

'KILL ME FIRST'

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TITLE CARD:

This thing of darkness,
I acknowledge mine.

~ *Prospero*

CLOSE UP ON:

A matted mop of HAIR pulsating in red-tinged darkness;
Up and down, with each gasping breath.

A heavily made-up **OLDER WOMAN**, late 50's, leans in,
Pulling the head of hair up into a SPOTLIGHT, to reveal;
JOHN, 56, haggard, but a rusted-steel-crowbar of a man.
Arms pulled behind his back;
And broken - *Physically. Mentally. Gratefully.*

OLDER WOMAN
(dry, husky whisper)
You senseless sad sack o'shit, huh?

JOHN
...Yes...Yes.

--BEEP! - BEEP! - BEEP!..
She walks away to silence an ALARM CLOCK.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Please?

OLDER WOMAN
I'm done...No more.

JOHN
Yeah...Just kill me.
(She comes back over...)
Please--

--and SLAPS John across the face.

OLDER WOMAN
YES...Not 'yeah'.

JOHN
Yes...Please-

OLDER WOMAN
-you want freaky, go down Chrystie.

John head droops. Giving up.

INT. DECREPIT STAIRWELL - DARK

A DOOR closes behind John,
At the top of a stairwell you wouldn't leave your dog in.
His eyes flick to a discarded FIRE EXTINGUISHER;
A WAFT OF SMOKE rising from its rusted metal body.
John backs away, convinced it's BUZZING.

Down he trudges, flight after flight;
 In darkness; bar the occasional bulb.
 Occasionally, his back winces, as if cattle-prodded.
 His arms stretch behind his back, for relief.

As he heads down to the SECOND FLOOR he TRIPS UP;
 Falling, slamming down onto the LANDING!
 That fucking hurt.
 He looks back at the dark stairs...

A LIGHTER tries to ignite in the darkness,
 Its sparks illuminating TWO BODIES slumped on the stairs;
 -- A red-haired WOMAN and an old craggy, scarred MAN --

But, as the Guy lights his cigarette,
 John sees only **2 YOUNG JUNKIES**.

John stares at them.
 To confirm they're not who he thought he saw.
 The Junkie Guy notices John's back-bound arms;

JUNKIE GUY
 Rather me than you, brother.

The Junkie Guy sits back in darkness, laughing.

John clambers to his feet,
 Down the stairs, into the dimly-lit CORRIDOR;
 Barging into the panic-barred METAL DOORS,
 To break free into...

CONT. - 102 E25TH / S.E. CORNER OF 25TH & PARK - DAWN

...A stifling, sticky New York summer night.

The hot air feels like air-con.
 As fantasy melts back to reality.
 The city's sounds, lights, waking him.

Clearly, still trashed,
 John staggers towards the corner.
 His wrists HANDCUFFED behind him.
 The inhuman leftovers of a four day bender.

Each labored step evolving the TINNITUS in his ears.
 His wincing back, affecting his gait.
 He doesn't look like he's enjoying freedom.

He slows to a crawl, approaching Park Ave...
 Dawn traffic; not busy, but not slow.

John's slow crawl doesn't miss a step;
 Off the sidewalk into the NORTH BOUND lane;

No regard for oncoming vehicles,
No regard for continuing life.

Bar a few angry CAR HORNS trying to stop him,
John makes it to the CENTRAL RESERVATION.
The nerves in his back spasm hard,
Stopping him cross the SOUTH BOUND lane.

He maneuvers to nullify the pain;
Noticing the 'METLIFE' building,
17 blocks north, straddling Park Ave.
Transfixed by its looming sign;

JOHN
Met life?
(sniggers)
My life?

*The SHRILL OF TINNITUS in John's ears;
-- mixes with Fire Engine SIRENS BLASTING --*

Unable to cover his ears,
John closes his eyes, focusing his mettle.
Trying to find equilibrium.
Fighting agony to stay standing.

*-- a spine-chilling **SCREAM** pierces his tinnitus! --*

John snaps open his eyes to its origin;

A young black **GIRL** pushing back a young white **GUY**,
Outside the metal doors of #102 E25th!

-- SIRENS louder n'louder; RED LIGHTS striping Park Ave --

The Girl bangs on the intercom;

GIRL
(shouting at the intercom)
TIFF? TIFFANY?!!

The Guy tries to stop her;
So she cold slaps him - *her fists about to fly!*
But he grabs her arm;
Backing her up to the metal doors with a KNIFE!

The second John sees the knife,
His tinnitus vaporizes to 'ON-CALL' acuity;

He RUNS back over the north bound lane,
Across the path of an oncoming blaring FIRE TRUCK!
Only missing it by the grace of God.

But, John never flinches, never stops,
 Running full pelt down 25th Street;
 SHOULDER BARGING into the Guy - *breaking them apart* -
 The Guy stumbling away - *his knife flies to the curb*;

GUY
 What-the-fuck?!

--The Guy pushes John to get at the Girl;
 --John launches back a whipping headbutt;
SMACK! - at the Guy's face - on his nose!
 Knocking him to the ground.

The Girl doesn't need a second invitation;
 She sprints away, across Park!

As John turns to glimpse her run,
 His legs are yanked from under him,
 Crashing him to the sidewalk - *THUD!*
 That fucking hurt.
 John rolls onto his back to stay conscious.

The Guy gets up - *checks the street*;
 She's gone - *FUCK!*

He goes back to John;
 To kick the shit out of him.
 John can't fight back, handcuffed,
 Laughing through the pounding.
 The Guy stops, confused;
 Turning John over to see the handcuffs;

GUY (CONT'D)
 Why ya cuffed, lil'bitch?

The Guy drop kicks John's gut.
 Winding any last laughs right out of him.

The Guy picks up his knife,
 To stand over John;

GUY (CONT'D)
 I see ya again, you'll get ya dues.

The Guy heads off, across Park,
 As John curls up, embracing the pain.
 Blood pouring out of his holes.
 Still smiling.
 Job done.

JOHN
 (laughing)
 Don't worry...I got mine.

EXT. BUONA NOTTE RESTAURANT: 120 MULBERRY ST. - SUNRISE

Little Italy is only just waking its ass up.

John hobbles home, down Mulberry.
Bruised. Broken. Still cuffed.

A **SERVER** lugs BUONA NOTTE's chairs outside to street seating.
DELIVERY BOYS off-load to the sidewalk cellar doors.
As **DINO**, 60's, Buona Notte's well-suited owner, wanders
outside to smoke a morning cigarette.
He sees John stumbling towards them;

DINO
(re: John's handcuffs)
Johnny, no?
(John shrugs)
Ya wanna Amaro? Or bolt-cutters?

JOHN
Amaro...Please.

Dino heads inside...
The Delivery Boys suspicious of John's handcuffs.
John nods 'hello', mildly embarrassed.

Dino comes back out with a SHOT OF AMARO and some KEYS.
He pours the shot into John's thirsty mouth.
And hands off the glass to his Server.

CONT. -- I/E. 120 MULBERRY ST. APTS - STAIRWELL - SUNRISE

Dino opens the door to the APARTMENTS above the restaurant.
And helps John inside, up the STAIRWELL.
He's not bothered by John's bloodied face.
But he is worried about the handcuffs.

DINO
(re: the handcuffs)
There's gotta be an easier way, no?

John stops; smiles, warm;
And motions for the keys.

DINO (CONT'D)
Let me help--

--John shakes his head. Defiant.

Dino palms him the keys.
John trudges off up the stairs.
Dino looking after him, concerned.
But forced to leave.

I/E. JOHN'S APARTMENT: 120 MULBERRY ST. - EARLY MORNING

The top floor.

John unlocks the door with his back to it,
And bursts in; not bothering to close it behind him;

*A RAILROAD APARTMENT: long, thin, like a rail carriage;
LOUNGE to KITCHEN to John's BEDROOM and BATHROOM.
John's is a hoarder's heaven, a garbage compactor.
Piled higher with crap the deeper in you dare.*

LOUNGE:

The ANALOG TV drones out FOX NEWS. Background life.
The curtains surrendering only a thin strip of morning.

JOHN
Jimmy?...JIMMY?

John's alone.
And relieved, in a way.
He tries to grab the MUG OF PENS on the DRESSER.
Impossible.

He clears the top of the DRESSER with his head;
BOOKS, PHOTOS, the MUG, and CRAP, fall to the floor.
On his knees, he empties the mug;
To find a set of HANDCUFF KEYS;
Bending down over a FAMILY PHOTO to unlock his hands.
His muscles cramping as he frees himself.

John sits back in the collapsed lung he calls home.
Dank air, dark light, no hope.
John lights up to stave off the gloom.

-- the faintest **WHIMPER OF BEGGING** from the STAIRWELL --

John fights to ignore it;

JOHN (CONT'D)
Met life...Met me.

His focus slips to the Family Photo, of;
*Two young boys, laughing, making funny faces in front.
Two ominous parental shadows lurking behind.*

John plays with the flint wheel on his LIGHTER;

FLICK... FLICK... FLICK...

And climbs to his feet;
To kick the Family Photo under the dresser,
Along with the rest of the fallen crap.

John turns to the party-for-one remnants on the DINING TABLE;
WINE BOTTLES, COKE STRANDS on a mirror, full ASHTRAYS, three
empty bottles of MOUTHWASH.

He checks the wines - *finds one with enough.*
And licks the mirror clean of coke,
Before taking the bottle to bed.

BEDROOM:

In the back, only the TV light penetrates.
The shadows revealing walls plastered with FDNY memorabilia.
PHOTOS, POSTERS, FLAGS, REPORTS etc.
A firefighting mausoleum.

John undresses; old BURN SCARS on his back,
With fresh red sores striped across them.
John seems proud of the wincing pain they cause.
But, his head hurts. The wine helps.

He sits on the edge of the bed.
Knowing he shouldn't sleep.
Exhausted, he fights fading.

The SHRILL OF TINNITUS in John's ears;
-- burning screams. The low buzz of hell approaching --

He grabs the remote, drowning it out with TV.
Locked on the small square of FOX in the LOUNGE.
Focusing his misery.

Fighting sleep.
Fighting to keep his eyes open.
Scared of what's coming if he doesn't.
He turns FOX up.
The tinnitus creeps up.
John stares down the TV square--

--PHONE RINGS!

John answers the 90's LANDLINE on the floor.

JOHN (CONT'D)
(to the phone)
Jimmy, where the--
(hearing foreign breaths)
Ji--...Jimmy?

John turns down the TV.
The next breath he hears, he knows - *WTF?!*

TELEPHONE VOICE (O.C.)
(soft, warm FEMALE VOICE)
D'ya still wanna kill me?

John's frozen by the confirmation - *GENUINE SHOCK!*
He's waiting for it to be a lie.

JOHN
No...No, Kell...I-- I, miss ya.

KELLY (O.C.)
Yeah?

JOHN
Yeah.

KITCHEN:

John stumbles to the counter. In disbelief.

KELLY (O.C.)
I wasn't sure I should call.

JOHN
Better ya left it twenty years
then.

They both laugh. Just.

KELLY (O.C.)
I heard 'bout the charges.

JOHN
Who told ya?

KELLY (O.C.)
I, I just heard ya might have to go
away for a bit. I was worried.

JOHN
I didn't do nothin', Kell. I
didn't. But, I might.

John senses her suspicions;

KELLY (O.C.)
Hmmm...John?...I'm sorry 'bout us.

JOHN
...I wish ya'd told me that. Then.

KELLY (O.C.)
I tried.

JOHN
Ya didn't, or I--
(Kelly's HUFFS disbelief)
Or I'd have done things different.

KELLY (O.C.)
 Yeah? Bar, Jimmy, bar, Jimmy, bar,
 Jimmy. Anything change?

JOHN
 I can be the man I could've been.

Awkward silence. Shared.
 John tests their old magic;

JOHN (CONT'D)
 (soft singing)
'After all that we've been through'

Kelly sniggers;
 - *Their song: CHICAGO: 'HARD TO SAY I'M SORRY / GET AWAY'* -
 She sings along with John;

JOHN & KELLY (O.C.)
 (both singing)
*'I will make it up to ya...I
 promise to'.*
 (Kelly stops; John can't)
'You're gonna be the lucky one!'

Kelly's trying to hold it together.

KELLY (O.C.)
 No change.
 (John wilts)
 We still can't sing.

JOHN
 We can.

LOUNGE:

John shuffles forward, in contemplation.

KELLY (O.C.)
 If only you could've loved you.

JOHN
 But, that's why I got youse.

Sad silence. Shared.

KELLY (O.C.)
 Well, ya don't, do ya?...*'Less ya
 come find me?*

JOHN
 Where are ya?

KELLY (O.C.)
Ya know where.

JOHN
Yeah, but where in--
(the line goes dead)
Kell?...Kelly?

John falls to his knees, in disbelief,
Into that thin strip of morning light.
Lit by hope. A second chance.

His eyes flash him;
-- a smiling, young, **RED-HAIRED WOMAN**, up close --

He drops the phone,
As the dream of her flowers his imagination.

John gets up, to open one of the curtains,
The light so bright it almost burns him.
He looks outside, his mind racing.

He sits down on the couch.
And pulls the COUCH THROW over his naked, burnt body.
Running the dream, lulling his eyes to rest.
But, the tinniest buzz of tinnitus bursts his eyes open.

He reaches for the GLASS JAR on the coffee table;
Full of BLUE and DARK BLUE CAPSULES.
Medications. 'Sleep tickets'.
He pops two, with some STALE WATER.
And lies back on the couch.
Closing his eyes. Focusing on Kelly.
The tinnitus buzzes his eyes back open.

He sees his window;
-- is that a **PLUME OF SMOKE** in the sky? --

--John BOLTS UPRIGHT on the couch!

Fighting to ignore what he just saw.
Fighting for his dream.
Forcing his eyes open to see it.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. JOHN'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN / LOUNGE - EVENING

John. Passed out. Drooling.
Sat-up on the couch.

A HAND moves towards John's sweaty face,
To gently wipe the drool away with a TISSUE.