

THE EIDOLONS

FADE IN:

EXT. GRANT'S PASS PARKWAY - NIGHT

An hour before daybreak. MARK HINAULT, 32, cruises on a bicycle at a practiced cadence up a wide, scenic mountain highway, city lights in the distance.

His bike is a Specialized McLaren S-Works Venge, top of the line carbon body with expensive, splashy wheels and high-pressure Italian clincher tires.

Same with Mark's outfit, helmet, and accessories; all pro gear. Even his headlight costs a fortune and announces it with a blazing 2000 lumens.

You gotta have it, if you're serious.

Mark wants to be serious, but he's breathing hard, his lungs scraping loudly for oxygen.

He sees one of the very few streetlights along the state park road and he slows with a groaning wheeze.

MARK

Hnnnnnn. Hnnnnnnnn.

Stops. Unclips his feet and steps off the bike and sets it down. Hands on knees. Wheezing. Face a rictus.

He reaches into the backside pocket of his jersey and digs out an inhaler. Draws a desperate hit from it.

Hands on knees, then straightens to take another inhalation. Loosens his helmet strap.

As his breath calms, he looks out across the highway at the city lights and the first hints of dawn.

CLATTER -- an empty glass bottle skidding down rocks.

Mark startles, turns.

Nothing there. He notices a SHARP TURN sign. Looks a little deeper into the night. The cliff. As if recalling...

Nothing there.

He picks his bike back up, turns it around, and with only a quick glance over his shoulder he's back on the road.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A bachelor pad but decently sized, with an open kitchen nook.

Every wall is dedicated to the world of cycling; half a dozen bikes hang there amid posters, eight or nine helmets, flyers for races, framed and signed Lycra jerseys.

Mark works online in a corner office facing dual monitors. He is neatly groomed for professional presentation.

A video-conference box CHIMES and he clicks it -- the name below the box is EDDY CREST, 46, who appears on the screen.

Eddy has shoulder length hair, is more unkempt and rough hewn than Mark, but also calmer and more settled.

MARK

(to the monitor)

Eddy. Give me a second here, just finishing a review.

EDDY

(on monitor)

You called me, pal.

MARK

I know. Almost there. Hey, I got in some elevation this morning.

EDDY

Yeah? How'd those flat-lander muscles like that?

MARK

Not at all... Not, at, all.

Mark finally closes a link on the other monitor and then sits back. He enlarges Eddy's feed to full size.

EDDY

Whole different beast. Where'd you go?

MARK

Grant's Pass Parkway.

EDDY

Over the top? Radio Road?

MARK

Oh no, no no no. Not going off the highway yet. My lungs almost imploded as it was.

EDDY

Yeah, no shit. That's a solid three thousand feet. Solid. Radio Road's another two. That's the big one around these parts.

MARK

Are there homeless people up there?

EDDY

Who knows. But if there are, they don't want to be noticed, so just cruise on by.

MARK

I did. Still...

EDDY

Need the puffer?

MARK

A little bit. Bad asthma season's almost over. That's why I was thinking about Double Mountain.

EDDY

Oh no way. Mark, that's a pro race. You'd have to train seriously for a year to compete in that.

MARK

Not compete, just enter. They have a Category five ProAmateur race.

EDDY

Yeah, that's no hammerfest, buddy. You're a big-ring guy. We're talking something like four hundred miles in four days? Twenty four thousand feet of elevation. Get real. That's flat-out nuts.

MARK

It would be a huge deal for a chronic wheezer like me. You know, just getting across the finish line?

EDDY

Not if you died. Mark, seriously?

MARK

You're supposed to be my sponsor.

EDDY

For AA, not for pie-in-the-sky fantasies. And for the ladies, I'm your advocate. Got a date yet?

MARK

Haven't checked today.

EDDY

Work on that mountain, my friend.

MARK

You know what I see up ahead? A fork in the road. One way goes downhill, forever downhill, and one way goes up. I'm going up the Parkway tomorrow.

EDDY

Check your dating site inbox.

MARK

No. I mean, I will, but I got an unofficial nod on my article idea.

EDDY

Really? The conquering asthma thing?

MARK

Yeah. It sounds like Cycle Fanatic wants the article. That's huge, Eddy. My first actual for real published article.

EDDY

Good luck with that. Hey--I'm out.

MARK

Take it easy.

They sign off.

Mark stares at his screens, looks at his bicycle collection. Then he clicks to a dating site: HEART & SOUL.

INSERT MONITOR:

A message in his inbox. He clicks it, opens an email from LADY FROM LAKE COUNTY.

BACK TO SCENE

Mark scans.

MARK (CONT'D)

(reading)

"Hey CyclePro. Interesting match-up, huh? I've been through a co-dependent relationship too, so I'm with you on that. Call me if you want."

Mark stands up, excited, bothered. Shakes his hands to dispel nervous energy.

MARK (CONT'D)

Call me? Yes, call me! Call me if you want. Do I want? Oh, do I want?

He goes to a bike mounted on a repair stand, sits on a low stool next to it.

Mark has a wide array of maintenance tools and parts and he begins touching up the derailleur with a can of solvent and oil, wiping, polishing, moving the chain a link at a time.

MARK (CONT'D)

(practice phone call)

Oh hey, Lady. Oh hey, hello, "Julie." Greetings, "Amanda." Hi, Lady From The Lakes. Uh, hi, this is Mark, from the site? Hey, you said to call, Miss Lakes. Ha-ha. Hi, this is Mark. Yeah, yeah, from the site...

His eyes fairly gleam as he focuses on the gears. Safe in his zone.

EXT. GRANT'S PASS PARKWAY - NIGHT

Five a.m. No moon darkness, the city lights sparkling in the distance as Mark works against the elevation.

The Parkway is wide, with gentle turns and good shoulders. High above everything clusters of red lights on transmitter towers float in the stars like stoic UFOs.

MARK (V.O.)

(recorded voice mail)

...and I thought you should know I have asthma. It's not crippling, because I stay in good shape and eat good--eat well--you know.

(MORE)

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

Just wanted to present myself realistically, in case you're athletic, then you could probably kick my ass. Okay, I guess that's all. Call me back if you want. Bye.

After a moment -- BEEP:

EDDY (V.O.)

(recorded voice mail)

Jesus H, Mark. No. No. No! Do not leave a message like that. Listen, buddy, you're defined by who you are, not what afflictions you have. Don't put in any hand-wringing, low self esteem, touchy-feely shit in a message. Man up. Man the fuck up and just say hello, this is Mark, yeah, I'd love to hook up. I've got a big swinging dick and--okay, maybe not that. But you get my drift. Mark, you already got the goods. Just be yourself. Later.

CLICK.

Return to early morning quiet. To rhythmic breathing. The road advances in the bright pool of light his headlight throws.

Up ahead, an animal in the road.

It is a dead raccoon, freshly hit. Mark swerves to avoid it.

His breath spits and hisses, out of cadence. Stands on the pedals to regain speed, but then he sits, cruises, and finally stops. Snaps both heels off pedals.

Just ahead--the same SHARP TURN sign.

MARK

Fine.

He swings the bike around to go back and move the carcass off the road.

In the headlight -- an APPARITION.

A man-shape squats by the dead animal, fingers dug into the hide. A silhouette, stringy shoulder-length hair, mildly ogre-like build.

The dark shadow picks up the carcass and hunkers off the road into heavy brush up the slope. Scaling the steep hillside with animal speed.

Mark is stunned. He stares, his breath starting to come in tiny painful gulps.

A THRASHING sound -- in the brambles nearer to him.

Mark takes a sprinting vault onto his bike and hauls ass back down the Parkway.

EXT. PARK BENCH - DAY

Mark sits on a bench in the sunshine, helmet and shoes off, his bike leaning against the back.

Eddy pulls up on a bicycle, a run-of-the-mill town cruiser, and before dismounting, presents Mark with a thermos. He wears paint-splattered work pants and a Neurosis tee-shirt.

EDDY

Coffee.

Mark takes it.

MARK

Praise be the most high, Lord Java.

Eddy joins him. As they talk, they take swigs directly from the thermos, no cups available.

EDDY

So--a homeless camp up there or what?

MARK

I don't know, it was too dark, but it was all over that roadkill. Dude, seriously creepy.

EDDY

Why do you think it's the same guy?

MARK

I don't know that either, but it was. The shape? Something about it.

EDDY

The problem is you stopped. Remember what I said, just keep pedaling and you'll be okay.

MARK

Right? My life story so far... No, this thing, Eddy, it sensed me.

EDDY

Sensed you? Did this hobo take a tricorder reading or something?

MARK

Seriously. I could feel it. It picked up on something about me. I swear to god. Freaked me out. Look.

Shows Eddy goose bumps on his arm.

EDDY

You're freaking out about a homeless guy? You can't project all your twitchy angst on some penniless drifter.

Sharp glare from Mark. Chewing back words.

EDDY (CONT'D)

Look, forget it. You just keep riding, that's all you need to think about. Right?

(pats Mark's leg)

So, tell me.

MARK

You didn't like my message? Shouldn't I be sensitive and all?

EDDY

Shit no, man. A "Snag" is a sensitive new age guy. You should be forthright but elusive. Be a mystery. Strong, silent, dynamic. So, what are we talking, seven out of ten?

MARK

Eddy... She's nearly perfect. Which is perfect, I know. Her profile is like, like...unreal. She loves AC/DC. She reads books, fiction. She takes care of her diet, she's clean and sober--mostly--she loves rep movie houses, hates reality TV. She says if she was any religion, she'd be Zen. That's like spiritual, not religious, right?

EDDY

Eight out of ten?

MARK

Nine. Dude, that's the best match ever. I actually start trembling when I think about it.

EDDY

There's your problem, Snag.

He thumps Mark's head with a finger.

MARK

Right? I know. I know, I know.

EDDY

What's her name?

MARK

Not quite at that step. I know tons of details from her profile, almost like I already met her, but they don't give out names. She's Lady Of The Lake on the site.

EDDY

All right. No expectations, okay? Don't set the goals impossibly high. Is she looking for a life partner, or just a casual relationship?

MARK

You could ask me the same thing.

EDDY

My advice, put in a sixty, steady pace, then take a shower, have some chamomile tea, and give her a ring.

Mark flexes his hands; fists, fingers spread, fists.

EDDY (CONT'D)

You said you were ready for this.

MARK

I thought so. I guess I never believed I'd get a nearly perfect match. Maybe I was hiding behind that. Could be all I need is a casual date, break the ice and all.

EDDY
(chicken)
Buck buck buck--

MARK
Come on! It's been five years. I'm
more nervous than I was when I was
seventeen.

EDDY
Maybe that's all she wants too.
Only one way to find out.

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Mark ports his bike down the apartment stairs, which are narrow and steep. But his carbon bike is super light, doesn't weigh a thing. *What you pay for.*

On a landing a door opens just as he comes down.

ARACHNE JONES, 31, emerges, blocking him. She is very urban; violet tinted hair, tattoos galore, thrift-store chic clothes.

MARK
Whoops. Sorry.

She backs into her doorway to let him pass.

ARACHNE
No, that's okay.
(waves him past)
Cool bike.

Mark pauses.

MARK
Thanks.

ARACHNE
You're the guy up on Six A, right?
I would love to see that view.
You're the only unit that even has
a view.

MARK
Seniority, I guess. I was down on
two, five years ago. Only view I
had was that stupid Cyclefit gym.

ARACHNE

What's that crap all over your
bike?

He sets it down. Mark has hand-painted white letters in fine
script over much of the frame of his bike.

MARK

The best riders of all time. Every
day I pick one and dedicate the
ride to him.

ARACHNE

Wowzers. That's commitment. Do you
have Pee Wee Herman on there?

MARK

Who?

ARACHNE

So what name today?

MARK

I was thinking this guy.
(finger on name)

ARACHNE

The Cannibal?

MARK

Eddy Merckx. Greatest rider in
history.

ARACHNE

There's no great women riders?

MARK

Women? Yeah, sure, I guess. I mean,
it is pretty male-dominated, the
professional side, anyway.

He hoists his bike.

MARK (CONT'D)

Nice to meet you.

He gives a wave goodbye and continues down the steps.

Arachne's eyebrows briefly rise; whatever.

EXT. PARK ROADS - DAY

An hour past sunrise finds Mark on level ground, getting in miles but sticking to the flats.

At one point he coasts, looking up at the transmitter towers.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mark types at his desk/office.

INSERT - MONITOR:

Types in an email box: "Hello, Lady From Lake County. I've been swamped at work lately. I'll call soon."

Cursor pauses over SEND -- it skitters about, then -- CLICK.

Message sent.

BACK TO SCENE

Mark grits his teeth in an exaggerated show of nervous excitement. Tabs up another site.

INSERT -- MONITOR

An EFT payroll site. The prominent names: TABOOLA. OUTBRAIN. REVCONTENT. ZERGNET.

Mark's weekly click-bait total: \$13.85

MARK (O.S.)
Eat shit.

CLICK TO--

AMAZON CPM REVENUE...\$48.65

MARK (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Bite me.

RETURN TO SCENE

He stabs the power off on the monitor and swivels away from his home office, arms crossed.

In the background: A very faint echo; glasses CLINK, a busy bar, drunken LAUGHTER, the same CLATTER of bottle skidding down rocks.

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Mark locks his apartment and begins porting his bike down the narrow stairs.

The lights flicker, then go out.

MARK

Great.

He turns his bike headlight on, continues down.

THUD THUD THUD THUD -- footfalls on the stairs below.

MARK (CONT'D)

Hey! That the super?

Silence.

Mark sets the bike down and pulls a steel U-Bolt bike lock from a sheath behind the saddle, then shoulders the bike.

The stairs sway precipitously in the concentrated light.

Above the lobby, he stops to peer over the bannister into the small entryway. The streetlight outside the wrought-iron front gate casts a stockade of heavy shadows.

MARK (CONT'D)

Hello?! This is a private residence! You need to leave!

Mark sweeps the area by swinging the bike on his shoulder, but sees nothing.

He sets the bike down, the light still on, somewhat angled down. He ventures into the--

APARTMENT LOBBY

--and searches through the shadows. Only the rear entrance and mail-slot alcove are still in total darkness.

MARK (CONT'D)

Listen...if you snuck in, you have to leave. You hear?

Mark steps forth, brandishing the heavy lock.

TWO LEGS

from a person sitting on the floor, but recessed into the alcove.

MARK (CONT'D)
Hey man. Seriously, if I call the
police--

The legs withdraw into the darkness around the corner. Mark swings wide of the alcove, looking in, lock ready for a strike.

Nothing there. Turns, scans through the columns of darkness.

Up on the landing, the light from his bike shifts abruptly, as if someone has seized the frame.

MARK (CONT'D)
Whoa! Leave that alone--

He bounds up the stairs, only to lurch to a stop.

On the first landing, a black silhouette of stringy hair and compact frame. The Apparition steps forward, the bright light blinding Mark.

Mark stumbles back a step.

The thing advances down a step and for a split second the face is partially visible; bluish-white skin darkly mottled with cratered fistulae and savage scars.

MARK (CONT'D)
Hands off my bike you son-of-a-
bitch!

He wields the U-Bolt for a strike and dashes up. His bike flies through the air and crashes against him.

The light from the headlamp slashes wildly as Mark is knocked off balance. He clutches for the handrail but tumbles down head over heels. Lands hard.

Mark sees the Apparition leap through space and crash into him.

Then, hands shake him. The lobby lights are on.

For a moment--a dark shape, hair hanging in his face.

ARACHNE
Hey. Hey. Come on, Sport Boy. Hey.
I think you fainted.

MARK
What?

The stairway lights blink back on.

ARACHNE

There we go. I thought I heard a commotion down here. You know you have to actually drink some of that water, not just lug it around.

Mark sits up, rubs head. Looks around with deep misgivings.

MARK

No way.

ARACHNE

Yeah way. Dehydration kicked your ass.

Mark struggles to his feet, looks around the lobby.

MARK

I'm okay... It's all clear down here.

Arachne smiles wryly. Okay... Gives him a little wave as she heads for the front gate.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mark stretches with resistance bands.

A KNOCK at the door. Mark opens it and Eddy enters with a plastic bag.

EDDY

Food logs have arrived.

MARK

Thank god. I totally forgot to eat.

They sit on the couch and set out chips, peel foil away from burritos.

EDDY

You're not doing an amateur Double Mountain not eating. That's training for shit. And don't put that in your article.

MARK

I know. I had Biotest Surge, and some Vega Protein and vitamins. Without sponsored food, I'd be dead. I need this burrito like no tomorrow.

They chow down.

EDDY

Dude, there's an eighteen percent pitch on Double Mountain, second day, in the middle of nine thousand feet straight up.

MARK

Yeah. I'm working low gears tomorrow. Today was steady and flat.

EDDY

Good for you. Never relenting does not mean you have to vow some goddamn oath. Off days are allowed.

MARK

I'm not relenting on this burrito. But I'm going back up tomorrow. I'm writing this article and I finally have the angle I was missing. It's about me crushing Grant's motherfucking Pass.

EDDY

And not dying. I'm not finishing the article for you.

MARK

Yeah. But I need that pressure. I can't just continue reviewing saddles and shoes and derailleurs forever. I'll start drinking again if that's my life.

EDDY

Stop it. Don't fixate on a negative. You're infinitely better off than you were back then.

MARK

...Yeah, but Izzy was there.

A beat.

EDDY

I know it's tough, but Isabella had her own issues, they weren't your issues.

MARK

I know. But if I don't achieve something, if I can't get one stupid article published--

EDDY

Then you'll write another one.

MARK

I mean it, Eddy.

EDDY

You mean you have a new obsession. That what you're telling me?

MARK

If I can't make that puny-ass hill, I hope my heart explodes or my lungs collapse and I die doing what I like.

EDDY

Aw, poor little Marky, wallowing in the past but not existing here and now. Do I need to dole out a few choice aphorisms at this point?

Mark smiles, actually chuckles.

MARK

Right? Carpe diem and all.

EDDY

And the Lady Of The Lake?

MARK

Yeah, Yeah. I'm on it.

Pointed look from Eddy, but Mark goes back to eating.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mark is in bed, his laptop on the night stand near him. It plays a video of a bike race.

Mark watches, eyes glazed with sleepiness.

Heroes from the past, narrated in another language.

LATER

Mark is out. Lights down. Laptop CRACKLES, then:

INSERT -- VIDEO

A grainy VHS transfer to digital.

A remote road, forested, day. A Bike Rider (RED RIDER) is seen in full Lycra gear, helmet on. His motif, down to the gloves: fiery red with blazing yellow and orange flames.

RED RIDER

(on screen)

After they modified the bike I was good to go. Expect for the pain, and I had to learn to manage that without drugs. It was tough. My first ride was maybe half a mile.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

That's amazing, to suffer a major stroke and extensive nerve damage as well as the loss of motor control of your limbs, but you pushed yourself to the limits to overcome these handicaps.

RED RIDER

Yeah. None of the local bike clubs would have me. Too slow, too much of a handicap, I guess. Called me "the gimp." But I'll show them. Nothing's going to stand in my way.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

That's so inspiring.

RED RIDER

Thanks. And for all the local cyclists, you better look out for me. I'm coming for you. I haven't forgotten.

BACK TO SCENE

The video glitches, stuck on the last moment. The sound degrades to a slow RUMBLE, highly distorted.

RED RIDER (CONT'D)

(on Laptop)

I'm...coming...for...you...

Mark's eyelids twitch, crack open. But now silence prevails.

INT. APARTMENT LOBBY - NIGHT

Mark is ready, geared up, helmet on but not strapped, shoes dangling from the frame as he pads down into the lobby, which is lit normally.

He sets his bike down and heads for the mail alcove and is met there by Arachne, which elicits a frown of consternation.

MARK

Oh. Hi. Again.

ARACHNE

Earlier than god, huh?

MARK

You work this early?

ARACHNE

Coffee shop.

MARK

Ah. No wonder we keep running into each other. My name's Mark, by the way.

ARACHNE

Arachne.

Mark's face flickers with surprise but he does not respond as he opens his slot. Arachne starts to walk away but turns back.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

Who today?

MARK

Today?

ARACHNE

You know--the names.

She points at his bike. He closes his empty mail slot and walks over.

MARK

Good question. Pick one.

She closes her eyes and makes a game of putting a finger on the frame. Looks.

ARACHNE

Eidolon?

MARK

Okay, ha-ha. That's actually the name of the bike. I call it the Eidolon.

ARACHNE

A phantom, or apparition. I like it.

MARK

No. Eidolon means an ideal, like the higher form of something.

ARACHNE

Oh. I always thought ghost.

Mark shakes his head, but uncertainty lingers.

EXT. PARK ROADS - NIGHT

Early morning, still dark. Mark rides along the semi-rural roads on a well marked shoulder and occasional genuine bike path.

He slows and comes to a crossroads. The street sign: GRANT'S PASS PARKWAY. He stops, doing the standing jig to maintain balance.

He turns onto the Parkway, then pulls over below a streetlight.

Extracts a portable spirometer from his jersey pocket and blows into it. After a couple steady breaths: BEEP.

As he waits for the results, THREE CYCLISTS arrive at the entrance. Cyclist #3 pulls off his riding jacket.

MARK

Hey guys. Going over?

CYCLIST #1

Getting the els.

MARK

You guys pros?

CYCLIST #2

ProAm. Trying to qualify.

MARK

Double Mountain?

They all laugh in a that's-not-even-funny way.

CYCLIST #2

Maybe the GranFondo first. The Double's a total nut crusher.

MARK

I'm considering it.

CYCLIST #1

(nods at spirometer)

Not if you're sucking on that nipple, buddy.

Mark casually hides it under his arm.

MARK

Ha... Mind if I draft a bit?

CYCLIST #2

This is a serious team drill. We don't need dead weight.

Mark spreads his arms -- *what the fuck* -- but he's still holding the inhaler.

They are ready and click back onto pedals.

MARK

Thanks! I'll mention that in my next article for Cycling World. Three dipshit losers--

Cyclist #1 turns back.

CYCLIST #1

Hey, easy, man. Competition's cut throat. You know that.

CYCLIST #2

Maybe you can model those tights in Men's Health.

They chuckle as they take off.

EXT. GRANT'S PASS PARKWAY - NIGHT

Marks chases three sets of lights up the incline. His teeth show as he pushes hard to catch them.

Scenic, sweeping panoramas of urban lights below, stars bright in the western sky.

Mark's motion through space is defined by a splash of light; road reflectors, white lines, rumble cuts along the sharper curves.

His rhythm is usually carefully choreographed, but now he's raging.

Three dipshit losers can't dis him.

But he's losing distance. Losing breath.

HNNNNN! HNNNNN!

Eventually he stops and snaps his heels outward, releasing cleats.

Ahead -- the SHARP TURN sign.

Drops his bike. Wrenches helmet off and acknowledges the sign by slamming his helmet against it.

MARK
(top of lungs)
Fuck you assholes!

A coarse, wheezing, painful breath. He takes an inhaler hit.

ROCK TUMBLE from below.

Mark edges forward, carefully peers over the cliff.

A dark human shadow scales the nearly vertical cliff face. Spider like. Unnaturally quick.

Mark grabs his bike, gets on, rolls a few dozen feet down the road. But stops to look back.

Coming up over; hands, head and shoulders. A darkness with mass, rising. Standing.

MARK (CONT'D)
Hey. What--

The Apparition sprints at him.

Mark springs up on pedals and races away furiously.

Behind him -- TWACK TWACK TWACK TWACK --footfalls!

Glance back -- the Apparition chases him at inhuman speed.

Mark's lungs tighten. He issues a strangling whine but does not stop. He's faster. He's flying. The road is a tight blur in his headlight.

Finally, no sound of pursuit. But his breathing is a mess, a combo of snorted nose and mouth gasps and an audible compressed grunt with every exhale.

He fights for calmness. Takes a deep breath. His head goes down, then up, as he works with the mechanics of his lungs and pumping legs.

Head down, then coming up, tears streaking back across his ears and throat.

INT./EXT. PICKUP - DAY - TRAVELING

Eddy drives Mark in his pickup, bikes in the back. The day is turgid gray with advancing marine layer.

Winding upwards toward the tall broadcast towers.

EDDY

You'd think there would be reports of homeless encampments and run-ins if any of this were true.

MARK

You don't believe me?

EDDY

Listen, Mark... You did the twelve steps, but sometimes that's not enough. This fixation on an "evil" tramp is not a healthy sign.

MARK

The twelve steps were enough for me. Sometimes you need to leave things alone and not pick at scabs.

Sullen silence, gray as the day. Eddy drinks coffee.

MARK (CONT'D)

Here. Pull over.

Eddy parks a hundred feet from the SHARP TURN sign.

MARK (CONT'D)

What's the elevation?

Eddy digs his phone out, clicks on an app.

EDDY

Two thousand four hundred forty two feet.

MARK

That's it? Damn. Why's that hanging me up?

EDDY

Because you live at zero feet. Your former smoker lungs like all that oxygen.

MARK

No. This spot, the five point turn. I think we wrecked our van here once.

EDDY

You think?

MARK

I was blitzkrieged. Izzy was too, but she said she could drive.

A distant echo: BRAKES SCREECH, TIRES SKID, WHAM--metal against rocks.

Mark startles -- looks at Eddy, who is observing him closely.

EDDY

I'm going to make an assumption here, my friend. You haven't called that girl yet.

Finally a distracted little laugh breaks Mark's mood.

MARK

I met a girl in the apartment. Her name's Arachne.

EDDY

Arachne? That's a girl's name? I bet her parents kept a pet boa, you know?

MARK

I looked on her mailbox. It's Arachne Jones.

Eddy chuckles, Mark smiles.

EDDY

Aaaaand...? Let me guess--not blond?

MARK

It's not like that.

EDDY

No? Even if she's one out of ten on the Mark Hinault scale of impossible requirements, you couldn't do her?

MARK

She's not my body type--

EDDY

We're talking ten, fifteen pounds over anorexic? Isabella was not a healthy weight, my friend.

MARK

Nothing was healthy. I smoked a pack a day. We spent whole weekends living off potato chips, booze, and smokes. I mean, you met April after you got sober.

EDDY

And after I got divorced. Eighteen years I'll never get back.

A beat. Mark looks away.

EDDY (CONT'D)

So you bailed on website girl? The match that was so perfect that it made you wet your diapers?

MARK

Fuck off.

EDDY

Just saying. You've been on the site for a year and a half.

(beat)

You have to realize what battles to fight and where to spend your energy.

MARK

I see where this is going.

EDDY

You don't see where this is going. No Double Mountain. Cyclists have to train like pros to even enter the Cat five race. Twenty four thousand feet of el? Jesus, Mark. Get real. Just... Write your article. Concentrate on that.

MARK

I am! But it's about going over
this exact road.

EDDY

It's about your goals and handicaps
and your unique life. It's--

MARK

The editor wants a draft in two
weeks. That means I have less than
ten days to train and get over this
hump, or die trying.

EDDY

"Or die trying." Here we go again.
They want an article, Mark. It
doesn't have to be the actual
goddamn truth.

Mark glares laser beams of self-righteousness.

Eddy's reply is to start the truck.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mark enters and stows his bike on a wall hook.

Goes into his --

BEDROOM

--as he peels off his jersey.

He catches a glance of himself in the mirror. His bibbed
leggings, his muscular, trim form. Flexes.

He could model those. Hell yeah he could.

Nods in approval.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM

Mark works at his office desk reviewing riding gloves, which
he has at least a dozen of at hand.

BING -- a video-conference alert.

Clicks it and on screen is DUANE GREEN, editor.

DUANE
(screen speakers)
Mark.

MARK
Hey Duane. What's up?

DUANE
Well, your column, for one.

MARK
I turned it in yesterday.

DUANE
Yeah.
(reads from tablet)
"The new Mavic line of cushioned
gloves are better suited for
bowling, or they might lend an
otherworldly sensation to
masturbation."

A beat.

MARK
No?

DUANE
Mark. We want snark, we expect
acerbic, witty reviews. That's your
whole M.O. But, did you even try
these on the road?

MARK
Sorry. They can't all be home runs.

Disappointed moue from the Editor.

MARK (CONT'D)
I've been doubling down on the
article.

DUANE
You're paid to write a column.
Double down on that. Take another
shot at this week's. Okay? You can
do better.

MARK
All right. I will. Is there any up
front money for a full length
article?

DUANE

We agreed it was on spec.

MARK

Right. It's just things are getting close to the bone around the old mansion here.

DUANE

Sell that Eddy Merckx I see on the wall behind you.

Mark glances behind himself, turns back with a look of utter disbelief.

DUANE (CONT'D)

Tomorrow please, by noon.

BLIP.

LATER

Still writing, but now flagging visibly, yawning, a permanent smirk on his face.

He gets up and goes to the kitchen counter, where he stabs a button on the blender, remixing a smoothie already loaded.

Catches his own reflection in the black glass door of his microwave oven. He steps nearer, framing his face.

MARK

Hey, listen, Duane. You rewrite the column. How about that? Think you can do better? Maybe I'll see what these gloves feel like while I'm pounding your peevish little face, jerk off!

Mark cocks a fist at the reflection. Increases his angry expression. Tries another stance, both fists up.

MARK (CONT'D)

Fuck you too, deadweight.

PFFFT! Walks away.

LATER

Feet up, smoothie long gone, a video is playing on his TV but Mark is out.

INSERT - TV

Another grainy analog to digital video, outdoors.

RED RIDER

(on screen)

If you're not a pro, a sponsored rider, then you're nothing but an obstacle on the road. But I'm going to prove them all wrong. I'm going to take them down. They can try to stop me. See what happens.

BACK TO SCENE

ZZZZZZZZZZTTTT -- a set of bike gears turning.

Mark snaps awake. Notices the TV still on, clicks it off.

Mark rubs his face with both hands, then sees--

THE APPARITION

--on the couch next to him. A partially decomposed face barely discernible under a veil of scraggly blond hair.

MARK

Hagh!

He springs up just as the thing does. They clench. Mark is pushed back and trips on the coffee table --CRACK!-- it collapses.

A moment of scurrying panic--dark limbs thrashing, the Apparition SNORTING, GRUNTING, making a SLOBBERING sound.

Mark SHRIEKS and drives the darkness away. They crash into a wall and a couple bikes are dislodged.

Mark launches himself into the--

BEDROOM

--and runs directly into his--

BATHROOM

SLAM! Locks the door. Lights on.

Silence, hunkered near the door. Panic breathing.

KNOCK KNOCK.

MARK

What do you want?!

KNOCK KNOCK

ARACHNE (O.S.)

(distant shout)

Hey, it's me. You got a package.

A beat.

MARK

What?

ARACHNE (O.S.)

You got something!

Mark opens the bathroom door. The short hallway is empty. He ventures out. The evidence of physical altercation is still evident, bikes dislodged, coffee table overturned.

ARACHNE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

(outside door)

Remember me? I don't think you should leave this overnight in the mail room.

Mark straightens up the mess quickly, deeply rattled. Goes to open the door.

Arachne is in the hall with a packaged box.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

Tah-dah. Deliveries.

MARK

Arachne. Hey.

ARACHNE

Here you go.

(hands off item)

So, I was hoping to take a peek out your window.

MARK

Oh.

(looks over shoulder)

Sure. Come on in. Sorry, I'm blasted from working all day. The place is a mess.

ARACHNE

Ah. Oh wow.

(looking at bikes)

(MORE)

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

You're really in deep with the bike
lust. You must have great stamina,
Sport.

Dazed, staring at her until she lifts her eyebrows.

MARK

Yeah. I guess.

Mark goes to the kitchen counter and uses a knife to open the
packing tape, then lifts a bicycle saddle out. His eyes
ignite with joy.

ARACHNE

A seat? You have four extra ones
hanging on the wall right there.
And two on that shelf. And one on
every bike here.

MARK

Not a Selle San Marco Concor Carbon
FX in red I don't. Do you know who
rides these saddles?

ARACHNE

Bike riders?

She goes to the window, looks out.

Mark takes his McLaren Venge down and begins to swap the
saddle, still casting doubtful glances around.

ARACHNE

I knew it. You have a killer view.
Lucky you. Hey, from my kitchen I
can see that Cyclefit gym you were
grousing about.

MARK (CONT'D)

(not looking up)
Grousing?

She comes over to where he works.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

Do you write for a biker magazine
or something?

MARK

Cyclists. Bikers ride motorcycles.

ARACHNE

Right. I think I knew that. My ex
rode a Harley.

(MORE)

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

Rode it right into an oncoming
Semi. Blood alcohol point one
eight. The rest of his blood was
all coke, meth, THC, and trans-
fats.

Mark stops, thrown out of his zone. He stands.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

Words like daggers, huh?

MARK

Sorry.

ARACHNE

Guess what his name was.

MARK

Um... Harley?

She laughs.

ARACHNE

No. Mark.

MARK

I don't know.

ARACHNE

It was Mark, dumbass.

She rolls up a sleeve, revealing a tattoo.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

That's why I got this. Ghost Rider.
It's like those names on your bike.

He starts to say something, then shakes his head.

She notices a framed photo standing inexplicably on the
coffee table that just toppled. She picks it up. A photo of
Mark and Isabella in better days.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

Oh my god! Look at her hair. She's
gorgeous. I'd kill for hair like
that.

Mark takes the picture from her, clearly disturbed.

MARK

Yeah, yeah, I--I shouldn't have
left that out.

ARACHNE

Your ex?

MARK

Yes. Isabella. Izzy... She, didn't, she...had the most beautiful hair in creation. It was like sunlight.

ARACHNE

I went platinum blonde once. Mark hated it. Hated it. I thought it looked cute.

Frown -- *what are we talking about?* The photo still in his hands. Isabella.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

Guess I'll leave you to it.

MARK

Sorry, Arachne. Yeah, I'm fairly obsessed with cycling. Hey, so...where do you work? Wait--you said coffee shop?

ARACHNE

It's kitty corner to the front entrance. Two doors down from your odious toy gym. You should come in some time, say hi.

MARK

I'm out the door at four-forty five a.m. But I could get a muffin. Do you have high protein, gluten free muffins? No sugar?

ARACHNE

Sure.

She boldly runs a finger down his torso, starting at his chest, going low.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

Like you need to diet.

MARK

I know. Part of obsession is neurosis. And mania. All franchise assets.

ARACHNE

I'm obsessed with modern jazz dancing and getting ink done.

MARK

I like the dancing part. Better than sitting on a fake bike and getting pumped up to rave music while some underwear-model instructor yells at you.

ARACHNE

Whew. I think it's more a social thing.

MARK

Exactly. Pure bullshit.

ARACHNE

Not into commingling with humanity? Meeting people in real space?

Mark shakes his head derisively, but is somewhat put off by the implications.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

Not into tattoos, either? You should see some of my hidden treasures.

Mark nods perfunctorily, not really catching her come on.

She heads for the door. He follows after a beat.

MARK

Thanks for bringing that up. That was really nice of you.

ARACHNE

No problem.

She steps out, half turns back.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

Hey Sport, you ever ride anything besides bikes?

MARK

Not any more. I grew up skateboarding, and surfed for one summer, but...cycling is it for me.

She smiles coyly and waves as she walks away.

Mark swings around and his eyes fix on the new bike seat.

Carbon rails! Come on.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mark sits on a stool at his kitchen counter.

His dinner is on three plates; a large steak on one, an entire head of steamed broccoli on another, and on the third plate is two baked potatoes amid a heap of spaghetti.

Also, a half gallon milk carton, open, no glass in sight.

In the background, almost subliminal; a bottle SHATTERS.

MARK (V.O.)
(very distant)
Goddamn it! You stupid goddamn
bitch!

ISABELLA (V.O.)
(very distant)
You put it there, asshole! Now we
have nothing to drink but box wine.

MARK (V.O.)
I already drank that. You can lick
that off the floor.

ISABELLA (V.O.)
You drank all my wine?! What kind
of low-life would do that?

MARK (V.O.)
The kind that lives with you.

ISABELLA (V.O.)
You're trash, you know that? You're
just white trash.

Mark grabs a fork and jams it into the steak.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mark is back at the DOUBLE MOUNTAIN site, the entry page and his Shopping Cart ENTRY FEE.

\$695.00.

A moment as fingers tap restlessly on the mouse, gathering determination, then -- CLICK.

It's on. It is so on.

EXT. GRANT'S PASS PARKWAY - NIGHT

Climbing. Getting El. Mark is locked into cadence, pushing a handful of light up the broad Parkway before the sun has touched the eastern sky.

As he rides, he speaks into his phone via an earbud and mic.

MARK

(into mic)

Eddy! Dude man. I did it. I did it.
Did it did it did it did it. Sad
sack randonneur Mark Hinault lives
up to his namesake and enters
Double Mountain. Dude! Can't stop
me now. Feeling better every day.
I've gained one point four pounds
of solid leg muscle already. I'll
be over this little hill in no time
and then I'll be writing articles
for every cycling zine and blog in
existence. Hope you're already
rolling, 'cause I'm past the
thousand foot mark. See ya soon.

He pinches the disconnect.

Riding.

The city lights below sweep into full view as Mark continues to work the pistons that are his legs.

He sees the SHARP TURN sign and barrels past it.

Fist clench, arm pump.

EXT. RADIO ROAD - NIGHT

Ahead--the Radio Road turn off, yellow Forest Service gate barring entry off hours.

And an oddly angled light on the ground. As Mark approaches, slowing, his headlight reveals a bicycle on the ground, front wheel still spinning, headlight on.

Mark drops his bike and hurries over.

MARK

Eddy! Eddy!

No sign of his buddy. Mark lifts the bike, swings it around to shine the light on road, bushes, the yellow gate, more undergrowth, the road ahead--

EDDY'S HEAD

decapitated, sideways in the road and trailing a long smear of blood.

Mark fights back rising bile. He grabs the U-Bolt from its holster behind his saddle a moment before --CREAK-- the yellow gate swings open.

Mark turns his bike to see the Apparition, a silhouette blacker than the night. His light does nothing to reveal the thing except a flash of waxen, mottled facial skin.

The Apparition runs straight at him.

Mark lifts his bike and rams it into the phantom. It hits with a physical THUNK and Mark swings the lock.

Misses. His own bike upends and is shoved violently at him.

Mark rages -- slapping the bike away and attacking with the lock. He connects with something -- WHAP!

Then he is body-slammed, lifted off his feet and carried with hideous strength across the Parkway and hammered into the steep rocky slope on the other side.

A brutal fist slams into his abdomen.

The stars whirl. The Apparition is close, punching again, powerful sternum shots.

The landscape tilts vertically, the earthen surface near Mark's eyes, then the road. A sick ripping of flesh on asphalt.

Long moments of sideways vision, darkness, Eddy's head lit up by a headlamp.

EDDY
(his head)
Marky... Did you call her yet? The
Lady of the Lake?

Mark is in the road, damaged, without oxygen, but his lips move as if replying.

Headlights from an approaching vehicle.

Mark is able to partially lift his head, but his skin is turning blue from asphyxiation. Waves a hand.

The small truck slams on brakes. Skids to a stop mere feet away. A door opens.

Eddy runs up to him, gets his helmet off.

EDDY (CONT'D)
Mark! For god's sake! Where's the
inhaler?

He dashes over to Mark's bike and digs into the tiny zippered bag under the apex. Dashes back, sits, lifts Mark's head up and squeezes a hit into his mouth.

EDDY (CONT'D)
Come on, try to get that down.
Mark, listen to me.
(demonstrates inhale)
Second hit. Come on. Please.

He administers another dose. Shows Mark how to suck down a deep breath.

Mark croaks, his arms flail.

EDDY (CONT'D)
That's it. You're back. You're
back. It's okay. You augered the
road, man. Fucking augered it.
Hey... Now we know. Come on, sit
up. Jesus, look at your side, look
at your arm.

Blood from wide but shallow pavement scrapes.

EDDY (CONT'D)
Let's get you out of the road.

INT. EDDY'S TRUCK - DAY - TRAVELING

Sunrise catches Eddy driving down the Parkway, two bikes in the back. Mark wraps a tee-shirt around his bloody forearm.

EDDY
You realize what happened at this
point?

Mark shakes his head.

MARK
I think it followed me. In my
apartment...it's--

EDDY
Exactly! All that crazy shit you've
been spouting?
(MORE)

EDDY (CONT'D)

You've been hyperventilating, then having asthma flares. Your brain was literally starving for oxygen and hallucinating.

Mark shakes his head dully.

MARK

There was a picture of Izzy. And the five point turn back there, I was never supposed to make it past that. It went psycho.

EDDY

Mark. Look at me. You said my head was in the road, talking to you. My head? Where is my head right now? No--look at me. Mark. Focus.

MARK

There was something else in our apartment lobby.

Eddy pounds the steering wheel with a fist.

EDDY

You went psycho, dude! YOU went psycho. Just listen to the shit coming out of your mouth. You have to stop. You never could do elevation and you never had psychotic visions before you tried.

A long beat as Mark broods, fussing with the tee shirt bandage.

MARK

Any Ibu, or Tylenol?

EDDY

No, but we'll be at St. Mary's in fifteen minutes.

MARK

I don't need a hospital.

EDDY

Not for the road rash. We're getting your lungs checked out.

Mark looks ahead, swaying a bit to manage the pain.

MARK

Twenty percent of Olympic cyclists
have exercise induced asthma.

EDDY

They have bronchoconstriction, and
they don't fall over in the road.

MARK

I think I just need to warm-up
more, put my lungs in what they
call a refractory state. It worked
today. I got up a half hour earlier
and--

EDDY

You got up at three thirty?

MARK

Yeah. It worked.

EDDY

Are you sure it worked? 'Cause this
doesn't look like something that
worked.

MARK

Exercise can reverse it. That's why
I'm doing this and writing about
it. I want a permanent refractory
state. You know? Right now I feel
like I don't have one good leg to
stand on.

EDDY

You're sober. How about that?

MARK

(not consoled)

Yeah...

Eddy looks at him, shakes his head.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mark enters, stiff legged, his torso wrapped under his shirt
and right forearm professionally bandaged. He carries a
stapled prescription bag to the couch and plunks down.

Mark opens the pharmacy bag, takes out pain meds, cracks the
container.

A couple pills in hand, and the faint echo again; glasses CLINK, a ROWDY bar, a drink being SHAKEN, poured out.

MARK

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Throws the pills down the hatch and drinks from a bicycle water bottle, which is followed by the thousand yard stare.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mark works in his corner office, websites of cycling gear on display.

BING! -- Eddy's name pops up in a video-conference box. Mark enlarges it to a quarter screen.

EDDY

(on monitor)

Mark. You're at home. Thank god.

MARK

Have a review to turn in today. New Italian saddles.

EDDY

Cha-ching, another forty bucks.

MARK

The hospital bill is going to just about drain Izzy's inheritance dry.

EDDY

How's the strawberry patch?

MARK

(shows forearm)

Sore, stiff.

EDDY

You better get a refund on that Double Mountain entry fee, speaking of stiffed.

MARK

No refunds.

EDDY

Come on man, this is a legitimate medical excuse.

MARK

No excuses. It's four and a half months away. I'm still in and I'm still turning in this article. Honest, truth-telling, my struggle and my triumph.

EDDY

You have to be shitting me.

MARK

Riding. Hopefully tomorrow. I'll see how the trainer feels.

EDDY

Goddamn it, Mark.

MARK

Ride or I might as well start drinking again.

EDDY

Don't give the world of absolutes credence or power over you. And obsessions can eat you alive.

MARK

Thanks for scraping me off the road, buddy. Hey, I'm almost done with this review. I gotta get back to it.

Eddy pulls a face, then his VC box goes blank.

Mark gets up, goes to his trainer. He tries to swing up while nursing his forearm, but it's too painful. But he manages to get on from the other side.

Keeping his injured arm in the air, he tries pumping along with one leg. His jaw is set hard despite the absurdity of the effort.

LATER

Sticking to routine, Mark has donned riding clothes, but is still in slippers. He makes a smoothie, the array of sports additions on the counter:

Protein powder, pre work-out formula, MCT oil, green powder, a dozen vitamin bottles.

After blending, he brings it over to his work station along with a handful of supplements.

Gotta stick to the routine.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The movie AMERICAN FLYERS is on, and Mark stands near his coffee table peeling away the hospital dressing around his torso.

The wound is all surface scratches, but a solid swathe of it.

He applies an antibiotic gel, then sits, peels the bandage off his forearm.

With the TV remote, he switches sources to a networked computer feed. Using a wifi track pad, he launches into a pro gear sight.

Helmets. Cycling through helmets, the very best, what the athletes currently use. Always checking the names of the living legends.

His cell phone BUZZES on the coffee table. He taps it.

MARK (CONT'D)
(speakerphone mic)
This is Mark.

DUANE (V.O.)
(on speaker, static)
Mark. Column rewrite--noon?

Mark sits bolt upright, picks up the phone.

MARK
Oh shit. Duane, sorry. I wiped out today. Had to go to the emergency room.

DUANE (V.O.)
Yikes. How bad?

MARK
Skid marks. Nothing broken. They gave me pain stuff, and I kinda checked out. So sorry. I can--

DUANE
No worries. Our copy editor, Matt, had a few witty suggestions, so we used those. It's a done deal.

MARK
What? Matt? He's an intern.

DUANE

Still attributed to you, don't worry.

MARK

He can't write my words.

DUANE

Going to press. Deadlines are called deadlines for a reason. Hope you're back in the saddle soon.

MARK

Yeah, tomorrow--

CLICK -- DIAL TONE.

Mark hangs his head, suppressing rage.

He cocks his arm, ready to throw his cell phone at the TV, but makes himself put it down.

Grabs the pill bottle and shakes out three more.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sleeping, the bottle of pills next to Mark on the bed and his laptop softly plays an archived video; Giro D'Italia, or the Tour of Flanders...

HIIIIZZZZ -- HIIIIZZZZ, tortured alveoli, stressed lungs.

Mark shifts restlessly, eyes crack open dully.

MARK'S POV SEGMENT:

The Apparition is on the screen of his laptop, nothing but the dark outline of its head.

Mark groans and rolls away.

EDDY'S HEAD

--next to him in bed.

Mark clenches, struggles against dopey muscles to rest on his back, looks at the ceiling.

Darkness, though the laptop throws harsh light and shadows up on the ceiling. Sounds, distant but louder this time: Car BRAKES, SWERVING, THINGS CRASHING, METAL STRIKING ROCKS.

And silence, followed by: HHHIIZZZZZ -- HHHIIZZZZZ.

Mark becomes aware of the Apparition, sitting on his chest. A dark looming man-thing. Crushing the life from his lungs.

Leaning closer, the Apparition's hair shrouding Mark's face. A dead thing. Closer.

BACK TO SCENE

Mark tries to thrash, but the weight is too great.

GGGNNNN -- throat convulsing.

Mark manages to get his injured arm free for a mighty swing upward, throwing himself into a sitting position with a howl of pain from his side wounds.

A swing at nothing.

He is alone in his bed. He gasps, raking in air.

He looks at his injured forearm and the shaking fist. Flexes the fingers, then picks up the pill bottle and gets out of bed.

INT. BATHROOM

He dumps the contents of the bottle into the toilet, flushes.

Hand on chest, he picks up a larger digital spirometer from the counter and blows into it.

Numbers tick on the LED screen, then the device prints a graphed receipt that he tears off and glares at.

Breathing is hard. Wheezing continues long after each exhalation.

He tries to read the label of the pill bottle but that makes him dizzy.

Drops it on the floor, takes a woozy step, crashes into the doorframe, scraping his wounded side and forearm.

MARK

Ahhhhg!

He staggers out to the--

KITCHEN

--and leans on the island like a life raft. Picks up his landline phone, dials.

After a couple rings, a muffled voice answers.

MARK (CONT'D)

Hi. I was there in the emergency room earlier, and was prescribed Percocet, and I think it's making my asthma flare up... Yeah, of course I have one, but... Okay. I'll try.

He finds the inhaler on the coffee table -- along with a ladies bicycle helmet with flower decals. It stops him cold.

And nearby, another framed 4x6 photo of him and Isabella. She wears the helmet as they pose with a tandem bike. Her long golden blonde hair spills out in braids.

Mark backs away, clutching his side.

FLASHBACK INT. TWEAKER PAD - NIGHT

(NOTE: the exact same room, except:)

Flies buzz. The grimy, threadbare carpet is piled with trash, clothes, magazines and papers, camping gear, an aluminum trash can filled with beer bottles.

A light shifts. The microwave above the oven is open and casts wan light. A SCUTTling sound from behind the island.

Mark approaches cautiously.

Legs, somewhat emaciated, jerk and pull into the cabinet under the sink.

He squats. In the dark little space, a human form. It looks like Isabella but the hair is savagely hacked at shoulder length. Her eyes reflect like a cornered cat.

MARK

What... What... I can't--

ISABELLA

You left.

MARK

No. Izzy. What did you do?

ISABELLA

Take me...

A thin hand reaches out. Nails destroyed, needle tracks up and down the inner elbow.

Mark considers for an agonizing moment, then collapses back against the island.

Movement, peripheral.

Isabella, in her dying, rake-hell junkie days, now walks toward the door.

Mark goes after her.

MARK

Izzy... Please. Wait--

Pushes out into the--

STAIRWELL

--as she takes the stairs down. She glances up at him, the shining eyes, the gray skeletal teeth flashing in a smile of sad delirium.

She waves for him to follow.

Mark is torn. But he backs away. Closes the door. Forehead against the wood.

END FLASHBACK

Mark finds himself at the door.

HHHHNNNZZ -- his breath.

Turns --

JUXTAPOSE -- Mark's place, and the tweaker pad just visited.

Mark blinks, grits teeth, seeing both.

But he latches onto his trainer bicycle. Holds tight for dear life.

He gets on and begins pedaling.

Fighting, weakly, but furiously.

After a short spell, sinking his breath into a rhythm, concentrating on the pedometer, the JUXTAPOSED apartment from the past begins to FADE.

Pedaling faster. Faster. Clearing out.

LATER

Mark dismounts with a gasping wheeze. The inhaler is on the kitchen counter. He goes over and takes a hit.

The cabinet under his own sink. That cabinet...

Mark sinks down, back against the island, staring at the little closed door. But breathing at last.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mark works out with resistance bands, grimacing at the scrapes on his bare forearm.

A KNOCK at the door.

MARK
(to closed door)
Yes?

ARACHNE (O.S.)
Hey, it's AJ again. Your downstairs neighbor?

He opens the door and she hefts his McLaren off her shoulder.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)
Once again, deliveries.

MARK
Hey... What the hell?

ARACHNE
I just ran into your pal Eddy. Nice guy. Too bad he's married. Anyway, he seemed like he was in a hurry so I volunteered to Sherpa your Big Wheel up here.

MARK
Oh my god--you carried this up six flights?

ARACHNE
Doesn't weigh a thing.

MARK
And that jerk let you?

ARACHNE
Hey--modern jazz, not to be taken lightly. How's--oh jeez, Sport, that's not good.

Mark looks down at his forearm, lifts up his jersey for inspection as well.

MARK

All surface. Not that bad.

ARACHNE

If you like wearing bacon.

MARK

Thanks, Arachne.

ARACHNE

Not a problem.

He wheels the bicycle in, she stands in the doorway.

MARK

Come on in, if you want. I don't have food or anything...

She enters.

ARACHNE

No food? You can't entertain the starving oinker from downstairs without food.

MARK

"Oinker." You just lugged a bike up one hundred forty four steps.

ARACHNE

The exact count.

MARK

What I meant by food is snacks. Have a look, you'll be shocked.

Arachne opens a cupboard filled with protein powder, pre and post drink mixes, full boxes of GU Gel Shots, boxes of energy bars, cases of Hammer Perpetuem.

In the next cabinet, more of the same along with a shelf full of pasta and other carbo-loading foods.

MARK (CONT'D)

I have soft sponsorship with these companies. Mention them in my column and a box shows up in the mail.

ARACHNE

Wow. Never mind the muffin I offered.

MARK

Oh, I'll eat junk, for sure, but I don't keep it here. Except for ice-cream. Check it out.

He opens his freezer to reveal half a dozen cartons.

MARK (CONT'D)

Pick one.

ARACHNE

Not a dairy person, but thanks.

MARK

I understand. Gotta know your strengths and weaknesses. Hey, Arachne, could I ask your opinion about something?

ARACHNE

Sure. The color of your next bike? How about black? And a black outfit, black helmet, everything, so at night you're just a pod of red lights floating down the road.

MARK

(uncertain)

Ha...

LATER

They sit at his corner office and he brings up the HEART & SOUL dating sight. Arachne slaps the desktop in surprise, which startles him.

ARACHNE

No fucking way! There's no fucking way you're on here.

MARK

I thought, with all my baggage, I should just put it all out there and see if there's a match. I'm a lot to put up with.

ARACHNE

You mean with all the bikes? You just need a bigger place.

MARK

I already have some in storage.

She whistles in derisive appreciation.

MARK (CONT'D)

But I'm talking about... I was, I am an alcoholic, so I can't go to bars for hook ups.

ARACHNE

Is that what you want? Booty-calls?

MARK

No, not at all.

ARACHNE

I don't drink out of choice. It just never did anything for me, especially after Mark died.

MARK

What? I -- oh that's right, you said that was his name.

ARACHNE

(pantomime phone)

Context, calling the only Mark in the universe...

MARK

Yeah. Sorry, I get caught up. But drinking did a lot for me...all bad in the end. Ended with my Ex... She died from it. She drank herself dead, a couple days after I left her.

She puts a hand on his arm.

ARACHNE

Sorry I brought it up.

MARK

That's all right. It was another lifetime ago at this point. But this sight--

ARACHNE

I can't believe you're on here. This is just too much.

MARK

It's not that bad.

ARACHNE

And you hate the Bicycle gym
because why?

MARK

Here it is.

Mark pulls up the Lady From Lake County profile. Arachne only glances at it, but she regards him closely.

MARK (CONT'D)

See? She matches me at ninety
percent.

Mark looks at her, then back at the screen.

ARACHNE

Jesus... Do you want ninety
percent?

MARK

Isn't that the goal on these sites?

ARACHNE

I guess, but, wouldn't it be like
masturbating or something? Don't
you want new and different
influences, points of view?

He fidgets.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

Mark--

(reading his responses)

--did you call her? She said to
call.

MARK

I pinged her back... But--

ARACHNE

The possibility of rejection
holding you back?

A beat. She looks at him as he looks at the screen.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

Well, CyclePro, you asked for my
advice, so brace yourself, it's
going to be brutal... Call her.

Mark looks at the space between the screen and her.

MARK

You don't think ninety percent is good?

ARACHNE

It's your call. I know my Mark liked Heavy Metal and I liked Jazz. He went for Dramas and I'm a Grindhouse girl. You see how those don't even match up? He should be the Jazz guy, I should listen to Slayer.

Mark nods, glances at the screen.

MARK

Isabella died five years ago. I should be over it, but I have this mountain of baggage and I don't want it anymore. I don't know how to start over. How do you start over?

Arachne gets up, swivels his chair away from the desk, and straddles him.

ARACHNE

Start with this.

She kisses him. It's an insistent, deep kiss. His hands and fingers flutter and then gently land on her sides.

She breaks off. Mark is so much cosmic dust.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

They make love by the light of neon signs reflected onto walls and ceiling from a window.

Arachne is vocal and having a good time. Mark is locked in, the lean mean machine of his body efficient and powerful.

She rises to climax, fingers raking, rhythmic breath becoming a long moan of ecstasy.

ARACHNE

Yeah. Take me. Take me...

She finishes with a long purr of ecstasy though he doesn't seem to notice and maintains his cadence.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

Uh-oh. What have I gotten myself
into? I knew you were Mr. Stamina.

MARK

(slows)

I can stop.

ARACHNE

Shut your mouth.

MARK

It's not uncommon for bike riders
to go a little numb down there.

She laughs.

MARK (CONT'D)

Some guys have to take Viagra just
to get it up. The pros.

ARACHNE

Okay. Hold up.

She maneuvers out from under him and ushers him onto his
back, repositions herself.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

Cage the tiger. Go ahead, Sport
Boy. Work it.

They continue. A light from the street fizzles, leaving the
room with not much more than a rectangle of light near the
window.

For a second, in darkness, she seems much thinner, hair
longer. Mark lets out a whimper.

The light crinkles back on. Arachne is perched naked above
him. She rubs his chest.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

Listen to that. You're like
bagpipes deflating. Don't over do
it. There's nothing to prove.

LATER

They are relaxed, apart, in the blankets.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

So, I'm assuming you have to train
for this ride you're writing about?

MARK

Yeah. I gotta do it, despite the fact that my lungs doth protest mightily.

ARACHNE

How does sex fit into that? Can I come over two, three times a week for a no-strings session?

Mark turns to look at her more closely. She smiles and gets up, draping a sheet loosely around herself.

MARK

You are a perceptive lady. I don't know what to say. Anyway, I have to get up at three-thirty to warm up. Nobody likes those hours.

ARACHNE

Coffee shop girl does. Hey, don't worry about it, I figured as much. But no strings attached means exactly that. You saw my radioactive tattoo down there, right?

MARK

Yeah. That's crazy shit.

Mark watches her as she looks at various knickknacks and photos, mostly of cycling. She picks something up that he can't see.

ARACHNE

The succubus. Feeds on misery and emptiness.

MARK

(startled)

I'm sorry, the--

She shows him an empty bottle of McCallan scotch.

He gets up, goes over and reaches out a hand to take it from her.

ARACHNE

(withholding bottle)

I don't know, drunk guy.

He puts up hands of surrender.

MARK

We met at an Irish bar. Drank that
on our first anniversary... Why did
you say succubus?

ARACHNE

It's a female spirit that feeds off
sexual energy. That was an analogy.
Right? Spirits--
(holds up bottle)
--sucking your life away?

MARK

Oh. Yeah, that's true.

She puts the bottle down.

ARACHNE

You okay?

He shakes his head. She opens the sheet and presses into him.

MARK

It's just...you know.

ARACHNE

You haven't been with anyone else
for five years?

MARK

I wasn't ready.

ARACHNE

It took me three years to move on.
Had a couple rebound flings.
Now...it's been a long time for me
too.

A sad smile and nod from him.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

Here. Here. Look, I want you to
remember something different. Hold
still. Open your eyes wide, that's
it. Now, keep them open no matter
what.

She sticks out her tongue.

MARK'S POV -- her tongue comes directly onto his eyeball.

He yelps, cringes.

MARK

Wagh! Wow! No way anybody likes
eyeball licking.

They both laugh. She begins to collect her stuff and get
dressed.

ARACHNE

So you're calling her, right? The
girl on the site?
(sexy pose)
Or what?

Mark's expressions: What? I guess? Who?

She stands in the bedroom doorway.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

Don't call me until after you call
her. That's the deal.

A more somber Mark as she leaves.

EXT. PARK ROADS - NIGHT

Super early, dark skies. Mark rides, passing through pools of
illumination from streetlights. A noticeably slower pace.

He passes the turn-off for Grant's Pass Parkway, glances up
at it, keeps to level surfaces.

As he rides:

MARK

(earbud mic)
...It was that girl I told you
about, Arachne Jones.

EDDY (V.O.)

Oh yeah, I met her. She took your
bike up. The Tat queen.

MARK

And I saw some ink, lemme tell you.
Wow, she tore it up. We had a
blast.

EDDY (V.O.)

Yeah? And?

MARK

And nothing. I'm just saying, first time in five years. Five fucking years!

EDDY (V.O.)

Five no fucking years. Do you like her?

MARK

Sure, she's fun and all. She's not my type, but just for a roll in the hay, you know..?

A beat.

EDDY (V.O.)

Let's hear it, by the numbers.

MARK

I'm not doing that, 'cause it was just casual. But...coffee shop girl? Ambition has to be a part of someone's make up. I'm not knocking it, but where's the goals?

EDDY (V.O.)

I think Barista is an Olympic sport next year.

A beat, riding.

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

Think about it, when you and Isabella were down on the rocks, did you or she have goals? Or was love and companionship enough?

MARK

I get that, I guess. So I made a resolution. This Tuesday is my birthday and I'm calling the Lady of the Lake by then. No excuses. I promise.

EDDY (V.O.)

Don't promise me. But good for you, my friend. I gotta sign off.

MARK

Catch you later.

CLICK. Windy silence. A headlamp bisects the darkness.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Desk office. Mark reads an email and his face turns to stone. He picks up his desk phone and dials. Gets a voice mail BEEP.

MARK

(into phone)

Duane--listen. I'm sending the first draft over today. But it's just a first draft. I have to finish it. Please give me an extension. I have road rash like you wouldn't believe. It set me back a little. Please call. We need to talk. I will be done on time I swear. Thanks.

He hangs up, glares at the screen.

LATER

Mark's routine:

Espresso shot.

Stretches.

Blender drink.

A row of twenty supplements on the counter, neatly spaced.

Espresso shot.

Back to work, but on the second monitor: Cyclist's shoes, clicking through a website, looking for the names of pro athlete endorsements.

Dumbbells, resistance bands.

Espresso shot. More vitamins.

Pasta, a giant steaming pot dumping into a colander.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mark stands on his trainer, sprinting hard for fifteen seconds, then slows to an eventual stop.

He blows into the digital spirometer, looks at the printed receipt.

An affirmative nod.

EXT. MARK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mark ports his bicycle out the front door, in socks, his clip-on shoes dangling on the frame. Arachne stands at the curb.

ARACHNE

Hey there, Sport.

MARK

Arachne. You're up early even for coffee shop hours.

ARACHNE

Not happy about it either, but we're opening a new store over on Mission, so I have to train new staff.

He parks his bike against the building. Brings his shoes over to the curb, sits to put them on.

MARK

Lucky you.

ARACHNE

You're recovered enough to ride?

MARK

Oh yeah. More than recovered. Today I'm getting some elevation, tomorrow I'm going over the big one. My first attempt.

ARACHNE

Big one?

MARK

Radio Road, above Grant's Pass Parkway.

ARACHNE

Good for you. Go for it.

MARK

Thanks. Nobody else says that. I'm crazy for trying, apparently. Hey, anyway, I should say, if you don't hear from me...you know--

ARACHNE

What? This a do or die mission?

MARK

With asthma and all, I just wanted to make sure someone knows. If you wanted to check in on me...

ARACHNE

I'll call you when you're dead, then. How about that? I have a special otherworldly rate.

Mark's uncertain smile.

A ride-hailing car pulls up.

ARACHNE (CONT'D)

There's my ride. Good luck. Hey, who you riding for today?

MARK

Today is for me, and Eidolon, my bike.

(pumps fist)

Teamwork.

ARACHNE

(from open window)

Well, that's spot on.

MARK

It means an ideal.

Her wave says *whatever*. The car pulls away.

EXT. GRANT'S PASS PARKWAY - NIGHT

Mark strokes along, mechanically following the white line of the shoulder as defined by his headlight.

It's hypnotic, the rhythm of everything moving in concert with his breath.

One side of the mountain drops away from the road. Mark pumps along near the shoulder, glancing out over the cliff at the city lights far below.

Ahead he sees the SHARP TURN sign. Head down. Pumps hard and steady, and just as he passes the sign--

Brakes -- SCREECH! THUNK.

FLASHBACK INT./EXT. VAN - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Isabella drives as Mark sways, red-eyed and bleary, in the passenger seat.

The road sways too, drunkenly, the pool of light seemingly disjoined from their loosely defined vector, until--

RED RIDER

in the lights, for a split second.

SCREECH! THUNK.

The van skids, front end badly dented, one headlight smashed.

Careens. They both yell.

MARK

What the hell?!

SCREECH! Metal scrapes rocks, glass BREAKING. They spin off the impact with the rocks and skid to a stop.

A palsied moment, two hammered individuals looking at each other, adrenaline coursing through alcohol.

ISABELLA

I hit something.

MARK

Izzy--

ISABELLA

It was a deer, I think. I tried to--

MARK

You dozed off? On a mountain road?!
What the hell you said you could
drive--

ISABELLA

I didn't see him! And I didn't fall
asleep. It's dark.

MARK

You said you could drive.

She breaks down in tears. He searches behind his seat, muttering angry curses, then gets out.

EXT. GRANT'S PASS - NIGHT

Mark surveys the damage, two paper sacks in hand. Isabella gets out, wobbly, shaken.

ISABELLA

He came out of nowhere--

MARK

We're talking a deer, right?

ISABELLA

Yes? It's so dark. What're we going to do, Mark?

He takes out a six pack, slings it out over the cliff.

ISABELLA (CONT'D)

Wait! Stop--

He slings a second six pack out over the cliff. From the other sack, a full bottle of whisky.

MARK

Think the police might find this interesting?

Isabella buries her face, sobbing. Mark uncaps the bottle, takes a massive chug, all the while glaring at her, then he offers it to her to make her stop crying.

MARK (CONT'D)

Here. Here. Goddamn it.

She takes a hefty slug.

MARK (CONT'D)

Don't see no deer.

ISABELLA

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, Mark. Your van...

MARK

Yeah, well--

Hoists the bottle for another healthy belt, then throws it over the cliff.

ISABELLA

Hey--that was a full bottle.

MARK

Any more evidence? Weed, pills?

Isabella shakes her head. Mark relents, throws an arm around her neck and gives her head a brush with knuckles.

MARK (CONT'D)
Lucky you're cute, borracho lady.
Wrecked my van...

She kisses him, but the adrenaline/alcohol giggles prove too much for intimacy.

ISABELLA
You're not mad?

MARK
Sort of, but--
(gestures at van)
--without you, I would have gone
right off that cliff.
(waves farewell at cliff)
Goodbye Mark. So long...

She presses back a smile of relief and stoner sadness and kisses him again. No giggling this time.

MARK (CONT'D)
I love you, crazy girl.

ISABELLA
I think we can coast down if the
brakes are working and we have one
headlight.

MARK
Yeah?

ISABELLA
The bar's still open.

MARK
Now we're talking.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. GRANT'S PASS - NIGHT

Mark has stopped near a lonely streetlight and waits for the spirometer reading. He sighs heavily.

LATER

Back on the road, working hard to push a bright cone of light up the mountain.

ZZZZZT--CLICK CLICK -- a derailleur changes gear. Behind him.

Mark glances over his shoulder. Another cyclist, without lights, but geared out in Lycra and helmet and gloves. Maybe a hundred yards back.

Mark keeps pumping, head down, glancing up, breathing. The other bike draws closer. Mark tries to push his pace, but he's fighting too much elevation.

The dark rider falls into draft position just behind him.

They pace for a short while, then Mark breaks his cadence, straightens, turns.

MARK

Hey! You break your light?

No reply. Flaming red Lycra, matching helmet, gloves, shoes. But the face obscured.

Mark glowers with fear and anger. Keeps taking glances over his shoulder.

Then, decision. He coasts, standing on his pedals, then wheels around, heading back downhill.

The drafter passes him silently. A face that looks like death.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mark types, watches the words form sentences on his screen.

He notices the tandem bike photo, behind the monitor. Picks it up. Hand trembling visibly. Isabella.

He pointedly ignores it. Rakes skull with fingers.

MARK

(typing, reading)

My illness... For me, it began five years ago... It began just after--

The photo. Picks it up again. Now his hand is shaking.

BING! -- Mark snaps back, startled.

A video-conference alert. "DUANE"

Mark blows out a couple deep breathes. Taps accept.

Duane appears on the monitor.

DUANE
(speaker, static)
Mark. Feeling better?

MARK
Yes. You got the pages?

DUANE
I got a collection of sentences and
a few stringy paragraphs, yes.

MARK
First draft, I said that, and--

DUANE
Understood. And there's glimmers of
promise. But we're maybe three
months out from a bona fide piece?

MARK
Yeah, probably. That's why I was
asking about an advance.

DUANE
I spoke to the publisher today, and
we went over the idea of your
article. He was fairly receptive.

MARK
Yeah? Did you show him anything?

DUANE
He loves your column, of course.
But pro riders sell magazines.

MARK
I'm thinking of writing a book, my
whole journey through alcoholism
and asthma to entering, maybe even
qualifying for a pro race. Isn't
that worth investing in?

DUANE
Sure, if you were twenty four.

A beat.

MARK
Twenty four?

DUANE
Mark. It's a spec piece. Write it,
we might buy it, we might not.
(MORE)

DUANE (CONT'D)

It's not even a fifty-fifty thing,
it's a we'll see thing.

MARK

Okay. Got it.

Mark spins mentally, chewing thoughts.

DUANE

Stop buying all that gear. Invest
in ramen noodles. Most writers
could tell you all about that.

Mark nods, makes acquiescing motions.

The call ends.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Mark looks in the window of the Cyclefit gym. Rows of people
in urban chic athletic gear, pumping away to throbbing music.

The Instructor, preppy crew cut with headset, spots Mark and
waves. Indicates empty slots.

Mark smirks and walks away.

EXT. BUS STOP BENCH - NIGHT

Mark sits alone on a city transit bench.

A bus pulls up. Eddy gets off. Spots Mark, shows empty hands--
what now?

MARK

Hey, Eddy.

Eddy stands before him, studies him. No nonsense.

MARK (CONT'D)

I've been remembering things.

EDDY

Like what a real job might be like?

MARK

Yeah, I guess. I'm almost broke.

EDDY

If you need to borrow some money,
just ask.

Mark nods but can't look at his friend.

MARK

It's not that, really...

Rather than sit, Eddy squats before him.

EDDY

I can't make you to stop this, Mark, but you're driving yourself into psychosis with this shit--yes, utter bullshit--and so, I am ordering you to stop. Cease and desist.

MARK

I think I know what she wants.

Eddy slaps a palm on his quad, stands up. Paces.

EDDY

Tell that to a therapist. The issue is, stop with the elevation, or find another AA sponsor. I mean it. I'm not loaning you cash, either, if you go on with this. Do you want to lose everything?

Jaws clench.

EDDY (CONT'D)

Mark. You know there's no such things as ghosts and evil street people, right? The sober adult in you knows that, right?

MARK

I can't even write. Look at my hands.

Holds up nervous hands. Skeleton fingers in garish streetlight, shaking.

EDDY

There you go. You look at your hands. Are those the hands of a writer?

MARK

A guy died up there, riding. He was trying to make it over. There was an accident. Izzy--

EDDY

(jabs Mark's chest)
A guy died right here.
(again, unfriendly jab)
You're the new guy, remember?

Mark reaches into his jacket (right where Eddy jabbed), takes out a photo, a 3x5 black and white.

MARK

If I'm making this all up, how did this get pinned to my kitchen cork board?

INSERT -- PHOTO

A police photo of Isabella's death scene, one emaciated leg still in the sink cabinet she was hiding in. Her hair crudely hacked off. Police tape.

BACK TO SCENE

EDDY

I don't want to see that, Mark.
Remember what you said about not picking at scabs?

MARK

(harsh whisper)
I can make it stop!

Eddy slams a fist into a palm, turns away with a grunt. Waits a moment, hands on hips, then sets off walking, both hands raised for Mark to see.

Mark watches him vanish into darkness. Stares into an oblique city, fingers tapping legs.

Down the street, a silhouette appears under a streetlight, a very tall, thin STREET PERSON, pushing a bicycle heaped ridiculously high with possessions.

He fades into darkness, then emerges nearer to the bus stop light. Pushing the creaking, dilapidated bike/home.

Halts in front of the bus bench.

STREET PERSON

You know how to fix a flat?

His front rim is bare, no tire or tube.

Mark shakes his head abstractedly.

Street Person holds up a box.

STREET PERSON (CONT'D)
I got a repair kit.

MARK
You need a pump. And a tire and a tube.

STREET PERSON
Yeah, I got those, up in here somewhere.

He begins to fiddle with his heap of earthly goods.

MARK
I don't know how. Sorry. I don't know.

Street Person looks at him a little too long, then pushes on.

STREET PERSON
You have a good night, sir.

Mark is sunk into himself and does not respond.

But he glances over just as the guy transits through darkness into another pool of streetlight.

For a heartbeat, the silhouette is stocky, man-like, chopped hair. Apparition.

Mark forces himself to stand, walks the other way.

EXT. RADIO ROAD - NIGHT

Mark stops his bike at the entrance to monitor his heartbeat, then blows into a portable spirometer. Gauges the results. Affirmative.

Mark leans his bike against the yellow Forest Service gate. Begins to rewrap his forearm ace bandage.

The Three Cyclists previously encountered come off the dark road into the turn-off.

CYCLIST #1
Hey buddy.

CYCLIST #2
The lone drafter.

MARK

I see we have the same goal this morning.

CYCLIST #3

Over the top, down to zero, and back over the top. Ten K by midday.

MARK

No shit.

CYCLIST #2

Hey maybe we should let pretty boy tag along. It would raise our manifest with the ladies.

They chuckle as they shoulder bikes over the gate.

MARK

Hey, yeah--could I?

CYCLIST #1

Not today. Maybe catch us on a maintenance day.

CYCLIST #3

Go slow and steady, that's the trick, or elevation will eat you alive.

They move out, quickly dissolve to red tail lights.

Mark takes a long drink, brooding. Looks down at his attire. Gives their vanishing points of light The Finger.

MARK

(mutters)

Loser assholes.

Stalks around, picks up a rock and throws it with all his might at the very thought of them.

Motivated with anger, Mark hefts his bike and climbs over the gate.

Radio Road has very few streetlights as it winds up the two thousand foot gradient to the broadcast towers on top, girded by stands of eucalyptus and evergreens down below.

O.S. -- in the distance, CHK-CHK CHK-CHK CHK-CHK CHK-CHK. Footfalls? Someone running?

Mark closes his eyes. Deep breath--the vague sound vanishes. He launches himself into darkness.

Under the looming trees it's extra dark and dripping with condensation. Small branches and eucalyptus berries scatter the road.

CRACK! SNAP! Something rushes from the trees, a blackness in the shape of a human being.

Mark sprints.

The Apparition sprints. Ragged BREATHING comes close.

Then it is ahead as Mark struggles with the slippery, debris filled road.

The Apparition plants itself in his path--too close for anything but a head-on collision.

Mark veers and snaps his heel away from the cleat clip and kicks his foot up -- THWAK! -- catches the all too solid Apparition in the face.

They careen together for a moment. Mark's momentum wins out and he pulls free. Swerves badly before bolting upright.

He sprints with all his might and comes barreling out of the grove of trees onto open road, now beginning the steep climb.

Looks behind himself. Nothing.

Nothing. Nothing... Settles down to his saddle. Sucks in extra deep breaths. Concentrates on breathing.

Out in the open, leaving everything behind.

EXT. RADIO ROAD - NIGHT

The single lane road twists and turns, no shoulder per se but it does have frequent turn-outs.

The panoramic view of city and suburban lights twists and turns with his transit.

DING -- cell phone alert.

Mark pulls over at a turn-out vista and fishes the phone out of the little utility holster under his saddle.

Tap-tap, and--

DUANE (V.O.)
(recorded voice mail)
Mark. Hey, the publisher passed on
the article. Pros riders only.
(MORE)

DUANE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
You know how it is. Concentrate on
the column for now, buddy. Catch ya
later.

BLIP -- disconnect.

Mark's face goes dead. He doesn't move a muscle for a long
moment.

He pushes off. Riding.

EXT. RADIO ROAD - NIGHT

Hard breathing now, more standing on the pedals. Sweat
trickling.

Mark attacks.

Pounding his legs down.

Yanks hard on the handlebars with every stroke, grimly
determined.

The mountainside closes in, steep craggy rises on one side,
plummets of hundreds of feet on the other, only tenacious
scrub brush clinging there.

A sharp bend and sudden rise--Mark has to downshift and grind
to a crawl.

Huff-huff-huff, head down. Then looks up--

EDDY'S HEAD is in the road.

Mark yelps and swerves. His tires skid on the dirt shoulder
and he almost topples trying to get his right cleat off the
pedal.

He catches himself--but leaning severely.

CRUNCH CRUNCH!-- and the Apparition slides down the
embankment from above and in a split second slams into Mark.

TUMBLING!

Mark crashes headlong over the edge, then rolls sideways,
falls a short distance, spirals on his back and sides, eating
dirt and bushes.

He arrests his fall on a less precipitous slope, against
bushes and a rock.

Mark is in shock. His breath begins to wince and wheeze.

Looks at his hands--his riding gloves torn, his forearms scraped through the riding jacket.

Panic drives his nerves and he gets to his feet, looks up.

Hand on chest. Slow down. Trembling limbs. Slow down. Breathe.

MARK

(murmur to himself)

Blanked out. You blanked out. Suck it in. Refractory state.

Eyes close for big breaths. *That's it.* Big in, compress out.

WHACK! -- Mark is knocked off his feet by his own bicycle--which has come sailing through the air to strike him.

TUMBLING!

Again, rolling down the treacherous, rocky slope and OVER a cliff.

Mark grabs the edge with both hands. Pebbles and dirt rain down below him -- a sheer fifteen foot drop to another slope below.

His toes find purchase, but as he reaches--

The APPARITION stands above him, the light of predawn casting its shape in solid blackness.

MARK (CONT'D)

What the fuck are you doing?!

He reaches and the Apparition steps to crush his hand with a foot. Mark yelps, tries again--another block.

The Apparition lifts a foot to crush his fingers. Mark scrabbles to find another hold and then the other hand is targeted.

MARK (CONT'D)

Hey! No! No!

But the Apparition stomps down and--

Mark drops. A moment later his bike is flung over with him.

He hits the hard-packed earth below and rolls sideways. For a second he grabs the frame of his bike and then everything is rolling in dirt, rocks, shale.

EXT. DOWNSLOPE - DAY

Daybreak finds Mark facedown, now a couple hundred feet below Radio Road.

He trembles as he removes his gloves, unlatches his helmet.

It is an effort to turn over, sit up. Inspects his limbs. Brushes off, mostly bruised and dirty.

No threat in his vicinity. He stands on creaky legs and makes it to his bike, which is badly bent.

The apex pouch is open and empty. Mark grows alarmed as he looks around, feels in his rear jersey pockets. The inhaler is gone, the spirometer is gone.

He does find his cell phone, but: NO SERVICE.

He scans his surroundings; the slopes all spill down into a narrow tree-choked valley before rising sharply on the opposite side.

Mark walks down toward the trees.

EXT. VALLEY TREES - DAY

Although the sun has risen, the valley bottom has not been touched by sunlight.

Mark constantly looks around but nothing follows him. Near the tree line he comes upon:

A bicycle frame, burned, twisted, rusting.

And a dozen steps further on; a stack of wheels, all without tires, burned in place, the remnants of the fire evident.

Mark gapes, the sight not registering properly.

He does a 360, then--slight movement under the gloaming shade of the trees.

Cautious steps forward.

Several bike helmets hang like wind-chimes from branches. One helmet clearly has a skull and neck bone inside it.

Whhhzzz...whhhnnnzzzz. Mark forces air down and it whistles out through constricted brachia.

He picks up a good size rock, hefts it. Proceeds toward the helmets, grimly determined.

WHUMP! His foot and calf fall into a hidden trap, a hole in the earth that was covered by a jersey hidden in the dirt.

MARK

AAEEIGGGHH!

He thrashes in pain. His leg won't come up. He sees blood, then he sees thin metal spikes. His leg is pierced numerous times by them.

He digs and wrenches at the sides of the trap, in a panic, and finally tears the whole thing free:

A bicycle wheel but with no hub, the spokes all broken and sharpened. His foot and calf went through them and when he pulled up, he is gored.

Mark rolls away, sits up. His calf is impaled a dozen times, the wheel still around it.

He cries out in horror and panic. Pulls upward on the wheel, the only direction to get the spokes out of his calf muscles.

With tears of pain, he yanks the spokes out and bends them away to dislodge the wheel.

Suddenly the Apparition is behind him.

A bicycle chain goes around Mark's neck and twists tight.

Mark fights, thrashing forward, goes down face first.

The Apparition lands a knee between his shoulder blades and tightens the chain as it leans forward. Long stringy blond hair spills over Mark's face.

Mark convulses, shudders, his limbs tremble.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. CAMP SITE - DAY

It is late afternoon, but under the murky shade of the trees it might as well be evening.

Mark comes to. WHNNNZZZ -- wheezing. Red welts and grease from the chain disfigure his neck.

The camp is littered with an odd collection of derelict stuff, mostly car and bicycle parts.

A car door, several tires and steering wheels. A stack of child seats. Riding clothes stretched like drying hide on frames made from branches. Backpacks and boots from hikers.

And near to Mark; bones. Forearms, leg bones, a pelvis, all partly charred.

He is bound, arms behind him, thrown over the frame of a bicycle partly buried in the ground.

Wrenches, pulls, but his hands are locked around his good leg with a bike chain-lock wrapped in protective rubber.

His breath comes painfully pinched as his chest heaves.

CHHK. The inhaler sound.

Mark looks to the side.

Fifteen feet away is the Apparition, hunched over on the dark ground. It takes more hits from the inhaler. CHHK. CHHKK. CHHHHHHK.

MARK

Hey! Hey, man. I know who you are.
I can help. I swear.

The Apparition stands, comes over, squats a few feet away.

Now its ravaged face is half revealed but still obscured by shade and greasy blond hair. Patches of scarred bluish-white waxy skin are visible.

Its dress is a shantytown of mismatched items from hikers, cyclists, and homeless shelters, but under an outer layer is red Lycra in a flame motif.

MARK (CONT'D)

You're that cyclist. You were
handicapped and you wanted to make
it over Radio Road. Hey--I'm the
same. Let me go. They think I'm
just an amateur--

HAAAAAGH. Like a dog's growl. It licks its lips.

It moves quickly, snatching at Mark's injured leg and stretching it out.

MARK (CONT'D)

No! Let go! Don't touch me!

The Apparition scoots a hefty log near and plants Mark's foot on it, then uses the laces of his shoe to secure his leg there.

Mark thrashes, lifted somewhat perpendicularly to the ground, his good leg bent up under his buttocks and tied to his hands.

The Apparition fondles Mark's leg muscles, then grabs the leggings by the waist and tugs them, but they are bibbed and go up around his shoulders.

It is a tense fight. Mark tries to twist himself away, but his position is awkward and painful. The Apparition tears violently, ripping the material away.

MARK (CONT'D)

You fucking creep! What the fuck are you doing?!

The leg is exposed as the Apparition rips the fabric down to the bound ankle.

The Apparition caresses his leg muscles, tearing off the bandages and sniffing the previous wound. SLAVERING.

It scuttles away; more primitive shuffle than a proper gait.

Mark breathes hard, hoarse and wheezing.

The thing squats near his leg, brandishes a fork, and slams it into Mark's quadriceps.

He screams. The Apparition feels his leg with both hands, excited by the current of pain.

It ransacks a nearby pile of trash and brings over an armful of moldy old paperbacks and scraps of wood and stuffs them under his knee.

MARK (CONT'D)

No! I can get you food! I can get you help! I'm not your enemy!

The Apparition scurries into the deeper shade, returns with a nondescript brown bottle. Takes a considerable chug, followed by a full body blanche: HAARGHGH!

Blood streams from a wound the chain made on the back of Mark's neck and it runs down his arms onto his bound hands, onto the rubberized chain.

The Apparition produces a lighter, but it is drained and can only spark. It takes another powerful mouthful of the liquid and sprays it out, holding the lighter up.

SNK! SNK! Sparks flying. Then -- WHOOSH!

Mark screams as his leg is swept with flame. He wrenches--and the blood has lubricated his skin enough--his hands come free.

He heaves and contorts as the Apparition stands. Mark is partially crippled by the cramped position of confinement, and knows it.

He falls forward swinging the chain -- WHAP!-- catches his tormentor across the temple. The Apparition goes down.

Mark throws his weight forward over the log. Rips his foot free of his shoe and wrenches the fork out of his quadriceps.

He pulls the tattered leggings up.

The Apparition growls and moves.

Mark lashes down hard --CRACK! -- belts him with the chain. Advances -- CRACK!

MARK (CONT'D)

You sick motherfucker! How many
have you killed?!

He picks up the bottle and dumps liquid on the Apparition. Grabs a burning paperback book: Zen And The Art Of Motorcycle Maintenance.

MARK (CONT'D)

Your turn to die, asshole.

He throws the book and the Apparition is engulfed in flaming vapor.

Mark backs away, limping badly.

The Apparition writhes, but the flames (only vapor burning) smolder out. It stands up, faces Mark.

The Apparition peels away husks of burnt skin--it is darkness peeling away more darkness, but the blackness that sloughs away steams.

Mark's face lights up with terror and he hobbles away.

EXT. DOWNSLOPE - DAY

Late afternoon, not quite sundown. Mark limps badly. Near the bicycle wheel trap he finds a discarded pair of sneakers. Grabs them and gets up the slope a bit before he stops.

He ties the torn fabric of his leggings around the numerous tiny but deep wounds. Uses a sock against the badly bleeding fork gouge.

Checks his cell phone: NO SERVICE.

At the tree line below; the silhouette of a man tipping a bottle up and guzzling down something.

Mark continues up the increasingly steep and rocky slope.

EXT. PINNACLE TRAIL - DAY (SUNSET)

Mark comes upon a hiking trail and a sign: "GRANT'S PASS SUMMIT 1 MILE." And an arrow in the opposite direction: "PINNACLE TRAILHEAD 8.2 MILES."

He goes for the summit, limping, starting to cool down. His lips are very dry. As he goes, takes his cell phone out: NO SERVICE.

He doesn't get far hiking uphill before he is out of breath, dehydrated and suffering from shock.

Below: the Apparition, coming straight up the rocky landscape, blond hair lit by the fading sun. Limping on a twisted leg, torso not moving in normal sync.

But it can move unnaturally fast.

Mark comes upon a fencing project, long abandoned, and finds a four foot long piece of rebar.

He uses it for a cane. Moves faster, forcing his body into a rhythm.

EXT. PINNACLE TRAIL - NIGHT

At a high vantage point, Mark sees Radio Road below and a string of three bike lights cutting through the long shadows of dusk.

MARK
(waving arms)
Hey! Hey! Up here!

But they are too far away and quickly out of sight around a bend.

A few hundred yards down the trail the Apparition waves both arms at him, a silent, mocking gesture.

Mark forces himself into a crippled jog up the trail.

EXT. SATELLITE FACILITY - NIGHT

Still a few hundred feet below the broadcast towers, Mark finds a small satellite repeater station surrounded by a fence.

A low, squat service building. He goes off trail toward it.

The building is actually two rectangular structures with an open space between, but sealed off by a sliding chain-link fence topped with burly barbed wire.

Mark staggers up, gauges the fence, then notices there is no lock. He pulls and the gate slides open.

He closes the gate and tries a door--locked. Tries another, locked. Then he sees a key box.

Mark swings the rebar cane and whacks the lock box with all his might. Again -- KARANG! and one more time, and the box cover is off.

A wad of keys falls out.

Mark grabs them just as the chain-link fence opens again.

The Apparition.

Mark gets to the nearest door and jams a key in. Not right.

The Apparition watches, not moving, but it makes the same gesture Mark used previously--hands waving, signaling.

Mark tries another, looks back, then the third one--click!

He steps in with a glance back.

The flaming red Lycra. Eyes blacker than the dusk.

INT. OUTER STORAGE ROOM - NIGHT

Mark slams the door, turns the latch to lock it. Rests against the door in the dark.

Takes his cell phone out. NO SERVICE.

He flicks on the lights. The room is filled with discarded, rusting electronic trash, construction left-overs, a shop bench and small desk.

MARK

How could there not be a goddamn phone?!

He rifles the desk drawers, finds several plastic bottles of water. Opens--chug chug chug. His face wrinkles in disgust--the water is ancient.

The door handle RATTLES -- Yank! Twist!

Mark ignores it and continues to search, opening all the drawers and the metal cabinets above.

A jar of Planter's Peanuts! He dumps them directly into his mouth.

Against a wall; a first aid kit.

Mark opens three little packets of pain-killer and washes them down. Then collects gauze, tape, bandages, and antibiotic, and sits at a bench.

INT. OUTER STORAGE ROOM - NIGHT

Wounds treated, Mark finds a zippered hoody with the logo: "Dr. Bob's Retox Bar & Grill." He puts it on.

Notices another door, an inside door.

He steps over heaps of jettisoned gear and trash, places an ear to the door. Tries the handle. It turns.

INT. INNER STORAGE ROOM - NIGHT

Mark sees glowing light switches and with a flick--

He recoils.

With the lights comes CLASSICAL MUSIC playing from a dingy old boombox.

The room is a nightmare scenario like the one in the woods.

The walls are plastered with jerseys and jackets, all torn and bloody, and skeletal bits of hands and feet are tacked there as well.

Bike parts dominate -- deconstructed, reassembled all wrong; gear cassettes and brake parts strung together from wall to wall with brake line and gear-shift cable and chains.

Central to it all is a mechanism constructed from many big gear sprockets in opposing, interlocked rows. Coated with dried blood and rendered flesh above a puddle of gore.

On the wall near the boombox is a map with splats of blood indicating that the Apparition has ventured far and wide across the greater region, collecting bikes and cyclists.

Mark stands near the map as an OPERA singer joins the orchestrated MUSIC.

Mark yanks the plug. Silence.

INT. OUTER STORAGE ROOM - NIGHT

Mark slides down the wall near the door and hunkers there, clutching a box knife for protection.

Dead-eyed. Dazed. His hands shake uncontrollably. He pulls the hood up tight and hugs himself.

ECHOES FROM THE PAST:

A THUNK THUNK THUNK noise, knife on wood.

MARK (V.O.)
(distant, echoing)
Izzy! My god--what are you doing?!

ISABELLA (V.O.)
(distant, echoing)
I'm--cutting--you--

MARK (V.O.)
Stop it. Izzy, your hair, you can't do that--

ISABELLA (V.O.)
You're being an asshole. You should just try it, it makes it better.

MARK (V.O.)
When does junk make things better?

ISABELLA (V.O.)
(wailing)
Mark... I think I killed that guy.

MARK (V.O.)
You're killing me. You're killing
me!

ISABELLA (V.O.)
No. Mark. In the van, we hit him--

MARK (V.O.)
You said it was a deer.

ISABELLA (V.O.)
You saw it too!

A beat.

ISABELLA (V.O.)
You saw him, Mark.

END V.O. SEQUENCE

Mark's head is down in his crossed arms.

Power goes out.

Mark snaps awake as a battery-powered emergency light turns
on, casting plastic yellow illumination.

THUMP-THUMP THUMP-THUMP -- footsteps on the roof.

Mark rises, the box knife ready. He follows the sound as it
goes across his room and over the Inner Storage Room.

Silence. Mark guards the closed inner door.

A metal GRATING sound and a BANG.

He throws the door open, steps in.

INT. INNER STORAGE ROOM - NIGHT

The room is illuminated only by the sharp angles of the
emergency light from the Outer Room, but a roof access hatch
near a cable tray is open.

The night sky is washed pale with approaching dawn.

MARK
It's not happening! You hear?!

WZZAP--CHANG! Threaded steel wire from brake lines whip
around him.

Mark lashes out with the box knife.

The lasso of brake line zips tight and he is nearly toppled. Arms pinned.

A derailleur CLICKS -- a chain winding link by link.

Mark is drawn mechanically into the dark. The shadow of the Apparition hand-cranks the gory mechanism.

Mark struggles, howling. The chains attached to the brake line CLINK loudly as they pass through the rending gear sprockets.

Six or seven feet to go. Mark launches himself at the dragging force--over the device and bodily slams into the Apparition.

They crash down. Mark rolls. Tension released, he frees himself. Up, kicks -- lands a solid foot.

Mark slashes wildly with the box knife. Objects are in motion--bike frames and wheels and handlebars glide on brake cable. Something metal strikes him.

He staggers but does not go down.

But the Apparition has vanished into darkness.

An electric COMPRESSOR fires up, a --HSSSS-- of air building up against a stopper, then--

BOOM!-- a hail of metal bits like a shot-gun blast strike Mark's hands and arms.

The knife clatters away.

MARK (CONT'D)
You son-of-a-bitch!

Pain! But no hesitation. He rushes the refilling compressor.

Snatches up a set of drop handlebars and swings as he leaps at the Apparition.

CHANG! -- lands a solid blow as they crash against the wall.

Grappling in the dark. Mark gets the bars around the thing's neck and they topple into the compressor.

A -- BLAP! -- and the crude firing mechanism is dislodged from the end of the hose.

Mark lets the bars go and slams the Apparition's head against the steel housing. Grabs the thrashing compressor line.

He wraps it around the thing's neck. The air hisses shrilly to a choked stop, followed by heavy grunting from Mark as he uses every ounce of strength to hold the Apparition down.

It goes limp.

MARK (CONT'D)

So you can die!

He smashes the head again and again against the compressor.

Staggeres away. Primal rage has forced his lungs open and he growls in the darkness.

He springs for the vertical cable ladder leading up to the access hatch.

In the dark room, the compressor line hisses again, free.

Mark climbs slowly, using one leg. The classical MUSIC starts again.

EXT. OUTER STORAGE ROOF - DAY

Sunrise as Mark pulls himself up.

Torso out, a knee up, one foot up, then -- SNAP!

Mark screams as he falls out onto the flat roof. His body jerks. He reaches down in pain.

A length of brake cable with a sharpened cotter pin has been plunged through his calf just behind his Achilles tendon at the heel.

As the line tightens, the cotter pin jams sideways.

The derailleur is heard CLICKING again.

Mark is stunned by the pain and the blood spurting from his upper heel. And he is being dragged back down.

Mark sits up as his foot is dragged back down the hatch. He reaches down and seizes the line with both hands and wrenches up with all the might of his athletic body.

The CLICKING stops.

Mark gains a foot, he wrenches again--both hands wrapped in brake cable.

SNAP! -- the line breaks free.

He scoots away. Takes the cotter pin and with great effort, forces it back through his upper heel. He wraps his dirty sock around the wound.

Hobbles on one leg to the edge, sees no way down. Six feet away is the rim of a large broadcast dish, long out of service.

He leaps.

Catches the edge, slides down ungracefully, and dangles a couple feet from the earth. He drops on one foot, collapses in agony.

Mark unrolls some of the bandaging from his leg and ties a tight wrap around his Achilles tendon.

Near at hand are several small bikes for kids, ancient and rusted. He grabs one but the tires are flat. The next has no chain.

The last one is a BMX suitable for a teenager. But the tires are good.

EXT. RADIO ROAD - DAY

Mark is about to steer the bike downhill, but stops.

He looks up at the summit, several hundred feet and a half mile away. Takes a step--

A photo drops behind him, from under the hoodie, picture side down. Smearred with blood and chain grease and ripped halfway through. Picks it up.

The police scene photo. He drops it.

Hops on the BMX and stands on the pedals to get going uphill.

His face is a tight rictus as he concentrates past the pain and trauma.

Breath ragged, each exhalation a HAGHHH! HAGHHH!

MINUTES LATER

Mark's breathing has deteriorated. The chronic wheeze is back. HNNNNN! HNNNNN!

But he won't look back. Plows ahead, glancing up at the summit.

A SHRIEK, close behind. And FOOTFALLS.

Then the Apparition is near.

A hand grasps his arm but he swats it off.

The Apparition leaps and knocks Mark and the bike over.

They struggle, the bike somewhat between them.

Mark gains his feet.

The summit! He jogs as fast as his constricted breath and battered limbs will allow.

It takes all his concentration to force forward momentum through WHEEZING tortured lungs.

GRUNTS from behind. The thing will not stop.

But Mark now has a clear sight line of the summit, a hundred feet above, two hundred yards off.

He lets out a HOWL of primal determination, followed by a crippling WHEEZE.

Lungs closing down.

No air.

Vision going spotty.

Red streaks across everything.

Mark stops a moment, looks back, hands on knees. Wrong move. He sways and collapses.

The Apparition is also on ground. Drags its body over the road to him. Clambers up onto him.

Sits on Mark's chest.

Mark's eyes open wide as no breath enters his lungs.

The Apparition leans close, a penumbra of darkness. The dead cyclist.

BZZZZNG. BZZZZNG. BZZZZNG. A cell phone rings.

The world coruscates with blackness.

BZZZZNG. BZZZZNG. BZZZZNG.

ARACHNE (V.O.)
(recorded voice mail)
Mark! Hahaha! Guess who?
(MORE)

ARACHNE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Yeah, it's AJ again. Your pal Eddy
said tomorrow is your birthday, so
just wanted to say, Happy birthday
Sport Boy.

CLICK.

Wave after wave of blackness. Mark's face goes dead.

FLASHBACK

--Arachne's tongue, in Mark's POV, coming directly at his
eye.

MARK

Wagh!

BACK TO SCENE

Mark contorts in a last-ditch effort, gets an arm free and
swings at the Apparition.

Spasms up off his back, sideways, throwing the dead weight
off.

Staggering up to stand.

Gasping for air. Raking. Keening sobs with every exhalation.

Hand on chest. Lungs working. Air. Yes, air.

Mark takes a step toward the summit.

A hand grasps his ankle.

In that moment: Eyes lock. *What's gone, and what's still
here.*

The red Lycra half decomposed on an emaciated body, bones
showing, skin blackened and crumbling.

Mark hesitates.

Then he picks up the body.

Now it's one step at a time. Limping. One breath. Pause. One
step. Breath.

EXT. GRANT'S PASS SUMMIT - DAY

Mark makes it to the signpost on top. He places the body
there, holds on to the post.

Tries to calm the painful contractions of his lungs.

And notices -- the wheezing has stopped.

He also finds the injuries to his leg and Achilles tendon are not there.

The corpse is gone.

EXT. RADIO ROAD - DAY

Coasting back down, having gone back for the BMX.

Around a tight bend, skids to a stop.

He looks over the edge where he went over, or remembers going over. No sign of the Eidolon.

He rubs his quadriceps, looks at his ankle--remembering the pain. A last glance back--remembering his bike.

Pushes off and coasts downhill on the kid's BMX.

INT. STAIRWELL - DAY

Mark hobbles slowly, one stair step at a time. Pulls hard on the bannister, teeth gritted all the way.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Just out of the shower, Mark sits on the couch with a towel around his waist.

He opens a first aid kit. Begins treating the previous road rash wounds on forearm and waist, along with many bruises from tumbling down the rocks.

Then he takes a moment, trembling, just sitting there, looking at the insular walls that contain his cycling world.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

At the desk, he goes over his HEART & SOUL profile page. His profile. His stats. His preferences, while listening to Eddy in the video-conference box.

EDDY

(speakers, static)

Dude, you're shell-shocked. Just move on. What about the book idea?

Mark makes a what-about-it flick of the fingers.

EDDY (CONT'D)

Tell you what. I already ran the idea by April--

MARK

You did what?

EDDY

She's an editor at Lonely Planet and I bounced it off her is all. Said it was intriguing, maybe you should write up a proposal and she'd toss it on the publisher's desk.

MARK

Why didn't you tell me that?!

EDDY

Because you don't like to be helped, remember?

The news forces him to focus on the present, his monitor.

EDDY (CONT'D)

You already made the first step, right? First hill conquered?

MARK

There's still some amends I have to make.

EDDY

Fair enough. But you've moved past getting all hung up about it. Just do what you have to do. These little OCD trigger points are your Achilles heel.

Mark, highly distracted and still traumatized, sits back, staring at nothing.

EDDY (CONT'D)

Doing anything special for your birthday?

MARK

I might go to the Cyclefit gym across the street.

PFFFT! -- from Eddy, utterly surprised.

MARK (CONT'D)
Seriously. You ever been?

EDDY
Are you kidding? April shipped me
and my trainer out of the living
room years ago. I have a premier
membership. Why?

MARK
Just thought... Get out and meet
humanity, as they say.

Eddy makes an exaggerated check mark in the air and clicks
off.

INSERT -- MONITOR

The cursor goes to the profile of MARK HINAULT, to settings,
and scrolls down to DELETE PROFILE.

"ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO DELETE THIS PROFILE? ALL
INFORMATION WILL BE PERMANENTLY REMOVED."

YES -- and CLICK.

BACK TO SCENE

Stone faced, but he sighs with relief.

Then an animated: "HAPPY BIRTHDAY!" Confetti explodes across
the screen. Resolves to: "AJ"

Mark smiles.

INT. STAIRWELL - DAY

Mark is in normal clothes, spiffed up, but limps and creaks
down the stairs.

On a landing, he pauses before Arachne's door, gathers
himself.

Knocks.

Building Super KENDAL CARVER, 65, opens the door.

KENDAL
Mark Hinault, Six A.

MARK
Hi, mister Carver. I was--uh, are
you fixing something for Arachne?

KENDAL

Getting ready for a new tenant,
coming tomorrow.

He goes back inside, waving Mark along.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

The entire apartment is empty. Pristine. Mark turns in a full bewildered circle as he enters.

MARK

New tenant? Did I knock on the
wrong door?

Kendal stops to face him in the bare living room.

KENDAL

You said Arachne Jones? She used to
live here. Nice lady. She liked
those dance classes.

MARK

Where did she go?

KENDAL

Shame about all that. Hey, her
partner had the same name as you,
as I recall. Mark. Rode a Harley
Davidson motorcycle. Eighteen
wheeler took 'em out... Sure was
one nice lady.

Stunned... Looks around for evidence, for a sign, for a
life...

MARK

She's dead?

KENDAL

Not many people survive a head on
with a semi.

MARK

How long ago?

KENDAL

Last month. New tenant is seventy
six years old. Have to hire a guy
with a strong back to help carry
her stuff up. I told her, no
elevator.

A beat. Kendal turns to go back to his tasks. Mark is bereft. The vivid memories, the sounds, the touch...

Kendal returns with a couple tools, heading into a bedroom.

MARK

I can help... Just come get me.
Knock on my door... I know how to
carry things up the steps.

KENDAL

Well, that's mighty nice of you.
Thank you, Six A.

Kendal wanders off into another room.

Mark can't move for a spell. Until--something catches his eye. A photo stuck in the window frame.

He takes it down.

INSERT -- PHOTO

ARACHNE JONES, her hair bleached platinum blonde, posing in front of a motorcycle. Her expression is pure *fuck you*, but she's sticking her tongue out mischievously.

Sunlight burnishes her white hair into a golden corona.

BACK TO SCENE

Tears flood his eyes. He gently places the photo back in the window frame.

Empty walls. Bare windows. Quiet and still.

What's gone, and what's still here.

FADE OUT.