



HIGHRISE

WRITTEN BY MATTIA PASSARO

HELL IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT

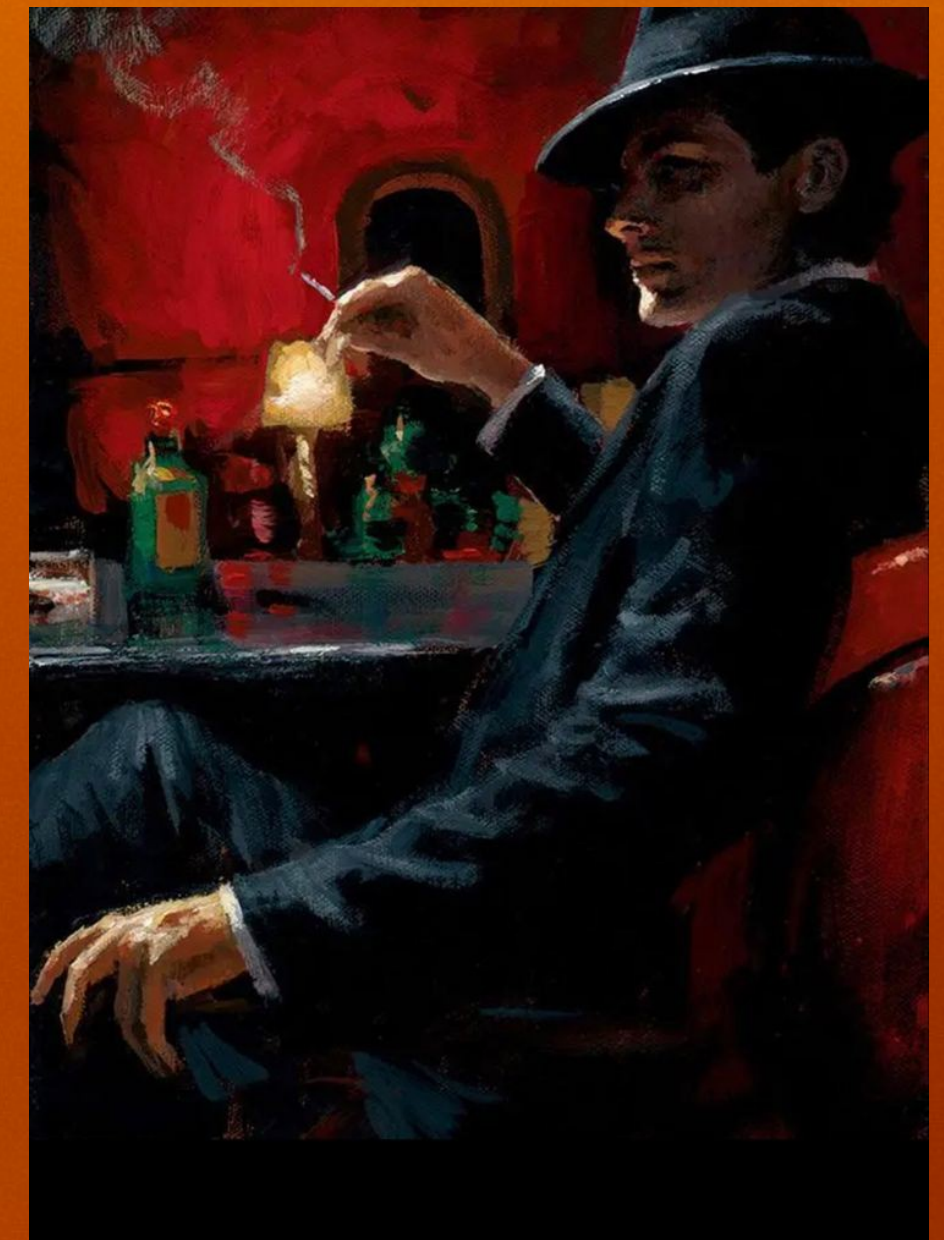
Highrise

Premise

Los Angeles, 1960.

Mary Miller, desperate to confront her past trauma, returns to the Highrise Jazz lounge, where she finds herself questioning her morals, and soon her reality, when deciding to seek revenge on the man who ruined her life.

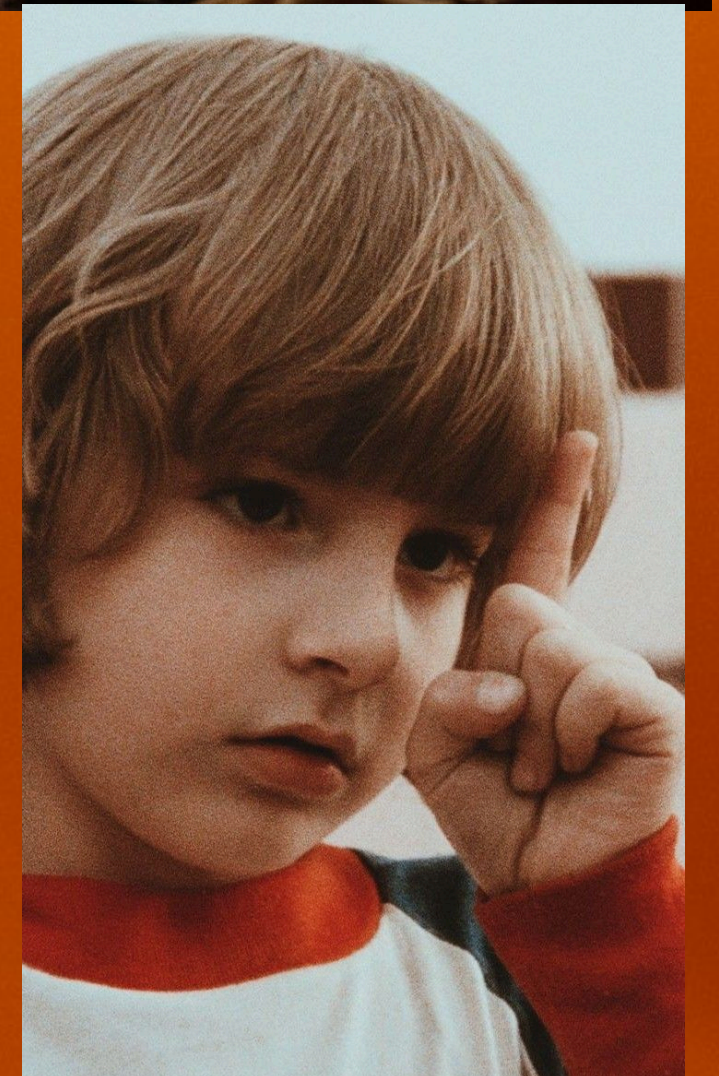
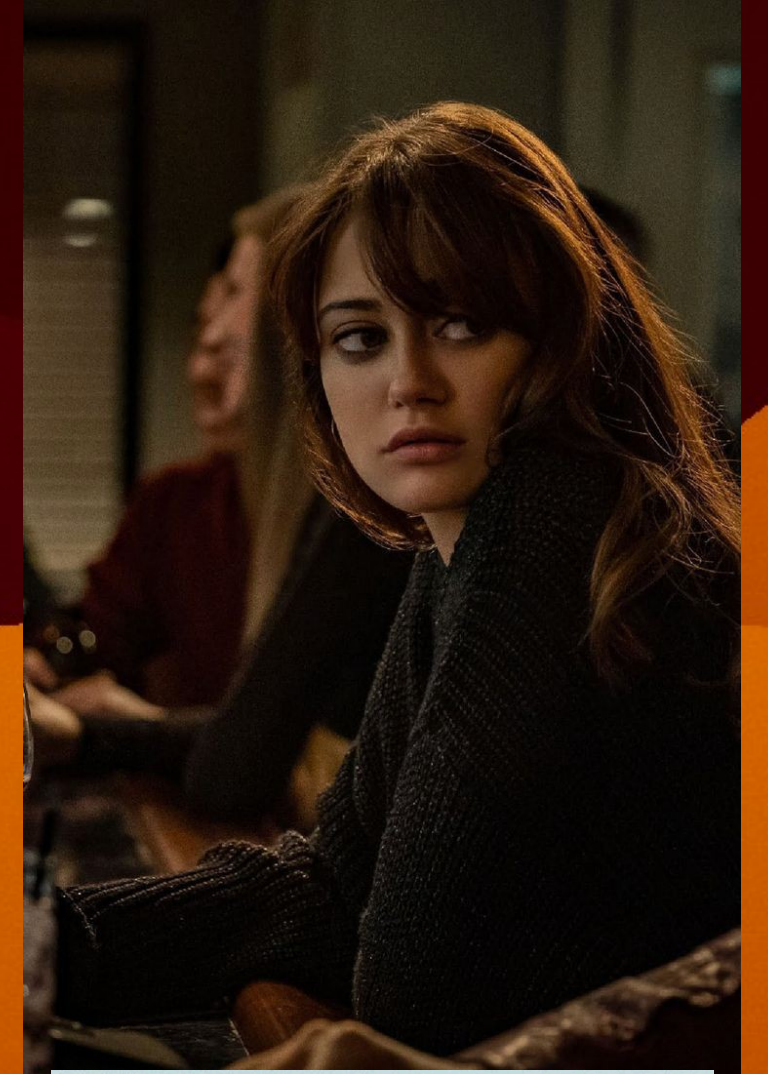
Highrise is a haunting noir-thriller story that twists its characters in a web of greed and revenge, fuelled by a vengeful protagonist who seeks to exact justice after the system has failed her.



Characters

Mary Miller (Thirties) was a hard working and joyful woman, before her life was pulled out from under her feet on one uneventful night at the Highrise Jazz Lounge. Having gone to the toilet, she is followed, beaten, raped and left for dead by an unknown drunk man. The events of this night, and the trauma that followed, have carved Mary into an entirely different person altogether. Burdened with a child, and unable to abort due to the strict laws of that period, Mary is forced to endure the pregnancy, and without a husband, is labelled a harlot. Losing her job and most of her reputation, Mary is ready to confront her past, and returns to the Highrise.

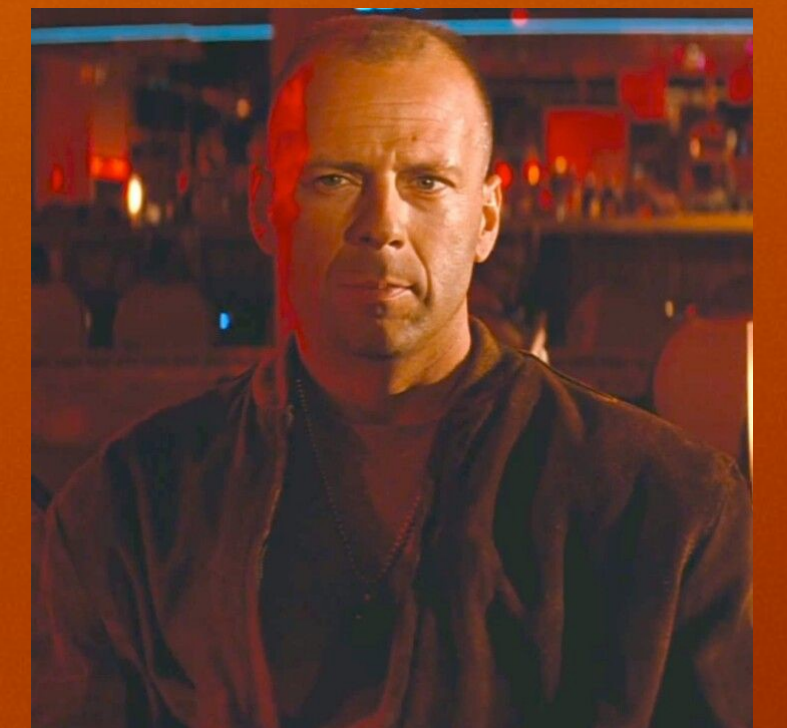
Joseph (older child) is a boy found by Mary sitting alone at the Jazz Lounge. His shy and closed off demeanor draws sympathy from our protagonist, Joseph falls under the care of Mary at the start of our story, and acts as a foil to her actions throughout the course of the night. Joseph's origin is unknown, as his mother never appears, and he never discloses much of why he's there. He nevertheless forms a strong bond to Mary, and as the night progresses, it becomes clear that his presence at the Highrise isn't purely coincidental.



Characters

Richard Hardy (forties) occupies himself with illegal money loaning through a lucrative business hidden from the law. Preying on vulnerable people with intentions of collecting their debt no matter the cost, Richard prides himself on living the American dream through manipulation, corruption and capitalism. But, unbeknownst to him, Richard holds a strong link with out lead. It was him, who one year ago, raped Mary in the women's bathroom of the Highrise. With a vague recollection of that night, Richard finds that his poor memory, and arrogance, will cost him his life.

Boyd Wilson (forties) is a down on his luck jazz drummer, who has fallen victim to the consequences of hard gambling. Trying to make back some money with a brief stint at the Highrise, Boyd sticks out like a sore thumb in the mellow and serene atmosphere of the club. With a rowdy attitude and sharp temper, Boyd tussles with the band and isolates himself, but cannot seem to escape his demons. Having borrowed money from Richard, he now finds himself short, and in a desperate situation.



Treatment

Act One

1960's:

Mary Miller finds herself outside of the Highrise Jazz Lounge, on a gloomy night in Los Angeles. The night reflects her sombre tone. She finishes a cigarette before throwing it onto the floor, and walks in.

1959:

We're transported back a year ago with Mary and some friends. They take a seat at one of the tables. The highrise is a bustling hub of music and people, as Mary makes her way to the bar. SAM, the bartender, greets her with a smile. They're familiar, friendly. She orders drinks for her table, as a DRUNKEN MAN throws himself onto the counter next to her. She smiles uncomfortably and walks away.

Mary sits down at her table, where her friends, Liz, Sue and Lisa. In conversation, they find out that Liz is pregnant even if she doesn't seem all too chuffed about it. Mary comforts her, before the need to go to the bathroom arises.

Getting up, she's followed by the same drunk man from before. Fixing her makeup in the mirror, Mary is startled by the man who bursts in. She informs him that this is the women's bathroom, but a look on his face assures her that he knows that very well. The man forces himself onto her, and with all her force, Mary can't seem to fight him off. Mary is assaulted and violated by the man, and left for dead on the floor.

1960's:

Mary fixes her makeup in the same bathroom, before experiencing a sudden flash of brief images. *Herself, in the same bathroom, but in her purse is a small pistol. She recovers, and puts her makeup back in her bag.*

A small revolver is revealed at the bottom. Mary exits and goes to the bar, where she catches up with Sam and orders a drink. Shortly after she goes over to a table, where she meets Joseph, a shy ten year old boy sitting by himself. Worried, Mary invites him over to her table. The two talk and begin to bond. Mary grows fond of him.

An altercation sparks between band members BOYD and ANTONIO that catches their attention. Mary goes to the bar to get one more drink, but doesn't hear the man behind her approaching as well. His greeting towards Sam causes her to freeze. She recognises that voice...Turning around, Mary is face to face with RICHARD, the man who raped and beat her a year prior. He doesn't remember her at all. She exits the bar, Joseph following closely behind. He consoles her, as Mary works up the nerve to go back inside, with intentions to hurt Richard.

As she sits back down at her table, Mary observes Richard before a migraine strikes her. *Flashes of two people sitting at a table, drinking. Jazz music plays in the background, as a clock ticks away to five past twelve.*

Mary snaps out of it as Meryl approaches her table. They catch up, Mary tells her she's lost her job, and that she keeps calling the police precinct to see if they found the man that raped her. Mary pensively denies having had hospital tests to check for a possible pregnancy. Meryl suggests she should move on, but Mary is consumed by rage and vengeance.

Tensions rise as she excuses herself. Mary bursts into the women's toilet, panicked. Joseph comes in shortly after, attempting to give Mary a solution to her problems.

If she doesn't want the guilt of killing Richard, she should get someone else to do it for her, this way she is free of guilt, and still gets what she wants without the "moral dilemma". Mary stands, and gathers herself, now with a new solution at hand.

Treatment

Act Two:

Boyd goes into the staff backrooms, and searches his locker for an envelope that has hardly any money inside. Out of options, he waits for Sam to finish counting the band's money, and attempts to steal it as a last ditch effort, but Antonio catches him in the act. The two fight it out, but Boyd loses the fight, and the money. Meanwhile, Mary talks to Richard for the first time at the bar, pretending to be interested. Their conversation is cut short as Antonio comes bursting out of the staff room, cursing Boyd. Richard excuses himself.

Mary follows him, but hides behind the wall as he slips into the staff room to interrogate Boyd. Frustrated, Richard reveals a gun hidden in his holster, and takes it out. Mary, panicked, reaches for her own gun, but suffers another migraine attack, temporarily incapacitating her. *She sees a gun being cocked as a man stares down the barrel of the gun. His face isn't visible.*

Richard threatens to kill Boyd, as Mary recovers. She leaves before the two men can notice her. Having gone back to her table, Mary tells Meryl to go put on some music. She turns to Joseph and asks for a favour, if he can hide her purse in the mens bathroom. She looks over at the bar, waiting for Boyd and Richard to come out. Spotting Boyd, she points to him, and asks if he can call that man over as well.

Joseph, committed to the task, walks over to Boyd and points to Mary, then goes into the mens bathroom. Joseph hides her purse behind one of the toilets, but not before taking out the gun for inspection. He pops the chamber open, and takes out a bullet, dropping it down the toilet before putting the gun back into the purse. Joseph leaves. Mary talks to Boyd, revealing her plan to kill Richard, but putting him behind the trigger. Reluctant, Boyd doesn't want to be involved, but Mary is confident that it's his only way out of his debt. It's either him or Richard. Boyd finally agrees, and Mary tells him where he can find the gun. Joseph approaches the table, and sits next to her.

Joseph expresses questions about the plan, but Mary assures him all is fine. Boyd finds the gun and makes his way back to the table, as they discuss how to go about killing Richard. But, before they can act it out, Meryl arrives at the table with Richard in tow, to the others surprise. The four of them sit at the table, talking. Joseph scurries off to another table as Sam leaves. Meryl proposes they play a game of "Never Have I Ever" to break the ice, and tensions quickly escalate. Mary reveals she lied about the hospital tests, and was indeed pregnant. Given the current social standards, she was forced to bear the child and give it up to adoption, consequently losing her job for being pregnant without a partner. She reveals Richard as the father, who is in disbelief. Boyd, seizing the opportunity, takes a shot at Richard but fires nothing. The chamber slides to the empty round.

Richard's a quick draw, and shoots Boyd through the leg. The two exchange in a brutal shootout. Mary ducks for cover.

Treatment

Act Three

Mary recovers from the shootout, Boyd and Meryl dead, Richard clinging onto life. She looks around, uncertain. She searches for Joseph. Another migraine strikes her, more vivid now.

A woman holds a gun up to her head as a man sits limp on a the chair in front of her. The woman's surroundings look awfully familiar, as a large glass pane window looks out into a city. She pulls the trigger.

Mary finds Joseph and they hug. He reassures Mary, but it feels like a question. "You had to do this, didn't you".

Richard gargles on his blood, and on his final few minutes of life, consoles Mary. He helps her understand her path of vengeance is futile in the grander scheme of things. He dies, and Mary finally moves on.

Joseph scolds her for not coming to this conclusion sooner, as the lights to the Highrise all shut down. Joseph disappears into the darkness of the club. Mary calls out for him to no response. As the lights turn back on, a figure is seated behind Mary. Here, we are introduced to MEPHISTOPHELES, the well dressed chain smoking advocate of Satan, who delivers to Mary the truth about her night, and consequently, her fate.

Mary, distraught, learns that has been living out her night in Hell as punishment for her sins on earth. After returning to the highrise, Mary proceeds to befriend Richard, only to kill him, and then herself, to exact her revenge and end her trauma.

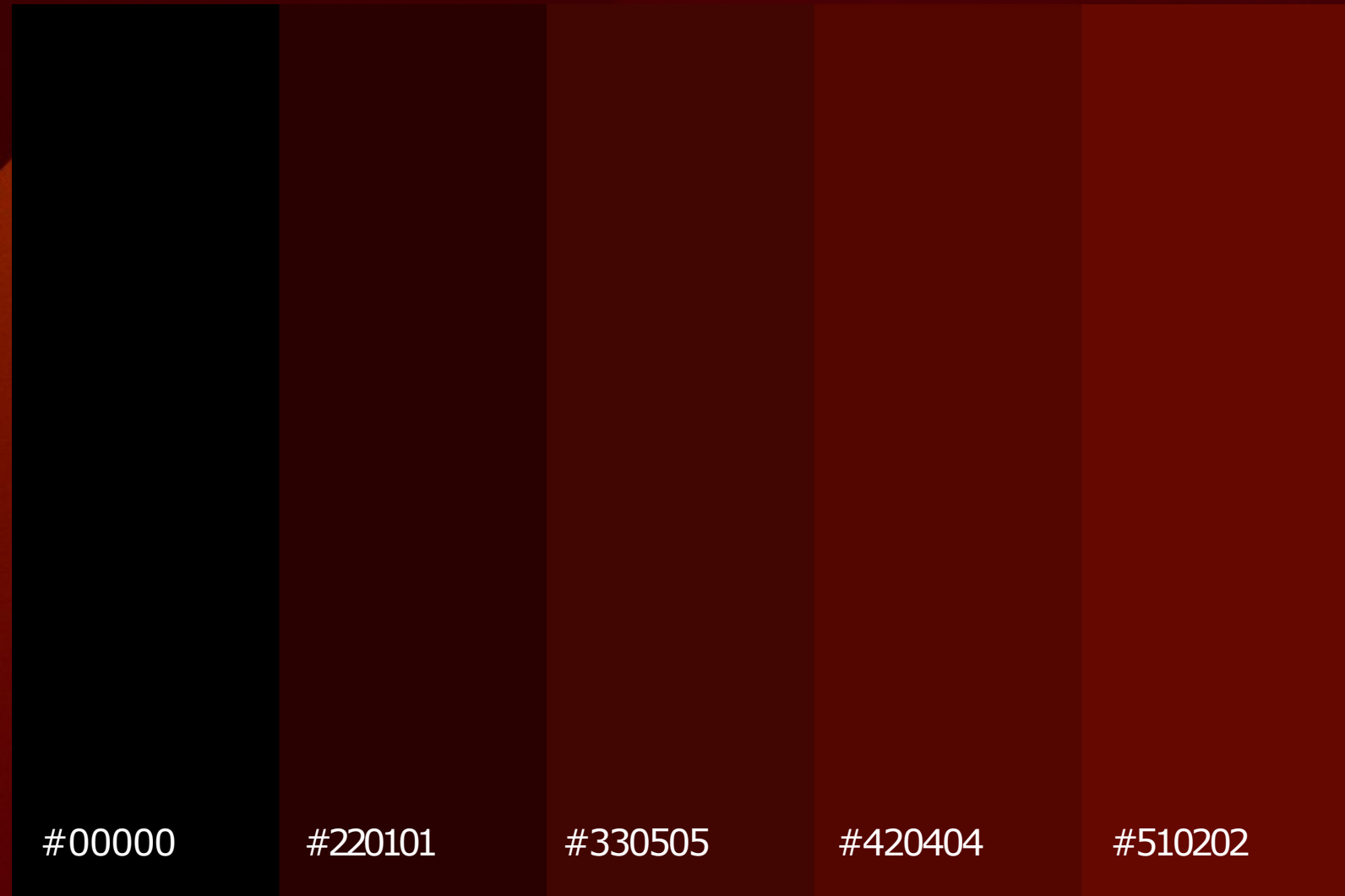
Her punishment in Hell has now been to live the same night, over and over, in order to pay for what she did. Unaccepting of this, Mary demands they make a deal, a bargain of sorts. Mephistopheles is reluctant, saying that she isn't the first, nor will she be the last of sinners to cross the plains of Hell. She isn't as special as she perceives herself to be.

The night, as it stands, has all been taken from Mary's desires, her perceptions of people, and of herself. Her guilt, trauma and vengeful attributes all piled together in one big play, just for her to learn something. Mephistopheles agrees to make a deal with Mary, a way for her to back to her old life and try again. All she has to do, is walk through a door. Mary, convinced that she can redeem herself and has truly learned her lesson, accepts without question and walks towards the door. Faced with an endless glow beyond her, Mary looks back once more before stepping into the light.

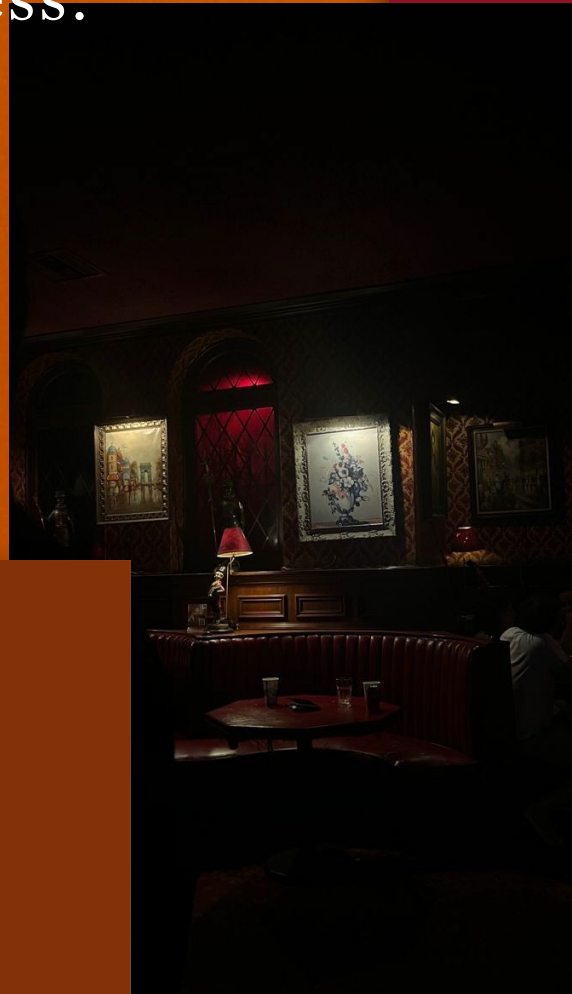
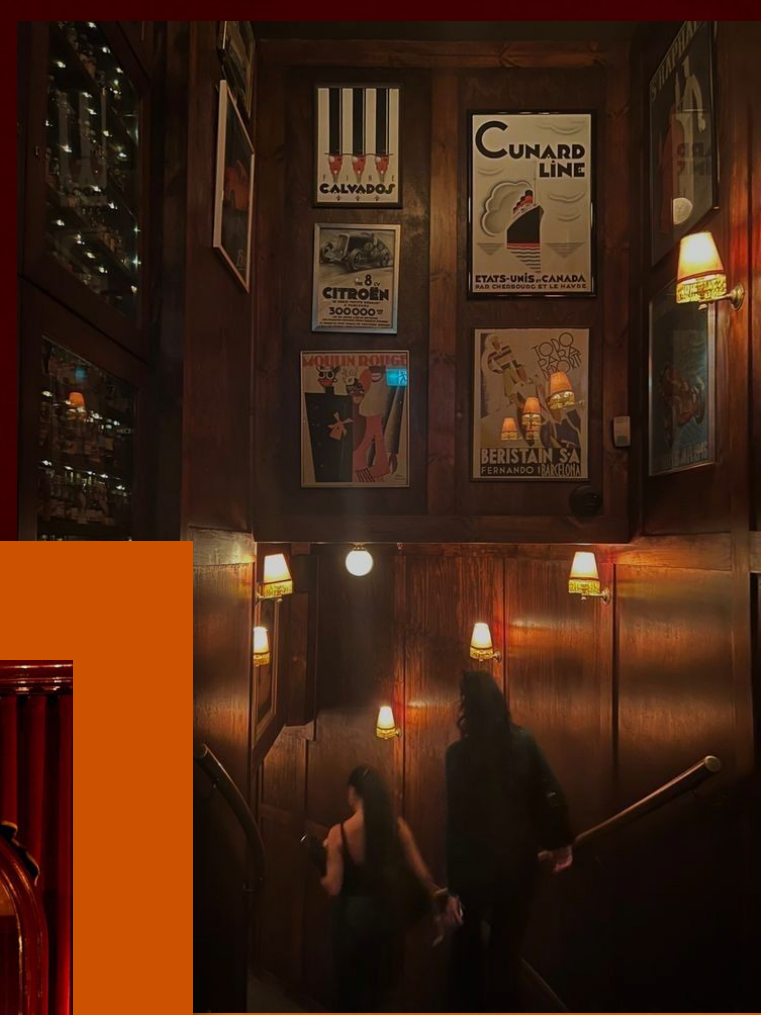
Mary Miller finds herself once more outside the Highrise Jazz Lounge on a gloomy night on Los Angeles. She seems calm, collected, the same way she did at the start of this story. Mary has no recollection of what happened before. She smokes a cigarette, before throwing it onto the floor and stepping into the HIGHRISE.

Mood Board

The Jazz Club



Warm Colours help to create a feeling of serenity, accompanied by the smoky woods to evoke a feeling of coziness.



Mood Board

Inspirations: Films



The Outfit



L.A. Confidential



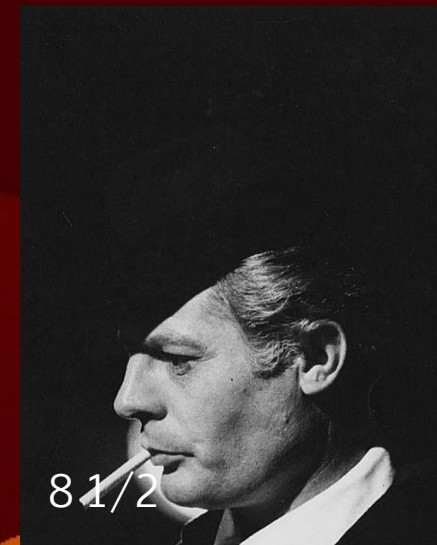
“The reward of Sin, is death.” -
Faustus



Heat



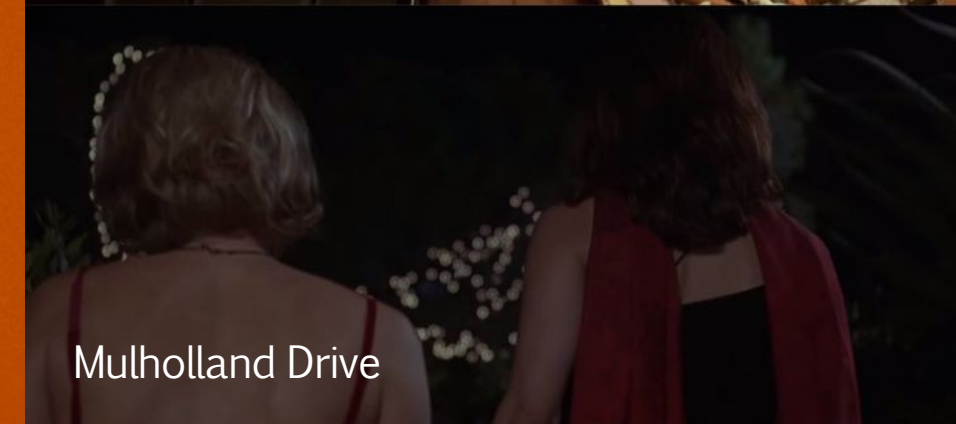
Bigger Than Life



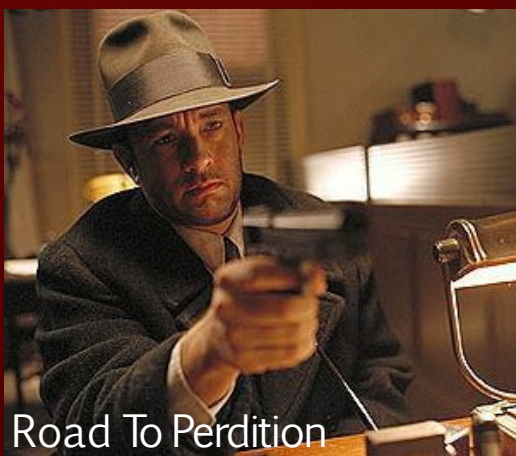
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Gangster Squad



Mulholland Drive



Road To Perdition



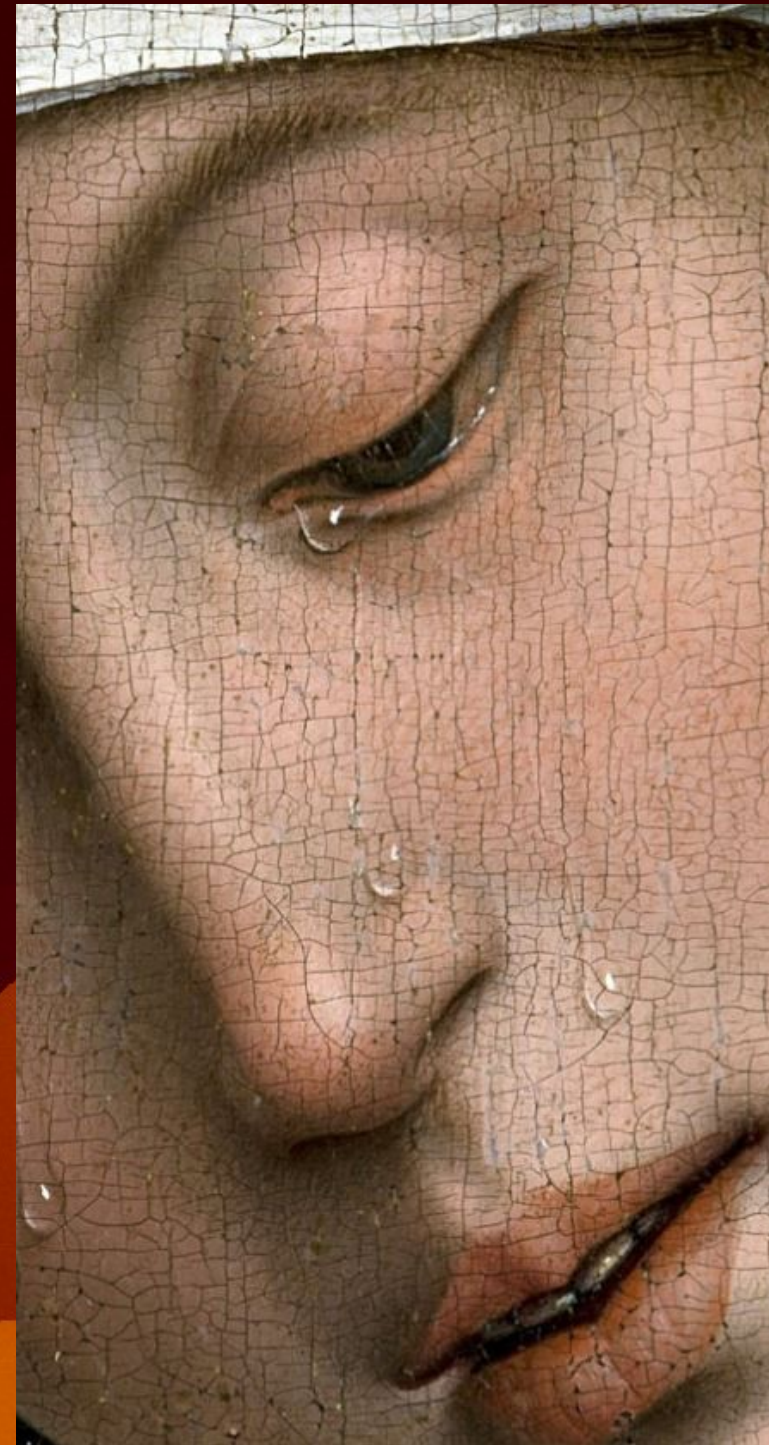
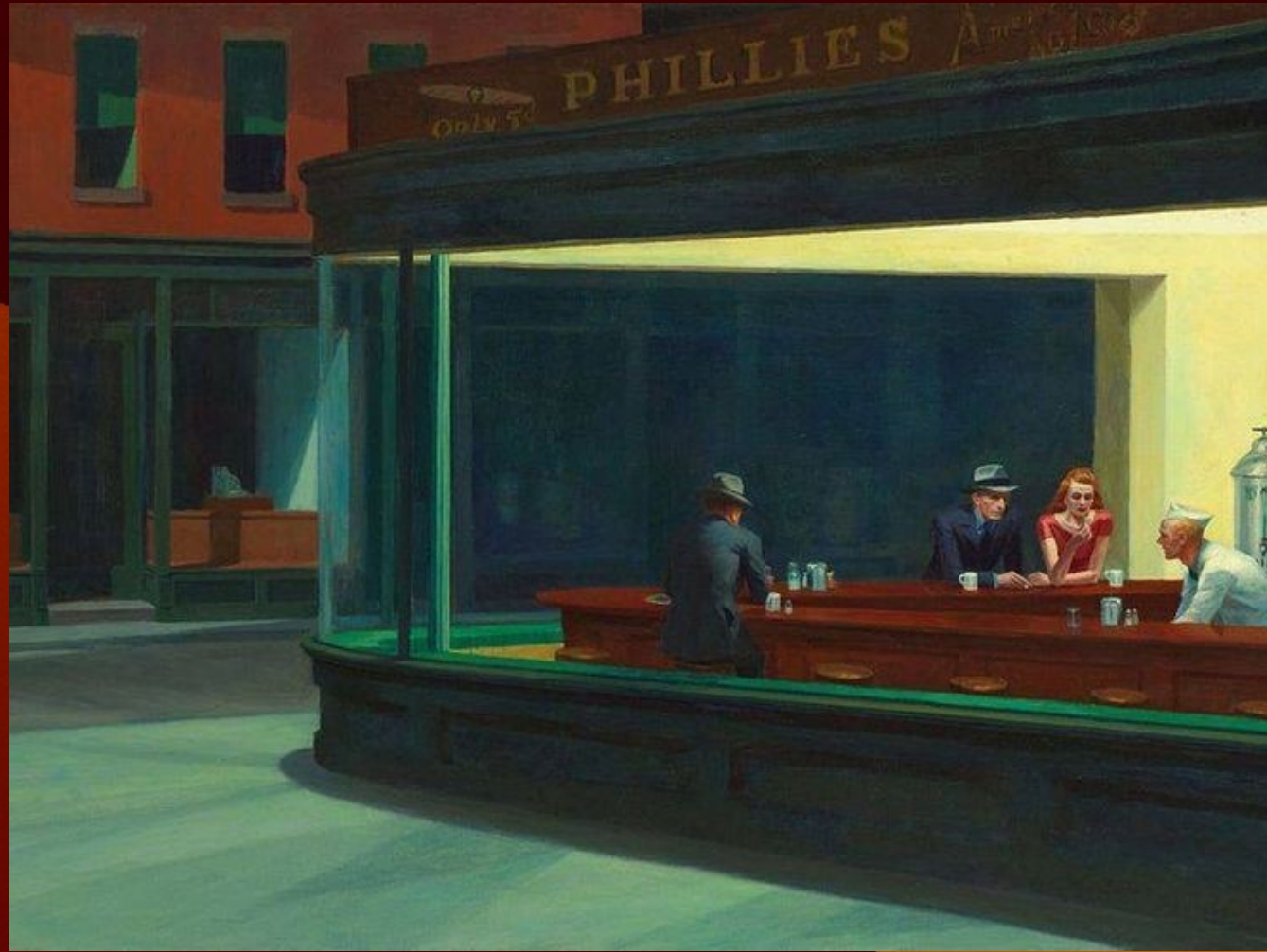
The Killing



The Shining

Mood Board

Inspirations: Art



“The idea that a movie should be seen only once is an extension of our traditional conceptions of film as entertainment rather than art,” - Stanley Kubrick



Writers Vision: Personal Inspirations

Highrise was born out of the emotional resonance that I felt when I saw Edward Hoppers Nighthawks. It's alienation and intimacy. The stillness of it all resonated in me something that would stay long after I was done looking at it. Hoppers vision revealed to me a world that was waiting to be discovered and a story begging to be told. The Highrise Lounge, it's broken and vulnerable characters, all came from the careful brushstrokes of Hoppers masterpiece.

The Lounge is meant to be a reflection of Mary's psyche, the low lighting and fading glamour reflect this. Each detail, each character, is truly a reflection of herself. I remained focused on a singular question when writing this: "What would you do if you where face to face with yourself"?

Thrillers attract me - their stories are fascinating and magnetic, the truly perfect ones settle under your skin and make your pulse quicken. I had this desire to craft a story that offers a truly visceral experience of not just suspense, but also of a deep emotional journey that sticks with you.

Writers Vision: Thematic Inspirations

Highrise is about trauma, injustice and the cynical essence of vengeance. Mary has been failed by the justice system of her time, shunned by society and shattered by the abhorrent act that was done to her. She is thrust headfirst into a hell of her own making - testing her morals and self-worth. The Highrise is her mirror, and the stage for her own reckoning.

Each character in the film reflects something of Mary. Her maternal instincts. Her rage. Her pain.

The story draws from Miltons *Paradise Lost* and Dante's *Divina Comedia: Inferno* taking from these masterful works their threads of moral and mythological punishment, while also interweaving the psychological aspects of Sigmund Freud's Id, Ego and Superego. Refracting these ideas through a modern lens, I found myself looking at films like *The Outfit*, *Bad Times at El Royale* and *The Devils Advocate*.

Highrise, like these films, uses the genre to its advantage, utilizing it as a vessel for deep psychological enquiry.

Highrise isn't meant to be a redemption story, because fundamentally, Mary isn't a good person. She's not worse than Richard, but she isn't a saint either. It's about confronting the consequences of profound pain and understanding the illusions we create in our mind in order to survive.

It's the theater of the mind.