

Unfurling Her Shadow

by

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*Scenes shot in the dark will be mostly black-and-white with a visible hue. The shadows will not have a visible hue aside from vague outlines, empty expressions, and mouthing lips. Lighting important.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

ACT 0 - SLEEPLESSNESS

The act title dissolves like a foggy, ghostly mist spiraling toward the dark corner.

A ghostly bodily form resembling that mist lurks in the corner by the bed where an older couple lay. It deepens its presence toward the audience as it collects sleepless kernels of dust that have been stagnating the home. Its ghostly eyes glint inside the dusty cloud. It is difficult to make out the silhouette, but it is 'feminine' in body and resembles old beauty.

As it forms into completion, it moves into the moonlight. HER SHADOW appears eerily similar to WOMAN in form like a doppelgänger, but the glinting eyes prove that it is something else.

It glides across the still living room toward an occupied bed.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - BEDROOM

The bed occupied by an older couple come into focus. They appear still, breathing deeply like a living portrait.

CUT to an analog clock on the wall above them winds softly like the quiet hum of a buzzing gnat. It is too dark to tell the time.

The clock's face appears to have a clear reflection of Her Shadow upon the glass, the face of Woman staring at the audience through its reflection.

CUT to Woman (60s) lifts her torso from the bed with a large breath in as if woken by command. She leans on her elbow then rubs dust from her eyes.

CUT to her bedside partner, MAN (60s). He remains asleep on his back, his mouth open ghastly, his lips dry and cracked.

CUT to Woman dragging her phone from the nightstand to check the time.

The phone's coning brightness beams, casting a shadow of

herself against the wall behind her. She blinks the light away. Deep dark circles under her eyes are visible.

The time is 4:04AM. Her phone's lock background is a picture of Iris and Pearl at their wedding.

Woman stares at her phone to try and unlock it.

Her Shadow, with the stillness of a pocket of dust shining under the moonlight after a stagnant winter, lurks in the corner. It widens its glowing eyes, mimicking Woman's realistic movements.

The unlock sound is heard. Her Shadow relaxes its gaze, appearing comfortable as if it had just finished a good stretch.

CUT to Woman clicking her phone to black.

Woman turns toward the wall to face Man.

CUT to Her Shadow's misty form, visible to the audience, slowly moving into focus. It presses itself against the wall beside the bed.

It stares down at Man. The ambiance surrounding Her Shadow's hue feels like a slow-decaying cloudy emotion as if it is wishing to release rain onto the bed.

Woman does not take notice of Her Shadow. Perhaps she already knows of its presence in front of her. Her posture does not show fear or paranoia but annoyance. Toward who?

Woman and Her Shadow, with gleaming eyes, stare down at the audience.

CUT to Man's sleeping face.

Man sleeps undisturbed. His wrinkled face, despite the obvious signs of age, do not appear as sunken in as Woman's.

The sound of Woman regurgitating a mucousy lump does not wake Man.

CUT to Woman, with Her Shadow mimicking her form, spitting the lump of mucus into Man's mouth.

There are some choking gurgles, sounding as if Man is having a bad drowning dream. Woman and Her Shadow stare down at the audience unfazed.

CLOSE CUT to Man with his eyes closed. It is clear he is in distress.

CUT to Woman returning her head to her pillow. Her Shadow's long, outstretched legs curve so it press onto Man's torso, though it is difficult to tell whether there is any actual impact of the shadowy being. It's body is still pressed against the wall as if sitting.

Man gurgles. He coughs.

CUT to Man lifting from the bed. Her Shadow removes its legs. It remains standing beside the bed.

Man hacks up a cough as Woman pretends to sleep. He spits the lump of mucus on the floor beside him.

Her Shadow's gleaming eyes shine with annoyance.

Man wipes his mouth clean with the bed sheet before returning to sleep.

CUT to Woman's eyes, barely open, glaring, staring toward the direction of Her Shadow as if they had just come to a mutual understanding about something that has been bothering them.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Woman stares at the ceiling, the back of her neck on her Korean buckwheat pillow. The whispering hum of the analog clock whirs above her. Faint shadows rustle along the ceiling near the curtains. The night sky shines through as if the moon is full.

The miniscule moments of cars rolling exhaustedly on cracked pavement late at night, the sharp sounds of a door closing down the hall, and the screeching shuffles of dry fingers along linen sheets cause Woman's almost-dejected expression to take a deep breath. She maintains a sense of paranoia with her gaze.

WOMAN

(whispering with desperation to herself)
Please just leave me alone.

She takes another deep breath as the curtains flutter. Shadows splay about on the ceiling. Who is she talking to?

The camera pans toward her line of sight directly above the bed, where Her Shadow lingers. It appears two-dimensional here, but the misty outlines of its body begins to pull away from the comfort of what exists within a shadow. It is beginning to resemble more of a phantom now.

Her Shadow's glistening eyes stare at the bed from the ceiling. Some mist sprinkles down like glittering dust

under moonlight.

WOMAN

(still whispering, with tears in her eyes)

Please. I never consented to this.

Her Shadow, descending from the ceiling with the movement of a being not from around here, moves aquatically, ghoulishly, toward woman as she sobs next to her sleeping husband.

Her Shadow, with the face of Woman, touches its face to hers. It backs away to stand at the end of the bed, watching.

CUT to Man, with dried drool along the side of his agape mouth.

CUT to Woman hovering her head above Man's mouth, studying his face as if about to spit in it again.

WOMAN

My darling husband.

Silence.

WOMAN

My babe!

Silence.

Woman grabs his cheeks like that of a child, pressing them together.

Man instantly wakes, his shock lifting him from the bed in terror. He flails his arms, breaking away her grasp. He glares at her as if this instance is one-too-many times she has woken him up like this.

MAN

What is it now? Was I snoring too heavily again, disrupting your princess sleep?

WOMAN

You were choking again. I thought you swallowed your tongue.

Man laughs with a snide disbelief before laying down again, turning away from Woman.

CUT to Man readjusting himself so he lay on his back. His breathing has returned to a deep lull.

CUT to Woman, still propped up on her elbow, staring at

Man.

CUT to Her Shadow watching them with glowing eyes at the end of the bed. Is it still possessing her?

CUT to Woman turning her back to the camera, laying her head onto her pillow with a sigh. She huddles herself under the covers almost like a child afraid of monsters in her closet.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Woman is moments away from lulling herself to sleep. Man stops breathing for a moment after a small gurgle, pulling Woman out of what felt like the beginnings of a dream.

Woman lifts her head with curiosity and shock. Did she just witness her husband die peacefully in his sleep next to her?

Woman's face hovers toward the wall above Man's head as if his deathly physique had lured her. The glint of Her Shadow's eyes at the foot of the bed in the darkness, standing, waiting.

Beat.

Man breathes out heavily with a snore.

Woman, ignoring Her Shadow, returns her head to her pillow with concern, maybe annoyance. She is wide awake now.

Woman speaks to herself while Her Shadow listens with intent.

WOMAN

Woman sighs deeply. The sigh is one that voices the frustration she has held onto for years. The release at the end of the breath - is it defeat? Loneliness? Suffering? It's remainder is mostly sadness.

Her Shadow, it's shadowy physique stands next to her as she lay on the bed. It is looking down.

Beat.

It reaches over Woman toward Man. Its shadow wraps its tendril-like fingers around his neck. They appear like the shadows of thin, fuzzy vines, growing length from its fingertips and curling like tendrils clinging to a dried, broken-off branch.

Its eyes glint like the dying embers of a flame.

Rapid breathing (from Woman) is heard as Her Shadow's eyes flicker.

After a few grunts, it stretches its grip. Some tendrils unfurl from Man's neck, some of its vines stretching and ripping away. The tendrils fully release, leaving a shadowy scar on his neck that fades.

Her Shadow stands tall beside the bed.

Woman breathes rapidly. Her stomach shakes the bed with sobs. She pushes her pillow off the bed. It lands on the floor beside Her Shadow's long, outstretched legs.

She speaks exhaustedly in child's pose, her head facing the wall, as if she is confessing feelings on a last pulled thread as if trying to remember the words that had convinced her to stay with him before.

WOMAN

(whispering) I love this man. I love him. I do. I am married to him. We will take care of each other when we are older.

Woman drags her phone from the nightstand to check the time. The brightness does not disturb her eyes. They are glossy from fatigue and plump as if she had gotten done crying hours ago.

She tosses her phone to the nightstand with little care for noise then turns her body again to face Man, who has not moved. He inhales a loud snore with a small gargle.

Woman drops her head to the mattress then moves to get more comfortable, creating a disturbance. He still does not wake.

With determination and fierceness, Woman tosses the blankets to the side then lifts herself off the bed.

She is dressed in loose pajamas that flow delicately as she moves.

She paces to the window, opens the curtain, then unlocks and lifts the window. There is not a bug screen.

Woman sticks her head out to take a few deep breaths. Her Shadow stands behind her. The windowpane reeks of mildew.

Her Shadow, hovering above Man in the corner by the chair, grows mistier as moonlight permeates through the open

window.

Her Shadow lingers with a glint in its eyes as it stands tall at the end of the bed, resembling a shadow in the darkness or a grave prepping itself for a body.

Woman's hands grip tightly onto the windowsill as she stares at the foggy light above her wrinkled fingertips. Perhaps the moon is healing. Perhaps she thought about jumping on the grass below to feel the softness of the midnight dew along her soles.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - DINING AREA (FLASHBACK)

IRIS (30), PEARL (23), and MAN (60s) stand in the living room.

The various stains gained through its lifetime are apparent on the old corduroy. Two mugs, empty, rest on the small coffee table in front of the television.

IRIS
(a kind plea) For fuck's sake,
help me to understand.

Iris breathes with calm intensity. Man mirrors Pearl's stance, who stands with his hands behind his back with worry and sadness.

Man leans forward, his eyes deplete and sunken in with fatigue. Man breathes in as he adjusts his posture. He breathes out with slight frustration.

Beat.

He turns his gaze toward Iris, who is standing beside Pearl.

IRIS
You say you need to forget about
the past to move on. Then you say
you want to remember the past to
better yourself. But then you say
you need to forget all about the
past to support the family. Don't
you understand how confusing that
is?

PEARL
We're all worried about your
health.

Man's back arches forward. He is eye level with Iris. His

face is scraggly. His eyes are glossy. He breathes in with tight lips.

MAN
My therapist says--

IRIS
Stop lying about going to therapy.

Iris looks back and forth between his glossy eyes with anger and sadness.

MAN
(said with monotony)
I go to therapy every Wednesday. I
bring my--

IRIS
Yeah, yeah. You bring him lunch
and he gives you a discount.

With a deep breath to relax the tension in her forehead, Iris leaves the living room to stand next to WOMAN at the threshold. Woman wraps her hands around Iris's shoulders, pulling her into the kitchen.

Man's gaze follows Iris before sweeping back to Pearl, who has not broken eye contact. Man opens his mouth with an inhale as if about to speak, then he closes his lips tightly with a gruff.

Beat.

Man and Pearl shift their stances.

MAN
My therapist discourages illusions
of improbability.

Pearl tightens his gaze in contemplation while peering at the backs of Iris and Woman whispering in the kitchen.

MAN
Do you agree or disagree?

Pearl shrugs with uncertainty.

MAN
It's a simple question I expect
answered. Do you agree or
disagree?

Man unfurls his index finger then leeches it toward Pearl's shoulder, hovering it inches from him.

Pearl looks to Iris and Woman for a moment, who are looking at each other.

MAN

It would be smart to think about how you invest your time within this family.

CUT TO:

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - KITCHEN (FLASHBACK CONTD)

IRIS

Oh, okay. So all of a sudden the consequences of his words are excusable? Everything he does and says is no longer the cause of his own actions?

Woman rubs her shaking hands together.

WOMAN

Your father *is* trying. His therapist advised him to rethink what his commitment to love means.

Iris's cheeks are flush with frustration.

IRIS

I told him that, you know. I told him to rethink what love means to him. He's the one who put the word commitment in there and credited his therapist for it.

Woman rubs her arms then adjusts her stance. She peers over her shoulder to glance at Man and Pearl in a growling discussion.

Pearl sneaks a glance of Woman then whispers something to Man.

HER SHADOW snakes along the floor, leaving traces of mist on the floor as Woman shifts her step. A dark, misty footprint rises from the floor as if it is evaporating.

The edges of Her Shadow rise along the perimeter of Woman, its orange eyes trailing along her sides until they stop at the nape of her neck to glare at Man.

Woman's transparent face is mimicked on Her Shadow. It bites the air in front of Man, its jaw a caricature of sharp teeth like a demon.

WOMAN

You should not be so mean to your father. He is trying his best every day.

CUT TO:

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - DINING AREA (FLASHBACK)

Man gruffs.

Woman turns to the living room where Man's arm is locked around Pearl's neck, his fist curling tightly.

Woman and Iris gasp then approach to quell the physical argument. Before Woman and Iris pass the threshold, Pearl unlocks Man then pushes him off.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Woman glares at Man. The side of her head lay on her pillow.

Man is looking up at the ceiling with his eyes closed. His mouth is closed as well. There is a small layer of chapstick on his lips.

Woman lifts her head slowly, methodically, then then breathes her rancid morning breath into his nostrils.

Man does not wake. He breathes in a snore then bellows as if it had lulled him to a deeper slumber.

Woman fluffs her pillow then drops her head on it. The waft of air hits Man's face, who gurgles. He remains asleep.

Woman speaks as if her body is asleep.

WOMAN

How can he sleep so soundly? Has he always slept without an instinct for the one he calls Wife? His Beloved? He says, 'Dear, I need a full eight hours to be functional. Please wake me only for an emergency,' yet he only considers it an emergency if he wakes with the disgusting ache of a full colon. But when I ask to sleep soundly for one god-forsaken night, he tells me, 'Dear, I have been as quiet as a mouse in the afternoon. Maybe you should call

the doctor tomorrow morning?' as
if that is what will assist me,
dear Husband?

Woman slaps her hand on top of the nightstand to drag her
phone off.

The time is 3:14AM.

Woman cups her face as if she is about to cry. She shakes
her head back and forth before tossing the blanket aside.

Woman pulls fuzzy socks from the top of the nightstand as
she cries silently to herself then slips them over her feet
before standing.

Woman is fully dressed in a loose dress nightgown that
covers the top of her feet. It is shoulderless and cropped
above her collarbone. She has the grace of old beauty.

WOMAN

I love my husband. I do. I should
not be so mean to him. I have
known this man my whole life. He
has known me his whole life. We
love each other.

Woman rotates her neck in slow circles. After she moves her
head from side to side, she walks in place to release the
nighttime ankle swelling, then massages her neck and arms
to release the sleepless nerves from her spine.

WOMAN

Will I be able to sleep if his
spirit lifts to the sky before
mine?

Woman shakes the thought away.

WOMAN

What a horrible thing to think.

Woman sighs then turns on the flashlight.

The flashlight shines on her worn slippers, animal paws,
illuminating the stray fuzz near the toes, which stretches
a misty shadow ahead of her.

Woman sniffs and closes her eyes for some semblance of
rest.

As Woman composes herself, the light of the flashlight
transitions into that of a flickering flame. It is then
when she gets up, her phone's flashlight undulating.

Behind her dimly lit silhouette is Her Shadow with tendrils flickering like the edge of a flame against the wall, above Man's sleeping silhouette.

ACT 1 - UNFURLING HER SHADOW

The words appears on the wall in the foreground of Her Shadow's mist, transparent and easily blended into the air of nighttime, aside from the gleaming, flicking eyes.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Woman's phone flashlight guides a bright pathway toward the bathroom.

An eerie sound emerges in the corner beside Man. Woman shines the light toward him, casting his shadow against the wall. His breathing is normal. He does not wake.

Woman's breathing, deep and airy, control the minor paranoid shakes of her hand as she pans her phone across the studio apartment, the occasional flicker of light appearing as if Her Shadow is lurking, facing her.

Dust hovers in the air next to a cabinet under family photos. The empty space underneath the cabinet appears darker than the surrounding night unlit by the flashlight. Wisps of its edges undulate with a misty edge as if something underneath had been waiting to be seen.

Her Shadow undulates as the flashlight darkens its hiding spot, its wispy form flailing like a waft of air pushing across a stillwater puddle as it welcomes discovery.

Woman does not notice.

She continues to pan the flashlight slowly toward her right as the soft rumbles of thunder echo within the quiet space of the apartment, the tremors of the home humming with the threats of incoming rain.

An old dusty one-seater couch with heavily frayed fabric and thin wooden legs, its back facing the entrance to the kitchen, is positioned at an angle to the television. The back of the dusty television, with its dust-caked wires exposed, faces Woman.

Directly next to the one-seater couch is a corner coffee table. On it is two dirty mugs, one plate with leftover food, and a singular fly sleeping on the plate's ceramic. Between the television and one-seater couch is a longer coffee table with a worn copy of *The Nine Cloud Dream* and another dirty plate.

Her Shadow follows the light as Woman continues to pan her flashlight right, its darkness zipping under the plate with the fly, disturbing the bug enough for it to buzz off. Her Shadow's form unfurls more aggressively as Woman does not take notice, its tendrils whipping ahead of her like sprawling ivy reaching toward the sky for something to latch onto.

Her phone's flashlight shines on a framed portrait of Iris and Pearl. Woman does not notice Her Shadow's tendrils extending out from behind the photograph, flailing.

To the right of that, after the small pathway to enter the crowded living room space, is an old corduroy two-seater couch. It has indents from long-term use and looks as if it is one-person-sitting-on-it-away from breaking.

Her Shadow, mist-like and translucent, floats toward the two-seater. Taking the form of Woman, it sits on the edge on the two-seater cushion with its knee turned toward the one-seater. It delicately cups its hands on its lap, right over left.

Woman does not notice Her Shadow as the phone flashlight pans right toward the bedroom.

Her Shadow lingers on the couch as it stays attached to Woman's feet. Its mimicking form of Woman becomes more opaque as Woman pans the flashlight toward Man.

Man still lay in bed undisturbed, his shadow panning against the wall with her flashlight and undulating as if traveling by ocean.

Only dust and dripping echoes inside the furnace are noticeable to Woman as oddities.

She grips her phone and maneuvers around the furniture toward the bathroom with fatigue, Her Shadow watching.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The door creaks as Woman closes the bathroom door quietly behind her. The door has difficulty latching, so she slams it a little harder to close than she wanted.

With a clenched fist and a sigh, she sets the phone, flashlight-side up on the edge of the sink. Thunder continues to maintain its calm roaring, the minor vibrations in the home like a broken lullaby.

She lifts the toilet seat then sits.

She tears toilet paper from the roll. Dust explodes into the air, glistening more brightly with the light.

She blows her nose then tosses the paper into the small linen waste basket beside her.

WOMAN

After this, I'll try to sleep.
I'll try my very best to sleep.

Woman closes her eyes and pees with a relieving sigh. When she finishes, she turns on the bidet. The bidet water cleans.

She pulls an old re-purposed T-shirt hand-sewn into a washable post-bidet towel. She stares at the design, lifting it to see more visibly with the phone flashlight. There is a faded Black Flag band logo.

She uses it to wipe water from her butt and the toilet seat.

She stands then grabs the toilet lid with the bidet towel. The lid slips from her fingertips then crashes loudly onto the toilet seat.

She flinches from the noise then sighs before flushing and tossing the towel into the used towel bin. She sprays a nose allergy spray in each nostril, sniffing as if she is crying. She washes and dries her hands.

Woman looks at herself in the mirror, embers of the flashlight highlighting an awkward angle. Her under-eye bags are pronounced. Her face appears sunken in like fatigue has aged her in a few minutes.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - KITCHEN (FLASHBACK)

Flashbacks, unless noted otherwise, appear in and out like a shadowy mist in the background. As the flashback is in action and overlaid atop the previous scene along the edges. The edges, softened like a shadow, play out in continuation. They should resemble a walking dream sequence.

WOMAN (45) heats a kettle on the stove. As she waits for it to boil, she stands between the kitchen and the living room listening to IRIS (24) and MAN (45) conversing. Woman's shoulder leans against the edge of the wall near the kitchen's entrance so she can watch the water boil. Her back is turned to them in the living room.

Man, sitting on the one-seater couch, studies his softly clasped hands. He taps his foot against the floor.

MAN

I have improved, really. I'm improving my mindset a little bit every day.

Iris, sitting on the cushion farthest from the one-seater, turns away from Man to give Woman a concerned gaze.

Woman turns her face slightly toward Iris. They hold each other's gaze for a moment.

WOMAN

(mouths to Iris)
Listen.

Woman raises her eyebrows at Iris, who sighs lightly then returns her gaze to Man. Her Shadow simmers at the base of her feet like the light steam from the kettle. No one pays any mind to it. Woman appears even more oblivious to its presence despite looking down at her animal paw print slippers. Its tendrils flail out briefly when Man speaks.

MAN

I understand you're upset with me Iris. I've been too disapproving. Love is hard. It's hard for me to understand. But to do better, I have to be honest with you. Pearl is not the guy for you.

Man lifts his head. Iris looks at Woman. Man turns to Woman. His eyes are sunken in and appear blank.

IRIS

What do you think about all this, Mom?

Woman looks back and forth between the kettle on the stove that is beginning to steam and Iris and Man who look at her with eager eyes. She rubs her hands together as if they are frigid. Her fingers are thin and wrinkled, but they look soft.

WOMAN

He is proud of the positive work he's accomplished. Both him and his doctor. And me. Him not approving of Pearl is something he will understand and heal from the more him and Pearl get to know one another. He will learn to love Pearl like he learned to love this family again.

Iris sighs through her nose, forming her lips into a thin line. She shrugs.

IRIS
(to Man)
I'm staying with Pearl.

MAN
You just need to reconsider.

IRIS
He is not who you think he is.
He's good to me.

MAN
He's going to fall out of love with you after kids. Happened to me and your mother.

Woman shakes her head in disbelief.

WOMAN
'Fell out of love'?

MAN
It's not like that. We are growing older - love looks different. I don't want Iris to have what we have.

WOMAN
What we have is something we have built together. You shouldn't compare our love to our daughter's marriage.

MAN
I'm not comparing - I'm worried, you know that. Pearl is too young to understand how much work it takes to be married. If I could turn back time, I wouldn't want to repeat the past.

WOMAN

That is not what we said to each other in our vow renewals.

Iris looks back and forth between her parents, whose eyes glint with a sheen layer of tears.

IRIS

Dad, are you sure your therapist is helping you?

WOMAN

Your father is doing the best he can. We just have to support him as he adjusts through a transformative period in his life.

MAN

(spoken like it has been memorized then recited many times)
I am doing better. The sadness I feel comes from a place of hurt. The sadness I feel is temporary. I am holding myself accountable by improving with positivity and light every day.

Woman lowers her clasped hands. She switches between smiling with support and unsmiling with concern as she looks back and forth between the living room and kitchen. The kettle is steaming softly. The thermometer on the lid shows it is close to the red mark. Her Shadow's tendrils flail more unruly.

WOMAN

Your father has been trying to learn how to love better. He really has.

Iris holds silent tears in her eyes. She stands then walks around the couch toward the kitchen.

IRIS

You're sure he's going to therapy this time? That his therapist isn't some made up person again?

Man clasps his hands more tightly.

MAN

(spoken like it has been memorized then recited many times)
I go to therapy every Wednesday. I pick up lunch for two beforehand.

We eat it together. He gives me a discount.

Her Shadow wisps beneath her feet like a fog as Woman stares at her feet, it flails aggressively.

WOMAN

Your father has no reason to lie to us. He loves me. He does. He loves you, too. He just has difficulty expressing his emotions sometimes.

Her Shadow releases its grasp and returns to a small, undulating simmer below Woman's feet. Iris stands in front of Woman then hold her trembling, clasped hands. Woman's nails had dug into her palms, leaving indents.

With tears in both of their eyes, Iris smiles as she comforts her mother, whose tears drip onto her pawprint slippers, calming Her Shadow enough for Woman to look up at her daughter's face.

IRIS

I think I'm ready for that calming tea you promised would soothe our nerves.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Woman faces the bathroom mirror. The flickering flashlight on the sink highlights her sunken-in face.

Her Shadow's silhouette hovers in the dark corner above the shiny, white-painted door behind her, its legs extending like a pair of knives. With extended tendrils like vines, Her Shadow presses itself against the wall. As Woman stares at herself in the mirror, Her Shadow lowers itself to the floor, the mirror image of Woman's face becoming more distinguishable within the mist-like form of Her Shadow.

Woman does not pay attention to Her Shadow, whose tendrils wrap around her ankles.

Woman turns on the faucet, rinses her hands, then presses her face with wet hands. She rubs her eyes clean. She turns off the faucet then leans against the sink to give herself a quiet pep talk.

WOMAN

Don't let him get into your head again.

With ease, her body mirrors Her Shadow like a bodily reflection, its mist-like edges hovering over her skin like steam.

WOMAN

(with tears welling in her eyes)
Don't let him fucking get into
your head again.

Woman turns off the flashlight then exits the bathroom. As she turns, Her Shadow's face, behind Woman, is visible in the mirror. There is a glint of orange in Her Shadow's eyes.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - THRESHOLD - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Woman leaves the bathroom. She stands between the living room and bedroom.

She blinks to adjust her vision to the dark. Her Shadow's orange eyes are still visible in the bathroom mirror as woman takes a few deep breaths to gather herself at the threshold. It is uncertain if the orange eyes are following Woman or the audience.

Its body expands in the mirror as woman stretches her neck from side to side, her eyes closed and mouth slightly agape. When Woman takes a step toward the threshold, Her Shadow's mist-like form reassembles as it detaches from the wall, looking as if it is leaving black mold imprints, then sits on the chair facing Man. Its orange eyes retain an ember.

Woman turns on the flashlight. She does not pay attention to Her Shadow, whose wave-like texture undulates with intense calmness. Its eyes, glowing like a cat's at night, looks directly at the audience. The then flashlight shines on Man, casting a shadow of his open-mouthed sleeping face against the wall. He does not wake.

Woman lingers with the flashlight facing the curtained window as it pans away from the bed.

WOMAN

I wish I could sleep that soundly.
Will he consider my aching heart
an emergency?

The heater turns on, its struggling fan whirring as it powers on. The vents blow air against the heavy curtain. The fabric sways as if the window is open and the wind is breezy.

Woman sighs then goes to the kitchen. Her Shadow's eyes follow her as the flashlight moves away.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Woman turns off the flashlight. The kitchen, designed as a small U-shape counter with the front door directly next to the fridge, is dimly lit from the streetlight through the small window above the sink.

A portion of the available counter space is filled with a rack of morning coffee supplies and a dish rack with a towel underneath for drying. There is a curtain installed on the bottom half of the window. The ground is not visible through the window, but the night sky is.

Woman grabs a ceramic mug from the rack, adds a chamomile tea bag, fills a gooseneck kettle with tap water, then sets the kettle on the stove to boil.

She watches the water's temperature rise on the thermometer. Creaks from the stove keep her eyes fluttering.

Once the thermometer reaches red, Woman pours the hot water on top of the chamomile to steep. The tea bag bloats as she pours then relaxes when she stops.

Woman lays her head on the counter as the tea steeps.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - DINING ROOM (FLASHBACK)

IRIS (30), sits at the table, sipping on her freshly poured tea with tense concern. She lowers the mug with both hands. With anger in her eyes, she stares at WOMAN (60s).

WOMAN

I'm sorry, Iris. You know how your father is.

Iris points to her phone on the table as she holds her mug.

IRIS

It's unbelievable to me he doesn't understand why we're upset with him.

Woman grips the mug in her hand. Her wrinkled fingers fidget around the ceramic.

WOMAN

He doesn't think Pearl is right

for you. He only said those things because he cares. Sometimes he is too reckless with his words.

Iris pulls out her phone to show Woman a series of text messages. They are screenshots between Iris and Man.

IRIS

He had plenty time to think before he sent those messages.

Woman places her mug on the table then grabs the phone with concern. Her eyes read the texts as Iris taps her short fingernails on the table.

IRIS

I know he's concerned about my well-being, but this is too much.

Woman filters through the screenshots with shock on her face.

WOMAN

Are you sure your father sent these? He told me his number got hacked around this time. The hacker sent both of us his messages.

Iris takes a sip of her tea.

IRIS

It's not a hacker. It's his words. He blames his therapist first if you go back far enough.

Woman shakes her head. She puts the phone on the table. Tears well in her eyes.

IRIS

It was unprompted. Before then, I called him to ask how his therapy went, and right after that is what he sent later in the day.

Woman shakes her head.

WOMAN

I don't believe he would say this unprompted. Have you researched this therapist of his?

Iris nods her head.

IRIS

I don't think he's going to therapy as regularly as he said. It's been years, Mom. He only went in for help on how to be a better husband and father. A therapist would not advise someone to send these texts.

Woman wipes tears from her eyes, the back of her trembling fingertips pressing her nostrils as she sniffs.

IRIS (CONT'D)

At this point, you're both suffering by staying together. Didn't your therapist tell you to divorce him years ago? Has Dad really been healing from his traumas?

WOMAN

Iris. Your father and I made a lifelong commitment. To each other. I will not divorce your father because his therapist told him to say mean, hurtful things. This is not who I know my husband to be.

Iris points to the phone. She sighs and plays with the teabag string, wrapping it around her mug handle.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

My therapist told me something that would help me to... not be a carrier of fearing about a loss of love. She said to grow together in every phase of living is a wondrous thing and should be cherished in spite of all the hardships that come with it. That was really eye opening for me.

IRIS

Have you grown with him after your therapy this much?

WOMAN

We have been married for longer than you've been alive, Iris. Essentially my whole life I've spent with your father. Of course we have grown together. Therapy has nothing to do with it.

IRIS

What about the vow renewals?

WOMAN

It was done in private. The renewal was just us two talking with each other.

IRIS

That's not what Dad told me. He said he didn't want to do it, and he only agreed to make another commitment so you would stop bothering him about it.

Woman shakes her head then leans back in her chair. Iris holds frustration in her face while Woman appears nervous.

WOMAN

It's not like that - our commitment has progressed into something more important than love. Your father and I... don't need a formal vow renewal to understand that we still love each other.

IRIS

What newfound commitment did you talk about? I remember you being excited. You asked me to find alterations shops around town that knows how to alter older wedding gowns.

WOMAN

It was something exciting to think about--I don't need to... I don't need to have a formal wedding vow renewal. Your father knows me better than anyone.

Iris chuckles sarcastically.

IRIS

I asked Dad about it a little bit ago. He said he forgot what his commitment was.

WOMAN

That can't be true, Iris. Your father is a private person, you know this.

Woman leans into her chin atop her right hand and sighs deeply. Her left hand, no wedding band, grips the handle of her teacup tightly. Her tea, still full, has grown cold.

Iris releases the tension in her shoulders and shows softness in her face for Woman.

IRIS

You entering retirement should be with a peaceful mind, not with the stress of guessing whether or not the man you committed to still loves you. I'm worried about your happiness, Mom.

WOMAN

I have lived many, many more years than you, Iris. Trust me when I say that your father and I still love each other very much. Our relationship has grown to look different than young love.

IRIS

I understand older relationships look different. But what I don't believe, Mom, is Dad telling you one thing and then goes against it.

WOMAN

Your father is trying, Iris. Really.

IRIS

Watching both of you not be the person you used to be around each other is draining. I want you both to be happy.

WOMAN

We all grow, Iris. It is normal to change as we grow older.

IRIS

Not like this, Mom. This is something else. This is both of you suffering in a loveless home.

WOMAN

Let me just try and talk to your father to try harder. We can fix it.

IRIS
You've been trying, Mom.

Iris points to the phone.

IRIS (CONT'D)
Dad is finished trying.

WOMAN
Iris. There are many things about
our marriage you don't understand.
Remember you are our daughter, not
a friend.

Iris sighs with tears in her eyes.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT (PRESENT)

The murky yellow of the steaming tea glimmers in the dimly lit darkness.

Woman lifts her head from the counter quickly. There is a red mark on her forehead.

She takes a sip and burns the tip of her tongue. She breathes with a slightly open mouth before swallowing with a tense face. She places the mug on the counter to cool as she holds her hand to her lips.

Woman turns in pain and looks at the fridge. A wedding photograph from Iris and Pearl holding hands in front of a lighthouse, dated October 21, decorates the fridge with a teddy bear magnet.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Woman, with turmoiling sadness in her stance, moves the photo up on the fridge closer to eye level before opening the fridge. The light highlights her fatigued body, casting a shadow behind her. Her Shadow lingers off camera, but the mist is seen on the outline for the audience.

She pulls a sweet syrup, glass bottles clinking, then adds it to her tea then swirls it with her finger. Thunder rolls in the background.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT (FLASHBACK)

Iris sighs. She turns to Man, who is sitting with one leg crossed in the chair. Pearl is standing next to Iris.

IRIS

How have you been trying?

MAN

Just like the doctor told me. With positivity and light every day.

IRIS

(To Man through clenched teeth)

How you're making me feel right now is not what love is. And how you've been making Mom feel is not what love is, either.

MAN

Your mother and I know very well what love should feel like.

Man leans back in the single-person chair, lifting it enough to balance on its hind legs.

Iris glares at Man, who thumps his foot on the hardwood floor as he balances the chair.

Woman crosses her arms. Her Shadow's tendrils flare out of Woman's back, clawing the air in front of Man, who sits undisturbed.

WOMAN

(to Iris)

Iris, please be kinder to your father. It is imperative we support each other as a family. We are all going through transformative periods in our lives.

Man nods as he balances the chair. The tendrils snake their way toward Man, wrapping around the chair's spine to hold it down.

The chair's front legs fall to the ground with a loud bang. Man keeps his feet planted on the floor. He taps his slipper.

IRIS

(to Man with pettiness)

Dad, what did you say your and Mom's renewals that was so romantic? Do you remember?

Man shrugs.

Her Shadow flares its tendrils around the chair as if it wants to encompass Man to choke him.

Iris raises her eyebrows at Woman. Woman looks to Iris with tired eyes.

Woman smiles softly at Iris. Her Shadow's tendrils relax as Woman breathes deeply to calm herself.

WOMAN

Your father and I both agreed it does not need to be *that* romantic.

Iris crosses her arms.

IRIS

Am I wrong to think this is how love should be expressed?

PEARL

He should want to showcase his love for you to the world. He should scream it as loud as he can so the world knows how much he loves you.

IRIS

Pearl and I know what's best for us. It is not your place to decide how we should love each other.

Woman takes a breath as if about to speak. Man holds up his palm.

MAN

I understand you're concerned, Iris, but Pearl is not the man for you.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Woman grips her mug. She breathes in slowly and deeply then takes a gulp of her tea, now cold. She shuts the cabinet door without worrying about closing it softly.

WOMAN

This better have woken that brute.

Woman closes her eyes and holds her breath briefly to listen. Man's heavy breathing pattern doesn't change. Woman releases her breath, and with it, some relief and frustration from her shoulders. Her eyes gloss over, from

fatigue or sadness or frustration, all exist within her movements.

Her Shadow, getting up from the chair, follows its webbed legs to the kitchen to reunite with Woman again. She is sipping on cold tea with her hands shaking.

Woman does not notice Her Shadow as it hides behind her, its webbed tendrils still latched to her ankles.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

WOMAN (60s) cleans the kitchen in preparation for dinner. She is wearing loose ankle slacks, a comfortable plain tee, an apron with cute bears printed on the fabric. There are four empty dinner sets lined on the kitchen counter.

NARRATOR ON THE TELEVISION (O.S.)

Their faces are getting red--blood
is pooling!

On the stove is mashed potatoes, glazed carrots and snap peas, roasted chicken, and a small pot of tomato soup.

CUT TO:

MAN (60s) watches television on the couch. He is wearing a loose button-up and comfortable ankle slacks, matching Woman in style but not color.

On the television is a competition reality show about who can stand on their head the longest.

NARRATOR ON THE TELEVISION

Who will pass out first?

CUT TO:

IRIS (30) and PEARL (24) knock on the door when one of the television contestants gets wheeled onto an ambulance for resurrection after fainting.

Pearl opens the door.

IRIS

Hello!

Pearl carries a small bouquet of daisies as he holds the door open for Iris. Once inside, Pearl offers the bouquet to Woman with a smile.

PEARL

Thank you for welcoming me into
your home. I brought these daisies

from the garden. They are meant to bring luck to new beginnings.

Woman accepts the bouquet as Iris closes and locks the door behind her. Woman smells the flowers.

WOMAN

How sweet, thank you. Iris's halmoni loved picking fresh flowers for the windowsill. I'm sure she'll love smelling these when her breeze rolls around.

Woman fills a tiny vase from the windowsill with water then adds the daisies. Her Shadow's needle-like tendrils flick toward Pearl with curiosity, who doesn't notice.

MAN (O.S.)

Who's at the door?

WOMAN

It's Iris' husband. And he brought us some daisies! It's very thoughtful.

MAN

Husband?

Man gets up then approaches Pearl, who is standing at the threshold between the living room and kitchen.

MAN

I didn't hear about a husband before today. I thought that dinner we went to was just to announce your pregnancy.

Iris hugs Woman. Woman gives Iris a big squeeze before letting go.

Her Shadow attempts to wrap its tendrils around Iris' ankle, but it is unsuccessful.

Iris turns to grabs Pearl's arm, who looks at Iris with a soft smile. Iris exchanges the smile before addressing their family.

IRIS

(to Man)

I've told you about this other Pearl. I started seeing him after Pearl.

MAN

Remind me, what kind of a name is
Pearl again? The other Pearl
wouldn't tell me.

Pearl extends his hand. Man shakes his hand with a firm
handshake. Pearl smiles.

PEARL

It's a matriarchal name. My mother
gifted it to me so I would always
remember to respect the women in
my life.

Man scoffs then moves past Pearl toward Iris. Woman stands
by the stove, Her Shadow flaring like a small flame beneath
her feet. Man gives Iris a brief hug.

MAN

A pearl is something you wear. You
know that, right?

Iris hugs back with a sigh.

Her Shadow's tendrils reach toward Iris and Man. It is
still attached to Woman.

IRIS

Hello, Dad.

Iris guides Pearl to the living room.

MAN

(to Woman)

You knew about this Pearl guy?

Woman nods.

WOMAN

Iris talks about him all the time.

Man scoffs. Her Shadow's tendrils, mist-like, fling out
from behind Woman in an attempt to grab Man.

Iris and Pearl sit on the couch then change the channel to
another reality TV show about the different ways one person
can cook an egg.

NARRATOR ON THE TELEVISION

There are so, so many ways to cook
an egg, but the one we're going to
learn today is how to boil an egg
just the way you like it.

Man eyes Woman, who wipes her hands on her apron.

WOMAN

Pearl is nice. Try to be nice. He is your only son-in-law.

MAN

I never liked him.

Woman rubs her hands together as if they are cold. She guides Man into the kitchen with her arm hovering over his shoulder. Her Shadow encircles Man's steps, keeping the small circle around him untouched. It covers Woman's steps with its misty body.

Man brushes her hand away when they are still. Her Shadow flings out from below Woman's feet then stands behind her like a life-sized parallel figurine.

WOMAN

We have accomplished so much to get you two to talk with each other.

Her Shadow's mouth mirrors Woman's dialogue without any sound.

MAN

All I'm saying is no punk is going to be my son-in-law.

Man goes to the living room then sits on the single sofa.

Woman stays in the kitchen with a sigh then turns to toss the carrots in the pan. Her Shadow remains on the threshold. Tendrils pull Her Shadow back to Woman as she focuses on the food.

Iris gets up to help her mother in the kitchen as wooden spoons clang in the pan. Iris pulls out mugs then fills them with tea. The kettle on the stove is already boiling, steam bursting with calm intensity.

IRIS

It was Pearl's idea to bring the flowers. He grew those.

WOMAN

He grew those?

Iris nods with a smile as she pours the steaming water into the mugs. Her Shadow's tendrils relax as Iris pours the water.

IRIS

He started them a few months ago.

He's got a wonderful green thumb.

CUT TO:

Man stares at Pearl with wide eyes and no words.

PEARL

Thank you for allowing me into
your home. I'm honored Iris
invited me to the harvest.

Man gruffs. He points to the television. There is a six-
minute timer set for the boiling egg.

MAN

Do you agree or disagree?

PEARL

Agree.

Man shakes his head. He lifts the single-seater couch to
balance it on its hind legs then drops the front loudly
onto the floor.

MAN

Punk.

Pearl tries his best to pay attention to the television.

CUT TO:

Woman and Iris stand at the threshold.

IRIS (CONT'D)

I thought they died before he
could pick them, but the flower
petals close at night and wake
with the sun.

PEARL (O.S.)

Oopsie-daisy.

MAN (O.S.)

Upsie-daisy.

WOMAN

What did he say they were meant
for?

IRIS

He said they're for new
beginnings. Is that right, Pearl?

Pearl turns on the couch, his torso facing Man.

PEARL

Yes, that's correct. It's a symbol
of my dedication for Iris and my--

Man points to Pearl. His finger moves between him and Woman
and Iris.

MAN

You should be standing next to my
daughter if you're thinking about
being romantically profound.

Pearl stands then approaches Iris to place his hand along
the square of her back. Iris places her hand over his.

PEARL

It's meant to symbolize my
commitment to Iris as we move
forward with our partnership.

Woman clasps her hands together in front of her and smiles.

Man turns in the chair then gruffs.

MAN

You really brought this little
punk over here again?

IRIS

Dad, will you at least try to be
nice while he's here?

Man scoffs then turns off the television.

MAN

Do you know how to cook, Pearl?

PEARL

I know an egg needs six minutes of
boiling to be perfect.

Man gruffs with some choice words uttered under his breath.

MAN

Do you know how to cook, Pearl?

Woman sighs then goes to the kitchen.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Boiled eggs sound so delightful as
a side for this soup--you said six
minutes, Pearl?

Off screen the sounds of a pot fills with water, scrapes of

the pot on the stove, the fridge opens, eggs drop into the water, snap of the stove turns on.

IRIS
Is that difficult for you to believe, Dad?

PEARL
I'll go help your mom with the soup.

Pearl whispers something to Iris then leaves to help Woman.

PEARL (O.S.)
You know, if you add some citrus and sugar with a tiny splash of bleach for the germs, the blooms will last longer.

CUT TO:

MAN
(to Iris)
You're really trusting a guy who approves of the six-minute egg?

IRIS
Mom's making a six-minute egg right now, you know.

Man scoffs.

MAN
Someone who thinks like that isn't gonna know what mature love looks like.

Iris moves to sit on the two-seater couch, farthest away from Man.

MAN
Are you planning on keeping this guy's kid?

Iris turns on the television back to the boiled egg cooking show. There's a commercial intermission about clearance rugs at the local mattress store.

IRIS
That's the current plan.

MAN
Like and love will feel the same when you've been married for as long as your mother and I have.

IRIS

You still feel that way about your commitment to Mom?

MAN

I've always felt that way, Iris.

The commercial ends. The show goes back to the egg. A close-up image of an egg boils in water with a live countdown. There are four minutes remaining.

MAN (CONT'D)

You'll understand when you're older. A punk like Pearl does not have a future with kids in mind, I can tell you that.

IRIS

I want there to always be love in our relationship.

MAN

That's the commitment your mother and I agreed to, Iris, and the same one you and Pearl will make to each other. Trust me when I say your mother and I still love each other.

Iris leans forward on the couch. She clasps her hands together. There's a close-up shot of the egg chef holding three fingers in the air with excitement.

IRIS

You've talked to Mom about the yearly vow renewal?

Man watches the television with intent, nodding his head as he balances the chair on its hind legs.

MAN

She's in agreement. I heal every day, and she says it's enough for the vows.

IRIS

Mom wants to renew them with a ceremony, like the one Pearl and I had. Remember it'll feel like a reception.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Iris! That was supposed to be between us. Your father should

have been the one to suggest it.

Woman stands on the threshold with the vase of daisies in her hand. Pearl has his back turned toward the living room. His left side appears in frame.

MAN

I'm not doing a ceremony. We made our vows already. Why do we need to say them every year?

WOMAN

What else did you say about these daisies, Pearl?

Woman returns to the sink with a sniffle.

MAN

The ceremony is just pomp and circumstance, Iris.

IRIS

That's not how Mom describes it.

WOMAN (O.S.)

You put so much care into your plants, Pearl.

MAN

Your mom describes everything with flowery language. You get that from her, you know.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Okay, food is ready! Pearl helped me plate.

CUT TO:

Iris moves food to the table. Pearl brings warm tea, napkins, and utensils.

Woman fills the four small bowls with soup. Pearl returns to the kitchen to carry the two bowls of soup to the table. Iris follows with the other two bowls in her hands.

Man stands as the last of the plates are placed on the table.

CUT TO:

The television is still showing boiling eggs. There is one minute left on the timer. The egg chef is dancing. The CC describes it as 'the egg dance from the egg chef, Chef

Egg.'

Man turns off the television then stands from the chair then goes to the dining room.

MAN

Do you need any help from me?

WOMAN

No, we have everything handled over here already. Just sit and eat.

Man sits at the table. He smiles at Woman, who smiles back as she adjusts the plate to make his roasted chicken leg look prettier.

PEARL

Everything smells delicious. Next time, we will arrive earlier to help.

WOMAN

This right here is nothing, Pearl. But when it's dumpling-making day? I'll need your hands.

PEARL

I'd love to. My family cooks together all the time. It's how we get to know each other better.

Iris smiles then whispers something to Pearl. Woman looks to Man, who has begun sipping his warm tea. Woman stands at the threshold then wipes her hands on her apron.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Thank you so much for helping, darlings. I'm happy our daughter has brought home a good man to assist in the kitchen.

Pearl, with a concerned look, smiles at Woman. Iris pats Pearl's shoulder then nods her head toward the table. Pearl takes a deep breath.

PEARL

I originally would have liked to wait until later...

MAN

Here we go.

Man places his mug on the table. He leans back in his chair

then glares at Pearl while Pearl looks back and forth between the Woman, Man, and Iris.

PEARL

... but I want to take this opportunity to be a 'progressive sexist' and to ask for your blessing to continue to make a lifelong commitment to Iris. I want to be accepted fully and unconditionally as part of this family, so we will also be renewing our vows along with you both.

MAN

Not blessed.

WOMAN

Okay. We are trying our best every day to refresh our relationship. The vow renewal will help us out a lot. It'll be a wonderful time to bond.

MAN

I'm not doing a renewal or attending one I have no interest in supporting. Waste of time, waste of money. We made our commitment to each other already over thirty years ago.

Woman places her mug on the table.

WOMAN

The doctor wants us to support his emotions while he still heals, Iris. Your dad wants to heal. It takes time. We are working on it.

Iris rolls her eyes.

IRIS

Wanting to heal and actively pursuing it are very different things.

MAN

Your mother and I agree about Pearl.

IRIS

Mom likes Pearl. You're the only

one who doesn't.

WOMAN

Pearl is nice.

MAN

(to Woman)

Pearl doesn't know what love is.

IRIS

(tensely to Man)

Pearl knows exactly what love is.

Pearl takes a seat at the table and stares at his soup.

CUT TO:

Man turns to Woman. The family is sitting at the table.

MAN

I'm living in reality, aren't I
honey?

Woman takes in a deep breath and smiles. Her Shadow's form is displayed on the wall behind her, mirroring her movements. When Woman smiles, Her Shadow frowns.

WOMAN

I try to live in my reality every
day.

HER SHADOW

(with Woman's voice, frowning)
It's good practice.

IRIS

This whole family needs a reality
check.

MAN

Great, so you're willing to
understand that Pearl is not right
for you.

Pearl looks up to Man with a serious gaze.

PEARL

I love Iris.

WOMAN

Isn't that wonderful, Dear? Pearl
loves Iris.

MAN

(to Pearl)
Do you even know what love is?

IRIS
(to Man)
Do you know what it is?

MAN
(to Iris)
Your mom has never complained
about me for all these years.
Pearl will not understand. He's
too soft.

WOMAN
Okay, okay. Let's not argue right
now.

HER SHADOW
(with Woman's voice, frowning)
Let's be happy, happy, happy.

Woman turns to Iris and Pearl who are looking at each other with concern. Iris has her arms crossed. Pearl looks back and forth between Man and Woman.

PEARL
I understand it may be difficult
to watch your only daughter invite
someone over to your home who you
don't approve of, but I want to
reassure you that we will take
care of each other.

Woman eyes Man. Woman picks up her chopsticks then takes a glazed carrot to chew on. She eats calmly. The duality of Woman and Her Shadow are shown in unison.

WOMAN
(to Iris)
Your father and Pearl may be able
to learn about each other.
Learning about the traditional
ways of love can be an important
guide in the modern world, you
know. Your father is just trying
to help in the best way he can. He
tries his best to improve every
day.

Woman pulls a chicken thigh from the cut-up roasted chicken. She chews on its thigh as Her Shadow's tendrils flicker on the wall behind her.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Woman hand washes dishes. An antique glass goblet slips from her soapy fingers. When it shatters in the sink, a large piece flings up. It slices her palm below her pinky.

She winces as the glass cup jumps a second time in the old porcelain sink, breaking into more chunks. The broken glass clinks against each other as it settles.

Woman stares at her cut. She turns on the faucet and holds her hand under the water, watching blood mix with the stream.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

WOMAN (early-40s), with HER SHADOW distended against the wall behind her, grabs IRIS' (17) hand when Iris tries to storm off angrily. Iris looks like a young version of Woman.

Mouths move, but no words are spoken. The sound of the running faucet is the only sound acting as white noise, a continuous audible backdrop.

Iris pulls her arm away aggressively, moves her mouth as if she's yelling, then walks away with tears.

Woman stands there in shock. Her mouth is slightly open. Her hand is held out and curled slightly as if she is still holding onto Iris.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Woman turns off the faucet then holds a paper towel to her cut to stop the bleeding.

Calmly, she loosely grips the cut with one hand then steadies her phone's flickering flashlight with the other, lighting the path in front of her like a flame. Woman walks softly over the living room rug toward the bed.

CUT TO:

Woman shines the flashlight at Man, his silhouette casting a shadow on the opposite wall. He is unmoved, still sleeping, mouth slightly agape.

WOMAN

Sweetheart, I might need stitches.
I cut myself with some glass.

Man stays asleep, unmoving, unbothered.

WOMAN

(louder)
Honey.

Man's breathing is deep and slow.

Tears well in Woman's eyes. Her hand, holding the flashlight, shakes as she cries.

Her Shadow's tendrils, whipping toward the bed, grip onto the sheets. Her Shadow pulls itself forward, the shadowy image of Woman kneeling on the bed, Her Shadow's face directly above Man's.

With her nervousness, she grips the phone flashlight tighter than snuffles.

Her Shadow hovers over Man then leans in, his breath pushing Her Shadow's tendrils like a small breeze. Her Shadow's fist enters his mouth. Man is unmoving.

Inhaling Her Shadow as if he had been needing to take a full breath, Man breathes out a loud snore. Her Shadow is expelled from his mouth then lurches itself on the chair next to the bed, the shadowy image of Woman on full display. Her Shadow crosses its legs then holds its hands over its knee, tendrils twirling around Man's shadow like a vine.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Woman turns off the flashlight then stares at her reflection in the window.

WOMAN

Fine. Fine! I'll go to the doctor myself.

Woman removes the paper towel to check the bleeding. It has not stopped. Her lips tremble and her hands shake. She presses the bloody towel against the bleeding cut.

WOMAN

Maybe if I leave, he'll wake up and follow me. Maybe he'll care enough to notice. Maybe he'll ask me what happened.

Woman tries to pull a roll of gauze from the top of the cabinet in the kitchen. It falls as she stands on her tip-toes to reach, but she catches it with her stomach against

the countertop. She sighs as she unravel the gauze.

WOMAN

I shouldn't rush. I'll stop the bleeding first. I'll assess it in the morning. I just want him to care enough to ask. Maybe he'll care enough to take me himself.

With tears cascading down her cheeks, Woman holds a thin cotton pad on her cut then wraps gauze around her hand.

Unlike the flashbacks, vocal memories surface as more ghostly like a vague shadow as Woman fulfills her actions of cleaning and mending and bandaging her cut. The vocal memories are slightly dampened and slightly distorted but are about as clear as the main sound.

MAN (V.O.)

Iris is exclusively *your* kid now.

WOMAN (V.O.)

What is wrong with you?

MAN (V.O.)

You really wanna know? After all these years, all this *stress*, you're finally asking me this question when I am *done* being a father?

IRIS (V.O.)

I need to get away from here.

MAN (V.O.)

Then go! Leave!

WOMAN (V.O.)

Iris stop. Wait! It's not you. It's really not you, Baby. Your father and I are having a marriage dispute, that's all.

MAN (V.O.)

Why don't you leave too, huh? Why don't I leave? Why don't I leave!

WOMAN (V.O.)

Wait.

IRIS (V.O.)

Wasn't I supposed to be the one leaving?

WOMAN (V.O.)

Wait!

MAN (V.O.)

Don't stop me.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Iris is thinking about her future.
We are working together as a
family to succeed in the future.
This can't be the reason you're
leaving.

MAN (V.O.)

I said don't stop me - no
recognized progeny of ours will be
remembered in the way Iris is
conducting herself.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Our descendants are not a complete
reflection of who we ourselves
have grown to become. That is how
a family works.

Woman holds her bandaged hand with shaking fingers. A bit of blood leaks from the gauze. She leaves to stand on the threshold between the kitchen and living room. Man is sleeping, the darkness of the night becoming clearer as Woman's eyes adjust.

Vocal memories surface as Man breathes, Her Shadow sitting on the chair with tendrils flaring, its orange eyes aglow like the embers of a flashlight.

MAN (V.O.)

Are you going to move back home
after graduation?

IRIS (V.O.)

No, I'll move to an apartment near
my job.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Your father is just worried about
you is all. He knows the job
market is difficult right now, and
he doesn't want to watch you
struggle.

IRIS (V.O.)

(Laughs with sarcasm)

I appreciate the concern, but now
you both can focus on other

things, like the divorce you've both been wanting.

MAN (V.O.)

We're not getting a divorce.

IRIS (V.O.)

What did you say to Mom to make her believe you this time?

WOMAN (V.O.)

Come on, this should be a happy time not a stressful time.

CUT TO:

Tears stream down Woman's cheeks in the darkness. She holds her bandaged hand as they shake. Woman meets eyes with Her Shadow, who taps its fingertip on its knee, its tendrils whipping.

WOMAN

I am doing better. The sadness I feel comes from a place of hurt. The sadness I feel is temporary. I am holding myself accountable by improving with positivity and light every day.

With a mimicking breath, Her Shadow follows Woman's breathing as Woman calms herself with slower breathing. The soft silhouette of Her Shadow's misty edge wisps like grass being caressed by a breeze.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Woman flips on a low-light lamp. Man is unmoving. His mouth is wide open.

Her Shadow stands slightly off parallel to Woman's physique and overlooks her shoulder as if it is mimicking her movements. Its mouth, slightly opaque, moves along with Woman's dialog.

WOMAN/HER SHADOW

His mouth must be so dry, keeping it open like that all night.

Woman rubs her bandaged hand softly. She grips it then lowers her hands, keeping them clasped.

Her Shadow mimics these mouth movements, the edge of its form wisping. Her Shadow appears as if it is the one

speaking during these scenes, but it is Woman's voice.

WOMAN

There's a hardness on his face I
haven't noticed before.

HER SHADOW

Perhaps it's the fatigue
distorting him.

WOMAN

I remember him holding a softer
face for me when we first fell in
love.

Woman sits on the two-seater farthest from the one-seater and stares at the curtains by the windows. The curtains' shadow flows as if there is a draft. The curtains themselves are unmoving.

Her Shadow sits on top of Woman, as if becoming one with her form. Its wisps grow with ferocity around her as her head tilts from fatigue.

Woman struggles to keep her eyes open. Her injured hand falls to her side.

The curtains' shadows flow more grandly. The heater kicks on. The draft flutters the curtains, its own shadows flowing softly along the floor.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - DINING ROOM (FLASHBACK)

IRIS (30) sits at the table with PEARL (24) and WOMAN (60s).

Woman sets down three cups for coffee. She pours black coffee from a French press then offers it to Iris and Pearl, who give her their thanks. Her Shadow lingers behind her, misty and distorted.

IRIS

We have exciting news, Mom.

Woman lowers her cup of coffee before having taken a sip.

WOMAN

Exciting? Is this something your
father should be here for?

Iris shakes her head.

IRIS

No, he already doesn't like Pearl.
I wanted to tell you first.

Woman looks back and forth between Iris and Pearl. Pearl offers Iris a delicate, serene gaze.

Woman smiles with kindness as she waits expectantly for Iris to share the news.

IRIS
We bought a house.

Woman pauses.

WOMAN
A house? Close to here?

Iris nods then smiles at Pearl with nervousness.

IRIS
No, it's closer to Pearl's parents. The environment is healthier for us to raise our family.

The smile fades from her eyes despite happiness showing on her face. She sighs as she looks back and forth between Iris and Pearl.

WOMAN
Why do you want to be so far away from us?

PEARL
We will still maintain a residence here while we move. I think it's important for us to always have a place to live close to family.

Woman frowns.

WOMAN
I thought the plan was for Iris to always stay with her mother. What am I supposed to do without my little girl?

Iris frowns then pulls her hand away.

IRIS
When you are ready to retire, we will have a room for you in our home.

Iris extends her hands to hold Woman's, who is holding stress on her face.

IRIS

Now is not the time to stress about us moving away. Change is good sometimes. You're supposed to congratulate us. You'll be there when your grandchild is born - remember we already bought the plane tickets and everything.

Woman sighs with a smile. The edges of Woman's skin extend, Her Shadow's tendrils wisping along the wall behind her.

WOMAN

Congratulations to you both.

There are tears in Woman's eyes.

Iris turns to Pearl with a disappointing shrug and then to Woman with tears as well.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

It certainly is a special time. Your dad really will not be happy about this. He wanted to get to know Pearl better.

IRIS

Why are you worried about what Dad thinks? I wanted to share this with you first. I know how Dad will respond to this whole thing.

Woman smiles widely then clasps her shaking hands. She rubs them together as if she is cold.

WOMAN

I'm supposed to be on your father's side... He... He won't appreciate if I'm supportive of something he'd disapprove of, especially when it comes to you.

IRIS

What you talk about doesn't have to always be about me anymore.

WOMAN

We will always talk about you. If we don't, we won't have anything left to talk about.

IRIS

When was the last time you had a
full conversation with Dad that
was enjoyable and didn't involve
me?

Woman sighs then opens her mouth slightly. Her Shadow's head lifts just above her shoulder, opening its mouth as if it will speak in unison.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Woman raises her head, waking herself. She surveys the dimly lit apartment with crusted eyes slowly blinking open. The curtains are still. She rubs the crust away.

In the corner on the chair, Her Shadow, vaguely hidden, grows with misty distortion the longer Woman does not pay attention to Man sleeping. Her Shadow's edges weave its tendrils around, whipping the mist until it grows more opaque like a vine. Its glowing eyes are flaming.

Woman shakes fear away then checks her bandaged hand. The leaked blood has not spread too far.

Woman stands then goes to the bedside table. She pulls the drawer open to find her wedding ring.

Her Shadow looms across the bed like a wave then knots itself to Woman's back with its tendrils, the intricate knots clasping like roots.

Digging under older necklaces and bracelets, Woman finds the ring tucked away in the corner. It is a small single gold-banded ring with a simple diamond in the center. The gold is tarnished.

Woman puts the ring on her right ring finger, but it is tough to put on. The ring barely makes it past her knuckle.

Woman sighs with frustration. She tosses the ring into the drawer then closes it, looking toward Man with sadness in her eyes and disgust on her mouth.

WOMAN

I don't know why I bother to try
when we are still suffering.

The dimly lit light casts Man's shadow against the wall above the empty chair.

Her Shadow leans its face against Woman's cheek as its hands wrap around her shoulders. It speaks into her ear

with damp distortion.

HER SHADOW

I don't know why I bother to try
when we are still suffering.

His shadow enlarges and shrinks as the dimly lit light
flickers against the wall.

Her Shadow lurches itself to the wall, suffocating Man's
shadow as if the low light in the living room switched off.

Their shadows play as if in a scene. The two are arguing,
and they merge, one shadow overtaking the other.

Woman is mesmerized with the scene as if lost in a
hallucination. Man snores.

HER SHADOW

Please just let me heal!

When the flickering light returns to normal and Man's
shadow now resembles an absent mist on the wall, Her Shadow
skulks to the chair beside the bed.

Man pauses his breathing open-mouthed as if his breath was
stolen.

Her Shadow sits in the empty chair, staring at Man, its
legs crossed, its finger tapping on its knee.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

MAN (40s) paces around the front of the bathroom with
anger. IRIS (17) has locked herself inside. He does not
bang on the door, but his rage builds as he paces. It
appears as if he is about to kick the door down.

MAN

No one is gonna lock me out.

WOMAN

There's no need to do all this. I
asked the school counselors, and
they tell me kids set boundaries
nowadays and get upset when you
don't respect privacy. This is a
phase in every young person's
life.

MAN

The boundary preventing us from
being a family is this goddamn

door.

IRIS

That is not what love is!

Man paces in front of the door. Woman stands with her arms crossed in the living room, peering at the scene.

Man's shadow follows him, mimicking his pace. As Man grows more angry, his shadow's tendrils fling more, shaking the environment around him, engulfing the space.

Woman notices. Her Shadow, unfurling from the safety of her body, creeps out to encroach upon Man's shadow.

WOMAN

Let's try to talk this out, okay?
Nothing will get accomplished with
yelling and unnecessary
aggression.

Man pauses in front of the bathroom and bangs on the door. His shadow forms a visual mirror of his body and stares at Woman. Her Shadow stares back next to Woman.

MAN

Open the door, Iris! Your mother
and I want to talk to you.

IRIS

You're just going to yell at me.
No thank you!

Woman fidgets with her thumb rubbing the inside of her other palm. The sound of her nail scratching her palm is dry but noticeable. Man's shadow grows bigger, touching the ceiling, as his anger rises.

MAN

Iris!

Man raises his fist again to bang on the door, but he hesitates. His voice falters.

Her Shadow grips onto the edges of his shadow when it begins to spread outward, the edges of its tendrils trying to leak inside the bathroom under the door. Her Shadow stifles the anger overcoming him.

Her Shadow collects the wisping edges and absorbs Man's shadow into itself. As it does, Her Shadow's eyes glow orange like a flame.

Man, upon breathing more heavily, his fists shaking beside

him as his shadow is absorbed, calms.

MAN

(with softness)

It is my job to talk and your job
to listen.

Man lowers his fist then sheds a few tears. His shadow evaporates beneath him as he cries.

Her Shadow slinks back within the limits below her feet, the edges of her soles wisping. Woman has her arms crossed across her chest with clenched fists.

MAN

I'm sorry, Iris. I know you want
to get out of here. I understand.
I understand.

Man lowers his head and snuffles, looking back and forth between the door and Woman.

Woman peers at him with fiery anger in her eyes.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Woman stands on her side of the bed with Her Shadow beside her, both looking down at Man seemingly unbreathing, his mouth wide open, his eyes closed.

Her Shadow looks up at her, its hands clasped together as it leans forward.

Woman sits on the edge of the bed with a relaxed form and gives Her Shadow a stern gaze.

WOMAN

I will tell him. I will.

HER SHADOW

You will tell him. You will.

Her Shadow straightens itself to face Woman, who breathes in and fixes her sleepy posture.

WOMAN

What will I tell him?

HER SHADOW

What will you tell him?

Woman approaches Man's side of the bed and sits in the chair. Her Shadow mimics her poise then integrates itself

into Woman. Its edges wisp and flick along the surface of Woman's skin.

WOMAN

Is it too late to tell him?

HER SHADOW

It is too late to fix things.

Leaning forward with slight anger and disgust, Woman whispers with spite to Man, Her Shadow mimicking her voice.

HER SHADOW

We will remember everything about your love, about your marriage. We will remember. Even after all this pain we've shut out, all the emotional suffering we've been through, we will remember for us.

Woman's brows tremble as if about to burst into tears.

WOMAN

We used to be in love. What happened to all that beauty?

Woman kicks the edge of the bed in the hopes that Man will rise, but it does not appear as if he is breathing, and his shadow dims the more she disturbs the mattress.

As if reaching out, Her Shadow's tendrils flick the edge of the bed where Man's shadow rests.

Woman, with Her Shadow, kneels against the bed while sitting on the chair. She rests her head in her hands then sobs.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT/DAWN

Woman slinks forward in the chair, waking with a small jolt.

She checks the time. It is 5:10AM.

Sighing, Woman stands sluggishly. Her eyes are crusty.

Woman drags her feet toward the low-light lamp and checks her bandaged hand. The bleeding has stopped. The bit of blood that leaked has turned brown.

She turns off the lamp.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT/DAWN

Woman turns on the faucet, rinses her hands under the sink, then rinses her face. Woman chuckles as she pats her eyes dry with a towel.

In the mirror, Her Shadow stares with orange eyes and a frown.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT/DAWN

Woman faces the bed near the threshold. In a low, whispered plea, she begs Her Shadow.

WOMAN

Please, please just let me sleep!

In the corner next to the chair, Her Shadow stands and faces Woman, its orange eyes glowing brighter. Woman stares back blankly with intense fatigue and tears in her eyes.

Her Shadow turns its back toward Woman.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT (QUASI-FLASHBACK BACK-TO-BACK)

The camera is behind Woman in the present. In front to her left, YOUNGER WOMAN (late 30s) stands where Her Shadow watches Man. Except here, Younger Woman watches HER SLEEPING SELF.

Younger Woman is blurred and transparent as she stands over Her Sleeping Self.

Her Sleeping Self, upon waking with fright, attempts to get out of bed. This is depicted as a layer of Her Sleeping Self being stuck in bed while HER MISTY SHADOW attempts to separate itself from Her Sleeping Self.

Her Misty Shadow cannot leave the bed or depart from Her Sleeping Self fully. A force holds her there.

As Woman watches the memory unfurl, she slips into another.

TRANSITION TO
FLASHBACK.

The camera shifts Woman's form to the left, her back still blurred and transparent, 'hiding' the prior flashback from the audience.

Through the transparency, the audience can view remnants of

the flashback on repeat of Her Sleeping Self and Her Misty Shadow trying to get out of bed. It plays on a loop.

ENTER SAME
FLASHBACK.

Woman sits at the dining room table with Iris. They are facing each other. The voices are distorted as if speaking through tin cans with string.

WOMAN

I'm trying to hold this family together, Iris.

IRIS

Mom, I am so, so, so unbelievably thankful for how much you've sacrificed on our behalf, but you don't need to do that anymore.

WOMAN

I love your father. I do.

IRIS

I love him too, Mom. He's my dad.

WOMAN

He is my husband. We've made a commitment to stay together to raise you.

IRIS

I'm grown now, Mom. I'm grown.

FLASHBACK FADES.

Camera shifts Woman to the right, still blurred and transparent. Her Misty Shadow rises from the bed. When its feet 'touches' the ground, Her Shadow bursts through the mist with orange eyes as bright as the sun.

Her Shadow walks toward Her Sleeping Self's side of the bed, whose eyes have opened. It looms over her. Her Sleeping Self opens her mouth to scream, but no sound escapes.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT/DAWN

Woman stares at Her Shadow in the corner staring at Man. Her mouth is closed, but it begins to open as if she is about to scream.

She immediately shuts her mouth then looks around. The lamp

light in the living room flickers on and off. When the lamp is on, the room is dark. When it is off, the room is lit with the dawn light.

She breathes rapidly as she closes her eyes, the flickers of light causing her to chuckle with frustration.

Woman sheds a few tears. With shaking hands as if she's cold, she rubs her bandaged hand.

Her Shadow lifts its head and stares at Woman, unmoving. Woman consoles herself in a quiet, shaking voice.

WOMAN

I am doing better. The sadness I feel comes from a place of hurt. The sadness I feel is temporary. I am holding myself accountable by improving with positivity and light every day.

HER SHADOW

Help me, help you.

Large tears shed from the corners of Woman's eyes.

HER SHADOW

Help you, help me.

Woman nods her head. She clears her throat then stands to go to the kitchen. The living room light remains on when she stands. It hums.

She ignores Her Shadow as it reaches its hand out. Its feet has webbed with Woman.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT/DAWN - CONTINUOUS

Above the kitchen sink, Woman takes a deep breath. Her eyes glow orange like a flame.

Holding her bandaged hand, with the low light of the streetlamp competing with the wakening sun, she unwraps the bandage to assess how deep the cut is.

It is gashed, but it doesn't appear deep enough to need stitches if she keeps it wrapped.

She puts the bandage back on, wrapping it slowly and methodically as Her Shadow's tendrils wisp like wind, papers on the fridge flapping lightly.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

GRANDMOTHER's (90s) shaking body, as if a shadow herself, struggles to sit on the couch. She manages without assistance. She is wearing a large sweater with a very loose opening and very loose pants that also appear too big. Her eyes are glowing orange.

GRANDMOTHER

I have something important to share, and you both must listen without interruption.

WOMAN

What's going on, Mom?

WOMAN (50s) hands Grandmother tea and sits on the couch.

IRIS (mid-20s) puts the television on mute. Iris stares at the television. On the television is a reality show about digging rainwater basins for the garden.

GRANDMOTHER

I am going to die soon. That is a fact, which I have come to terms with long ago. I feel my body slipping. I know my time is soon.

WOMAN

Oh don't scare us like that, Mom. You're still young.

Grandmother lifts her hand to stop Woman from speaking. Grandmother's shining orange eyes blaze.

Her Shadow slowly separating itself from Grandmother, moves forward and shrinks, webbing itself to under her eyes as if Grandmother is crying Her Shadow away. Her eyes are glowing orange fully like the sun.

GRANDMOTHER

Natural death should never be shamed. I am thankful to be able to pass on in this way. Many are not offered this same opportunity at the end of their life. I do not wish to waste it.

Woman clasps her hands gently together. She looks at Iris, who is unmoved, sitting on the floor, staring at the television.

GRANDMOTHER

First, you must understand that

death with loneliness is a
tragedy. When I am on the verge of
passing, I request for my hand to
be held until the light leaves my
eyes.

Woman breathes in deeply. Her Shadow, still attached to
Grandmother, falls heavier beneath her eyes until its
darkness drips from her chin onto her wrinkled hands,
clasped, shaking, rubbing together as if they are cold.

WOMAN

You're scaring me a little bit
here, Mom. Why now all of a
sudden?

Grandmother extends one out toward Woman, who takes it with
both hands. Grandmother extends her other hand to Iris, who
follows Woman's lead and takes it with both hands. Her
Shadow drips down Grandmother's neck onto her collarbone.

GRANDMOTHER

I cannot remove the sadness for
you. Fix it yourself.

WOMAN

We're not sad, Mom. We're happy.

Iris turns to give Woman a glance. Her eyes are glowing
orange.

WOMAN

(with a shaking voice)
I have a beautiful daughter, who I
love with all my soul. I have a
husband, who...

Grandmother grips Woman's hand. Her Shadow drips to
Grandmother's chest.

GRANDMOTHER

I thought I taught you what love
was supposed to look like. Did I
fail you in this, my daughter? Did
you fail yours?

ACT 2 - HOW WILL THEY BE ABLE TO SUSTAIN THEIR LOVE?

The words appear like mist along the screen as the camera
pans away from the flashback scene into the next. Mist-like
rain droplets appear as if the audience is looking out a
rainy window.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - KITCHEN - SUNRISE

Woman lifts her head from the counter and opens her eyes with a gasp. Her eyes are no longer flaming.

Woman straightens her stance with a shaking breath and trembling palms.

The living room lamp is off. The sun's gray light peeks through the living room curtains. Man's sleeping body breathes normally, his mouth agape.

Woman cries over the kitchen sink as she holds her bandaged hand, her reflection bright in the window. Small bits of light leak into the sky around the cloudy sky.

Hunching over, she takes deep breaths as she opens the faucet. Woman places her hands against the edge of the sink, kitchen faucet running, then lowers her head. She pats her cheeks with wet hands then breathes out quickly.

WOMAN

I'm not sleeping, I'm not
sleeping, I'm not sleeping!

After flicking her wrists, she turns off the faucet then moves to the threshold to look at the bed. Man still sleeps undisturbed.

Woman returns to the kitchen with visual frustration. She takes a fierce breath through her nose.

Woman grabs her phone from the kitchen counter to check the time. She fumbles with grabbing it.

It is 5:40AM. The early morning sun breaks the night sky.

Woman accidentally speed dials Iris then immediately hangs up with a sigh. She sends a message instead.

WOMAN

Sorry for the early call. I was up
early thinking about you.

Woman sends the message then types out another text message with shaking fingers.

WOMAN

I'm going to talk to your father
today. Thank you. I love you.

She tosses her phone on the counter then fills up the kettle with water. Her steps swoon as she puts the kettle on the stove.

Her Shadow stands behind Woman as she watches the water boil. Cloudy rays of morning light peek through the kitchen window. Her Shadow's mist-like figure is pronounced. Its embering eyes appear dull with the flames of the sun's light beaming through the window. The breeze shakes the window pane against the railing as if trying to open.

Her Shadow lingers a few inches behind Woman.

Woman turns with fatigue to grab the French press. She jumps with fright upon seeing Her Shadow. She leans over the kitchen sink to catch her breath. When she turns to see it again, its ember-like eyes unmoving as it continues to stare at her, its physique like a shadowy clone. She leans over the sink again then mumbles to herself in panic.

After placing her hand over her heart and breathing in deeply, she turns again. Her Shadow is unmoving. Woman tries to look behind Her Shadow to oversee its opaqueness. She is unable to.

Her Shadow's eyes are glowing orange. Her Shadow's voice sounds staticky.

WOMAN

Do you need to tell me something?

Her Shadow walks through Woman to stand by the sink. As it walks through her, layers of whispers of Woman's own voice sound back. Lines overlaying at the same time, 'Will we ever be happy again?' and 'I don't know if I want to be with him anymore,' and 'Are we working toward the life we have wanted to share with each other?' and 'Does he want to be with me?' Woman shivers then turns to face Her Shadow.

WOMAN

Why are you asking me these questions?

Her Shadow mimics Woman.

HER SHADOW

Do you need to tell me something?

The hum of the stove heats up. The water is on the verge of boiling.

HER SHADOW

Why now, all of a sudden, am I asking myself these questions?

A small sliver of light beams through the gray clouds into the kitchen in a flash, forcing Her Shadow to disappear from view.

Woman sighs then rubs her fatigued eyes. She cries in frustration, moving her body as if she is arguing with herself.

WOMAN

Believe in disbelief. This is just
doubt. Maybe my fear. Maybe anger.

As Woman rubs her eyes, Her Shadow ascends from the floor in front of Woman. Its opaqueness is vivid.

As it faces her, Woman's eyes turn to the corner where Man sleeps soundly, unmoving, mouth wide open.

Woman breathes in deeply then looks directly at Her Shadow.

WOMAN

I don't know what you need me to
understand.

Woman pulls coarse grind coffee from the shelf then grabs the French press from the dishes she had done earlier. She puts three tablespoons of coffee into the French press.

Her Shadow points to Man.

HER SHADOW

I don't know what you need me to
understand.

Woman turns off the stove then grabs the water. She pours a cup of the steaming water into the press, then she stirs the grind to allow it to bloom.

WOMAN

I'm going to talk to him. We can
make it work.

HER SHADOW

I don't want to commit to him
anymore.

Woman pulls out two coffee mugs from the cabinet. She sighs then returns one mug to the cabinet before lifting the bag of coffee to put it away.

WOMAN

It's just a fear. I want to have a
conversation with him. Just one.

As if in a standing sleep paralysis, Woman cannot move her feet. She grips the bag of coffee beans. Tears stream down her cheeks.

Her Shadow points to Woman.

HER SHADOW

You don't want to commit to him
anymore.

WOMAN

It's not like that. It's not like
that. I need to hear what he has
to say. I need to--

Woman pauses. Her Shadow lowers its hand to its side.

WOMAN

He's worried about Iris. We can
worry about Iris together. We can
still make this work.

HER SHADOW

We can worry about Iris together.

WOMAN

You leave my daughter alone.

HER SHADOW

You leave our daughter alone.

Woman breathes in quickly. When she opens her mouth as if
to speak, Her Shadow opens its mouth as if it is the one to
speak and Woman is the one to mimic.

WOMAN/HER SHADOW

Iris knows what love looks like.
Do you know what love looks like?

Woman/Her Shadow's voice says a few lines overlapping in
unison. 'Coffee will keep you sane,' and 'The water will
get cold,' and 'You need something warm to calm your
nerves.'

Woman turns in frustration to stir the coffee. The grind
rises to the top of the French press, steam softly lifting
into the air.

Woman puts the top of the press on then pushes it down
slightly so the beans are held underneath the water. Her
hands shake.

Woman clasps her hands together, rubbing her bandaged hand.
Her Shadow stands a few feet away, pointing at her. She
turns to address Her Shadow again with more calmness.

WOMAN

We are trying. What more do you
need me to admit?

Her Shadow points to Man again.

HER SHADOW
What more do you need to admit?

Tears stream down Woman's face. She closes her eyes for a
moment.

When Woman opens her eyes, Her Shadow's tendrils flare out
to web themselves around her ankles.

Woman takes a step back. Her Shadow takes a step forward.
Woman's hands breathing becomes labored, and her hands
tremor.

WOMAN
I need to go. I'll go see the
doctor. Just like my husband
suggested. Maybe... Maybe...

Woman turns to grab her phone then places her injured hand
on the door to go outside to escape, but Her Shadow puts
its hand on the lock, preventing Woman from escaping.

HER SHADOW
I'm worried about Iris.

WOMAN
Why are you worried about Iris?
She is happy and in love.

Woman tries to jimmy the door open, but the handle will not
turn, and the deadbolt will not unlock.

HER SHADOW
I'm worried she will become like
us.

Woman begins to panic and runs to the window in the living
room. She opens the curtains then opens the window.

Woman stares outside, poking her head out to breathe in the
cloudy morning air and feel the comforting breeze caress
her face. She turns to Her Shadow and points at it.

WOMAN
What do you know about love?

Her Shadow points back.

HER SHADOW

What do you know about love?

Her Shadow unwebs its feet, passes through her, then vanishes like fog into the morning.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - EARLY MORNING

Woman checks her phone with shaking hands. It is 7AM.

Woman leaves the living room window open then goes to the other side of the bed to open the second curtain and window by Man's head. He does not wake.

The sky is misty. The morning is bright.

Woman breathes in the outdoor air then studies the misty clouds. There are deep dark circles under her eyes. It's more obvious now that she hasn't slept.

She turns to Man.

WOMAN

Wake up.

He does not wake.

WOMAN

Wake up!

Woman shake the bed. Instead of waking, Man breathes in deeply with a snore.

WOMAN

Ugh!

Woman drags her feet to the kitchen then pulls out a broom and a mop. She sweeps the floor then mops the floor with only pine floor cleaner by pouring it straight out of the bottle onto the kitchen tiles. She sniffs in some of the strong pine smell then sneezes. Man still does not wake.

She sets the wet mop on the carpet near the bed then leans the handle against the wall. The mop falls against the nightstand then clanks to the floor.

She turns to Man, who still sleeps.

With a sigh, Woman picks up the mop, rubs the wet spot on the carpet with her bare feet, then puts the cleaning stuff away. The tiles are soaked and her indoor bear slippers leave footprints like stepping on glossy pavement after a rainfall.

She puts the cleaning stuff away then pours a cup of black coffee.

Woman stands around the living room then stares at pictures of her family on the wall.

The mug is steaming, and the smell of coffee helps to wake her eyes a little bit, but fatigue still weighs her body down. She does not take a sip.

The first picture is of Iris as a baby.

The second is of Iris and Woman when Iris is a little girl. Woman smiles with true happiness in this photo.

The third picture is a family picture when Iris is around 12 or 13. Woman does not look happy. Man is holding her shoulder with a smile she doesn't find beautiful as she studies the portrait.

Woman sighs with reflection at these photos as if she doesn't recognize herself.

Woman checks on Man, who is, in fact, still sleeping.

WOMAN

This brute is still sleeping?

She sits in the chair by the bed. With the steaming coffee in her hand, she stares at him without taking a single sip.

The camera switches to become Man's eyes as if he is awake, but his deep breathing is the only sound heard by the audience.

The camera slowly zooms out as Woman stares at him, the focal point on her eyes with an orange glimmer of fatigue. The steam slowly fades as the camera lifts up then zooms in on Man's sleeping face.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING -
CONTINUOUS

Man lays in bed, still asleep. The morning light is growing brighter and highlights the oiliness on his forehead. The camera moves back slowly. The curtains flutter quickly, the thick fabric rustling.

Steam from Woman's cup rises from the bottom center as the camera pans back, drifting to the left to cover his face like mist. The steam fades as the sun shines brighter, indicating the beginning of mid-day, storm clouds passing, and the coffee growing cold.

Woman sighs. Her right thumb rubs her bandaged hand. The leaked blood dried brown.

The silent analog clock on the wall behind the bed shows 11AM.

As if Woman had spoken his name aloud, Man jolts awake. His eyes open wide as if in shock, and he breathes in slowly and deeply. With one large slow blink, he closes his mouth, moves spit around to moisturize it, then forces his breathing to a more normal pattern.

Man blinks a few more times then turns toward the chair. He pauses.

Woman, with little expression, does not break eye contact with Man.

Man frowns.

Woman frowns back.

Man looks at the clock behind him. He then looks at the kitchen, then at the windows. He breathes in deeply.

MAN

You finally cleaned.

WOMAN

Thanks so much for noticing.

Man turns to Woman again. He eyes her up and down while the frown etches onto his face.

Woman's upper lip quivers slightly with intense rage.

Man chuckles.

MAN

Your lip does that when you don't get any sleep, you know. You should stop drinking all that coffee. Keeps you up.

WOMAN

I made this for you, Dear. To help you start your day fresh. Today is a fresh day. Fresh attitude. Fresh mindset. Fresh--

MAN

Yeah, yeah, I get it. Thanks.

Man sits up from the bed. He stretches his arms lazily, but

he pays special attention to rotating his neck in circles.

WOMAN

You look so peaceful when you
dream. I wonder how I can achieve
sleep like that.

Man shrugs.

MAN

You just... sleep.

Woman holds disgust on her face.

WOMAN

Do you notice anything different
about me?

MAN

What is there to notice? Not much
has changed since yesterday.

Woman taps her short nail on the side of the mug, the bone
beneath her fingertips creating a harshly soft tapping
sound while her nail occasionally clinks against the
ceramic.

WOMAN

There's a few things to notice.

MAN

Ask me after I wake up more.

WOMAN

I'll be in bed by then. I had the
night shift.

MAN

You should fix your schedule. The
night crew will be fine without
you. Enjoy your retirement more.

Man cracks his knuckles after he finishes his stretches.
Woman takes deeper breathes as she watches Man conduct his
morning stretch routine, groaning and grunting as if he had
the most excellent, undisturbed sleep and nothing was going
to prevent him from having as excellent of a morning.

Woman carries a sternness in her face as she watches Man,
the full cup of coffee still untouched, a small dust hair
floating on the the surface with a very thin layer of film
broken apart by the dust hair.

Woman taps the side of the mug a few times. Man turns as if

he acknowledges the sound but ignores why she's making it.
He continues to stretch. Beat.

WOMAN
I messaged Iris.

Man grimaces.

MAN
You're both always hurt by
something I do or something I say.
I really am trying to be better.

Man stands from the bed. His knees crack as he shuffles
toward the bathroom, lifting and dropping his hand to
indicate he is finished having the conversation.

He closes the bathroom door harshly.

Woman holds the cup of coffee in her hands, unmoving from
the chair. The breeze blows through the window, softly
caressing her hair.

When Man opens the bathroom door then heads to the kitchen
without glancing at Woman.

Woman follows. She offers him the cup of coffee.

Man accepts the cup of coffee without a word then takes a
sip. He makes a face then slams the cup on the counter, a
splash spilling onto the counter and floor.

Beat.

WOMAN
Is it too hot for you?

MAN
Why is it cold? Is this from
yesterday?

Beat.

WOMAN
No, it's from this morning.

Man grimaces a cough then pours the coffee down the sink.
His hand feels the side of the French press.

MAN
This tastes like it's from
yesterday. Why are you lying so
much nowadays?

Long beat.

WOMAN

You're right. I'll stop doing that.

MAN

So the coffee is from last night?

Beat.

WOMAN

I made the coffee this morning.

Man chuckles once then pours the coffee from the French press down the sink, tosses the beans into the trash, then begins the process of making another batch.

MAN

I'm just saying it doesn't taste like it's from this morning.

Man slams the kettle onto the stove after filling it with water, the electric burner clinking. He turns on the stovetop.

MAN

You still have to take care of the house, you know. We're well off right now because of my pension. You're lucky I got it early, otherwise you'd still be working.

Man slams the coffee bag onto the counter. The bag cracks open at the bottom. Coffee spills out. He doesn't bother fixing the mess as bits fall onto the floor, crumbs splayed over the edge of the counter.

He opens the top of the bag then eyeballs how much coffee goes into the press. He pours about half a cup.

MAN

You taking care of the house is a fair deal. We could've hired a cleaner if you didn't retire.

WOMAN

We're saving money by being home all the time.

MAN

We have my pension. Your roth helps out, too. Why do we need to save money? We're in perfect

health.

As steam rises from the kettle, Man pours it into the press until it's full then pops the top onto the press.

WOMAN

It's for the family.

MAN

We are all taking care of ourselves. I just wish I could relax like you at least once a week without getting yelled at for something stupid.

WOMAN

It was your decision to keep working - we were supposed to retire together.

Man laughs. Woman clasps her hands together.

Man sits on the single-seater couch reading a book with the French press and a clean coffee mug.

WOMAN

I'm going to sleep.

Woman walks to the bed.

MAN

Might as well stay up. It's daylight. What will we have for lunch if you're sleeping?

WOMAN

You'll figure it out, I'm sure.

Man lowers his book. His chin is tilted toward the ground as if he is looking down at Woman.

MAN

I'd really appreciate a plan before you start making decisions without me. You haven't been sleeping well for a while. You sure you don't want to stay up so you can visit a doctor?

Long beat. Woman pulls the covers back then hops into bed. She places her head onto the pillow, facing the chair against the wall.

WOMAN

I'd really appreciate it if you'd
keep the noise to a minimum
throughout the day.

Man sighs then raises his book to continue reading.

MAN

I will stay as quiet as a mouse,
Dear.

ACT 3 - WHAT ARE YOUR MOST RECENT THOUGHTS ON LOVE?

The words appear on screen after being silently spoken by Her Shadow, who stares at woman as her eyes close. The words leave Her Shadow's mouth like a mist, the structure of the line flowing off screen like a vine being pulled back in from unraveling.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - EARLY AFTERNOON

Woman's eyes jolts awake.

In the background, Man adjusts himself, tilting the single sofa backward, balancing it on its hind legs.

The chair's front legs hit the tile floor with a thud when he loses balance, but he does not stop reading. He lifts the chair again.

Woman's eyes flutter as if she isn't sure if she is dreaming or awake. Her breathing pattern changes to calm her heart rate from waking up with a shock.

Her Shadow wisps in and out of her line of vision, fluttering with the edges of the curtain, eyeing Man.

WOMAN

(to Her Shadow,
sleepily)
What are you doing?

HER SHADOW

What are you doing?

Man looks up and lets the chair's front legs fall onto the floor with a thud.

MAN

Huh?

HER SHADOW

We're trying to sleep.

MAN

Yeah, yeah.

Woman, still woozy from fatigue, closes her eyes. She falls back asleep as Her Shadow's eyes glow ablaze.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - EARLY AFTERNOON

Woman wakes. Her eyes open wide.

Man is blending something in the kitchen. The high-pitched whir of the blender sharpens Woman's ears to the point of a headache. She scrunches her face as she turns into the pillow.

Woman lifts her head, holding herself up with her elbows, then rubs her frustrated eyes.

Man taps the side of the blender with something. He is making a smoothie.

Woman checks the time on the wall above her.

It is 11:20AM.

The blender stops. Man bangs on the side of the blender. The blender starts again. The blender stops.

WOMAN

Are you planning on making any other loud noises because I really need to sleep.

Man bangs on the side of the blender. He starts it again. He stops the blender then bangs on the side again.

MAN

I can't not eat throughout the day. This is breakfast.

WOMAN

You said you'd keep the noise to a minimum.

MAN

I'll be as quiet as a mouse.

Man lifts the blender from the machine and slaps the side to let the smoothie fall into his cup.

MAN

Oh, come on! I literally just made this fucking thing and now I have

to do it again? Come on. Come on!

The smoothie did not make it into the cup.

Woman lay her head down again. She closes her eyes and tries to fall asleep. Clanks echo in the kitchen.

When her ears get used to the chaotic kitchen sounds, she lulls herself asleep as the sounds turn to white noise.

Woman is lulled out of her sleep again when Man thumps on the couch, slurps, and coughs away the cold in his throat.

Woman turns her head toward the chair to go to sleep again. Her Shadow, mist-like and unmoving, shakes its head at Woman, its legs crossed, its finger tapping its knee, its ember eyes still ablaze.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - LUNCHTIME

In a sudden state of heightened anxiety, Woman opens her eyes.

Man, standing beside the bed, looks down at her.

Woman furrows her sleepy face with confusion.

WOMAN

What are you doing?

MAN

Making sure you weren't sleeping too hard. We're getting older, you know.

Woman veers at Man.

WOMAN

Deep sleep is what I need right now.

MAN

You stopped snoring for a few minutes. I thought you swallowed your tongue.

Woman checks the time on the wall behind her head. It's a little past 12.

WOMAN

Thanks for worrying about my health.

Woman lays her head back on the pillow, her bandaged hand lifting the covers to cover her shoulders.

Man grimaces then leaves to flump onto the couch.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

MAN (O.S.)

Hey.

Woman's eyes are closed.

MAN (O.S.)

Hey.

Woman opens her eyes. Man stands on the side of the bed.

MAN

You've been asleep for half the day. You should wake up if you're wanting to sleep through the night.

WOMAN

What time is it?

MAN

Late. It's way past the time you should be sleeping.

Woman sighs then turns to go back to sleep. Man shuffles away.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Woman opens her eyes and rubs the crust away. She turns to check the time on the wall.

It is 1PM.

She groggily sits on the edge of the bed then stretches her neck while twirling her ankles in circles. She sighs as she stands. Her Shadow presses itself against the chair near the bed, its eyes ablaze

MAN

Glad to see you're finally awake.

Woman walks toward the kitchen. Her Shadow watches as it stares at Woman.

Woman, with a stressed whisper, turns to Her Shadow, whose

eyes are no longer a glowing orange but a mist resembling the rest of its form.

WOMAN

Why do you not want me to sleep?

Woman grabs a glass from the cabinet, trying to ignore the mess on the counter, then fills it with water.

Her Shadow loiters in silence.

WOMAN

I need to sleep.

Woman sips on the water as she inspects the mess Man left.

There is an unwashed blender, four dirty cups, four big plates with only a small dab of sauce on each of them, crumbs along the kitchen counters, and splotches of smoothie on the floor.

Woman stands at the threshold, staring at the back of Man's head. On the television is the local news on mute. He is reading.

WOMAN

What's with all the dishes?

MAN

I got a little hungry after the smoothie.

WOMAN

Was it necessary to grab four sets?

MAN

I was finishing leftovers from the fridge. I didn't want them to touch each other.

Woman sighs. Man puts down his book then turns.

MAN

Should I feel sorry?

Woman stands between the kitchen and living room. Man is pushing the single sofa backward to balance it on its hind legs.

WOMAN

Are you done pretending you still love me?

MAN

Our marriage died a long time ago.
When have I ever pretended?

The chair thrashes to the ground then returns to face the television and read his book. He pushes the chair back again. Her Shadow's head turns toward Man. It stands as if it is hovering, a small trail of its tendrils more apparent now as the connection between it and Woman increase. Woman sighs.

WOMAN

We agreed to try to repair our relationship to show Iris how to overcome hardships.

MAN

Iris has made it very clear she knows how to handle herself. We don't need to factor her into our marriage equation anymore.

WOMAN

Then why bother to stay together?

Man lowers his book.

MAN

You and I both know why.

Beat.

WOMAN

Remind me, please, dear husband,
why.

The chair clicks to the ground. Man turns his head to face Woman, who has her arms crossed.

MAN

We made an agreement that when
Iris and her boyfriend--

WOMAN

Husband.

Man laughs with frustration. He places his arm against the chair's backrest.

MAN

Husband? Are you serious? I
thought they just got engaged?

WOMAN

They eloped last year.

Man laughs. He goes between setting his book down and lifting it up again, keeping a finger on the part he's reading.

MAN

I felt love like that once.

Man leans the chair back again, balancing its hind legs.

WOMAN

Once?

MAN

When we first fell in love. And then we thought having Iris would fix it, and now here we are watching her make the same mistake as us.

WOMAN

Mistake?

The chair clicks onto the ground. Man turns.

MAN

We've talked about this years ago before Iris moved out. I thought we were in agreement?

Woman lowers her arms and clasps her hands together, rubbing her bandaged hand. Her Shadow mimics Woman's actions.

WOMAN

Iris talks about him like they've formed a strong connection.

MAN

You think they were ready to get married?

WOMAN

We were ready at 20.

Man turns to face Woman. He balances the chair then immediately drops it.

MAN

You were ready because you were pregnant.

Man closes the book then pushes the chair back. He drops

the chair's legs onto the ground.

MAN (CONT'D)

I was ready because I was willing
to be responsible.

Woman approaches Man in the living room then stands in front of the television. Her Shadow stands behind the television. Woman crosses her arms.

WOMAN

We were thrilled to be pregnant
with Iris.

Man slaps the spine of the book against his palm.

MAN

I didn't truly feel ready to be a
father until I was 35.

Woman shakes her head then sits on the edge of the bed. Unfurling below the darkness of the mattress, Her Shadow's webbed connection to Woman's feet grown darker, as if a deep, shadowy ravine opened between them.

WOMAN

Why didn't we divorce then? Iris
was about to go to college at that
point.

MAN

I thought it would get better, I
really thought it would. But now
we're here, still stuck, and we're
forced to take care of each other
until one of us kicks the bucket.

Man leans the chair back to balance. The ravine stretches to fit below the chair's legs.

WOMAN

We do resent each other.

Man thrashes the front of the chair on the ground. One of the legs splinters.

MAN

That's not true.

WOMAN

We had young love, which was nice
and special, but what we have now
is resentment. That's why we can't
talk to each other. We are keeping

ourselves miserable.

MAN

Is this what you told Iris? Is this why she's worried about us?

WOMAN

We've felt it for a long time. I know you feel it. I feel it.

Her Shadow wisps as it embraces Woman's body, Her Shadow's embering eyes matching Woman's as if they have become one. Man does not take notice.

MAN

I told her she shouldn't get married. I told her to wait. I told her to live her life and that she can have a geriatric pregnancy if she wanted to. I didn't tell her we hated each other. That's what you said.

Woman stretches her neck from side to side. She clasps her hands together delicately, placing her bandaged hand atop her palm.

MAN

They shouldn't have gotten married.

WOMAN

Both of them are capable of making their own decisions.

Man tosses the book on the coffee table in front of him. A few large droplets from his half-drunken mug of coffee spills onto the book. Man does not mind.

WOMAN

What you should worry about is our progress.

MAN

Progress? Do you think they'll be happy? Are you happy right now? Am I happy right now?

Man clasps his hands together.

WOMAN

They believe it's love.

MAN

We believed it was love.

Woman sighs. Man clicks the chair onto the floor and leans forward, his elbows resting near his knees.

WOMAN

You don't think what he had was love?

MAN

We made a commitment to one another.

Man picks up his coffee, takes a sip, smacks his tongue at the bitterness, then picks up the book to inspect the few droplets that spilled onto its pages.

WOMAN

Love is a commitment, you know.

Man wipes the remaining spills on the coffee table with his bare hands as if he's helping the table by massaging it into the plastic that looks like wood.

MAN

That's not the commitment we made to each other.

WOMAN

That's not what you said in your vow to me. Your vows included love.

Man wipes his hands together then rubs his palms onto the corner of the couch arms.

MAN

We both agreed that when Iris went off to college, we would try out the actual love portion, which we did. And now, all these years later, you resent me because I offer love beyond what I committed.

Woman's mouth trembles with anger. Her Shadow's mist hovers around Woman's skin like an aura, the layering of Her Shadow becoming more prominent. Man still does not take notice.

WOMAN

You think that's why I resent you?

Man picks up his book and flails it around, gripping the

cover between his palms so hard it scrunches the book, denting the cover.

MAN

Oh, come on! Your insomnia? It's your own mind trying to tell you that you don't want to love me in your way anymore.

WOMAN

Did your therapist say this to you?

Man rolls the book in half like a newspaper.

MAN

I have had more than one session, you know. You just stopped asking when the progress stopped involving our relationship.

WOMAN

You're not lying about going to therapy?

MAN

I go every Wednesday. I pick up lunch for us, then we eat and have a session together. He gives me a discount.

Man taps the edge of the rolled book lightly against the edge of the armrest.

WOMAN

Is this what your therapist tells you?

Woman opens the curtains near her bed. It does not disrupt Her Shadow, but it shows the audience how far Her Shadow's mist had stretched, overtaking a large part of Woman's surrounding as if she invited dusk into the home.

MAN

He tells me to seriously consider why I've stayed in the relationship for so long and to realize that it's not about the time spent in it but about the sustainability of our progress together. To me, there has been the opposite of progress for years.

Woman laughs with sarcasm.

MAN

I've realized that I am humoring your idea of love because you are terrified to die alone. I am still promising you that we will take care of each other, just like I said in my vow to you, but it doesn't have to subscribe to your view of love. I'm fine with just the commitment.

Man leans back in the chair, balancing it on its hind legs.

WOMAN

That's horrible.

Man unfurls the book.

MAN

We talked about this when we tried to rekindle. You said you were fine with the new commitment.

WOMAN

Not like this. This is not what I agreed to happen.

The chair clicks onto the ground. Man leans forward and flips through the pages of his book to find out where he left off.

MAN

The love I have for you is one I have for the mother of my daughter and the roommate I have lived with for most of my life.

Woman stares at the wall holding up their family portraits.

WOMAN

So our views on love have never overlapped is what you're telling me, dear husband?

MAN

You've viewed me as a partner for all these years. Isn't that called 'commitment' and not 'love'?

WOMAN

Why can't that be a part of what love is?

Woman turns to face Man, who is still flipping through the pages of his book.

WOMAN

It felt like love to me.

Man looks up as he bends the book to secure the location of the page he's on.

MAN

Think about it. What kind of love does that look like? Right now, we are each other's care takers.

WOMAN

Our actions to show our love may involve dedication, but that's not what 'love' is.

Man laughs then looks down to continue to flip through the book. Man shrugs. He folds a page in the corner of the book. Her Shadow's tendrils whip, extending beyond Woman, the mist of Her Shadow extending farther out.

Woman shakes her head, the essence of Her Shadow following Woman. Her Shadow's edges crinkle as Woman walks past Man to go to the kitchen.

WOMAN

I'm making coffee.

Man opens his book and flips the folded corner up to start reading again.

MAN

You shouldn't make coffee if you're struggling to sleep.

WOMAN

It's decaf.

Woman sighs then pulls out a bottle of pre-made decaf coffee from the fridge. She puts four ice cubes in a cup, adds a splash of the concentrate, then fills the remainder with water.

Man lays down his book as Woman sips on her drink.

MAN

We are old. What time do we have to improve something neither of us want?

WOMAN

We may be older to Iris and Pearl,
but we are not that old to have
given up on our commitment we made
together.

Woman sighs and rubs her eyes. She stares at her reflection
in the window, the bottom-half view obscuring the outdoors.

MAN

You know, I think we are on the
same page. You're just refusing to
see what I see. We're both only
wanting commitment so we don't
have to go into hospice.

WOMAN

That's not what I want.

Man sighs.

Woman takes a sip of coffee then places it on the counter.

MAN

I'll tell my therapist you're
still thinking about it.

As Woman holds sadness in her eyes, Her Shadow looms behind
her.

Woman sits across from Man on the larger couch, their knees
facing each other. Her Shadow creeps toward the open window
as if trying to sneak away for a phone call.

Man puts down his book. He gives Woman soft eyes while hers
has purpose behind it. Her Shadow unwebs itself from Woman
then leaves through the open window with alerting bright
orange eyes.

ACT 4 - IS THIS WHAT LOVE IS?

The words appear on the screen like a mist, dripping
droplets of the words away until the holes within the words
crack away like rust.

EXT. IRIS' STUDIO APARTMENT - MIDDAY

Her Shadow peers through a window. Iris and Pearl are in
their home.

Her Shadow lingers by Iris and Pearl's open window,
studying them sharing smiles and laughter.

Her Shadow flattens itself then sneaks in through the tiny crevice near the opening of the window.

INT. IRIS' STUDIO APARTMENT - MIDDAY - CONTINUOUS

Iris and Pearl just finished lunch.

A box of cauliflower crust pizza, half finished, lay open on the table.

Pearl closes the pizza box.

Iris is rinsing blueberries in the sink.

Her Shadow slinks below the cabinets in the kitchen to get to Iris. It tries to web itself to her feet by flicking its tendrils in an attempt to wrap itself around her ankles, but they are unable to attach.

Pearl turns on a low-light lamp in the apartment. He notices a shadowy movement out of the corner of his eyes in the kitchen. He follows its mist to Iris, who does not notice Her Shadow.

PEARL

Your mom is thinking about you
right now.

Iris turns off the sink faucet then drains water from the blueberries while looking around her. Her Shadow does not try to hide, but its embering eyes look toward Pearl, eyeing him.

IRIS

She's probably thinking about that
text she sent earlier. I haven't
responded.

Her Shadow slinks back underneath the counter as Iris moves around the kitchen.

PEARL

What are you thinking about
telling her?

Iris turns to grab a towel from the oven rack to dry the bottom of the colander. She smiles at Pearl, who is watching with worry.

IRIS

That she should focus on her end-
of-life happiness. My dad is
already set on being selfish with
his, so she should worry about

hers.

Pearl listens intently. He stands to walk to the kitchen, eyeing Her Shadow, who has stood behind Iris, its embering eyes ablaze, still watching Pearl.

Iris finishes drying her hands on the towel. She turns to face Pearl then offers him a blueberry. They both take a small handful.

Iris puts the colander on the counter then pulls a bottle of wine from the fridge to hand to Pearl.

IRIS

We'll open our hearts tonight
finishing the bottle.

Pearl grabs two wine glasses from the cabinet near him then opens the bottle of red.

PEARL

And what is so terrible about
that?

Pearl pours the wine into the glasses then leaves them on the counter to aerate. He grabs a blueberry from the colander.

IRIS

I'm personally looking forward to
it.

Iris grabs the wine glasses then walks toward the living room. She takes a sip as she walks.

Her Shadow attempts to wrap its tendrils around her ankles again, but it fails. Its shadowy mist spreads across the room like a low fog. Pearl grabs the colander as he intensely watches Iris.

Her Shadow's embering eyes float along fog, following Iris to the couch.

Pearl watches Her Shadow with intent as if his mood will placate it. Pearl grabs the opened bottle of wine then joins Iris on the couch. He places the bottle and the colander on the coffee table.

Iris moves her legs so Pearl can fit, one leg crossed on the cushion with the other propped up on the edge. She leans her head against the back of the couch then hands Pearl his glass of wine.

INT. IRIS' STUDIO APARTMENT - EARLY EVENING

Pearl turns on the television to a small slideshow. The television is connected to the laptop that Pearl has on the end table.

The apartment has dimmed significantly, but there is still light entering from the window. It is dark enough in the studio to need a dim light on. Her Shadow remains above the fog between them and the television, its eyes aglow.

From the corner of the screen, a second pair of orange eyes float along the surface of the fog.

PEARL

Okay, so we have it narrowed down to three photos. And this is for our bulletin.

Pearl flips through the three photos, back-to-back for Iris to study the angles. Iris groans at one of the photos then takes her final sip of wine. She pours herself another glass.

Pearl takes a sip of his wine. Iris takes a sip of hers. The first bottle is empty and there is a second on the table, half empty.

PEARL

The newspaper said to include something with our faces, but I really like this one.

Pearl displays a photo of Iris and Pearl sitting on a prairie field having a picnic. Iris and Pearl are looking at each other lovingly. Pearl takes a sip of his wine.

Her Shadow lurches itself into the photo to enter a memory.

EXT. PRAIRIE FIELD - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

IRIS (29) and PEARL (23) are wearing cozy sweaters. They are sitting on a thick blanket.

The tree leaves in the distance are yellow and orange. The breeze blows softly.

Iris leans against Pearl.

Her Shadow, sitting at a distance behind them, spectates the memory. There is a photographer behind them taking a picture of the scenery. Her Shadow lurks by the camera.

A second pair of eyes leeches out from the camera lens, bringing with it the fog. Her Shadow ascends from the fog, resembling a shadowy mist of Woman. The second pair of embering eyes ascends beside the photographer, resembling a shadowy mist of Grandma (Halmi) like a ghost.

While the photographer does not notice Her Shadow and Halmi, they spectate Iris and Pearl as they angle the lens toward them to record the sunset. Iris and Pearl are not in the shot.

When the angle is correct, the photographer sits on the grass, the mist encroaching their neck.

Her Shadow and Halmi both enter the photographer. The outline of their mist is visible outside of their body, as if parts of the fog have surrounded their head like buzzing gnats.

The photographer stands, revealing more of the mist outside of their body. They go to the camera and tilt the frame down until Iris and Pearl are in view.

CUT TO:

Pearl turns to the photographer then waves. The camera quickly moves to Iris and Pearl. The photographer waves back. Iris smiles as if she had remembered something heartfelt.

IRIS

They wave like my grandma used to.
We used to have picnics here when
I was a kid. My mom started waving
like that when she passed as a
bodily keepsake to remember who
she came from.

In front of Iris and Pearl, the breeze carries dried leaves floating along as if the breeze is delighted for them.

Pearl lifts a small notebook with a handwritten prompt at the top. 'What does love mean to you?' There are small hearts doodled around the word 'love.'

PEARL

You want me to write under the
prompt?

IRIS

I was only asked to write the
prompt. I'm not sure what your
intention is aside from that.

Pearl smiles. He shifts to the side. Iris gently moves away and leans her chin on her knee, facing Pearl.

Pearl leans to the corner behind them to pull a pen from the tote.

PEARL

I'm glad you wrote this as a prompt.

Pearl props his leg up and leans the notebook against his thigh. He taps his pen on the page as he gazes in concentration at Iris, who smiles at him.

IRIS

Let your inner poet shine, Pearly.

Pearl turns to the page and begins to write.

Iris watches Pearl as he writes, paying attention to his concentration.

Pearl scribbles words as if he already knows what he wants to write. He scratches out a few lines, bites the edge of the pen a few times, and sneaks glances at Iris occasionally as he thinks.

When Pearl is deep in writing, Iris picks forget-me-not flowers from a bush next to them, some daisies, and some prairie grass to braid a small bracelet.

Iris finishes the bracelet quickly, lacing the blades and stems into a sturdy circle. She offers it to Pearl, who slides it onto his wrist.

Pearl smiles.

PEARL

Thank you.

Pearl leans forward to give Iris a kiss on her pinky. On it is a cotton-braided ring, a pearl as its stone.

Pearl props his leg back up and continues to write. He erases, scratches, and stops to think, occasionally glancing at the bracelet Iris made for him.

PEARL

Why did you pick this prompt, Iris?

Iris shrugs.

IRIS

I'm curious.

PEARL

What are you curious about?

IRIS

If you actually love me or if you think you're in love with me. People can't tell the difference sometimes.

PEARL

Can you tell the difference?

Iris sighs a little.

IRIS

I hope so, Pearly.

Pearl continues to write in silence.

CUT TO:

Her Shadow, sitting beside the camera, wisps as the wind blows. The photographer still has a shadowy mist surrounding them. Their eyes are glowing orange. Shadowy tears fall down their face, rolling down their neck, dripping off their chin.

HER SHADOW

We're afraid we raised her to not know what love looks like.

HALMI

We raised her with as much love as we could offer.

HER SHADOW

Then why are you crying?

HALMI

I cherish the memories here with you both. It reminds me what love means to me.

CUT TO:

Iris, with her cheek resting on her knee, closes her eyes to listen to the calming breeze tickle the blades of grass along the prairie.

PEARL

Okay, I'm finished writing.

Pearl adjusts himself to sit cross-legged and face Iris.

PEARL

Can I read it to you?

Iris open her eyes and faces Pearl. She lowers her leg and sits cross-legged.

IRIS

Okay.

Pearl prepares to read with a few deep breaths and further adjustments to his posture. His face holds a serious gaze as he prepares to recite his heart.

After a deep breath, he reads.

PEARL

Love is a shared emotion that creates unity. In the version of love I share with you, love perseveres as it faces challenges. It continually asks tough questions, gives tough answers, and makes it safe to feel, to express, to hold. It adapts based on how we choose to live because in the version of love I wish to always share with you, it does not remain stagnant. It shifts like the peacefulness in our kisses, the respectfulness in our words, and the reassurance of comfort when we gaze into one another with intensity. Our love is gentle and fierce. Our embraces, tender and passionate. Our words, soothing and serene. With softness in our eyes as we yearn for one another, the beautiful ache between our hearts encourages us to remember that our love is ethereal.

Iris smiles with a faint blush highlighting the bridge of her nose and the apples of her cheeks.

Pearl sets the notebook down then rests his forearm on his knee. He studies Iris for her response.

Iris raises her leg and rests her cheek on her knee.

IRIS

That was sweet, Pearly. It's like you're the wind giving kisses to

the grass today.

Pearl smiles.

IRIS

Is this really what love means to you?

PEARL

It's what I want it to always mean for us.

Iris breathes in a slow breath.

IRIS

How are you so confident in your decision?

CUT TO:

Her Shadow's eyes glow a brighter orange. The mist on the photographer's face has dried.

HALMI

Do you feel as if their love is genuine?

Her Shadow inches forward in the fog, the end of its line a few feet away. It pauses there, eyeing Iris and Pearl share serene glances with one another.

HER SHADOW

We really hope it is.

The photographer nods.

HALMI

We will still watch over them when your spirit is ready.

Her Shadow, peering down the hill, its embering eyes aglow like a soft flickering flame from the breeze, sighs deeply.

CUT TO:

PEARL

I know myself. I want our love forever, in this life and the next, and the next after that.

IRIS

You're ready for a commitment like that?

Pearl's eyes show softness.

PEARL

I'm serious, Iris. I want to
experience the rest of my life
with you.

Iris smiles. Her Shadow pauses. The orange in its eyes
flicker to dim and not dim like the living room lamp in
Woman's apartment.

IRIS

Okay, Pearly. Let's try it out and
see how it goes. Day by day, week
by week.

PEARL

Year by year, lifetime after
lifetime.

Pearl smiles and leans forward. He delicately lifts Iris'
hand and kisses her pinky. He caresses her hand.

IRIS

Pearly, why are you so sweet to
me?

Pearl looks up and leans in. His face is close to hers.

PEARL

I love you Iris, that's why.

Iris raises her hand to caress the back of his neck and
glide her fingertips through his hair. She smiles.

IRIS

I love you too, Pearly.

Iris leans in forward for a kiss, and Pearl falls into her.

INT. IRIS' STUDIO APARTMENT - EARLY EVENING

Iris and Pearl sit on the couch. Their knees face one
another as they hold wine in their hands. They gaze at one
another with adoring faces filled with love.

Her Shadow, returning from the memory, unfurls its tendrils
from Iris' ankles. It is unable to sustain a dark
attachment to her.

IRIS

I cherish that memory. I fell in
love with you that day.

Pearl smiles.

Her Shadow slinks back to the window. Only the sound of the breeze swaying through the trees and the prairie is vocal.

Behind the couch as the sound dissipates, Her Shadow maneuvers through the mess in the studio apartment.

There are crumbs on the table, a sink full of dirty dishes, and a mess on the kitchen counter.

The aura is not filled with misery as Her Shadow takes another glance to Iris and Pearl sitting on the couch, talking as they sip on their wine with smiles and laughter.

Her Shadow, as Iris and Pearl finish the last drops of their wine, sneaks out of the apartment to return to Woman.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - EARLY NIGHT

Woman sits on the couch, her knees facing Man. Man has his book lowered.

Woman's hands are clasped together. Her bandaged hand is on top.

Man glances at the bandaged hand but doesn't say anything. He picks up his book again to read.

Man crosses his legs, his foot pointing away from Woman.

Woman looks toward the window and spots Her Shadow maneuvering around the living room to return to her.

When Her Shadow sneaks under the couch to web itself to her feet, Woman breathes in deeply.

WOMAN

Iris is happy, you know. She and Pearl are in love.

Man glances up. He raises his eyebrows like an eye roll. He coughs before looking back down to read. Man pushes the chair back, balancing it on its hind legs.

MAN

He's going to break her heart.

With a reverberating shimmer, Her Shadow flares toward Man beneath Woman's feet, its mist-like form crating a fog around her pathway. Man doesn't pay attention.

WOMAN

What does love mean to you?

Man lifts his book and wiggles it in front of his face.

MAN

In reference to Shakespeare, it should be not with the eyes but with the mind.

Woman rubs her bandaged hand. She turns it around to look at the leaked portion in the bandage.

MAN

Our commitment is proof that I love with the mind. What more could you need from me beyond what we've agreed to in our vows?

Woman sighs. Her Shadow's tendrils whip toward Man like a flame.

MAN

What happened to your hand, Dear?

Man points to Woman's hand.

WOMAN

I cut it on some broken glass last night. I'm surprised you didn't wake up to the noise.

MAN

You sure it was last night? I would have woken up and taken you to urgent care.

WOMAN

You didn't wake up. I tried.

A haunting silence encompasses the room.

Her Shadow peers into the kitchen with its unwashed dishes and dried stains from the morning.

Her Shadow hovers near the edge of the couch.

WOMAN

Do you want to see my cut? I may need stitches.

MAN

It looks like you've gotten it all taken care of.

The studio apartment appears much, much smaller. The furniture appear closer together, and the pathways smaller. Woman eyes the pathway to the door, which remains closed. The wind is blowing inside, the strands of Woman's loose clothing and hair pushing toward the door.

Woman turns her knees to Man just a little more. She looks to Her Shadow then looks to Man.

Woman's mouth opens and closes like she's speaking, but the sound comes from Her Shadow, its misty eyes glowing orange.

HER SHADOW

Why are you like this?

Man lifts his book and continues to read.

WOMAN

You aren't going to ask if I'm all right?

Woman has tears in her eyes. She wipes them away with her bandaged hand.

Man looks to her bandaged hand and then to her face.

MAN

Are you all right?

HER SHADOW

No, I'm not all right.

WOMAN

No, I'm not all right.

Tears well in Woman's eyes, but they hold embarrassment and a bit of anger.

WOMAN

Do you love me?

Her Shadow points to the camera.

HER SHADOW

Have I ever been happy when I was with you?

WOMAN

We've talked about it before, but have you ever thought we would need a divorce?

Beat.

There is bewilderment on Man's face as if this is the first time he has ever heard of the topic. He looks to the family portrait wall. With a glossiness along his eyes, he looks as if he is about to cry, but his expression blends with bewilderment.

He turns to face Her Shadow, as if seeing it for the first time. It is pointing directly at Man with embering eyes. Behind Her Shadow is Halmi.

HALMI

Has he ever hurt you?

Man shakes his head.

HER SHADOW

Liar!

Woman takes a deep breath in. Man has since stood to walk past Her Shadow and stare outside the open window.

MAN

I am doing better. The sadness I feel comes from a place of hurt. The sadness I feel is temporary. I am holding myself accountable by improving with positivity and light every day.

Her Shadow and Halmi stand behind Woman. Her Shadow stands directly behind Woman like a mirror. Halmi stands off to the side.

Man looks between Woman and a framed of Iris and Pearl on the coffee table.

Beat.

WOMAN

What are your thoughts about divorce?

Man takes a breathes in, his mouth slightly agape, his lips dry.

The screen cuts to black.

Beat.

Fade into the title, UNFURLING HER SHADOW.

END.