

BLACK ASPHALT

Pilot

FADE IN:

EXT. INTERSTATE 80 NEAR HERSHEY, NEBRASKA - DAY

A flat stretch of western Nebraska - heat shimmering off black asphalt.

Endless sky.

Endless road.

INT. KELLIN'S SHERIFF'S CRUISER - DAY

DEPUTY KELLIN WISE (32) sits low in the driver's seat - muscular, handsome, controlled. The kind of calm you earn. Behind him: a stainless steel K-9 kennel. A sliding pass-through door between front and rear.

K-9 MAXIMUS, a large Belgian Malinois with a dark mask, pushes his head through the sliding door.

Kellin scratches behind Maximus' ears. The dog breathes steady.

Ready.

A radar chirp.

A maroon minivan rockets past.

Radar reads: 85.

Kellin's eyes don't change, but everything else does.

He flips on lights.

The cruiser pulls out of the median and closes fast.

INT. KELLIN'S SHERIFF'S CRUISER - DAY

Kellin keys the mic, all business.

KELLIN
91523, Dispatch.

DISPATCH (O.S.)
Go ahead, 91523.

KELLIN
10-82 on a maroon mini-van.
California plate 6-K-A-W-4-6-9.
Mile marker 164, eastbound.

DISPATCH (V.O.)
10-4, 91523

Kellin watches the van drift to the shoulder.
Maximus starts to bark – the sound of purpose.
Kellin shuts the sliding door, firm.

KELLIN
Pfui.

Maximus cuts it instantly. Locked in.

EXT. INTERSTATE 80 NEAR HERSHEY, NEBRASKA – DAY

Kellin approaches the passenger side.

Tactical BDU's.

"K-9 UNIT" on his back in bold white block letters.

Confidence without swagger.

Passenger DONALD WASHINGTON (31) rolls the window down.

DONALD
What's the problem, officer?

Kellin positions himself where he can see driver and passenger.

Driver MARY MILLS (34) grips the wheel too tight.

KELLIN
I clocked you well over the posted
speed limit. I need your license,
registration, proof of insurance,
please.

Donald smiles like a man used to talking his way out of things.

DONALD
We weren't going that fast.

Kellin doesn't react. He waits.

The silence does the work.

Donald hands over the paperwork.

Mary avoids eye contact.

Kellin scans the interior.

Small tells. Too clean. Too staged.

KELLIN
Where you headed?

MARY
Denver. Visiting family.

Donald answers at the same time.

DONALD
Kansas City. Business.

A beat.

Kellin looks at them – not angry. Just... certain.

KELLIN
Sit tight.

He steps away.

INT. KELLIN'S SHERIFF'S CRUISER - DAY

Kellin checks the computer. His eyes flick to Maximus through the steel bars.

KELLIN
(quiet)
Alright, partner.

EXT. INTERSTATE 80 - MOMENTS LATER

Another unit pulls up. DEPUTY CONNORS (30's) exits, approaches.

Kellin gestures toward the van, low and concise.

Maximus is out now, muzzled, vibrating with focus.

Kellin runs Maximus along the exterior. The dog inhales the world.

Then – at the rear – Maximus sits.

That's it. That's the sentence.

KELLIN

Good boy.

Kellin rewards him with touch and praise. Controlled affection.

Deputy Connors moves to separate Donald.

Kellin pops the hatch.

The cargo area is stripped – seats removed. A black tarp covering something. A duffel bag. A cooler. Shoes.

Kellin pulls back the tarp.

Bundled bricks wrapped in brown tape. Lots of them.

Kellin grabs one, slices it open.

Marijuana.

He looks to Connors, nods once.

KELLIN (CONT'D)

Put him under arrest.

EXT. LINCOLN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Kellin and Maximus enter. The place is alive with routine chaos.

Maximus still muzzled.

CORPORAL DWIGHT NEWMAN (34), Kellin's K-9 supervisor, calls out like

Kellin's a walking highlight reel.

CORPORAL NEWMAN

There he is – drug runners beware!

KELLIN

Oh shut it.

Laughter breaks across the room.

Newman claps him on the shoulder.

CORPORAL NEWMAN

Two years as a handler and you've already broken every record I had.

KELLIN
 Maximus makes me look good.

He bends, scratches Maximus' neck.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
 Ain't that right, buddy?

CORPORAL NEWMAN
 A dog's only as good as his
 handler.

KELLIN
 And a handler's only as good as his
 dog.

Newman smirks.

CORPORAL NEWMAN
 Touché.

Kellin clocks paperwork waiting like a mountain.

KELLIN
 I'd love to hang out, but unlike
 some of you, I've got inventory,
 reports, and a whole lot of typing.

DEPUTY BRICE LINDEN (30's) forces a smile.

The room cracks up again.

Kellin moves on. Work first.

EXT. HOME OF KELLIN WISE - DUSK

A modest ranch home at the end of a cul-de-sac.

Safe. Ordinary.

Kellin pulls in. Opens the door.

Maximus launches out, joyfully athletic.

They head through a backyard gate.

INT. HOME OF KELLIN WISE - DUSK

Warm noise. Family life.

BRE WISE (31) - attractive, fit, sharp-eyed - moves in the
 kitchen.

AUDRA (11) at the table. ZACH (10). BREON (7) on a chair nearby.

Breon's head is shaved. A scar curves across her scalp – a quiet testament.

BRE
Hey, babe.

KELLIN
Hey, Bre.

Maximus barrels straight to Audra and licks her face. Audra laughs.

Kellin takes in Breon for a moment – his smile softens.

Dinner prep. Homework. The normal life he fights to keep.

INT. HOME OF KELLIN WISE - NIGHT - MASTER BEDROOM

Phone RINGS.

Kellin sits up instantly. Bre stirs beside him.

KELLIN
Wise.

VOICE (O.S.)
Nebraska State Patrol requesting a

K-9.

KELLIN
Advise him I'll be there in thirty.
Tops.

He hangs up. Bre blinks awake.

BRE
NSP doesn't have K-9s available?

KELLIN
Local handler's on vacation. Next
closest is three hours out.

Bre exhales – concerned, but used to it.

BRE
Be careful. Stay safe.

KELLIN

Always.

EXT. INTERSTATE 80 NEAR NORTH PLATTE - NIGHT

Two NSP cruisers.

A stop in progress.

Kellin rolls in.

Maximus barks, wired.

KELLIN

Maximus - Pfui.

Silence. Control.

TROOPER RICK HINES (32) meets Kellin. They've done big busts together.

TROOPER HINES

Max is pumped.

KELLIN

He knows why we're here. What've we got?

Hines gestures to the stopped vehicle.

TROOPER HINES

Speeding. Two occupants. Stories don't match. Fast-food wrappers. Energy drinks. And—

He points to the windshield.

Fifteen evergreen tree air fresheners hanging from the rearview mirror.

TROOPER HINES (CONT'D)

The Felony Forest.

KELLIN

Yep. Consent refused?

TROOPER HINES

You got it.

Kellin nods. Goes to the cruiser.

KELLIN
Okay, Maximus. Let's find the
drugs. Such Rauschgift.

They work the car. Sniff. Sniff. Sniff.

At the rear—

Maximus sits.

Kellin's eyes narrow. He's already assembling the truth.

INT. STATE PATROL OFFICE / CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Money stacked on tables like bricks. Bands and bricks. The
air smells of paper and consequence.

Kellin stares at it, stunned despite himself.

Two million dollars, arranged like a shrine.

His face doesn't show greed.

It shows a question he hates having.

INT. HOME OF KELLIN WISE - DAWN

Kellin slips inside with Maximus.

House asleep.

Maximus pads to his bed. Drops down.

Kellin goes to the counter.

A stack of medical bills.

Stamped "PAST DUE" in angry red.

He flips one over. Another. Another.

His jaw tightens.

INT. LINCOLN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - BILLING OFFICE - DAY

A fluorescent-lit patient services room. Posters about
payment plans and charity care. A small row of chairs. A TV
drones a daytime talk show silently.

Kellin sits at a counter across from LUCY (40s), a billing
rep with a clipboard and practiced empathy.

He's in plain clothes, but the posture of a cop remains – controlled, tired.

LUCY
(sympathetic)
Mr. Wise, thank you for coming in.
I know these statements aren't easy
to look at.

She slides an itemized bill across the counter.

Totals in bold, large dollar amounts.

Facility fees. Surgeon fees. Radiation. ICU.

KELLIN
(reading)
Seventy-four thousand for a three
day stay? For a kid?

LUCY
That's the facility charge, Doctor
consults, medications, imaging. It
adds up fast.

KELLIN
We had insurance. Why's a chunk
labeled "non-covered"?

LUCY
(soft)
Out-of-network provider fees. Part
of the surgeon's bill was billed
through a specialty group not in-
network. We can request an
adjustment, but it's not
guaranteed.

Kellin's jaw tightens. He flips pages – each more brutal than the last.

KELLIN
What are my options?

LUCY
We can set up a payment plan. We
can submit a financial assistance
application – charity care – but
that process can take thirty to
ninety days, and it's income-
sensitive.

KELLIN

We're below the threshold, right?
I'm not exactly swimming in cash.

LUCY

It depends on household size,
assets. I can start the application
today. We'll need documentation –
tax returns, bank statements.

KELLIN

(straight)
I don't have time.

Lucy looks at him – not a judgment, just professional
clarity.

LUCY

If you can't make even the minimum,
we'll refer it to our patient
advocate. They might negotiate a
reduction with the provider.

Kellin's eyes flick to the amount again. A single number
expands like a gulf.

KELLIN

What's the reduction look like?
Fifty percent?

LUCY

Realistically? Twenty to thirty if
they approve. Some cases, more.
It's not a promise.

He exhales, the sound small and sharp.

KELLIN

My wife works part-time. I'm a
deputy. We don't make... we're not
rich. My daughter – she's fine now.
They say "fine." But this bill
reads like a life sentence.

LUCY

(soft)
I'm so sorry. The hospital can't
take away what happened, but we can
try to make the balance less of a
burden.

A beat.

An older social worker, MARIA (50s), steps in with a folder. She knows the system.

MARIA

We could look into state assistance for rehabilitation follow-up, transportation help. It's not a cure-all, but every little bit helps.

KELLIN

(angry, taut)

How does that help when the interest keeps growing? When collectors start calling?

Lucy glances at the printed "PAST DUE" stamp on one page.

LUCY

If you set a payment plan, we can stop collections for the moment. It's not forgiveness, Mr. Wise. It's time.

KELLIN

(fists clench)

Time to what? Work two jobs? Leave my posts? Bre can't- I don't want her worrying.

MARIA

You should know - some families in similar situations end up qualifying for a hardship waiver, but the paperwork is invasive. It asks about every part of life.

Kellin laughs - a brittle sound.

KELLIN

I don't have another life to hand over.

MARIA

Then let's start with a payment plan. We'll help you with the application. I'll flag it urgent.

Kellin stares at the numbers again, the reality of the next months - years - settling in like a stone.

KELLIN

(quiet)

And if it doesn't work?

LUCY

Then we keep fighting. We don't give up. But you have to give us documents.

Kellin nods once, more to himself than them. He stands, takes the pages, pockets them like heavy currency.

KELLIN

I'll get the paperwork. I'll do what I can. He hesitates as he reaches the door, then turns back.

KELLIN (CONT'D)

(softer)

If you can make anything happen faster – call me. Please.

LUCY

We'll do everything we can.

He walks out. The door closes. He stands in the small hallway for a second – a man who protects others, in a place where protection doesn't buy mercy.

FLASHBACK:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Two million dollars.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. HOME OF KELLIN WISE - DUSK

Bre comes up behind him, wraps her arms around him.

BRE

What are you doing?

KELLIN

Looking at the mountain.

BRE

Yep. Still there.

She sees the tension in his shoulders. The stress he hides all day.

BRE (CONT'D)
What was the call you went on last night?

KELLIN
Hines stopped a car. Max found a hidden compartment.

Bre waits.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
Two million dollars.

Bre's eyes widen.

BRE
Two million?

KELLIN
Stacked across tables like it was nothing.

Bre tries a joke to cut the weight.

BRE
Well... did you bring some home?

Kellin laughs, but it's bitter.

KELLIN
A quarter of that wipes our slate clean.

BRE
And buys you a cell.

KELLIN
Rafel was joking at class last night - said I'm on the wrong side of the law.

BRE
Rafel would know. He lived over there. Didn't work out.

Kellin stares at the bills again.

KELLIN
I strap on a gun, risk my life, and it's... a laughable salary. Then some criminal makes in one night what I make in a year.

Bre doesn't scold. She grounds him.

BRE

Their risk is different. You think the guy who lost that cash gets a slap on the wrist? You think he goes home?

Kellin meets her eyes. He hates that she's right.

KELLIN

How did I land such a smart woman?

Bre smiles, a flash of warmth.

BRE

Must've been those tight college baseball pants.

Kellin cracks. A real laugh.

KELLIN

You'd think a college sprinter could've gotten away.

BRE

I let you catch me.

They kiss – but under it is the pressure. Always there.

EXT. HOME OF ANTHONY JANZ - DAY

Secluded canyons outside North Platte, Nebraska.

A private training range built for people who take violence seriously.

THE KILL CREW is gathered: ANTHONY JANZ (28), JONAS DAHL (29), LIAM CASTANO (28), RAFEL PALACIA (32), MATT EISEN (30), and Kellin.

Kellin runs the obstacle course with an AR-556 and sidearms. Clean movements. Fast. Professional.

Targets drop. POP! POP!

CRACK! CRACK!

FRAP! FRAP!

He hits everything.

Applause.

ANTHONY
Very nice.

LIAM
I taught him very well.

Everyone laughs.

Kellin grins – then throws a challenge.

KELLIN
Thousand bucks you can't beat that.

LIAM
You don't have a thousand bucks.

KELLIN
Neither do you. Leg kicks. Winner
kicks the loser.

RAFEL
Oh shit.

INT. BODYWISE MMA GYM – NIGHT

Sweat. Mats. The familiar language of pain.

Liam limps in.

KELLIN
How's that leg, brochacho?

Roars of laughter.

Sparring begins. Shin pads crack – SCHMACK! SCHMACK! SCHMACK!

Jonas limps after getting chopped down.

LIAM
Paybacks are a bitch!

JONAS
Yeah, yeah, dick.

Kellin wipes down mats. The gym empties.

A man steps in

JAKE ALLEN (32). Old teammate. Old friend. California energy
in a Nebraska room.

Rafel nods. Jake nods back.

Jake spots Kellin disinfecting.

JAKE

Damn. You can't find a student to mop the mats?

Kellin looks up, surprised – then happy.

KELLIN

Jake? What the hell? You're a long way from California.

They meet, hug hard.

JAKE

I told you I was coming.

KELLIN

Yeah, but I didn't think you meant right now.

Jonas smirks.

JONAS

Damn, look at you, bro. You've gotten big.

KELLIN

When you don't have to make weight, you can lift like a grown man.

They laugh.

Kellin studies Jake – sees something behind the smile.

KELLIN (CONT'D)

So what brings you to Nebraska?

JAKE

Needed a vacation.

KELLIN

You can't bullshit a bullshitter. Nobody from California vacations in Nebraska.

Jake laughs – busted.

JAKE

Alright, alright.

KELLIN

What's up?

Jake hesitates – then goes for it.

JAKE
I have a proposition.

KELLIN
A proposition, eh?

JAKE
More like an offer that gets you
out of that medical debt you told
me about.

Kellin's smile fades. There it is.

KELLIN
Uh-oh. What's in it for you?

JAKE
Nothing. After we talked, I kept
thinking. I can't help you with
cash... but I might have a way for
you to make enough to breathe
again.

KELLIN
If you're going to ask me to fly
out and teach a seminar, answer's
no.

JAKE
Not a seminar.

Jake glances around – makes sure they're alone.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Private clients. High-end. They
want law enforcement expertise.
Interdiction training. Avoiding
stops. How K-9's work. They pay...
very well.

Kellin's eyes sharpen.

KELLIN
Who are they?

JAKE
Friends of a friend.

KELLIN
That's not an answer.

Jake holds his gaze.

JAKE

I'm not asking you to do anything violent. Not asking you to cross a line you can't come back from. You're teaching. That's it.

Kellin swallows, because he knows how lines work.

They don't announce themselves. They just... move.

INT. HOME OF KELLIN WISE - NIGHT

Kellin sits in the dark living room.

Maximus lies nearby, ears tracking Kellin's breath.

Kellin stares at the medical bills on the table.

KELLIN

(to himself)

What the fuck are you doing, Kellin?

He reaches for his phone.

INT. HUNAN CHINESE RESTAURANT - DAY

A secluded booth in the back.

Kellin in uniform. Controlled. Alert.

Jake slides in.

JAKE

Chinese food buffet?

KELLIN

One, this place is bomb. Two, I'm a cop in uniform. I'm not eating anywhere they bring my food out special.

Jake laughs.

KELLIN (CONT'D)

If someone spits in my food here, they're spitting in everyone's.

Jake leans in, whispering.

JAKE

I'm going to assume you didn't call me here to say no.

Kellin whispers back – the weight in his voice is real.

KELLIN

Every day I'm on that black asphalt hunting drug runners. This is... a big deal. To even consider it.

JAKE

I get it. I do.

KELLIN

This stays between us. I'm not telling the guys and I'm sure as hell not telling Bre the real reason.

Jake makes the motion of "zipping" his lips.

JAKE

Not a word. You have my word.

A long beat. Kellin makes the choice – not proudly.

Necessarily.

KELLIN

Alright then.

Jake nods, almost relieved.

KELLIN (CONT'D)

Let's eat.

Jake pats his back, quiet victory.

JAKE

My man.

INT. BODYWISE MMA GYM – NIGHT

Jiu-jitsu class just ended. The crew sits on the mat, talking.

Kellin keeps it casual. Controlled.

KELLIN

Liam – I'm going to California next week. Teaching a seminar for Jake. Cover Muay Thai class for me.

LIAM
Absolutely. Won't miss a chance to
teach women's kickboxing.

KELLIN
I'm shocked.

Laughter.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
Just don't flirt them into
quitting. Those classes pay the
rent.

MATT
Hundred bucks says he teaches
shirtless.

LIAM
Shit, cabron. I look goood.

RAFEL
Don't speak Spanish, Liam. You're
the whitest Mexican I know.

The room erupts with laughter.

Kellin stands, calls to Rafel as others pack up.

KELLIN
Hey, Rafel. You got a sec?

RAFEL
Yeah. What's up?

KELLIN
I'll be gone a week. Keep an eye on
Bre and the kids?

Rafel doesn't joke now. He understands the ask.

RAFEL
You got it. Anytime.

Kellin nods. Grateful, but uneasy.

INT. HOME OF KELLIN WISE - DAY

Kellin enters with Maximus.

Maximus hops on the couch next to Breon.

Zach and Audra read at the table.

Audra looks up.

AUDRA
Hi, Dad.

KELLIN
Hi, Audra. Another book?

AUDRA
Always.

Kellin looks to Zach.

KELLIN
Hey, Zach.

ZACH
Hey, Dad.

Kellin fake-sighs.

KELLIN
It's like I'm invisible around
here. Only one kid acknowledges me.

From the kitchen:

BRE
Enjoy the silence, babe.

KELLIN
Valid point.

He crosses to Breon, rubs her head gently.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
Hey there, kiddo. How you doing?

BREON
Good, Dad.

KELLIN
I'm gonna change and watch TV with
you.

Breon smiles.

BREON
Okay.

Bre watches – noticing.

BRE
You're not going to the gym
tonight?

KELLIN
Nah. I leave tomorrow. Want to hang
with you guys.

Bre smirks.

BRE
That'll be a nice change.

INT. HOME OF KELLIN WISE - NIGHT - MASTER BEDROOM

Kellin and Bre get ready for bed.

Maximus lies on his dog bed, eyes open - listening like a
soldier.

BRE
Are you sure you want to drive all
the way to California? That's a
long drive.

Kellin keeps his voice steady.

KELLIN
I need to take Maximus. I'm gone a
week. He's department property. I'm
not leaving you responsible for
him. Other option is a kennel.

Maximus' ears twitch at "kennel." Offended.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
Jake said the apartment above his
gym is vacant. I'll stay there.

Bre nods. Concern still present.

BRE
That'll be nice.

Lights out.

INT. KELLIN'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Soft morning light spills across the kitchen.

A radio hums low.

Kid clutter – crayons, a soccer ball – gives the kitchen a lived-in rhythm.

Breon sits at the table with a small army of plastic soldiers lined up in formation.

Kellin at the stove flips pancakes with practiced calm.

Maximus pads around their feet, tail slow and content.

BREON

(serious)

If the knights fight the robots and
the robots have a ladder, who wins?

KELLIN

(playing)

Depends who can climb faster and
who remembers to bring coffee.
Knights are terrible without
coffee.

Breon looks at him carefully, testing.

BREON

Does my head hurt when I run
because the knights hit me?

Kellin turns the pancake, goes to her, kneels so he's eye level.

KELLIN

(gentle)

No, kiddo. Your head's tricky
sometimes. Doctor says it's
healing. That's good, right?

BREON

If it's healing, why's it still
bumpy?

Kellin places a thumb to the smooth scar, his smile held tight.

KELLIN

Because brains are weird. They take
their time. You're doing everything
right. You're brave. You hide when
you need to. You tell Mommy when
you feel funny, yeah?

Breon nods. She reaches across the table and squeezes his hand.

BREON
 Promise you come home?

KELLIN
 (soft laugh)
 I promise. I always come home.

Breon takes a small plastic soldier and makes it salute.

BREON
 This is Officer Maximus. He eats
 socks.

Maximus snorts, nudges a pancake crumb, then sits more
 soberly, attentive.

KELLIN
 You be good to your sister and
 brother. And you keep Dad's secret
 door a secret, you hear me?

BREON
 (earnest)
 Secret forever.

He ruffles her hair, kisses her forehead. She grins wide like
 the world is small enough to fix.

BREON (CONT'D)
 (still worried)
 If a knight comes, I'll hide behind
 the closet.

KELLIN
 (half-smile)
 Best hiding place in the world.

He stands, plates pancakes.

The ordinary smallness of the moment – pancakes, plastic
 soldiers, a dog at the table – makes the life fragile and
 human.

EXT. HOME OF KELLIN WISE - DAWN

Early morning. Cold light.

Kellin loads his pickup for the trip.

Maximus lies in the driveway, calm, watching.

Bre steps out with a travel mug.

BRE
Extra creamer and sugar. Just like
you like it.

KELLIN
Thanks, babe.

He kisses her.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
I better get going. Long-ass drive.

Bre kneels, pets Maximus.

BRE
You take good care of him.. and
bring him home to me.

Maximus licks her face. Bre laughs, kisses his nose.

Kellin opens passenger door.

KELLIN
Maximus. Load up.

Maximus jumps in, sits like he owns the truck.

Kellin kisses Bre again – a little longer this time.

BRE
Drive safe. Text me often.

KELLIN
Of course.

Kellin climbs in, backs out, waves.

Bre stands in the driveway, waving as the truck disappears
down the street.

The sound of tires on asphalt fades into the morning.

EXT. HOME OF ARMOND GARCIA – DAY

A walled estate that feels more like a resort than a home.
Heat shimmers off stone. Beyond the infinity pool: armed
Sicarios posted like statues.

Jake crosses the patio, escorted by one Sicario who never
stops watching.

By the pool, ARMOND GARCIA (28) lounges in sunglasses,
relaxed—but not soft. Power wears comfort well.

Armond doesn't stand.

JAKE
Hello, Armond.

Armond lifts his glass, barely acknowledging.

ARMOND
I hope you brought me something
worth my time.

JAKE
He's on his way. Couple days.

Armond's smile is thin.

ARMOND
I'm impressed. A police officer... on
the payroll.

Jake keeps his face neutral—careful.

JAKE
He doesn't know the whole picture.
If he knew "cartel," he'd never
come.

Armond's gaze hardens behind the lenses.

ARMOND
People don't have to agree to
anything. They just have to...
understand the alternatives.

Jake shifts—subtle, but it's there.

JAKE
You promised no harm comes to him.

Armond sets the glass down. The sound is small. The threat is
not.

ARMOND
I keep my word.
(pauses)
But you should also remember what
happens when someone makes me
repeat myself.

Jake swallows it.

JAKE
I remember.

Armond finally sits up, interest returning.

ARMOND

I want control of distribution in this area. Your man gets my product across the country clean—you become a rich man.

JAKE

He's one of the best in the U.S. He's trained for interdiction. He knows how people get caught. He's put a lot of guys in cuffs.

Armond nods, as if considering a new tool.

ARMOND

We'll see what he knows.

(pause, then)

And Jake... you know we don't only deal in drugs.

Jake doesn't blink.

JAKE

Yeah. I'm aware.

Armond reclines again, conversation finished.

ARMOND

Go. I'll be in contact.

Jake turns to leave. The escort falls in beside him.

ARMOND (CONT'D)

And Jake.

Jake stops—doesn't turn.

ARMOND (CONT'D)

If this doesn't go how I want... I'll kill both of you.

A beat.

ARMOND (CONT'D)

And I'll kill your families too.

Jake forces his legs to move. He walks away like a man trying not to run.

EXT. ALLEN'S MIXED MARTIAL ARTS AND FITNESS - DAY

Chula Vista, California sun. A clean gym with big windows and big energy.

Kellin pulls in, road-dusted from the drive. He steps out and rolls his shoulders like he's shaking off miles.

Jake appears at the top of an exterior staircase, all smiles—the version of Jake that Kellin trusts.

JAKE
There he is!

Kellin looks up, grins.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Come on up. We'll grab your bags later.

Kellin nods, then—

KELLIN
Maximus... Hier.

Maximus jumps out and snaps into position at Kellin's left, all business.

They head upstairs.

INT. GYM APARTMENT - DAY

A surprisingly nice apartment. New finishes, clean lines, meant for guests who matter.

Kellin steps in, clocking the quality.

JAKE
Well?

KELLIN
Damn. This is a nice place.

JAKE
Just remodeled it. I keep it open for out-of-town fighters... guests... people who need somewhere to land.

Kellin nods, impressed—then watches Jake a half-second longer than normal. Like he's measuring something.

INT. INDUSTRIAL BUILDING — NIGHT

A plain door in a plain building—exactly the kind of place you don't remember afterward.

Kellin and Jake move with purpose down a hallway. Maximus is with them, steady and alert.

They enter a large, empty room.

Armond stands waiting, with a Sicario beside him. The Sicario doesn't move—doesn't need to.

ARMOND

Hello. Jake has told me a lot about you.

Armond steps forward to shake Kellin's hand.

Maximus low growls—deep, warning.

Armond stops immediately. Smart.

KELLIN

Maximus... Platz.

Maximus drops, obedient, but his eyes stay locked on Armond and the Sicario.

Armond smiles, impressed despite himself.

ARMOND

That's a man's dog. I'll stay right here.

KELLIN

I'd like to say his bark is worse than his bite... but that'd be a lie.

Armond chuckles, carefully.

ARMOND

I prefer not to test the theory.

A beat.

Kellin's eyes don't leave Armond.

ARMOND (CONT'D)

As I said... Jake tells me you're exceptional.

KELLIN

I'd like to say the same. But Jake hasn't told me anything about you.

Armond spreads his hands, almost friendly.

ARMOND

Better that way. What's the phrase your government uses?

KELLIN

Plausible deniability.

ARMOND

Exactly. The less you know about me, the easier your life becomes... if you're ever compromised.

Kellin doesn't smile.

KELLIN

So what do you want from me?

Armond's tone is casual, like discussing a business lease.

ARMOND

I'm a businessman. I want to expand. I want more money. The American dream, no?

KELLIN

Most people take an honest route.

Armond tilts his head.

ARMOND

"Honest" is a word men invented to control other men.

Kellin holds his stare.

Armond leans in—just enough to make it feel personal.

ARMOND (CONT'D)

I know you're torn. Oath. Duty. All that. But I'm not asking you to carry product. Not asking you to shoot anyone.

Kellin's jaw tightens.

ARMOND (CONT'D)
You teach. You pass on knowledge.
The kind that keeps my people from
making stupid mistakes.

A beat.

ARMOND (CONT'D)
And you get paid. Very generously.

Kellin's eyes flick—medical bills, his daughter's scar, the weight of debt. He hates that it's true.

KELLIN
That's why I'm here. When I'm out
from under my debt... I'm done.

Armond nods like he's granting a favor.

ARMOND
Of course. You tell me when. We
help each other. That's all.

Kellin gives a restrained nod.

No enthusiasm, just resignation.

ARMOND (CONT'D)
That's enough for tonight. I wanted
to make sure we understood each
other. Tomorrow night, Jake brings
you. You start teaching my guys how
to not screw up.

JAKE
I'll handle it.

Armond turns. The Sicario turns with him. They exit without another word.

Kellin stays still, watching the door. Then slowly looks at Jake.

A long, loaded silence.

INT. JAKE'S CAR — NIGHT

Jake drives. City lights blur across the windshield.

In the backseat, Maximus stands with his head resting against Kellin's shoulder—grounding him.

Kellin stares out the window, jaw set.

KELLIN
Tell me more about this guy.

Jake keeps his eyes on the road.

JAKE
There's not much to tell.

Kellin turns to him.

KELLIN
Everybody has a story, Jake.
There's always more than "not
much."

Jake shrugs, too quick.

JAKE
He's small-time. That's it.

Kellin doesn't buy it for a second.

KELLIN
He didn't feel small-time.

Jake pushes it harder—like repetition will make it true.

JAKE
I'm telling you... he's a small-time
guy with big dreams.

Kellin studies him.

KELLIN
How'd you meet him?

Jake answers like he's rehearsed it.

JAKE
My martial arts classes. He came
in, wanted lessons. We got
friendly. I don't hang out with
him, but... we help each other out.

Kellin's eyes narrow—quiet danger.

KELLIN
I've got a bad feeling about this.

Jake says nothing.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
But I'm in a situation I have to
get out of. This is a means to an
end.

A beat.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
So you better be straight with me.
Don't you dare drag me into
something we can't handle.

Jake finally looks at him—just a glance, then back to the road.

JAKE
You have my word.

Kellin turns back to the window, because if he looks at Jake any longer, he might see the lie.

Maximus exhales, low and uneasy.

INT. AUTO MECHANIC SHOP - NIGHT

A cavernous, oil-stained space. Hydraulic lifts. Tool chests. Shadows.

The kind of place where engines come to be rebuilt — or stripped.

Armond stands off to the side with his Sicario.

Four men — hard-eyed, attentive — wait near a workbench. These aren't mules. These are supervisors.

INT. AUTO MECHANIC SHOP — NIGHT

Fluorescent glare. Toolboxes. An empty car shell on a lift. Men drift in, curious.

Tonight the room is set up like a mock roadside: a folding table with clipboards, a cheap folding chair for a "driver," and a cardboard windshield with a hole cut for a "window."

Kellin stands with Maximus at his side.

Jake watches nervously from the back.

Armond's Sicario stands off to the side like a sculpture.

The four supervisors from the earlier lecture file in, eyes bright and expectant.

KELLIN

Tonight we do it live. Theory's
fine-practice is what gets you past
a cop.

Kellin nods to a young MAN (late 20s). An actor Jake hired to be the "mule." He's wearing a worn hoodie, hands folded, too-calm.

KELLIN (CONT'D)

You know your story?

MULE

(nods)

Yep.

KELLIN

Say it like it's the only thing you
own. No pauses. No extra details.
If we get an officer who's polite –
we fall into that routine. If we
get an officer who's terse – we
fall into another. Learn both.

Kellin walks through a choreographed stop with the supervisors playing roles: Officer; backup; a distracted trooper.

He shows where to put hands, how to answer, how to breathe. He demonstrates a level stare, a practiced smile, the small jest to diffuse tension.

KELLIN (CONT'D)

(soft, to the group)

Two people sharing one story. One
voice. If your stories don't match,
you invite the search.

The "Officer" approaches the mock car. The man playing him is deliberate – respectful.

ROLEPLAY OFFICER

Sir, do you know why I stopped you?

MULE (DRIVER)

Sorry, officer. Speeding? I was
talking about work. I'm on my way
to see family.

Kellin watches closely, correcting posture here, softening tone there. Maximus sits, ears pricked.

Then Kellin throws a curve: a sudden, unexpected question from the mock officer.

ROLEPLAY OFFICER
Is there anything in the back I
should know about?

The "mule" hesitates a fraction too long. He swallows. It's a tiny flinch – enough.

KELLIN
(cutting in)
Stop.

He steps into the light, lowering his voice so the others can't hear.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
You let curiosity in. You gave
detail. You swung the door open.

Kellin addresses the men, teaching – not condescending, exact.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
If you teach your driver to say one
phrase – "It's in the trunk,
officer" – you maintain. If you say
"we were given something to
transport," you've given the
officer the hook: who gave it,
where, why. Hook leads to a
warrant.

A supervisor murmurs assent.

Armond's men pay close attention.

A supervisor leans in, reverent.

Armond nods once, satisfied.

Maximus lifts his head, watches the man playing the mule – a dog noticing nerves.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
(to the room)
Training's over. You go practice.
Remember: boring cars, boring
people. Keep it like the
background. Nobody remembers the
background.

The men disperse, conversations low and tactical.

Jake lingers near Kellin, the forced grin gone.

He pauses – tone shifts slightly.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
Cargo matters too.

A subtle change in the room.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
Weight distribution. Vehicle sag.
Aftermarket modifications.

One man nods.

DRUG RUNNER #4
Hidden compartments?

KELLIN
Only if they're done right. Poorly
built compartments get people
prison time.

A beat.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
And nothing illegal should ever be
accessible from the passenger
compartment.

The Sicario shifts. Armond notices – but says nothing.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
The less the driver knows, the
better.

That line hangs.

Kellin senses the room tightening – but doesn't yet know why.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
Your mules aren't criminals.
They're actors.

DRUG RUNNER #1
Actors?

KELLIN
They're playing normal people. The
better they sell it, the better
your odds.

Kellin steps back.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
That's enough for tonight.

The men exchange looks — impressed, respectful.

Armond steps forward.

ARMOND
Tomorrow?

KELLIN
Tomorrow we get into routes.
Timing. Patterns.

He glances at Maximus.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
And what not to do if you see one
of these.

Armond smiles — measured, pleased.

ARMOND
Very good.

Armond turns to Jake.

ARMOND (CONT'D)
Bring him tomorrow night.

JAKE
I will.

Armond nods once — then exits with the Sicario.

The men follow.

The room empties.

Kellin exhales — slow, controlled.

He looks at Jake.

EXT. AUTO MECHANIC SHOP — ALLEY / PARKING LOT — NIGHT

A diesel glow.

The shop's neon sign buzzes.

Trucks and a nondescript SUV park in the shadow.

The men from the training file out, laughing low, cigarettes
passing hands.

Jake lingers near the back, shoulders tight.

He glances toward the shop door – Kellin's silhouette vanishes inside.

Jake checks his phone, breath quick.

He turns as a black SUV idles to a stop and Armond's Sicario opens the passenger door for Armond.

Armond steps out like he owns quiet.

Jake straightens, trying for calm.

He approaches.

JAKE
(trying smile)
Armond. Good session.

Armond's smile is slow, polite – not warm.

ARMOND
Jake. You did well tonight. Your man is talented – his style, the dog's discipline. It will pay.

JAKE
(uneasy)
Yeah. He's— he's an expert. Better than I thought.

Armond walks with a light, measured step.

He stops beside a trash bin, leans on it casually.

ARMOND
You understand the next phase, yes? Routes. Timing. Not just drivers but supervisors.

Jake swallows. He's already swallowed too much.

JAKE
I do. He'll teach it. I told him it's good money. He gets out from under his burden, you get safety in the desert. Everyone wins.

Armond's eyes narrow a fraction – interest, not pleasure.

ARMOND

Everyone wins when people do what they're told. They also win when they understand consequences.

Jake forces a laugh that dies fast.

JAKE

We're squared. He's getting paid for what he does. No one's asking him to— you know, to do anything outside the classroom.

Armond's smile thins into a line.

ARMOND

(calm)

I prefer clarity. You brought a policeman into my house. He did not know everything. That's fortunate. But I do not like surprises.

Jake shifts on his feet.

He knows the meaning.

Surprises have teeth.

JAKE

I told him it was educational. Traffic craft. Nothing more. He's just teaching people how to drive normal.

Armond lets that hang, then tilts his head toward Jake like a question and a verdict.

ARMOND

And if he refuses the next request?
Refuses to continue?

Jake's face goes still. He does not want to answer.

ARMOND (CONT'D)

I have been clear with my friends. They are thorough. They dislike men who close doors on opportunity.

JAKE

(quick, pleading)

I can make him understand. I can calm him down. I'll talk to him—

ARMOND

(cutting, soft)

You will do more than talk. You will ensure he cooperates. You will keep him at the table. If he is stubborn – you will help him remember the value of compliance.

Jake's jaw works.

He swallows.

He thinks of something unsaid – a family, a mortgage, a past favor.

The weight is visible in his shoulders.

JAKE

And if I can't?

Armond's voice drops then, as if reminding Jake of a contract signed in blood.

ARMOND

Then you remind me who your family is. I am patient, Jake. Patient men are rewarded. Impatient men are useful for lessons.

A Sicario leans against the SUV, silent and watchful.

Jake looks at him.

He imagines the simple arithmetic: one man who keeps quiet vs. a family that won't be able to breathe.

JAKE

(voice small)

He won't walk. He'll keep teaching.

ARMOND

Good. Because I prefer not to repeat myself. I care about efficiency.

He straightens, offering a hand that feels like an offer and an unspoken bribe.

ARMOND (CONT'D)

Find me a timetable. Keep me informed. If you do well – there's more than money in it. You will be useful. Useful men are protected.

Jake takes the hand, but his fingers tremble slightly as they close.

JAKE
(whisper)
I understand.

Armond nods once.

His approval is an order.

ARMOND
See that you do.

Jake's smile fades - he understands now what this really is.

Jake steps back as Armond gets into the SUV.

As the door closes, Armond's driver starts the engine without haste.

The SUV pulls away, tires whisper on asphalt, leaving Jake under the shop's neon, small and very much exposed.

Jake watches the taillights vanish.

He exhales, a harsh sound, and checks his phone again - then pockets it, face set like someone who's already chosen and will live with the consequence.

KELLIN
These aren't mules.

Jake hesitates.

JAKE
Supervisors.

KELLIN
That's not what I said.

Jake doesn't answer.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
Those guys weren't worried about traffic stops. They were worried about losses.

Jake shrugs - weak.

JAKE
That's how it works.

Kellin stares at him.

KELLIN
That's not how small-time guys
think.

Jake forces a smile.

JAKE
You're reading too much into it.
Kellin kneels, unclips Maximus' muzzle.

KELLIN
Maybe.
Maximus shakes his head, relieved.
Kellin stands – eyes hard now.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
Tomorrow night – I teach routes.

JAKE
Good.

KELLIN
After that – I want to know exactly
what kind of operation this is.
Jake meets his eyes.

JAKE
You're overthinking it.
Kellin doesn't blink.

KELLIN
That's my job.
They walk toward the exit.
Maximus pauses – looks back at the dark shop.
Something here doesn't smell right.
He follows Kellin.

EXT. HOME OF KELLIN WISE – LATE AFTERNOON (SAME NIGHT)

WHILE KELLIN TRAINS IN CALIFORNIA

Rafel pulls up across the street and parks.

He sits in the truck, engine running.

Watching the house.

INT. RAFEL'S TRUCK

Rafel checks his phone.

One missed call.

No contact name.

He ignores it.

Pocketed.

EXT. HOME OF KELLIN WISE

Rafel walks up and knocks.

Bre answers, relieved to see a familiar face.

BRE

Rafel. Hey.

RAFEL

Kellin asked me to check in. Make sure everything's good.

BRE

That's nice of him. Come in.

INT. HOME OF KELLIN WISE

Too quiet.

No dog nails on tile.

No heavy breathing.

No presence.

Rafel clocks it instantly.

RAFEL

Maximus not here?

BRE

Kellin took him with him. Didn't want to kennel him.

RAFEL
Makes sense.

Rafel steps farther in – comfortable.

He looks around casually.

The hallway.

The bedrooms.

The stairwell.

Breon sits on the couch watching cartoons.

Her head scarf slips slightly, revealing the scar beneath.

Rafel notices.

A flicker of something crosses his face – gone just as fast.

RAFEL (CONT'D)
How's she doing?

BRE
Better every day.

Bre says it with pride and exhaustion.

BRE (CONT'D)
Doctors think they got it all.

RAFEL
That's good.

A beat.

RAFEL (CONT'D)
Kids are tough.

INT. KITCHEN – MOMENTS LATER

Bre pours coffee.

Rafel leans against the counter – relaxed, unthreatening.

RAFEL
Kellin gone long?

BRE
Just the week.

RAFEL
Long drive.

BRE
He wanted Maximus with him. Didn't
want to leave me juggling
everything.

Rafel nods.

RAFEL
Smart.

His eyes drift – not staring, just observing.

A calendar on the fridge:

Doctor appointments.

Times circled.

Rafel notes it.

RAFEL (CONT'D)
Anyone else checking on you?

BRE
My parents call. Kellin's brother
is a few hours away.

RAFEL
Stephen.

Bre looks at him – surprised.

BRE
Yeah.

RAFEL
Former Marine, right?

BRE
That's right.

Rafel sips coffee.

RAFEL
He sounds squared away.

INT. LIVING ROOM – LATER

Zach and Audra work on homework.

Rafel sits on the floor helping Zach with math.

He's good with kids.

Natural.

Disarming.

Audra looks up.

AUDRA

Are you staying for dinner?

Rafel smiles.

RAFEL

Not tonight.

He checks the window – instinctive.

RAFEL (CONT'D)

I should get going before it gets dark.

EXT. HOME OF KELLIN WISE

Rafel steps onto the porch.

He turns – looks back inside through the window.

Bre laughs with the kids.

A normal family moment.

Rafel's phone vibrates.

He doesn't answer.

He walks to his truck.

INT. RAFEL'S TRUCK

Rafel starts the engine.

He looks back at the house one last time.

Then pulls away.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD – NIGHT

Rafel drives through darkness.

The phone vibrates again.

This time, he answers.

RAFEL

Yeah.

We don't hear the other voice.

RAFEL (CONT'D)

He's gone. Dog's with him. House is open. No visible security.

A beat.

RAFEL (CONT'D)

I know. Tonight's not the move.

Another pause.

RAFEL (CONT'D)

I'll let you know when.

He ends the call.

The road swallows the truck.

INT. AUTO MECHANIC SHOP — NIGHT

Kellin finishes another training session.

Laughing lightly with Jake.

Completely unaware.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. HOME OF KELLIN WISE — NIGHT

The house glows peacefully.

Quiet.

Unprotected.

INT. AUTO MECHANIC SHOP — NIGHT

The shop is quieter tonight.

Less casual. More controlled.

Several vehicles are parked inside now – SUVs, vans, a box truck.

Engines off. Doors closed.

Armond stands with the Sicario near a workbench.

Jake is already there, tense.

Kellin enters with Maximus at his side.

Something feels different.

Kellin clocks the vehicles immediately.

KELLIN
That's new.

JAKE
More volume.

Kellin doesn't respond.

He looks down at Maximus.

KELLIN
Platz.

Maximus drops, alert.

Kellin steps forward.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
Tonight we talk routes.

Armond nods.

ARMOND
Please.

Kellin moves to a whiteboard mounted on the wall.

KELLIN
Most interdiction units track
patterns. Same gas stations. Same
rest stops. Same food.

He draws a line.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
Rotate everything. Drivers.
Vehicles. Timelines.

The men from before listen.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
And you never move large quantities
with nervous drivers.

A beat.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
Drivers need to know as little as
possible. That's how they stay
calm.

One man shifts.

DRUG SUPERVISOR
They don't need to know what
they're carrying.

Kellin freezes.

Just a fraction.

KELLIN
They need to know enough to not
panic if stopped.

DRUG SUPERVISOR
They're instructed not to ask
questions.

That's not what Kellin said.

Kellin turns.

KELLIN
That depends on the cargo.

The room tightens.

Armond watches carefully now.

ARMOND
Continue.

Kellin nods — but his instincts are screaming.

KELLIN
Weight matters. Distribution
matters. Noise matters.

He points to a van.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
That vehicle should never be
overloaded.

DRUG SUPERVISOR #2
They won't notice.

Kellin looks at him.

KELLIN
I will.

Silence.

Kellin walks toward the van.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
Open it.

Jake stiffens.

JAKE
Kellin—

KELLIN
Open it.

Armond gives a small nod.

The Sicario opens the rear doors.

Inside: blankets, coolers, duct-tapped containers.

And beneath them—

A pair of eyes.

A girl.

Mid teens.

Terrified.

Silent.

Kellin doesn't move.

Doesn't blink.

His breathing changes — slow, controlled, dangerous.

Another door opens.

More people.

Women.

Young.

Huddled.

Not bound.

Not screaming.

Worse.

Kellin steps back.

KELLIN (CONT'D)

No.

Armond speaks calmly – like correcting a misunderstanding.

ARMOND

It's logistics.

Kellin turns on him.

KELLIN

You told me drugs.

ARMOND

Drugs are part of the business.

KELLIN

This isn't business.

The Sicario watches Kellin's hands.

Jake finally speaks – voice cracking.

JAKE

Kellin... it's not what it looks
like.

Kellin looks at him.

KELLIN

It's exactly what it looks like.

One of the girls whimpers.

Kellin looks back at the van – sees fear he's seen before.

Traffic stops.

Victims.

The ones he couldn't save.

His jaw clenches.

KELLIN (CONT'D)
I'm done.

Armond tilts his head.

ARMOND
Everyone says that at first.

KELLIN
I'm not negotiating. I walk away.
Right now.

Armond steps closer – not threatening, just present.

ARMOND
You've already helped. You can't
unlearn what you know.

KELLIN
I won't help you move people.

ARMOND
They move themselves. We provide
opportunity.

Kellin's restraint snaps, but only internally.

KELLIN
I'm out.

A long beat.

Armond studies him.

ARMOND
That's disappointing.

He nods to the Sicario.

ARMOND (CONT'D)
Let him go.

Jake exhales – relieved too quickly.

Kellin moves back to Maximus.

He kneels.

KELLIN
Hier.

Maximus snaps to him instantly.

Kellin stands – eyes locked on Jake.

KELLIN (CONT'D)

You knew.

Jake can't meet his eyes.

JAKE

I didn't know at first.

KELLIN

But you know now.

Jake says nothing.

Kellin turns and walks out.

Maximus follows.

INT. JAKE'S CAR — NIGHT

Jake drives.

Silence.

Maximus stares out the window.

Kellin stares straight ahead.

KELLIN

They ever come near my family—

Jake grips the wheel tighter.

JAKE

They won't touch them.

KELLIN

You don't get to promise that.

Jake swallows.

JAKE

I'll fix it.

Kellin finally turns to him.

KELLIN

You already broke it.

INT. GYM APARTMENT — NIGHT

Kellin enters.

He sits on the edge of the bed.

Hands shaking now – just a little.

Maximus rests his head on Kellin's knee.

Kellin grips the dog's collar – grounding himself.

KELLIN

We're done here.

His phone buzzes.

Unknown number.

He doesn't answer.

INT. ARMOND GARCIA'S ESTATE – NIGHT

The pool is lit now.

Water ripples quietly. Reflections of palm trees shimmer across the surface like ghosts.

Armond sits at the edge, shoes off, feet in the water.

The Sicario stands behind him.

A phone rests on the table beside a half-finished drink.

Armond doesn't look angry.

He looks inconvenienced.

SICARIO

He left.

ARMOND

I know.

SICARIO

He refused.

ARMOND

He didn't refuse. He chose.

Armond lifts his glass, takes a sip.

SICARIO

Jake says he'll calm him down.

Armond smiles faintly.

ARMOND
 Jake says many things.

A beat.

ARMOND (CONT'D)
 Does the policeman understand what
 happens when someone walks away?

SICARIO
 He will.

Armond finally looks up.

ARMOND
 No. He won't.

SICARIO
 Then—

ARMOND
 Then we teach him.

The Sicario waits.

This is the part that matters.

ARMOND (CONT'D)
 You don't punish men like him with
 threats.

SICARIO
 Family?

Armond considers it — not emotionally, but tactically.

ARMOND
 He believes in rules. In lines. In
 consequences.

A pause.

ARMOND (CONT'D)
 Remove the illusion.

The Sicario nods once.

SICARIO
 We have an address.

Armond raises an eyebrow — curious.

ARMOND
 Already?

SICARIO
A friend of his.

Armond smiles now – genuine appreciation.

ARMOND
Of course.

He looks back at the water.

ARMOND (CONT'D)
Make it clean. Make it fast.

SICARIO
Anyone spared?

Armond doesn't answer right away.

ARMOND
I'm not in the sparing mood.

The Sicario tilts his head slightly.

SICARIO
Message?

ARMOND
Insurance.

A beat.

ARMOND (CONT'D)
And remind Jake—

The Sicario waits.

ARMOND (CONT'D)
—that gifts should never be wasted.

The Sicario nods, already moving.

SICARIO
I'll take care of it.

He turns and walks away.

Armond sits alone again.

The water laps gently at his feet.

He closes his eyes – not in regret.

In certainty.

CUT TO BLACK.