

Black Riddle

written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. WEEDY BACKYARD, DOWNTOWN, NOON

The sky is cloudy and grey. A worn-down townhouse of old brick looms over our characters as they bound into frame. ENTER a middle-aged black man, toned and wide of frame with an ugly polo, twirling around with a little boy and girl clinging on. The three of them are laughing. The boy is hanging on by his arm and *flying*, the girl hanging onto his stomach like it's a buckle. It's not much longer before the whirling ceases, the man stopping in a direction of some spiked tone that never bleeds into coherence. He's still there momentarily, until the kids fall off and he walks forward, towards a dark-toned woman that's emerged out of the house now. The little girl, still giggly and dizzy, falls into her brother whose just in time to catch her. In contrast, he's quiet, almost doe-eyed as he glances toward the adults.

They get louder, but the words never get clearer. The image of them blurs before us as it keeps growing and growing, but he's frozen as he keeps looking, until a loud THUD tears through the air and we're pulled out of the scene with the boy-- now visibly older, but still juvenile-- who's now jolted up from a messy bed in a sweat. The bedroom we're in now is no different, clothes and papers scattered around the room from the floor, the walls, to the desk. As he breathes heavily there's a ringing that lingers but fades rather quickly, replaced by the obnoxious blare of a box alarm.

6:47 AM.

And by the time he registers it enough to get annoyed, he smacks it into the wall, falling back into blankets with a groan that fails to drown out the alarm he failed to shut off.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM, MORNING

The bathroom is scattered with clutter, clearly lived in but gaining dust on some of the surfaces. The walls are dull and the floor is lined in tile, but the shower curtains sparkle like prism. Aside from the product around the sink and shelves there's other odd items scattered around, an oversized plant in the corner by the door that seems too green to be real.

ENTER Kaelen Lonan: A scrawny dark-skinned 14-year-old Afro-kid with a plastic band aid on the side of his head. One of his eyebrows is lopsided with a scar.

We're staring dead-on as Kaelen drones through brushing his teeth, still in baggy pajamas, when we hear some considerable thumping coming down the hall, something Kaelen doesn't even react to until we see an older girl whizz past the doorway.

KAELEN LONAN (MUMBLING)  
You're forgetting something.

The thumping stops, only to start back up again, coming back toward us as Kaelen stares stoically to meet this girl, who prods herself halfway through the frame completely flabbergasted.

ENTER Zakkia Lonan: a tall tawny-skinned teenager nearly at 18, sharper in features with fraying locs in a loose ponytail, bleached at the ends. She's sporting a black leather jacket with a horde of patches stitched on, buckled boots and patchy jeans. Compared to her brother, her eye bags weigh heavier.

ZAKKIA LONAN  
What?

KAELEN LONAN (MUMBLING)  
It's under the couch.

ZAKKIA LONAN  
You don't even know what I'm doing,  
the hell are you talking about?

KAELEN LONAN (MUMBLING)  
I know there's a thumb drive that's  
under the couch that I know you're  
gonna be pissed about when you  
leave without it.

ZAKKIA LONAN  
What makes you think-

KAELEN LONAN (MUMBLING)  
Check your pockets.

Zakkia stares at Kaelen for a moment, keeping her eyes on him as she pats around, cheating a glance or two towards the end of it. And when it ends, her irritation blooms in her face as she squints at him.

ZAKKIA LONAN  
I hope you choke on that  
toothbrush.

Kaelen spits into the sink, stray toothpaste rimmed on his mouth as he flashes a sarcastic grin.

KAELEN LONAN

Nuh-uh.

Zakkia growls, walking back in the direction she initially came from, the stomping much calmer but still present.

ZAKKIA LONAN

Happy birthday, asshole.

Kaelen cranes his head out the doorway, just in time to catch her still walking down the hall. It's lined with odd frames, some family portraits and some generic replica paintings.

KAELEN LONAN

You even check on Ayo?

That gets Zakkia to stop, at least to turn around. She still does this half-walk backward with her arms thrown up in the air.

ZAKKIA LONAN

Kae, the damn sun ain't even up all the way. Stop rushing people.

KAELEN LONAN (SCOFFING)

Yeah, whatever.

Zakkia rather quickly turns to take off again, shouting behind her.

ZAKKIA LONAN

And you look like you got rabies!

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN, MORNING

The Kitchen is an open space that bleeds into the living room and the rest of the house, blending some old 90s antique aesthetic with modern marble. Plates and silverware are left stranded in the sink and the current cooking session has left some ingredients scattered on the counter and on the table, along with some minor spills.

ENTER Ayo Lonan: A dark-skinned ten-year-old girl with beaded braids, somewhat entangled in a bulky set of headphones that seem too big for the shape of her head. She's wearing a green, black and white sweater vest with a club badge and a tiny clip-on tie, skirted pants and light-up sneakers. There's a wooden barret in her hair that looks like a bird.

The girls are seated at the table, Zakkia intensely staring down a laptop screen and hitting the keys with a little extra force, a red little thumb drive sticking out on the side, and Ayo was engulfed with a DS in her hands. Kaelen is in the background, at work with a stove and a pan of batter. He's out of the pajamas now, wearing a red puffy jacket and convertible pants that hide the wear and tear on his shoes. He's humming something quietly as Zakkia leans back with a groan, making Ayo perk up from the game.

ZAKKIA LONAN

I swear to God, if I have to throw something like that again, I'm dragging everyone down to hell with me.

Ayo raises a brow and shifts her headphones to rest on her shoulders, fiddling with her braids to get them to stop tugging with the newfound position.

AYO LONAN

You can't say that.

Zakkia lazily lifts her head to look at her.

ZAKKIA LONAN

Say what?

AYO LONAN

God's name in vain. It's rude.

Zakkia rolls her head back.

ZAKKIA LONAN

Tell you what, God can talk to me about his name when *he* steps up to keep the lights on.

AYO LONAN

But he does keep the-

ZAKKIA LONAN (INTERRUPTING LOUDLY)

Kaelen, get your sister!

Kaelen looks up irritably as Ayo thumps the table with her hands and an ugly frown.

KAELEN LONAN

How about I get that curve out your back?

ZAKKIA LONAN

Boy, you are built like a bendy straw.

Kaelen suddenly whips around with the end of the spatula handle stabbed at his chest.

KAELEN LONAN (SARCASTICALLY)  
Oh, ouch! I'm bleeding! I'm  
bleeding!

AYO LONAN (GRUMBLING)  
You guys are so mean.

Kaelen transfers a now golden brown pancake onto a plate with a stack of two, then gracefully goes to set it in front of the youngest. She brightens in the face immediately, quickly getting to work at cutting it up, after he adjusts her hold on the knife.

KAELEN LONAN  
Yeah, I'm such a meanie, I should  
have burned those all up.

AYO LONAN (GIGGLING)  
Noo! You're gonna waste it!

ZAKKIA LONAN (SMIRKING)  
Yeah, Kae, don't waste food.

KAELEN LONAN  
Please, ain't nobody missing the  
crappy store brand stuff! You know  
how much work I gotta do?

Zakkia laughed then, the tension gone from her face for once as she finally leans forward and clicks through something on the laptop again. Meanwhile, Kaelen pats Ayo's back and walks back to the stove, grabbing the bowl of batter to pour into the pan. The sound of sizzling cuts through the air.

KAELEN LONAN (CONT'D)  
I'm serious, it'd taste like  
nothing!

ZAKKIA LONAN  
Look, when you get a job you can  
get the fancy box that makes you  
feel good, ok?

Kaelen decidedly turned around, walking back over to the table and looming over his sister, who merely pushed him out of the way without looking.

KAELEN LONAN  
Yeah and where am I gonna go?  
Wheatley's?

ZAKKIA LONAN

I don't know, Kae, it's downtown.  
Find something.

Ayo tilts her head, her brow furrowing.

AYO LONAN

But what about what the do-

Kaelen cuts her off. As he speaks he moves away from Zakkia, rolling his upper body on the table just to lean back.

KAELEN LONAN

**Whatever**, rather not be a sellout.  
Don't need one anyway.

Ayo looks frustrated and crosses her arms on the table, looking away from both of them. One of her hands discreetly tugs at a sleeve.

ZAKKIA LONAN

You talking about fancy pancake mix  
and you're gonna need one. I need  
help out here.

KAELEN LONAN

I already did your homework!

Zakkia whips around with wide eyes, that tension in her face returning as Kaelen raises a brow.

ZAKKIA LONAN

You did my *what*.

Ayo raises her hand as Kaelen lifts himself to sit on the table, drawing the twitch of Zakkia's eye.

AYO LONAN

Kae, we did her homework!

KAELEN LONAN

Yeah, we did it. What's the look  
for?

Zakkia grips at her temple.

ZAKKIA LONAN (HISSING)

Kaelen, that is senior level-  
you're not even a freshman, the  
hell do you mean you did it??

KAELEN LONAN

Ayo does the reading, I do the math, simple. It was your late stuff anyway.

The laptop is swiftly closed shut, and Zakkia leans into the table to plant her face into it. There's a growing scowl on Kaelen's face now, and Ayo is looking between them while gripping the headphones around her tightly, wincing with each spike in their tone. Neither of them notice.

ZAKKIA LONAN (STRAINED)

Oh my **God**, I'm getting a migraine.

KAELEN LONAN (SHARPLY)

Well you're the one who said we gotta keep up appearances, so the hell's your problem??

ZAKKIA LONAN

Kae, I'm not doing this in front of Ayo.

KAELEN LONAN

Well you could say 'thank you-'

AYO LONAN (INTERRUPTING LOUDLY)

STOP!

She slammed the table with her shout, making the other two whip around to her. Kaelen's scowl is gone and his eyes are a little wider. Zakkia looks softer, she opens her mouth to speak--

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

The smoke alarm is pronounced, and Ayo in particular ducks to cover her ears with a whine. The other two jolt, Kaelen whipping around towards the stove and Zakkia whipping around to *him*.

ZAKKIA LONAN

KAELEN! You're gonna burn the damn house down!

KAELEN LONAN

THAT'S NOT ME! Look!

He dives to turn off the stove, making quick work of a spatula to flip over the raw side, revealing a golden brown underneath. Grabbing the handle, he practically flings the pan Zakkia's way.

KAELEN LONAN (CONT'D)

See! It ain't even burnt!

Zakkia quickly gets up from her place, hitting the switch to the stove fan and taking the pan from Kaelen's hand. She sets it on a cold eye of the stove and moves to open a window nearby, we see Kaelen by Ayo now, moving the headphones over her ears.

It's a few more moments until it finally stops. Kaelen steps away from his younger sister and Zakkia looks around warily.

ZAKKIA LONAN (SKEPTICALLY)

... I thought we took all those  
down.

Kaelen scoffs, slouching as he shoves his hands in the long pocket of his hoodie.

KAELEN LONAN

Cool, we got a ghost alarm.

Ayo slides her headphones off again.

AYO LONAN

Ghosts aren't real, Kae.

ZAKKIA LONAN (SCOFFING)

But God's real?

Kaelen shoots her a look, his teeth baring like an animal.

KAELEN LONAN (SHARPLY)

**Zak.**

Zakkia waves her hand, grabbing her laptop and turning to walk off.

ZAKKIA LONAN

I'm checking the boiler. Get out of  
here on time.

It takes a moment for her to disappear down the hall. At that point, Kaelen shoves himself onto the table again, arms crossed tightly. Ayo looks down with a new weight in her bones.

KAELEN LONAN (MOCKINGLY)

'gEt OuT Of hErE On TiMe' like it  
even matters.

The silence lingers, and Kaelen finally turns around, studying Ayo's face with a certain amount of guilt on his own. He shifts, taking his hands to lightly pinch her cheeks, drawing her gaze to him.

KAELEN LONAN (CONT'D)  
C'mon, don't let Zak get to ya.  
She's a big ol' meanie, right?

AYO LONAN (GRUMBLING)  
You both are.

KAELEN LONAN  
Ok, ok, I'm a big meanie too. But I  
got your back, sis. I promise.

He gently pulls the flesh of her cheeks upward into a half-smile.

KAELEN LONAN (CONT'D)  
Flock sticks together, right?

Ayo stares for what feels like ages, before plastering a plastic smile on her own.

INT. SCHOOL HALL, NOON

The ring of the school bell bleeds into the last scene and guides our transition as we CUT into a bustling hall of lockers and students. We're centered on Kaelen as he slams his own locker shut, the door graffitied with paint that looks like it's been stubbornly repainted over and over. And it's a wide range of crude caricatures, unidentifiable creatures, random objects, and words in varying degree. We see the word BASTARD in bold, still dripping with red ink.

We watch Kaelen roll his shoulders to slide down his backpack that was already open, but barely filled. He shoves a notebook in when a girl walks behind him.

ENTER Avery Cane: A curly redhead with tan skin, a beige long sleeve shirt with blue stripes that match her eyes, and baggy cargo pants, around Kae's age. Her backpack is practically bulging and yet she doesn't seem weighed down at all. She's chewing gum with her mouth open, speaking an odd mix of sarcasm and bubblyness.

AVERY CANE  
Oh wow, I actually saw you this  
morning!

Kaelen shoots her a look, swinging his bag back around him without closing it all the way.

KAELEN LONAN

I can punch you.

AVERY CANE

Aw, come on Birthday Boy! thought you'd be in a better mood.

KAELEN LONAN (SARCASTICALLY)

You try after you have to hear the same lecture every morning.

Kaelen straightens his posture- still with a little arch- doing some gestures with his hands as he talks. Avery smirks as she watches.

KAELEN LONAN (CONT'D)

"Oh, well you're the ONLY one who seems to have an issue, obviously this isn't for you-" Every. Damn. Day.

AVERY CANE

Eh, fair.

Avery bumps into his shoulder and spins around him, walking off cockily as he trudges after her, somewhat flustered in the face.

AVERY CANE (CONT'D)

I think my mom called her a nepo baby or somethin'.

Kaelen snorted at that.

AVERY CANE (CONT'D)

What? You don't believe me?

KAELEN LONAN

Nah, ain't nobody else hiring Grander.

Avery scoffed back and looked away to a bulletin they were walking past. At this point the number of students around were significantly less, most walking the opposite direction.

AVERY CANE

Ooh, we should trash the play.

Kaelen stuck his tongue out with a raised brow.

KAELEN LONAN

You really gonna be that petty?

Avery throws her hands up.

AVERY CANE

I'm just saying! Once a stage light explodes and you start acting like *that* in front of *kids*, I don't care how many times you apologize! You shouldn't have a job anymore! Besides, Romeo and Juliet is like- THE most overrated thing, it's literally satire but everybody thinks it's so "uWu" Romantic-

Kaelen groans and throws his head back.

KAELEN LONAN

Keep your nerd rants away from me.

AVERY CANE (SMIRKING)

Sorry, I forgot you're allergic.

KAELEN LONAN

Nah, I just don't give a shit.

AVERY CANE

Did you even start on Lazlos'?

We get a long pause from Kaelen as he stares off into nothing, his eyes getting visibly wider. The stoicism quickly settles back in.

KAELEN LONAN

Nope.

Avery scoffs.

AVERY CANE

C'mon, you can't just go your whole life without finding *one* book you actually like.

KAELEN LONAN

At least I can divide a fraction.

AVERY CANE

You know what? Ow. You're a Narc.

We see Avery wrap her arm around his shoulders, pulling him close into a huddle. She has a devious grin.

AVERY CANE (CONT'D)

Let's team up.

Kaelen looks bewildered.

KAELEN LONAN

You wanna team up for an *essay*?

AVERY CANE

I wanna see you pick up a damn book that *isn't* your dad's dusty coffee-stained bible.

Kaelen grunts as Avery pulls away. There's a lingering wince in his eye.

AVERY CANE (CONT'D)

Besides, Lazlos' cool. Maybe we can do a presentation or something.

KAELEN LONAN

What about you?

AVERY CANE

Oh, I didn't start mine either.

KAELEN LONAN

HYPOCRITE!

Kaelen hisses, and Avery pushes his head back with her hand as he goes for a sloppy punch, missing completely. Their banter goes on briefly until they pass by some kid in particular that immediately catches Avery's attention, and she abruptly spins on her heel to look back. Kaelen follows suite, raising a brow.

AVERY CANE

Wh- Lucky! Hey, Lucky!

The kid flinches, craning his head to look back like a criminal on the run.

ENTER Loki Corella: A lanky pale 11-12-year-old kid with deep brown hair and hazel eyes, a cotton grey hoodie, shorts, and crocks all in monochrome. He's taller than *both* of them. Most kids call him Lucky.

AVERY CANE (CONT'D)

You're in the wrong building! I think Bucky's out on the courtyard.

Kaelen turns his head to gag. Avery pinches him and he yelps like a puppy. Lucky speaks lowly with a quivered tone.

LOKI "LUCKY" CORELLA

I'm not looking for my brother.

Avery points behind her.

AVERY CANE  
 Ok, well, you're still in the  
 wrong-

                  LOKI "LUCKY" CORELLA (INTERRUPTING)  
 Don't tell me what to do, p-pepper  
 head!

Avery's eye twitches. Kaelen's brow tightens as he steps forward.

                  KAELEN LONAN  
 She's tryna save *your* ass. Snitches  
 everywhere.

Lucky turns around, clearly irritated but still wimpy, and he stomps right up to the other boy. Kaelen cranes his head back when he gets way too close.

                  LOKI "LUCKY" CORELLA  
 Y-You gonna snitch on me?

                  KAELEN LONAN  
 You wanna get in trouble, that's  
 your own damn funeral.

Avery tries to get between them, at least getting in front of Kaelen successfully.

                  AVERY CANE  
 Look, no snitching, no whatever...  
*this* is! Just go, Lucky.

                  KAELEN LONAN  
 The hell's so important that you  
 gotta be over here, anyway?

Avery shoots him a look, and Lucky switches between about a million faces in a second.

                  LOKI "LUCKY" CORELLA  
 W-- Well!! Where are YOU going!!

Kaelen looks deadpanned.

                  KAELEN LONAN  
 None ya business.

                  LOKI "LUCKY" CORELLA  
 Well- me too! So what's it to you?!

                  KAELEN LONAN  
 I ain't like surprises.

Kaelen mutters under his breathe.

KAELEN LONAN (CONT'D)  
And I *hate* Bucky's.

Lucky scowls, and Kaelen returns it.

LOKI "LUCKY" CORELLA  
W-Watch it!

KAELEN LONAN  
***Make me.***

At that point Avery shoves herself into Kaelen and starts pushing him away. Kaelen purposely drags his feet.

AVERY CANE (LOUDLY)  
THANK YOU, Kaelen! But we're going to be LATE for our VERY IMPORTANT CLASS. Goodluck with whatever you're doing!

They get a few feet as Lucky stands there, quivering at the fists, before he shouts again.

LOKI "LUCKY" CORELLA  
At least Bucky doesn't lie about a broken car!

Kaelen stops, and Avery looks annoyed as she keeps trying to pull him, but he plants his feet now. He looks back with a raised brow.

KAELEN LONAN  
... *What?*

Lucky jolts when he meets his eye, but that doesn't stop the scowl.

LOKI "LUCKY" CORELLA  
B-Bucky said you make your sister run everyday cause your mom's car broke down!-

KAELEN LONAN (INTERRUPTING)  
*What-*

LOKI "LUCKY" CORELLA (INTERRUPTING)  
But then he went by your house the other day! He said it was in the driveway and he said it looked fine! So there!

Kaelen stands still, wide-eyed, and even Avery's stopped to listen. She looks skeptically at Kaelen.

KAELEN LONAN (WARILY)  
... Bucky was at my house?

Avery raised a hand out.

AVERY CANE  
Look, Broken can mean- it can mean  
a *million* different things, words  
are sort of cultural and-

LOKI "LUCKY" CORELLA (INTERRUPTING)  
Admit it, nothing's broke! So  
what's your deal?

Kaelen's scowl deepens and he marches up to Lucky, slipping out of Avery's reach. The lack of personal space is now a choice.

KAELEN LONAN (GROWLING)  
You and Bucky ain't know nothing  
about anybody.

LOKI "LUCKY" CORELLA  
W-What? Your mom and dad beat you  
or somethin'?

The ringing comes back. Kaelen's fist ball nail-first into his thumbs.

KAELEN LONAN (GROWLING)  
You ain't know nothing about my  
mama. You ain't know nothing about  
my dad.

Avery picks up her pace to rush over.

AVERY CANE  
Kaelen, let it go!

LOKI "LUCKY" CORELLA  
Y-You're gonna bully your sister  
like you bully everyone else?!

AVERY CANE (SHOUTING)  
LUCKY, BE QUIET!

The ringing gets louder. Kaelen's panting now.

LOKI "LUCKY" CORELLA  
What's your problem?! WHAT'S YOUR  
PROBLEM?!

AVERY CANE

Kae, DON'T-

In a flash, we see Kaelen square his fist right in Lucky's face, and we CUT TO BLACK. The ringing cuts with it.

AVERY CANE (SCREAMING) (CONT'D)

**KAELEN!**

CUT TO:

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE, AFTERNOON

The Interior is neat and organized yet filled with clutter, papers and photos and documents lined on the shelves, the walls, and the desk. As the two walk in there's a desk tag that reads 'Galen Thomas', right next to it a photo the man himself with a woman and a little girl, a frame clearly homemade with crude sticks and stickers.

ENTER Principal Thomas: A well-dressed man with short, jet black hair and fair skin. He wears rounded glasses, a light blue dress shirt with a striped tie, grey khakis, and sleek leather shoes. He has a single earring that hangs down, shaped like a jewel.

PRINCIPAL THOMAS

Have a seat, Mr. Lonan.

Kaelen practically flops back onto the cushioned seat, with an audacity like the boy has been here before. In contrast, the Principle lowers himself politely, folding his hands together as he stares intently at the boy.

PRINCIPAL THOMAS (CONT'D)

Can you tell me why you're here?

Kaelen scoffs at that, tapping his fingers on the arm of the chair almost irritably. One of his hands is bandaged.

KAELEN LONAN

What you want me to say now? Just gimme the lecture or whatever.

PRINCIPAL THOMAS

Kae, I want you to listen when I tell you this. And I mean I really, really want you to listen.

Kaelen goes quiet then, his stare shifting to meet him then with a newfound wariness. Principal Thomas lets out a sigh.

PRINCIPAL THOMAS (CONT'D)

This is the third time in the last month, son. And that's just *this* month. If I have to report another incident like this, you'll end up with *more* than just an expulsion. Do you understand that?

Kaelen is quiet still, shifting his gaze to look around a few times, but his body is stiff as a board. Galen is quiet a few more moments.

PRINCIPAL THOMAS (CONT'D)

What happened with you, son? You used to be so bright in my class.

KAELEN LONAN

When I was seven. People grow up.

PRINCIPAL THOMAS

You're only thirteen.

Kaelen shoots him a look.

KAELEN LONAN (SHARPLY)

*Fourteen.*

Principal Thomas seems surprised, double-taking and clearing his throat.

PRINCIPAL THOMAS

.. Alright, You're fourteen, and you punched a grade schooler in the nose for... what exactly?

Kaelen turns his head away with a huff.

KAELEN LONAN

Don't matter.

PRINCIPAL THOMAS

I think it will matter when I call your parents about this.

Kaelen shot up then, gripping the edges of the arms on the chair like his life depended on it.

KAELEN LONAN (PANICKED)

Wait- Wait, you can't!

Principal Thomas gains a newfound worry in the face.

PRINCIPAL THOMAS

Kaelen Lonan, I've been lenient with you, I've tried. This has been going on for far too long. I'll lose my job for this.

He reaches for the desk phone. As Kaelen watches with horror, we hear the ringing start to come back until he shoots over it.

KAELEN LONAN (SHOUTING)

I'LL BE GOOD!

Principal Thomas pauses, looking over to Kaelen as his curled in on himself with his hands still gripping the seat. His panting again, but it's quieter.

KAELEN LONAN (CONT'D)

I'll be good, I swear- I promise, please- *Please don't.*

Principal Thomas moves his hand away, and Kaelen relaxes a little.

PRINCIPAL THOMAS

Son... If there's something going on, you can tell me.

KAELEN LONAN

T-There's nothin' going on. I- I'll never mess up again--

Principal Thomas raises his hand.

PRINCIPAL THOMAS

Stop, Kae.

He goes quiet, resting his mouth and chin inside his palm as he looks contemplative. The silence gives Kaelen time to lessen his grip, never taking his eyes off him, always wary. Eventually, he lets out a sigh.

PRINCIPAL THOMAS (CONT'D)

Go back to class.

Kaelen perks up, wasting no time to hoist himself up and head towards the door, still locked on him.

KAELEN LONAN

I promise, I promise you'll never see me here again.

We see through the door opening as Kaelen walks through, the Principal's brow furrowing and him burying his head in his hands. We don't get much longer as the foggy stained glass shuts behind him.

CUT TO BLACK.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM, EVENING

We get a mouse angle shot of the siblings walking in from the front door.

ZAKKIA LONAN

Ayo, go upstairs and start your work. Kaelen'll help you later.

Ayo hesitates for a moment as Kaelen closes the door behind all of them, hard in the face and avoiding anyone's stare. Zakkia is calm but stern, looking at Ayo directly, until the youngest hugs her headphones to her ears and hurries rather quickly up the stairs. When Zakkia hears the door click shut, she turns back to her brother, her face growing sterner. He finally looks up.

ZAKKIA LONAN (CONT'D)

I can't believe you.

Kaelen huffs, attempting to walk past her only to get stopped by her hand to his chest. He looks at her irritably.

KAELEN LONAN

The hell do you want to me to say?

ZAKKIA LONAN

Oh, I don't know, Kae- How about what hell were you thinking? Oh wait! You weren't, because you never fucking do-

Kaelen shoots up with outrage, flailing his arms wildly.

KAELEN LONAN

BUCKY'S a damn snitch!

ZAKKIA LONAN

Well first off you don't LOOSE your damn cool! Now it's suspicious!

Kaelen scoffs, crossing his arms and turning away from her. Zakkia looks outraged and she swings her arm out.

ZAKKIA LONAN (CONT'D)

And that's ANOTHER kid's parents I gotta curb off now because of you, and hell! Maybe they'll press charges, maybe CPS will just come right the fuck now-

KAELEN LONAN

The Principal ain't call nobody!

ZAKKIA LONAN

You don't KNOW THAT, Kaelen! You don't know as much as you think you do!

Kaelen whips around, glaring up at Zakkia with tears welling in his eyes.

KAELEN LONAN

How much do YOU know?! You weren't even here! Not until-

ZAKKIA LONAN

Well now I'm stuck here working my ass off to keep us all together, you happy now?! Can I even get a thank you?! How about the bare minimum of not fucking this all up?!

KAELEN LONAN

YOU WERE GONNA LEAVE US!

ZAKKIA LONAN

Oh GROW UP, KAELEN! WE GOT BIGGER PROBLEMS!

And with that, Kaelen suddenly takes off, ripping the door open and slamming it behind him too fast for Zakkia to even think of stopping. The notebook from earlier falls out his bag before he's out, and Zakkia is left stiff in her place for some moments until she lets out an exasperated sigh. The exhaustion lays heavy on her face as she goes to pick it up, pausing on the first page it opens to, The word BASTARD in bold black ink.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN CITY, DUSK

We're on the rooftops. Kaelen jumps from building to building and *flies*, his pants now zipped off into shorts and his bag finally closed. He leaps off ledges and scales pipelines with ease and precision. This is his domain, and he's good at it.

He finally comes to a stop on a particular rooftop, coming to a crouch as he makes his way to the other side. The busy traffic and flashing lights come to a calm as the side paths bleed into a landmark park, with a brilliant fountain at the center, tricolored lights and sprinkles that came and went in waves. His upper half leans on the guard rail as he tucks his arms in, his eyes half lidded as he's hypnotized. For a moment, we hear the over stimulus of downtown fade away, every ripple of that water bleeding into another like a symphony.

When he finally snaps out of that trance, he looks at the bandaged hand, a couple other doodles with a bird in the center. He leans in to kiss it, resting his mouth there.

KAELEN LONAN (SOFTLY)  
I'm gonna fix it, I promise.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM, NIGHT

Ayo's sat at the table, staring dully at a worksheet with a plate of apples cut into sticks by her side. Zakkia is reading a book on the sofa when Ayo shoves the paper away, clonking her head on the table and putting her hands over it. Zakkia stares for some moments before she sighs, walking over with some resignation.

ZAKKIA LONAN (SOFTLY)  
What? What's wrong?

AYO LONAN (MUFFLED)  
I don't get it.

ZAKKIA LONAN  
Let me see.

Without looking she hands it to the eldest, who looks at it skeptically until her little hand points to a section. It's all math. Zakkia is quietly for long enough that Ayo finally raises her head, and when she does, Zakkia puts the paper back on the table and taps at the section.

ZAKKIA LONAN (CONT'D)  
You forgot the two. Huzzah.

Ayo doesn't speak, staring at the paper like it's a sin.

AYO LONAN  
.. I need Kae.

Zakkia leans against the table with her arms crossed.

ZAKKIA LONAN  
Yeah, well.. you know how he is.  
He'll be back.

Ayo huffs quietly, turning in her chair and facing away from her. Her arms are crossed now.

ZAKKIA LONAN (CONT'D)  
Baby sis, it's the way things are.  
That's it. Math ain't gonna math  
itself.

Ayo tugs her legs onto the seat, hugging to keep them there.

AYO LONAN  
.. What if he goes away, too?

Zakkia pauses, her eyes softening and filling with a thousand words. She leans to touch her cheek, guiding her face to meet her.

ZAKKIA LONAN  
No one else is going away, alright?  
Don't think like that.

Ayo doesn't respond, looking away towards a window. Her eyes suddenly widen, and as Zakkia follows her skeptically, we see blue and red flashing lights leak through the curtain. Zakkia freezes, and Ayo looks at her warily.

AYO LONAN (SHAKILY)  
K-Kia-?

Before she can respond, there's a pronounced knock at the door that Ayo jolts at, covering her ears.

???  
Police! Anybody home?

Zakkia hisses under her breath. Ayo tugs at her arm.

ZAKKIA LONAN  
**Shit.**

CUT TO:

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD/TOWNHOUSE, NIGHT.

We see Kaelen walking back in the streets, hands in his pockets and a bit crestfallen. He's like that for some time until he looks up and we see the hint of police lights around the corner, and we see him pale.

KAELEN LONAN (SOFTLY)

Shit.

He ducks into a bush, and sneaks around a line of them as cover, until he gets his house and view. And there they are, three police cars and a black car he can't place, with the door to his house wide open.

KAELEN LONAN (SHARPLY) (CONT'D)

Shit, shit, *shit-*!

We faintly hear voices in the background, calm but not coherent. Kaelen takes a chance to dive behind one of the police cars to get a better view. We see half of a policeman in there but more importantly we see Ayo nervously sitting on a chair, and she almost immediately spots him outside but quickly straightens up, cheating a few panicked glances. Kaelen curses under his breath again and he crawls forward toward the backyard.

He gets to the gate and finds it's locked, and wastes no more time climbing over it, stumbling to the other side and ripping his jacket in the process. He barely acknowledges it outside of a sting on his side, and his eyes land on the back door, and he hesitates. He then darts for a window near the ground, and to his joy, it slides open.

It's a tight fit, but he climbs in, feet first that makes him crane his head at an odd angle. It's a bit of a drop for him but he lands it on some empty boxes in the boiler room, after loosing his grip on the concrete. He bites his tongue in favor of making *any* sound, but he lays there to catch his breath, surrounded by junk.

There's a shining at the corner of his eye, and it gets brighter, making him skeptically roll his head upside down to look- and even quicker, he jolts his whole body over and stares with wide eyes. We don't see what he sees, but we feel the fear.

KAELEN LONAN (BREATHLESSLY) (CONT'D)

*What the- HELL-*

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM/HALLWAY/BOILER, NIGHT

We're back inside the house now, Zakkia is sat down in the living room with a woman dressed in black and a clipboard in her lap, and a police officer by her side. There's two others, one by Ayo who still sits uncomfortably, and another one examining the space. Zakkia looks calm and composed, her hands folded into each other and her stare certain.

ZAKKIA LONAN  
Marcel Lanon and Roslyn Lanon-  
Monroe.

WELFARE WOMAN  
I see.

She writes something down before looking back up at her.

WELFARE WOMAN (CONT'D)  
And there's no violence in the  
home? Threatening of any kind?

ZAKKIA LONAN  
No, ma'am.

She writes something again, more quickly.

WELFARE WOMAN  
There's nothing floating around,  
like uh.. baggies? Pills?

ZAKKIA LONAN  
No, ma'am. Just prescribed.

WELFARE WOMAN  
Prescribed what? Who?

Zakkia leans forward a bit.

ZAKKIA LONAN  
My dad had a few. Upstairs, it's  
the master bedroom. Check the  
nightstand.

The woman makes some signal to the officer beside her, and we see him walk towards the stairs, the one that was wandering around follows soon after.

WELFARE WOMAN  
And you're all getting along fine?

ZAKKIA LONAN

Yes, ma'am. They left us money before they went on the trip, so we're taken care of. They call often to make sure we're ok.

The woman writes something down again. It's a bit longer.

WELFARE WOMAN

And how long ago did they leave?

ZAKKIA LONAN

A couple days ago.

She writes something down again.

WELFARE WOMAN

Marcel Lonan?

ZAKKIA LONAN

Yes, ma'am. He's a hard worker.

WELFARE WOMAN

Strange.. the police had gotten a report from the brewery. No one's heard from him in the last three weeks. No notice, nothing.

Zakkia is silent, staring at her still, and the woman stares right back.

ZAKKIA LONAN

Strange, he quit actually.

WELFARE WOMAN

Really?

ZAKKIA LONAN

We had to convince him it was too much stress. He rode out the two weeks, I guess they didn't get the note.

WELFARE WOMAN

And your mother?

ZAKKIA LONAN

Looking for work, she's been at home for a while. It was easier with my sister needing more help.

She writes something down again.

WELFARE WOMAN

I imagine it's been hectic.

ZAKKIA LONAN

We get by. I work on the weekends,  
so it helps. My siblings go to  
their friend's usually.

WELFARE WOMAN

And you?

ZAKKIA LONAN

I have friends.

She writes something down again, Ayo's looking on nervously still. The little girl glances behind her at the officer, he looks at her sternly, and she cautiously turns back around. She takes a fist to bump at her chest, her eyes darting to the door again, but Kaelen's no longer there. Her eyes scan around the room, landing on the hallway. It's a few more moments before she raises her hand in the air.

AYO LONAN

M-May I be excused!

The officer looms over her, and she rocks in her chair a little.

OFFICER (SKEPTICALLY)

And where you thinking of going?

Zakkia's teeth grit for a split second but it's gone before the woman sees.

ZAKKIA LONAN

She needs to go when she gets  
nervous.

WELFARE WOMAN

It's alright, sweetie. Go ahead,  
just come back when you're done.

Ayo hops down and rather hurriedly takes off, still bumping her chest. She keeps going until she reaches the bathroom, flicks the switch for the light and fan to turn on, then closes the door. Still outside, she steps lighter until she reaches the end of the hall.

She slowly turns the knob and silently cracks open the back door just enough for her to look out, but still doesn't see him. She's silent still closing it back, looking around with newfound worry until she hears a soft clicking nearby. When she follows it, it leads her to the door to the boiler room.

Pressing her head against the door, it's the sound of the lock being picked with.

There's a newfound vigor as she grabs the handle, and it flies open faster than she had control over- and incomes Kaelen, sticking his hands out to keep him from thudding on wood. They both stand frozen, not a word between them, listening for steps or a voice that would never come. And when they were sure it wouldn't, Kaelen rose himself to grab her shoulders. He was breathless.

KAELEN LONAN (HUSHED)

Zak- Where's Zak?

Ayo points down the hall, and Kaelen curses under his breath again, trying to move from the side to get a peak- but she shoves him back. She motions her hand, and she sneaks forward while he carefully slides back into the basement.

We cut back to the living room, and nothing's changed. The woman looks up from her clipboard again.

WELFARE WOMAN

It's strange, you really have no other family around?

ZAKKIA LONAN

My mom's side disowned her. My dad's, well... He said it was a choice.

The welfare woman taps her pen to her chin.

WELFARE WOMEN

Well in these cases... we'd require an adult in the home.

ZAKKIA LONAN

I'm almost eighteen.

WELFARE WOMAN

Right, well... that doesn't exactly-

Ayo's voice is somewhat muffled in the distance

AYO LONAN

K-Kia! Please!

ZAKKIA LONAN

Sorry, she needs help sometimes.

WELFARE WOMEN

That's alright, go.

Zakkia calmly rises from the sofa, lightly making her way down the hall as the woman goes to talk to the remaining officer. We see them look up to the stairs before they disappear out of our view, and Zakkia goes to knock lightly on the bathroom door. When it opens, Ayo looks wide-eyed.

AYO LONAN (HUSHED)

Kae's here.

It's Zakkia's turn to have her eyes go wide, and she lets Ayo guide her as they shuffle quietly towards the basement door. Before they can go in, Kaelen emerges again and grabs Zakkia by the shoulders now, covering her mouth before she can dare make a sound.

KAELEN LONAN (HUSHED)

There's something freaky in the boiler!

Zakkia roughly removes his hand, outrage blossoming on her face.

ZAKKIA LONAN (HUSHED)

You brought the authorities to our door with your stupid ideas and you're worried about something freaky in the damn boiler?!

Kaelen doesn't listen, instead he grabs the both of them and pulls them down, Ayo silently closing the door behind them before following. As they reach the bottom of the dark room, Kaelen points at a crack.

KAELEN LONAN (HUSHED)

There! It was right there!

ZAKKIA LONAN (HUSHED)

Kaelen, that thing been there since we moved in here!

KAELEN LONAN (HUSHED)

No! I came in here and it was glowing! I know what I saw!

ZAKKIA LONAN (HUSHED)

Oh I know like HELL you did!-

They're cut off the smoke alarm blare. It's louder than before, and it makes Ayo duck just as quickly. Kaelen rushes over to her, and with her lack of headphones, he uses his hands.

ZAKKIA LONAN (CONT'D)

What's burning now?!

KAELEN LONAN  
Don't look at me!

ZAKKIA LONAN  
Motherfucker, you're standing  
right-!

Zakkia freezes, and we see the crack grow in an instant, under the two younger siblings and under Zakkia herself at once. Then it grows again, all the way to the edges of the room. Fear washes over all of them.

ZAKKIA LONAN (BREATHLESSLY) (CONT'D)  
Kae, don't let go.

KAELEN LONAN (BREATHLESSLY)  
Zak-

The floor breaks, and the three of them fall into an endless pit of red, with nothing but their screams to trail behind them.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. THE CHRYSALIS

We're surrounded darkness. The silence grows muffled, until we see some green hue shine below the surface- and Kaelen bursts through coughing, Ayo clutched to his chest like a buckle. They collapse on solid ground and Ayo gets a chance to hack out her lungs now, and Kaelen crawls to lean over her.

KAELEN LONAN  
AYO! T-That's it, get it out-

He rolls her over and pats her chest, and by the time she's done she's crying, and he pulls her close again. All we see is the immediate area illuminated around them and themselves, still surrounded by black. There's the liquid they came out of, leaning towards more purple than blue, and the hard earth they stood on-- which was grey, some streaks on the surface. Small tufts of moss were sticking out in some places.

It all settles in at once in his face, and Kaelen winces, moving his bandages hand to look- there's black patches on it now, almost like it burnt, but glossier. Ayo notices, and her eyes go wide.

AYO LONAN (SNIFFLING)  
K-Kaelen?

KAELEN LONAN (BREATHLESSLY)

It's ok.

He's wobbly in the knees but he gets up, and Ayo keeps a tight grip on him. He's clutching that injured hand now like it's alien. His voice dares to crack when he yells.

KAELEN LONAN (CONT'D)

Zak! ZAK, WHERE ARE YOU?!

All that comes back is the rumble of void. Kaelen's face wrinkles, he's trying not to cry.

AYO LONAN

Th-The Water-

Kaelen perks up at that, immediately whipping his head around. He wastes no more time, Ayo willingly let's go and he dives back in. We see her fall to her knees, as she's still sobbing, trying to keep alert.

It feels like ages before he finally comes up again, with their big sister on top of him. He struggles to swim back with an unconscious body, and throws her onto the bank like a meat sack. Ayo goes pale, grabbing both sleeves of her shoulders.

KAELEN LONAN (COUGHING)

SHE'S NOT DEAD! She's not dead!

AYO LONAN

K-Kae-

Kaelen's voice cracks again as he tries to do chest compressions, who's never been taught how.

KAELEN LONAN

SHUT UP! SHUT UP, SHE'S NOT DEAD!

He keeps pushing, up and down, rhythmically. Ayo breathes heavily as she curls in on herself. Now, the tears are coming.

KAELEN LONAN (CONT'D)

WAKE! UP! YOU STUPID- HARDHEADED-  
KNOW IT ALL- **DUMBASS-!**

A stream of water spurs from her mouth, right into Kaelen's face, and he couldn't care less. He hugs her before she can even finish clearing her lungs, and Ayo quickly joins in.

ZAKKIA LONAN (FAINTLY)

Who're you callin' a dumbass..?

KAELEN LONAN  
D-Don't ever do that again!

Kaelen's voice quivers, and Zakkia tiredly planks an arm around the both of them with a weak smile. Kaelen's smiling wider than we've ever seen him.

ZAKKIA LONAN  
Sorry.

AYO LONAN  
I WANNA GO HOME!

ZAKKIA LONAN  
... Where *is* home?

It settles in for her now, as she lifts herself up, and eventually gets to her feet with their help. Somehow, the void seems even wider with the three of them. Ayo chooses to cling to Zakkia now, who takes a hand to cross her chest.

KAELEN LONAN  
Wh-What're you doing?

ZAKKIA LONAN  
.. Changing my religion.

???  
Oh, you won't need any of that!

A jovial voice tears through the eerie void, and the three siblings jolt and cling to each other. Out from the void pops a little creature colored like soot, it's eyes aglow with the color of envy, curved horns and a pointed tail. It has a funny little top hat and cane with a skull on it, holding a hand out to shake.

??? (CONT'D)  
Pleasure to meet you, wayfarers!  
Don't get many visitors around  
here, what's the occasion?

The three of them stare at this thing, wide eyed.

KAELEN LONAN, ZAKKIA LONAN, AYO LONAN  
(IN UNISON)  
SATAN?!

The creature scoffs, leaning back on it's cane.

???  
Oh, no no. If you wanna talk to my  
boss you gotta go to corporate.  
(MORE)

??? (CONT'D)

I'm what you call, a, uh... Unpaid intern!

Zakkia stares seriously while the other two look confused.

ZAKKIA LONAN

There's unpaid interns in *hell*?

???

Oh, y-yeah! Business ain't what it used to be, y'know?

KAELEN LONAN

I'm *not* sorry-- who the hell are you?!

???

Ooh! Names! I got so many names!

The creature disappears and reappears behind them, making them all jump again.

??? (CONT'D)

Sleep demon, Parasite, Satan- which is my boss, Lucifer- which is also my boss, Luci- that one I do like actually-!

The creature disappears again. This time it's at their feet, and Zakkia shuffles backward with her hands raised as a guard. It extends it's hand again.

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER (CONT'D)

You know what, for simplicity's sake, call me Santa's Little Helper!

KAELEN LONAN

That's stupid as hell!

AYO LONAN (SHAKILY)

A-Are we dead? Are we gonna burn forever??

SLH laughs, summoning it's cane to it's side.

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER

Oh, you wayfarers are very much alive! You still have your bodies!

ZAKKIA LONAN (SKEPTICALLY)

Our basement floor fell in and we're not dead?

SLH takes the can to poke at her stomach. She stares bewilderedly, while Kaelen's scowl deepens.

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER  
Yyyyyep! You're corporeal! Must  
have been a gateway.

ZAKKIA LONAN (FLABBERGASTED)  
There's a gateway to hell in our  
fucking basement.

KAELEN LONAN  
Well send us back, then! There's  
cops in our damn house!

SLH sucks air through it's teeth as it claps it's hands together.

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER  
Ooohhh, sorry, you gotta be  
processed like everybody else.  
Don't worry though! Once you get up  
there it'll be no problem!

ZAKKIA LONAN  
How long's that gonna take?

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER  
Wheeennever my coworker remembers  
to go on his run! He'll pick you  
right up!

SLH goes silent for some moments and stares directly in our direction. The siblings stare at it, Kaelen bouncing his gaze a few times between it and our direction.

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER (CONT'D)  
Eventually!

ZAKKIA LONAN  
Look, we don't have that kind of  
time? Can't you just do it??

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER  
Tsk, tsk! You Wayfarers, so  
impatient! I can't just break  
protocol!

SLH flips through the air to lean with it's legs crossed, it's tail flicking rhythmically.

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER (CONT'D)

I gotta tell ya, there was this one duo that I tried that on, now my boss is keepin' em as a trophy prize. "I hAvE ThReE KiDs" so does Jacko, and y'know what! He doesn't complain, he's Jacko! He doesn't even have a mouth!

The three of them freeze.

ZAKKIA LONAN

... Did they say their names?

SLH raises their finger, opening their mouth and keeping it there for a few seconds.

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER

No. BUT I get a record of every Wayfarers that passes through here!

A book appears in its hands and the pages start flipping through themselves. Kaelen leans in to look closer as SLH materializes a pair of reading glasses.

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER (CONT'D)

Carter Lake, Jeremiah, Penny, Ganhua, Candy Korn- that was a funny one- Oh! Here we go! Marcel and Roslyn Lanon.. Monroe. Hey, those are you names! You look like them, too. Good for you.

Ayo puts a hand over her mouth and Zakkia is left frozen, Kaelen steps back with an intense stare. It takes SLH a few more seconds before the blank stare drops, and it perks up, flipping the page back and forth like something was going to change.

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER (CONT'D)

Oooooohhhh, I messed up a *family*, didn't I?

KAELEN LONAN

Well FIX IT! Get them out!

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER

Oh, I don't have clearance for that! You have to take that up with my boss.

Ayo squeaks out a shout as she clutches Zakkia tighter.

AYO LONAN  
THE DEVIL'S A LIAR!

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER (MOCKINGLY)  
"The DeViL's A LiAr" look, I've  
been hearing that same thing since  
the sixteenth century and y'know  
what, when you're trying to climb  
the corporate ladder it's always  
the same.

Kaelen looks between them, contemplative.

KAELEN LONAN  
... How could you get clearance?

His sisters whip around to them, while SLH's eyes sparkle as  
it squeals.

ZAKKIA LONAN (WARILY)  
Kaelen.

KAELEN LONAN  
Look, if we gotta bust em' out, I'd  
rather go with the bobble head!

SLH disappears and reappears, leaning on Kaelen's shoulder  
with his tail brushing against his face.

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER  
Employee of the month!

They all stare.

ZAKKIA LONAN  
*What.*

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER  
Employee of the month! The stats  
are tallied on who's extorted the  
most sin, and whoever's the highest  
gets clearance into the upper  
headquarters to do... Well, I  
dunno!

SLH disappears and reappears in front of them again,  
slouched.

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER (CONT'D)  
And I've always been last! I don't  
know why, no one wants to listen to  
a guy in a top hat.

KAELEN LONAN

Then take off the hat.

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER

Tell you what! I can break a few more laws!

SLH disappears and Kaelen groans, throwing a fist in the air as SLH appears behind him. When it talks, he jumps.

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER (CONT'D)

I get you back up on your plane, and I'll free your folks when I get access! All you *three* have to do is be my little minions and get my rank up!

ZAKKIA LONAN

Hold on, how much sin are we talking here?

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER

Ooh, maybe like... Couple hundred points, maybe. I've seen them jump by the tens!

Kaelen whips out his hand, extending it for a shake.

KAELEN LONAN

Bet.

Zakkia barges in front of him with a growl.

ZAKKIA LONAN

Think about what you're doing, dumbass!

KAELEN LONAN

YOU can think about what you're doing! You don't gotta do it! But I'm getting my family back!

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER

Oohh, I wouldn't recommend that. It'd be a lot less dangerous with all three of you.

They both whip around, bewildered.

ZAKKIA LONAN

The hell do you mean, *DANGEROUS?*

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER  
 We gotta make a pact, you silly  
 goose!

SLH disappears and reappears in front of them, hand extended forward as Ayo slowly creeps back by their sides.

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER (CONT'D)  
 So! We have a deal?

There's a silence. Kaelen and Zakkia stare at each other as Kaelen extends his hand. Zakkia phases through some passes of irritation before she finally extends hers.

ZAKKIA LONAN  
 Like hell you give me a choice.

Kaelen and Zakkia then turn to little Ayo, who's doe eyed as she stares between all of them. She looks at her own hand, soft and supple at the palm, and gingerly stretches out her own. SLH somehow takes all of their wrists at once, it's hand stretching beyond reason, and it's spits on it's other hand. Kaelen sticks out his tongue and Ayo's face twists in disgust.

ZAKKIA LONAN (CONT'D)  
 Fucking ew?!

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER  
 Here we go! I- forgot the chant,  
 darn, uh... Ok! IMPROV!

It slaps the wet hand on all of theirs, and suddenly, the void rushes for them. It dives for their lungs, their hearts, and pins them like dolls on a wire. It fills Zakkia's mouth with toxin, and she can't cough it away. Ayo screams as it fills her ears, but the poor kid will never hear herself even as she flails. Kaelen's screaming curses as it pushes into his eyes, and all he sees is black.

KAELEN LONAN  
 SHIT! SHIT-- I'LL FIX THIS! I'LL  
 FIX THIS!

Zakkia looks over to him, her attempt to speak futile. She only coughs without the space for air. Ayo's still screaming, trying to rip the void away-- but it only swallows her whole. The rest of them start following suite.

KAELEN LONAN (CONT'D)  
 IT'S GONNA BE OK! I'LL FIX ALL OF  
 IT, I PROMISE!

Kaelen is the last to go under with his last cries too garbled to hear. The light is gone, and the void becomes whole.

FADE TO BLACK.