

PANDORA

"Pilot"

Written by

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INTRODUCTION SEQUENCE:

MONTAGE:

A swarm of warring nations; a mushroom cloud and bloodied civilians splayed out on the streets; a fantastic microburst of wind and then a forest fire lights up the night and leaves burnt animal corpses in its wake. There's a flash of purple lightning and immediately dawn breaks. The people don't know it yet, but the sun is rising over a new world. A peaceful world.

JOSHAN (V.O.)

My father told me of a time when
out world was in chaos. Countries
were warring, people were dying,
yet the persons in power didn't
care because money was more
valuable than life. Then, one night
everything changed. All conflict
was resolved and the earth and its
people became a priority.

END MONTAGE

Cut to JOSHAN (22), a young spectacled scholar, sitting at his desk sifting through his papers, which includes an old photograph of his father MEMRYN: a serious looking man.

OFF the photograph, Joshan's face is intense and passionate.

JOSHAN (V.O.)

It's been 100 years since the world
found peace and to this day, no one
knows why... or cares anymore. But
my father cared. He spent his whole
career trying to uncover the
truth... I will not let his work go
to waste. I will find the missing
piece of history. He'll see his
life's work answered and then,
maybe, I can make him proud.

EXT. CHADD HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Sun pours in from the window. ELI CHADD (55) prepares breakfast: cutting strawberries, stirring oatmeal bubbling on the stove. She goes to pour a glass of orange juice, when out of nowhere the glass begins to quiver. In a matter of seconds the whole kitchen is shaking. Eli darts to turn off the stove and dives to grab hold of the glass, before it shimmies off the counter. The quaking passes as quickly as it started.

Relieved, Eli finally pours the juice when the SOUND OF TRUMPETS shatters the peace again. Startled, Eli knocks over the glass. She <SIGHS> and reaches for a dish towel --

INT. JOSHAN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Joshan's ALARM is no match for Joshan who's snoring away. He would be good-looking if it weren't for all the sleepless nights, his perpetually unkept hair and the drool dripping from his mouth. A purple rock on a chain which he always wears around his neck, lays glistening in the pool of saliva.

A FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH stands on the desk: five-year-old Joshan on a beach with a woman we recognize as Eli. Mother and son smile cheesily at the camera. Behind them we see Memryn, watching them with a distant look on his face.

Eli enters the room with a breakfast tray. We see her shouting something, but the trumpet alarm drowns her out. She shuts off the alarm.

ELI

That thing's been going off for
five straight minutes now! Joshan?
Joshan!

She squeezes her slumbering son's cheek and he jolts awake, sitting up with paper stuck to the side of his face.

He <GRUMBLES> incoherently, still half asleep.

ELI (CONT'D)

I swear, one day the house will be
up in flames and you'll burn with
it. Not even an earthquake can wake
you.

JOSHAN

(GROGGILY) There was another
earthquake? What time is it?

Joshan reaches blindly for his glasses.

Eli appraises the array of books spewed across his desk and floor: *Dictators and their Atrocities*, *Murderers who Ruled*, and *The Ugly Face of Ambition*.

ELI

You've been going through your
dad's old things again, I see...

Joshan who's managed to find his glasses nearly yelps when he sees the time --

JOSHAN
Crap, I'm late!

He gathers his things while Eli helpfully places the tray on top of ALL of his papers.

ELI
I thought you were done with this silliness Joshan. What happened to transferring to nutrition? History is irrelevant these days, you know that. Joshan? Joshan are you even listening to me?

He's not. He's extracting his papers from under the breakfast tray.

JOSHAN
Let's talk about this later?
Professor Eamen is waiting for me.

He stuffs the papers into his bag and rushes out the door.
Eli calls after him --

ELI
But I made you... breakfast.

EXT. PAX UNIVERSITY - MORNING

It's industrial meets environment: the campus is a coming together of stone, metal and greenery. Some students lounge under verandas covered in lush vines while others rush to their classes. Joshan is one of the latter.

INT. PAX UNIVERSITY - MAIN HALL/HALLWAYS - MORNING

Inside matches the outside: held up by green metal beams with a skylight as a roof giving the feel like there's no boundary between outside and in. Posters line the walls showcasing different clubs such as *Allies to the Elderly* and *Gratitude's An Attitude Club*.

Joshan weaves in between students who are all doing acts of "goodness." One student drops a twenty and five other students go out of their way to return it. Joshan leaves the bustle and heads into a rundown looking wing of the school towards a door tucked in the corner.

Instead of rushing inside, he animatedly slows his stride. Almost immediately another door opens and out comes CEDAR (21) and her group of friends.

He resumes his normal pace as he walks past her --

JOSHAN
Uh, good morning.

She smiles brightly at him; the sun is no match.

CEDAR
Oh, hi, good morning!

They've done this dance a hundred times and yet he's still terribly awkward as he simply nods at her friends. Her friends wave back, but there is pity in their eyes as they pass.

Joshan pretends not to see and goes to open the door to Professor Eaman's study. He pauses when he hears a bustle of sounds coming from behind the door. A sudden <SCREAM> and <CRASH> propels him to burst through --

INT. PAX UNIVERSITY - EAMAN'S STUDY - MORNING

EAMAN (60), hawk-eyed with straight black-cropped hair, streaked with grey, is on a rampage trashing her office. She hollers as she <SMASHES> a GLASS on the wall.

JOSHAN
Professor!

She turns to him, grinning, cheeks flushed, eyes ablaze.

EAMAN
Joshan. Perfect timing!

JOSHAN
What are you doing?

EAMAN
Destroying things.

She throws down a VASE. It shatters.

JOSHAN
I'm not following.

EAMAN
I was pondering about how many evil and hateful people in pre-peace history were prone to destruction.

(MORE)

EAMAN (CONT'D)

So I thought that maybe, if I did the same -- on a lower scale of course -- I could perhaps understand the emotionality behind it. Maybe I'll finally be able to tap into hatred and understand its motivation.

JOSHAN

Why do you need to know that?

EAMAN

How are we supposed to understand how evil and hatred ceased existing if we don't understand them at their core?

She kicks over a bookcase which knocks the neighboring ones over like dominoes.

JOSHAN

Is it working?

EAMAN

Honestly, I don't think so, but it's kinda fun. I read about this emotion called "anger" before. My theory is that this is the seed of hatred. I was hoping to trigger it. Hmm...what if I destroy something more important...

She grabs a notebook off the table and begins to rip all the pages out. Joshan reaches out to stop her, but it's too late.

JOSHAN

Our research!

Eaman freezes, closing her eyes almost in reverence, waiting for the anger to take over her. Her eyes snap open.

EAMAN

Nothing. Still just fun. Damn...
You try.

Joshan just stares wide-eyed at their ripped up research. It's happened again: that flash of, "something" he can't name. His muscles feel tense, his jaw is clenched.

JOSHAN

I'm good.

Luckily Eaman seems oblivious to his emotional state. Joshan relaxes.

EAMAN

...unless fun is the root of it
all...interesting...evil committed
by dictators and terrorists because
it gave them a sense of thrill?

She runs over to her desk. Joshan follows after her, already
on her wave-length.

JOSHAN

That's a new angle! We could
interview the thrill seekers!

Eaman grins and enthusiastically throws her coffee mug. The
mug smashes on the door frame just as it opens, revealing an
extremely shocked DR. GREGORY (50), the dean of the
university. He blanches when he sees the state of the office.

JOSHAN (CONT'D)

Hello Sir.

DR. GREGORY

Professor Eaman...what has happened
here?

EAMAN

Research.

DR. GREGORY

I was under the impression that
research involves books and
reading...quietly.

EAMAN

Can I help you with something
Gregory?

DR. GREGORY

Um, yes...

He struggles to find a chair to sit in that hasn't been
upturned or broken by Eaman's rampage. He makes do with
standing.

DR. GREGORY (CONT'D)

The faculty is inquiring about the
state of your research?

EAMAN

It's going great, I think we've
just had a breakthrough.

DR. GREGORY

Again? I mean, erm, good. But you see, the faculty is discussing, once again, on the essentiality of your research --

EAMAN

Do you have my book?

DR. GREGORY

Uh, book? Oh yes, I have it here.

He takes out a book from his BRIEF-CASE. He holds it out for Eaman to take.

DR. GREGORY (CONT'D)

How this will help your research is lost on me.

Eaman immediately flips through the book, brows knit. Joshan peers at the book, which is more of a JOURNAL. Written on the cover is "PROPERTY OF EMELIA HARPER."

EAMAN

Thank you Gregory. If that's everything, Joshan and I will be getting back to work now.

Dr. Gregory nods grimly, then looks to Joshan, gesturing to the door. Joshan consents.

DR. GREGORY

(lowering his voice)

What year of your Master's are you on now, Joshan?

JOSHAN

My fifth sir.

DR. GREGORY

Hmm. Don't you think it might be time to reconsider your options? I know that Professor Eaman's passion is contagious, but you could be putting your time into something more...useful.

A stapler whizzes past him, hitting the wall behind him. He spins around in a huff to face her. Eaman shrugs impishly --

EAMAN

Research.

-- and before he can respond, switches focus to her work.

JOSHAN

With all due respect, sir, this thesis was my idea.

DR. GREGORY

Why not study the Coming of Nations? Or the Environmental Reverence Act? Or the --

JOSHAN

Because it's bizarre. It's all bizarre! We go from killing to hugging each other overnight. It doesn't add up. Historically civilization was never so quick to accept change. I just can't believe it.

Dr. Gregory sighs.

DR. GREGORY

We're living in a monumental time, son. Instead of questioning, just enjoy it. I understand that your father --

EAMAN

Are you still here, Gregory?

She's holding a bookend in her hands with a playful glint in her eye.

DR. GREGORY

Not at all. Good day.

Eaman and Joshan share a look and get back to work.

Day turns to night.

INT. PAX UNIVERSITY - EAMAN'S STUDY - EVENING

Eaman and Joshan are still at work. Joshan's stares intensely at the flickering light bulb on the wall. He watches as a moth flies curiously around it, before slamming its body against it once, twice, three times, faster and faster. Joshan watches the bug slowly kill itself.

JOSHAN (V.O)

How can people really believe that evil and pain are really gone when the world around us is riddled with it?

The bug falls, having burnt its wings, right into the web of an awaiting spider. The moth struggles, but it's no use. The spider spins its web around the terrified moth.

EAMAN

Josh, can you look at --

She pauses, taking in Joshan's intensity.

EAMAN (CONT'D)

Josh? Joshan!

He snaps out of it and looks at her, bewildered.

EAMAN (CONT'D)

You okay, kiddo?

JOSHAN

Yeah! Sorry, just got lost in thought.

Eaman regards him, misinterpreting his intensity for fatigue.

EAMAN

Go home, all right? It's late.

JOSHAN

No I'm good to keep going. I think we might be on to something.

EAMAN

We're not. Well maybe a little -- there were reports of people labelled as serial-killer psychopaths who were sometimes motivated by a "rush" after a kill. But, I think hate and evil derive from my previous hypothesis. From a different base of emotions: anger, despair...

Joshan's face is unreadable. Eaman grabs the journal from before and hands it to Joshan.

EAMAN (CONT'D)

Here, take this with you.

JOSHAN

Shouldn't we stick to academic sources?

EAMAN

I've had enough of theory. Go home
and flip through it. See if you
have any insights.

Joshua accepts the journal, and leaves.

EXT. STREET/BUS STOP - NIGHT

A bus pulls up to the stop. Joshua runs to catch it, but just misses it. As it pulls away he sees Cedar standing at the back of the bus, all alone, reading her book.

JOSHUA (V.O)

Why don't I work out, ever?

Out of breath and silently cursing himself for being out of shape, he waits for the next bus.

He misses Cedar's face light-up when she looks up from her book and sees him.

Another bus pulls up. He gets on.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

Joshua sits down and fishes out the journal. He glimpses the cover again and is about to open it when the bus stops and a pregnant woman, carrying tote bags, struggles to rise from her seat. Instantly, everyone on the bus rises to help her. Joshua makes it to her first, waving everyone else down. He takes her bags from her and receives an appreciative smile from the lady. They step off the bus together.

EXT. PREGNANT LADY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Her house is right across from the bus stop. It's narrow and tall; uniform with the other houses on the block. Just like the university, lush greenery grows around the home. Joshua walks her to her door, handing her the bags.

PREGNANT LADY

Thank you.

Joshua gives a small smile and goes back to the bus stop.

EXT. BUS STOP/STREET - NIGHT

A SCREEN at the stop displays: DELAY. Next bus in 15 minutes. He waits a moment, before changing his mind, deciding to walk home.

EXT. JOSHAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Same look as the neighborhood before. Joshan's neighbor, MR. HYMA, an elderly man with a cane, and with one eye like a sphere of sparkling marble, rocks in a rocking chair on his porch. He waves to Joshan.

MR. HYMA

You still wearing those glasses
little Joshy? Four eyes are better
than one!

JOSHAN

(waving back)

I've got two more hiding at the
back of my head!

MR. Hyma laughs whole-heartedly.

INT. JOSHAN'S FRONT HALL - NIGHT

He drops his keys on the side table in the tiny hallway.
There's a note from his mom:

GOT CALLED IN. DINNER'S IN THE FRIDGE -
-LOVE MOM XX

Joshan ignores the note and goes straight to his bedroom.

INT. JOSHAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

He sets up camp at his desk; all the papers and books from the morning are still strewn all over. He pushes them to the side and, for a moment, glimpses at the family photograph.

He then opens the journal. On the first page reads: "Poetry of Emilia Harper" and underneath in small letters: "Private. If you're reading this and you're not me, I'll hunt you down." Circling the message are hand drawn doodles of a dragon-creature eating a human. The human's head lies a bit away from the dragon with "X"s as eyes.

He flips a few pages to the first poem called "CHEATERS DIE" dated August 2nd, 1953.

JOSHAN

(reading)

"My skin crawls when I see you, my
eyes shoot daggers through you.
Your heart's in my hand and I'll
squeeze it bloody --" Hmm...

He flips forward to a random page and reads another excerpt.

JOSHAN (CONT'D)
Brains spilling...nice. Oh and more drawings.

Keeps flipping through.

JOSHAN (CONT'D)
"I am red, I am anger..."

He picks up a red pencil and examines it. He doesn't get it. He flips to the front of the journal.

JOSHAN (CONT'D)
Who wrote this? Sounds like a kid.

He finds a worn blue stamp on the second page from "McArthur Private School for Girls."

JOSHAN (CONT'D)
Bingo. Waste of time.

He goes to reach for a history book, but pauses.

FLASHBACK to the previous conversation with Eaman.

EAMAN
How are we supposed to understand how evil and hatred ceased existing if we don't understand them at their core?

END OF FLASHBACK

He sighs, brushes his hair back, and flips to another page. He flips and flips all the way to the last page. There are two passages there. The first one is titled, "Dear Hope," dated October 7th, 1954.

JOSHAN (V.O)
"There's a hole in my chest. In the shape of your dress. Eaten away by a shadow of hate. Thoughts of you consume me. Your scream is an arrow shot through my ears. But nothing can compare to your pounding behind my eyes. Please move the hole over my eyes."

There is something different about this poem. Joshan is suddenly engaged. He looks to the next poem written the day after on October 8th: "Untitled."

JOSHAN (V.O.)

"How can I say this without breaking? How can I say this without losing myself? To the monster that slumbers within."

We dive into Joshan's mouth, travel down his throat and into his chest cavity. It's all black, but then suddenly an eye opens: it's reptilian and red.

JOSHAN (V.O)(CONT'D)

"With one eye open. Waiting for its chance to light the match."

Orange red fire erupts in the background of the eye. The eye becomes charred and black but continues staring on. Slowly a mouth opens beneath the eye, with black teeth. It emits a low growling sound.

JOSHAN (V.O)(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

"Torching my heart, all I see is red. Everything through red lenses. Red styrofoam, red moon, red sheep."

Beads of sweat form on his forehead. His hands are in fists, knuckles white.

JOSHAN (V.O)(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

"Blues, yellows, greens have been taken from me. My heart is a demon and it's eating me whole--" NO!

The creature opens its jaws and roars. Joshan throws the journal against the wall, breathing heavily.

He picks up the photograph of his family, focusing on Memryn. The resemblance between Joshan and his father is remarkable.

There's a moment where we don't know whether Joshan will throw the frame like he did the book.

FLASHBACK

INT. JOSHAN'S HOUSE/HALLWAY - DAY

A sepia colour scheme: light pours through the window illuminating the hallway. Joshan, 6 years-old, sits. We don't see what he's doing, just that he's very focused on something.

His father stands over him, a look of horror on his face at the sight.

JOSHAN

Daddy?

MEMRYN

Joshan, what have you done?

Joshan looks confused.

Eli comes into the room and sees her husband in distress.

ELI

Memryn, what's going on?

MEMRYN

What kind of child plays like this?

Eli sees Joshan playing. Most importantly, she sees Joshan's face that's close to tears.

ELI

Honey. It's nothing, he's just curious.

MEMRYN

I have to go. I can't be around you.

ELI

Memryn!

He disappears into their bedroom. Eli runs after him. She looks back at Joshan with a torn expression, before leaving him alone in the hallway. Joshan looks down at what he's done...

INT. JOSHAN'S HOUSE/FRONT HALL- DAY

Memryn has packed his bags and stands in the front hall. Eli is quietly weeping. He hugs her gently and kisses her forehead.

Joshan stands further down the hall, eyes brimming with tears. Memryn looks at him, face stern. He approaches his son, leaning down on one knee.

MEMRYN

You be good. Okay?

Joshan nods. Memryn reveals a silver chain necklace from underneath his shirt -- a purple rock pendant hangs from it -- and hangs it around Joshan's neck. Joshan grasps it firmly with his tiny, shaking hands.

JOSHAN
(spluttering)
Don't go, Daddy.

Memryn rises and walks towards the door and picks up his bags, then walks out of Joshan's life, never looking back.

JOSHAN (CONT'D)
Daddy!

The door shuts. Joshan tries to run after his father but his mother holds him back.

JOSHAN (CONT'D)
(sobbing)
I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. JOSHAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Still at his desk, he grasps at the rock pendant. The photograph lies on its face.

JOSHAN
(whispers)
I'm sorry I let you down.

He gets up from the desk and catches his reflection in the window. His face looks pale and gaunt. In the mirror, the journal lies open on the ground behind him.

Overwhelmed, he collapses into bed.

INT. JOSHAN'S HOUSE/HALL/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Eli comes home late, wearing scrubs. She goes to the fridge to get a snack when she sees Joshan's untouched dinner.

She walks down the hall and sees that his light is still on. She knocks lightly. When he doesn't respond she opens the door carefully.

She takes in the cluttered desk, the thrown journal and Joshan sleeping, fully clothed. He's mumbling incoherently. She pets his cheek gently and he relaxes at her touch. Gently, she removes his glasses.

She places them on his desk and notices the overturned photo. Concerned, she stands the photo up again properly and looks back at Joshan.

ELI

I will always be here for you, my
angel.

EXT. JOSHAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT/MORNING

The light in Joshan's room goes off. Time passes. The sun rises. Another day.

INT. JOSHAN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Lying awake in bed, Joshan stares apprehensively at the journal, still open on the floor, exactly as he'd left it. Sluggishly, he changes into fresh clothes, puts on his glasses, and gets his things together. When he's unable to ignore the journal any longer, he reluctantly collects it.

JOSHAN (V.O)

I could say I forgot it...

But he puts it in his bag.

EXT. STREET/BUS STOP - MORNING

The beautiful day goes unnoticed by Joshan who has his head down, deep in troubled thoughts.

JOSHAN (V.O)

What do I tell Eaman?

He reaches the bus stop.

JOSHAN (V.O)(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

HOW do I tell her? What even was
that?

The bus arrives.

INT. BUS - MORNING

He gets onto the busy bus and reaches for the hanging hand grip. His hand is so sweaty, it slips from his grip.

JOSHAN (V.O)(CONT'D)

Relax. Everything is fine...you had
a late night, you probably just
drifted off...

Cedar gets on the bus and spots him. She smiles at him, but he doesn't notice her. She frowns.

JOSHAN (V.O)(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 Oh god, I know I didn't, it was all
 --

Cedar walks past him and "accidentally" bumps him.

CEDAR
 Oh sorry --

Joshan turns his head and sees her. Immediately the dark clouds part and she is the sun and Joshan can already feel another sweat patch forming on his back.

CEDAR (CONT'D)
 Hey! Joshan, right?

JOSHAN
 Uh, oh hey! Yeah. Cedar? Ha, never seen you on this bus before.

CEDAR
 Yeah, got a big test today so I decided to sleep in.

JOSHAN
 Skipping class. You're a rebel.

CEDAR
 Not really... I usually have study group in the mornings. Classes don't run that early.

JOSHAN
 (awkwardly)
 Oh, right.
 (trying to turn it around)
 Study groups, huh? You're a big nerd then.
 (and fails)

CEDAR
 I guess you can say that.

JOSHAN
 I don't mean that as a bad thing -- I mean, I am too -- I love books and...

JOSHAN (V.O)(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 (turning beet red)
 Oh yeah, you just looove books, do you?? Idiot.

JOSHAN (CONT'D)
Um, what's the test on?

CEDAR
Mineralogy.

JOSHAN
Nice. You're studying geology?

CEDAR
Yeah... Are you still working on your thesis?

JOSHAN
(suddenly embarrassed)
Yeah. Still going at it...I know people think I'm wasting my time but --

CEDAR
I think it's awesome. Not enough people have the passion you have.

Joshua flushes red at the compliment, at a loss for words.
Cedar -- brilliant, beautiful Cedar -- thinks HE'S awesome?

JOSHAN
I -- well, I admire y--

CEDAR
What's that?

She's spotted the rock pendant hanging around his neck.

JOSHAN
What? Oh, it's just a rock.

CEDAR
What kind of rock is that?

JOSHAN
I dunno -- some kind of quartz?

CEDAR
That's not quartz. Can I touch it?

JOSHAN
Uh yeah, sure.

He leans in a bit and she carefully takes the rock in her hands, examining it. She's completely enraptured which makes her even more beautiful to Joshua.

CEDAR

Interesting. I've never seen anything like it. I would love to examine it further...

She looks up at him. Their faces are inches apart. She parts her lips. There's a touch of a smile hiding in the corners of her mouth. Joshan's heart begins to beat hard. They hold eye contact, frozen in the moment.

He has no idea what to do in this situation, but before he can overthink it, the bus aggressively lurches to a stop: a loose dog runs out in front, trying to catch a squirrel. Cedar falls back, still holding onto Joshan's necklace forcing him down with her.

He grabs onto a pole and manages to catch Cedar around the waist, saving them both. However, the damage is already done. With the momentum of Cedar's fall, Joshan's necklace snaps. Trying to catch herself from falling, Cedar opens her hand and the rock plummets to the ground. It cracks upon contact.

At that same precise moment, the ground begins to quake. The earth's plates are shifting and suddenly the road in front of the bus begins to split. The bus driver reverses. Passengers, already jostled, hold on for dear life. Joshan tries to hold Cedar steady, but abruptly loses his footing. A wall of earth rises beside them. The bus swerves.

Joshan's vision becomes blurry and he loses sense of his limbs.

CEDAR (O.S) (CONT'D)
(incoherent)

Joshan?

He closes his eyes tight, trying to rid the blur. When he opens his eyes, Cedar, the people, the bus; they're all gone. Instead he's in a --

INT. PALACE ROOM - NIGHT

A massive octagonal room with a high ceiling, painted to look like the night sky. Grey cloud frames the sky, like the eye of a storm. A single chandelier lights up the room. The floors are a dark marble with branches of gold running through.

The room is empty except for a massive ornate thrown of a chair facing the only window in the room.

A large man in long blue iridescent robes that pool onto the floor like water, sits in the chair looking out the open window.

Joshua blinks, disoriented.

JOSHAN
(flabbergasted)
What the...?

He sees the robed man for the first time, however the man appears to be oblivious to his presence.

JOSHAN (CONT'D)
Hello?

The man continues to take no notice of him.

JOSHAN (CONT'D)
Where am I?

Still nothing. He seems to be chuckling. Something swells inside Joshua.

JOSHAN (CONT'D)
Hey! I'm talking to you!

He takes a few tentative steps closer.

The man's shoulders tremble slightly and Joshua realizes that the man isn't laughing...he's crying.

Unsure what to do, Joshua approaches slowly.

JOSHAN (CONT'D)
Umm --

A bustle of robes and the man stands. He's like a mountain, and all of a sudden the vast room feels small. Joshua shrinks back.

MAN
Hello.

The man's voice is a low rumble. Taken aback, Joshua tries to speak, but no words stumble out.

The man's hands are in prayer position with his middle fingers at his chin. He still has not looked at Joshua.

MAN (CONT'D)
Years ago your world was in
destruction.
(MORE)

MAN (CONT'D)

Then my kind ended your suffering
by committing an unspeakable act.
This is my appeal and my apology.
We have stolen something from you.
You are but half. You are broken.

JOSHAN

What are you -- ?

MAN

I fought to have it differently,
but was outnumbered. And so this is
also my last act of defense.
Consider this is my gift to you.

JOSHAN

I don't understand.

The man makes a fist with his right hand. He brings it back as if to throw something out the window. Whether he does throw something, Joshan will not know because at that moment the door opens.

Joshan looks back. A woman: her eyes are cat-like and her robes are a deep, burnt-orange. Her size is just as towering as the man's (THOTH)

WOMAN

Thoth?

She also doesn't look at Joshan. Her eyes are only on the man (Thoth) who's arms are now at his sides.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

What are you still doing up, my
sweet?

THOTH

Watching the meteor shower.

WOMAN

There are meteors every night.

THOTH

There's one that's particularly
bright tonight.

She slips into the room soundlessly.

WOMAN

You're troubled.

THOTH

We're murderers, Sol.

SOL (the woman) laughs. The sound is more beautiful than any instrument can hope to play.

SOL
Someone has to die for there to be
murder.

THOTH
They're as good as dead.

SOL
Come to bed, my love. We finally
get to sleep.

The man sighs, but finally turns around. He's young, but his face is already etched with lines and his grey eyes hold severity in them.

THOTH
Very well.

She holds her hands out and he strides towards her. Though his speed is leisurely, his legs are long, forcing any normal sized person to jog to keep up.

JOSHAN
Wait!

He's running for it, but Thoth has already taken Sol's hand and the door -- mammoth, stygian and speckled with gold -- is closing behind them. It slams in Joshan's face. The door knob is way above his reach. He crams his fingers into the crack and tries to open it, with no luck.

JOSHAN (CONT'D)
Open this door!

He bangs his fists against it.

JOSHAN (CONT'D)
HELLO! I'M STILL IN HERE!

The creature begins to stir.

JOSHAN (CONT'D)
HELLO? COME ON!

His vision is blurring again. He stumbles. He's falling. The eye of the storm above him is circling faster and faster. A flash of lightning and --

INT. BUS - MORNING

-- he's now back on the bus, kneeling on the floor. He looks up, his vision returning.

JOSHAN (V.O)
What...what happened?

His body aches and his knuckles are scraped and bruised.

JOSHAN (V.O) (CONT'D)
Why am I...

The bus is stopped and the passengers are all crowded at the back of the bus. Some have bumps and scrapes and some are holding each other...and all sit far away from Joshan, staring at him, mouths agape.

JOSHAN (V.O) (CONT'D)
Why are they...

Cedar sits a few seats away from him. Her expression is foreign to him. Wide eyed, tense, her body language looks like she's trying to create as much space between them as possible.

JOSHAN (V.O) (CONT'D)
What did I do?

The bus driver who had stepped off the bus, climbs back on, red faced and stressed.

BUS DRIVER
Okay folks, they've brought back up to get you where you need to go. If anyone's in bad shape just stay put. The paramedics are here to help.

Nobody moves. They are all looking at Joshan. At six and sevens, he takes the lead and doesn't miss how the bus driver flinches as he passes by him.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

The neighborhood is a mishmash. The road ahead has folded over itself like a pancake stack, a few houses have fallen, and trees are overturned, roots splayed. Firetrucks and paramedics are on-site, tending to people.

Joshan paces outside the bus, waiting for Cedar to emerge. Everyone who files out looks pointedly away from him, and to his dismay, so does Cedar.

The moment she steps off the bus, she b-lines for the SHUTTLE BUS. He goes after her.

JOSHAN
Cedar wait --

She stops in her tracks, but doesn't turn to face him.

JOSHAN (CONT'D)
I don't know what --

She turns.

CEDAR
Here's your rock. It's cracked. I'm
sorry.

He accepts it and sees that a milky white line now runs through it.

JOSHAN
That's okay. I kind of like it
better now.

She says nothing back.

JOSHAN (CONT'D)
Cedar. What happened?

Her eyes glimpse down at his bloody knuckles. She looks torn. There's a glimmer of empathy there, but when she looks back at him, that foreign expression is back. And so, she just shrugs.

INT. SHUTTLE BUS - MORNING

They get on the bus and Cedar immediately sits down beside a middle-aged man. Hurt, but trying not to show it, Joshan makes his way to the back of the bus.

He hangs his father's pendant back around his neck.

The bus starts moving. Joshan peers at Cedar, willing her to look back but she just looks straight ahead. In fact, he realizes that no one has sat near him.

Red flashes over his vision. He feels hot, his breath is shallow and sweat forms on his temple. There's a tremble in his chest. The *thing* is awake again and it wants to come out.

JOSHAN (CONT'D)
(through gritted teeth)
No...

And then desperation.

JOSHAN (CONT'D)
What is wrong with me?

EXT. PAX UNIVERSITY - DAY

The bus arrives at the university stop. Cedar is first to leave the bus. Her friends, AIA, MONA, and YASMINE are waiting for her. They run up to her.

AIA
Oh my god, finally! We thought the earthquake got you!

CEDAR
It almost did. It stopped the bus.

MONA
Are you okay?

YASMINE
We heard that a few buildings fell in the west end...

CEDAR
Yeah we were there...

Joshua runs past her like a blur, running full speed for the university. She watches him disappear into the building.

INT. PAX UNIVERSITY - DAY

Joshua sprints through the university, going down the same halls as last time. There's been some alteration to the Gratitude Club poster: someone has drawn some questionable art on it.

INT. PAX UNIVERSITY - OUTSIDE EAMAN'S STUDY - DAY

Raised voices are heard from inside. Joshua's about to blast through, but stops himself. Instead, he positions himself near the keyhole and listens.

Camera shot sweeps in through the hole and we see what's happening inside...

INT. PAX UNIVERSITY - EAMAN'S STUDY - DAY

...Eaman is standing off against Dr. Gregory. But this isn't the same Dr. Gregory we met before: the meek, mouse of a man has been replaced by a lion.

EAMAN

You can't be serious!

DR. GREGORY

What can I say, Professor Eaman? I did warn you.

EAMAN

But we're THIS close.

DR. GREGORY

That's what you've been telling the board for years now.

EAMAN

Oh stop. This isn't about the board and you know it.

DR. GREGORY

No. You're right. This is about what's best for the university and its reputation. I am the Dean of this institution and it is my responsibility to protect it.

EAMAN

That's not what I meant, Gregory.

Dr. Gregory flushes red.

DR. GREGORY

This is my final word. It's fine time you look outside your small corner and see that the world has left you behind. From this day forward you will have no more support from the university. I do hope you find some sense, Lee. Good day.

He turns to leave. We sweep back through the keyhole...

INT. PAX UNIVERSITY - OUTSIDE OF EAMAN'S STUDY - DAY

... to Joshan, still listening at the door. He steps back as Dr. Gregory approaches, opening the door.

He stops, surprised at the sight of Joshan standing there. He puts a hand on Joshan's shoulder.

DR. GREGORY
Pick a new path, son.

He walks away.

INT. PAX UNIVERSITY - EAMAN'S STUDY - DAY

Joshan enters to see Eaman crumpled over her desk.

JOSHAN
What just happened?

EAMAN
I have no idea.

Joshan comes around Eaman's desk and sits down, feeling numb.

JOSHAN
Was he serious? Just like that,
we're done?

She looks at him, crushed.

EAMAN
I am so sorry. I know this was
important to you...to Memryn.

Joshan can't find the words to respond. The thing inside him is long-gone. They sit in silence for a moment, and then Joshan quietly breaks down and cries.

EXT. JOSHAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Joshan opens the door and enters.

INT. JOSHAN'S HOUSE/FRONT HALL - NIGHT

He tosses his keys and starts walking to his room ready to hide forever.

ELI (O.S)
Joshan? You're home early! Did hear
about that earthquake!

She pops out of the kitchen, faltering at the sight of him.

ELI (CONT'D)
We'll eat together.

INT. JOSHAN'S HOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Joshua helps his mother with dinner. A CLOSE UP of Joshua's torn up knuckles as he sets the TINY TABLE. Eli, who is preparing the food, sees them, but says nothing.

Joshua plates the food she's prepared. It's hot and steaming.

ELI
You're troubled.

Joshua jumps as the phrase echoes within him:

SOL (V.O)
(a distant echo)
You're troubled...

Joshua shakes his head and looks up at his mother.

JOSHUA
I'm fine... no I'm not. My thesis
has been scrapped by the
university.

She's at his side immediately.

ELI
Oh Joshua... I'm so sorry.

JOSHUA
I thought you'd be happy.

ELI
I'd be happy if it had been your
decision.

Joshua says nothing. She reaches for his bruised hand, holding it lightly. They both gaze down at the scab and discolored skin.

ELI (CONT'D)
I know this isn't what you want to
hear, but... maybe this is for the
best... it's been wearing on you
for so many years. You've grown
unhappy.

JOSHUA
I've always been like this. The
project has been the only thing
keeping me afloat.

Eli tenses.

ELI
 Not always. I remember a little boy
 who was full of light.

Joshua withdraws, but Eli pulls him into a hug.

ELI (CONT'D)
 You are my light, Joshua.

She holds him tightly. He tears up, appreciating his mother's forceful love.

After a long moment, she lets go.

ELI (CONT'D)
 How about we watch something. It's
 been so long since we've had a
 movie night.

Joshua nods, hesitantly.

INT. JOSHUA'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

They sit in front of the TV, with their food on their laps. Eli surfs through the channels.

ELI
 So what do we want? Comedy?
 Romance?

As she continues skipping through the channels, the camera zooms in on the television screen.

INT. STRANGER'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

When it zooms out, we're watching a TV in a completely different living room. A nature show is playing. There's <SHOUTING>, then blood splatters onto the TV.

The camera zooms into the TV screen...

INT. JOSHUA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

...and back to Joshua who is now watching the same program.

His heart starts beating hard in his chest. His vision begins to blur.

JOSHUA
 ...Mom...

Eli's frightened voice calls out to him and then:

INT. A DARK, DARK CAVE - WHO KNOWS WHAT TIME OF DAY IT IS

It's dark, and wet and it's hard to breathe. Someone yells.

Joshua squints, trying to see.

A whimper.

His eyes adjust. He wishes they hadn't.

Hanging in midair, spread-eagled by metal cuffs that shackle her hands and feet, is a young girl. She's soaked in blood, and her skin barely resembles skin anymore. Her head is down; her matted black hair covers her face.

And then all at once she lifts up her head: eyes big and rolling, she screams a scream of raw torture.

The scream stabs through Joshua's being. He reaches out to her, but before he can take another step, he faints.

INT. LIVING ROOM - 10 MINS LATER

Joshua is coming to. He feels something cold and wet on his forehead. His mother comes into view. She's pressing a wet towel to his forehead.

ELI

Oh Joshua, thank god.

He tries to sit up.

ELI (CONT'D)

Slowly...

The nature program which is still playing on the television is suddenly interrupted by BREAKING NEWS.

ON SCREEN: A normal suburban neighborhood. Paramedics emerge from inside one of the houses carrying a covered body on a stretcher.

Joshua bolts up to a seated position.

ELI (CONT'D)

Not so fast. Please eat something --

But Joshua isn't listening.

JOSHAN

Mom. Look.

NEWSCASTER (V.O)

A man has been found dead in his home. There was forced entry and what looks like a blow to the back of his head

She turns to watch the broadcast.

NEWSCASTER (CONT'D)

This marks the first murder we've seen in one hundred years...

Off Joshan and Eli's shocked expressions as we END.