

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Rain pours down on cracked sidewalks. Neon lights flicker, reflecting on puddles. The city hums with distant sirens and muffled shouts.

MAYA (late 30s), gaunt, eyes haunted, walks with shoulders hunched, clutching a small, worn backpack.

She pauses under a flickering streetlamp, scanning the darkness.

INT. MAYA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sparse, dimly lit. MAYA enters, locks the door, and slides down to the floor. She exhales shakily.

A faded children's drawing is taped to the wall: a woman and a child holding hands.

MAYA reaches into her backpack, pulling out a well-worn stuffed animal.

She clutches it to her chest, rocking gently.

EXT. CITY ROOFTOP - NIGHT

MAYA stands at the edge, looking out over the city, the wind tugging at her hair.

She pulls out her phone, hesitates, then dials.

MAYA

It's me. I need to see you.

INT. ABANDONED CAFE - NIGHT

Flickering bulbs cast long shadows. MAYA sits across from VICTOR (40s), sharp suit, colder eyes.

VICTOR

You know what this will cost.

MAYA

I don't care. Just bring her back.

Victor studies her, a hint of pity flickering in his eyes.

INT. MAYA'S APARTMENT - LATER

MAYA sits at the kitchen table, hands trembling. A small envelope lies before her.

She opens it. Inside: a single key and a slip of paper with an address.

EXT. ABANDONED WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

MAYA stands outside, rain soaking her. She hesitates, then unlocks the door and steps inside.

INT. ABANDONED WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Shadows loom. Victor waits near a makeshift altar, candles burning low.

VICTOR

Are you ready?

MAYA

Do it.

Victor gestures for Maya to kneel. She obeys.

INT. ABANDONED WAREHOUSE - LATER

A ritual unfolds. Shadows twist. Maya's face is streaked with tears. Victor chants in a harsh, guttural voice.

The candles flicker violently. Maya gasps, clutching the stuffed animal.

INT. WAREHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

A child's silhouette appears in the darkness. Maya's breath catches.

MAYA

Sophie?

A little girl, SOPHIE (7), steps into the candlelight, eyes wide and confused.

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Maya rushes forward, embracing Sophie. Tears stream down her face.

SOPHIE

Mama?

MAYA

I'm here. I'm here.

Victor watches from the shadows, face unreadable.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Maya leads Sophie through the rain-soaked city. Sophie clings to her, shivering.

Maya glances at her reflection in a shop window—her eyes are hollow, a shadow of her former self.

INT. MAYA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Maya tucks Sophie into bed. She strokes her daughter's hair, her movements slow and mechanical.

SOPHIE

Will you stay with me?

MAYA

Always.

She sits on the edge of the bed, staring into the darkness.

INT. MAYA'S APARTMENT - LATER

Maya sits alone at the table, hands shaking. She tries to light a cigarette but can't steady her grip.

She looks at the faded drawing on the wall. Tears slip down her cheeks.

INT. MAYA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Soft light filters through the window. Maya sits on the bed, watching Sophie sleep.

MAYA

I'm sorry.

She gently brushes Sophie's hair back, her face etched with sorrow and relief.

EXT. CITY ROOFTOP - DAY

Maya stands alone, wind in her hair. She looks down at the city, her face blank.

She drops the stuffed animal, watching it fall to the street below.

INT. MAYA'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Maya sits beside Sophie, reading a story. Her voice is flat, eyes distant.

SOPHIE

Why are you sad, Mama?

MAYA

I'm just tired, sweetheart.

INT. ABANDONED CAFE - NIGHT

Victor sits alone, staring at his reflection in a cracked mirror. He pours a drink, hands steady.

VICTOR

We all pay in the end.