

Coldblooded

by

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FADE IN:

INT. SCHOOL LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Moonlight shining through high-set glass block windows bathes the shower area in green light. All the showers run, but no one is there. A GIRL'S VOICE echoes off the metal lockers.

JULIA (O.S.)
Oh, you think I'm a bad girl,
leading me into the boy's room. Are
we going to take a shower?

Pretty JULIA, 16, approaches, waving a note.

A DARK FIGURE jumps from behind the lockers, grabs her, and pushes her to the shower room.

JULIA
Robby, this is not funny! If you
thought I was going to fuck you in
the boys' shower--

The shadowy figure pushes Julia roughly to the ground and sits astride her back. Shower water splashes up around them.

He removes his hand from her mouth and squeezes her throat for a moment.

JULIA
You're really hurting me this time.

The boy snorts a half-laugh.

JULIA
It's not funny. I'm serious!

He turns her over, staying on top of her. Julia's eyes widen in terror.

The boy is JOSH HALSTON, seventeen, tall, skinny and pale. JULIA screams, then gasps as he grabs her throat.

JOSH
Choking is normal foreplay for you
and Robby?

Julia kicks uselessly at his back. He chokes her. He brings his face down inches away from hers.

Josh rolls her over and pulls her to the middle of the shower room. He turns on the light -- flickering fluorescent tubes. Foggy mist rises up around Julia.

Josh retrieves a knife, rope, chemistry bottle and mask from his duffel bag. He binds Julia's wrists and ankles with the rope. She groans, regaining consciousness.

JOSH
You brought this on yourself. Is that what Robby tells you?

Julia looks disgusted. Josh removes a 1970's plastic Wonder Woman mask from the bag and holds it up in front of her face.

JOSH
Now you'll be... wonderful.

Josh lays the mask down and picks up the bottle.

JOSH
We're almost done.

He puts his face close to Julia's. She moans softly.

He pours some solution onto each of Julia's eyes. The skin immediately blisters. Julia screams.

Josh holds Julia still with one hand. He carefully pours the acid onto her face in the outline of a mask as she screams. He places the mask over her face and smiles at his handiwork.

SIRENS blare outside. Josh jumps up and grabs his equipment.

JOSH
Goddammit!

He runs out of the shower area. Red and blue lights sweep through the windows. Josh shoves his equipment into his bag and runs. Julia screams.

EXT. SCHOOL - NIGHT

SWAT team members convene on the school lawn. Josh appears at a door, setting off an alarm.

JOSH
Shit.

Josh drops his bag and falls to his knees. He slowly raises his hands.

CUT TO:

CLOSEUP ON scrapbook pages:

SUPER: "ONE YEAR LATER"

Article from the Rocky Mountain News: "Central High Student Signs School Shooting Book Deal." A picture of Goth girl TEEN ARCADIA accompanies the article, along with a book cover photo: Central High Shooter: The Inside Story.

Press Release from Slaughterhouse X: "Arcadia Grey To Continue Writing Killer-Focused True Crime!" A photo of teen Arcadia holding a book: A Barrel of Body Parts.

Photograph of ARCADIA GREY (now early 20s) holding up a book.

The pages turn faster, with quick flashes of Arcadia and her books in photos and newspaper articles.

The last page is an article from The State (Columbia, South Carolina): "Mask Killer Josh Halston Signs Deal With Shock Writer." Pictures of Arcadia and Josh accompany the article.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

INT. REEFER MADNESS SHOP - DAY

The dispensary is clean and modern. Neatly labeled jars of marijuana leaf line the back wall. A display case holds baked goods, while pipes and bongos sit on counter shelves. A large sign reads "Reefer Madness! Licensed Marijuana Dispensary."

ARCADIA GREY, 30 and beautiful with a suicide girl edginess, pulls the open scrapbook to her chest. Her look is punk/grunge, except for a badly macrame'ed necklace with an odd-looking pendant. She examines the scrapbook.

Behind the counter, DAVID LANG, also 30, is shorter than Arcadia. His legs are twisted. Metal crutches sit nearby.

ARCADIA

This is so sweet. Thanks.

David shrugs. He looks at the Josh Halston page with Arcadia.

DAVID

This is the kid who killed girls and then burned them with acid?

ARCADIA

Acid first. Disfiguring victims post-mortem is a different M.O.

David returns to the counter and opens the cash register.

DAVID

Please, no details. I'll read your book when it comes out.

Arcadia has a tendency to pick up and examine anything in her path: marijuana plants, rolling papers, bongos...

ARCADIA

He made this for me.

She indicates the necklace. David examines the pendant. It's a timer which is counting down (currently at 58:35). Arcadia opens the back, revealing an oddly bent piece of wire.

ARCADIA

Josh showed me how to pick locks with a modified bobby pin -- in case I'm ever in trouble, you know?

DAVID

That's... sweet. What's the timer?

ARCADIA

Count-down to his execution. One minute after he turns eighteen. Great birthday gift, huh?

David hands Arcadia a small key.

DAVID

Lock those cabinets. You get close to these... people. This kid killed two girls and mutilated another. I can't work up a lot of sympathy.

Arcadia pulls on the cabinet doors.

ARCADIA

They're locked. You just don't trust me around your stash. It's not that he's innocent or anything. He's... He could be a good kid.

DAVID

You're right, I don't trust you.

David looks outside, startled.

DAVID

Shit. Did I--

Arcadia follows his gaze and sees a DERANGED METH-HEAD, (appears mid-50s, but probably around 22) coming at the door. The key is in the lock on the inside.

Arcadia tries to hold it shut and turn the key. She points at the "CLOSED" sign, but the meth-head forces his way in.

The deranged man pulls out a knife and grabs Arcadia.

METH-HEAD

Give me it all, little man. Money, dope, come on.

DAVID

Nothing in the cash register. I'll see what I've got in my wallet.

METH-HEAD

The dope. All of it. Put it in...

He lets go of Arcadia and looks at his hand, as if expecting a handy ill-gotten-loot sack to appear. Arcadia backs away.

METH-HEAD

Just give it to me, goddammit!

David reaches under the counter.

ARCADIA

Did you press that silent alarm thing, sweetie?

David looks at her and rolls his eyes.

DAVID

Honey-bunch, they call it a "silent" alarm because the robber isn't supposed to know about it.

Arcadia puts her hand to her mouth.

ARCADIA

Oooh, sorry!

The meth-head is confused and angry.

METH-HEAD

What's she talking about? What fucking alarm?

David is firm.

DAVID

Nothing. No alarm.

The meth-head looks back to Arcadia, growing angrier. He raises his knife.

ARCADIA

I didn't know it was a secret! It rings at the police station. The one two, three blocks south?

METH-HEAD

Fuck. Fuck!

The meth-head approaches Arcadia with the knife up. He grabs the timer and looks like he's about to cut the macrame.

METH-HEAD

That is one ugly fucking necklace.

DAVID

Hey!

The deranged man turns, to see David scooping marijuana-filled zip-lock baggies into a plastic grocery bag.

The meth-head grabs the bag and bolts out the door.

David closes the cash register and grabs his keys.

DAVID

You're smarter than you look. Let's blow this joint.

He grins.

EXT. REEFER MADNESS SHOP - DAY

Reefer Madness sits amidst its mainstream strip-mall neighbors, giant marijuana leaves painted on the windows. A dirty white van is parked in front.

David locks the door.

ARCADIA

Why don't you have one of those silent alarms?

They walk down the sidewalk passing little shops and studios.

DAVID

Cops don't trust anyone associated with marijuana. Legality doesn't matter. We're the bad guys and when shit like this goes down, I just "got what I deserved."

ARCADIA

You really think they'd just sit there and let you get robbed?

David shrugs and stops at a pay-phone.

DAVID

They mostly do what's expected of them. I'll put in an anonymous call about our little fried-out friend.

Arcadia looks up and down the empty sidewalk. She drops the timer inside her shirt after checking it.

EXT. COLORADO HIGHWAY - DAY

David's van crests a hill with a fantasitc view of the Rockies.

INT. DAVID'S VAN - MOVING - DAY

The van is outfitted to accommodate David's condition. He drives while Arcadia pokes around the glove box.

ARCADIA

How much pot did you give that guy?

DAVID

The lawn clippings? I paid the kid who mows my yard an extra five bucks to fill those bags.

Arcadia laughs.

ARCADIA

I may be dependent on your charity if Slaughterhouse Ten goes under.

DAVID

What about your current not-so-bestseller? Killing Ties?

ARCADIA

Ties that Bind and Kill. Sales suck. Did you buy a copy?

DAVID

I buy all your books. I just don't read them.

ARCADIA

I thought this one might be the break-through. Guy enslaves his young wife and then the kids he forces her to have for twenty years. The mainstream true crime writers are outselling me more than usual. It's hard to make a guy like that a sympathetic protagonist.

DAVID

Your last book did well. The one about the dude who lured in wannabe models, chopped them up and rearranged their parts.

ARCADIA

See what I mean? That's a guy people can identify with...

David looks at Arcadia sideways, shaking his head.

DAVID

You're a better writer than those other guys. Just go mainstream. I might even read your books if you quit making killers into heroes.

ARCADIA

I don't make them into heroes, David. I just tell their stories. Oh, turn here! Right!

David makes the turn, looking puzzled.

DAVID

What about your bookstore talk?

ARCADIA

You'll see. This book about Josh, it's going to change things. Left here. I think Josh's story will be more like my first book, only now I know what I'm doing.

DAVID

Your first book was different. You knew Adam. Now you're glamorizing monsters. Evil, sick monsters.

ARCADIA

It's not like that. Not with Josh, anyway. Pull over here.

David pulls over in front of a small, alternative high school. Kids are just starting to come out the doors.

DAVID

A school? I drive a white van. Are you trying to make me look like a pedophile?

Arcadia points out COLE DOUGLAS, 15, in a tie-dye t-shirt and carrying a frisbee. She slides down in her seat.

DAVID

Great. Now you look like a pedophile.

ARCADIA

This is serious.

DAVID

You've got this kid pegged as a future school shooter?

A dark look flashes momentarily on Arcadia's face.

Cole and the others walk past the van and head out on a sports field. Arcadia straightens up in her seat.

DAVID

Arcadia--

ARCADIA

He's my nephew.

DAVID

Ione and Phil's baby?

ARCADIA

My mom wanted to keep him after they were killed. But, you know. The schizophrenia and all...

Arcadia makes a "crazy" gesture with her finger.

ARCADIA

He was adopted by strangers and I just found out he was in Boulder.

DAVID

Does he know who you are?

ARCADIA

No. I found him through... let's say, creative sneak-thievery. He doesn't know anything about me.

David nods. He looks from Arcadia to Cole, who is throwing the frisbee with his friends. He starts to open the van door.

DAVID

Come on! Don't you want to--?

Arcadia pulls him back.

ARCADIA

No! I've watched him some and he seems happy. I don't want to fuck up his life with my weirdness.

DAVID

He already lives in Boulder. How opposed to weirdness can he be?

ARCADIA

It's late. Let's go.

INT. BOULDER BOOKSTORE MAIN FLOOR - DAY

David walks with his crutches next to Arcadia through the old-fashioned yet funky Boulder Bookstore.

Arcadia pauses by the "Local Favorites" section. Ties that Bind and Kill sits in the number twenty-five position.

ARCADIA

Josh's situation motivated me to look for Cole. He was adopted too.

Arcadia switches her stack of books with the number one seller, a new-age tome on aura magnification.

ARCADIA

Goddamn hippy town.

David smiles, shaking his head.

DAVID

Tell me about him. Josh, I mean. I promise to keep my mouth shut.

Arcadia heads for the stairs, but David steers her to the elevator.

INT. BOOKSTORE ELEVATOR - DAY

An OLDER COUPLE join David and Arcadia and the doors close. Arcadia ignores them as she talks.

ARCADIA

A fucking 17-year-old who gets off
pouring acid on girls' faces before
he stabs them and fu...

David discreetly makes shushing motions at Arcadia, while the
older couple look horrified.

ARCADIA

It's like Eric Harris and Ted
Bundy's love child. High school
girls tortured and disfigured...

The elevator doors open and the older couple get off quickly,
keeping as far away as they can from Arcadia and David.

INT. BOULDER BOOKSTORE SECOND LEVEL - DAY

A seating area is packed, and more people stand to the side.

ARCADIA

I've met his adoptive mother and
his birth mother. Evil and
pathetic, respectively.

Arcadia glances at the timer before tucking it back in.

DAVID

Good luck, sweets.

Arcadia walks confidently to the podium. A few audience
members whistle and clap when they see her.

EXT. ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS FIELD - DAY

Cole and his friends finish their game as David approaches on
his crutches. Cole sees him first and approaches him.

COLE

Can we help you with something?

David puts on a sheepish look and holds out some papers.

DAVID

The Boulder Bookstore is paying me
to hand out these certificates. I'm
supposed to give them out on Pearl
Street, but folks there seem to be,
uh, avoiding me.

The other boys come over.

COLE

Sorry, man, but we can't really help with that--

DAVID

Oh, no. It's just, I've got eight left and there's eight of you. If you take them and go pick up the free books within an hour, I'll get paid. And they'll hire me again?

Cole and his friends argue a bit about going to the bookstore, but decide to help the poor handicapped man.

COLE

Sure, it's no problem.

David looks through the stack and pulls out a certificate to give Cole first, then gives out the rest.

INT. BOULDER BOOKSTORE SECOND LEVEL - DAY

Arcadia wraps up her talk. Many of the fans look like they might one day be the subject of a true crime book. Store employees and regular folks are intermingled with them.

ARCADIA

...so even though this one
(holding up her book)
Is a little different than some of my others, I really hope you guys will give it a chance. It was a bitch to write, but you don't have to be a bitch like me to read it!

The audience applauds and whistles.

ARCADIA

Now, come up here and let's sign some goddamn books!

The audience claps, roars, whistles. They love her.

INT. BOULDER BOOKSTORE SECOND LEVEL - LATER

Arcadia sits at a table signing books. The end of the line has been blocked off. Arcadia sees David and waves.

She turns back to the book now on the table, "Central High Shooter: The Inside Story," and smiles.

ARCADIA

My first book! Hasn't this been out of print for like a hundred years?

She looks up, startled, to see Cole.

COLE

I don't know. It was free.

ARCADIA

Beware. People giving out free books are usually up to no good.

Arcadia glares at David who shrugs innocently. She signs the book and smiles up at Cole. He takes it and looks at the cover. Arcadia taps her fingers nervously.

COLE

I didn't even know they had school shooters before Columbine.

Arcadia looks down for a moment and discreetly wipes away a tear before smiling up at Cole.

ARCADIA

Yeah, he was a real pioneer.

Cole looks disturbed. Arcadia laughs a bit manically.

COLE

Maybe I'll take that advice about free books.

Cole leaves the book on the table and walks away. Arcadia watches him and puts her hand to the timer under her shirt.

INT. ARCADIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Arcadia's apartment is several steps below "cluttered but clean." The walls are plastered with movie posters. One is Slaughterhouse Five showing a soldier and a cloaked figure in the snow. Another is Truman Capote's In Cold Blood with two pairs of eyes.

A snowy owl with a bandaged wing sleeps in a large cage.

PHOEBE VAN DER GROOT, 40s, fills the room with her loud, colorful and bejeweled presence. MADISON MEERS, 21 and timid, stands to the side, overloaded with books and papers.

ARCADIA

Phoebe, you really didn't have to come all the way across town.

PHOEBE

No trouble, dear. The papers could get... lost in the fax.

Arcadia shakes her head and Madison hands her some papers.

PHOEBE

We have some trouble. It may be good trouble.

Madison, fumbling for something, drops a book and several papers. The book lands, fanned out: Fight Filth With Faith by Malcolm Ballard. The back cover displays an author photo of a man in a clerical collar. Phoebe picks up the book.

PHOEBE

When did you get this?
(showing the book to
Arcadia)

This is the trouble I was telling you about. This new age guru or whatever he is, has been speaking out viciously against Slaughterhouse Ten, and you in particular.

Arcadia ignores the book and moves to Alistair's cage.

MADISON

I was researching him.

PHOEBE

Good thinking. Arcadia, I wouldn't worry about it.

Arcadia shrugs and retrieves the owl's lunch: a live mouse.

MADISON

How's Alistair doing?

ARCADIA

His wing is healing. Thanks for getting him here, Madison. I'm sure there was a ton of red tape.

MADISON

You just need to talk to the right people. What happened to his wing?

ARCADIA

When Josh's mother was informed of his arrest, she threw everything in his bedroom out the second story window.

(MORE)

ARCADIA (CONT'D)

Which wouldn't have gone so badly
for Alistair if she'd taken him out
of his cage first.

Arcadia drops the mouse. Alistair eyes it hungrily.

MADISON

It's cruel to keep such a
magnificent creature in a cage. I
don't mean you, Arcadia.

ARCADIA

Josh did worse than caging an owl.

Arcadia looks down at the timer, which reads 52:03. Alistair
pounces and the mouse is gone.

PHOEBE

Owl's better off than the mouse.

Madison's phone rings. She looks at the ID and then answers
in a girlish voice several octaves above her normal tone.

MADISON

(girlish voice)
Helloooo... Ooooh, yes!

Madison scoots out of the room.

ARCADIA

You depend on her too much. She
doesn't have access to my private
files, does she?

PHOEBE

Oh! Certainly not. I have the
key... In a place so safe even I'm
not quite sure where it is.

Madison enters the living room, still on the phone.

MADISON

(girlish voice)
Oh! I hope so. Sure! Buh-bye!

Madison looks more animated and confident than usual. She
returns to her mousy, bookish self as soon as she hangs up.

PHOEBE

Was that about Arcadia's interview
with Joanne the owl-tosser?

Phoebe hands Madison Fight Filth With Faith. Madison
brightens momentarily as she looks at the back cover.

MADISON

Oh, yes. It's all set!

CLOSEUP ON Malcolm Ballard's author photo.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Arcadia sits in coach, laptop computer on her lap. Handsome, well-groomed MAX (MALCOLM) BALLARD (the man from the author photo), 42, sits next to her. Screens embedded in the headrests show flight information in front of Max and a news feed in front of Arcadia.

Papers spill out over Arcadia's, revealing grisly evidence photos. Max eyes them.

MAX

Some light reading for the flight?

Arcadia mumbles something and ignores him.

Max plugs in his earphones and tunes to an orchestra channel.

Arcadia looks up briefly at the small television screen on the seat in front of her. The headline reads "Mother of 'Mask Killer' speaks!"

ARCADIA

(whispering)

Shit.

She frantically digs through the seat pocket.

The screen shows a woman sobbing and dabbing her tears. Arcadia hits the call button repeatedly.

ARCADIA

Hello! I need some headphones over here right now! Please...

Arcadia looks at Max, his eyes closed and head nodding to the music. Arcadia taps him and pulls his headphones off.

ARCADIA

I'm sorry, I really need these!

Max looks shocked. Arcadia puts on the headphones and switches the plug. A FLIGHT ATTENDANT appears.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Is everything all right sir? Would you like me to find you a new seat?

Max's expression smooths out to practiced nonchalance.

MAX

Nothing at all. We're fine.

Arcadia is riveted by the newscast.

ARCADIA

Sorry...

The flight attendant turns and walks away.

Arcadia watches the interview, taking notes. Joanne sobs dramatically. Arcadia shakes her head.

ARCADIA

(whispering)

Bitch. You fucking bitch.

Arcadia sees Max watching her. She looks embarrassed.

ARCADIA

Sorry.

Arcadia puts down her pen, takes the earphones off and hands them to Max with an abashed smile. She doesn't want to look at him, but he leans over to make eye contact.

ARCADIA

Wow. I don't even know what to say.
I have to drive straight to a big
interview when I land...

Max holds his palm up towards her, smiling.

MAX

You're clearly a woman on a
mission. I hope you catch the
perpetrator and lock him up, or
whatever it is that you do?

ARCADIA

No, it's nothing--

Max points to his headphones.

MAX

Are you finished with these?

Max puts the headphones on and leans back. Arcadia, still looking a little embarrassed, turns off the screen in front of her and returns to her papers and laptop.

INT. COLUMBIA AIRPORT - DAY

Arcadia stands in the gate area, struggling with her mish-mash of half-zipped luggage and shopping bags.

Behind her a YOUNG MOTHER comforts her DISABLED CHILD. Max walks by them to talk to a gate agent.

Arcadia manages to find her cell phone and make a call.

ARCADIA

(on phone)

I saw the interview you gave --
that's a breach of contract...
Arcadia Grey, you signed an
exclusive contract with me...

Arcadia turns around and sees Max handing the disabled child a pilot wing pin, while the mother looks on in gratitude. The child grins at Max. Max pins the wings on the child's collar.

ARCADIA

(on phone)

"Emancipated minor" is just your
way of avoiding unpleasantness...

Arcadia watches as the child reaches up to give Max a hug. Max looks to the mother who nods her approval. He hugs the child and gives him a crisp salute.

ARCADIA

(on phone)

You signed the contract and you're
still bound by the terms.

Max takes his single rolling bag and walks down the concourse. The mother and child gather their luggage.

ARCADIA

(on phone, getting louder)

I don't care if you and your slimy
lawyer have legally destroyed a
goddamn mother-child relationship,
you fucking bitch!

The child looks fearfully at Arcadia, while the mother glares at her.

Arcadia picks up one of her tattered bags and the side pocket falls open, spilling her papers and crime scene photos. The child bursts into tears.

Max turns his head to look at them, but continues walking.

EXT. SUBURBAN MALL - NIGHT

A boxy 1980's style building that looks like any other suburban mall. Dusk and light rain soften the corners.

INT. SUBURBAN MALL BOOKSTORE- NIGHT

Arcadia speaks to an audience in a chain bookstore. About half the chairs remain empty. The fans are a motley lot. Arcadia clears her throat.

ARCADIA

(in an academic tone)

Crime...and punishment. Serious business, my friends. It is important that we, as potential victims, as concerned citizens, as Americans, that we understand the criminal mind. In order to do this we must closely examine the psyche of the criminal himself.

The audience members appear uncomfortable, wondering perhaps if they've wandered into the wrong author talk. But Arcadia suddenly changes her tone and manner.

ARCADIA

Fuck that academic bullshit!

The store employees look shocked. CHET (whose name-tag identifies him thusly) approaches Arcadia.

ARCADIA

(to Chet)

Untwist your panties Chester. I'll try to keep it clean.

(to her audience)

So, fu... screw the whole FBI profiler 'we have to understand the criminal in order to stop him' bull--B.S. Odds are, you and I will never be the victim of a psycho killer. Even though I know a few.

One greasy teen moves aside revealing Max standing at the back. Max's expensive suit and neat appearance stand out from the grungy patina on the rest of the crowd.

ARCADIA

But they're all dead or in prison. I may have a hard-on for these fu--screw-ups, but I'm not leading the psycho killer liberation front.

(MORE)

ARCADIA (CONT'D)

You and I, what we want to know is not some psychological profile of Charlie Manson or how to stop the next Ed Gein -- as if there could be another Ed Gein, right? We want to sit across from Ted Bundy and say 'What the Hell, man?'

Chet approaches the podium again.

ARCADIA

Oh come on, I can say Hell, it's in the Bible for Christ's sake!

The employees are clearly unhappy with this week's guest speaker. Max smirks. The fans love Arcadia.

ARCADIA

We want to ask what was it like to kill? How did it feel to tighten the noose? To stab flesh? To get the perfect head-shot? What was going on in your head when you got the first glimmer that killing would satisfy your hunger? When you planned your first encounter? When you met the woman -- or man, or child--

Here even this rowdy audience looks a bit taken aback. Max watches Arcadia intently.

ARCADIA

The one who would become your first human kill? That's right folks, it's not pretty. We don't want to be the bad guy. Just go for the ride, feel the excitement. That's what I offer you. No intellectual stimulation here, just cheap thrills.

Arcadia holds up her latest book and looks at it.

ARCADIA

Nineteen ninety-five. Thrills don't come much cheaper.

Arcadia beams at her audience as they hoot and whistle.

INT. SUBURBAN MALL - LATER

Arcadia sits at a table, her speech finished. She has a stack of her luridly titled books beside her. A few FANS stand in line. A SKINNY FAN gets his book signed.

SKINNY FAN

Yeah, you can just make it to "Ice Man." That was my name even before that ice killer guy. I'm not him, you know?

Arcadia smiles and nods at her crazy fan.

SKINNY FAN

Are you gonna write a book on that Ice Man? Maybe he'll get some more kills. Make your book more exciting, you know?

A bookstore clerk shoots a nasty look at the fan.

ARCADIA

Glad you're looking forward to that one already.

She pushes the book to him and motions a BUG-EYED FAN forward. Two staff members shake their heads in disgust.

BUG-EYED FAN

Make it to "Earl Hinman." Hey, man, is it true that you guys kidnapped some of your readers and dumped them in a psych ward?

ARCADIA

Not for my books. But yeah, they did that.

BUG-EYED FAN

Wow, cool. I wish that woulda happened to me. Freaking awesome!

Arcadia looks at him bemusedly as she finishes her signature.

ARCADIA

We all have dreams. Good luck.

Arcadia signs books for fans, some psychotic-looking and some near-normal. The clerks come over and start removing books. They can't get rid of this "guest of honor" fast enough.

Max approaches and picks up Ties That Bind And Kill.

ARCADIA
Did you want to buy one? I can
still sign it.

MAX
I don't read this... genre.

ARCADIA
What's your name?

She opens a book, holding her pen up. He pauses.

MAX
Max. But please don't.

ARCADIA
This one's on the house.

She signs the book and holds it out, but Max busies himself with his cell phone. The two of them walk to the store exit, both seeming unsure if they are attempting to stay together.

CHET
Hey, you're going to pay for that?

ARCADIA
Bill my publisher.

Chet sputters, but mostly is just glad to see Arcadia go.

INT. SUBURBAN MALL - NIGHT

Chet pulls the rolling door down behind them. Arcadia and Max walk through the nearly empty mall.

MAX
How long are you here for? Would
you like to join me for dinner?

ARCADIA
I ate. Earlier.

As they walk through the mall, employees pull gates down.

MAX
Your publisher truly had readers
thrown into a psychiatric ward?
That's pretty outrageous.

ARCADIA
Outrageous is what Slaughterhouse
Ten is all about.
(MORE)

ARCADIA (CONT'D)

They had this contest that was supposedly for "live interactive fiction." The three winners came in and signed releases. They were hypnotized and given suggestions that they'd been found insane. They were brought to a fake psych ward. Actors played the staff and patients. Then the zombies came. Zombies who the other "patients" pretended not to be able to see. One of the winners found a metal pipe and started taking out "zombies." And fellow contestants. Long story short -- big lawsuit.

Max's eyes widen.

MAX

Quite a stunt. Did that mark the end of "live interactive fiction?"

Arcadia laughs.

ARCADIA

There was never any such thing. It was just a promotion for a new book, Zombie Asylum.

Arcadia smiles. They exit the mall together.

EXT. SUBURBAN MALL - NIGHT

Rain glistens on the dark expanse of parking lot. Arcadia and Max pause under the overhang.

MAX

If you've eaten, perhaps drinks?

Arcadia glances at the timer. Twenty-six hours.

ARCADIA

Long day. Tomorrow too. I'm sorry about the headphone thing, but I've got to go.

Max looks disappointed at Arcadia's brush-off.

MAX

Walk you to your car? I promise to provide protection from any serial killers who might be awaiting you.

Max's smile almost convinces her, but she shakes her head.

ARCADIA

No, no, I'm good. Take care.

Arcadia hurries off into the rainy night. She holds a book over her head as a makeshift umbrella -- the book she had signed for Max. He watches her from the sidewalk.

INT. JAIL LOBBY

Arcadia awkwardly hugs WANDA HOLLOWAY, a woman in her 40s who looks like she's always had a hard life. A GUARD waits to the side.

GUARD

I'm sorry Wanda, sometimes they get all out of sorts at the end.

(to Arcadia)

This way, Ms. Grey.

Arcadia and the guard cross to the barred door.

Max walks down the hallway, but Arcadia doesn't see him. He wears black garb and a clerical collar. Max turns quickly into another hallway when he spots Arcadia.

Arcadia walks down the hall with the guard. Max comes out to the lobby and sits next to Wanda, comforting her.

INT. JAIL VISITING ROOM - DAY

Arcadia paces around the small, spare room. The guard brings in Josh, his wrists handcuffed in front of him. They sit. Josh holds up the pencil Arcadia has left on the table.

JOSH

I know fifteen different ways to attack you with this pencil. Some would kill you instantly and some would leave you writhing on the floor but give the guards time to come rescue you... Maybe. I don't have anything to lose. Do you?

Arcadia surveys him quietly. She opens her notebook, pulls a second pencil from her pocket and watches him.

JOSH

Did you talk to the bitch?

ARCADIA

No. But I just talked to Wanda. She badly wants to see you.

JOSH

Guess she shouldnt'a handed over her baby then. Fuck her.

Arcadia shrugs.

JOSH

I don't need any fucking mother. The bitch said I wasn't her son in her soul. Fucking tears my heart out.

He laughs. Arcadia nods and waits.

JOSH

I had these little dreams or whatever when I was a kid. I always hated the bitch and I figured she'd stole me from my real parents. Before she ever even told me I was adopted, we went to the Biltmore house... You know that mansion you can go on tours of?

Arcadia nods.

JOSH

As soon as we walked in there I knew, I mean really knew, that was my house. I'd been born there as one of the Biltmores--

ARCADIA

Vanderbilts.

JOSH

Whatever. I snuck away from the tour group when no one was looking and hid in this fancy bed with curtains. I was where I belonged, but then the fuckers found me. The bitch beat the shit out of me. And I think I'm banned from that place for life. Not that it really matters now. Jesus.

Arcadia reaches across the table. Josh pulls back.

ARCADIA

Alistair's wing is mending.

JOSH

I don't care about the fucking owl.
Only got him to piss off Joanne.
She's got some kind of bird phobia.

Arcadia nods and makes notes.

JOSH

Will my birthday party with Dr.
Death send our book to the top of
the best-seller lists?

ARCADIA

Don't worry about the book. See the
people who love--

JOSH

Fuck love! And fuck you too,
Arcadia. All I've got left is
imagining some kid reading my book
and thinking, that Josh, he was one
crazy motherfucker! It would've
been scary as fuck to hang out with
that motherfucker!

Arcadia nods. She looks at the timer and then the wall clock.

ARCADIA

Not much time. Tell me the rest.

JOSH

It's my fault I got caught, but
Monster fucked me over. I should
never have trusted anyone.

ARCADIA

The serial killer who helped you?

JOSH

Yeah, the one in jail who killed
six people?

ARCADIA

I checked that out. I thought I
could figure out who he was.

JOSH

You found him? Tell that fucker--

ARCADIA

Nobody fits the profile you gave
me. Either Monster didn't kill six
people or he isn't in jail.

JOSH

Whoever he was, he turned me in on Julia. I should have figured it out. He was starting to get angry and told me I wasn't listening to him. I'll never trust another human as long as I live.

Josh points at the timer and shakes his head.

JOSH

Guess that won't be too long.

INT. JAIL VISITING ROOM - LATER

A guard opens the door a crack.

GUARD

One minute!

He closes the door.

Arcadia and Josh stand. She opens the back of the timer, takes out a twisted hair-pin and holds it out to Josh. He holds his cuffed wrists up.

JOSH

You do it. I need to make sure you can take care of yourself.

Arcadia smiles and uses the hair-pin to unlock the handcuffs.

JOSH

Take care of that stupid owl.

Arcadia hugs him tightly and speaks softly in his ear.

ARCADIA

You're one crazy motherfucker.

INT. ARCADIA'S RENTAL CAR - NIGHT

Arcadia drives down a curvy, rural road. A box of Chinese food and her phone sit on the seat beside her. The phone rings. The caller ID reads "Columbia Prison."

A deer is suddenly in front of the car. She slams on the brakes. Her food carton flies off the seat, spilling on the floor. The deer, a buck with antlers, stands still.

ARCADIA

Shit! That was from the jail. If you were smaller I'd run you over.

The deer turns his head to look at Arcadia, his eyes glowing in her headlights. She scoops up some food and licks her fingers. The phone rings again. Arcadia answers.

ARCADIA

Josh?

CALLER (V.O.)

No, but I have information.

ARCADIA

Is he okay?

Arcadia glances at the timer. Fifty-five minutes.

CALLER (V.O.)

What I have could save Halston's life.

ARCADIA

Why aren't you bringing it to the police? They're going to fucking kill him in less than an hour!

CALLER (V.O.)

I'm not in a good position to talk to the police. If you want to see the evidence, go to Josh's last crime scene. You know it?

ARCADIA

Sure, the high school... Shit, are you Monster?

CALLER (V.O.)

Come alone.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Arcadia gets out of her car. It and a white VW Beetle sit alone in the lot. She copies down the VW's plate number.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT

Arcadia walks down the hall. There are no windows. She uses a small key-chain light which flickers on and off. She makes a call on her cell.