

ANDREA BATTLES THE GIANT INSECTS

Written by

Christopher Michaels

Christopher "Michaels" Andre
(847) 707-3073
Christopherandre25@gmail.com

FADE IN:

TITLE: THREE HUNDREND FIFTEEN MILLION YEARS AGO.

TITLE: BOULDER COLORADO

Steaming fern forests.

A giant DRAGONFLY—wings broad as a small airplane—skims over the ground. Its eyes glitter with cold, insect hunger. Its mandibles click.

The air trembles.

A ROAR

The sky splits open.

A burning asteroid screams downward and slams into the earth with a violence that folds the horizon. The impact sends a shockwave ripping across the field, tearing plants from their roots, shredding everything in its path.

The Dragon tries to launch itself upward—

Crimson and electric-blue light erupts from the cracked soil, spraying upward like veins bursting under pressure.

It snatches the dragonfly midair.

The creature beats its colossal wings in panic, but the light wraps around them, peeling them back with an audible wet crack. The dragonfly's body convulses, mandibles screeching in a metallic rasp, legs thrashing as the ground drags it down.

The light pulls the dragonfly into the chasm,

The earth seals shut.

EXT. APARTMENT - DAY

TITLE: BOULDER, COLORADO, PRESENT.

Snow slants hard through the dark, hammering the side of an aging apartment complex. The wind howls down the street, rattling loose gutters and street signs.

Then the light shifts.

A massive shadow crawls across the walls, swallowing the glow from the windows. Something moves above—slow, deliberate.

Broad, wet, glistening wings.

A ladybug the size of a car drifts into view, its shell slick with snowmelt. It presses against the glass, pulsing, feeding on the heat bleeding from inside.

The building groans.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

HEATHER REFUGE (22), sits stiffly at the dinner table. Her long skirt grazes the linoleum, the fabric still damp from melted snow. Her retro curls are pinned too tightly, every strand in submission.

Beside her CARSON REFUGE (70, tall, his shoulders knotted from years of tension), shifts in his chair. The wood creaks beneath him.

Across the table, NANCY REFUGE, (69, long-haired, face lined with the kind of sleep that never really rests) stares ahead with half-lidded eyes.

At the head of the table sits JACK REFUGE (12, head bowed, eyes flicking from plate to floor. He won't look at anyone.

ANDREA REFUGE (16), lingers near the doorway. Her gaze moves quick, jittery. A tremor in her neck. The faint pulse of something under her skin.

Behind Jack, the cockroach looms—glossy shell the color of wet oil, legs gripping the cabinet like blackened hooks. Every few seconds, its wings flex with a soft, papery crackle.

Carson clears his throat.

CARSON
(low/trembling)
You don't have to do this, Heather.

He glances toward Andrea.

CARSON (TO ANDREA) (CONT'D)
Honey, come sit down. Nobody's
judging you.

Heather's jaw tightens.

HEATHER
He's my brother—your half-son—and
he's missing. I know Philip's
involved.

Nancy moves her hand. She slides open her purse, revealing a small PILL ORGANIZER labeled "ANDREA - AM/PM." She hesitates. Closes the purse.

NANCY

You're sure he doesn't know who you are? We're not exactly... anonymous, Heather.

HEATHER

I'm careful. Even if I slip, it won't matter. I'll find Eric.

Jack rises slowly, eyes fixed on the roach. The thing doesn't move, but its antennae twitch toward him.

Carson exhales, steadies himself.

CARSON

These creatures don't hurt us, Jack. They help balance the population. The only time they attack is when the balance breaks.

Jack tilts his head.

JACK

Yeah, but how do you know they won't wipe us out?

NANCY

(mutters)

That's the problem with your father, he thinks he can play God.

CARSON

(tone hardens)

Heather, find out what you can about Eric. But remember he's not my child.

Nancy's face burns red.

NANCY

He's still a human being. And I made a mistake, sure. But not like the one you made. Letting them out.

Heather forces a nervous laugh that dies halfway through.

HEATHER

I'll get answers.

Andrea steps closer, silent.

ANDREA
(softly)
Don't fight. Please. It's because
of me.

Carson slides a folded notecard from his shirt pocket. On it, in pen, the word "BALANCE." He draws a line through it. Writes "CONTROL." He tucks it away.

Andrea sits. Her eyes lower to the soup bowl in front of her. A thin, flesh-colored straw unfurls from her mouth-wet, trembling-and dips into the broth. She sips slowly.

Everyone looks away except Nancy, who watches, unblinking.

Heather glances to her satchel-then to Andrea.

Andrea senses the stare. Forces a smile.

EXT. APARTMENT - DAY

Wind claws at the windows. Something scuttles in the walls.

Andrea's bedroom light flickers through thin curtains, a shadow of something not human.

INT. APARTMENT - HALL - DAY

Heather stands alone coat half-on. She pulls a tiny, unlabeled MICRO SD CARD from her pocket, hesitates, then tucks it into a hidden zipper of her satchel.

Resolve hardens.

She looks back toward the kitchen-toward Andrea.

HEATHER
(quiet, to herself)
No one uses her.

She shoulders the bag.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Heather stands in a field overgrown with flowers. The wind moves through them unsettling Andrea who lingers behind, eyes half-hidden beneath the shifting light.

FRANK CALLUS (25, lean tattooed) trails close. His camera hums in his hands, the red light blinking steady. He grins.

Heather lifts a hand, shielding her face and Andrea from the lens.

HEATHER
Not her. Not yet.

Frank lowers the camera, mock-pouting.

FRANK
You said you wanted documentation.

HEATHER
Of the story. Not my sister's face.

She glances toward Andrea—protective, tired.

HEATHER (CONT'D)
World's not ready for her.

Andrea winces, her tentacles quivering.

ANDREA
I'm not pretty enough to be on
camera.

Frank smirks, shifting the viewfinder.

FRANK
Trust me, ugly sells too. People
like freak shows.

Heather laughs, but it's tight, forced.

HEATHER
It's not that. I just don't think
the world's ready for you, Andrea.
And Frank, stop. Please. I'm not
makeup-ready.

Frank lowers the camera.

FRANK
(smirks)
You two sure you want to put your
careers and your lives on the line?
For an illegitimate child? That's
deep.

Andrea trembles, her voice thin.

ANDREA
I've never done something like
this. But I'm ready.

Heather swallows the dry taste of fear.

HEATHER
Relax. We'll be fine.

A shadow rolls across the field. The air vibrates, low and droning. Wings beat overhead, heavy, rhythmic, like helicopter rotors. A mosquito the size of a goose dips low, its mouth glinting like a blade. More follow, drifting through the air in a dark shimmer.

Andrea hums under her breath.

ANDREA
The insects are getting restless.

Heather points toward Evilton Hospital in the distance, its windows black. Frank raises the camera again, following her gesture. The red light blinks once, steady and unblinking, as the swarm thickens above them.

HEATHER
Then let's get inside before they
get curious.

EXT. EVILTON HOSPITAL - DAY

EVILTON HOSPITAL looms, concrete and glass, edges chipped by weather.

Two SENTINELS (Human sized Mantises in hazmat gear) stand guard by the doors.

Heather approaches first, press badge raised—alert, focused, hunting.

Andrea and Frank flank her.

SENTINEL
No entry without clearance.

Heather doesn't flinch.

HEATHER
Doctor Evilton is expecting us.

FRANK
(mutters)
You called the guy Doctor Evilton
on tape?

Heather elbows him lightly but her eyes stay locked on the Sentinels.

The Sentinels exchange a dry rasp, then unlock the inner door.

INT. EVILTON HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS

Fluorescent lights buzz. A distant echo tunnels through vents.

The Sentinels eyes track Heather's every step. Their antennae twitch whenever she veers—even slightly—off the center line. She notes it. Catalogues it.

ANDREA
(trembles)
Are these prisoners? Hybrids? Oh my
god -

HEATHER
(snaps)
Focus, Andrea. We're here to find
Eric.

Andrea nods, startled into silence.

DOCTOR PHILIP EVILOTN (35, tailored suit, handsome in a manufactured, plastic way) steps into view.

PHILIP
Welcome. You must be Ms. Refuge.

HEATHER
Independent journalist. And we are
filming.

Philip smiles too smoothly.

PHILIP
Transparency. Of course.

A LARGE Sentinel hands them a clipboard filled with NDA forms, blank where names should be.

Heather scans it. Eyes narrow.

HEATHER
You left the subject lines empty.

PHILIP
Confidentiality. The law
appreciates vagueness.

Heather deliberately lifts her gaze to the camera lens.

HEATHER
Then I won't sign. Transparency
cuts both ways.

Philip's smile strains, hairline fracture of annoyance.

PHILIP
Understood. Follow me. You brought
family.

HEATHER
For perspective.

Heather's hand drifts subtly to Andrea's shoulder.

Philip studies Andrea far longer than is polite.

PHILIP
Fascinating.

Heather clocks it.

INT. RESEARCH CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Heather walks ahead, not behind Philip, forcing him to adjust his pace.

Every time they pass a door, she glances at labels, handles, security pads.

HEATHER
What wing is patient rehab?

PHILIP
We don't keep patients here long.

HEATHER
What about male hybrids? Any in
their twenties? Any with the last
name Refuge?

Frank shoots her a shocked look. But Heather keeps her face neutral.

PHILIP
(clears throat)
I'll show you what matters.

He gestures them into a cavernous chamber.

INT. CONTAINMENT HALL - DAY

Tall windows. Rows of tanks glowing sickly green.

Inside drifting shapes—half-formed, half-absorbed by fluid that clings like a second skin.

Frank steadies his camera, zooming in.

Andrea grips his arm. The click of her pincers makes him wince.

FRANK
(whispers)
Easy.

Philip sweeps a hand toward the tanks.

PHILIP
This could cure the world's
diseases.

Heather barely hears him.

Her eyes are locked on a workstation in the corner—clipboard, charts, half-hidden papers. She moves toward it subtly.

Philip intercepts.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
That's restricted.

HEATHER
Then tell me if Eric Refuge ever
checked in here.

Philip's eyes flicker, one second too long. Heather catches it. Andrea is breathing hard. Her chest plates rattle.

Andrea drifts toward the closest tank. Inside a face like hers floats past.

Ridged. Soft. Sleeping. Andrea's knees buckle. She presses both hands to the glass.

A shudder breaks through her whole frame.

ANDREA
(whispers)
Oh god. I'm not alone.

Heather's heart stutters. She steps beside Andrea, placing a hand on her shoulder.

She doesn't pull her away this time.

Another shape turns in the murk, a child-sized hybrid with Jack's jawline.

Andrea's breath cracks.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
My my family...he copied them.

The tank THUMPS. Hard. Heather lifts her mic.

HEATHER
(trembly)
So what's the next stage? Can they
really cure disease, or are you
experimenting without consent?

Philip's smile never reaches his eyes.

PHILIP
This is evolution. The next step.
Flesh made perfect.

Andrea's hiss slices the air, raw, furious.

ANDREA
These aren't cures. These are my
siblings.

Heather's stomach drops. She turns the mic toward Andrea.

HEATHER
Philip. Why do these hybrids match
a real family?

Another THUMP.

One hybrid presses a pincer against the glass as if trying to reach Andrea.

Frank moves closer to Heather.

FRANK
We gotta get out.

HEATHER
(whispers)
Not yet. Not without answers.

She steps to another workstation quick, purposeful.

She flips a folder open.

Frank gasps.

Inside: an intake sheet. Half-erased. The name REF- smudged but visible. Age: early twenties.

HEATHER (CONT'D)
Where is he, Philip? Where is Eric?

Philip chuckles, wrong, too loud.

PHILIP
I laugh when nervous. Forgive me.

Another vibration rolls through the tanks—a wet, coiling movement behind the glass.

Heather doesn't back away.

HEATHER
You kidnapped him.

PHILIP
(murmurs)
I improved him

He steps close to Andrea, eyes hungry.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
You're proof the process works.

Andrea's pincers flare.

ANDREA
You made me. You stole my family.
You tried to erase us.

BANG

The glass buckles. Green light spills.

Heather grabs Andrea's arm.

HEATHER
We're leaving. Now.

Frank backs toward the exit, camera still rolling.

Philip stands perfectly still, watching them go—reflection fractured in the trembling glass.

His smile finally dies.

And something in the tank smiles back.

TITLE: THE GIANT INSECTS**EXT. MOUNTAIN - DAY****TITLE: ROCKY MOUNTAINS**

The wind howls through the Rockies, carrying flecks of ice that sting the skin.

Carson grips his ice pick, breath clouding in the freezing air. The mountain seems alive—groaning, shifting under the weight of something buried deep.

Beside him stands HUNTER WILSON (56 rugged and weathered.) His beard is tangled, his eyes sharp, restless. He clears his throat.

HUNTER

I'm gonna make you rich, Carson.
Richer than you ever dreamed. All
you need to do is stay calm. We
close this portal, stop the insects
from crossing over. Then we take
the credit. You and me.

Carson's jaw tightens.

CARSON

You slept with my wife. Had a kid.
And now you want me to forget that?

Hunter gives a low chuckle that doesn't reach his eyes.

HUNTER

Eric? My kid? Let that die where it
is. Don't go looking for him. I
couldn't find him if I tried.

They raise their picks and strike the ice, metal cracking against ancient frost. The sound echoes through the ravine like gunfire.

A thunderclap tears the sky apart. Lightning hits the ridge with a deafening roar, hurling them backward. The world flashes white, then falls into smoke and shadow.

The snow begins to move. Shapes coil and stretch inside the haze, antennae twitching, limbs unfolding from the dark.

Carson staggers to his feet, eyes wide.

CARSON
We just made it worse, Hunter. The
portal's open. All the way.

Hunter stares into the shifting smoke.

HUNTER
(whisper)
Then we run.

INT. LABATORY - DAY

The lab hums with low, electric static. Glass tubes glimmer faintly in the dark, shapes pulsing inside them.

Carson freezes. Something clicks behind him, wet, metallic. Pincers twitch in the shadows.

Hunter steps closer, his grin stretched thin, teeth catching the fluorescent flicker.

CARSON
(whisper)
What the hell is this place?

Hunter's eyes shine like oil.

HUNTER
We're miles under the mountain.
I've been trying to figure out how
to end them. How to stop this
before it spreads.

Carson looks down. In his arms, a NEWBORN HYBRID (writhes—tentacles coiled across her skull, hands tipped in tiny pincers.) The thing breathes, shallow and wet. Carson's stomach turns.

CARSON
(voice trembles)
How many? How many of these things
have you killed? In the name of
your science?

Hunter exhales, a dry rasp.

HUNTER
After Nancy came crawling back to
you begging for forgiveness. I
stopped counting after one-fifty.

Carson's eyes flicker with something close to pity.

CARSON
Nonsense. We need them alive. You
don't understand what they are.

HUNTER
I lost everything because of these
fucking things.

Carson tightens his hold on the creature. It squirms against
his chest, warm and slick.

CARSON
(whispers)
God help us. What have we brought
into the world?

The hum of the machines swells. Somewhere in the dark,
another click answers.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Heather stands in an open field beneath a pale afternoon sky.
The diffuse light washes everything in gray. Her face is
composed as she clears her throat.

Andrea lingers beside her.

ANDREA
(whispers)
I don't want to be on camera.

Heather nods toward her.

HEATHER
Just crouch down for a second.

Andrea ducks as Heather faces the lens, forcing a smile.

HEATHER (CONT'D)
Sorry about that. The camera
must've died.

She gestures to the land around her.

HETAHER
This field was once nothing. Almost
a dump. Now it's transformed into,
well -

She steps aside, letting the lens capture the view: waist-
high grass swaying in the wind, trees clawing at the soil,
giant ladybugs drifting between the blades.

Their red shells flash in the gray light. Above, dragonflies buzz like miniature helicopters.

Heather's voice stays steady, but unease trembles underneath.

HEATHER

The area will be called Boulder Heights. New laws will protect it. Proof that damaged land can be reborn. Proof that we need these insects more than ever.

She glances toward the white van, its back door hanging open.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

Andrea, it's safe. You can stand up now.

But Andrea has wandered into the field, studying one of the ladybugs.

Heather looks back at Frank in the van.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

What a day, huh?

Frank grins from behind the camera, the red light glowing. Heather leans in, kisses him lightly.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

Let's wrap it up. I think it's time you met my papa.

Andrea trudges over, smiling.

ANDREA

You might as well. We've been talking about you.

Heather blushes.

Frank lowers the camera.

FRANK

Perfect. We'll use the title Boulder Heights—clickbait gold. You'll have hundreds of thousands of views. You might actually make a name for yourself.

Heather shrugs.

HEATHER
Exactly. People will see what a
nutcase Philip is, but—

FRANK
You actually believe him?

Andrea hesitates.

ANDREA
Strange as it sounds, Philip seemed
genuine. Just weird.

Heather smiles faintly.

HEATHER
That's what worries me. I believe
him about Eric. But there's
something off.

Frank shakes his head.

FRANK
He's crazy, Heather. I hope this
story's worth it.

Heather's eyes drift to the field—the insects, the wind, the
quiet.

HEATHER
Maybe. But because of Philip's
research, my brother Jack is still
alive. My mom, too. So I'm not so
sure anymore.

Andrea studies her sister. Heather's shaking a little.

INT. EVILTON HOSPITAL - DAY

The hybrid lies on the bed (half child, half insect.)
Antennae twitch in slow, uncertain rhythms. Where hands once
were, slick black pincers flex against the sheets. Tubes
thread through its chest, into a machine that hums. Its
breathing is shallow, mechanical.

A crimson vein runs from the creature's arm into Nancy. She
sleeps beside it, her skin pale under the lab's blue/white
light. Her hair spills across the pillow like a map of veins.

Carson stands at the foot of the bed, weight resting on his
bad leg. His knee aches, but he barely feels it.

CARSON
This isn't how I imagined saving
her.

Doctor Philip Evilton doesn't look up. His reflection glints
off the glass monitors.

PHILIP
Imagination is a weakness. Reality
doesn't care what you pictured.
Look -
 (gestures toward hybrid)
- she's breathing. That's more than
either of us promised.

Carson's stomach turns.

CARSON
And Nancy? What about her?

PHILIP
She'll live. Better than live. This
primes the body, strengthens it.
Fertility, immunity, resilience.
It's the next step forward.

Carson looks at the creature. It twitches under the sheets
like something dreaming.

CARSON
What about the hybrid?

Philip's hand lands on his shoulder, heavy, anchoring.

PHILIP
Not fragile. Insect DNA heals
faster than any human could
imagine. She's self-repairing.
She's the blueprint.

He smiles, a thin, mechanical expression.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
We could study Nancy. Learn from
her.

Carson shakes his head.

CARSON
I can't. She's been through enough.
She's fought her way back once
already.

Philip pours something into a glass, a slow, brown swirl that catches the light like oil.

PHILIP
You're sentimental. That's the part
of you that hurts.

He hands Carson the glass.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
Drink. See the world clearer.

Carson stares at it.

CARSON
What is this?

PHILIP
Cockroach extract. They outlive
everything. Fire. Cold. Radiation.
I thought you might appreciate that
kind of strength.

The air hums louder. The machine pulses in rhythm with the creature's chest.

Philip's tone softens.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
You could be part of this, Carson.
Medicine, defense, survival. People
will pay everything for what we've
made here.

Carson shakes his head, stomach growls.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
Think of the good you could do.
Think of how small your pain is
next to the future.

Carson's hand trembles. His reflection shakes in the brown liquid.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
(whispers)
Take a sip. Then we'll talk about
what you owe the world.

Carson drinks.

The taste crawls down his throat - bitter.

EXT. PHOTO STUDIO - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Light dims, the street swallowed by a moving shadow. Windows flicker, a shutter creaks somewhere far off.

A grasshopper the size of a building drifts overhead, its wings folding with a sound like distant metal bending. Dust swirls upward, drawn toward its mass. When it lands, the ground ripples, a low shudder running through the asphalt.

Carson, Nancy, Jack, Heather, and Andrea stand motionless. No one speaks.

The creature's shadow stretches over them. Black, immense, alive.

INT. PHOTO STUDIO - DAY

The vintage photo studio hums with mechanical clicks and brittle laughter that doesn't seem to come from anyone.

Heather stands beside Jack. Behind them, Andrea waits. Her antennae tremble at every sound; her red pincers flex, tasting the air for meaning. Her gaze never leaves them.

Jack leans close to Heather.

JACK

I'm not touching you.

Heather makes a grotesque face—tongue out, eyes crossed.

HEATHER

That the hand you wiped on your
butt, or the one from the bug
pancake?

Andrea's voice drifts between them.

ANDREA

Insects are rich in protein. They
would be useful to your nutrition.

Neither of them turns. Heather shoves him lightly. Jack reels as though stabbed, clutching his ribs in mock pain.

From the back, Carson watches. His brow furrows like a seam being pulled shut.

CARSON

Enough. Let's try to look like we
belong here.

He adjusts his sleeve. A green fedora is inked on his arm, edges faded, as if it's been waiting there longer than he remembers.

JACK
(mutters)
He could've hugged me instead.

Nancy lifts her eyes to Heather - warning.

NANCY
Behave, all three of you. We need something presentable for the relatives.

Andrea straightens. Her pincers click once, like a camera shutter.

ANDREA
I have done nothing wrong. In fact, I helped with Heather and Frank.

CARSON
Whose Frank?

The loudspeaker comes alive, drowning him out:

LOUDSPEAKER (O.S.)
Country roads, take me home...

The song bleeds through the walls, distorted, nostalgic.

SNAP. Jack's bubble gum bursts across his face.

Andrea shrieks—a sound like glass vibrating, a cicada cry that warps the air. The laughter outside stops.

Carson doesn't flinch.

CARSON
Clean up, Jack. She bites when startled. And I know she may bite you.

Andrea rolls her eyes, but the stiffness in her limbs betrays her.

ANDREA
Only if you push me.

Heather digs a handkerchief from her pocket.

HEATHER
God, I clean up everything.

Nancy's smile wavers, faint and brittle.

NANCY

Thank you, Heather. I know you feel
second best sometimes. You're not.

Heather freezes.

HEATHER

There's just... something between you
and Papa.

The photographer snaps his fingers.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Line up.

They obey. Heather and Jack in front, Carson and Nancy
behind. Andrea barely visible at the back, her antennae
quivering above their forced smiles.

The photographer adjusts the lens. His voice comes distant,
disembodied.

PHOTOGRAPHER (CONT'D)

Pretend you're a happy family.

The camera clicks.

Andrea adjusts her skirt to hide her insect deformity. She's
placed far in back, barely visible.

JACK

Why can't we just do this at home?

CARSON

Because your mother likes nice
things.

FLASH

Andrea blinks against the glare, face half-cut from the
frame.

EXT. PARK - SUNSET - DUSK

The sun sinks behind the hills, bleeding gold across a field
of wildflowers.

Frank takes Heather's hand. They run through the tall grass,
her laughter echoing—until she slows.

HEATHER
(catches breath)
Wait. You were supposed to pick me
up to meet my dad.

Frank smiles, kneels. Heather's heart kicks against her ribs.

A faint buzzing brushes her ear. She swats, irritated. A mosquito lands on her neck.

WHAP

When she pulls her hand away, a streak of blood smears across her skin.

Frank's grin falters. His eyes widen. He lowers the camera. Six mosquitoes crawl from his nostrils, wings glinting in the light. His eyes go red, the veins pulsing.

FRANK
(whispers)
Oh boy. You made Mama angry. Hope
she's not close.

Heather stares.

HEATHER
Mama? What are you?

The buzzing deepens—low, wet. It fills the field. The sound vibrates through her teeth. Frank turns toward the horizon, face drained of color.

The grass begins to ripple. The earth quivers, alive beneath her shoes. From the soil and stems, black dots lift into the air—thousands—until the sky swarms with wings.

Heather grips Frank's arm.

HEATHER (CONT'D)
Tell me this isn't real.

His pupils writhe. Blood runs from his nose.

FRANK
(whispers)
It's not.

SHING

A sharp sound cuts the air. The camera rips from his hands, skids across the grass, still recording. A spray of blood paints the lens.

HEATHER
(screams)
Frank! Frank!

He staggers backward, slapping at his face. Mosquitoes bury into him, hundreds at once. They swell as they drink. His shirt darkens with blood. His movements slow, then collapse.

The swarm descends. Heather swings wildly, swatting, clawing, her screams swallowed by the drone.

HEATHER (CONT'D)
No! Get off me!

A sting rips across her arm—then her leg. It's not a bite. It's a cut. The insects slice through her skin with needle-sharp stingers.

She stumbles back, gasping.

HEATHER (CONT'D)
Please! Please, stop!

The swarm screams with her—an inhuman harmony of wings and hunger. Her hair whips across her face. Blood beads down her cheek. Each puncture burns hotter, deeper, until her body shakes.

Something pierces her back. She reaches behind and grips a long, twitching stinger, slick with her own blood. It pulses once before she tears it free.

Her vision fractures. The world turns gray and streaked. She drops to her knees.

Frank is a mound of wings now, a trembling shape barely human.

Heather reaches toward him.

HEATHER (CONT'D)
(voice fades)
Frank...

Her hand falls still.

The microphone lies in the grass, the red light blinking.

The swarm hangs above her, a single living shade. Its wings thrumming like a thousand blades. It blots out the sun.

Silence.

Only the whisper of grass over two bodies cooling in the dusk.

EXT. PATIO - NIGHT - VISION

Andrea's antennae twitch. Night has swallowed the yard.

The fire pit breathes — each exhale a roaring wash of flame that licks the dark. Heat ripples against Heather's face.

Carson folds an arm around her shoulders, voice soft, almost tender.

CARSON

I'm proud of you, Heather. You've done well. Now it's Andrea's turn. This is her story. Yours is done.

Heather looks up.

His face collapses. Eyes sink inward, swallowed by shadow. Spiders pour from the sockets, legs scrabbling across skin. Beetles surge out of his mouth, forcing his lips apart in a wet, chittering spill. Moths shred themselves driving into his nostrils. Flesh buckles.

Carson's smile stretches too wide — skin tearing, blood bright — something beneath the skin clicking like hidden teeth.

The fire exhales again. Ash and wings scatter through Heather's hair.

CARSON (CONT'D)

...Andrea's turn...

Wind replaces heat.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - VISION - NIGHT

Snow tears sideways across a white void. Mountains rise jagged on all sides. Andrea stands alone in it — the sky crawling with insects by the thousands, a living ceiling. Tears stream down her face. Her mouth trembles open.

ANDREA

Heather's gone.

END VISION

INT. BATHROOM - REALITY

Andrea wakes in her bathroom.

She sags against the mirror. Her reflection stares back, antennae trembling.

ANDREA
(scream)
Mom! Dad! Jack!

The cry ricochets down the hall.

No answer comes.

She wipes steam from the mirror—her eyes glow briefly, then fade.

She punches the glass. It spider-webs.

EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAINS - DAY

Andrea leads.

The wind scours the ridge, stripping the world to white. The jelly sheath on her skin clings and quivers with each step. Around her neck, tucked under the living membrane, a strip of red fabric flutters.

Behind her, the others are only shapes — blue, green, brown — dragged through the blizzard like afterthoughts.

Nancy's voice cuts the storm.

NANCY
You said this was for Heather's
ashes. What is he doing here?

Andrea doesn't turn. Her hand drifts, almost unconsciously, to the scarf's edge.

Carson answers without lifting his head.

CARSON
I want to bury Heather properly.
And I'm closing the portal. I was
wrong.

Jack stumbles, teeth chattering, thin/breakable.

JACK

W-what is this, Papa? Heather...
Heather used to tell me the
mountains were safe.

Foam threads from Andrea's mouth – hot, mineral, alive. She smears it across Jack's forearm. Heat leaps into him like a rush of blood. The shaking stops.

HUNTER

The insects never should've gone to
Philip. He'll break the balance. I
tried to make Carson shut it down.

Nancy flinches back. She stares at the red scarf like it's a ghost.

Andrea hears the recoil – the small animal sound of guilt.

Andrea's breath fogs; tiny insects crawl from it and freeze mid-air.

ANDREA

We shouldn't be here. Heather
warned us about the ridge.

Carson unstraps his pack. Metal clinks. An ice pick gleams in his hand.

Hunter mirrors him.

Andrea watches.

Steel bites ice.

CRACK

The ridge answers with a deep, hollow groan traveling through the stone, through her legs, through the sheath clinging to her skin. The scarf snaps in the wind like a flag of warning.

Fractures rip across the slope, glowing under the snow like veins of molten glass.

The ground heaves. A blue javelin of lightning claws upward into the sky.

Hunter lifts his pick again, voice ripped thin by the wind.

HUNTER

I finally have a way to close the
portal!

Carson shouts back – desperate, shaking.

CARSON

(shouts)

You must not! Heather's death can't
be for nothing – the insects
changed everything – we need them–

The scarf whips across his jaw as the wind hits, stinging him like a rebuke.

Andrea slams down hard. Bone shocks. Snow tears at her skin. Jack chokes on blood beside her. Nancy folds over clutching her ribs.

Andrea's fingers clutch the scarf instinctively – an anchor – as the ringing in the air drills into her skull.

Then the rift opens.

A wound of light splits the mountain – violet, green, black, cycling like a pulse under flesh. Heat rolls out of it, wet and chemical.

Something in Andrea's jaw shudders. Pain forks through her –

Her mouth splits wider. She feels the wetness, the blood, the skin parting – and at the same time the clean mechanical precision of new anatomy forming beneath it. Needle-teeth push through in layered rows.

Jack staggers back

JACK

What's happening to you, 'Drea?
Heather said you weren't like
this...

Heat blooms under Andrea's skin. The scarf chars at the edges – yet doesn't burn through.

ANDREA

Papa you lied. You said I was in an
accident. You said I belonged here.

Carson lurches toward her, eyes briefly catching on the scarf.

Hunter reaches Andrea first – his grip brutal on her arm. His breath blasts her cheek in white bursts.

CARSON

(roar)

Let her go, you bastard!

Hunter yanks her tighter.

Andrea tastes blood and chitin on her tongue.

HUNTER

(snarls)

You think you can steal Nancy back
and walk away clean? You think I
haven't been rotting since she
left? You turned her against me
while you played god with the
world!

NANCY

(voice cracks)

You told me she was his child that
she came from here. What did you do
to her? What did you do to Heather?

Carson's jaw locks.

CARSON

Andrea is the key. The only way to
live with them. To survive what's
coming.

HUNTER

(laughs)

You don't care about your family.
You care about your prophet.

He jerks Andrea.

HUNTER (CONT'D)

I'm giving her back to whatever
spawned her.

The rift heaves behind him. Shapes writhe in the glow: legs,
pincers, antennae striking the air.

Heat shudders up Andrea's spine. She feels the wrath coming
through the portal before she hears it.

ANDREA

They're angry. They want this world
the way they took their own.
Heather knew.

HUNTER

(snarls)

Then you go first.

The rift tears wider.

A colossal grasshopper forces itself through. Eyes like cracked ice. Its mandibles grind. Frost splits under its mass as it charges.

Nancy grips Carson's sleeve hard.

NANCY

What are you planning? That's the look you had the day Heather disappeared.

Carson, face set like stone:

CARSON

Andrea is the key. She will bring balance.

Jack lurches backward, drained. Andrea twists in Hunter's grip jaw unhinging.

CRACK

Hunter's arm snaps. His scream tears up the slope.

The grasshopper lunges. Mandibles shear into his leg. Blood fans across the snow and turns to steam.

Andrea rips free and runs. Snow explodes beneath her steps. The scarf flaps wildly. Streaks of red against white, like somebody else's blood.

Carson, Nancy, Jack crash after her.

Behind them, the rift vomits life. Armored beetles, blade-centipedes, powder-winged moths. The earth shakes under them.

NANCY

(screams)

This isn't right! Heather would never!

The ground splits under her boots. Light spears upward, boiling the air. Steam detonates. She slips; Carson yanks her.

CARSON

Move! We regroup at the apartment!

They reach a fork in the slope. Wind screaming sideways.

Behind them the swarm shrieks.

They break. Carson and Nancy dive into the trees.

Andrea spins in whiteout.

Jack erupts.

JACK
I gotcha, 'Drea.

He grabs her wrist his fingers brushing the scarf.

Together they run.

The scarf trails behind her like a comet-tail red against ruin.

The mountain screams. The rift vomits insects. A hemorrhage of legs and shell.

Snow blackens.

Flakes become wings.

The blizzard is no longer weather.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

The cabin squats in the trees like something watching.

Jack and Andrea slide behind a trunk, lungs scraping.

Jack's grin flickers.

JACK
What is this place?

Andrea's hand clamps his coat.

ANDREA
Eric lived here. That's all you
need...

A fly the size of a dog explodes from the dark. Hooks slam into the bark inches from Jack's face. The tree shudders.

Jack chokes on his own breath.

JACK
Jesus.

The fly's wings shriek like tearing metal as it drags itself free of the trunk.

Andrea's pupils narrow.

ANDREA
Light. Move.

She hauls him sideways into deeper black.

Branches whip. Breath burns. Behind them, the wing-beat rises furious, hunting, close.

They run toward a wound of light in the trees.

The fly lifts its head, tasting, clicking.

JACK
(breathless)
Did Eric do this? Did he kill her?

ANDREA
We honor her. Keep moving.
Another shape stirs. Hooks rasp bark.
Jack's mouth tightens.

JACK
Heard that.
The shriek drills the air wet, metallic.
Two more flies drop from the dark, beaks scraping the earth.
Light dies. The forest goes bruise-black.

ANDREA
Cabin. Now.
They freeze as the insects close.

JACK
(thin)
Bad.
Six small bugs track across Andrea's eyes. She doesn't blink.

ANDREA
(whispers)
Stillness buys time. Don't breathe.

JACK
(mutters)
Mama always rooted for the T-Rex.
Andrea doesn't answer. Her nails dig into his sleeve.

The flies advance into the clearing skin like wet cellophane, red eyes bulging, foam stringing from slit mouths. Their forelimbs jitter, metal-fast with hunger.

Jack flattens to the bark, breath broken.

JACK (CONT'D)

'Drea...

Andrea locks eyes with the lead fly.

ANDREA

When I say run, you run.

The fly quivers like a patient waiting to be fed.

Andrea peels off her shoe. Her calf trembles under her own hand. She reaches beneath the hem and drags her nails down her own leg lifting a strip of skin slow enough to wet the air. Flesh threads. Blood beads fat and bright.

The flies tilt their heads in unison, enthralled.

Jack's throat clicks shut.

Andrea tears the strip free in one rip a wet, sticky sound like tearing fruit.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

Now.

She flings the skin deep into the dark.

The flies convulse and launch a shrieking collision of wings and bone.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

(snarls)

Move.

They tear across the snow. Jack slips face-first teeth clicking on ice. Andrea hauls him up by his coat and shoves him forward. Their boots grind through crusted drift toward the cabin like animals clawing for a burrow.

She throws Jack inside and pivots.

JACK

(shouts)

What are you...

Andrea slams the door. The frame shudders.

Impact follows instantly flesh and chitin slamming wood. The door bellows under it. Wings thrash like wet tarps whipping in a storm. Hooked limbs rake the boards with a grinding, surgical scrape metal-on-bone.

Something on the other side shrieks not high, but deep as if a throat is tearing itself open to make the sound.

The whole wall vibrates.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

The cabin is blind dark.

Jack gropes until his hand sinks into something warm.

Andrea lifts her pincers. They drip with blood.

ANDREA
If Eric's dead, this place is a
tomb.

A shape looms above the hearth an antique clock, its face lacquered black, and across it a single word carved through the varnish:

TIME

Jack's throat clicks.

JACK
That's all it says.

Andrea stares at the carving as if it were staring back.

ANDREA
Then it isn't telling hours. It's
telling us a condition.

She rips a chair off the floor and hurls it.

The clock doesn't just break, it splits, wood fibers screaming. Shards skitter across the floor, each one throwing a sliver of moonlight like a blade.

EXT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

A HAIL of frozen insects slams the roof. The forest glows red beyond the tree line. Andrea peers through a crack in the boards. The blizzard's alive every flake a beating wing.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Somewhere under the wreckage, the mechanism keeps ticking – faint, deliberate – as though it survived on purpose.

Andrea studies the glass on the floor, as if reading bones.

ANDREA

He didn't write a word. He made a warning. Time is gone.

Jack leans close, voice hushed as in a church.

JACK

Then whatever is coming isn't waiting.

Andrea lifts a shard. Blood streaks its edge. Jack takes another, mirroring her without speaking.

JACK (CONT'D)

If we reach the apartment, we tell them. Before the hour closes.

Andrea's eyes stay on the shard, not him.

ANDREA

It isn't for defense. It's for the rite of return. If there is one.

The silence inside the cabin thickens.

Jack's breath hitches.

JACK

The wings stopped.

CREAK

Andrea opens the door a crack. Moonlight stains the trees silver. The forest holds still, like before a verdict.

ANDREA

(whisper)

They hunt elsewhere now – but they circle back to what is marked.

She backs away from the threshold.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

We move before the mark completes.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Carson leans in, elbows locked to the wood.

His face is stone. His eyes fixed on Andrea.

The soup in the bowls trembles.

No one touches the table. No one breathes loud enough to shake it. The liquid moves anyway – a soft, constant disturbance.

The lamp flickers. The shadows on the wall warp and do not go back to what they were.

Pipes overhead exhale and then grind upward into a strained, rising whine.

Andrea's antennae rise. Jack's eyes cut toward the frost slowly crawling across the window.

Andrea hunches over her bowl. Black hair spills forward, hiding half her face.

Carson doesn't wait.

CARSON

Medicine. Did you take it?

Andrea shakes her head once.

ANDREA

(minimize pain)

No. I feel fine.

Carson softens only enough to sound rehearsed.

CARSON

It keeps you steady. Keeps you human. Don't fight it. I know you want to be both, but look at us please. Don't make us live through this again.

A spoon hits porcelain. Nancy hasn't looked up once, but her jaw is locked.

NANCY

(voice shakes)

One night. That's all she gets. Tomorrow she takes the pill. My daughter died because of you. I won't call Philip but God knows I should.

Carson slams his fist down. Bowls jump. Broth spills. He does not look at Nancy.

He stares at the girl, as though daring anyone to take her.

CARSON

She stays. She's ours now. She was off her meds, that's all. No one touches her.

He leans in, firm.

CARSON (CONT'D)

Andrea ends this not destroys it. Closes it. Fixes what you say she broke. She can do what we couldn't.

Nancy's mouth curls.

Nancy's eyes glint cold.

NANCY

She's a fugitive. Dr. Philip says she's dangerous. Do you want to lose more, Carson? You lied about her once. And now you want the truth?

Carson's jaw locks.

CARSON

You lied to me about Hunter don't you point your finger at me.

Jack's chair screeches back. He shoots up, breath sharp, face flushed. He looks from Nancy to Carson then to Andrea.

JACK

She's family. She belongs here. With us.

Andrea's hands tighten around the bowl. The broth shakes.

INT. APARTMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

Andrea lies in the dark at the edge of the twin bed. The house is still old wood inhaling in the walls.

Jack slips in and lowers his voice.

JACK

I hope this isn't too weird. This used to be Heather's room.

Andrea only nods. Her hands stay in her lap. Silence presses between them.

BAM, BAM

Gunfire cracks the quiet apart.

Andrea snaps upright, breath gone. Her pulse hits her throat.

ANDREA

No...

She is already swinging her legs off the bed.

Jack freezes, wide-eyed.

JACK

Was that—?

Andrea doesn't answer. Her hands tremble as they find the doorknob.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

From down the hall: muffled voices, a scrape, something heavy shifting then stillness.

She whispers, not turning, not breathing fully:

ANDREA

(whispers)

It's getting worse.

JACK

(whispers)

What the hell are you doing?

Andrea keeps her eyes forward.

ANDREA

When it's clear, I move you to the
hiding place. Don't slow me down.

Andrea peers into the hallway. A ceiling hatch yawns above; muffled voices trade numbers.

VOICE (O.S.)

Two more.

ANDREA

No -

Two Sentinels appear at the far end, lights bobbing, armor clinking. One drops into a low stance and points.

SENTINEL

Stack left. Cover the flank. Move
on my mark.

The other snaps a hand signal three quick taps and a third man behind them ducks, muzzle low.

Jack slides back against the doorframe, knees tight, eyes flicking between Andrea and the approaching threat. His hand goes to the pocket where he keeps the small pocketknife. He breathes shallow, ready to sprint.

SENTINEL TWO

Philip wants her back. Dead or
alive.

SENTINEL (INTO THROAT MIC)

Take the kid. Contain no civilians.

They advance in practiced steps: one clears the center, the other sweeps the wall, flashlights stroking for movement. A net launcher hums; a cable whips past the banister, ricocheting off the wood.

Andrea steps forward before the net can reach her. Her wings unfurl, cutting the air; the net tangles on the feathers and tears. The Sentinel's boot catches on the torn mesh; he stumbles.

Jack moves fast and precise dives past Andrea and into the hall, shoulder into the nearest Sentinel's chest, knocking him off balance. The second Sentinel spins, baton arcing. Andrea meets the strike mid-swing: a wing blocks, scales rasping against composite armor; the baton snaps into the air and clatters away.

SENINTEL

Down!

The Sentinels react like a trained unit. One seizes the fallen comrade, another goes low to secure the corridor. They form a pivot, trying to funnel Andrea into a choke point.

Andrea slams a shoulder into the nearest wall and twists, driving the Sentinel back with a flurry of movement her blows are animal, precise, short. Jack scrambles behind her, breath burning, eyes fixed on an exit. He rips a chair free and wedges it across the hall to slow the others.

A radio hisses.

SENTINEL (O.S.)
Suppressing fire north stair!

More boots thunder. The hallway narrows; the Sentinels close ranks and push.

Andrea's teeth flash. She moves like an using wings to hook an arm, shove a helmeted head into the wall, then pivot, spit a sound like a warning. Jack slams the door at the far end, hand shaking on the knob, and the two of them jam it shut together.

For a beat they hold metal bending, boots scratching on linoleum breathing fast, tactical and raw. The Sentinels regroup on the other side, voices low, orders precise, recalculating.

Andrea listens to their coordination and counts their cadence. She finds the gap in their rhythm.

The Sentinel lunges and clamps Andrea's arm.

SENTINEL (CONT'D)
I've got her this ends now.

Andrea's eyes fly open.

ANDREA
Not today.

She bites his hand. Jack hears cartilage tear a wet, fibrous rip and the man jerks back screaming. Andrea doesn't stop. She drives her teeth into his throat and Jack watches the flesh give skin splitting like fruit hot blood spraying the wall in an arc.

The body drops. Jack flinches at the sound a loose, soft thud like meat hitting tile.

The other Sentinels recoil, faces twisting.

SENTINEL
You little bitch. Get back here!

Andrea is already moving, she slides, disappears under one man's stance, bolts. Jack runs after her on instinct.

JACK
Run, 'Drea go!

Behind them:

SENTINEL (O.S.)
Would be easier if she were
unconscious. Drug her.

CRUCNCH

Andrea's jaws are already in someone's leg Jack sees the creature open, sees green flash white beneath the torn red. The Sentinel buckles, howling through clenched teeth, spitting,

SENTINEL (CONT'D)
Then shut up and move!

Boots thunder after them. Jack's lungs are fire. His ears ring. Andrea's back is ahead of him red skin glowing in the hall lights.

EXT. APARTMENT - DAY

Andrea bursts into the alley behind the apartment, dead end. Brick wall. No exit. Footsteps thunder closer.

She presses her palms to the wall, searching for a seam, a latch, anything then she freezes.

At the bottom of the stairs, Nancy lies facedown. Neck bent at an impossible angle. Skin already sagging, insects busy at the tissue. The sun throws a long shadow across her body. Dung beetles crawl the spine. Flies bloom at the mouth.

Andrea staggers back, breath breaking.

ANDREA
No -

The footsteps behind her stop. Silence replaces pursuit.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Andrea rushes back inside, into the kitchen.

VOICE (O.S.)
She couldn't have gone far.

Her pincers shake.

ANDREA
Papa, something terrible happened
to Mama.

A smell seeps in before he can answer and Andrea's antenna flare.

EXT. APARTMENT - DAY

The Sentinels gather beneath the flickering streetlight.

SENTINEL
(murmurs)
She went left.

SENTINEL TWO
No, right.

They fall quiet, heads bowed as if listening to something only they can hear.

Then the eldest lifts his face.

SENTINEL THREE
It doesn't matter. The thread is
already pulled. Mark her missing.
She will return to Philip in time.
All who are chosen are drawn back.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

The kitchen breathes like a sick animal.

Andrea turns. Carson is facedown in his bowl as if bowing to something unseen. Horseflies halo his skull.

Her body jerks. Thin scarlet tears slide from her eyes.

ANDREA
Papa - not you too.

She folds into the corner, knees to chest. Her weeping is not human it drones, warps, a hive-tone fracturing the air, as if a thousand tiny throats are crying through her.

The sound falters. Silence gathers like dust in a crypt. Then sleep falls on her.

INT. APARTMENT - HOURS LATER - DAY

Andrea wakes on the kitchen floor, her skin slick with sweat, the cold tile pressing up from all around her. Sunlight slices through the cracks in the roof, each beam a knife cutting into her blurred vision.

Slowly, she lifts her head. Crumpled food wrappers encircle her. Her stomach churns, and she retches, but the sound doesn't come out right something echoes in her throat, a buzzing, like a swarm waking.

SNAP

The sound snaps her to attention. She rises, trembling, and stumbles toward the door. Her hand finds the lock. She takes a breath deep, steady.

She opens the door and steps out into the cold. The Boulder winter stretches before her, vast and empty.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Silence grips the parking lot.

Andrea spins nothing. The world is a white wall of snow, erasing edges, erasing direction.

ANDREA
(voice cracks)
Where's the apartment?

She blinks hard, once, twice the door is gone. No outline. No shape. Just white.

She yanks her coat tighter, breath quick and sharp.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
No. No. No.

She turns in circles, searching the storm. There is only wind and white.

In the white haze, insects shriek. Jack barrels down the stairs.

JACK
'Drea. You're alive.

Andrea squints, disoriented.

ANDREA
Mama and Papa are gone.

He grabs her. Hard.

JACK
Those things took me. I got loose.
They're gone. Mama and Papa have
been gone a while. You know that.

ANDREA
Philip killed them. We end him.

Jack freezes.

JACK
No. He helped them.

She jerks free.

ANDREA
Then we talk to Hunter.

Jack wipes his nose.

JACK
Hunter's dead. Think back. After
the grasshopper hit.

Andrea's antennae twitch, frantic.

ANDREA
Then we go to Eric. His son knows
something.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

The apartment is dark. No lights. Police tape slices across
the floor.

Andrea steps over it, wrapped in a towel, her skin still
drying, white-translucent shifting to a raw, living red.
Water drips somewhere behind her.

On the couch, Jack bounces his knee.

JACK
How are we supposed to find Eric?

ANDREA
Papa talked once. Hunter had a
secret lab. In the Rockies.

Jack's face drains.

JACK
Where we lost Mama and Papa.

ANDREA
(nods)
Eric is our only lead.

Tears gather in Jack's eyes.

JACK
We're walking back into a murder
ground.

Andrea hugs him once, firm.

ANDREA
This time, we're not the victims.

He tears free, pacing.

JACK
We get in, we get out. That place
is crawling. We find out from Eric
how to balance the world.

Andrea hands him Carson's old fedora.

ANDREA
Then we move.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

TITLE: ROCKY MOUNTAIN

A blizzard tears across the Rockies. Snow knives sideways,
erasing the world.

Jack and Andrea lean into it, hoods up, bodies swallowed in
white.

JACK
(shouts)
I forgot winter hits three months
early up here!

Ahead, a cave yawns open-black, rimmed in ice.

Andrea stalls.

ANDREA
I don't remember this cave.

Jack tugs his scarf, breath ragged.

JACK
Then we turn back. It's done. We
live our own life now.

Andrea grips his arm.

ANDREA
Not without Eric. Balance is
survival.

A shape snaps out of the dark.

HUNTER
(barks)
You shouldn't have come. Get
inside. Now.

INT. CAVE - DAY

The cave is warm. Heat breathes from the stone.

A cot. A jury-rigged stove. Photographs pinned to the wall
with rusted nails.

Hunter paces, older now. Silver hair. A scar twisting his leg
into a permanent limp. His eyes never stop moving.

HUNTER
(mutters)
The Sentinels. Evilton built them.
That company ruined everything.
They took my son.
(jaw tightens)
I know about Nancy.

JACK
(snaps back)
We thought you were dead. We
watched the insects tear Mama and
Papa apart.

Hunter scoffs without looking at him.

HUNTER
I don't walk into traps. Not like
they did.

He glances at Andrea, thin smile.

ANDREA
And they're evolving. No offense,
Andrea.

Andrea studies the photos Hunter and Carson, arms around each
other, smiling like brothers. Her antennae twitch without
stopping.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Why did this world kill Heather?
Mama? Papa?

Hunter freezes. His face empties. He rubs the scar on his leg.

HUNTER
Carson caught one of them alive. We were going to open it up, learn something, fix something. Maybe even cure this place. We could've been rich. We could've taken the world back. Instead the insects took it.

Jack exhales, sour.

JACK
Greed never ends well. You learned that.

ANDREA
(nods slowly)
They want to use me to balance their new world. Your son my stepbrother is the key.

JACK
(voice drops)
My father hated that. Hated that Nancy had a bastard child.

ANDREA
(flat)
He hated the apartment more. He wanted more. Then the insects came and they became the only thing. Maybe that's why Mama strayed.

Hunter's jaw goes rigid.

HUNTER
Philip never paid. Not for Eric. Not for you. He promised balance. He's building chaos.

He pulls a jacket off the wall. Then Carson's fedora. Jack snaps.

JACK
Where are you going?

Hunter pauses at the mouth of the cave.

HUNTER
Dinner. We talk after.

Andrea steps forward.

ANDREA
No. We go too. Teach us to hunt.

Jack lifts the photo of Nancy. His eyes thin to slits.

JACK
Mama despised you. Papa ended up
the same. Everyone did.

Andrea hooks him by the collar.

ANDREA
You're alive. We're not them. We
can still use him.

Hunter's face caves for a second shame. He looks away.

HUNTER
We need food. Storm's getting
worse.

Jack huffs a laugh.

JACK
I'm too young to be a cave orphan.
I don't get left again.

Hunter exhales through his teeth.

HUNTER
If it goes wrong -

ANDREA
It won't.

Bees creep up her legs. She doesn't move.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
You take us.

Hunter snorts.

HUNTER
Fine. I teach you. Then we plan. We
fix this world. We burn the ones
who broke it.

Andrea squares her stance. Spiked insects grip her arms like
gauntlets.

ANDREA
(non-complimentary)
I see why Mama liked you.

Jack steps up beside her.

JACK
I still don't trust you. I'm
coming.

Hunter freezes. Then a slow nod.

HUNTER
Fine. Supplies first.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - DAY

The storm eats their breath. Snow lashes skin. The cold chews through Andrea's coat and keeps going.

ANDREA
(mutters)
Is dinner always like this?

Hunter lifts a hand.

HUNTER
Quiet.

A growl rides the wind. Then the beetle appears huge, green-lit, foam stringing from its mandibles like spit. Its red eyes burn straight through the storm.

HUNTER (CONT'D)
Back. Watch how I move.

A second shape steps into view beside the beast. ERIC WILSON (pincers, foam at his teeth, insect eyes set in human skull, grin is pure venom.)

ERIC
Hi, Dad. Meet my pet.

Andrea jerks forward before she knows she's moving.

ANDREA
Eric. You're you're like me.

Eric turns that grin on her.

ERIC
Balance. And you're late to it,
bitch.

(MORE)

ERIC (CONT'D)
(gaze flicks to Jack)
One of you dies first. Him seems poetic.

ANDREA
No.

Andrea puts herself between Jack and the beetle, legs shaking in the snow.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Not him.

Hunter steps up, palms raised.

HUNTER
Eric. You want someone, take me.
I'm the one who tried to study you.

Eric's head tilts. Slow. Interested.

ERIC
(whispers)
Oh, I'll take you. I just want you
awake enough to listen while I peel
the others first.

Andrea lifts both pincers.

ANDREA
You don't have to do this. We can
bring balance.

Her skin fades to a translucent blue, showing organs and veins.

The beetle lunges.

Andrea hurls Jack aside. He hits the snow.

JACK
'Drea - NO!

She rolls as mandibles scrape the ground where her head was.

The beetle pivots and slams into Hunter, driving him toward the cliff. He teeters, boots clawing for grip.

HUNTER
Eric's gone. He's not thinking,
he's pure rage.

ERIC
Not gone. Broken by you.

Eric lets out a sound, half laugh, half chitter.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Study is a soft word for carving.

The insect voice under it hisses:

ERIC (CONT'D)
Cutting. Cutting. Cutting.

JACK
(sobs)
'Drea, help!

Andrea rips him up by the arm.

ANDREA
Run.

They sprint into the whiteout. The beetle shrieks and follows.

Eric exhales like a bored god.

ERIC
Jesus... I do everything myself.

He draws a Glock.

BAM

The shot punches through Hunter's skull. He falls backward off the cliff without a fight.

Eric calls into the storm.

ERIC (CONT'D)
You don't run. You scatter.

He fires into the whiteout.

BAM. BAM. BAM.

Muzzle-light stabs the snow. Andrea and Jack vanish.

Jack whispers into the wind,

JACK
Where are we?

A red pulse throbs underfoot.

The floor explodes with current. Jack lifts off the ice and slams into the crevice lip.

SNAP — wet and decisive.

FLASH TO:

INT. KITCHEN - FANTASY

Black and White. A checkered floor. Andrea kneels over Jack's twisted body.

VOICE (O.S.)
Remember what you did -

Andrea looks around and back at Jack's twisted body.

FLASH TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN - REALITY - DAY

Back to the mountain. Jack is gone.

Andrea screams as the portal seals.

ANDREA
No—Jack—no— I didn't—

The ground opens under her and swallows her whole.

Silence.

The beetle scuttles, clicking, lost.

Eric steps through the hush. His teeth show but it is not a smile.

ERIC
Balance fails. Flesh erased. Good.

INT. ROOM - UNKNOWN - DAY

Andrea lies strapped to the gurney. The straps are pulsing breathing with her.

Two Sentinels loom over her, their green skin stippled like wet leaves. Their eyes do not blink. Their bodies hum at the exact pitch of her heartbeat.

ANDREA
How am I back here? What are you
doing to me?

They turn to each other in perfect unison, as though sharing a single thought in two skulls.

SENTINEL

I thought you knocked her out.

Then, without hesitation, they hinge their jaws wide and bite each other's heads off. Their bodies blacken, not into blood but into absence, like film burning away.

The absence spreads a little on the floor before stopping.

Andrea exhales once.

DRIP

A bead lands on her forehead. It tastes metallic. She looks up there is no crack in the ceiling, yet water pushes through the plaster as if the room sweat through its pores. The walls bulge, pulse, and then rupture.

Flooding is instant, not gradual the way lungs drown in one wrong inhalation. The water is thick, not water at all. It has weight like intention.

She thrashes. The straps tighten by themselves, constricting like muscle around prey.

The surface vanishes above her. Down is the only direction.

VOICE (O.S.)

Hybrids do not belong in the cycle.
You will be recycled.

Something cold coils her ankle.

Another coils the other leg.

She tries to scream but the water eats the sound before it leaves her teeth.

They yank. The room elongates downward like a throat swallowing.

She is dragged deeper into the room.

INT. TOWN - DAY

The sun is a beating nerve of wings. The moon hangs behind it a colossal caterpillar curled into eclipse. Lightning bugs pulse like a hospital monitor across the sky.

WHAM

Andrea hits gold-brick pavement, ribs screaming. Her skull rings. Something warm moves beneath her skin.

She tries to stand, but her arms lock before she chooses to move, as if an unseen hand lifts her from the inside. A tremor passes through her limbs.

A towering sign leers over her:

WELCOME TO INCEPTION HEIGHTS — YOUR NEW HATCHLINGS

Her eyes flick upward without consent. Pupils drag across every letter like she's being made to read.

Beyond the sign, a shadow twitches. A wet moan follows.

ANDREA
(whispers)
Who's there?

A bee lands on her pincers. Then another. Then a green one on her leg. The contact sends an immediate electrical command down her spine her pincers lifts toward her mouth against her will.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
No.

Her pincers keeps rising.

Air thickens with wing-sound. A giant bee descends, eyes like polished resin, voice vibrating her teeth:

GIANT BEE
Hybrid. You return.

She tries to step back. Her legs do not obey. They step forward.

ANDREA
Stop

Her calves tighten and carry her closer, like marionette strings are cinched into her joints.

The swarm lifts, circling overhead. With each orbit, new commands fire in her nerves — stand, tilt head, expose throat.

From far off, Jack's voice slices the air:

JACK (O.S.)
Drea — come on!

Her antennae snap upright violently — as though yanked — her whole body turns toward the sound like a trained animal.

The giant bee's voice drops, low and warning:

GIANT BEE
That is not a man calling you.

The swarm contracts — and Andrea's spine arches in the exact shape they circle, like her vertebrae are magnetized to their orbit.

GIANT BEE (CONT'D)
Get on my back.

Her pincers move before her mind answers. They grip chitin. Her knees climb.

The swarm surges and she rises with it swallowed into the sky of living light.

INT. ROOM - DAY

The room unspools dark, dusty, warped in ways that make the corners shudder if she looks too long.

Andrea steps in slow, antennae twitching on instinct before she forces them flat.

The Giant Bee hovers just behind her shoulder. Its wings keep changing rhythm, too fast, then too slow, as if fighting itself. Its voice strains toward human shape:

GIANT BEE
This place breaks people.

She scans the walls, peeling paint, faint claw marks, a shelving unit sagging under the weight of old radios and dead machines.

ANDREA
(mutters)
This room's alive.

GIANT BEE
(shivers)
Mind first. Body second.

Andrea keeps her distance.

ANDREA

Fine. Then tell me how to get out.

A long beat.

The Bee's compound eyes do not turn, but something inside them contracts. It hesitates.

GIANT BEE

I don't remember the exact way.

Her throat tightens.

ANDREA

Then why bring me here?

The Bee buzzes sharply, almost defensive.

GIANT BEE

Because your mind needs anchoring.
This place eats thought.

Another fractured flutter.

GIANT BEE (CONT'D)

Your memories might open something.

Andrea steadies herself. She notices the floorboards pulsing under her feet slow breaths. Something unseen sucking at her ankles.

Her vision blurs. She sways.

ANDREA

It's draining me.

The Bee darts too close, grabbing her arm with a jittery limb, pressure too hard, then too gentle, like it's forgetting how strong it is.

GIANT BEE

Stay awake.

Andrea wrenches herself free.

ANDREA

Don't touch me again.

The room tilts. Warm liquid runs down her face. Not tears. It twitches.

She drops to her knees, curling tight against the sensory collapse.

The Bee hovers above her, wings stuttering, the stinger swelling with heat.

GIANT BEE

The room wants me to drain you. I'm
trying trying -

It slams into the far wall suddenly, as if shoved. It buzzes, confused, furious.

GIANT BEE (CONT'D)

(whispers)

I can't stop what this place turns
me into.

Andrea shuts her eyes.

INT. BASEMENT - FLASHBACK

Carson spinning Andrea, Jack stumbling, Nancy refusing to dance. Music too loud. Warm hands gripping her until her hybrid body shrieked.

Her eyelids flutter. Dirt on her palms from that basement. A rhythm under her skin she never noticed before.

ANDREA

(whispers to self)

I found something. It's mine. Not
yours. Not this room's.

She breathes through it. The room loosens its hold.

INT. ROOM - DAY

Andrea snaps awake on the floor, drenched, shaking.

The Bee retreats half a meter.

GIANT BEE

You resisted. Not many do.

ANDREA

Parasites in your head?

It jerks, almost offended.

GIANT BEE

Put there. To keep me obedient.

Another glitch.

GIANT BEE (CONT'D)
To keep me useful.

ANDREA
Useful to who?

A swarm of tiny bees circles above, thickening. Andrea covers her face.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
How do I stop the drain? How do I
stop them?

The Bee does not answer. Its stinger reddens instead.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
(hisses)
If you know something, say it.

The Bee finally sputters.

GIANT BEE
Your path home keeps your mind
intact. If you leave it you
dissolve.

A small bee dives at her. Hunger spikes. Andrea lashes her fly-tongue instinctively, catching it mid-air. It writhes. She tears it apart between her teeth snapping shell, burst of honeyed rot.

The Giant Bee flinches this time. Andrea wipes her mouth.

ANDREA
I need to move. Drop me with
someone who can actually help.

The Bee's wings jitter.

GIANT BEE
I cannot locate your world anymore.
They...they cut it from my senses.

Its eyes dull.

GIANT BEE (CONT'D)
I can only place you somewhere on
this one.

Andrea's jaw tightens.

ANDREA

Then put me where the trail leads.
Anywhere connected to Philip
Evilton.

It hesitates then nods.

GIANT BEE

Philip. Yes. His door. I can take
you there. But, but do not trust
what you see. Do not trust him.

Andrea stands firm.

ANDREA

He kidnapped me at the start of my
life. Trust was never on the table.

The Bee vibrates with panic.

GIANT BEE

You are made of both worlds. Bridge
them. Or they tear each other
apart.

She turns toward the portal of lightning bugs forming on the
far wall, their glow unstable, crackling.

She steps forward.

Behind her, the Giant Bee's body distorts exploding into a
frenzy of hornets, wings clashing, a roar of betrayal finally
unleashed.

One hornet escapes the mass and spears toward her just as she
crosses the light.

KABOOM. The Hornet explodes.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Crickets coat the asphalt like a second living skin. Ants
stream over mailboxes. Fireflies drift in thick veils,
dimming the last band of eclipse-light. Houses sit like
mausoleums under a lace of webs.

Andrea rounds the corner and nearly collides with them: JOHN,
(a heavy-bodied fly-hybrid) bent over a map, and JENNY, (a
tall katydid-woman with long leaf-green limbs folded with
prayer-like poise). At their feet, a golden tortoise beetle
chirps softly, as though taking roll.

Jenny lifts her head slowly.

JENNY

Another one joins the refinement.
You are on schedule.

John rubs his forelegs together with unhurried pleasure.

JOHN

Welcome. The corridor corrects all
of us eventually.

Andrea steadies herself and takes the tone, not them.

ANDREA

Enough poetry. You're going to
answer me directly. Where is
Philip?

Jenny's expression widens with radiant pride.

JENNY

Philip rewrote the fate of bodies.
He is the fulcrum and the door.

ANDREA

(snaps)
Location. Not myth.

John tilts his head until his compound eyes gleam.

JOHN

We were in route. The beetle
guides. We rejoice in the delay.

Andrea's gaze does not soften.

ANDREA

How did he change you?

Jenny's mandibles part in something like laughter.

JENNY

He did not break us. He delivered
us from smallness.

Andrea cuts across her.

ANDREA

You were my neighbors. Who ordered
this? Philip or whatever rules this
place?

John speaks with delighted certainty.

JOHN

Both are the same. Resistance is
nostalgia.

Andrea leans in.

ANDREA

Listen carefully. I am not here to
convert. You are going to tell me
how to get back.

JENNY

Return is obsolete. Earth has
already fallen to us.

ANDREA

Prove it.

John's face almost glows with exaltation.

JOHN

We no longer need to prove what has
completed. We are the proof.

Andrea opens her mouth again.

John's right eye bursts open. A storm of red moths tears out,
shredding the socket into petals of flesh. Jenny's right eye
splits and a centipede uncoils from the wound, legs tasting
the air with reverence.

Jenny rises in ecstasy.

JENNY

Join the completion. Our joy is
your future state.

The beetle at their feet ruptures into blowflies, a thousand
at once the sound like wet applause under wings. The pavement
buckles; larvae boil up through cracks, white fat bodies
pushing through black tar.

Andrea strikes first.

Her pincers slam into Jenny's forearm and rip. The flesh
comes away in a clean peel and carrion beetles pour out like
pressurized pulp.

John lunges for her throat Andrea rakes his chest, opening it
and rove beetles flood from the cavity, rivers of slick,
living black.

Jenny turns ecstatic and ravenous, jaws open – she seizes John's neck and feeds, and swarms flood the wound until his voice gurgles into silence.

The sky goes black with wings. Heat. Screaming air.

Andrea bolts.

The swarm freezes whenever she stops. Chases whenever she runs.

She sprints toward the end of the street, where a towering wrought-iron gate made of living gray beetles flexes like a lung.

Behind her.

JENNY (CONT'D)
You will return to joy, Andrea!
Completion does not miss its own!

EXT. YARD - DAY

The gate hums under Andrea's pincers.

BAM

A gunshot cleaves the yard. Metal shrieks. Beetles detonate outward like shrapnel.

Eric stands beyond the wreckage—trembling, gun smoking, eyes wild as if woken in the wrong universe.

Andrea does not blink.

ANDREA
Drop it.

His eyelids twitch like something crawling beneath them.

ERIC
They told me no other hybrids were left.

Andrea steps through scorched dust.

ANDREA
You were told wrong.

Her antennae taste the air fear, metal, ozone.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Talk.

He swallows, insect-wrong.

ERIC

We came to take down Evilton.
Restore balance. I didn't know who
you were.

Andrea's mandibles click once.

ANDREA

You shot at my brother.

Something in the air snaps. Hornets flood from her throat in
a disciplined spiral an execution ring around Eric's skull.
He recoils, hands over face.

ERIC

Stop! I'm not your enemy.

Andrea cuts the swarm with a flick. They freeze mid-orbit,
vibrating like live wire.

ANDREA

Then be useful.

Eric sags to one knee.

ERIC

They altered me. I didn't choose
it.

Gel leaks from his mouth, translucent and hot on the dirt.
Andrea watches it steam.

ANDREA

Good. Contamination means access.

She tears the gun from his hand with one clean motion.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

You lead. You shut up.

ERIC

(nods fast)

Through the house. But if you go...

ANDREA

They try to use me. They can try.

JACK (O.S.)

'Drea! Thank God.

Jack stands on the porch, smiling-alive, warm, impossible.

Andrea doesn't break stance.

ERIC
(hisses)
Illusion. Trap.

Andrea doesn't look at him.

ANDREA
He's real. I can sense his human
pulse.

Jack extends a hand.

JACK
Portal's open. We can go home.

Andrea moves not toward him but past, her gaze fixed on the house's interior void.

ANDREA
No one opens a door that wide
without hiding teeth.

She turns back to Eric.

ANDREA (TO ERIC) (CONT'D)
Behind me. Fire only when I
command.

The door groans open.

Philip steps out in blood-stuck scrubs, hornets crawling his lips like living punctuation.

PHILIP
You don't fight my hive. You belong
to me.

ANDREA
I belong to nothing.

The hornets erupt again, a controlled storm. Philip's grin fractures. His stinger rises. Andrea is faster.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Jack—down.

BAM. BAM. BAM.

Philip snaps backward through the doorway. Insects spill from his mouth like a confession as he vanishes into them.

Andrea lowers the gun. Smoke threads the air.

Yet, once the smoke clears. It's Eric who is not moving in a pool of blood. Andrea is shocked, her antennas twitch.

Yet she turns towards Jack.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
No one controls me.

Jack stares half awe, half fear.

Hornets settle around Andrea. Her body is still.

INT. APARTMENT - FLASHBACK

Color has drained from the world

Jack lies on the floor – limbs splayed, body unmoving – horseflies hissing as carrion beetles climb his ribs.

Andrea storms in. No hesitation. She drops beside him and rips the insects off with her bare hands.

ANDREA
Jack. Open your eyes. Now.

A horsefly lands on her wrist and bites. She snarls through her teeth but doesn't stop.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
You are not dying here. Not in front of me.

She fists his shirt and shakes him once – hard. No response.

She plants her palms on his sternum and forces compressions, breath ragged.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Breathe. Do you hear me? You breathe when I tell you to.

The hissing rises – insects swarming, circling, enclosing the two of them like a throat tightening.

Andrea doesn't look away.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
(whispers)
I am not losing you.

The room begins to dissolve around her – walls ghosting, edges fading – but she refuses to release him.

END FANTASY

EXT BACKYARD - DAY

Color bleeds back into the world, slow, viscous, wrong.

Andrea stands in the backyard. The air hums. Grass folds under her feet like wet paper.

Jack is ahead of her, but every step she takes stretches the distance, bending space like heat over asphalt.

ANDREA

Jack! What's happening? What's wrong with you?

Jack lowers his hands. His eyes are pits of black earwigs shifting behind the surface.

JACK

Hello, 'Drea.

Andrea freezes. Something in her chest fractures.

ANDREA

What happened to you?

Dark Jack's back splits. A wet sound, the rip of new anatomy. Moth-wings unfold, pale and powdery, trembling in the heat.

DARK JACK

Nothing. I'm evolving. It feels freeing. I'm finally becoming myself.

Andrea lunges forward. But from the dark beside her, a shape rises tall, patient, inevitable. Philip. He moves like smoke with bones, his shadow fracturing the grass beneath him.

PHILIP

(murmurs/static)

You won't get far. The only way home is to remember.

(smile)

You can stop pretending. Become one of us. Let instinct take the wheel.

Andrea's tentacles flare like nerves.

ANDREA

I don't want your stories! I'm
going home with Jack!

Philip tilts his head, beetles rippling beneath his skin.

PHILIP

I could end your brother right now.
One snap.

He clicks his pincers and Jack collapses, like a puppet cut
from its strings.

ANDREA

(screams)

No! What the hell do you want, you
thing?

Another click. DARK JACK IS BORN, he rises, limbs dangling,
mouth twisted in a grin.

DARK JACK

Look at me, 'Drea. I can fly. It's
so freeing to be an insect.

Philip watches, pleased.

PHILIP

When you first passed the portal,
Jack was already gone. Death is my
craft.

He steps closer, the ground beneath him crawling alive.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

But you could be reborn. You
already smell like change.

Beetles swarm his body, glinting like armor. Andrea sinks to
her knees.

ANDREA

My brother is dead but I'm not.

Above her, Jack hovers—luminous, terrible.

DARK JACK

I'm not dead, 'Drea. I've been
reborn. You can be free too.

Philip claps once. The sound is a crack in the air, the snap
of a click beetle righting itself.

PHILIP
New body. Better mind. Cheaper than
resurrection.
(grin widens)
You could finally let go.

Andrea presses her face into her crawling twitching hands.

ANDREA
(whisper)
Why are you doing this to me?

Philip leans close. His eyes shimmer with moths.

PHILIP
A proposal. Hear me out. You'll
come out better for it.

Andrea straightens. Her breath shakes, but she stands.

ANDREA
What do you want?

Philip's laugh crawls through the grass, a thousand crickets
singing his joy.

PHILIP
A trade. You stay. He lives your
life in your place. Simple balance.

Dark Jack hovers near her, radiant, monstrous.

DARK JACK
I don't want to go back. I've never
felt stronger. I don't want to die
again.

Philip laughs louder, and the night answers like hornets
disturbed.

Andrea paces, eyes flicking toward the gate at the end of the
yard. Its outline pulses like a heartbeat.

ANDREA
(mutters)
This feels manageable. But -

Philip's voice ripples through the dark.

PHILIP
Take your time. The longer you
wait, the hungrier the dark
becomes. I can still fix you if you
let me.

Andrea turns. The world quakes around her.

ANDREA
I'm going to find my own way home.
You can't keep me here.

Her body glows, veins alive with a swarm's pulse.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
I will go home and you can't stop
me.

Philip's tone sharpens, calm breaking.

PHILIP
Be careful what you wish for. The
more you fight, the deeper the
dark.

Andrea's eyes burn.

ANDREA
Then I'll break Jack and make him
whole again.

Philip gestures to the gate.

PHILIP
Through there. But deeper means
darker. If you refuse the change,
you'll regret it.

Andrea grips the gate. Light and shadow collide around her.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
Andrea! The portal isn't real it's
your mind! This isn't a taunt it's
a warning! Go deeper, and you end
yourself!

Andrea steps through anyway.

The color drains again.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - FLASHBACK

THREE BOYS (8, 9, 10) stand in a loose triangle around Andrea (8, barefoot in the sand, her long blonde hair glinting like static, her gray eyes too bright for a child).

They snicker.

BOY
(sneers)
She has no friends.

BOY TWO
(jeers)
Where's she even from?

BOY THREE
(tilts his head)
Look at her. So weird. Like... what
even is she?

Andrea doesn't move. Her head lowers, shadow slipping across her face. Sadness flickers and vanishes. Behind her back, her small fists tremble, knuckles whitening. A low hum builds in the air, almost too faint to hear.

Mosquitoes land on her skin. One. Then three. Then a dozen.

They twitch, feeding.

The boys don't notice.

Andrea blinks, eyes glassy. Something in her chest tightens.

The hum grows louder. She takes a breath slow, deliberate and the air around her ripples.

THUD

Something heavy shifts in the mud. A giant maggot slithers past, its pale skin glistening, folding over itself like wet fabric. Each movement makes a low, suctioning hiss – The air turns thick and sour, like rainwater mixed with blood.

Andrea doesn't move. She doesn't have to.

The boys are already on the ground – sprawled, faces bruised, eyes wide with shock. Blood drips from their noses and lips, thin red lines mixing with the mud.

Andrea stands over them, panting.

Two shadows stretch behind her: one human, one wrong. The second blinks open a pair of glowing red eyes. For a moment, they pulse in time with her heartbeat.

She looks down at her trembling hands. Her skin feels strange, tight. She glances around the playground – everything trembling faintly, leaves twitching, dirt breathing.

BOY
(whimpers)
I'm sorry for bullying you. Please
just leave us alone.

Andrea says nothing. Her fists stay clenched, a faint hum rising in her ears. Her face remains calm.

A teacher rushes toward her, shoes splashing in the mud, hands grabbing her shoulders.

Andrea meets the adult's eyes.

ANDREA
I don't like being provoked. I was
only defending myself.

She pauses — a tiny smile, almost human.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
If it was even me.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - PRESENT - DAY

Andrea stands at a different playground

She tilts her head to the strange sky above, where giant beetles and pale earthworms drift like clouds.

ANDREA
Sigh.

Nearby, a group of CHILDREN (8, 9, 10) laugh and chase each other, their joy echoing through the thick, insect-filled air.

Andrea tenses. Her heartbeat stutters. The laughter twists, slowing, warping, until three boys step from the noise and encircle her, grinning too wide. Their giggles don't sound human anymore.

Andrea takes a cautious step back.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Where's my brother? I followed him
here.

A firecracker explodes somewhere in the distance. The boys flinch but she doesn't.

From the shadows, Dark Jack emerges, his form slick with the shimmer of insect wings, his eyes black and calm. He steps between her and escape.

DARK JACK

(softly)

The children are Mantidflies – they resemble wasps to deter predators, but they're hunters underneath. Once you get close, they snap. Don't think I'm going anywhere with you.

Andrea's breath catches.

ANDREA

Am I dreaming? I thought maybe you and me could go home.

DARK JACK

This is real, 'Drea. You can't go back. You can't change what's already decayed. But you can become one of us. It's time to finish what started.

Andrea paces, eyes darting. Her body twitches tiny wings pulse under her skin, beetles shifting beneath the surface.

ANDREA

We go home. We live our lives. We don't need Mama or Papa to have a human existence. We can balance.

Dark Jack's smirk deepens a crack forming across his face.

DARK JACK

Your brother's gone, 'Drea.

Andrea's voice wavers, but her gaze holds steady.

ANDREA

He's not. He's still alive. I know he's inside you.

Dark Jack's expression turns cold, predatory.

DARK JACK

Then face it. Everything you see is real. Look around. Do you see your brother?

Andrea swallows the lump in her throat and steps forward.

ANDREA

(voice trembles)

That's not true.

(MORE)

ANDREA (CONT'D)

If you can't see it, then maybe you
never knew what we had.

Dark Jack's smirk flickers.

DARK JACK

Don't be foolish. Believe what you
want. It's over. Go home, 'Drea.
You're not wanted.

Andrea folds her arms.

ANDREA

You're not my brother. He would
never leave me behind.

Dark Jack leans forward, the light distorting around him. A
maggot detaches from his collarbone and drops onto her
sleeve, writhing.

DARK JACK

I'm better now. Stronger. Jack is
dead.

The children circling them whisper without mouths. Their eyes
glint like wet carapaces. Andrea steadies her breath.

ANDREA

You won't go with me? But you won't
kill me either will you?

DARK JACK

That's right.

Andrea takes a step toward a boy whose smile is too wide.

ANDREA

Then I'll ask you again.

DARK JACK

Don't.

Dark Jack stiffens, wings humming beneath his skin.

DARK JACK (CONT'D)

They'll sting you.

The boy snaps at her, his jaw unhinging like a mantis trap.
Andrea swings. The crack echoes through the playground. He
gasps then locusts surge from his mouth, a living scream of
wings. Andrea watches them scatter into the twilight.

ANDREA
(voice shaking)
Feel that? I won't hurt you, Jack.
But your insects they're fair game.

Dark Jack reels back, his form glitching between shadow and skin.

DARK JACK
That hurt! I could erase him. Turn
Jack into a ghost, into nothing!

Andrea's eyes glisten.

ANDREA
Mama and Papa tried to lock me
away. Said you were gone. But I
never stopped believing.

She turns toward a little girl whose face flickers like film on fire. One strike to the gut blood bursts, transforming into a cloud of ladybugs that dissolve into the air.

Dark Jack winces.

DARK JACK
You think you can save this town?
It's already gone. Look around,
Andrea. The air's an echo. The
ground's a lie.

He dives toward her, wings slicing the air with the sound of knives.

DARK JACK (CONT'D)
Why, 'Drea? Why do you want to
destroy Jack?

Andrea grabs another child, flings them down. Their skin cracks open, and blowflies pour out like smoke.

ANDREA
Because you're still in there. And
I'm not leaving without you.

Dark Jack convulses, clutching his skull as light leaks through the cracks in his body.

DARK JACK
(screams)
You're draining me. You're bleeding
my power!

Andrea steps forward.

ANDREA

Then make a choice. Help me, or rot
here in this playground. We go home
together, Jack. We go home.

His eyes flicker, color returning in trembling flashes. For a
heartbeat, he's JACK REFUGE.

JACK

(whispers)

I don't have much time. I can fight
him but not forever.

Andrea's breath catches. The air vibrates, humming like a
hive.

ANDREA

(whispers)

Jack. It's you.

He smiles faintly.

JACK

Not for long.

She helps him to his feet. He is shaking.

DARK JACK

(voice tremble)

I'm being controlled. Philip's the
parasite pulling the strings.

The children collapse. Shadow shapes made of beetles lift
above their still forms. Andrea swallows.

ANDREA

Can we break it?

Jack blinks, fingers loose in hers.

DARK JACK

I think I'm feeling normal again.

A thick mist rolls across the field. The sky bleeds orange.
Lightning bug pulses wink in the fog. Dark Jack dissolves
inside it; the real Jack staggers free, dazed.

JACK

'Drea, I thought I died.

She wraps him in a hug until his shoulders stop shaking.

ANDREA

You did. And I keep thinking it was my fault.

He smiles, the ghost of the boy she remembers.

JACK

You couldn't have stopped it.

They sit on a bench. A hush settles.

ANDREA

I'm glad I got to see you to say goodbye. I know you can't get me home I was just hoping.

Jack's face tightens.

JACK

You're leaving? Why not become an insect, stand tall and mighty. We could fight Philip.

She looks at him.

ANDREA

I can't stay. I have to go home, restore whatever balance is left. I think you're already gone.

He nods, a pained little motion.

JACK

(points)

This playground it's like the one we used to go to.

Andrea smiles despite herself and points at the rusted jungle gym. Butterflies bloom into a blue-cobalt frame, wings folding into bars. Beside them a swing set forms from red ladybugs, their backs gleaming. The slide appears, crawling with stink bugs; it gives off a sour, childish laugh.

Jack actually laughs—a human, real sound. His laughter dies down.

JACK (CONT'D)

You may not recognize what you return to.

Her joy thins.

ANDREA

I wish there was a way to bring you
back. It's terrifying to go alone.

Behind them the field drains to black. A tunnel of shadow
yawns open. Jack reaches for her hand.

JACK

You can't go back the way you left.
But let the present be bright.

Andrea squeezes his fingers until they ache.

ANDREA

Without you, everything feels
empty.

He brushes a hand across his face.

JACK

Then hold onto the memories. That's
how I'll stay.

They stand and hug again, the world folding into that small,
stubborn human mercy.

Then the children stir. Their joined hands lift like a chorus
of crickets. The air snaps. Something throws Andrea backward;
she hits the ground and tastes dust.

ANDREA

(screams)

Jack! I'm not ready -

A boom splits the silence.

Philip steps out of the smoke, half-human, half-insect: the
long thorax of a stink bug, the spiny jaw of an earwig.

PHILIP

Back to the present, Andrea. Your
brother is gone.

He reaches for Jack. The movement is so casual it feels
obscene. Jack goes limp in his grip.

ANDREA

(spits)

Stay away from him!

Philip watches her, amused.

PHILIP

Dreams are cozy. Reality is harder.

He twists. A soundless, sharp snap. Jack gasps once in monochrome and falls. Andrea lunges.

ANDREA
No, not again!

Tears run down her face, honey gold in the dying light, as insects climb Jack's skin and his body begins to dissolve into them.

Philip steps close, unbothered, hunger coiled in his smile.

PHILIP
Stop fighting. Accept the truth.

She scrabbles to her knees, claws forming at the edges of her hands.

ANDREA
I want to go home. I will go home.

Philip bares hornet stingers that glitter like a crown.

PHILIP
We're both parasites, Andrea.
Leave, and I am free. Stay, and we
both lose.

She spits blood into the dust.

ANDREA
If I get the chance, I will kill
you.

He shrugs and drops Jack like a used toy.

PHILIP
You won't.

Like a grasshopper he hops away into the mist. Andrea rises, fist clenched so tightly her knuckles whiten.

ANDREA
I will destroy you before I go
home.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

Long shadows stretch across cracked headstones. Wind moans through skeletal trees.

Andrea staggers forward, strong but trembling, cradling Jack's lifeless body.

Near a leaning stone, Philip waits disheveled, translucent, his grotesque smile glinting like a hyena's. Botflies squirm in his eyes.

PHILIP

You can bury your brother again, if you like. It'll help you remember.

Color drains from the world.

Andrea kneels beside a freshly dug grave. She lowers Jack into the dirt, slow and reverent.

The headstone reads:

JACK REFUGE – 2012-2025.

She brushes soil from her shaking hands.

ANDREA

I can't believe it. Did I do this?

Color rushes back – wrong, like paint smeared over rot. Philip watches, amused.

PHILIP

You knew he was dead. That's what brought you here. Insect instinct like going home.

Andrea turns, fury snapping in her eyes.

ANDREA

Philip. Move. I'm going home.

A Giant Bee zips past. Philip's head jerks toward it. He licks his lips. Shoots a dark filament from his eye. THWIP! The Bee crashes, twitching.

PHILIP

Dinner.

Andrea slaps him.

ANDREA

Don't you dare get distracted.

Her insect eyes shimmer – cold, unblinking. Philip steadies himself.

PHILIP

You're right. I can't kill you. You break through my human side somehow.

ANDREA

Philip, it's over. Your death will be quick.

He nods toward another grave. Andrea looks:

CARSON REFUGE – 1955-2026.

Rain falls, cold as bone.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

Papa's dead? No he was supposed to be temporary. He turned against me.

Thunder CRACKS.

PHILIP (O.S.)

The day he opened that portal he knew it was his last.

The world flickers black and white. Andrea drops to her knees.

ANDREA

Papa's gone the Sentinels -

Philip coughs, hollow, hungry.

PHILIP

I need a break. I'm starving.

Andrea grabs his collar.

ANDREA

I'm gonna kill you, Philip.

He bows, mocking.

PHILIP

Yet you can't bring yourself to do it.

He fades into shadow.

ANDREA

(whispering)

Papa did the Sentinels kill you or did I?

A VOICE rises from beneath the soil.

CARSON (O.S.)

You don't remember?

A bloody hand bursts from the dirt. Carson claws his way up grotesque, hollow-eyed, lesions crawling across his face.

CARSON (CONT'D)
Why did you follow us here? You
should be on Earth.

ANDREA
I don't understand

Carson grins, nose crooked. He sneezes – and MOTHS erupt from his mouth, their wings etched with tiny skeletons.

They spiral around Andrea like a curse.

CARSON
What's wrong? Don't you recognize
good ol' Papa?

The moths slice through the air, razors on wings.

ANDREA
(screams)
Ahh!

Andrea tears them away. They shatter like glass. Carson inhales their shards with grotesque pleasure.

CARSON
They're busy dying. Why don't you
join them?

Andrea rises, eyes burning.

ANDREA
I can't. I won't. I'm going home.

Philip leans against a tombstone, grinning.

PHILIP
You can't save Jack. You can't go
back. Give in you're already ours.

Carson drags one foot toward her, rotting.

ANDREA
Papa come with me. We can still go
home.

CARSON
I can do that. Come out, come out.

PHILIP (O.S.)
You'll end up just like him,
Andrea.

Andrea turns and runs. Graveyard blurs behind her. Heart pounding, breath sharp but she's smiling. She knows what she's doing.

EXT. COCOON - NIGHT

Andrea runs toward the glow.

The cocoon thrums with light.

High above it, pressed against the storm-black ridge, Hunter's shape flickers. His voice carries strangely, warped by wind and distance.

HUNTER
Run, Andrea. The dead keep their
own kind of time. And your old man...
he keeps the part you gave him.

She flinches.

Carson's steps drag behind her, slow and wrong. The rain distorts him: a hulking shadow with a smile too steady, too practiced. His teeth seem darker tonight, like something has nested between them.

ANDREA
(whispers)
Papa. Please don't you remember how
I took care of you?

The cocoon pulses again, softer this time.

Carson tilts his head, rain slipping down his ruined cheek. A sound escapes him—a laugh, or a cough, or something caught in both.

CARSON
Memories aren't what you think,
little girl.

The shape of his mouth doesn't match the voice.

CARSON (CONT'D)
Some things stay buried. Some
things crawl back.

Andrea's stomach knots.

ANDREA

I know you. I still know you.

The graveyard behind them stirs—shadows stretching, bending, listening.

She plants her feet.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

I'm not letting this be the end for us.

Carson lunges. She falls hard into mud.

He looms above her, the rain boiling to steam where it touches him. Black spiders spill from between his teeth, silent, frantic, fleeing.

CARSON

You were always inside me, Andrea.
Long before the dying. Long before
the forgetting.

Her throat tightens; tears mix with the rain.

ANDREA

Papa, it's me. It's still me.

He opens his mouth wider. Her face blurs. A shadow falls over both of them.

A massive SPITTLEBUG rises from behind the cocoon—towering, ancient, carved from the mountain itself. Its compound eyes glow with a strange, somber wisdom.

It moves slowly, reverently.

A claw—more like a ceremonial hand—extends toward her.

SPITTLEBUG

Child, there is light here for you.
Step away.

Andrea shakes her head, trembling but resolute.

ANDREA

Not without him. I can't leave him
again.

The Spittlebug watches her.

Two more descend from the mist, wings whispering.

SPITTLEBUG TWO

We cleanse what clings to death. It
is the oldest work.

Another steps forward, lowering its head in respect.

SPITTLEBUG THREE

You have carried sorrow long
enough.

Acid hisses across the graveyard.

Carson's scream tears the air. Smoke roils from his leg as it
blackens, cracks.

He twists, gasping.

CARSON

Should've stayed -

The words crumble.

A Spittlebug kneels beside him.

SPITTLEBUG

Rest. Let the soil keep what the
soil remembers.

Carson collapses into steam.

Andrea's breath fractures. She almost reaches for him.

The Spittlebug at her side steadies her gently.

SPITTLEBUG TWO

There are paths forward even for
the ones you leave behind.

Andrea's tears fall freely now-hot, relentless.

ANDREA

(whispers)

I didn't want to lose him.

SPITTLEBUG

You didn't. You are made of what
you keep.

The cocoon glows brighter, as if agreeing.

Rain softens. The graveyard exhales.

Andrea, hollowed and shaking, lets herself be guided toward
the light.

INT. COCOON - NIGHT

The cocoon breathes around her.

Walls pulse like distant throats, light drifting through them in slow, tidal shimmers. Andrea sits in something shaped vaguely like a pew, though it flexes faintly beneath her, as if listening for her heartbeat.

Across the aisle, the Spittlebug watches. Its eyes contract and dilate in a rhythm that doesn't belong to any creature she's ever seen.

SPITTLEBUG

You shouldn't have done that.

Andrea raises her fist, though she feels a second rhythm in her bones.

ANDREA

You sacrifice for your family.
That's what you do.

The creature tilts its head, considering her the way a surgeon considers a specimen.

SPITTLEBUG

You speak of family as if it is
salvation. It is not. It is hunger
wearing love's mask.

The temperature drops. Her breath clouds in front of her.

Her antennae tremble.

ANDREA

I'm not fully human.

A slow ripple crawls across the Spittlebug's abdomen.

SPITTLEBUG

No. But you cling to the human
parts. The emotional rot. The
guilt. The myth of choice.

Its mandibles click, a delicate little laugh.

SPITTLEBUG (CONT'D)

Humans pretend to love. Insects
simply consume.

Andrea rises, drawn to the altar without understanding why. The basin atop it fills with a milky mist, the color shifting like bruised skin.

The Spittlebug places a clawed hand on her head—not gently, not cruelly, simply inevitably.

Smoke wraps around her skull, seeping into her nostrils, her ears, the soft parts of her memory.

SPITTLEBUG (CONT'D)

(whispers)

You are carrying something violent.
Something that wants a body. Let it
out.

Andrea claws at the air.

ANDREA

Stop. Please, I can't—

SURGEON (O.S.)

We're losing her.

Her vision fractures like shattered glass.

Andrea chokes, bending over the basin as if gravity has tripled. Black insects gush from her mouth, wet, frantic wings beating against her teeth. They hit the mist, sizzle, dissolve.

The Spittlebug's eyes widen, a priest seeing a miracle.

PRIEST

Good. Good. Purge the self.

Andrea wheezes, barely able to form words.

ANDREA

What is this?

The creature leans close. She feels its breath

SPITTLEBUG

You call it madness. It is simply
removal of the parts that ruined
you.

It drools a slow line of acid that eats through the altar.

ANDREA

(whispers)

You want to kill me.

SPITTLEBUG

No. I want to see what remains
after the killing.

SURGEON (O.S.)
Pulse stabilizing.

Andrea looks up sharply.

The cathedral seems to fold inward, petals closing around her. The Spittlebug stands utterly still.

SURGEON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Come back to us.

INT. COCOON CORIDOR - NIGHT

Andrea moves down the corridor, each step swallowed by soft, breathing darkness. The walls pulse faintly, as if the cocoon inhales around her. Closed doors line the path.

The Spittlebug walks beside her, its limbs folding and unfolding in rhythmic, unsettling grace.

SPITTLEBUG
(murmurs)
Curious, isn't it? How many rooms a
mind needs.

ANDREA
Are these rooms filled with people?

The Spittlebug tilts its head. Its mandibles flex in something almost like a smile, but sharper.

SPITTLEBUG
Not people. Lineages. Roots. The
things that cling even when you try
to rip them free.

Andrea's breath catches.

ANDREA
I guess I'll have to put something
about my dad here.

SPITTLEBUG
Strange. You talk as though he's
already dead.

Her face crumples. She turns away, hiding her eyes with her sleeve.

ANDREA
I don't know if I killed him.. or if
the monsters back home did.
(MORE)

ANDREA (CONT'D)

I just don't want to forget him. I
can't lose him twice.

The Spittlebug's claw brushes her shoulder.

SPITTLEBUG

Memory bends. It sheds. Letting go
is natural.

Images manifest behind a nearby door: ghostly silhouettes of
families, flickering like moth wings caught on a lantern
flame.

SPITTLEBUG (CONT'D)

(croons)

Your mind makes such vivid
pictures. You would be a
magnificent archivist, if you let
your instincts take over.

ANDREA

(shivers)

Sometimes they try to make me
forget in the place I remember.

VOICE (O.S.)

Get me to forget.

The corridor contracts around them; shadows thicken like ink.
The Spittlebug looks pleased.

SPITTLEBUG

(murmurs)

No one can enter this cocoon. This
womb protects you. And if others
try our brood will dissolve them.
Quickly.

ANDREA

(stiffens)

Good. Because if Papa gets in here,
we're screwed.

A ripple of darkness trembles down the hall, and the
Spittlebug's antennae tremor

SPITTLEBUG

(whispers)

The dark comforts larvae. It helps
them sleep before they shed.

ANDREA

(frowns)

It's making me nervous.

SPITTLEBUG

The past is fixed. Even if you
crawl back home, your father will
be exactly as he was. You cannot
unspin what's already woven.

ANDREA

(swallows hard)

I still want to change him. Even if
it hurts.

The Spittlebug halts so suddenly she nearly walks into it.

SPITTLEBUG

Child, some fathers should never be
touched. Turning them can poison
you.

Her throat tightens. She exhales shakily. The Spittlebug
places one long, cold limb along her back—stroking in slow,
insective circles.

ANDREA

(shudders)

That feels too good. Stop.

The Spittlebug withdraws, but not far.

SPITTLEBUG

Your body remembers what you are
becoming. It recognizes kin. You
should listen to that.

ANDREA

I don't want to be -

SPITTLEBUG

Shh.

It gestures toward a small bed grown from the cocoon wall,
its surface rippling like warm honeycomb.

SPITTLEBUG (CONT'D)

You're tired. Resting will help
your memories loosen. When you
wake, perhaps you'll finally know
whether your father is gone or
whether you simply shed him.

Andrea hesitates—then lies down. The surface molds to her
shape, cradling her like a chrysalis beginning to close.

ANDREA

Papa please don't be dead. Please
don't be what I'm becoming.

The Spittlebug leans close as sleep claims her.

SPITTLEBUG

Sleep, little hybrid. The molt is
always gentler in the dark.

INT. KITCHEN - DREAM SEQUENCE - DAY

Andrea stands in her kitchen again. Bacon sizzles in the pan, popping tiny sparks of grease. Carson-human, impossibly human-hums a soft tune as he flips the strips without even turning around.

CARSON

Andrea! Breakfast is ready!

Her heart leaps. She rushes toward him, overjoyed-until something inside her stutters.

She looks down at herself. She's fully human.

A red light pulses behind her eyes. Sharp. Wrong. Blinding.

END SEQUENCE

INT. COCOON CORIDOR - NIGHT

She jolts awake to a blinking red light that pulses like a heartbeat-hers, or the Cocoon's. The walls shimmer, soft and translucent, as if a thin membrane separates her from something luminous and writhing just beyond sight.

Andrea sits up. The bed tilts slightly beneath her, adjusting, sighing. Overhead, the lights ripple instead of flicker, bending the shadows until they look like figures swimming through water. Every door hangs open as though the room itself has exhaled.

CARSON (O.S.)

Aren't you hungry, my dear?

A nectar-like fog curls around her ankles. Andrea steps forward, and the hall stretches, then contracts. Space rearranges itself, unfurling like a blooming organism.

INT. COCOON - NIGHT

Andrea bursts into the main cocoon hall and the space warps around her, stretching like a lung inhaling. The walls ripple with red and black mold, blooming in fast-motion. The air tastes metallic, like a nosebleed.

The Spittlebug hunches over a vat of water. Its head is swollen, discolored, split in places like overripe fruit. It turns slowly.

SPITTLEBUG
Come closer.

ANDREA
(stiffens)
No.

Its face is caving inward—burned, hollow, soft.

SPITTLEBUG
(murmurs)
A parasite entered the Cocoon. It reminds me of you. Something rotten you carry.

Andrea steps back. Her throat tightens. The water in the vat darkens. She blinks.

ANDREA
(whispers)
Stay back.

The Spittlebug doesn't.

SPITTLEBUG
Death is easier. No more remembering.

It lunges.

Andrea stumbles—straight into Carson. His silhouette flickers, swapping between her father's shape and his own. His breath hits her cheek, warm and sour.

CARSON
I found you. Like always.

ANDREA
(gasps)
This isn't real.

Philip appears silently at the Cocoon's entrance, wings folded like a priest's robes.

PHILIP
You keep recreating this. Your
father's death. Your blame. Your
refusal to let it end.

Andrea presses her palms to her temples.

ANDREA
Just send me home.

PHILIP
(mandibles twitch)
I'm trying. But you cling to the
violence. You replay it. You feed
it.

The Spittlebug and Carson close in.

ANDREA
(voice breaks)
Stop using him against me.

Philip only watches.

PHILIP
I don't need to. You do that
yourself.

The creatures lunge.

Andrea throws her arm out, grabbing a candle. She spots the
black ooze spreading, pulsing, almost breathing.

ANDREA
(whispers)
Fine. If this is my memory I'll
burn it.

She drops the flame.

The ooze erupts. Fire races across the Cocoon in a surreal
bloom of color-blue, then green, then a violent crimson.

PHILIP
Andrea this isn't healing.

Andrea turns away.

ANDREA
Then I'll find my own way out.

The Cocoon burns behind her, collapsing like a dying
organism.

EXT. COCOON - NIGHT

Andrea bursts through the cocoon doors as they explode behind her. Shards rain like falling stars. She hits the grass hard, breath sawing in and out of her chest. The sky above her warps too bright, too close, as if watching.

ANDREA
(whispers)
I'm ready to go home.

Firelight blooms in the doorway. Philip steps out through the smoke as if it parts for him. His silhouette stretches impossibly long across the lawn, bending, insect-like. He clicks his pincers once—quiet, deliberate, ceremonial.

PHILIP
You speak of home. But you were
never safe there.

Sentinels materialize from the haze—too many legs, too many eyes. They clamp her wrists, her ankles, her waist, strapping her to a cold metal gurney. Their touch is clinical, almost tender.

SENTINEL
(murmurs)
You can't go home. But we can keep
you safe. Study you. Your home is
with us now. The alternative is a
dark hole you won't crawl out of.

Andrea thrashes against the straps. Her heart stutters.

ANDREA
I want to see Mama!

Philip gives the smallest shake of his head.

PHILIP
I offered you mercy. You didn't
take it. Now we proceed.

She rips an arm free with a scream and drives her fist into a Sentinel's faceplate. Sparks bloom like dying fireflies. Another Sentinel seizes her, impressed.

SENTINEL TWO
(hums)
She carries heat. She remembers
being human.

Philip's head tilts, studying her with ancient curiosity.

PHILIP

Did you do what I asked her to do?

Andrea's eyes burn.

ANDREA

This wasn't the deal! I go home. I
tell Mama what happened!

Philip almost smiles.

PHILIP

My dear Andrea your memory is
fractured. Trauma will do that. But
if you look closely, you'll recall
what you did to your Mama.

ANDREA

No, No.

A Sentinel lifts a syringe filled with fluid that glows like
captured moonlight, wrong and alive.

SENTINEL

(murmurs)

This will quiet her.

The needle pierces her neck. A cold rush floods her veins.
Her vision fractures into hexagons.

Andrea chokes.

ANDREA

(chokes)

I'll find you every one of you.
I'll burn this town down. I'll kill
you, Philip.

Philip exhales slowly.

PHILIP

Anger is such a human reflex. Soon
you won't be burdened by it. Soon
you'll shed the last of your skin.
And then if you remain troublesome
yes. We will crush you.

The ground tilts. The sky smears. Andrea falls, collapsing
into mud that pulses faintly beneath her, as if breathing.

A Sentinel leans close, its many eyes dimming.

SENTINEL

She is gone, sir.

Philip doesn't kneel. He only watches her with a tired, ancient sadness.

PHILIP

I see. Take her. Study her. This iteration failed. We will begin again. And this time the metamorphosis will not falter.

SENTINEL

(nods)

Understood, sir.

They lift her limp form. As they carry her away, the burning cocoon groans behind them, collapsing in on itself like a dying chrysalis.

INT. BATHROOM - FLASHBACK - DAY

Stark black and white, fourteen-year-old Andrea stares into a cracked mirror. The fractures split her reflection into jittering fragments. In her trembling hand, scissors gleam beneath a dying bulb.

Moths the size of fists land across her face, wings brushing her cheeks like cold breath.

MOTH

(whisper)

Prove it.

MOTH TWO

Show them.

Beetles scurry up her leg, clicking like teeth.

BEETLE

(murmur)

Cut.

BEETLE TWO

They can't tell you no.

ANDREA

I'll prove them wrong. They can't boss me around.

She lifts the scissors. The tip snags her shirt, hovering above her stomach. The moths' wings pulse faster, fanning her with sickly air.

MOTH
(hisses)
Do it.

MOTH (CONT'D)
Be brave.

Her breath quickens. The room folds inward, swallowed by a humming silence. Her fingers tighten.

She thrusts downward but misses her own skin entirely, the scissors slicing clean through a beetle skittering across the floor.

BEETLE
Wrong one.

END FLASHBACK

INT. DEATH ROOM - DAY

Andrea jolts awake, pincers strapped to a gurney under flickering lights. Her eyes dart in fractured motions, the world stuttering around her. Cold metal beneath her.

She thrashes against the straps, teeth grit, insect tongue tapping in panic. With one violent twist she tears a pincer free and rolls off the gurney, hitting the floor with a bruising thud that echoes too long.

She pushes herself up and freezes. The room breathes. Body parts. Scattered limbs twitch faintly, as if remembering movement. Jars hold drifting heads that blink, slow and wrong.

Eyeballs on trays swivel toward her. Flayed torsos lean like mannequins mid-conversation.

ANDREA
(whispers)
Oh God. What the hell?

Her pincers clamps over her mouth too late. She vomits violently—hornets, bees, and beetles spilling across a tray of staring eyes. They skitter through the bile, wings twitching.

Footsteps.

Two Sentinels wander in, talking like they're on a break.

SENTINEL ONE
Yeah, this is where I put her.

SENTINEL TWO
You sure? Last time you lost the
girl with the missing arm.

Andrea crouches behind a steel cabinet, willing her body translucent. Her skin flickers on, off, on. Her heartbeat glows faintly in her chest, pulsing through her.

SENTINEL ONE
No, I'm positive. Right here.

Sentinel Two stares at the empty gurney.

SENTINEL TWO
She's gone. Unless she stood up and
walked off after death.

A third Sentinel drags a frozen corpse in, its feet scraping in rhythmic beats that don't match his steps.

SENTINEL THREE
This is my room. Need something?

The first two stiffen.

SENTINEL ONE
Nope. Wrong room. Sorry. Leaving.

They retreat fast. Doors hiss shut.

Andrea shifts barely and the cabinet squeals.

Sentinel Three's head snaps toward her. His eyes narrow. He stares directly at Andrea's trembling, glitching silhouette flicker, solid, flicker.

Her breath stops.

SENTINEL THREE
(mutters)
That's it. I forgot the clamps.

It turns away, absorbed in his corpse.

When he finally leaves, the lights flicker twice.

Andrea exhales, shaking so hard her translucence sputters and returns to full skin. She forces herself upright and slips through the door, one unstable, echoing step at a time.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Stark room washed in icy fluorescence, rows of frozen jars crowd the walls. Inside them, pickled fingers drift like pale worms; spinal cords coil and uncoil as if dreaming; hearts pulse faintly against the glass. Philip stands in the center, arms crossed, his shadow bending at the wrong angle. The Sentinels wait, their bodies humming as though sharing one breath.

PHILIP

Where is she?

Philip's mandibles clicking in a nervous rhythm that doesn't match the lights.

SENTINEL ONE

(swallows)

I may have misplaced her.

A tremor ripples through the jars. Philip's eye twitches with fluid.

PHILIP

You filled the syringe. Correct?

Before the Sentinel can speak, a sharp snap breaks the air, too loud, too close, echoing as though the room itself just cracked.

INT. OFFICE - DAY - REALITY

Philip stands in the center of the room like a statue carved from something colder than flesh. His tailored suit is immaculate, but his pupils twitch with strain, as if the light in here scratches at him. Around him, the Sentinels have shifted shape—white coats now hang from their segmented frames, gloves stretched tight over hands that don't quite know how to be human. They resemble DOCTORS.

DOCTOR

(clears throat)

Three-fourths.

Philip exhales through his nose, slow and venomous. His fingers press to his temples.

PHILIP

The point was to sedate her long enough to keep her from tearing herself or anyone else apart. Three-fourths buys us an hour. Maybe two. She's awake.

A heartbeat of silence. The fluorescents hum like insects.

DOCTOR

(murmurs)

I was concerned a full dose would
kill her.

Philip turns, and the air shifts with him. A shadow glides
across the wall that doesn't belong to him.

PHILIP

Better dead than wandering the
halls unbound. Better dead than
dreaming with her eyes open.

He paces, each step measured, predatory.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Find Andrea. If we keep her under
long enough... we can open her.
Rewire her. Strip the sickness out.

DOCTOR

(swallows)

I worry about the implications.

Philip stops mid-stride.

PHILIP

Implications?

Philip's eyes glint wet, furious, almost luminous.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

We could have ended her cleanly. We
could have rebuilt what was broken.
I tested the method on a monkey
afterward. It screamed once. Then
it was quiet.

He reaches for a jar from the nearby shelf. The fluid inside
sloshes darkly, something pale suspended within. Without
warning, he hurls it. The shatter is thunder in the small
room. Glass, fluid, and fragments of whatever was inside
slide down the wall like shedding skin.

The doctor flinches, hands raised to shield his ears, but the
sound seems to burrow deeper, reverberating inside the walls.

DOCTOR

She couldn't have gotten far.

Philip smooths the front of his suit, breath steady.

PHILIP

(murmurs)

She's killing staff now. Find her.
Before she remembers too much.

The doctor nods and turns, eager to escape.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

What does it say about us, if our
top-rated hospital can't contain a
single girl?

(faint, curling smile)

We're pioneers, after all. The
first hospital willing to carve
open the mind and rearrange it.

INT. OFFICE - ANDREA'S EYES - DAY

The door creaks open a sliver. Andrea's eyes stare through
wide, shining, terrified but held open.

Behind her, Philip's hands convulse. Skin stretches. Knuckles
split. New joints blossom beneath the flesh as his fingers
unravel into twitching, insectile hooks. Wet strands of
tendon string between them.

SENTINEL ONE

We will kill her.

Philip's pupils dilate into molten yellow. His jaw unhinges
with a soft pop.

PHILIP

Excellent.

INT. LOBBY - DAY

Andrea bolts through the lobby. Behind her, chaos ruptures
voices cracking into screams, metal slamming, alarms
shrilling. Her stomach knots hard. She swallows the acid
rising in her throat, crushes the panic back down, and tears
toward the steel exit door. She hits the latch and rips it
open.

INT. STAIRWELL - DAY

LOUDSPEAKER (O.S.)

Escapee in progress.

Red sirens bloom in pulses. A klaxon wails, long and
mournful.

SENTINEL ONE (O.S.)
(shouts)
That's got to be her!

Another voice rises behind her as Andrea stumbles into the stairwell, feet crashing against the metal steps. The door above slams open.

SENTINEL TWO (O.S.)
You remember what the boss said.

Andrea's breath fractures. The exit at the bottom doesn't budge. The handle stays dead beneath her grip. Panic squeezes her chest.

ANDREA
Shit. What do I do?

She turns. Something waits in the shadows. A severed arm fresh, fingers curled as if clinging to its last thought. The nails are long, curved, almost ritualistic. It gives a faint twitch, as though recognizing her.

Andrea drops to her knees, hands trembling. Footsteps pound closer from both directions.

She seizes the cold hand, aligns one carved nail to the lock. Click. The door swings open.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - DAY

Andrea bursts into a parking garage that feels too large, too hollow. A single fluorescent bulb flickers overhead, but its light doesn't behave correctly – it blinks in patterns, like coded breathing.

Her footsteps echo.

A shadow stretches behind her, then crawls sideways, then detaches itself from her entirely.

Before she can turn, a hand cold, soft, wrong lands on her shoulder.

Andrea jerks around.

Nancy stands there, but her outline flickers like a projection misaligned. Insects aren't simply crawling on her they replace parts of her, forming and dissolving her face in looping shapes. A mandible appears where her cheek should be, then a field of moth wings, then her old smile.

NANCY

It's me, sweetheart. Mama's here.
You're safe.

ANDREA

(breath catches)
Mama? What did they do to you?

Nancy tilts her head.

NANCY

They didn't do anything I didn't
deserve.

A staircase materializes behind them simply descends into
darkness. Sentinels appear at the bottom, then blink to the
top, then are halfway down again, their shadows moving faster
than their bodies.

ANDREA

(whispers)
I'm sorry.

Nancy's hand slides up Andrea's cheek. The insects on her
palm whisper, clicking tiny jaws.

NANCY

There, there. You're not dead yet.

The Sentinels halt, but their reflections continue walking.
Nancy watches them with new, alien authority.

NANNY

(murmurs)
Strange, they listen to you. Or to
something in you.

Her torso expands and contracts like a hive breathing.

NANCY

Sweetheart we can evolve. You're
brilliant. A natural.

Andrea backs away.

ANDREA

I want to go back. Before all this.

Nancy's eyes brim with black liquid that drips upward.

NANCY

The past isn't a place. It's a
wound. We don't go back to wounds.

Andrea lifts a white flag from her pocket except it isn't a flag. It's a scrap of cloud. It's a torn apron. It's Heather's handwriting.

Nancy freezes. Her grip releases. The insects on her body hush.

NANCY (CONT'D)
(whispers)
What is that?

The Sentinels' lights stutter. The garage flickers like a glitching memory.

Andrea lowers the flag.

Nancy steps closer, her form glitching between mother, monster, and something still shifting.

EXT. FIELD - FLASHBACK

Black and white figures stand together: Nancy, Carson, Jack, Heather and Andrea, whose outline wavers. Above them, fireflies climb the sky in trembling swarms, bursting into flag-shaped flares that ripple as though the night itself is trying to breathe.

Nancy's hands clasp in front of her chest, trembling with borrowed warmth.

NANCY
Happy Fourth of July.

Heather watches her mother carefully.

HEATHER
Thanks for accepting her, Mama. I
know it's been hard.

Andrea stares upward, pupils dilated, transfixed.

ANDREA
There are so many shapes.

CARSON
(exhales)
It's nice.

Jack smiles, though the edges don't quite reach his eyes.

JACK
Nothing can ruin this.

The firefly fireworks shudder, then fall silent

END FLASHBACK

INT. PARKING GARAGE - PRESENT

Nancy's head twitches sharply, eyes scanning the shadows

NANCY

The old family? Wait.

Thick black blood threads down her cheeks, slow and viscous.
Her expression flickers between recognition and dread.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Get out while you can. Leave me.

Andrea pushes herself upright, pain rippling through her
abdomen. Something underneath her skin shifts.

ANDREA

We can go together, Mama.

Nancy lowers her gaze.

NANCY

Negative.

Her voice fractures into warped static.

NANCY (CONT'D)

They'll kill you. I'll turn on you.
That's what the insects do. Now go.

The scream that follows is quieter than before, but far more
wrong — layered whispers, chittering tones woven through a
human wail.

Andrea covers her ears as Sentinels move in.

ANDREA

Shit.

She bolts, slipping past claws and bone-pale faces, feet
skidding over oil-slick concrete.

A Sentinel grabs her arm.

SENTINEL

(murmurs)

Your old life? It's already gone.

The grip tightens. Andrea twists, and something sharp—not her nails—scrapes free from her skin.

ANDREA
Get off of me.

Gunfire ruptures the silence. Muzzle flashes stutter across the ceiling.

Each shot hits clean: one, two, three. Sentinels jerk like puppets with cut strings.

Andrea knees her captor and tears herself free just as a bullet caves in its skull.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Oh.

Nancy staggers into the glow of a distant overhead lamp, face twisted by sorrow and fury.

NANCY
Finish me. Finish me too.

A bullet rips through Andrea's shoulder; another splinters Nancy's head. Insect parts spill across the floor in a soft scatter. Nancy collapses.

Andrea crawls to her, fingers trembling as they touch her mother's cooling cheek.

ANDREA
Mama? No I tried. I tried to fix this.

Blood spreads across Andrea's chest, warm at first, then cold. Her breath thins. Her vision blurs at the edges, fracturing into hexagonal shards compound eye flashes she can't blink away.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
My breath. It's getting shorter.

She leans against her mother.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
This is how I die, next to the woman who kept trying to love me.

INT. OPERATING ROOM - NIGHT

SURGEON
Come on. I can't lose another one.

The machines deepen into a low, predatory hum, their beeps stuttering.

Gloved hands blur. A flash of metal. Blood pressure sinks fast, vanishing from the screen.

The second surgeon goes rigid.

SURGEON TWO
Time of death.

Flatline.

EXT. YARD - FANTASY - DAY

Andrea stumbles forward, unsteady, her vision bending until the yard ripples into place.

Philip appears in front of her like he's been there all along, blocking her path.

PHILIP
I can't let you go. I can fix this.
Look doesn't this yard feel
familiar? This is where you well -

Andrea's breath trembles, shallow, but her eyes focus through the haze.

ANDREA
I remember.

EXT. PARK - FLASHBACK - DAY

A faint buzzing grazes her ear. She swats, irritated. A mosquito settles on her neck. WHAP. When she pulls her hand back, a thin smear of blood lingers, darker than it should be.

Frank's grin falters. His eyes widen. He lowers the camera slowly. Six mosquitoes slide from his nostrils, their wings trembling like they're waiting for a signal. His eyes bloom red, veins twitching.

FRANK
(whispers)
Oh boy, you made Andrea angry. Hope
she's not close.

A soft metallic whisper cuts the air - not loud, almost delicate, like silk being torn.

Heather turns in time to glimpse Andrea emerging from the shadows, her movements too fluid, too silent, her eyes reflecting light like an insect's. The camera slips from Frank's hands. As it falls, the lens catches only a blurred motion and Heather's startled breath. Heather runs.

HEATHER

(voice cracked)

No, no – please stay away from me!

Mosquitoes settle onto her arms again. She swats at them desperately, panic rising.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

Please! Just leave me alone!

That soft whisper again – a blade moving, or perhaps wings. Andrea is suddenly in front of her.

Heather gasps, reaching for the blade she keeps hidden, but her limbs feel heavy, as if the air around Andrea thickens. She collapses to her knees, breath stuttering. The grass beneath her ripples, growing over her legs, swallowing her.

Andrea stands above her, posture unnervingly still. A thin sheen of something not quite blood glints on the sword in her hand. Her pupils dilate, widening into an insectoid geometry. She touches her cheek, leaving a streak of dark fluid.

ANDREA

I hate that you were the favorite child.

Far off, butterflies make a sound that shouldn't belong to them – soft, echoing caws drifting through the air like warnings.

END FLASHBACK

INT. OPERATING ROOM - DAY

Beep. A faint rhythm breaks through the stillness. The surgeon freezes.

SURGEON

She's breathing. Impossible.

Another stares at the monitor, shaken.

SURGEON TWO

(whispers)

The treatment might be working.

The first surgeon bends over Andrea's unmoving body.

SURGEON

Then Philip may have been right and
whatever she becomes, we can't stop
it now.

They work in tense silence.

EXT. YARD - FANTASY

In the yard, Andrea grips a sword. Her bruised, bloodied body trembles. Philip shimmers at the edge of the lawn, almost doubling, like he's being redrawn each second.

He steps forward.

PHILIP

All you have to do, my dear, is
accept reality. Once you accept it,
it's all over.

Andrea bares her teeth.

ANDREA

It is over, Philip. You can't hurt
anyone else.

Philip claps slow.

PHILIP

When you wake up from surgery, I
hope it's a success and you're not
so delusional.

Andrea lunges. The sword moves before she does, as if tugged by invisible hands. It glides across Philip's neck. His head tilts back at an impossible angle, geometry bending. SNAP. The sky fractures.

His head lifts free of his body, floats for a heartbeat, then drops. His body folds in on itself, collapsing without weight.

Reality peels apart colors unspooling, the yard dissolving into soft watercolor shapes that run together and bleed away.

INT. OPERATING ROOM - DAY

Andrea jolts upright on the table, eyes wild with panic.

SURGEON

(gasps)

She's alive. Oh, thank God.

SURGEON TWO

We need to get Philip now.

Without warning, Andrea snatches a scalpel from the tray and drives it into the first surgeon's neck. He staggers back, clutching his throat, gurgling as blood spills between his fingers. Andrea shakes her head.

ANDREA

I need a way out of this place.
It's evil.

She yanks the scalpel free, crimson staining the blade. Then she turns to the second surgeon.

He freezes, hands raised, inching backward.

EXT. INCEPTION HEIGHTS REHABILITATION CENTER - FLASHBACK

TITLE: WEEKS EARLIER

The large circular building is decaying, its once white paint flaking off in curled strips like shed insect skin, exposing splotches of gray concrete.

Graffiti sprawls across one wall: "DARK JACK WAS HERE"

Tiny black beetles crawl through the letters. The words seem to pulse in the dim light, breathing with them.

INT. INCEPTION HEIGHTS REHABILITATION CENTER - NIGHT

In a sterile, brightly lit office, Nancy and Carson sit stiffly across from Doctor Philip Evilton, whose crisp lab coat contrasts with the unsettling clutter around him. Odd instruments, scattered files, jars whose contents twitch faintly in the light.

NANCY

(rage)

She killed my son and daughter. You
have to do something.

Carson, head in his hands.

CARSON

(mutters)

I hate to admit it, but my methods
the pills aren't working anymore.
What kind of security do you even
have here?

NANCY

(pleads)

She can't be allowed out. That
dangerous side of her if it escapes
again.

Philip leans forward, his pupils widening into something
almost faceted..

PHILIP

We're moving to experimental
treatments. No pills. A more direct
surgical correction of her
chemistry. It will help her see the
world accurately for once.

CARSON

(stiffens)

I don't love that idea. It sounds
invasive.

NANCY

(snaps)

Those pills turned her into a
monster!

CARSON

(exhales)

But they kept her functioning.

Philip's mandible twitches beneath the skin almost a shadow.

PHILIP

I assure you, this program works.
We've had success before. The
subjects rarely resist once they
understand their purpose.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. PHILIP'S FRONT YARD - PRESENT - NIGHT

Police cars screech to a halt, sirens tearing at the night. Firetrucks bathe the street in red and blue, the colors stuttering like a dying heartbeat. Officers spill out with guns raised, their faces blank as carved masks.

POLICE OFFICER
(shouts)
It's over! Drop the knife and put
your head on the ground!

At the center stands Andrea, blood dripping from her hands. She lifts her gaze to the sky.

She exhales. Smiles. In her grip: Philip's severed head, its eyes half-lidded, almost blinking in the shifting lights.

MARION EVILTON collapses nearby with a ragged scream.

MARION
My husband! Philip!

A police officer steps closer.

POLICE OFFICER
Andrea Refuge! Hands up! Now!

Andrea tilts her head, dazed. Her pupils shimmer, fracturing like an insect's.

ANDREA
Huh?

They rush her. Handcuffs snap around her wrists. Her skin ripples—tiny chitinous ridges rising, then sinking as fast as they appear.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
(screams)
No! You don't understand!

The officers recoil.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
I guess I'm supposed to give up and
let you have me.

Shadows fold in around her.

OFFICER
(hesitates)
Andrea, do you understand what's
happening?

They shove her into the squad car. The door closes with a final, metallic thud.

EXT. APARTMENT STAIRWAY - FLASHBACK - DAY

Nancy stands at the top of the stairs in the apartment complex, her back to Andrea, who lingers below with a twisted mixture of anger and hurt tightening her features.

Andrea growls through clenched teeth.

ANDREA
I'm not a freak.

Nancy doesn't turn.

NANCY
You killed my favorite children.
And now look at you clicking your
jaw like some bug. You were always
destined for this.

Andrea's face contorts. The skin along her temples ripples, translucent for a heartbeat.

ANDREA
You just need a little help
understanding me!

Andrea lunges. Her fingers split briefly, segmenting like tiny limbs as she shoves Nancy hard.

Time seems to freeze as Nancy stumbles, balance gone, arms flailing. She falls backward down the stairs. Her skull strikes the stair post at the landing. A brittle, insectile crack slices through the silence.

Nancy lies motionless. Dead.

INT. KITCHEN - FLASHBACK - DAY

The kitchen is warm. Andrea (8) stands at the counter, ladling broth into a bowl with careful, practiced motions. At the table, Carson sits hunched, skin gray, eyes flat and distant.

She approaches.

ANDREA
Papa, you're sick. You have to eat.

Her small mandibles tremble.

Carson doesn't look at her. His gaze drifts upward, vacant. Andrea follows it and for a heartbeat, she sees the thing too: a giant bug clinging to the wall, legs twitching.

Carson reaches up with slow, deliberate fingers, plucks it from the air, and swallows without chewing.

Andrea flinches.

Only then does Carson look at her, eyes suddenly sharp.

CARSON

There you are.

(He snaps his fingers)

Don't disappear like that. You know what happens when you drift. The insects get bigger. You make them bigger.

Andrea blinks hard, grounding herself. She lifts the spoon and brings it to his mouth.

ANDREA

Sorry, Papa. I wasn't trying to.

Carson gives a thin smile that never reaches his eyes.

CARSON

It's all in your head, sweetheart.
All of it. Remember that.

ANDREA

(nods)

I'm starting to realize that.

The bugs swell in the corners of the room, darkening, crawling, waiting.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Andrea grows older, now sixteen.

Sunlight cuts through the window, throwing warped shadows across the walls. Andrea stirs the pot with careful, measured movements.

ANDREA

(murmurs)

I'm sorry for everything, Papa.

Carson steps in, hollow-eyed.

CARSON

Sweetheart, none of it was your fault. You remember it wrong. I protected you from Jack and Heather. From your mother. I kept their secrets safe, didn't I?

Andrea turns, offering a small smile.

ANDREA

Here. Try this.

She sets the bowl in front of him. Carson tastes the soup, face twisting.

CARSON

Andrea, this isn't right. You wouldn't hurt me. You love me. Don't you?

Andrea slides the bowl closer.

ANDREA

You don't like it?

Carson coughs, breath cracking. He reaches for her hand.

CARSON

Honey, look at me. You're confused. You're always confused. Let me help you think clearly.

Andrea pulls back, strikes a match. Flames bloom.

Her smile widens.

ANDREA

I'm thinking clearly now, Papa.

Carson scrambles, but the flame reaches him first. Fire crawls up his shirt. He screams her name as if she owes him something.

Andrea watches, steady.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

(whispers)

I'm done letting you rewire me.

EXT. SQUAD CAR - NIGHT

The squad car drifts along an unlit street, headlights carving thin, trembling slices through the gloom.

INT. SQUAD CAR - NIGHT

Andrea leans against the window, her reflection thinning with each breath. She's quiet, withdrawn, slipping toward a place only she can see.

Outside, the shadows split open just a flicker at first then a giant butterfly slams into a massive grasshopper, their wings and legs cracking against pavement while army tanks rumble through the real street, firing at shapes no one else reacts to.

THE END FOR NOW