

Morning After

Treatment, [08/17/2023]

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Logline

When a wild night ends rubbing shoulders with the LA mob, an aimless and unsuspecting college grad has to get his friends out of danger, or it'll be their blood spilt on the streets.

Characters

Henry - Our protagonist, HENRY (23), is a young, Black photographer and recent CalArts graduate navigating life in LA. Despite his affinity for capturing beauty through the lens, his passion isn't paying the bills, leading him to question the worth of his arts degree. On top of professional woes, Henry is grappling with a broken heart, a combination that thrusts him headfirst into a quarter-life crisis.

Raised by a family who sacrificed for his opportunities, Henry's life has been a sheltered one, protected from the same struggles and discriminations most Black Americans face in his generation. This separation leaves him feeling ill-prepared for reality, a fact that terrifies him and fuels his character arc: transcending his worldly naivety.

When Henry moves back in with Sam, his old high school friend and now roommate, he's given a chance to rekindle a flame never fully lit. As the story unfolds, their relationship and Sam's loyalty becomes a beacon of stability in Henry's chaotic life.

Henry's strength lies in his giving nature, but it's a trait that has often led to his exploitation, most painfully by his recent ex-girlfriend. As he navigates his journey, Henry must determine whether his inherent kindness is a boon or a curse. His story will invite the audience to reflect on whether adaptation is crucial for survival, or if remaining true to one's core self is equally valid, posing the question whether Henry's generosity is an unappreciated asset or a fatal liability. Furthermore, as the viewers witness changes in Henry in response to the possibility of losing all of his friends, they will be left to ponder whether these transformations were

too extensive, too insufficient, or if he risked losing his identity in the process.

Sam - Former UCLA volleyball star and current Kinesiology student, SAM (22) is Henry's best friend and love interest. After an ACL injury dashed her athletic aspirations, Sam's academic pursuit became a reality.

Sam's father, OSCAR "OZZY" (50's), has always been a steadfast presence in her life. His dedication to his daughter is evident in his career sacrifices. Ozzy has showed up every time Sam needed him, from watching every game she played to sitting in the hospital with her during surgery. Despite being overlooked for promotions within the police department, Ozzy's focus has always been on Sam.

These sacrifices Ozzy has made for his daughter, however, could explain why he's never had a promotion in the last decade. Everyone at the station complains he should at least be a captain, not a detective. Regardless, Ozzy always justified it to be there for Sam, and Sam never regrets growing up close to her father.

Her injury acted as a catalyst for self-discovery, making her realize that fulfillment comes from personal growth rather than external validation. She's started a business as a trainer, finding satisfaction in her current path. However, it pains her to see Henry struggle with finding his own direction.

Sam's feelings for Henry run deeper than friendship, but she's always kept her emotions hidden, uncertain of their reciprocity. As the story unfolds, she seizes the chance to express her feelings, though their realization may come too late.

Before the end of the film, Sam will finally get her chance to express how she feels, and she and Henry will finally be able to release the tension they've always had towards each other. But, that relationship may be realized a little too late...

Josh - An unspoken rivalry simmers between Henry and his best friend JOSH (23), rooted in their shared love for photography and contrasting success. Hailing from a similar background, Josh's journey through CalArts was adorned with accolades and recognition, which led to a prestigious job at Getty Images.

However, beneath the surface, Josh harbors a deep-seated envy of Henry's raw talent and authenticity, something he struggles to replicate in his own work. A pivotal moment in the narrative comes when Josh, in the throes of a heated argument, confesses his admiration for Henry's artistry. Unfortunately, this admission comes just before Josh becomes one of the first casualties of their encounter with the mob.

Destiny - The tragic femme fatale to Henry and the ultimate villain, DESTINY's (21) has only one goal in mind in her story: toppling her father's empire in LA's crime world. Born as "Abigail" or "Abby" for short, Destiny grew up with a shadowy understanding of her family, her origins, and her mother's true identity. The only connection she had to her past was through her father, JAVIER (50's), notoriously known in Los Angeles as "The Collector."

From the age of nine, Destiny was already forced to live a life of deception. Having to lie to her classmates about her father's business, painting him as an "investor" or "entrepreneur in LA's rap/hip-hop industry, she knew better than the lies she was told. Javier's true trade was much darker: he ran a mob that controlled the city's underbelly, taxing dealers and pimps for the right to operate within his territories. His power came from his leverage over significant figures within the city, including cops, city councilmen, and music producers.

As a teenager, Destiny's pursuit for her past intensified, particularly her mother's real identity. However, her father's influence loomed over her life, even when he was imprisoned when she turned 14. She eventually found her mother, who had been living in Kansas City all this time, and ran away to meet her. The long-awaited reunion was within arm's reach in a public park, but destiny, it seemed, had other plans. Javier's men kidnapped them, pulling her back into the grim world she was trying to escape.

Following Javier's orders, the goons murdered Destiny's mother right in front of her and took her back to LA. On their way, they got carried away and violated her, forever scarring her innocence. When Javier learned about the horrifying incident, he had the men involved executed. Destiny, however, blamed Javier for everything that happened. Her hatred for her father took root in this traumatic experience.

The film's timeline begins with Destiny covertly seizing control of her father's empire through Martin (30's), a faithful ally who runs a night club and acts as a figurehead in her father's business during his prison stint. Her ultimate plan is to orchestrate her father's murder upon his release, cleverly framing a plausible suspect for the crime.

Her scheme involves taking Sam hostage, provoking her father, Ozzy, into killing Javier as a revengeful act. Destiny's veil begins to lift, setting her plans into motion, as she begins her pursuit of Sam by getting closer to Sam's friend and roommate, Henry.

Muscles - The formidable bodyguard and loyal lieutenant, MUSCLES (30's) is a man of mystery who refuses to reveal his real name to anyone. His distinctive dreadlocks, rugged smirk, and broad shoulders mark his intimidating presence. Steadfast and undertaking her orders without question, Muscles has been Destiny's protector since she was a teenager, harboring guilt over his absence during her traumatic encounter with Javier's men.

Muscles has always been vigilant around Destiny, fostering a special, soft spot for her over the years. He resonates with her mission to seize control of her father's business and willingly lends his formidable strength to her cause. As Destiny's primary enforcer, he poses a significant threat to Henry and Sam, spearheading the mission to capture them.

Synopsis

The narrative of the film will follow a non-linear format until the climax at the end of Act 2, where the flashbacks and flash-forwards converge.

ACT 1

DREAM BEGINS: Immersed in a POV in SLOW-MOTION, we traverse through a nebulous dance of swirling lights and shadowy forms. The captivating DESTINY is a center frame, her hypnotic dance pulling us into her orbit. As the camera begins its orbital dance, ROTATING OUR PERSPECTIVE, this dreamlike rapture subtly corrodes into a stark, grim reality.

Destiny's enticing lips, offering a seductive invitation, suddenly morph into a forewarning. As part of her rhythm, she swings her head and, in a jarring MATCH CUT to REAL-TIME, swings it back to reveal the same lips cruelly silenced by a strip of duct tape. The CAMERA STOPS ROTATING as the stark reality sinks in, her hair hanging down in disheveled strands.

As the DREAM ENDS, we snap to:

A chilling reality: an inhospitable, menacing warehouse. Destiny remains suspended upside down, hogtied with rope. Her terrified eyes meet ours, offering a silent plea. A towering figure blocks our view, pacing ominously between us and Destiny. He discards a bloody instrument of torture from his extensive, grim collection. The figure is MUSCLES, the puppeteer of this macabre tableau. His aura of intimidation is near-tangible, choking the air around us. He leans in, his malicious gaze meeting ours. The CAMERA WHIPS around, revealing our own fearful reflection...

HENRY - a haunting portrait of terror, paralyzed by fear. Muscles casually douses Destiny in lighter fluid, her desperate struggles barely making a difference. He holds a lighter aloft, the threat of escalating violence hanging in the air, demanding that Henry spill his vital secrets. Henry's panicked eyes focus on the lighter, adorned with an incongruous smiley-face sticker, dangerously close to setting Destiny aflame when-

FLASHBACK: We're whisked back to 3 days prior. The same lighter, smiley face and all, is now cradled Henry's hand. He sparks a cigarette and takes a drag, absorbing the LA skyline from his apartment balcony as day fades into evening. Behind him, a party rages on, pulling him back into its wild vortex at the behest of his friend, JOSH, who has a pair of girls clamoring for his attention.

SAM, Henry's roommate and apparent object of affection, enters, her arms laden with grocery bags and a 6-pack of beer. As Josh and his entourage rally the partygoers for more shots, Henry steps in to help Sam with her load.

The party transitions to the vibrant city streets. Long lines of partygoers extend around every block. Josh playfully suggests exploiting Sam's father's police influence to bypass the wait, causing a ripple of laughter through their group. One of Josh's companions mentions a club from a past outing. They join the

queue, with Josh urging Henry to keep quiet about his hidden camera, as Henry has been capturing the whole night.

Moving with the crowd, Josh notices Henry's lingering gaze on Sam, and prods him to finally make a move. Initially, Henry deflects bashfully, but it's clear he's considering the suggestion.

As they approach the entrance of the club, Josh smooth-talks their way past the bouncer. Yet, all remain oblivious to the high-tech security system scanning each entrant's face. The surveillance locks onto Sam and then switches to Josh and Henry—targets locked.

The evening explodes into a colorful montage of dancing, drinking, and Henry losing himself to the euphoria of the lights and music. This carefree revelry is abruptly disrupted by—

FLASHING JARRING TITLE CARD WITH CHAOTIC CACOPHONY: THE MORNING AFTER

END TITLE CARD: CUT TO:

Bathed in the soft morning light, Henry's apartment is in complete disarray. The remnants of a wild night are evident: empty bottles, scattered clothes, and an upturned sofa. Henry stirs, his fingers instinctively rising to touch a tender black eye. The sharp sting serves as a painful reminder, though of what, he can't recall.

Amidst the chaos, Sam and Josh are sprawled on the floor, unconscious, showing no signs of life until the persistent RING of the DOORBELL disrupts the stillness. Dragging himself to his feet, Henry makes his way to the door, each step echoing the throbbing in his head. As he opens it, a nondescript package awaits.

Before Henry can fully process this, Sam springs to life, snatching the package and tearing it open with a mix of curiosity and excitement. Josh, smirking, jabs at Henry about his battered face, "Looks like someone had a rough night, huh?" But Henry's mind draws a blank, only deepening the mystery.

The room grows tense as Sam reveals the package's contents: a succinct and menacing note, "HIGH AND HONEY AIN'T FREE. PAY OR

PRAY." The weight of their situation, it seems, is just beginning to dawn on them.

The atmosphere turns thick with tension. Panic and confusion cloud the room as Sam, Henry, and a barely coherent Josh dive into a whirlwind of accusations and heated questions. They dig deeper into the package, uncovering Henry's wallet and watch. The evidence is damning.

Sam and Josh, both now wide awake, corner Henry. The weight of the night's mystery bears down on them, their voices a cacophony of anger and desperation. They sift through their foggy memories, each offering hazy snippets of the evening, trying to piece together a coherent narrative and decode the ominous message of the note.

Henry's memory is muddled, but intermittent FLASHBACKS give glimpses of the previous night. The recurring image is that of Destiny, a magnetic presence that Henry can't shake off. While Josh has a clearer recollection of the club, Destiny, and the menacing MARTIN, Henry is overwhelmed by fragmented memories. Amongst them, there's a vivid FLASHBACK of Destiny, away from prying eyes, sharing a joint with Henry, her raw vulnerability on display, followed by an intense make-out session in the club's green room. Just as the memory gets intense, Destiny's urgent warning pulls him back to reality: they need to leave, and fast.

Sam is conflicted. On one hand, she's concerned for their safety; on the other, she's visibly shocked that Destiny might be involved in the underworld. As for Josh, guilt creeps in. He begins to suspect that his drug purchases could be the root cause of their predicament.

Their frantic discussion is interrupted by a sudden, forceful knock on the door. Outside stands a menacing figure, brass knuckles gleaming under the dim hallway light. Recognizing imminent danger, Henry and Josh swiftly hide Sam in her room. As the door bursts open, they brace themselves.

As the goon enters using their spare key, a brawl ensues between him, Henry, and Josh. Despite their efforts, the goon effortlessly overpowers them.

Josh is knocked unconscious, and the goon has Henry pinned, demanding repayment. He threatens to hurt Destiny if they don't comply—

FLASH FORWARD with a MATCH CUT on Henry back in the warehouse. Just like in the last scene, Henry is pinned down, now by Muscles towering over him. The echoing sound of Muscles flickering the lighter punctuates the heavy air. Muscles, enjoying the weight of the threat, brandishes the lighter teasingly near Destiny, whose eyes flash with defiance and fear.

As the tension thickens, the sound of shoes on concrete announces Martin's entrance. More than his entourage of goons, it's his garish, exotic coat that steals the scene. The poor attempt at a bandage over his broke nose contrasts sharply with his others flamboyant appearance. But it's clear: Martins on edge, his reputation on the line before their boss, JAVIER "THE COLLECTOR" that's supposed to arrive soon.

Muscles and Martin's dialogue crackles with disdain. Henry, sensing an opportunity, mocks Martin's broken nose, hinting at inside knowledge. Their charged exchange almost spirals out of control, but Muscles, ever the pragmatist, cuts in. He receives a call, and from the brief exchange, it's evident: JAVIER is en route. The weight of the impending meeting sets Martin further on edge, but Muscles, always in command, reminds him of his place. He pointedly tells Martin that this is his territory, and Martin should remember his role.

Martin, frustrated, warns Muscles about the clock ticking down to Javier's arrival, and departs in a huff. In the charged silence that follows, Muscles turns his attention back to Henry. He admires his guts, standing up for his friends, and fighting for Destiny, even when outnumbered. The gangster proposes an offer: a chance for Henry to join them. For Muscles, this world is all about family, about loyalty and protection. He insinuates his intention on keeping Destiny in this family, adding a layer of complexity to his connection with her.

Henry, ever defiant, pushes back. But Muscles, seizing the moment, drives home a point about survival and loyalty. As he speaks, a familiar tune starts playing softly in the background. Drawing closer, Muscles leaves Henry with a cold piece of advice: "In this world, trust no one."

The haunting resonance of that advice anchors us as we—

FLASHBACK to the electric atmosphere of the nightclub. We BEGIN A SERIES OF SHOTS:

Dance Floor Exchange: Amidst pulsing music, Destiny sensually transfers a molly to Henry with a lingering French kiss. Their connection is unmistakable.

Evasive Moves: They stealthily duck away from watchful eyes, especially those of Martin and Muscles, seeking refuge under the neon-lit LA skyline.

Intimacy & Panic: Sharing a joint, they bond under the city lights. When Destiny spirals into a panic attack, Henry's comforting embrace brings her back.

Heat in the Green Room: The air thickens with tension and desire. Destiny's hushed confession, "I want you," fuels their passion. But as their intensity rises, so does danger.

Imminent Threat: Henry's safety is short-lived in the closet. Through a sliver, he observes a tense confrontation, and though Martin departs, the danger isn't gone. Muscles, with a chilling "Trust no one," spots him.

Fear & Waking Pain: Henry's dragged out, Destiny's frantic pleas echoing. Time dilates as Muscles delivers a devastating blow to Henry's eye, the force of which reverberates through the room.

ENDING SERIES OF SHOTS, the chaos of the flashback dissipates. Through chaotic CRASH ZOOM following Muscle's fist closing in on Henry's eye, we abruptly transition back.

FLASH FORWARD with a jolting MATCH CUT, pulling out from the blackened right eye of Henry. It's now clear where the bruise came from - a memento from the night before. As the goon tightens his grip on Henry, demanding his dues, a WHAM reverberates through the room. Sam, armed with a baseball bat, has taken the goon by surprise.

The three scramble to their feet, staring at the motionless form of the goon. As an argument ensues over whether they've just killed him, the goon's slight twitch amplifies their panic, leading to another swift hit from the bat to ensure he stays down.

Quick thinking sees the goon securely taped to a chair. The room is thick with tension as the blame game commences. Henry shoots a glare at Josh, blaming his reckless drug purchases and accusing him of possibly stiffing the dealer. But Josh, on the defensive, retorts by pointing out the goon's fixation on Henry and the evidence in the package, asserting that Henry is the real epicenter of this mess. In the midst of this heated exchange, Henry reveals his worry for Destiny, convinced she's in grave danger herself.

Sam, overwhelmed by the spiraling situation, shuts down the incessant bickering. She's uninterested in their drug escapades, goon theories, or Destiny's role. Declaring that she made a distress call to her detective father during her hiding, she advocates seeking his help. Although Josh hesitates, fearing police involvement, he begrudgingly acknowledges that they're out of options.

Sam dials up her father, OZZY, who insists they find refuge at his home in Calabasas, assuring them he'll be there waiting. This means a risky drive through the sprawling city of LA. As they prepare to make their escape, the groggy goon musters enough strength to give them a menacing threat to them: no distance is far enough, and "We'll always find you."

The trio's urgency amplifies as they step into the hallway, only to be met by the intimidating gaze of Muscles, flanked by two henchmen coming from the elevator down the hall. The chilling familiarity of the previous night hangs in the air between Henry and Muscles. Without a word, the chase begins. With their pursuers coming from the elevators, they make a beeline for the stairwell. One of the henchmen unloads his gun, but Muscles swiftly stops him, indicating they need the group unharmed.

Forced to think on their feet, the group barricades the stairwell entry with discarded furniture. Amidst the chaos, they realize Josh has been hit. Blood stains his side. They support his limping form, helping him down the stairs. At the stairwell's base, with Josh's consciousness fading, Sam instructs them to wait while she retrieves the car.

As the sounds of their pursuers struggling with the door echoes louder, Josh hands Henry a camera. Through pained breaths, he reveals there are photos from the previous night – potential evidence. Their lifelong, unspoken rivalry briefly surfaces as

Josh admits he always thought Henry was the superior artist, and overall better person.

The moment is shattered as Josh's life slips away. With profound sorrow, Henry joins Sam in the car, her expression changing when she sees the weight of loss in Henry's eyes.

The LA streets blur into a desperate getaway on the 101 freeway. Henry and Sam weave in and out of traffic, their silence echoing the grave danger they're in and the grief of losing Josh. Despite their escape, the looming threat of pursuit hangs heavy in the air. We FADE TO BLACK as we slowly FADE INTO:

ACT 2

FLASHBACK returning to the nightclub with its pulsating energy. The group, in high spirits, dives headfirst into the vibrant scene—drinks in hand, they are lost in the rhythm of the music.

Nestled at the bar, Henry and Josh strike up a more serious conversation. From their vantage, they watch Sam dancing, her energy infectious. With friendly ribbing, Josh harps on Henry again on his inaction towards his feelings for Sam, implying Henry's tendency to desire things but hesitate in pursuing them. The conversation extends to their careers: Henry's passion for photography and Josh's stable job at Getty Images. With a sigh, Josh reveals a hidden side to his success. He admits to being a conformist, a 'yes-man' to his corporate bosses, revealing the emptiness that accompanies such a life. His heartfelt confession is a stark warning to Henry about the dangers of not staying true to oneself.

In the midst of this deep introspection, Destiny, a sultry and tempting figure, approaches. Her eyes lasciviously dance between the two friends before locking onto Henry, her voice dripping with seduction as she asks if he's interested in something "off the menu." Henry, entranced by the allure in her eyes and the sway of her hips, hesitates for a split second before—

SMASH CUT into a MONTAGE SEQUENCE. The dance floor is ablaze with lights and gyrating bodies, but in the midst of it all, Henry and Destiny burn brighter. They're electric together, their bodies moving in a choreography of desire. Destiny slips Henry some molly through a deeply passionate French kiss, their tongues dancing and mingling, and the drug sends them into an even more fervent and tactile world. Guided by their heightened

senses, they retreat to the greenroom. Here, amidst dim lighting and plush couches, their hands explore every inch, every curve. But just as things threaten to cross the line, Destiny, with a hint of fear and regret, pushes him away, ENDING our MONTAGE.

She whispers cryptic warnings of the looming danger and the club's shadowy dealings, revealing her trapped position amidst its grim power plays and the relentless objectification and victimization she endures daily.

The atmosphere thickens with dread as the door suddenly swings open, ushering in the looming figures of Muscles and Martin, trailed by a group of menacing goons. Henry, quickly hidden away in a closet, has a limited view of the unfolding drama. Muscles, protective yet firm, admonishes Destiny for straying from her role in the club, while Martin, impatient and arrogant, asserts his authority, leading to a fierce confrontation and a punch that reshapes Martin's nose.

In the aftermath, with Martin and his goons gone, Muscles' suspicions turn to Destiny. His search of the room soon reveals Henry in his hiding spot. Pulling out Henry's wallet, he smirks as he reads out the name. "Such a white-ass name," he scoffs. "Did mommy and daddy give you that so you could fit in better with the white kids at school?" His taunts about Henry's seemingly privileged background grow nastier until, with a sudden violent move, Henry's world goes spinning into darkness.

Waking up amidst the thumping music and flashing lights, a battered Henry stumbles toward the restroom, trying to escape the overwhelming stimuli. But his injuries and the night's excesses take their toll, and he crumples to the ground. It's Sam and Josh who rush to his side, concern evident in their eyes, supporting him as they try to leave the chaos behind, the world darkening as the screen fades out.

We FLASH FORWARD back to Henry and Sam on the run, pulling up to an unassuming, even nondescript, home. It appears to be a normal suburban home from the outside, not betraying the fact that its owner is a seasoned detective. As Sam and Henry approach, the door swings open to reveal Ozzy. Immediately, without a word, he pulls Sam into a heartfelt embrace, a moment where the overwhelming relief and safety is palpable. They break apart after a deep breath and Ozzy's stern gaze settles on Henry. With a nod, he guides them inside.

As they move through the home, it becomes more evident that this is a detective's residence when they reach Ozzy's study. Inside, it's a visual cacophony, walls adorned with mugshots, paperwork, and intricate webs of connections. Henry hands over Josh's camera. Together, they scour through the photos, hoping to find clues. They identify Martin, Destiny, and Muscles. Ozzy, cigarette in hand, leans in, revealing Martin's questionable European origins and suspected illicit activities. Despite the minor charges on paper, Ozzy is convinced there's a darker underworld to Martin.

Ozzy's face darkens at the sight of Muscles, relaying information about the man's deep connections with the club's criminal activities. He rebukes them, clearly concerned, questioning their decision to step foot in such a dangerous setting.

Distracted by the weight of the recent events, Henry finds solace on the deck, with Sam joining him. They share a moment, with Henry confiding in her about Josh's revelations before his death. But this quiet reflection is shattered by Ozzy's frantic voice, warning of imminent danger.

Two black SUVs come to a screeching halt in front of Ozzy's home. A palpable sense of danger engulfs the place. With a sense of urgency, Ozzy escorts Henry and Sam into a secret chamber behind a bookshelf in his office. From a concealed viewpoint, Henry watches Muscles and his entourage infiltrate the house. Sam and Ozzy scan through multiple security cameras feeding into the two computer monitors set up in the cramped safe room.

Muscles exudes an almost predatory aura, like a shark zoning in on the scent of injured prey. There's an eerie stillness as he addresses the silence, offering a trade: the young ones for Ozzy, making it clear he's the real prize. The tension tightens, verging on breaking point. But suddenly, a phone call breaks the suspense. Muscles answers, his tone shifting as he hears the words, "The Big Man's waiting." Without hesitation, he swiftly departs with half his men, leaving the other half stationed behind as they drive away in one of the SUVs.

Taking advantage of this, Ozzy, displaying unexpected combat skills, neutralizes the intruders with deadly efficiency. Henry, fueled by adrenaline, takes down the last henchman with a swing of a golf club. An address on a phone dropped during the scuffle provides the next lead.

Driven by resolve, Henry persuades a wary Ozzy to chase down the lead. Their pursuit trails Muscles' SUV through LA's labyrinthine streets, culminating outside "The Underground"— the nightclub where their troubles began. Henry covertly captures photos, his lens focusing on a concerning exchange: Martin, the club owner, handing Destiny off to Muscles before disappearing back into the club's shadows. This sight fuels Henry's determination to intervene and rescue her.

Their pursuit deepens into LA's underbelly. An unexpected turn of events sees them at a detention center. Here, Destiny reunites with a man freshly released, identified by Ozzy as Javier, the notorious "Collector." Ozzy elaborates on Javier's operations, collecting dirt on influential figures and using it for extortion. He also discloses a disturbing realization: Javier's interest in them is likely due to Ozzy's attempts to bring him down.

This revelation weighs heavily on Henry and Sam. With danger looming large and the stakes higher than ever, Ozzy decides their best course of action is to retreat to his safe house and then leave California, setting the stage for their next steps in this perilous journey.

We're back on the road again with the group. The Pacific Coast Highway stretches out before them, with the endless ocean on their left. Ozzy drives in silence, Henry and Sam lost in thought, their heavy demeanors juxtaposed by the serene ocean view to the left of them.

Upon reaching the safe house, Ozzy acquaints them with its essentials - the food supply, a stash of weapons, and an emergency fund. As they settle in, he announces his departure to consult his partner, TOMMY, about their next move.

As the golden hues of the evening paint the sky, Henry, cigarette in hand, gets lost in its vastness. He's brought back to the present by the aroma of something cooking. Entering the house, he finds Sam attempting a culinary experiment. Without a word, he joins in, their shared anxiety prompting a heart-to-heart about their uncertain futures.

While Sam clings to a sliver of hope, envisioning a future under witness protection with new identities, Henry's facade crumbles. He's swamped by guilt, berating himself for the mess they're in,

for the death of Josh, and the danger he put Sam in. His tears flow freely, and Sam, ever the pillar, wraps him in a comforting embrace, reassuring him that they'd weather this storm together. Henry wants to believe what she says, but his eyes tell a different story.

Night falls. Henry, restless and plagued by guilt, sprawls on the couch. Sam, fresh out of the shower, signals that it's vacant. Their deep friendship teeters on an edge of awkwardness as she stands there, clad only in a towel. Covering up his unease, Henry declines the offer to shower, too engrossed in his thoughts. He can't help but watch her retreat, her vulnerability mirrored in his own feelings.

A new day dawns, and the atmosphere is lighter. While Sam preps a brunch, Henry grapples with outdated tech, trying to sync his laptop with Ozzy's vintage TV. They settle down, eager for a distraction, only to discover the foreign film Henry had downloaded is in French and sans subtitles. Their attempt at a relaxed morning is quickly thwarted.

Feeling trapped, they brainstorm alternatives. Henry suggests a stroll on Main Street, but Sam, ever cautious, reminds him of The Collector's looming threat. He counters with the beach, an open space, perhaps less risky.

MONTAGE of them strolling the sandy beach. Waves crash against their feet. Playful water splashes. With each captured memory, the shutter of Henry's camera clicks. We END the MONTAGE as the sun casts its final golden glow, both Henry and Sam sprawled on towels, immersed in quiet contemplation. Henry, cigarette in hand, reviews the photos. Sam jests about his smoking habits. In defense, Henry cites creative sparks, name-dropping idols like James Van Der Zee and Jamel Shabazz.

Their banter intensifies as Sam mentions the iconic James Dean photo with his cigarette. Their dreams and aspirations fill the air: her opening a quaint coffee shop in Seattle; him managing its digital image. But Henry's dreams are buried under the shadow of his ex-girlfriend, Jessica, saying that the relationship made it harder for him to dream again.

Sam softly nudges him, suggesting he just needs to find someone who genuinely values him. Their gaze locks, loaded with unsaid emotions.

The scene transitions to a moonlit room. There's no romance, but an intimacy undeniable as they lie beside one another, sharing a joint, with a soft tune in the background. They journey back in time, accompanied by INTERCUTTING FLASHBACKS showing Sam's grueling ACL surgery and her dream of joining the Women's Volleyball league, Henry's unwavering support during her recovery, juxtaposed with her being there for him when Jessica left. Their shared past is a roller coaster, peppered with dreams and heartbreaks.

Yet, as their eyes meet once more, intense FLASHBACKS INTERCUT showcasing numerous moments they've shared. But Henry, sensing the gravity of the moment, retracts, suggesting he take the couch, thus ENDING the FLASHBACK INTERCUTTING. Sam, hurt and confused, demands clarity. Does he still yearn for Destiny? Is she not enough?

Henry's impassioned revelation paints Destiny in a heart-wrenching light: a captive dancer, victim to her father's wrath, enduring unthinkable traumas. These revelations, and the web of deception and lies he's entangled in, make him feel unworthy of Sam's love and trust.

But Sam, undeterred, champions his good heart, his genuine care for people. Henry's vulnerability boils over as he vents his fears, feeling lost and incapable. Yet, she draws close, whispering reassurances, and they share a passionate kiss, ultimately surrendering to the love they've held at bay. Under a canopy of twinkling stars, their love story truly begins.

DREAM SEQUENCE: In a surreal, dimly lit studio, Henry, younger and more innocent, captures the ethereal beauty of a model. As the camera focuses, it's revealed to be JESSICA, his ex-flame, hanging gracefully on a rope in a high-fashion, avant-garde shoot reminiscent of Vogue spreads. Josh, brimming with confidence, interjects from the periphery, throwing praising Henry's technique and Jessica's poses. However, Jessica is criticizing Henry, saying that this isn't what she wanted for her shoot.

Suddenly, the ambiance shifts; shadows grow longer, the atmosphere thickens. Josh commandeers, demonstrating his vision by flipping Jessica upside down, her silhouette casting an eerie reflection. But as Henry refocuses, it's not Jessica; it's Sam, her face contorted in disapproval.

Desperation seeping in, Henry seeks reassurance from Josh, but the scene morphs into a chilling nightmare. Josh's once lively face now pallid, blood oozing, staining the pristine backdrop. The weight of Henry's camera feels foreign; it's now a cold, metallic gun.

A frantic gaze towards Sam reveals her ensnared, gasping for breath amidst the twisted ropes. He rushes forward, and in her fleeting consciousness, she pleads for one last kiss and words of comfort. As he kisses her, we hear another voice whisper into an accusatory, haunting voice, "You left me, Henry."

Drawn back, the face isn't Sam's anymore but Destiny's, tear-streaked, eyes filled with pain and resignation. Henry, drenched in Josh's blood, watches in horror as Destiny, draped in a noose of ropes, pleads for a merciful end. Overwhelmed by the cries, Henry's bloodied hands raise the gun, its weight magnifying his guilt and torment. Just as he's about to pull the trigger, the scene shatters. END DREAM SEQUENCE.

Henry awakens with a start, his pulse racing. The crimson imagery of his nightmare is nowhere to be found, only the dimly lit room and Sam peacefully asleep beside him. The dawn's first light is still hours away.

Stepping out onto the porch, Henry lights a cigarette, trying to shake off the residual dread. As the sky slowly tinges with orange, his apprehension deepens, feeling almost like a vice tightening around his throat.

Drawn back inside by the chill, Henry rummages through the kitchen. The comforting aroma of coffee is absent, and he's out. A groggy Sam shuffles in, suggesting he makes a quick dash to the market. Her mention of bacon, eggs, and toast brightens his mood momentarily, eager for a break from canned dinners. The weight of a goodbye kiss surprises him, but he departs, hopeful for more.

At the market, Henry moves with purpose, grabbing necessities. But upon exiting, a sense of foreboding washes over him. A black SUV appears down the street. His instincts scream danger.

Speed dialing Sam, he urges her to slip out and hit the beach, to run, to hide, emphasizing not to turn back for him. She hesitates but his urgency breaks through, and she complies.

The SUV comes to a stop, and Muscles, with his trademark smirk, steps out flanked by two henchmen. Just then, an egg smashes onto their windshield. Distracted, they assess the surroundings.

With swift action, Henry starts to hurl more eggs at the group, along with the rest of his groceries. As the goons and Muscles are disoriented, Henry seizes the advantage he made for himself and bolts.

The chase is intense. Weaving through the narrow alleys of the neighborhood, Henry sprints desperately. Behind him, the other goons are struggling to keep pace, but Muscles, with a steely determination, narrows the distance between them. After a few sharp turns, Henry finds himself trapped in the backyard of a house, cornered between a shimmering pool and imposing fences too high to scale.

Muscles saunters up, confident, taking a moment to mock Henry, taunting him about his apparent lack of courage to face a fight head-on. Desperation fuels Henry as he pulls out a pocket knife, hoping it would turn the tables. But Muscles anticipates the move, easily disarming him and putting him into a suffocating arm lock.

Muscles, enjoying his dominance, yells out to his lagging goons, signaling them to his location. It's in this brief distraction that Henry spots Muscles' sidearm. With sheer will and determination, he bites down hard on Muscles' arm. Muscles yells in pain, releasing his hold momentarily. Seizing the chance, Henry snatches the gun, the balance of power shifting instantly.

Facing the gun's barrel, Muscles' bravado doesn't waver. He challenges Henry to prove himself, daring him to pull the trigger. A torrent of emotions rages within Henry as he screams, finally pulling the trigger. But the hollow click of a safety mechanism is all that echoes back. Muscles grins, praising Henry for being an obedient boy, just before landing a devastating punch. The world fades for Henry as he crashes into the pool. The peaceful surface is shattered as he sinks beneath, as we FADE TO BLACK.

WE ARE NOW CAUGHT UP TO THE FLASH FORWARD. Henry's vision is blurred as a black bag is yanked off his head. Snapshots of what's happening unfold in a fragmented MONTAGE: Muscles, menacing as ever, standing tall over Henry, Destiny hanging, battered but alive, Martin sneering and showing a phone to

Muscles. Echoes of Muscles' voice taunt him, "Trust no one." END MONTAGE.

We close in on Henry's bruised face. His eyes flutter to Destiny, now untied but laying limply on the floor. "Destiny, you okay?" he rasps out. She manages a weak nod.

"We've got a plan," she whispers, though her gaze is shadowed with doubt.

The door slams open, and Muscles struts in with Martin smirking behind him. Muscles yanks Henry up. "Time to seal the deal, homie," he growls, flashing his phone.

Ozzy's voice fills the room, confusion evident. Muscles fills him in. The price? All evidence erased and exile from LA. As Ozzy protests, Martin drops a veiled threat about a 90s cold case, implying his influence with the police.

Henry's attempts to rally, urging Ozzy not to give in, are met with a crushing blow from Muscles. Henry's ears ring with Sam's voice, pleading for his safety. Muscles hisses a new threat: not only will Henry die, but Sam will too.

In a hushed moment, Destiny nudges Henry, urging him to trust. A brief FLASHBACK of Muscles being tender with Destiny suggests a deeper connection. The FLASHBACK ENDS, and Henry, looking from Destiny to Muscles, reluctantly nods.

The deal, though tense, is sealed. Martin, buoyed by his perceived success, prattles about impressing "The Collector". He and his crew leave, but Muscles and Destiny share a quiet, intense moment.

The arrival of the motorcade cuts the silence. Martin's babbling excitement about a meeting with mob boss Cage the Butcher halts abruptly when a stern-looking man, The Collector, steps in.

But the biggest reveal is yet to come. The Collector's wrath isn't directed just at Martin, but on Muscles as well. A shocking revelation to Martin: Destiny is The Collector's daughter.

Martin's pleas of not knowing about Destiny fall on deaf ears as The Collector retaliates for his daughter's treatment. Chaos ensues as Javier readies his mean to shoot at both Martin and

Muscles for their incompetence. Henry winces, shutting his eyes from the bloodshed about to happen. Multiple guns shoot in a chaotic unison, but only one body drops to the ground. Henry opens his eyes and has his jaw dropped to see who has fallen.

As the smoke clears, we see it's Javier and his goons that have been shot by Muscles and the other goons loyal to him. Destiny, now free, confronts her dying father, pinning every misfortune on him. And with cold resolution, she ends his life, multiple shots in his head from her pistol.

Martin, shocked by the twist in events, squirms out and escapes the scene. We can see Destiny, with bloodlust still in her eyes, wants to go after him, but Muscles says to let him go, he's nothing to worry about.

Henry, shocked and shaken, watches as Destiny approaches him. "It's just the game," she says with a hint of regret. "Pawn or player. Which one are you?" As she walks away, her meaning clear: it's time for Henry's next move.

Ozzy and Sam sit in his car in the parking lot across from the warehouse. Ozzy holds a duffle bag of evidence while communicating with Tommy, his partner set up with a sniper rifle perched on a distant hill. The mob's cars are tactically positioned in front of the warehouse entrance. Tension in the air is palpable as Destiny, with Muscles and a captive Henry, emerges from the warehouse.

Destiny sets the terms - it's Sam, not Ozzy, who will make the handover.

With trepidation, Sam makes the nerve-racking walk across the lot, duffle bag in hand. She exchanges the evidence bag for Henry. Destiny, cold and assertive, warns them to leave LA for good.

However, distant sirens shatter their momentary relief. Tommy, listening to police radio chatter, tells Ozzy the cops were tipped off by an anonymous call. They need to leave, now. However, chaos ensues. Ozzy's car screeches to life, while Henry and Sam make a break for it. Bullets pepper the lot, with Destiny's guards and she herself taking aim at the duo. In the chaos, Sam is hit.

In an emotional rage seeing his daughter shot, Ozzy continues to floor the gas and rams his car straight into the goons taking fire behind their SUVs. Tommy provides cover from afar, sniping down one guard at a time. Yet, with Destiny's bullets fatal shot to Sam and Ozzy's car totaled, the situation turns dire.

The mob starts to make a run for it inside the warehouse. The cops close in, and a firefight ensues between the cops and the mob. Muscles leads Destiny and some of their men inside the warehouse.

Henry drags Sam to Ozzy as he stumbles out of his wrecked car. Ozzy, hearing from Tommy the situation is FUBAR, orders Henry to take Sam to the nearest hospital, to use the sewer tunnel into the LA river. He gives his gun to Henry and kisses Sam on her forehead before raising his hands to surrender to the cops, acting as a distraction for Sam and Henry.

As Henry carries Sam inside the warehouse, they enter the torture room from before and Henry tries to find painkillers and medical gauze wrap to stop the bleeding, but Sam's injury is severe. In a gut-wrenching moment, she confesses her love to Henry one final time before succumbing to her injuries.

Hearing voices, Henry hides and takes cover over Sam's body. It's Destiny and Muscles preparing their getaway car. Accusations fly - Martin's presumed betrayal, the police chief's compromised loyalty - but it culminates in Destiny's shocking act of treachery. She shoots Muscles under his ribcage, rebuking him for his perceived weaknesses. His plea, claiming to have only wanted to protect her, is met with her fierce declaration of independence.

As Muscles lay bleeding, Henry grapples with his past impressions of the man. FLASHBACKS reveal Muscles' occasional softness toward Destiny, complicating the narrative. In a snap decision, Henry aids the dying enforcer by patching him up very roughly, helping him escape to the LA River's sewer outlets.

In a contrasting MONTAGE, we witness: Sam's lifeless body, a scene of sorrow; Destiny, now the unrivaled puppet master, retreating to her lavish Hollywood Hills base; and Ozzy, handcuffed but stoic, being taken by the police, his eyes locked onto the grim sight of his daughter. END MONTAGE.

On the concrete bank of the LA River, Henry and Muscles argue. Muscles is puzzled by Henry's mercy, but Henry counters, reminding Muscles of his own loss. It's Destiny who is the true antagonist, and now, the two unlikely allies share a burning desire for revenge.

ACT 3

Henry and Muscles hijacking a delivery car. As they strategize, Muscles divulges Martin's secret: he's not from Eastern Europe, but an American with a false identity linked to trafficking underage girls. He is also accused of pedophilia and rape with some of those same underage girls as well.

Back at Martin's nightclub, staff are alarmed at Martin's blood-soaked arm. He orders an evacuation. In his office, packing hurriedly, Muscles ambushes him, exposing Martin's deception. With Henry by his side, Muscles demands answers about the police interference. Martin admits his panic led to the call. But Henry has a bigger demand: the location of the upcoming meeting with the notorious Chicago mob boss, Cage the Butcher.

Resigned, Martin relents and also finds himself robbed of weapons. In the armory, while checking weaponry, Henry tries to break the ice, seeking Muscles' backstory. But Muscles deflects, stating that in their line of work, personal connections can be deadly. Henry observes Muscles' protective instinct towards Destiny. But Muscles counters, reminding Henry of the pain he felt losing Sam, a pain Muscles has felt anticipating harm towards Destiny.

In the club's dimly lit basement, Henry and Muscles gear up for the showdown. Amidst the hum of overhead lights, Henry tests his aim at the club's makeshift gun range, each shot echoing through the underground space. Meanwhile, Muscles grimly extracts a bullet from his side, bandaging the wound with practiced precision. As he works, he offers Henry pointers on improving his shot.

Amid the metallic clicks and the scent of gunpowder, they broach the subject of what comes after - life beyond this bloody vendetta. Henry's voice trembles as he admits he never imagined an escape without Sam by his side. Muscles, looking distant for a moment, reveals he has an inherited family property in the serene landscapes of rural Illinois, just outside Chicago.

A solemn pact forms between the two men. Muscles, with a rare softness in his eyes, assures Henry that if they stay true to their plan, the deaths of Sam and Josh won't be mere footnotes in a tragic tale. They'd ensure their memories were honored.

Henry stands in the bathroom, slipping into a sleek black suit, sans tie, with the top two buttons undone. He splashes water on his face, each droplet triggering a cascade of memories. FLASH FRAMES flicker rapidly: his profound conversation with Josh, a dying Josh passing him the camera, the intimate moments of him and Sam gazing deeply into each other's eyes, their heart-wrenching final kiss, and then the dichotomy of him dancing with Destiny at the nightclub to Destiny's face later challenges him, forcing him to choose between being a pawn or a player.

The FLASH FRAMES crescendo with a surreal image: the dream photoshoot where Henry points a gun at Destiny. But in this iteration, her face beams with a wicked, triumphant grin, replacing the earlier fear and desperation.

A surge of fury sweeps over Henry, originating in his stomach, surging to his chest, and finally constricting his throat. As his fists clench and his jaw tenses, he's consumed by a violent catharsis. With a mix of self-loathing and uncontrollable rage, he first punishes himself with frantic blows before directing his turmoil at the bathroom, shattering everything in sight.

As dusk turns to dawn and then dusk again, LA transitions from one scene to another. Beverly Hills becomes the focal point, as luxurious SUVs approach a lavish mansion. Guests, mobsters, and high-society figures fill the estate. But all eyes are on Destiny as she arrives, exuding power. The crime world is buzzing with rumors of her father's mysterious death, a scenario the police seemingly exploited.

Cage the Butcher makes a grand entrance, his reputation preceding him. As he's flocked by musicians, oblivious to his true identity, Destiny ushers him away. Yet, an inconspicuous figure lurks - Muscles, expertly concealed. He discreetly gestures to other undercover operatives.

In a plush home office, Destiny and Cage deliberate. Brief exchanges hint at Destiny's involvement in her father's demise, emphasizing her ruthless determination. They seal their allegiance with a toast in the mansion's luxurious pool area.

But things take a dark twist. Cage introduces Destiny to a new associate he just met at the party. It's Muscles. Their exchange is tense, filled with unsaid threats. As a photographer captures the moment, it's revealed that it's Henry. Destiny realizes the danger she's in.

A bullet is fired. Muscles has already drawn his weapon, and Destiny is hit. The scene becomes chaotic. Shots echo, party-goers scatter, and a bloody confrontation ensues. Muscles and Henry take on Destiny's and Cage's men, with reinforcements from the balcony, transforming the mansion into a war zone.

As police sirens wail in the distance, Muscles and Henry attempt to regroup, but a bullet from Destiny, wounded but defiant, takes down Muscles. Henry dives for cover. Destiny and Henry, both injured, take their final shots.

Henry lands a bullet squarely on Destiny's forehead, while a shot from her pistol pierces his chest, right over the heart. He falls back onto the mansion's ornate marble floor, blood pooling around him. The grandeur of the mansion contrasts starkly with the brutal aftermath of the showdown.

As the lifeblood spills from Henry, it melds with the champagne on the floor, glistening under the cascading sunlight filtering through the open patio doors. The scene becomes eerily dreamlike; the chaos of earlier events distant, drowned out by the muted sounds of sirens approaching from afar.

The camera remains intimately close to Henry, his gaze faltering, unfocused, as it meanders upwards. Just then, entering the frame from behind and descending gracefully to meet his gaze is the visage of Sam. Illuminated by the soft, radiant sunlight, she appears as tangible and vivid as the memories still imprinted on Henry's heart.

With a gentle beckoning, she stretches out her hand. Despite the weight of his injuries, Henry's fingers twitch, instinctively reaching out to grasp the solace she offers. Their fingertips hover mere inches apart, a heart-wrenching testament to their love, shared moments of joy, and the tragedy that sundered them.

The urgency of the sirens intensifies, but their shrill cry is overshadowed by the melancholic cadence of music serenading the background, juxtaposing the raw brutality of the scene just witnessed. As SWAT officers storm the opulent room, their

decisive strides stand in stark contrast to the still, silent figures sprawled around – with Henry, propped against the one of the pillars, forming the poignant centerpiece, the vast LA skyline painting a breathtaking backdrop through the gaping patio.

CUT TO BLACK.