



SCAN AT YOUR OWN RISK

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. CEMETARY - PARKING LOT - DAY

Late afternoon. A foggy mist hangs in the air while lead gray clouds hover above the tree tops.

A beat-up economy car pulls into the empty lot, parks under a tree. AMARA, (21) cute, a couple of tats, faded red color in her hair, gets out with a bouquet of flowers in her hand.

She looks around the area. There's no one else there. She locks her car, strides off towards the graveyard entrance.

EXT. CEMETARY - GRAVEYARD - DAY

Headstones of various styles and ages spread out under old oaks. A few with fresh flowers. Many more with wilted. Serene, but creepy at the same time.

Amara follows a path towards the rear of the cemetery. She reaches a beautiful marble headstone with a couple's names on it. In the lower corner is a QR code. She scans it.

On her phone, a photo of her happy parents appear.

Sadness fills her face. She kneels by the stone, carefully placing the flowers by it.

AMARA

Melanie couldn't make it today.
She's studying for her exams. You
would be so proud of her. She's
doing really great.

She adjusts the flowers. As she does, her jaw tightens.

AMARA

Actually, that's not true. I'm
tired of covering for her. She
didn't want to come. Said you're
not really here, so what's the
point? I know she's right, but...

She peers up at the sky, gets up.

AMARA

I better go. Looks like it might
rain. I'll be back in two weeks. On
your 30th. Love you.

She dabs at her moist eyes, then heads back on the path.

Amara reaches into her pocket, pulls out her phone. Along with it a piece of paper flutters away off to the side.

She tries to grab it, but it drifts further away.

Annoyed, she chases after it. It keeps moving until it finally lands on a plain old overgrown grave marker. she picks up the paper, puts it back in her pocket.

Curious, she brushes away weeds and dirt from the plaque. "Curt Owen. Born 1902. Died 1937." There's nothing else, except one tiny little thing in the lower corner.

Amara squints, tries to see what it is. She turns on her phone's camera, zooms in on the barely visible mark. The camera focuses.

It's a QR code.

Surprised, Amara stares at her phone as a man's face appear.

His face is beat up. Swollen and bruised, with numerous cuts. His eyes wild, desperate. He's in a dark tight space. This is CURT OWEN.

CURT

Ya gotta help me, ma'am. I didn't do nothin' to them women. I'm swearin' on my life. I'm innocent, I'm tellin' ya.

Horrified and confused, Amara stares at her phone.

CURT

Please. You look like a nice gal. I'm beggin' ya to help me out of here. Please.

She looks around for someone playing a prank, sees no one.

AMARA

Who are you, and why the hell are you on my phone?

CURT

The name's Curt Owen. I was put here, left to rot in this grave. Them women I supposedly killed, I didn't do it.

Amara smirks, glances around the area again.

AMARA

If you're Curt Owen, you've been dead for almost a century. Pretty good trick to show up on my phone like this. Whoever put that QR code on your marker has a sick sense of humor.

Her smirk turns into a smile.

AMARA

But, I have to admit, it's pretty cool. In a morbid kind of way.

Anger flushes over Curt. He gets close-up.

CURT

This ain't no fuckin' joke, miss! I'm down here, breathin' and sufferin'. I need your help. You gotta help me.

Amara checks the sky. The clouds threaten rain.

AMARA

I got to go, but I give you a thumbs up for your effort.

CURT

No, no, no, no! Don't ya dare walk away. Listen to me, I'm inno --

Amara turns off her phone, pockets it, then hurries off.

INT. CAR - DAY

Amara jumps in just as raindrops begin to pelt her car.

She gazes at the cemetery, brow furrowed, then takes out her phone from her pocket. She looks at the phone, then puts it away, starts up the car.

INT. APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Amara brushes her teeth. When finished, she turns off the lights. For a quick second, her reflection in the mirror over the sink appear distorted. Spooky.

She turns the lights on again. She smiles at her silliness, turns off the lights, then heads into the --

BEDROOM

Amara pads over to a chair with her clothes draped over it. She digs into her pants pocket, takes out her phone, then climbs into bed. She puts the phone on the bedside table, turns off the light, then drifts off to sleep.

LATER

Dark. Peaceful. The alarm clock shows 3:04. Amara's asleep when the --

-- phone lights up. Curt's face in close-up on the screen.

CURT

Amara! Wake up. You got to get me out of here.

Amara stirs.

CURT

Wake the fuck up!

Her eyes pop open. She snaps her head towards the phone. Alarm, when she sees Curt. She snatches up the phone.

AMARA

How the hell did you get my phone number? This is not cool.

CURT

Please. I'm beggin' you. All I ask is that you set me free.

AMARA

This is not funny. If you don't leave me alone, I'm going to have to call the police.

Curt forces himself to calm.

CURT

I ain't tryin' to be funny. This ain't no joke. I don't rightly understand how this all works. All I know is that you're the first person I've been able to reach since they buried me. Please, I'm beggin' ya. Help me out.

Amara scoffs.

AMARA

This is ridiculous. What do you want me to do? Go dig at the cemetery?

Curt appears hopeful.

CURT

Would you do that, please?

AMARA

Hell no! I'd be arrested. Probably go to jail.

Amara chuckles. Thinks she knows what this is about.

AMARA

I know. I get it. You want me to go to the cemetery and start digging while someone is filming me and I end up on TikTok or something.

CURT

I don't know what that is.

He pleads. Earnest.

CURT

Please, Amara, I beg ya from the bottom of my heart. I've been trapped down here for so long. If ya dig up the truth, you'll see I ain't no killer. I just need a chance to clear my name, to show the world the truth.

AMARA

I'm not going to the cemetery at night with a shovel.

Curt concentrates to keep his frustration in check.

CURT

No one will be here if you come now. Please...

Amara sighs.

EXT. CEMETARY - GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

Dark. Foggy. Silent.

Amara walks down the path with a shovel and an LED lantern in hand. She keeps constant glances over her shoulder.

She steps off the path towards Curt's grave. When she reaches it, she takes out her phone. Curt's face appear.

AMARA

Okay, I'm here, but if this is a set-up, I swear I'll beat y'all to death with this shovel. Got that?

CURT

This ain't no set-up. You'll see.

Amara scans the cemetery. All quiet. She's all alone.

She stabs the ground with the shovel, removes a stack of dirt. Seems loud. She takes another glance around before she continues to dig.

The pile of dirt grows next to the grave as she works.

THUD.

Her shovel hits something.

Amara checks her surroundings, then peers down into the hole.

She scrapes the dirt off a plain old rotted plywood casket, stares at it, then takes out her phone, turns it on.

Curt's right there on the screen. Excited. Hopeful.

Amara taps the casket with the shovel.

AMARA

Can you hear this?

CURT

Yes! Yes!

AMARA

You're putting me on. You can't possibly be in there.

She checks the cemetery for movements. Speaks out louder to anyone who might be hiding out there.

AMARA

Alright. You can come out now. I admit, you got me.

She's met by silence.

CURT

Just let me out, Amara. You'll see
this ain't no prank. I swear it.

She pockets the phone, then pries the shovel in under the lid
of the casket.

The rotten wood CREAKS.

Amara takes a deep breath, braces herself, then forces the
lid ajar.

A small HISS as fetid air escapes.

Amara winces, turns her face away from the putrid odor, then
pops the lid off the coffin.

A skeleton. Bones twisted. Brittle. Cobwebs clinging to the
eye sockets. The jaw open as if frozen in a tormented scream.

In horror, Amara stares at the corpse. She glances around the
cemetery. All quiet.

She takes out her phone.

Curt's face, right there. He's confused.

Amara grows angry.

AMARA

Asshole. I knew you were just
putting me on. Now I have to cover
this up.

CURT

I don't understand. I can hear you
loud and clear, but I'm still
trapped down here.

Amara aims her phone on the corpse.

AMARA

See that? Does that look like you?

Sadness replaces Curt's desperation. Realizes --

CURT

...Am I a ghost?

Amara looks over her shoulders. It's so quiet. Eerie. She
shivers. Uncertain.

AMARA

I don't believe in ghosts.

Curt's heartbroken. Amara's pissed.

AMARA

I'm covering this up, then I'm going home. And, don't ever contact me again.

She's about to turn off the phone when --

CURT

Now I'll never get another chance to prove it was Martin Renquist who took those women's lives. My name won't ever be cleared.

Amara pauses. Looks back at the screen.

AMARA

What did you just say?

CURT

I said, no one will ever know it was Martin Renquist who killed those women.

Amara perks up.

AMARA

Martin Renquist?

Curt peers at Amara with sad eyes.

CURT

Yeah, he's the real killer.

AMARA

I think I saw that name somewhere.

She stalks off into the sea of gravestones. Searches for one in particular.

She checks several headstones. Finally finds the right one. A big impressive one.

Martin Renquist. Born 1905. Died 1978.

Amara turns her phone to the grave. Eager, Curt looks on.

AMARA

Is that him?

Excited, Curt reads the grave.

CURT

Yes! That's him! I remember he was three years younger than myself.

Curt's face harden.

CURT

I reckon that bastard got to live thirty-eight years more after they buried me here. That ain't right.

Amara googles Martin Renquist. Confused, she reads the results.

AMARA

Are you sure it's him? Says here that he was a prominent politician and loving father to four kids and a husband for forty years.

CURT

It's always the ones you least expect, ain't it?

She contemplates her next move. Sees something on the headstone. Another tiny mark. She aims her camera at it.

On the phone's screen, MARTIN RENQUIST, (73), appears. A predator as slick as a silver-skinned shark with black eyes and a sinister grin to match. He's in a dark tight space.

Aghast, Amara stares at her phone.

AMARA

Who... are you?

Amused, Martin eyes her closely.

MARTIN

Well, well, well, pray tell, what brings such a delicious young lady to my humble --
 (looks around his space)
 -- grave?

Amara switches window on her phone to Curt.

AMARA

(hushed)

What do I say to him? Hurry.

Curt thinks fast.

CURT

Ya gotta get him to confess his crimes.

Amara switches back to Martin. Thinks for a beat.

AMARA

Did you kill five women between 1932 and 1936?

Surprised, Martin scoffs, then an amused grin appears.

MARTIN

My dear girl, if I happen to furnish you with the accurate answer, might there be a chance I secure a token of victory? Some sort of prize?

AMARA

An award? Why would you need one, you're already dead?

Martin looks around his tight space.

MARTIN

I've been holed up in this gloomy, stifling cavity for ages. If you could find it in your heart to release me, I promise you, I'll spill every secret you're chasing.

Amara's skeptical.

AMARA

Release you? As in opening up your grave?

A hopeful flicker in Martin's eyes.

MARTIN

Ah, yes. Would you be so kind?

Amara walks back to Curt's grave, switches over to him on the phone.

CURT

What's happenin'? What did he say?

Amara picks up the shovel by the pile of dirt, aims her phone at it.

AMARA

He wants me to dig up his grave.

CURT
Are you plannin' on doin' it?

AMARA
I'm kind of curious myself now.

She heads back to Martin's grave. Switches back to him on the phone, shows him the shovel.

AMARA
Alright. Tell me about the murders.

A darkness spreads across Martin's face.

MARTIN
I shall unfold each bloodstained
chapter, every grim and gruesome
detail, only after you've bestowed
upon me the sweet freedom from this
cold tomb.

Amara stands firm.

AMARA
No. I don't trust you. You tell me
about the first murder and I'll dig
two feet, then you tell me about
the second one and I'll dig again.

Martin weighs it. Gives in. Stares coldly, but amused at her.

MARTIN
Vanessa Barden, barely nineteen, a
naive beauty unaware of her potent
allure. I performed the act myself,
her breath ceasing under the
pressure of my own hands. The rush,
the exquisite thrill of her life
energy flowing into mine, was a
sensation unlike any I had ever
known.

Amara stares at her phone, shivers as the reality hits her. She props the phone up by his gravestone, raises the shovel, stabs it into the dirt.

When she reaches her target depth, she turns to the phone where Martin keeps an eye on the process.

AMARA
Who was the second?

MARTIN

LouMarie Jones. Merely twenty, still playing coy with her youthful charm. Attempting to echo the allure of my maiden kill, I found her lacking. The taste had dulled, the thrill, faded. It was a razor that offered the novel titillation I craved. With a swift, deliberate cut across her throat, the warm, life-affirming surge against my hands restored the sensation I'd hungered for.

With disgust and hatred, she stares back at him.

AMARA

I looked you up online. It said you were a prominent politician with four kids and a wife of almost forty years. Why? Why did you feel the need to kill?

The fog swirls around the headstone. Ominous.

MARTIN

When a man finds himself perched upon the pinnacle of all his desires, he inevitably gazes toward the unreachable, yearning for that which remains tantalizingly beyond his grasp.

Amara jams the shovel back into the ground, digs another two feet down.

AMARA

The third one?

MARTIN

She was an unfortunate miscalculation. A sly attempt at career advancement by flirting her way into my grace. I strangled her with my belt. No pleasure or thrill, I assure you, just a simple necessity.

Amara trembles with anger.

AMARA

What was her name?

MARTIN

Irrelevant. Barely a footnote in the grand narrative, not worth the effort to recall.

Martin smiles. Slippery. Slimy.

MARTIN

Now, kindly continue. I can hear you getting closer.

Amara digs. As she does, the fog seems to come alive. It moves across the graveyard in deliberate swirls. Restless. A breathy HISSING in its wake.

CLUNK!

The shovel hits the lid of the casket. Amara looks at Martin.

He appears delighted. Eager.

MARTIN

So enticingly near. Go on, my dear. Don't stop now.

Amara glares at him.

AMARA

Who was the forth?

Martin closes his eyes, draws in a breath of pleasure.

MARTIN

Ah, Julia McKenzie. A soul enthralled by darkness, she yearned to bare her inner self... through my blade.

AMARA

...You cut her open?

MARTIN

She desired it. I simply obliged.

Appalled, Amara gapes at him. He glares back.

MARTIN

Now open the fucking casket!

AMARA

No. Not until you tell me who the fifth one was.

MARTIN

Curt fucking Owen! That's who. A mere trifle, an impertinent little mouse nosing around my political bastion. Dared to threaten the veil of secrecy around my... diversions. His audacity was his downfall. His fate was sealed by the merciless blows of my crowbar.

Amara stares aghast at her phone.

AMARA

You framed him for the murders.

Martin's face changes. Goes from angry and smug to surprised.

Behind Amara, the translucent shape of Curt appears. He walks up behind her.

CURT

You did it.

Startled, Amara spins around, sees him.

AMARA

Curt?

CURT

You got him to confess. You cleared my tarnished name.

He looks around the graveyard.

CURT

I am finally free.

AMARA

What happens now?

He gazes out into the distance.

CURT

There's a light. It's pulling me towards it. I reckon, that's where I ought to be headin'.

He turns to Amara.

CURT

I knew one day, an angel would appear. From the depths of my heart, I thank you.

He staggers forward, then fades away until he's gone.

The fog floats towards Amara. Swirls around her feet, then smoke-like tendrils feel their way up her legs.

Mesmerized, Amara can't help but watch.

MARTIN (O.S.)

Now it's my turn. My liberation.

Amara's jolted back to reality.

AMARA

I'm not setting you free. You're a murderer.

Martin's face, wicked. A monster.

MARTIN

I'm afraid you don't have a choice.

AMARA

Of course I do. I'm up here, free.
You're trapped down in a hell hole
somewhere. Where you belong.

She turns off her phone, pockets it, then shovels dirt back into the hole.

The fog becomes more turbulent. Leaves rustle in the trees as a breeze whines its way through the cemetery.

There's a BUZZ.

Amara stops takes out her phone. On the screen is the face of her mother and the word MOM.

Amara stares at the phone while it continues to ring.

Wary, she hits the answer button along with the speaker button.

AMARA

...Hello?

Martin's chilling voice fills the air.

MARTIN

Refuse to open my coffin and I will
make you regret it. I may be
confined, but my reach is far more
extensive than this grave.

She punches the end call button, but the phone stays on.

MARTIN

Perhaps I should pay a visit to
your dear mother. Or your sweet
little sister. How old is she now?

The color drains from Amara's face. Horrified, she stares at
her phone.

AMARA

No! Go away!

Panicked, she tries to power off the phone, but it stays on.

MARTIN

Either liberate me from this
suffocating tomb, or prepare
yourself for relentless nocturnal
visits and daytime spectres.
Consider it your lasting requiem,
until your own curtain call.

AMARA

Stop! Leave me alone.

MARTIN

I assure you, once freed, I shall
not linger in your existence. You,
hold no fascination for me. I only
seek my own freedom.

Amara stares at her phone, weighs it.

MARTIN

You have my word.

AMARA

Will you disappear just like Curt?

MARTIN

I vow to vanish, leaving no trace
in your life.

Amara looks down into the grave, then hits the coffin's
hinges with the shovel, pries the lid ajar. This time, no
foul air escapes. It's dead quiet.

She pops the lid wide open.

EMPTY!

Horrified, she stares down into the empty casket, then turns
to her phone.

AMARA

It's empty. Where are you?

The dark and translucent shape of Martin rises behind her.

MARTIN

In every shadow, in every whisper
of the wind, I exist. Boundless,
unchained to wander as I will, to
play as I desire. Yet fear not. You
shall remain untouched. The world
offers ample distractions.

Terrified, Amara turns to face him.

Martin chuckles. Low at first, but it soon grows into an evil
laughter before he fades away along with the fog.

Creeped out, Amara backs off down the path, then turns
around, decides to jog. Then faster. Faster.

EXT. CEMETARY - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Amara bursts out of the entrance, hurries to her car. She
fumbles with the key fob before she gets the door open.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Amara stabs the door-lock mechanism, then starts the car. A
sigh of relief as she drives off.

INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Driving through the city, she starts to relax. She turns on
the radio. Soft music wafts out of the speakers.

Until --

MARTIN (O.S.)

Just remember Amara, the shadows
are my domain. Sleep tight... don't
let the nightmares bite.

His chilling laughter fades away before the music is back.

Terrified, with her eyes wide, and a death grip on the
steering wheel, Amara can't help but --

SCREAM.

FADE OUT: