthony motions for Duke to come with him around to the back of the house where they stop short and see the horribly mangled family car.

INT. HERNANDEZ RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Maria sits on a threadbare sofa in a small, sparsely decorated living room. A few boxes with personal belongings sit on the floor.

Isabelle lies on the bed in the adjacent bedroom and reads a book. Vanessa returns from the kitchen with a glass of water and hands it to Maria.

MARIA

Thank you... Not just for the water, I mean, but for all of this. I'm sure it must be hard.

VANESSA

Hard? Honestly I don't think it's all set in yet.

She glances at a family photo on a table across the room. It's of her mother, father, herself and a baby Isabelle.

Maria nods and unconsciously reaches for her bracelet.

MARIA

Would you mind telling me more about her? Your mother.

VANESSA

She was braver than anyone I've ever known and came out here to live in this...

She gestures around her at the shabby dwelling.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

...this place. So that my daughter and I could chase our dreams. So that we wouldn't have to suffer the indignity of living under the feet of people like these.

She points in the direction of the main house.

MARIA

The people she worked for?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Vanessa nods, biting her lip in anger with tears beginning to stream down her face.

VANESSA

Every single day for the last 5 years. Always with a smile, never a complaint. And in the end...

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Vanessa and Isabelle stand in the cold before an open grave by themselves.

A simple wooden casket lowers into the hole.

VANESSA (V.O.)

...the bastards she worked for... never even attended her funeral.

INT. HERNANDEZ RESIDENCE - DAY

Maria looks down at the glass of water held tightly in her hands. Vanessa clenches her fist in anger.

ISABELLE (O.S.)

Bastards!

Vanessa looks up with a horrified expression on her face. Isabelle peeks playfully from around a corner.

VANESSA

Isabelle Angeline Hernandez! What did I tell you about using that kind of language?

Vanessa shakes her head and gives Maria an embarrassed look. Maria stifles a small giggle.

EXT. HERNANDEZ RESIDENCE - BACK OF HOUSE - SAME TIME

Anthony studies the interior of Sofia's car. Duke circles the car, snapping photos of the wreckage.

DUKE

So here we are, just the two of us...

ANTHONY

Mmhmm, no signs of blood, unusual for this bad of a wreck.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

The circulation must've been
stopped well before the impact...
And this...

Anthony runs his hand along knife marks.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. GAS STATION - NIGHT

Close on: The hunter's knife cuts into the car's side.

In the background Sofia's silhouette can be seen in the
phone booth.

EXT. BACK OF HOUSE - DAY

Anthony stops, notices a small object that catches the
light and reaches for it.

DUKE (O.S.)

You know, It's almost as if you're
trying to avoid something...

CLOSE ON: The paper wrapped box trapped between the
impacted door and the seat, Anthony tries to pry it out
with his fingers but can't get it.

Anthony tries to open the door. RATTLE. It's stuck tight.

DUKE (O.S.)

Maybe there's something out there
that even you're scared of...?

ANTHONY

Hey help me with this.

Duke shakes his head and walks over slowly. Anthony
GRUNTS and pulls on the door.

DUKE

I swear, if you spent half as much
effort looking at what's right in
front of you as you do this old
rust bucket-

ANTHONY

Duke, what the blazes are you
babbling about!?

INT. HERNANDEZ RESIDENCE - MOMENTS LATER

Maria and Vanessa sit across from each other. Isabelle sits beside her mother, who has one arm around her. Maria makes notes in her notepad.

MARIA

What about her life here? Did she ever mention anything unusual?

VANESSA

The way she told it, you'd think this was the quietest town in the country. She had a lot in common with the people here... people who came looking for work and a lower cost of living.

Vanessa picks up a neatly folded newspaper and passes it to Maria. On the front is an ad for Paradise Falls.

TEXT: PARADISE FALLS: THE PROMISE OF A BETTER TOMORROW.

Vanessa smiles to herself with a far off look in her eye.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

She was one of the first to pack up and move out here. Said she'd go to Russia if it meant putting me through school.

She gives Isabelle a little squeeze.

MARIA

She sounds like an amazing woman.

Vanessa gives Maria a weak smile, holding back tears.

VANESSA

She was. I'm sorry I can't tell you much more than that. Hopefully your friends are having more luck.

MARIA

Oh no need to worry about those two, they might not look it, but they're professionals.

EXT. BACK OF HOUSE - SAME TIME

CRANKKKK. Duke pulls back with all his might on a prybar, trying to wrench the door open.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DUKE

(grunting)

You love her, and in case you
hadn't noticed she loves you too!

Anthony strains, grips the top of the door and pulls.

ANTHONY

(clenched teeth)

Tell me you didn't bring me all
the way out here to play
matchmaker in the woods! You told
me this was serious, life or
death. That's what you said!

DUKE

It is! Somebody's sweet old
grandmother died because she got
involved! But god dammit man,
you've gotta seize this
opportunity!

ANTHONY

An opportunity? Jesus, have you
ever stopped and asked yourself if
your schemes benefit anybody but
you?

DUKE

Benefit me? How does throwing my
back out to get this stupid door
open help me with my situation?

With a metallic GROAN and SNAP the door flies open. A
beat. The two men catch their breath.

ANTHONY

Your situation? And just what is
that supposed to mean?

DUKE

Well, you know... Trying to close
this case, and-

ANTHONY

And what? Collect a fat paycheck
from a rich actor? Christ Duke,
you never change. You always-

The house door opens. Both men turn to face the sound.

MARIA (O.S.)

Thank you so much for your time.

EXT. HERNANDEZ RESIDENCE - FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Vanessa stands by the door, holding it open.

VANESSA

I just wish I could have been more helpful.

Maria squeezes Vanessa's hand.

MARIA

No, you gave me plenty. I'm glad we got the chance to talk.

The CRASH and SHATTER of a box with a vase being dropped comes from inside the house.

ISABELLE (O.S.)

I DIDN'T DO IT!

Vanessa turns back to Maria and shakes her head.

VANESSA

Some days I can't keep up with her.

Maria pauses for a second, thinking to herself.

MARIA

It sounds like a little distraction is just what you both need. Maybe this festival could be just the ticket?

Vanessa thinks to herself, then nods her head and smiles.

VANESSA

Thank you. It just might be.

She turns to head back into the house, but turns to Maria one last time.

VANESSA

I hope you find who you're looking for.

Maria waves goodbye and the door shuts behind her. She let's out a breath and turns to see Duke and Anthony sulking by the van -- backs turned to each other.

Duke flicks away his finished cigar with a scowl, he holds cloth wrapped music box in his hands.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARIA
What's eating you two?

EXT. LODGE - PARKING LOT - SUNSET

The van pulls up to the Darling Estates Grand Lodge overlooking the town. It has a lavish parking area, in the most stand out point in the town of Paradise Falls.

Cars arrive and leave like a red carpet premiere and wealthy couples are escorted inside by the hotel staff.

The trio walk away from the parked van outside of the mountain lodge hotel. Duke looks exasperated as he angrily chews an unlit cigar.

DUKE
(striking the map)
Nothing is where it should be on this god damn map.

MARIA
Well asking for directions was an option...

ANTHONY
He'd have to want to hear what someone else has to say.

DUKE
(lighting his cigar)
I'm really starting to find the lack of decorum from you two pretty GOD DAMN frustrating!

Anthony walks past them both -- ignoring Duke. Maria pauses and puts her hand on Duke's shoulder.

MARIA
Hey, are you okay?

Duke sulks -- a little embarrassed.

DUKE
Yeah, just need to let off some steam.

He hands her his camera and Maria snatches it up.

DUKE
Here, SUNSHINE and I took some photos of Granny's car while we were at the house.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DUKE (CONT'D)

Mind getting them started for me?
I'm going to grab a bite to eat,
away from-

ANTHONY (O.S.)

You coming Marco Polo?

DUKE

(angrily smoking)
Marco Polo is going to navigate
his way to a decent burger. Wise
ass.

Anthony smirks and tosses Duke the van keys.

ANTHONY

Try not to get lost.

Anthony turns and shuffles away, his back turned -- Duke extends his middle finger in his direction. Maria laughs and gives Duke a playful kiss on the cheek.

MARIA

I know you did your best.

Duke grumbles and wipes off lipstick from his cheek as he walks to the van.

Anthony holds open the door for Maria.

MARIA

(shoving him)
You just can't help yourself, can
you?

Anthony chuckles and follows her.

INT. HOTEL - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Inside the grand hotel lobby a check-in desk waits inside the center of a warmly lit room. People chatter and discuss. A line of guests wait to be seen by the clerks.

Anthony looks around the large room.

Animal trophies line the walls and a large moose head looms over the lavish front desk.

MARIA

We're not in Kansas anymore Mr.
Adams.

Anthony steps forward and leans on the desk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANTHONY

Hey. Here for our room.

The CLERK, (40s) a woman with pearly white teeth and bright blond hair, in a carefully tended uniform leans forward, smiling warmly.

CLERK

Do you have a reservation, or are you here as festival staff?

MARIA

It should be under Wallace Cuthbert.

The clerk flips through a book of names and makes a confused face.

CLERK

I'm sorry, we don't have any reservations under that name.

Wallace glides up to the desk from the nearby bar, cognac still in one hand. Two bellhops carry his large suitcases. They struggle with the weight.

WALLACE

Ah there you are! I began to fret that you had become an evening feast for wild beasts.

Wallace casually signals to the Clerk.

WALLACE

They are my very special guests. Look under "Nigel Todd."

(To Anthony and Maria)

It's a studio name.

CLERK

Oh it looks like you'll be staying in an east wing two bedroom suite. Room 227.

MARIA

A suite? Oh that won't be -

WALLACE

Oh but it is, in any case it is good to see you both here at last.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MARIA

(looks around)

Where is everyone off to in such a hurry?

Wallace downs the remainder of his drink, puts a cigarette in his mouth and smiles.

WALLACE

Off enjoying the night's festivities I'm sure. Not a soul in town wants to miss the celebration. In fact I'm ashamed to admit, that with all of the hustle and bustle I could not find any additional staff to see to your luggage as well.

He gestures to the large pile of bags sitting in the corner which Anthony eyes. Wallace strongly pats Anthony's shoulder.

WALLACE

I assured them that it was quite alright, as you have young Albert here to do the... "heavy lifting" I believe you put it?

Wallace chuckles to himself. Anthony squints with held back frustration at being touched by Wallace. Wallace grins and walks to the exit as he speaks.

WALLACE

I'm afraid I must excuse myself, One simply cannot resist the allure of such a grand spectacle. It promises to be a night to remember.

Wallace turns to face them, but continues backing towards the door.

WALLACE

Ah yes, In all the excitement I nearly forgot. I trust your efforts on the search fare well?

MARIA

Yes, actually we spoke with --

WALLACE

Yes yes, very good -- we resume our hunt in the morning.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

THUD. The doors close as Wallace leaves the hotel.

MARIA

What a strange man.

Anthony sighs -- still looking at the luggage.

INT. HOTEL - ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

CLUNK. Anthony places the luggage down.

Inside the bathroom Maria puts a red filter over the light as the sink fills.

MARIA (O.S.)

So are you going to tell me what
got into you and Duke back there?

Anthony sits on the edge of the bed and looks at a taxidermy fox on the mantle of a small fireplace.

ANTHONY

You know how it goes with him.

Maria places the photo rolls in the water of the sink and shakes them dry. She CLIPS them up.

ANTHONY (O.S.)

He knows just what to say to get
under your skin.

MARIA

Well you boys better kiss and make
up or this is going to be a long
investigation.

Anthony is lost in thought, staring into the eyes of the fox.

Anthony stretches across the bed and looks across the room to the opposite bed. Maria walks up to the desk between the two beds, a record player sits on top of it.

MARIA

I can't believe they have one of
these in here.

Maria flips through a selection of records and smiles to herself as she flops onto the adjacent bed. Dust FLIES from it. Both cough.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARIA

(coughing)

You'd think they'd tend to the dust a bit. East wing suite?

Anthony smiles and looks at Maria upside down.

MARIA

Penny for your thoughts?

ANTHONY

It's hard to explain, but I've just had this feeling ever since we arrived. One that...

MARIA

That's quite the surprise. I expect to hear about "feelings" and "hunches" from Duke, but this is new coming from you.

EXT. FRANCE BURNED DOWN FARM HOUSE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Anthony stands in the door of a burned out farm house, an emotionless stare on his face.

Dead bodies are piled up before him. A corpse stares lifelessly at him, a fly resting on one of its open eyes.

ANTHONY (V.O.)

It feels like we're being watched.

INT. HOTEL - ROOM - NIGHT

Maria holds Anthony's hand for a moment.

MARIA

Hey, you know what would help you unwind?

ANTHONY

A stiff drink?

Maria childishly bites her bottom lip and bats her eyelashes at him.

ANTHONY

Oh no.

Maria drops the act and tosses a pillow at his head.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARIA

Come on, it'll be fun. Let's see what this Paradise Falls magic is all about.

ANTHONY

No way. I'm just fine right here.

Anthony looks back at the taxidermy fox and a fly lands on one of its glass eyes.

EXT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Nora's bus pulls up in front of the hotel. The scraggly laborers pour out of the doors. Nora steps out and takes in her new surroundings.

She notices a pair of workers carrying large silver canisters into the hotel.

She eyes them suspiciously and enters the lobby.

EXT. GONDOLA - SAME TIME

Anthony and Maria stand side by side on the crowded Gondola. Maria wears a nice dress and a jacket and Anthony is wearing a different Hawaiian shirt.

ANTHONY

I can't believe I let you talk me into this. I seem to recall saying "no".

MARIA

Why Anthony Adams, when have you ever been able to say no to me?

A feeling of awkwardness settles in between the pair and they try to avoid making eye contact with each other. Anthony opens his mouth as if to speak, when suddenly...

FIREWORKS explode in the sky above them.

CLOSE ON: Anthony's eyes.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. PARK - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Maria smiles and raises a glass to Anthony. The two look lovingly into each others eyes. Fireworks POP in the air above them.

MARIA (V.O.)

Anthony?

EXT. GONDOLA - PLATFORM - NIGHT

The Gondola comes to a stop and its passengers disembark.

MARIA

Are you alright?

Anthony snaps out of his trance-like state and gives a reassuring grin.

ANTHONY

Never better.

Another firework HISSES into the sky.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN FESTIVAL - NIGHT

A BOY, 12 and GIRL, 11 in paper fox masks run past as SPARKLERS CRACKLE in their hands.

On an impromptu stage -- a band of musicians preform!

SONG. WHAT KIND OF AN AMERICAN ARE YOU - 1940s Edition

Anthony and Maria walk through the festival streets. A pair of festival workers carry a large keg of beer.

MARIA

So did you pack any other kind of shirt?

ANTHONY

What? I was told this was a vacation.

MARIA

Clearly you've never vacationed with Duke before.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - FESTIVAL - CONTINUOUS

Maria tugs on Anthony shoulder. He looks in the direction she indicates.

MARIA

Looks like our benefactor has some company.

Wallace Cuthbert whispers and talks with a MYSTERIOUS WOMAN IN WHITE, she touches his hand gracefully and vanishes into the shadows. He remains bowed politely.

The band finishes their performance and the audience erupts in applause. Anthony halfheartedly joins in.

ELIZA DARLING, (30s) an elegant woman with flowing blond hair, an elaborate dress, long gloves and a large wide-brimmed hat, steps onto the stage.

The hat obscures the details of her face with a veil. She pulls the microphone up to her lips and speaks in a dreamlike tone of voice -- like she's about to say goodnight to her own child.

ELIZA

Hello my dears, and good evening.
Tonight we are gathered here to
celebrate a very special occasion.

She grips the mic with both hands and pulls it closer.

ELIZA

It is a marvelous privilege to
live and celebrate here within the
town of Paradise Falls but the
greatest privilege comes in
knowing that our efforts have
given a home to our lost lambs
seeking a place where they truly
belong. Thank you all and have a
beautiful night.

The band continues their music and Eliza exits the stage.

The crowd applauds. Stage hands throw roses around Eliza as she steps off stage.

We pan up behind Maria. Someone is right behind her --

Vanessa's hand touches Maria's shoulder.

MARIA

Vanessa, hey good to see you both.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VANESSA
(concerned)
Could we talk for a moment?

Maria nods in agreement. Vanessa turns to Anthony and smiles.

VANESSA
I'm so sorry, I didn't get your name earlier.

ANTHONY
It's Anthony Ma'am.

VANESSA
(to Anthony)
Anthony, could you watch Isabelle for a moment. Sorry to ask this.

ANTHONY
Uh...

MARIA
Sure, he's great with kids.

Maria winks at Anthony and walks away with Vanessa. Anthony looks at Isabelle who enjoys a large multi-colored lollipop.

There is an awkward silence. Isabelle turns and looks at a nearby STUFFED FOX TOY strung up at an air-gun festival booth.

Anthony sighs -- he's going to have to win that...

EXT. FESTIVAL - BLEACHERS - MOMENTS LATER

Vanessa stands in a quiet spot under the bleachers. Maria looks around at the dimly lit area around them.

MARIA
Well, it's been awhile since anyone invited me down here.

Vanessa paces anxiously.

MARIA
What's wrong?

VANESSA
I don't know, but all these little things just keep nagging in the back of my head.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VANESSA (CONT'D)

You're gonna think I'm crazy, but ever since I got here I just can't seem to shake this feeling that someone's...

MARIA

Watching you?

VANESSA

YES and that's not all... Look around you, at all the people here. Do you notice anything about them?

Maria's eyes narrow as looks out from the bleachers at the crowd of people milling about.

EXT. SHOOTING BOOTH - SAME TIME

Anthony steadies the air gun, lets out a breath and fires. Behind him, Isabelle takes notice of something offscreen and wanders off in that direction.

EXT. FESTIVAL - BLEACHERS - SAME TIME

VANESSA

Where are all the residents? From the moment I stepped foot in this town they've been telling me about this festival. It's all they ever seem to want to talk about, but where are they now? Not a single one of them to be seen.

EXT. SHOOTING BOOTH - SAME TIME

POP. DING. Anthony fires again, squints and reloads.

VANESSA (V.O.)

I can feel it everywhere I go.
Take a look at the windows.

DING. Anthony hits another shot, and reveals A MASKED MAN, (40s) standing in a suit and tie behind the booth with the prizes. He watches Anthony. POP.

EXT. FESTIVAL - BLEACHERS - MOMENTS LATER

Vanessa leans in closer.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Maria looks out to the buildings overlooking the busy square. In them she can see the dark silhouettes of figures watching the festivities below.

VANESSA

They're watching us like we're animals in the fucking circus.

EXT. SHOOTING BOOTH - SAME TIME

POP. DING. The final shot! Anthony lowers his gun -- smiles and motions for the large stuffed Freddy Fox toy. The masked man hands it to him.

ANTHONY

Not too shabby eh kid?

He looks around -- Isabelle is nowhere to be seen.

ANTHONY

Shit.

EXT. TOWN STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Isabelle enjoys her lollipop and walks down the dark street. She HOPS into a small puddle creating a SPLASH.

She pauses before a dimly-lit alley, a happy jingle plays from within. She absentmindedly drops her candy and walks into the darkness.

EXT. FESTIVAL - SQUARE - MOMENTS LATER

Anthony frantically maneuvers his way through the crowd and searches for Isabelle.

ANTHONY

Hey KID!

EXT. FESTIVAL - BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

ANTHONY (O.S.)

HEY KID COME BACK.

Vanessa and Maria flash each other a horrified look.

EXT. TOWN STREET - CONTINUOUS

Anthony dashes onto the dark street. He looks at the muddy prints on the ground and at the lollipop nearby the alley's entrance.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Isabelle stands in front of a cotton candy stand. Colorful lights come from the paper lanterns strung around it which reveal, a MASKED MAN, in a fox mask.

The vendor offers his hand to Isabel. She takes a fearful step back and bumps into Anthony.

ANTHONY

Thanks pal, but I'll be taking
this little lady back to her mama.

The man slowly turns his head to peer at Anthony, eyes obscured behind the mask. His mouth curls into a smile.

He pulls a knife out of his sleeve and steps forward with a CHUCKLE. Anthony's smile vanishes.

The tall man dashes forward with the knife. Anthony grabs his wrist. SNAP. He bends it backward, exposes the tall man's bone. The masked man SCREAMS.

ANTHONY

Yeah I don't think you heard me.

VANESSA (O.S.)

Isabelle!

Anthony turns to see the two women running towards them in the alley. Vanessa rushes to Isabelle and lifts her into the air with her embrace. Maria joins Anthony's side and looks down at the festival worker.

MARIA

What's going on? Who's this guy?

Before Anthony can reply, the masked man scrambles to his feet and pulls a small gas mask from within the folds of his apron.

He gives Anthony a bloody smile and holds the apparatus to his face. He turns and flees into the darkness of the alley.

Anthony holds up his hand, sniffs the air and turns to see a thin mist seep into the alley from the town square.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANTHONY

We need to get out of here. Now!

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Duke walks through the front door into the hotel lobby, a desk attendant looks up as he enters. Duke approaches him with a smile.

DUKE

Jesus pal, do you know how far a guy has to go to get a decent burger around here? Took me hours to find one. Doesn't help that your damn maps are a bunch of bupkis.

The attendant appraises Duke with a flat expression, uninterested in his culinary or topographical opinions.

DESK CLERK

One of Mr. Cuthbert's party? I thought you had all gone to the Founders Festival.

DUKE

Have you tried the food down there buddy? I wouldn't feed that to my ex-wife's dog.

The desk clerk shoves a room key at Duke in an attempt to shut him up.

DESK CLERK

Your room...

Duke takes the key and begins walking to his room.

DUKE

Thanks pal, shame you're stuck up here by yourself. Seems like quite the party they're having down there.

EXT. DARK STREET - CONTINUOUS

Anthony, Maria, and Vanessa run frantically through the back-alleys of the town away from the square. Vanessa holds Isabelle tightly in her arms. Distant muffled screams echo in the darkness.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They turn down a street running parallel to the main road, and can now see unconscious townspeople being bound by masked figures and carried off.

Masked men with large shears cut the clothes from those they have captured, tossing the scraps to the ground.

The air is thick with gas pouring out of the silver containers spread throughout the town.

Two townsfolk burst from a side street into the road behind them. Their clothes are hanging off of their bodies as if they've been cut down the middle.

The masked assailants enter the street behind the couple and two more appear from openings in front of the fleeing duo, cutting off their escape.

One tosses a rope net over the two of them - which causes the pair to fall to the ground screaming for their lives.

Anthony turns to continue his escape down the narrow street. Maria grabs him by the arm.

MARIA

We need to help them!

Anthony looks back to the couple. The attention of the masked figures is drawn by another fleeing victim.

Anthony turns and looks with desperation at the clear path in front of them. He ushers Maria and Vanessa to continue onwards.

ANTHONY

Go! Find Duke! I'll catch up.

MARIA

I'm not leaving you!

ANTHONY

(unsheathing his
knife)

I can take care of myself. Get
those two somewhere safe!

Maria opens her mouth to protest, but stops herself and turns to run after Vanessa.

Anthony dashes over and kneels next to the couple who struggle to free themselves from the weighted net.

INT. HOTEL - BATHROOM/HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Duke enters the makeshift darkroom and plucks the finished photographs from where they've been pinned.

He flips through them absentmindedly as he hums along with the record playing in the background.

INSERT - In the room the closet door quietly opens.

Duke pauses as he comes to one of the photos of Sophia's car. He holds it up to his face and squints.

In the background of the photo, a shadowy figure observes Anthony and Duke from the cover of the forest.

CLICK. The snub of a pistol presses against his neck.

DUKE

My wallet is in my coat pocket -
on the bed just take it.

NORA

Oh Mister Williamson, we both know
there's nothing in there.

DUKE

Fuck.

EXT. DARK TOWN STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Anthony SAWS away at the couples net with his knife. It rips open. They TUMBLE to the ground -- unconscious.

ANTHONY

God dammit...

CRACK. A whip snaps past Anthony's face -- he barely dodges it. He turns as the two masked men approach him.

ISABELLE SCREAMS. Anthony turns on his heel.

A huge net hidden under a large festival banner drops from the adjacent rooftops over Maria, Vanessa, and Isabelle.

ANTHONY

Maria...

No hesitation - Anthony races down the street towards Maria. He COUGHS and stops in his tracks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THIRTEEN masked men swarm into the street and block his way. One of them readies a night stick, another a net.

Anthony COUGHS, looks down at the gas gathering at his ankles. He takes a deep breath and places the gas mask on his face.

INT. HOTEL - ROOM - SAME TIME

Nora pushes Duke into the hotel room at gunpoint.

Duke puts on his flashy grin and tries to turn around.

DUKE

Look I can explain.

Nora pushes the gun back into his neck. Duke sweats.

NORA

You said one month.

DUKE

Well you see -

NORA

What I don't see don't see IS OUR
MONEY.

DUKE

(talking fast)

You will! I have it. I *WILL* have it. A client is paying me twenty five thousand dollars - it'll be there with interest.

THUD. The door opens to the hotel room.

Duke and Nora turn to look at THREE MASKED MEN. One has a net, the other a night stick and the third a gas canister.

A beat.

Duke RUNS, and leaps headfirst out of the hotel window.

The masked men all turn to Nora.

NORA

Look, whatever this is I didn't see anything.

One of the men walks forward, taps the stick in his hand and raises it to strike her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAM. Nora blows a hole in his head.

BLAM. Another shot opens the gas canister - which fills the room with gas.

Nora keeps blasting and is lost inside the smoke.

EXT. DARK TOWN STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Anthony makes his way from right to left and takes an aggressive SWING at the nearest masked man.

He dodges out of the way of his knife -- just barely.

CRACK. CRACK. Two MEN rush Anthony and beat him on the back with night sticks from behind. Anthony SPINS on his heel and cuts their throats. BLOOD SPLASHES EVERYWHERE.

The ELEVEN *still breathing* take a step back...

Anthony is dangerous.

One leaps on him from behind and wraps his arms around Anthony's waist.

Anthony lurches, tosses his attacker forward, and brings his foot down on his head with a CURBSTOMP.

TEN remain. A rope comes around Anthony's neck.

He gags and uses his knife to quickly cut the rope.

He grips the wrist of the masked attacker and headbutts him. CRACK. Anthony's mask breaks. Anthony pulls him into his knife. EIGHT to go.

Gas leaks in Anthony's fractured mask. Anthony coughs.

Two men throw ropes over Anthony and restrain him.

Anthony roars with rage and pulls both men to the ground.

He dashes forward and brings a knife down into the back of one's skull. SEVEN remain.

He coughs and struggles to keep his eyes open. The gas is getting to be too much.

Two attackers GRIP AND HOLD Anthony's right arm at bay so he cannot stab.

Anthony lashes out and pulls off both their masks at once -- they tumble to the ground. FIVE to go.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He stands upright, barely able to stay conscious and takes off the broken gas mask -- coughing.

He stumbles backwards and takes a swing -- only to fall onto the ground. His vision blurs.

MARIA (O.S.)

Anthony!

Anthony stumble-runs in the direction of Maria's voice. He sees her fighting against a net in the darkness ahead.

A rope goes around Anthony's neck. He falls forward and rises back up. Another rope goes around his waist and arms.

Seven more masked men appear.

Anthony falls onto his knees, blood runs down his face and into his bloodshot eyes. He's out of strength.

The gang of attackers throw two large weighted nets over Anthony and he CRASHES face-first to the pavement.

He loses breath and wheezes with pain.

Unable to move, he reaches in vain to the now-unconscious Maria mere inches away from his fingertips.

ANTHONY

Maria...

FUME. FUME. FUME. The streetlamps down the street shut off one by one and envelop the town in darkness.

Maria's netted body is pulled away by unseen hands.

Bits of her outfit lay scattered on the ground. Anthony trembles, tears of rage form in his eyes.

He claws at the nets around him in vain. The mist of gas continues to swirl and saps his consciousness.

EXT. HOTEL - SAME TIME

Duke bursts from around the hotel's side.

He brushes off leaves, twigs and bits of glass.

A beat. He turns to the town, just in time to see the lights fade into darkness.

Duke gazes past the overlook in silent horror.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A red flare ascends into the sky, along with several others, reflecting in his glasses.

EXT. DARK TOWN STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Down the center of the dark street strides a group of SIX HEAVILY ARMED GUARDS, leading the obscured Eliza, wrapped tightly in an expensive cloak and hood.

Her troupe stops in front of Anthony. He looks up at her face, unable to see it through his blurred vision.

Eliza lifts Anthony's chin with a delicate touch.

ELIZA
(motioning to her
left)
Well, what have we here? I do
believe this one doesn't belong.
But you know what they say...

Out from the smoke like a demon steps, Cuthbert, fully disguised as **THE HUNTER**.

ELIZA
Waste not, want not.

The Hunter SMACKS the butt of his rifle against Anthony's head.

CUT TO BLACK

MUSIC. SHANGRI-LA - BY THE FOUR COINS

END OF EPISODE ONE