

MEMORIES OF GREEN

Screenplay by Ho Lin

1. INT. ROOM, DAY

FADE IN on a bare, nondescript room, paint peeling off the bare ceiling and walls. MOVE ACROSS the empty floor, which is composed of warped wood, violent scratches crisscrossing the surface.

PAN to the only notable feature of the room, an open window. A pool of dim gray light from outside floods in. Before the window hang light, almost transparent green curtains. Fresh breezes are blowing in from outside and the curtains billow, expanding and contracting as if they are breathing, stretching out tendrils.

As we draw closer to the window and the curtains, the SOUNDTRACK fades in: a collage of muffled voices and sounds. It seems a heated discussion is taking place. Slowly, the volume rises. Mixed in with the voices are the sounds of what might be a scuffle, but like the voices, they are still too indistinct to make out clearly. Unperturbed, the curtains continue to billow, unsettling in their free and easy motion.

FADE TO:

TITLE CARD: MEMORIES OF GREEN

CAST

CREW

As the titles play out, the indistinct voices and sounds fade away.

CUT TO:

2. INT. BAR, NIGHT

A blast of electronica takes over the soundtrack, as a glass is slammed down on a table. There is a tiny bit of liquor left at the bottom, buried underneath rattling ice cubes.

WALDEN, the man who has slammed down his drink, lets out a satisfied sigh. He is a pleasant thirtysomething man, comfortably average and comfortably drunk. We see the rest of the bar behind him, sparsely decorated but cozy, bathed in warm lighting reminiscent of fireglow. Patrons mill about in groups, chatty but not overwhelming. An OVERCOAT and SCARF hang on the chair behind WALDEN, and he is dressed in a winter sweater. On

the table is a bowl of steaming hot noodles, and WALDEN attacks it with vigor.

WALDEN

(slurping)

You been to Suskino? Noodles there -- ten times as good as these ...

WALDEN looks across the booth at the man he is conversing with. We see only the man's glass sitting on the table, half full, the man's finger circling around the edge of it.

WALDEN (CONT'D)

How long you in town?

THE MAN

Just a few days. For the ice festival.

WALDEN

They still have it?

(beat)

Well amen, brother.

Another glass has arrived at the table, and WALDEN raises it. The two men clink a toast.

WALDEN (CONT'D)

Why live someone else's memory when you can live it yourself? That's what I say.

WALDEN holds his hand out.

WALDEN (CONT'D)

My name's Walden.

The MAN takes WALDEN's hand.

THE MAN

Like Thoreau.

WALDEN

Thoreau? Oh sure. Yeah.

THE MAN

Thoreau. Wrote *Walden*. Independent traveler, thinker.

WALDEN

Oh. Never heard of him. But I do travel. I was in East Asia a few months ago. Suskino, Harbor Town? Go inland a few hundred kilometers, and you'll find a tribe in the jungle. They've lived there for thousands of years, stick to the old traditions. While I was visiting they had a mourning festival.

THE MAN

Morning?

WALDEN

Mourning. Like when someone dies. For three days after the burial they drink, sing, dance, tell stories about the person who passed. Celebrating his memory. And when the three days are up, they go back to their normal lives, and the dead person is never spoken of again. They start from scratch.

(beat)

That's the way to go. One last party, no regrets, and you move on, cycle begins again.

WALDEN raises his glass for another toast. This time THE MAN doesn't raise his.

THE MAN

You haven't been to Suskino.

WALDEN

Huh?

THE MAN

Look at your passport.

WALDEN

My pass ...? Huh, okay, fine.

Genial, playing along, WALDEN takes his passport out and starts flipping through it.

WALDEN (CONT'D)

That's the way it works, huh ... buy a guy a few drinks, and he doesn't even believe you when ...

The smile leaves WALDEN's face as he flips through his passport at an accelerated rate. It is empty, no signs of visas or customs entry stamps -- just blank, pristine pages.

THE MAN  
(matter-of-fact)  
You have an appointment scheduled for the  
A.M. Come with me.

WALDEN looks at the man, an inkling of understanding in his widened eyes.

THE MAN (CONT'D)  
(almost gentle)  
Let's go.

WALDEN stares at THE MAN for a few moments, still dumbstruck. Slowly, he rises from his chair.

WALDEN  
I gotta -- I gotta take a piss.

WALDEN totters off towards the back of the bar. We finally see the face of THE MAN as WALDEN leaves. He is also in his thirties, but his face is an implacable mask and his manner is different -- calm, methodical, alert. THE MAN watches WALDEN disappear into the back. He looks at his watch, calculating times and distances. He then looks over at the chair where WALDEN was sitting. His coat is still there, but his scarf is gone.

THE MAN  
Shit.

CUT TO:

3. EXT. OUTSIDE BAR, NIGHT

THE MAN bursts through the back door of the bar, which leads out into an alley. It is a winter night of deep blues and blacks, snow on the ground and caking the trash cans and other random bits of debris that litter the street. Fresh flurries scatter in the air like dust. In the distance, festive holiday music plays. WALDEN is running away down the alley, his scarf crazily bobbing behind him. THE MAN gives chase.

WALDEN slips and falls hard to the pavement. He scrambles to his feet, his legs kicking almost comically. His scarf has fallen to the ground like spilled blood.

THE MAN is gaining ground quickly. In his hand he holds a weapon, and he aims it at the fleeing WALDEN.

WALDEN cuts abruptly around the corner and to the left, nearly losing his balance on the slick ground as he turns, and then he is out of sight.

THE MAN curses under his breath and launches himself into a slide. His momentum and the slippery ground carry him on his back, as if he is sledding, past the corner of the alley.

As THE MAN slides out WALDEN comes back into his view. He is running down the street, about twenty feet ahead.

THE MAN fires his weapon. Ahead, WALDEN tumbles head-first to the pavement, cables wrapped tightly around his legs, cutting off all movement.

THE MAN gets to his feet and approaches the prone WALDEN, who is groaning in pain.

WALDEN

I didn't do anything ... I swear I didn't

...

THE MAN gets down on a knee and lays a firm hand on WALDEN's shoulder. He has WALDEN's scarf in his hand, and he wraps it around WALDEN's neck.

THE MAN

I know.

CUT TO:

TITLE ON BLACK: TUESDAY

CUT TO:

#### 4. INT., INTERROGATION CHAMBER / VIEWING ROOM

The INTERROGATION CHAMBER is an antiseptic windowless room with a steel table, two chairs, and a screen mounted on the wall. The more comfortable wood-paneled VIEWING ROOM has a two-way mirror that faces the interrogation chamber. The viewing room contains a spacious conference table, a few unattended desks and computer monitors, and a row of chairs in front of the two-way mirror.

As the scene begins, the INTERROGATION CHAMBER is lit with dirty fluorescent light, unoccupied, while the VIEWING ROOM is cloaked in darkness. Slowly, the lights fade up in the VIEWING ROOM. THE MAN enters the frame, looking a bit tired but otherwise relaxed. He sits in one of the chairs facing the INTERROGATION CHAMBER.

The DOOR to the INTERROGATION CHAMBER clangs open and a SECURITY GUARD escorts WALDEN into the room. WALDEN is bleary-eyed from lack of sleep, and walks with a stoop, as if he has aged a few years within the past few hours.

The GUARD points at a chair for WALDEN to sit, and he does so. The GUARD then departs. As he leaves, BENNETT, a burly, neatly dressed man, passes him in the doorway and enters the room. The door slams shut ominously.

WALDEN, ill at ease, looks at BENNETT.

BENNETT pulls the other chair up to the table and sits down across from him. He is carrying some files and lays them out efficiently.

BENNETT

(looking up at WALDEN, just for a moment)

My name's Bennett.

(looking down at paperwork again)

You say you were in Suskino for about a week last summer. What did you enjoy about it?

WALDEN

(slowly relaxing a bit as he speaks)

The food, the tropical fruits. Never had mango so fresh. Completely spoiled me. And the mosquitoes ... I never thought I'd miss mosquitoes, but I do. Just reminds you of older days. The time flew by out there.

BENNETT

(still looking at paperwork)

What did you have for lunch fifty-three days ago?

WALDEN

(eyes furrowed, flustered)

Um ...

BENNETT

I'll save time. Fifty-three days ago you were in Riverside on a routine inspection. Industrial repairs.

(looking up at WALDEN)

Your job, correct?

WALDEN

Yes...

BENNETT

Yes. That day you ate at the Dim Sum House. You remember what you had?

WALDEN

(desultory, defeated)

Usually... usually I have lotus leaf rice ...

BENNETT

You don't remember?

Agitated, WALDEN half-rises from his seat.

WALDEN

Who can be expected to remember that?

With a quick gesture, BENNETT signals for him to sit and calm down.

BENNETT

That's well put. No one would expect to remember. Which is my point. Certain memories are residual. You can bypass the hippocampus, store information outside the declarative memory centers. But free-floating sensations are sometimes strong enough to imprint themselves. Like the mango and the mosquitoes.

WALDEN sags back to his seat.

WALDEN

I went to Suskino. I would know if the memories were someone else's.

BENNETT

Would you, though? Identifying factors can be subtracted. Anything that confirms who the person having the memory is. Then you're left with nothing but emotions, random experiences. And once a memory is absorbed by a host, it's altered, fundamentally. You twist it to fit who you are, your history, your personality. The human brain is a remarkably adaptable organism. Let me show you something.

BENNETT has a control in his hand. He presses a button, and the lights in the INTERROGATION CHAMBER dim. The screen on the wall lights up. Scenes are playing out in flashes, from a first-person perspective: the inside of a hotel room, a glass of beer as it is raised to the lips, streets at night as seen from a moving bus, the sight of the clouds outside a jet window, an isolated sunlit beach.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Memories of your Suskino trip. Hotel room, the places you visited. Notice anything missing?

WALDEN stares at the screen, mute.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

We never see your face. Never a single mirror shot. No memory of using a passport or ID. No credit or debit card.

WALDEN

Stuff not worth remembering.

On the screen, the scene has shifted back to the HOTEL ROOM. The person is watching television, and in a burst of boredom, switches off the screen. The image is frozen.

BENNETT

Take a good look.

There is a reflection in the deactivated television screen, very faint, barely visible: it is the person who has been watching TV. The reflection is enlarged, cleaned up with a variety of calibrations until it is clear enough to decipher: a distinctly Asian face.

WALDEN looks at the image in horror.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

You know this man?

WALDEN

Fong.

BENNETT

You met him on one of your inspection trips. Had a few drinks with him. Two months ago. Passed out in his apartment. Which is when we suspect --

WALDEN

Yes ...

BENNETT

Our case concerns Mr. Fong.

BENNETT digs out an electronic tablet from the pile of paperwork and pushes it at WALDEN.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

This is a waiver, giving us permission for further probing. The process is safe, and you are fully protected in case of accidents.

WALDEN

(gallows smile)

If something went wrong, would I remember to sue you?

BENNETT

You can give yourself permission beforehand. It'll be all right, Mr. Walden. Thumbprint that and you'll be home by the end of the day.

WALDEN looks at the sheet in front of him, then looks at BENNETT, who is professional, unreadable.

Resigned, WALDEN presses his thumb to the tablet. We hear an affirmative beep.

BENNETT stands to leave.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

You'll be escorted out in a minute. Thanks for your cooperation.

WALDEN

Wait. Can you ... take it out? What's not mine?

BENNETT

(after a pause)

Sorry. Everyone's mind is unique. Extraction would cause more damage.

WALDEN

Then ... what's going to happen to me?

BENNETT

Nothing. Good-bye, Mr. Walden.

BENNETT exits the room. WALDEN watches him leave, then buries his head in his hands.

THE MAN watches from behind the two-way mirror, bemused.

The DOOR to the VIEWING ROOM opens and BENNETT enters, along with PRENTISS, a gaunt man dressed in a trim suit. BENNETT grabs a seat alongside THE MAN while PRENTISS stands at a remove from the two of them, his gaze focused on WALDEN through the two-way mirror.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

(to THE MAN)

What do you think?

THE MAN

Classic free agent.

BENNETT

Yep. Anyone who's never experienced a memory implant before lacks the cognitive tools to interpret an illegal hack. Easy pickings for folks like Fong.

THE MAN

It does bring up the question ...

BENNETT

Yes?

THE MAN

When he was trying to escape, was it him or was it Fong?

BENNETT

The psychologists and philosophers can fight that one out.

THE MAN

You think you have enough?

BENNETT

Prentiss?

PRENTISS

(diffident)

There's a limit to how far we can dig. But we'll find it.

(indicating WALDEN, who is still slumped at the table in the INTERROGATION CHAMBER)

If those memories are irretrievable, Fong wouldn't have gone to the trouble of transferring them, then wiping his own mind.

THE MAN

I thought that was impossible.

BENNETT

Not impossible. Just not advisable.

(beat)

Shoddy job, he burned out a few circuits. Now he can't go twenty seconds without drooling.

In the INTERROGATION CHAMBER, the SECURITY GUARD has returned and WALDEN is being led off. As he walks away his head turns towards the two-way mirror, as if he can see beyond it, and his eyes lock with THE MAN's for a moment.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Poor guy. Some hella bad nightmares in his future.

With an almost inaudible sigh, THE MAN stands to leave.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Thanks for the help, as always. I'll call if another extradition request comes in?

THE MAN

Sure.

BENNETT

Hey, say hi to Friday if you see her. Tell her the Department misses her.

THE MAN

(tonelessly)

She's in no condition to be missed.

He walks out of the room, leaving BENNETT and PRENTISS behind to stare at the screen in the INTERROGATION CHAMBER. Shards of WALDEN's memories are still playing out on the screen, and we have arrived at the moment at which he is meeting with THE MAN in the bar. We see THE MAN's face fill the frame.

CUT TO:

5. EXT. THE STREETS OF THE CAPITAL, LATE AFTERNOON

THE MAN is riding a conveyance home. The sun is fast setting, and it burns deep orange through the smog, casting everything in an impressionistic glow. The boulevards are wide and soaring, yet jammed with cars and transports of every description. Above the streets, skyscrapers and office buildings are spread out as far as the eye can see, but the city has been planned out so there are yawning spaces between the buildings. In their isolation, they seem distant, lonely.

Faint on the soundtrack is a local radio transmission, the voice fuzzy yet soothing.

RADIO

UV forecast for tomorrow, index of 9. West Bay reports chemical fire in sections 4 and 5, all commuters are advised to change routes accordingly. Tide watch in effect for full moon in East Asia, expected height plus of fifteen meters, with scattered monsoons in Matsu and Green Island. Forecast for Outer Rim is for three times normal precip through end of the week. That's why we call it the Outer Rim, eh?

THE MAN observes the sprawl through his window, lost in thought.

CUT TO:

6. INT. LOBBY OF THE MAN'S APARTMENT BUILDING, LATE AFTERNOON

THE MAN enters through the threshold of his apartment building. He pauses for a moment as built-in fans in the floor power to life. He holds his arms akimbo, spinning slowly in place, his eyes closed as the wind from the fans blows away all the accumulated dust on his body.

CUT TO:

7. INT. THE MAN'S APARTMENT, LATE AFTERNOON

THE MAN's apartment is a loft-like space, with angled walls and ceilings and little standard furniture apart from a bed, some chairs, a kitchen alcove, a desk. The high glass windows look out onto an urban panorama of skyscrapers and towers. Video monitors are scattered throughout the room, ranging in size from a few inches to a wide-screen monitor in the center of the room. All the monitors are playing different scenes, different environments, all from a first-person perspective: walking down wooded trails, engaging in conversation with friends, even getting close to a lover's face. The sound has been turned on low for all the monitors, reduced to background hum.

THE MAN sits on a couch, nursing a drink. In front of him on the table is a nondescript monitor. Onscreen is a woman scrutinizing herself in a mirror. In a playful mood, she is pursing her lips, making funny faces. This is FRIDAY. In the reflection of the mirror we see a cozy apartment living room, miles away in appearance and feel from THE MAN's. The entire scene is bathed in a pleasant, veil-like ambience, as if it is being viewed through a light fog.

THE MAN takes a long, painful sip of his drink, and pushes a few buttons on the monitor to increase the sound. Now we can hear FRIDAY as she speaks.

During the following sequence on the monitor, THE MAN slowly stands and walks to the windows overlooking the city, observing his own dim reflection in the window as he finishes the last of his drink. He stares intently at the reflection, lost in thought.

FRIDAY  
Hurry up, willya?

THE MAN  
(off-camera)

One sec. Bennett on the horn.

FRIDAY

Is he my boss or yours? Jesus ...

FRIDAY holds up a container that is shaped like a time-release cold capsule, as big as a rock in her hand.

FRIDAY (CONT'D)

Want some?

THE MAN appears in the mirror's reflection, standing behind FRIDAY.

THE MAN

No thanks. I like staying clear.

FRIDAY

Unlike the rest of us.

THE MAN moves in, his head hovering over her shoulder, the both of them looking into the mirror.

THE MAN

You look good.

FRIDAY

Who does?

THE MAN says something else, but at that moment the screen fuzzes up for a moment, the words unintelligible, a hiccup of faulty memory, something lost. They both smile.

CUT TO:

8. INT. THE MAN'S APARTMENT, LATER THAT EVENING

The chime of a communications receiver builds in volume and intensity. THE MAN is asleep on a couch, his empty drink glass cradled to his stomach, the apartment lights dimmed low. As the sound of the receiver grows louder, he stirs, opens his eyes groggily.

THE MAN

Wha ...

An INTRUDER's face looms over THE MAN's. It is ASOKA, an older man with graying hair and an unshaven face, dark bags under his eyes. He may have been a military man once, or something more

sinister, but now he's roly-poly, a bit past his prime. He does not move, does not speak, and yet there is something unsteady about his manner.

THE MAN (CONT'D)

(shocked awake)

Jesus!

ASOKA, still mute, merely looks at THE MAN, making sure he has his attention. A portable monitor is in his hands, hovering a foot away from THE MAN's face. The monitor clicks to life in full color to reveal a man who seems to be about THE MAN's age, but with thinning hair, sallow cheeks, an overall air of fragility. A device that resembles a bluetooth receiver sprouts from his right ear.

SANDERSON

How's the boy?

THE MAN

Sanderson... What the hell?

SANDERSON

Sorry, sorry. Couldn't go public on the line. I woke you?

THE MAN

(to ASOKA)

How the hell did you get in here?

ASOKA continues to stare at THE MAN, impassive.

SANDERSON

Please pardon Asoka. Old habits die hard. He probably saw your entry system as a challenge.

THE MAN

Not much of one, apparently. What's up?

SANDERSON

A favor to ask.

THE MAN

That's rare, coming from you.

SANDERSON

Can you drop by? Asoka will drive you over.

THE MAN

Now?

SANDERSON

It's delicate. See you soon?

The monitor winks off, and ASOKA tucks it in under his arm. THE MAN juts his jaw in puzzlement and curiosity.

THE MAN

(to ASOKA)

Want a drink?

ASOKA takes a step to the side, allowing THE MAN room to climb to his feet. He remains silent.

THE MAN (CONT'D)

No, course not. Deaf-mute in a previous life?

The faintest hint of a smile crosses ASOKA's face, and he holds his hand out to the side, gesturing for THE MAN to get a move on.

CUT TO:

9. EXT. SANDERSON'S HOME, NIGHT.

A light rain is falling, the wind whipping up a frenzy as ASOKA's transport pulls up in front of SANDERSON's home. The neighborhood is quiet, empty, solitary streetlamps describing sharp arcs on the sidewalk. It is a far cry from THE MAN's bustling urban environment back home. SANDERSON's two-story house is a throwback to an earlier era, with Victorian construction, an angled roof, bay windows, a long flight of steps up from the street, and a tastefully worn-down feeling. A single light burns from the second-story window.

ASOKA opens the door for THE MAN and escorts him to the front door of the house.

CUT TO:

10. INT. SANDERSON'S HOME, NIGHT.

The interior of SANDERSON's home is in stark opposition to the exterior -- cool, spartan, spacious, furnished with antique statues and furniture. The effect is like being in a museum. The walls seem to tower above the two men, and high lamps in

the ceiling cast dusky light. The two men walk across wood flooring, their feet eliciting satisfying sharp taps with each step as they climb the stairs.

CUT TO:

11. INT. SANDERSON'S STUDY, NIGHT.

The door to SANDERSON's study yawns open. SANDERSON sits in a wheelchair facing away from the door, towards a massive bookshelf that takes up the entire far wall. The shelf is packed with books and videos of every description. At one corner of the room a small desk has been set up, a single monitor perched atop it. This is the communication receiver SANDERSON used to call THE MAN.

SANDERSON is absorbed in reading something.

SANDERSON

(reading aloud)

"I would fain write to you now by broad daylight, and report to you some of my life, such as it is, and recall you to your life, which is not always lived by you, even in daylight ..."

THE MAN walks towards SANDERSON slowly as SANDERSON continues to read.

SANDERSON (CONT'D)

"Are you awake? Are you aware what an ever-glorious morning this is? What long expected never to be repeated opportunity is now offered to get life and knowledge?"

THE MAN

I'll take a little knowledge.

SANDERSON shuts the book closed theatrically and wheels around in place to face THE MAN. There is a spark in his eyes, but sadness seems to be hanging over him.

SANDERSON opens a cigarette case and offers one.

THE MAN (CONT'D)

No thanks.

SANDERSON

They're good for you.

THE MAN

That's why I don't smoke them.

SANDERSON shrugs and lights his own cigarette. He exhales generous plumes that rise up among the books on the shelf, lined toward the ceiling.

THE MAN (CONT'D)

Still in antiques, I see.

SANDERSON

There are those who want the real things, to touch them, smell them, see them with their own eyes. You might call them fetishists.

THE MAN

How are the legs?

SANDERSON

Bad as ever. What a world, huh? It's illegal to crack open my spine and fix it, but it's legal to stick fiberoptics and wireless data processors into my brain...

SANDERSON taps at the bluetooth-type device attached to his right ear.

SANDERSON (CONT'D)

Voices in my head, all day long. Data buzz-buzz-buzzing in my ear, like bees.

ASOKA has pulled up a chair, and THE MAN sits in it.

SANDERSON (CONT'D)

And you're still bounty hunting -- I mean, investigating. Sorry. Takes a steady, objective mind to do that. Free from all encumbrances. Still a free agent? Never an implant? Never a download?

THE MAN

Nope.

SANDERSON

The few and the proud. One moment.

SANDERSON reaches up to the device by his ear and pushes a button. There is a faint little whine as the device shuts down.

SANDERSON closes his eyes for a moment, reorienting himself as the data stream inside his head fades away. Then he opens his eyes again.

SANDERSON (CONT'D)

We're private now. Lira is missing.

THE MAN

Lira?

SANDERSON

You haven't met her. She's wonderful, just wonderful. Puts up with a lot from a cripple like me. For the money, you're thinking, sure, sure, she knows I'm rich, but there are plenty of rich ambulatory men in this world. She indulges me, and I indulge her. That's where the current problem lies.

THE MAN gazes at SANDERSON, patient, awaiting the explanation. SANDERSON chuckles softly at the dramatic pause, and continues.

SANDERSON (CONT'D)

Lira's an implant junkie. Climb to the top of K2. Sail the oceans blue -- when they used to be blue. Ride horseback through the Gobi Desert. Visit the polar ice caps. So every week she pays her little visit to the memory archivist at the Bellbottom. Gets a fresh shot of someone's fabulous experience. Just enough for a little pick-me-up, maybe a few minutes from someone's life. One week it's like adrenaline, another it's sad and beautiful, another it's the warmest kind of happiness. You know how it goes.

THE MAN

I know.

SANDERSON

This is her way of doing things she can't do with me. That's fine, when she's with me we have a good time, she's good in bed. That's what matters.

THE MAN

But something happened.

SANDERSON

(sighing)

The wrong crowd. Joylining. Unsanctioned experiences. Getting high without needing to shoot up. Unprotected sex with a video idol. Soldier in the jungle, tracers in the night, bodies blown apart left and right. Extreme stuff. Pulse accelerators. Bootlegs.

SANDERSON pauses again to light a fresh cigarette. He is growing more solemn.

SANDERSON (CONT'D)

Three nights ago she called me, from somewhere in the Old Town. She was incoherent -- not herself.

SANDERSON switches on the monitor. The video signal is snowy, taken in a darkened environment. LIRA's right eye is close up to the camera, blurry and dilated. Music thuds loudly in the background, severe drum-and-bass that escapes the monitor's tiny speakers in thumping bursts of feedback. In the lower right corner is a time stamp: 3:00:00 a.m.

LIRA

(half-shouting, half-mumbling)

Hello? Hello? Who are -- who is this? Why do I have --

(muttering something incoherent)

Joyliner. Mercutio. I should be somewhere else. Forest. In the gray forest. I grew up in the Far East. In someone else's bed. Cold days, the sun at an angle. Playground bars, all rusted, my hands carrying rust home with them.

SANDERSON

(interjecting)

She was born here. Never been to the Far East.

LIRA

No, wait. It was once called Scandanavia.  
Days as black as nights. That's where the  
silk trail picks up.

LIRA starts talking in an unknown foreign language, a fast  
stream of gibberish that sounds like a possession. Then she  
pauses, her eye blinking rapidly at the camera.

LIRA (CONT'D)

Help me. Help me.

The transmission ends.

SANDERSON

She hasn't been heard from or seen since.  
Your take?

THE MAN

Identity breakdown. Happens with faulty  
implants. Joyliner gets sloppy, accesses  
the wrong memory center, sets off  
fireworks. You notify the police?

SANDERSON

(scoffing)

What's the penalty for illegal implants?  
Twenty years, at least? They find her,  
they'll know immediately. No.

THE MAN

This message all we have to go on?

SANDERSON

Any of it make sense to you? Mercutio?  
Scandanavia? My own data search, zero  
leads.

THE MAN

(doubtfully)

Doesn't sound familiar.

SANDERSON

But you know where to look.

SANDERSON hunches forward in his wheelchair, more urgent.

SANDERSON (CONT'D)

I don't have long, you know. This  
degeneration will continue until my lungs

seize up and my brain loses oxygen, and then it's death, or hooked up to respirators the rest of my life. I'm not looking forward to either. But Lira ... she has a long life ahead. I want that for her. I have to get her back. You understand?

THE MAN

Bypassing official channels could compromise me.

SANDERSON

Reward will be commensurate with the risk. Whatever you want. Can you help me?

THE MAN

(after a pause)

I'll be in touch.

SANDERSON

Thank you.

He grips THE MAN's hand in a warm shake.

THE MAN

One question. If I find her, and she's ...

SANDERSON

(deep breath)

Just bring her back. Please.

The two men stare somberly at each other.

CUT TO:

TITLE ON BLACK: WEDNESDAY

CUT TO:

12. INT. UNDERGROUND CAVERNS, DAWN.

THE MAN makes his way through a seemingly endless corridor crammed with shops, vendors laying their wares out on the floor for all to see, people swarming in every direction like bees seeking to flee a hive. Most have receivers plugged in their ears, mouthing silent conversations as they converse with others over the stream. People do not so much pass each other as they take specific paths that others must avoid. Signs and video screens are garishly lit with advertisements and news.

Against this electronic flow, THE MAN seems simple, almost priest-like, dressed in an overcoat and lacking any external devices.

Along the side of the corridor, LEE, a slim Asian man dressed in a jaunty cap and sunglasses, waits, making a great show of doing nothing. THE MAN walks by and without a word, LEE follows him.

CUT TO:

13. ALLEY IN THE CAPITAL, DAY.

The two men are standing in an alley, the gilded flanks of buildings towering above them. The asphalt beneath their feet is chewed up, small puddles left over from the storm the night before. It is an oppressive day, the distant sky above a single shade of gray.

LEE is smoking a cigarette. He offers a fresh one to THE MAN.

THE MAN

Don't smoke.

LEE

It's not a cig, it's a chem compound.  
Enhances memory enjoyment.

THE MAN

Don't need it.

LEE

Friday buys them all the time. That's what  
you're here for, right? Doing her  
shopping?

THE MAN

No.

LEE casts a nervous glance around them.

LEE

Then what?

THE MAN

Mercutio.

LEE

Oh man ... Mercutio?

THE MAN

What is it?

LEE

Not what, who. Joyrider. Works both sides of the river. He's open-minded that way.

THE MAN

Where can I find him?

LEE

(snorting)

The penal code states that any acknowledged contact with a joyrider results in a jail sentence of at least --

LEE pauses, sees that THE MAN won't take no for an answer.

LEE (CONT'D)

Double Happiness Cathedral.

THE MAN

*The Double Happiness?*

LEE

Yeah, as in talked about but nonexistent. District 14. The Warrick building. Eighth floor. He holes up there in daylight.

THE MAN

The word "Scandanavia" mean anything to you?

LEE shakes his head. He is getting impatient.

LEE

Are you gonna purchase anything? If not --

THE MAN

How often does Friday see you?

LEE

Three times a week, for the past two years. Train timetable.

THE MAN

And you sell her chem compounds.

LEE

Only the best for her. She's a nice woman.

THE MAN  
And you're a nice seller.

LEE  
I take my responsibilities seriously.

THE MAN grabs LEE by the collar and shoves him against a wall. LEE loses his balance and tumbles awkwardly to the ground, his body getting wet and slimy from the puddles.

THE MAN  
You're going to miss your next appointment with her. In fact, you're going to be downright negligent in your dealings with her from now on. Savvy?

LEE  
(sputtering, with bravado)  
Fine! Fine! All you had to do was ask!

LEE struggles to get up, but THE MAN shoves him down again.

THE MAN  
I'm a believer in memory imprinting.

THE MAN walks out of the alley, leaving LEE in a prone position. LEE curses under his breath and shakes his head.

LEE  
What's with you, man?

CUT TO:

14. EXT. OUTSIDE THE WARRICK BUILDING, DAY

The building is part of a faceless office block, every perfectly proportioned window the same size and dimensions as every other window, the clouds reflecting off them like fragments of a dream. THE MAN stands before it, looking up apprehensively at the structure, then walks in.

CUT TO:

15. INT. THE CATHEDRAL, MAIN HALLWAY

The main hallway of the CATHEDRAL is decorated with a single beige carpet. The walls are painted blank white. Several doors

are on each side of the hallway. THE MAN walks past each of them, noting the neat brass plates next to each door. He comes upon a plate that reads: TRANSCENDENTAL, LTD. He opens the door and walks through.

CUT TO:

16. INT. THE CATHEDRAL, RECEPTION AREA

The reception area is equipped with a desk, several abstract, vaguely corporate paintings, and a couch for waiting visitors. A chipper female RECEPTIONIST nods hello to him.

RECEPTIONIST  
Good morning to you!

THE MAN  
Mercutio recommended me.

RECEPTIONIST  
Mercutio! Of course. Midday meditation will be finished shortly. Have a seat, and I'll fetch the afternoon program and some forms for you. Don't worry, we don't ask for money or your soul.

(beat)  
That was a joke.

THE MAN  
Mm-hmm.

RECEPTIONIST  
I'll be right back.

The RECEPTIONIST bustles off. THE MAN leans forward to make sure she is out of sight, and then walks behind her desk. Her computer screen displays a layout for several rooms in the office. THE MAN's attention focuses on "Communal Room 8." A simple line diagram shows a circular room with a large wraparound screen on the walls. In the center of the room are eight chairs, arranged in a circle, facing outward. On each chair is a person's name. "Mercutio" is listed on chair 3.

THE MAN leaves the RECEPTION AREA. He finds himself in another hallway, doors labeled with brass plates as before. He hurries down the hallway, looking at the doors until he finds the correct one: COMMUNAL ROOM 8. He pushes through the doors.

CUT TO:

17. INT. COMMUNAL ROOM 8, THE CATHEDRAL

Communal room 8 is windowless and featureless save for the wraparound screen. On the screen is a scene of a sunlit lake surrounded by oak trees, the surface of the water completely still. A slow wind whistles through, and the leaves of the trees shudder with its passing. The sky is a perfect blue, and the only sounds besides the wind are of distant birds and buzzing cicadas.

In the center of the room are eight chairs facing outward. In each chair a person sits, dressed in casual clothes. Their eyes are closed, and all of them sit erect in perfect posture. Small electrodes are connected to their temples, and thick collars sprouting connecting wires are cuffed around their necks.

As one, the eight people stretch their arms upward, taking in the scene around them. As one, they let out a lazy, contented yawn.

On the screen, a YOUNG GIRL in a swimming suit is facing the group, giggling and enjoying her freedom in the sun.

THE GROUP  
(laughing as one)  
Careful! Don't go out too far!

The YOUNG GIRL sticks her tongue out at them, and with an energetic bound she throws herself into the lake, destroying the placid surface with a splash.

The GROUP shake their heads as one, enjoying the child's brazenness. Their faces wear identical smiles of pure contentment.

THE MAN scans the chairs until he lands on #3: MERCUTIO. MERCUTIO is a young man, dressed in casual clothes, unshaven. Right now he is laughing along with the others, an unguarded laugh.

THE MAN walks up to MERCUTIO, who is still in the midst of his laugh with the rest of the group. With two quick movements, THE MAN rips the electrodes off MERCUTIO's head and the collar away from his neck. MERCUTIO's laugh is cut off, and his eyes open to look at THE MAN unseeingly, disoriented, even as the others continue laughing in unison.

MERCUTIO

Wha--?

THE MAN

(harsh whisper)

Come on.

THE MAN pulls MERCUTIO out of his seat and drags him out of the room. Onscreen, the GIRL's head is bobbing above the water and she shoots a smile at the remaining worshippers.

CUT TO:

18. INT. BATHROOM, THE CATHEDRAL

THE MAN shoves MERCUTIO into the bathroom. It is a roomy, cleanly maintained space, with numerous sinks and large windows that give the impression that the room is more spacious than it is.

MERCUTIO stumbles into the wall, sinks down a bit until he sits atop a urinal. He still wears the beatific smile from back in the communal room.

MERCUTIO

You don't appreciate it, do you, brother?

THE MAN

Appreciate what?

MERCUTIO

The communion. Sharing the same experience with others in real time, knowing you're all feeling the same thing, responding to it, unified by it ... it's like finding God.

THE MAN

Is that what you did to Lira?

MERCUTIO

(not listening)

In this world you're alone ... locked in your head.

THE MAN plugs up a sink and starts filling it with water.

THE MAN

(slowly, insinuatingly)

"I talk of dreams; which are the children of an idle brain, begot of nothing but vain fantasy; which is as thin of substance as the air."

MERCUTIO

What?

THE MAN

Shakespeare. You should know.

THE MAN grabs hold of MERCUTIO's head and dunks it in the half-full sink. MERCUTIO struggles a bit, gargling. THE MAN pulls MERCUTIO's head out.

THE MAN (CONT'D)

Back on Planet Earth yet?

MERCUTIO

(gasping)

Everything else drives us apart, brother  
... Here we're brought together ...

THE MAN dunks him in the sink again for a few moments. MERCUTIO's arms flail and his body jerks in place.

THE MAN pulls him out again and MERCUTIO collapses on the floor, sputtering water. THE MAN drags him up to a sitting position and thrusts a handheld device before his eyes. On it is a photograph of LIRA.

THE MAN

Two choices. You tell me here and now, or we pay a visit to Dr. Prentiss. And after he's through, I'll have what I need, and you'll have the urge to puke for about two days, which is how long it takes for the side effects to wear off.

MERCUTIO

(his tone growing coarse as he  
fades back to normalcy)

Yeah I know her. That a crime?

THE MAN

Joylining is. When did you see her last?

MERCUTIO

Three nights ago. Wanted fresh stuff. I suggested a friend on the other side of the river.

THE MAN

His handle?

MERCUTIO

Babar. No address, he drifts around -- like the wind ...

THE MAN

How do I connect?

MERCUTIO

You don't. He's selective.

THE MAN

Then you connect. Tell him tonight, twenty-three hundred. In the catacombs. I'm your client.

MERCUTIO

I can't do that. My reputation --

THE MAN

"Scandanavia." "Silk Road." Mean anything to you?

MERCUTIO

Points on a map. Decades ago. Bet you they're worth something.

THE MAN

How?

MERCUTIO

Anything that's gone is worth something. If you get it in here --

MERCUTIO points theatrically to his head.

MERCUTIO (CONT'D)

That's the other way you get to God. You know everything that's ever been known, feel everything that's ever been felt. Lira knows. Like snowflakes, every single one is different.

(beat)

I've heard about you. Photographic memory?

THE MAN

Yes.

MERCUTIO

So you know -- personal perception, the details some of us see and others don't. Still, you and I have a conversation, we each remember it differently. But what if we combine all that? Omnipotence, brother.

A momentary cloud passes over THE MAN's face. We hear voices as he recalls an episode:

THE MAN

(voice over)

You look good.

FRIDAY

(voice over)

Who does?

CUT TO:

19. INT. FRIDAY'S APARTMENT, NIGHT

It is the same scene we saw earlier on the monitor at THE MAN's apartment, only this time we are watching through his eyes. FRIDAY sits in front of him, her back to him, facing the mirror which faces him. She looks at him in the mirror's reflection.

THE MAN

You do.

FRIDAY

I don't. It's the other one who looks good.

THE MAN

Who?

FRIDAY

The other one. The one who's not here right now.

THE MAN

You're here. You're always here.

FRIDAY

Not me. The other.

THE MAN

Stop that.

FRIDAY

Just the facts. Sometimes I'm here,  
sometimes she is, sometimes it's someone  
else. On and on.

THE MAN

Stop thinking like that. You're occupying  
this space. You're talking to me. You, you,  
you.

FRIDAY

This?

FRIDAY plucks at her own bare arms.

FRIDAY (CONT'D)

A sleeve. A shell. A circulatory system,  
a bundle of nerves. But the head? The soul?  
Multitudes. All of them singing in one  
place.

THE MAN

You should cut back on the compounds.

FRIDAY

(smiling)

I'm fine. I pontificate. Therefore I am.

THE MAN

Just remember that.

FRIDAY turns to face THE MAN, her smile somehow vacant.

FRIDAY

I'm not like you. I don't remember  
everything.

CUT TO:

20. INT. BATHROOM, THE CATHEDRAL

MERCUTIO is still sitting, composure regained, facing THE MAN.

MERCUTIO

I see you understand.

THE MAN  
Tonight. Twenty-three hundred.

MERCUTIO  
(chuckling)  
"Some consequence, yet hanging in the  
stars,  
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date  
With this night's revels."  
(beat)  
I do read my Shakespeare.

Without a word, THE MAN exits the BATHROOM. MERCUTIO laughs some more, holding his hand before his face, as if not quite believing it is there.

CUT TO:

21. INT. UNDERGROUND CAVERNS, LATE AFTERNOON.

The corridor is still bustling with humanity, and LEE winds his way through the crowds, carrying a satchel, in a hurry.

CUT TO:

22. INT. BAZAAR, UNDERGROUND CAVERNS, LATE AFTERNOON

This space is crowded with individual silk and clothes retailers that are set up in individual stores not much bigger than bedrooms, reams of curtain-like fabric flowing everywhere. LEE stands in a corner of one of the stores, waiting.

A high-school age KID with a close-shaven head, dressed in dark colors that only accentuate his aggressiveness, walks into the store, popping gum in his mouth. He sees LEE and approaches, the two men exchanging nods in greeting.

THE KID  
How about a sale?

LEE  
(scoffing)  
What do you have? Menage trois? Drug use?  
Grand theft? Have 'em all.

THE KID  
Burma-Chinese border. August 2012.

LEE

I don't buy second gen.

THE KID

This is good second gen. Assimilated in real time from the original source. Mercenaries hiding out in Myitkyina.

(slowly becoming rapt)

In the morning, when the mist rolls in, that's when you move. Plenty of jade merchants passing through, on the way to Kunming. Simple folks, no weapons, just traveling in large numbers, they're always thinking there's safety in numbers. The jade isn't even that valuable, we just want practice. Some wait in the trees. Sentry, like birds. They pick them off with rifles, like low-hanging fruit. I prefer to get up close. Shave my head, put on monk robes, approach with a little bow. Then grab with the left hand, palm across the mouth, thumb smashes down on the nose, because anyone who gets hit in the nose is disoriented just long enough ...

LEE

(uneasy, backing away a bit)

Okay, fine ...

THE KID

You play tennis? Eastern or western grip?

LEE

Huh?

THE KID

That's what it comes down to, when you use the knife.

THE KID holds up a knife before LEE's face and demonstrates.

THE KID (CONT'D)

Your grip determines your motion. I prefer western style myself. I like to get up behind a subject. Forget looking at his eyes, you know all you need to know by the feel of the body, the tension of it.

LEE  
(hoarse)  
What do you want?

With a sudden, professional movement, THE KID slides behind LEE and clasps his left hand over LEE's mouth and nose. His right hand holds the knife to LEE's throat.

THE KID  
Shhhh, quiet ...

With a jaunty little movement, THE KID flips the knife in his hand so the handle faces LEE's neck, and then slams it home. LEE slumps, dazed. Still propping him up, THE KID produces a small battered, black-market device the size of an mp3 player and holds it up against the back of LEE's head. The device has a screen and THE KID observes dispassionately as myriad images flicker across it in accelerated time. After a few seconds of this he deactivates the device and returns it to his pocket.

THE KID (CONT'D)  
Like I was saying ... you don't chop down,  
you draw the blade across. Like with sushi  
-- with the tendons rather than against  
them so the cells aren't bruised...

THE KID slashes once, with finality, across LEE's neck. With a rattling gurgle, LEE collapses, his flailing hands grabbing hold of loose fabrics and pulling them down on top of him. Without a pause the KID exits the store with a purposeful, military stride, the storekeepers he passes only beginning to realize something has happened.

As he walks, THE KID looks at the device in his hand. THE MAN's face fills the screen.

THE MAN  
Where can I find him?

LEE  
(v.o.)  
Double Happiness Cathedral.

LEE's body lies crumpled on the floor, silk fabrics twisting all about it like an artful shroud.

CUT TO:

22. EXT. THE RIVER, EVENING

A ferry lit like a holiday tree with blue neon from stem to stern winds its way across the river. Aboard the ship, on an outdoor deck, THE MAN gazes at the crowded skyline of the modern side of the city as it recedes behind him. The boat is approaching OLD TOWN on the other side of the river. Although it features a few skyscrapers that are as modern and blazing with light as anything on the other side, many of the buildings pulse with dirty fluorescent light, or are shrouded in near-darkness.

CUT TO:

23. EXT. THE CATACOMBS, NIGHT

As the name suggests, the catacombs are a dizzying collection of alleys and sidestreets, booths and carts and displays crammed together, the crowds thick like molasses. Dirty fluorescent lights illuminate fresh food stands, and steam from the stoves escapes into the air in clogged-up bursts. Overhead, signs jostle against each other in their attempt to gain passerbys' attention. The hum of the crowds is loud enough, but riding on top of it is sound from myriad sources, coming from stray windows or loudspeakers, some of it vendors hawking their wares in a constant torrent of salesmanship, or snatches of melodies or dance music from halls. The people who frequent the catacombs seem more downtrodden, poorer than the population on the other side of the river.

THE MAN makes his way through the crowds purposefully, patiently. He seems at home in this environment, but wary.

At a corner of one of the alleys, he sees BABAR, a stocky man with a beard and a cheerful manner, a Father Christmas-type. BABAR acknowledges the man's arrival with a nod.

CUT TO:

24. EXT. FOOD STAND, THE CATACOMBS, NIGHT

Surrounded by stove steam, THE MAN and BABAR are eating noodles.

BABAR

What have you got?

THE MAN

Photographic memory.

BABAR

Well, good. The clearer the source material, the more punch the iteration. But is the source material worth anything?

THE MAN  
Extradition work.

BABAR  
Pursuing, capturing criminals? You?

THE MAN nods. BABAR allows himself a single throaty laugh.

BABAR (CONT'D)  
Huh. Very rare. And valuable. And dangerous.

THE MAN  
And genuine.

BABAR considers for a moment.

BABAR  
I have a proposition for you.

CUT TO:

25. INT. THE PHANTOM CLUB, NIGHT

The PHANTOM CLUB resembles any other dance club one can find in the catacombs -- strobing lights, neon signage on the walls, young bodies writhing in time with the house music. Except that there is no music, only the shuffling of feet, the rustling of clothes, the barely audible breathing of the dancers.

BABAR and THE MAN make their way through the crowds, and BABAR pauses a moment to point out one of the dancers. THE MAN can see an earphone in her ear.

BABAR  
BPM is constant for everyone, but they import their own music. We just provide the space and the visual stimuli.

THE MAN  
At least you don't wake the neighbors.

BABAR  
It's all about freedom of choice.

BABAR leads THE MAN up a steel staircase to the second floor, which contains a darkened hallway leading to private rooms.

BABAR (CONT'D)

The dream factory. In there, please. It's fully shielded from surveillance.

BABAR points towards a door, and THE MAN enters the room, BABAR behind him.

CUT TO:

26. THE STUDIO, PHANTOM CLUB, NIGHT

The room is cramped and muffled, like a run-down version of the communal room in the Double Happiness Cathedral. Recording equipment is set up on a table, with a chair resembling a patient's chair in a dentist office for the subject to seat himself nearby. A single row of theater-style seats faces a screen on the wall, and currently random images are being projected there: bare branches trembling with the wind, window wipers on a car flashing back and forth in the rain, the sun breaking out over a mountainous horizon with the dawn.

BABAR offers THE MAN a seat and they both recline, watching the images on screen.

BABAR

So what do you think?

THE MAN

Impressive.

BABAR

(a mighty laugh)

Bullshit. Greeting cards. We have so much old-time crap like this that it's hardly worth the effort recording the actual memory.

THE MAN

And joylining?

BABAR

Same thing, as far as I'm concerned. Handpicked experiences, events? Like reading a book. You're still living someone else's delineated life. Jam your

head full of everyone else's experiences?  
No better than being a library. That's  
prose, I'm looking for poetry.

THE MAN

And what's the poetry?

BABAR

Memories are more than sensory details.  
How about the *feeling* of it, that  
particular chemical mixture sloshing in  
the original brain at the moment of  
remembrance? *That's* what I want. The  
problem is, with current *legal* technology,  
all we have are sensory details. Personal  
biases influence our emotional response.  
The machine with an imperfect ghost. How  
about the perfection of the original  
memory with the accompanying emotion, shot  
directly into you, with no dilution?  
*That's* a drug worth something.

THE MAN

There's no such thing.

BABAR

We're getting there. We inject chemicals  
as a supplement to the implant. Next-gen  
joylining. Reproduce the chemical  
reaction that took place in the original  
memory holder's brain, then recalibrate  
for each individual subject. Custom  
emotion.

THE MAN

Like the dancers downstairs?

BABAR

Test subjects. What's rhythm without the  
soul?

THE MAN

You said you're getting there...

BABAR

Think about it mystically, if you like.  
Maybe there's a primordial emotion out  
there, tied to a particular memory.

Something as old as humankind itself,  
passed down through generations, getting  
fainter and fainter, like a ripple across  
the ocean. But what if somewhere out there  
is the original emotion, preserved like an  
insect in amber, carried within someone?  
I'd imagine the feeling would be something  
like witnessing the birth of the world...

THE MAN

What does this have to do with me?

BABAR

Someone in your position has access to the  
best equipment, the best archivists. With  
your connections I can draw out that  
memory. It must be preserved. Kept safe.  
And rare. Only to the highest bidder, in  
a format which prevents duplication. It  
would be like holding a snowflake, forever  
...

THE MAN

So it's about profit after all.

BABAR

Discovery always has an economic  
component. Even Columbus had to negotiate  
with the Queen of Spain for his ships.

THE MAN

How do you know I'm trustworthy?

BABAR

Because she told me about you. During one  
of her few lucid periods, anyway.

THE MAN

(expression hardening)

Who?

BABAR

Lira. She's got the memory. Somehow she's  
inherited it. And when she came here three  
nights ago --

THE MAN stands and pulls BABAR to his feet.

THE MAN  
Where is she?

BABAR  
(more urgent)  
Listen. We must move quickly. She's in a fragile state, and if we're not careful --

THE MAN  
Is she here?

BABAR  
The joylining unlocked something. Readings off the grid. I just felt one-tenth of what she was feeling, and let me tell you ... it's the universe in a grain of sand ...

THE MAN  
(wearying of him)  
Dammit ...

Grabbing one of the recording consoles, THE MAN strikes BABAR full in the face.

CUT TO:

27. INT. THE PHANTOM CLUB, NIGHT

The door to the STUDIO slams open and THE MAN hurries down the hallway, opening every door to see what's inside.

CUT TO:

28. INT. ROOM 1, THE PHANTOM CLUB, NIGHT

The room has the same layout as the studio. A MIDDLE-AGED MAN sits in the row of seats, facing the screen. The familiar electrodes and collar are attached to his head and neck. Something that resembles a blood pressure test-strap is wrapped around his arm, the strap connected to a small module by a tube. Inside the module are several vials of chemicals that are slowly being emptied out through the tube into the man's arm.

The face of A YOUNG MAN is on the screen, and it quickly becomes apparent that the YOUNG MAN and the MIDDLE-AGED MAN are the same. The MIDDLE-AGED MAN is mouthing silent words at the screen, shaking his head a bit, tears running down his cheeks.

THE MAN sees this with a growing look of revulsion, and exits.

CUT TO:

29. INT. ROOM 2, THE PHANTOM CLUB, NIGHT

A young, fragile-looking WOMAN faces the screen, breathing hard, in regular, rhythmic bursts. She is hooked up to the drug module like the man in the previous room. On screen, we see the windshield of a car on a rainy night, the front headlights illuminating a lonely strip of highway, visibility down to near zero.

THE WOMAN continues to breathe hard, her arms rising from the armrest as if gripping the steering wheel.

On the screen, there is a sudden blast of lights from an oncoming truck. THE WOMAN pulls hard with her empty hands, but it is too late -- the car collides with the truck in a sickening crunch of metal and glass, the POV of the screen going askew and then completely black for a few moments. THE WOMAN jerks in her seat with the motion of the crash, then collapses.

Alarmed, THE MAN crouches down by her, taking her pulse.

The screen comes to life again to reveal a cracked windshield, the sound of the stuck car horn going off without pause, smoke rising from what is left of the engine. A large, bloodied hand comes into view. THE WOMAN raises her own hand in a mirror of the movement, and brings it to her head.

THE WOMAN

(almost giggling, near  
hysterical)

I'm alive ... I'm alive! I'm alive!

Tears roll down THE WOMAN's cheeks.

CUT TO:

30. INT. ROOM 3, THE PHANTOM CLUB, NIGHT

THE MAN throws the door open -- another studio, this one seemingly unoccupied. On screen is an ice flow in the dead of winter, the sky purple with the setting sun, the stiff winds as loud as a scream.

THE MAN turns to leave the room, then stops, turns back around. There is someone huddled on the floor, in front of the seats. Slowly, THE MAN approaches the figure.

It is LIRA, lying on her side, still collared up and connected to the drug module, bundled in a blanket, her hair stringy and unwashed, her knees to her chin, trembling as if freezing, unable to take her eyes off the screen.

THE MAN bends down to her and gently lifts her into a sitting position. He removes the electrodes and collar, then tears away the drug tube from her arm. With a convulsion, as if jolting awake from a nightmare, her eyes snap wide open.

THE MAN

It's okay. I'm here to help. Sanderson sent me. Sanderson.

LIRA claws at him for a moment, then grabs his arms, her fingers pressing in, then relaxing, then pressing in again, making sure he's real. Her eyes remain wide and unblinking.

LIRA

Help me. Help me.

THE MAN

Can you stand? We have to go. Can you hear me?

LIRA

Help ...

THE MAN

I'm here to help. I got you. Come on.

He helps her to her feet, letting her lean against him, and she moans in pain.

CUT TO:

31. THE STUDIO, PHANTOM CLUB, NIGHT

Coming back to consciousness, BABAR climbs onto his knees, his hand to his bloody mouth where THE MAN struck him. On the screen is a lightning storm in the middle of the countryside, the room lighting up with every burst of electricity.

BABAR is fully back on his feet, still woozy. A lightning flash ends, and the room goes dark for a few moments. Then a fresh

bolt zig-zags across the screen, lighting up the room once more, and we see BABAR, with ASOKA standing right behind him. BABAR is unaware that ASOKA is there.

ASOKA grabs BABAR with his left hand, the palm coming down hard on the man's mouth, the thumb clamping down on the nose. ASOKA has a knife in his hand and he looks at it incuriously for a moment as he adjusts his grip on the knife so it is western-style.

As BABAR begins to struggle, ASOKA slashes the man's neck. A particularly blinding lightning flash renders the room white with illumination, and then all goes black.

CUT TO:

32. INT. THE PHANTOM CLUB, NIGHT

THE MAN, with LIRA's arm around her shoulder, has made it into the hallway, and they are stumbling towards the steel staircase leading down to the dance floor.

THE MAN  
Come on. Almost there.

They are a few steps away from the top of the stairs when the door to the STUDIO opens and ASOKA emerges.

THE MAN stares at ASOKA.

THE MAN (CONT'D)  
(to ASOKA)  
Hey, how did --?

THE MAN's gaze travels down to the bloody knife at ASOKA's side. Impassive as ever, ASOKA stares at the man for a moment, then advances on them.

THE MAN (CONT'D)  
(to LIRA)  
Move it!

Almost dragging her, THE MAN makes it to the foot of the staircase. ASOKA is hurrying towards them, picking up his pace.

THE MAN (CONT'D)  
Get to the bottom! Go!

THE MAN pushes LIRA against the top of the staircase, and her body hits the railing, sliding down it until she comes to a stop halfway down, falling on her back, facing the ceiling and the crazy strobe lights. Below, the dancers continue dancing, oblivious to what is happening above them.

THE MAN whirls to face ASOKA, who is upon him with the knife. ASOKA slashes, THE MAN dodges, and the knife clangs against the railing. THE MAN grabs hold of ASOKA's knife arm and the two of them struggle for control of the weapon.

Painfully, LIRA gets to her feet and starts making her way down the stairs, fragile as a hospital patient.

THE MAN and ASOKA continue their battle. ASOKA frees a hand and strikes the MAN with a backhanded blow. Caught off balance, THE MAN trips against the top step of the stairs and stumbles forward, down the steps, doing all he can to stay upright as he stumbles towards the bottom.

LIRA has nearly made it to the bottom of the stairs when THE MAN falls upon her, the two of them ending up in a heap on the dance floor.

Above, ASOKA regains his bearings and starts hurrying down the stairs towards them.

Still prone, THE MAN twists around so he faces the stairs. He sees ASOKA approaching.

THE MAN draws his weapon and fires. The cables wrap themselves around ASOKA's legs, sending the large man off balance. He crashes forward awkwardly, tumbling down the stairs to the ground floor.

THE MAN pulls LIRA to her feet. None of the dancers have noticed anything amiss -- they continue grooving to their own rhythms, their eyes closed.

THE MAN (CONT'D)

Go, go!

Limping slightly, THE MAN pulls LIRA's arm around his shoulder again. The two of them stagger towards the club entrance.

ASOKA is back on his feet, limping much more badly than THE MAN. He pursues the couple, in a chase that seems to be occurring in almost comical slow motion.

THE MAN and LIRA make it to the entrance, and exit to the street.

A few seconds later, ASOKA reaches the entrance and exits. He looks around him -- crowds as far as the eye can see in the catacombs, a confusing whirl of noise and movement, all traces of THE MAN and LIRA lost.

ASOKA looks down at his injured leg, breathing heavily, collecting himself. When he lifts his head again, THE KID is there, staring at him with distaste.

THE KID  
Broken leg, old man?

ASOKA glares at him, as if ready to fight him on the spot.

THE KID looks down to see ASOKA's injured leg, and kicks him there. ASOKA crumbles to the ground, a low moan escaping his rarely-used mouth.

THE KID (CONT'D)  
What good are you?

TO BE CONCLUDED IN NEXT ISSUE OF CAVEAT LECTOR