

BEYOND PULSE

A SCREENPLAY

Based on the story by Colin McCabe, featuring Jody Shenn

First of a trilogy

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MYSTERY TEASER — 40 SECONDS

FADE IN:

BLACK. A beat of true silence. No logos. No music. No sound at all.

Then — a single heartbeat. *Lub-dub.*

Soft. Close. The ordinary sound of the inside of a body.

Another. *Lub-dub.*

Another. *Lub-dub.*

The rhythm is — comforting. Steady. The heartbeat of a healthy person in a quiet room.

The camera remains on black.

Ten seconds pass in which nothing happens except this heartbeat. It becomes hypnotic. An audience settles into it. The theatre grows still around it.

A soft electronic tone — a single sustained note, almost subliminal — begins to creep under the heartbeat. We do not quite hear it. We feel it.

And then — *underneath* the heartbeat — we begin to notice something else.

A faint, patterned trembling. It is not a second heartbeat. It is not a rhythm we recognize. It is *inside* the first rhythm, as a whisper is inside a crowd.

Dot. Dash. Dash-dot.

Dot. Dash. Dot.

Dash. Dash. Dot-dash-dot.

Our ear begins to resolve it. Morse code. Very quiet. Very patient. Being sent from — somewhere.

The heartbeat continues. The morse continues underneath it, spelling something we almost catch, almost do not.

The electronic tone rises, one semitone.

And then — for one frame — text:

SOMETHING IS TRYING

HOLD ON BLACK.

The heartbeat continues. The morse continues. The tone rises again.

Another frame of text:

TO REACH YOU

HOLD ON BLACK.

A third beat. The tone rises a third time. The morse beneath the heartbeat briefly quickens — as if the sender has realized we might, finally, be listening.

A third frame of text:

FROM INSIDE

HOLD.

Then, all at once — the heartbeat *stops*.

The morse *stops*.

The tone *stops*.

Absolute silence. Absolute black. A silence that is almost a physical absence.

Five full seconds.

Then, white, one letter at a time, each letter accompanied by a single sharp morse-code click:

B · E · Y · O · N · D P · U · L · S · E

The final letter lands.

Beneath it, almost too small to read:

YOUR BODY HAS BEEN SPEAKING FOR A VERY LONG TIME.

CUT TO BLACK.

One final, slow, unhurried heartbeat from somewhere off-screen. *Lub — dub.*

FADE OUT.

END OF MYSTERY TEASER.

BEYOND PULSE — THE SCREENPLAY

FADE IN:

BLACK.

A sound: *lub-dub. lub-dub. lub-dub.*

A heartbeat, close and intimate, as if we are inside it. We listen. Steady. Ordinary.

Then — beneath it — something else. A faint, patterned trembling, almost too quiet to name. Almost, but not quite, rhythmic in a different way.

SUPERIMPOSE: *"There is a hidden thing inside the body that speaks. We have simply, for a very long time, refused to listen."*

— attributed to an unnamed philosopher, 2024

The heartbeat fades.

ACT ONE

INT. CARLOS'S HOUSE — PANAMA CITY — NIGHT

A modest single-story house in the hills above the city. Terracotta floors. Slow ceiling fan. Through an open window, the distant hum of traffic and cicadas.

CARLOS MENDEZ (60, graying, neat mustache, a man whose face is handsome and tired in equal measure) sits at a cluttered table under a hanging lamp. Around him: a half-finished painting of a mountain that is somehow both too yellow and too sad. A small coffee plant on the sill. A record on the turntable spinning slowly — *Chopin, Nocturne in B-flat Minor, Op. 9 No. 1*.

On a low shelf near the table: a framed photograph, faded, of a young Carlos in his thirties standing outside a squat warehouse in the sun. A hand-painted sign above the warehouse reads *MENDEZ MEDICAL SUPPLY — SAN ANTONIO*. Beside the photograph, a small certificate of business dissolution, dated 2019.

In front of Carlos: a modified stethoscope wired into a laptop. On the screen, the green line of an electrocardiogram traces calmly across. *Lub-dub. Lub-dub.*

He sips from a chipped mug that reads *WORLD'S OKAYEST GRANDUNCLE*.

He adjusts a dial. Leans in.

The line on the screen tightens — reveals something underneath. A second wave, much smaller, almost a shiver inside the larger beat.

Carlos frowns. Rewinds. Plays it back at half speed.

Now we can see it: the small wave is not random. It pulses. Gaps. Clusters. Gaps.

Carlos slowly puts down the mug. He stares.

CARLOS
(soft, to himself)
No.

He opens another program. A pattern-recognition tool. Drags the isolated secondary waveform into it. Runs it.

A pause.

The result blinks up on screen:

ASCII MATCH: 87%

NEAREST ENCODING: INTERNATIONAL MORSE CODE

Carlos does not move for a long time.

He lifts one hand and places it flat against his own chest.

On the speakers, Chopin reaches a tender passage and holds it.

INT. CARLOS'S HOUSE — KITCHEN — CONTINUOUS

A knock at the door.

Carlos startles as if he has been pulled from deep water. He checks a wall clock. Looks back at the laptop. Looks at the door.

Another knock.

He shuts the laptop, rises, crosses to the door, and opens it.

MIGUEL (mid-30s, stocky, in a courier uniform, a company cap that says *ENTREGAS RÁPIDAS*) stands on the step with a small box and a handheld scanner.

MIGUEL
Don Carlos. Buenas.

CARLOS
Miguel. Pasa, pasa.

Miguel steps inside with the easy familiarity of a man who delivers here every week. Carlos signs the scanner without really looking at it.

MIGUEL
Everything okay, Don Carlos? You look —

CARLOS
Miguel. I have a strange question.

Miguel laughs, cautious.

MIGUEL
That's usually how our conversations start.

Carlos walks to the table. Gestures. Miguel follows slowly, box still under one arm.

CARLOS
Listen to this.

Carlos hits play. The laptop's speakers give out the isolated secondary wave, slowed down, rendered as audible tones.

Beep. Beep-beep-beep. Beep. Beep-beep.

Miguel listens.

MIGUEL
Okay.

CARLOS
Do you recognize that?

MIGUEL
It sounds like... like a movie when the submarine is in trouble.

CARLOS
Morse code.

MIGUEL
(nods, smiles)
Sure, jefe.

CARLOS
Miguel. Where is this coming from?

Miguel looks at him. Shrugs, a little uncomfortable.

MIGUEL
A radio? You have a radio?

Carlos shakes his head, slowly. He walks around the table until he is directly facing Miguel. He lifts Carlos's right hand and presses it — gently, like a confession — flat to the left side of his own chest.

CARLOS
(quietly)
From here.

Miguel's face does something small and private. He lets his hand stay for a respectful second, then removes it.

MIGUEL
(forcing a smile)
Don Carlos. You should eat something, maybe. You
want me to bring you sancocho from my mother's?

Carlos smiles back. The smile does not reach his eyes.

CARLOS
Yes. Bring me sancocho.

Miguel nods and leaves, a little too quickly.

The door clicks shut.

Carlos stands alone in his kitchen, one hand still at his chest, as Chopin
dwindles down into the quiet.

INT. CARLOS'S HOUSE — LIVING ROOM — LATER THAT NIGHT

A portable phone in Carlos's hand. It has been ringing. He looks at the name
on the screen for several full rings before thumbing accept.

CARLOS
(Spanish, subtitled)
Olga.

OLGA (O.S.)
(tinny, a woman's voice, warm and impatient
in equal measure)
Little brother. You are not dead.

CARLOS
Not tonight.

OLGA (O.S.)
Diego says you did not call him back.

CARLOS
I did not.

OLGA (O.S.)
Why.

Carlos looks at the laptop. At the frozen waveform on the screen.

CARLOS
I have been busy.

OLGA (O.S.)
You do not have a job.

CARLOS
(a smile ghosts his lips)
I have a project.

A long silence on the line. The kind older sisters do when they know.

OLGA (O.S.)
Carlos. Are you drinking again.

CARLOS
No.

OLGA (O.S.)
Are you painting again?

CARLOS
(glancing at the yellow-mountain canvas)
Poorly.

OLGA (O.S.)
Come for lunch on Sunday.

CARLOS
I will.

OLGA (O.S.)
Carlos.

CARLOS
What.

OLGA (O.S.)
(softer)
You do not sound like yourself.

Carlos does not answer. He looks at his own hand on the phone as if it belongs to a stranger.

CARLOS
Goodnight, Olga.

He hangs up before she can say goodnight back.

The laptop hums.

The waveform waits.

Carlos sits back down.

INT. CARLOS'S HOUSE — STUDY — DAWN

Pale light. The same chair. The same laptop. Carlos has not moved.

Around him now: the accumulated wreckage of a man who has not slept. A half-eaten empanada on a plate. A cooled mug. Printouts of ECG traces pinned haphazardly to the wall with pushpins. A spiral notebook open to a fresh page on which he has written, in neat block letters:

T

TH

THE

THEY

Outside the open window, a rooster crows.

Carlos hears it. Looks up. Looks at his own hands.

He pushes back from the table, rises, and walks — on stiff legs — out onto his small back patio.

EXT. CARLOS'S GARDEN — DAWN

A modest patch of cultivated green. Four coffee plants in clay pots. A lemon tree. A hose coiled on a rack.

Carlos stands among the coffee plants, breathing.

He reaches out, cups a cluster of ripe red coffee cherries in his palm.

For a long moment he simply holds them. Feels their weight. Their ordinariness.

He brings his other hand, unconsciously, to his chest.

The morse is there. He can feel it now, even without the stethoscope. A tiny persistent quivering beneath the larger beat, as if a second organ has moved in.

He closes his eyes.

Somewhere in the distance, below in the city, a car horn. Somewhere nearer, a mourning dove.

From an open window down the hill, very faint — piano alone — *Debussy, Arabesque No. 1*. Someone's radio. Someone's morning.

He says, to the coffee cherries, to the morning, to nothing in particular:

CARLOS
(whispered)
¿Quién eres?

The morse pulses.

No answer he can parse.

Yet.

CUT TO:

EXT. CENTRAL PARK — NEW YORK CITY — DAY

Autumn. Gold leaves scudding across a footpath. Joggers. A woman with a stroller. Skyline just visible through trees.

A FIGURE walks alone on the path. Blue Columbia hoodie pulled up, earbuds in, hands deep in the pockets. His face is mostly shadow — we catch a glimpse: young, gaunt, tired. This is ALEX THOMPSON (22).

Through his earbuds we HEAR: "*Mo Man (Ill Tribute)*" by DJ 1999 — warm, haunted, synthesizer pads that sound like breathing.

Alex walks without hurry. He passes a park bench where an OLD COUPLE sits close together, the woman's head on the man's shoulder. Alex's pace slows, just slightly. He looks away.

He reaches the edge of the park. Steps out into traffic noise and cab horns.

A revolving door. A lobby. An elevator. A numbered door: *Dr. F. Reynaud, Cardiology*.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — BATHROOM — NIGHT — EARLIER THIS YEAR

SUPERIMPOSE: *EARLIER THIS YEAR*

A small bathroom. The fluorescent above the mirror buzzes. 3 a.m.

Alex — in a Columbia hoodie, no shoes, younger somehow — sits on the tile floor with his back against the bathtub. One hand is pressed flat to his chest. His phone rests on the floor beside him, a pulse-oximeter app flashing a red number.

He is counting under his breath.

ALEX
(whispered)
One — two — three-and — wait — wait —

The beat skips. His shoulders twitch.

He closes his eyes.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Come on. Come on. Come on.

His phone lights up. One text, no preview: *AUNT MARGARET*.

Alex looks at it. He does not pick it up.

He puts his head back against the tub.

He keeps breathing.

He is alone.

HOLD on him. A long moment. Then —

CUT TO:

INT. CARDIOLOGIST'S OFFICE — DAY

A small, beige exam room. DR. REYNAUD (50s, French-accented, warm but overworked) studies a tablet. Alex sits on the exam table, hoodie down now. Up close he is paler than he should be. There are shadows under his eyes that shouldn't be on a 22-year-old.

DR. REYNAUD
Your Holter data from last week is — how should I say — boring. Which is good. Very good.

ALEX
It was boring because nothing happened that week. They don't happen every week.

DR. REYNAUD
I understand. And when they happen — you feel it exactly as you described?

ALEX
(reciting, a little tired)
Fluttering. Skipping. Like my chest is a — a bag of mice.

Dr. Reynaud nods patiently.

DR. REYNAUD
Atrial fibrillation in a healthy young man — it's unusual, yes, but not unheard of. Stress. Caffeine. Sometimes nothing we ever find. We'll put you on a longer monitor. Thirty days.

ALEX
And if you don't catch it in thirty days?

DR. REYNAUD
Sixty.

Alex laughs, once, without humor.

Dr. Reynaud sets down the tablet. Meets his eyes — gentler.

DR. REYNAUD
Alex. How are you sleeping?

A pause. Alex's jaw moves.

ALEX
Fine.

DR. REYNAUD
How's school?

ALEX
Fine.

DR. REYNAUD
How's your aunt?

A longer pause.

ALEX
I don't see her much.

Dr. Reynaud nods slowly, as if he has filed something away.

DR. REYNAUD
Let me know if the episodes change in any way.
Different. Worse. New sensations. Anything.

ALEX
(softly)
Yeah.

He pulls the hoodie back up as he leaves.

INT. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY — LECTURE HALL — DAY

Tiered seats. Maybe forty students. A PROFESSOR (60s, cardigan, chalk-dusted sleeves) at the whiteboard, deep in a derivation.

PROFESSOR
— and so the Fourier transform of a signal with
this modulation gives us —

Alex sits three rows back, hood up, notebook open. He has not written anything. His eyes are on the professor but they are not *with* the professor.

The young woman next to him — MAYA (21, thoughtful, glasses) — glances over. Sees his blank page. Sees his face.

MAYA
(whispered)
You okay?

ALEX
(not looking at her)
Yeah.

MAYA
You look like you haven't slept.

ALEX
I haven't.

MAYA
(pause)
Do you want my notes?

Alex turns, slowly. Looks at her. He hasn't properly looked at another human being in days.

ALEX
(genuinely)
Yeah. Yeah, I would like that. Thank you, Maya.

She nods. Turns back to the professor.

Alex turns back too. Tries to focus.

The professor's chalk *taps* against the board — once, twice, in a cluster, and then —

— something under Alex's sternum goes *wrong*.

Not painful. Not yet. Just — out of phase.

His heart is ahead of itself, then behind itself, then ahead again. The chalk taps and the heart taps and they are almost in rhythm and then they are not and the *not* is worse than any pain.

Alex's face goes the color of paper. His hand goes to his chest.

He cannot get enough air.

MAYA
(whispered, alarmed)
Alex —

Alex stands. The room tilts. He grips the desk.

MAYA
Alex, do you want me to —

ALEX
(through his teeth)
I'm fine. I'm fine.

He stumbles out of the row.

ALEX
(mumbling)
Sorry. Sorry.

Every head in the row turns to watch him go.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — BUILDING HALLWAY — NIGHT

A narrow, scuffed hallway. Alex fumbles his key in the lock. Under one arm: a copy of *The New York Times*.

He steps inside.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — NIGHT

A small two-bedroom in Morningside Heights. One wall is entirely textbooks. A battered couch. A kitchenette. No photographs of family on any surface. Just a single framed poster: *MIT Logic Workshop, 2022*.

Alex drops the paper on the coffee table. He goes to the kitchen, fills a glass of water, drinks it standing up.

Puts the glass down.

Freezes.

A ripple crosses his face. He swallows once. Twice. He closes his eyes. Opens them.

He presses one hand flat against his chest.

ALEX
(quietly)
No. Not today.

His breath goes shallow. He sits on the couch slowly, carefully, the way someone sits with a full glass.

And then — faintly — through the thin wall of his ribs, the heartbeat *changes*.

Thu-thump. Thu-thump-thump. Thu-th-th-thump.

Alex gasps. Grabs the couch.

The beats come unevenly. Clustered. Gapped. Clustered again. The rhythm isn't random. It's *patterned*.

Alex stares down at his own chest like it's a stranger.

His eyes drift — frantic, searching — and land on the newspaper on the coffee table.

The front page headline:

FED SIGNALS NO RATE CUT THIS QUARTER

Alex's lips move silently.

Dash-dot-dash... Dash-dot... Dot...

He looks at the letters on the page. F. E. D.

He looks down at his chest.

Dash-dot... Dot... Dash-dot-dot.

E. D. N.

His hand flies up, covers his mouth.

Dash-dot-dash. Dot. Dash-dot.

K. E. ...

He doesn't finish. He stumbles to his feet. The apartment tilts. He falls against the wall.

His heart pounds *normal* suddenly — too fast, too hard, but normal.

ALEX
(to the empty room)
Help. Help me.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM — NIGHT

Fluorescents. The smell of antiseptic. Alex sits on the edge of a gurney in a curtained bay. His hoodie strings dangle. An IV sits in his arm.

A RESIDENT (late 20s, exhausted) stands with a chart.

RESIDENT
Your rhythm's normal. BP's normal. Troponin's clean. You want to tell me what's going on?

ALEX
I told the nurse.

RESIDENT
Tell me.

Alex looks at her. Looks at the curtain.

ALEX

My heart was... sending messages.

The resident's pen stops moving.

RESIDENT
Messages.

ALEX
In morse code.

RESIDENT
Okay.

ALEX
I'm an engineering student. I know what morse code is.

RESIDENT
Mm-hm.

ALEX
It was spelling — it started to spell — the headline of a newspaper on my table.

The resident writes something. It is a long something.

ALEX (CONT'D)
(looking at the pen)
You think I'm crazy.

RESIDENT
I don't think anything. I think you came in feeling very afraid and that matters. Have you ever — has anyone in your family ever —

ALEX
No.

RESIDENT
Has anything happened recently that was very stressful?

Alex looks past her, at nothing.

ALEX
(flat)
My parents died when I was eight. That was stressful. Does that count.

The resident sets down the clipboard.

RESIDENT
Alex. I'd like you to talk to someone. Tonight. Just talk. We have a psychiatric consult —

Alex's face does a small, frightened thing. We see him calculate — the room, the word *consult*, the length of such a stay, the locked doors he knows follow from such a word.

ALEX
(forcing a smile)
You know what. Yeah. I'm — I think I had too much coffee. I think I got scared. I think I'm okay now.

RESIDENT
Alex —

ALEX
I'm okay. Really. Can I just go home?

He is already pulling the tape off his IV.

The resident watches him, worried but uncertain. Eventually she nods.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — LATER THAT NIGHT

Alex at the kitchen counter, phone pressed to his ear, the dialtone in the receiver. He is pacing slowly.

A RINGING. Once. Twice. Three times.

AUNT MARGARET (O.S.)
(answering, suburban, older, a little surprised)
Alex?

Somewhere behind her — her living room TV, low — the familiar domesticated chorale of *Bach, "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring,"* playing through whatever late-night program she has left on for company.

ALEX
Hi, Aunt Margaret.

AUNT MARGARET (O.S.)
Is everything — is something wrong? It's almost eleven.

ALEX
No. No. Nothing's wrong.

AUNT MARGARET (O.S.)
Oh. Good. Good.

A silence. The silence of two people who have not known each other well since he was twelve.

ALEX
I just. Wanted to call.

AUNT MARGARET (O.S.)
Is it midterms?

ALEX
(slight smile)
No. No, it's not midterms.

AUNT MARGARET (O.S.)
Oh. Okay. (a pause) Your uncle is watching the game. He says hi.

ALEX
Hi, Uncle Paul.

AUNT MARGARET (O.S.)
Alex.

ALEX
Yeah?

AUNT MARGARET (O.S.)
You sure you're okay?

Alex looks at his own reflection in the dark window above the kitchen sink. He looks very young and very alone.

ALEX
I'm okay. Love you.

AUNT MARGARET (O.S.)
(a beat, surprised by the word)
Love you too, honey.

He hangs up.

He stands in the kitchen a long time.

EXT. MANHATTAN STREET — NIGHT

Alex emerges from his building into a wet, cold New York night. Neon reflecting on pavement. Steam rising from a grate.

He walks without direction.

He passes a bar. A laundromat. A shuttered bodega. A doorway with a muffled bass line behind it — red light leaking through a velvet curtain.

He stops. Looks at it. Looks at his hand, which is trembling.

He goes in.

INT. NIGHTCLUB — NIGHT

Dim, violet-lit. Bodies moving. The air thick with sweat and smoke-machine haze.

On the speakers: a *DJ 1999 song* — slow, deep, insistent, a kick drum that echoes the cardiac rhythm.

Alex moves through the crowd without touching it. He finds a wall. He leans against it. He closes his eyes.

The music pounds. His heart pounds.

For the first time in the film, a human face relaxes on camera. He is not okay. But for two minutes, with the beat outside him matching the beat inside him, he is almost okay.

A WOMAN (late 20s, generous eyeliner, a single gold hoop) dances near him. Catches his eye. Smiles in the way strangers smile in clubs — a small, offered thing.

Alex, surprising himself, smiles back.

She moves closer. She mouths something he can't hear over the bass.

ALEX
(leaning in, half-shouting)
What?

THE WOMAN
I said — your heart is loud.

Alex freezes.

He pulls back.

The woman looks at him, confused.

THE WOMAN
(shouting, concerned now)
You okay?

ALEX
What did you just say?

THE WOMAN

What?

ALEX

(nearly yelling)

What did you just say?

THE WOMAN

I said your heart! It's loud! I can feel it —
through the floor — I was joking — hey —

But Alex is already pushing back through the crowd toward the exit.

She watches him go. She shrugs. She turns back to the dance floor.

The bass keeps pounding.

INT. CARLOS'S HOUSE — NIGHT — INTERCUT

Carlos at his table. Three laptops open now. Papers everywhere. Handwritten notes. A printout pinned to the wall: a grid of letters with the beginnings of sentences. He has not shaved. He has not, by the looks of him, slept.

A phone rings on the counter. He does not answer.

It stops. Starts. Stops.

INT. OLGA'S HOUSE — PANAMA CITY — NIGHT

A warm, lived-in home, family photos on every wall. OLGA MENDEZ (65, sharp-eyed, an apron over a neat blouse) sits at her kitchen table, phone in hand, brow furrowed.

She looks at the silent phone. She tries again. It rings and rings.

Diego, her grandson, appears in the doorway with car keys.

DIEGO

Abuela?

OLGA

He is not answering.

DIEGO

He's probably sleeping.

OLGA

He is not sleeping.

She studies Diego — this young man who she has raised, who adores his great-uncle, who has become in the last years the informal keeper of Carlos's peace of mind.

OLGA

Go check on him. In the morning.

DIEGO

Abuela —

OLGA

In the morning, mi vida.

Diego nods. Turns to go. Stops.

DIEGO

Abuela. Do you think he's okay?

Olga does not answer for a long moment. She looks down at the silent phone in her hand. She sighs.

OLGA
Your great-uncle has not been okay since 1989. He has simply been different kinds of not-okay. (looks up) I worry about the new kind.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — NIGHT

Alex hunched over his laptop. Cup of coffee. Chest strap heart monitor blinking green on his ribs. A spiral notebook filled with dashes and dots.

Knock at the apartment door. Alex does not answer.

ROOMMATE (O.S.)
(muffled)
Bro. You alive in there?

Alex does not answer.

CUT TO:

EXT. CARLOS'S HOUSE — MORNING

A car in the drive. CARLOS'S GREAT-NEPHEW — DIEGO (24, warm, open face, Emberá bead bracelet) — stands at the front door, one hand on the knob.

DIEGO
Tío! You said noon. It's noon-thirty. Come on, we'll miss the first set, tío, abre.

Silence. Then the door opens. Carlos, unshaven, in the same shirt as two scenes ago.

Diego takes one look at him and his face darkens — less angry than sad.

DIEGO
Tío, when is the last time you left the house?

CARLOS
I — I had some work. Medical work.

DIEGO
(gently)
Tío. Camila's family is expecting us. I am expecting you. You promised.

A beat. Carlos looks at him. Carlos looks past him at his car.

Carlos looks back into his house — at the papers, at the laptops, at the accumulated weight of four days of obsession.

And then he seems, for a moment, very tired.

CARLOS
Give me fifteen minutes.

DIEGO
(relieved)
Fifteen.

INT. DIEGO'S CAR — DAY

A dusty compact, the dash cluttered with receipts and empty water bottles. Carlos in the passenger seat, shaved now, in a clean guayabera, looking out the window. Diego drives.

They ride in silence for a while.

DIEGO
(in Spanish, subtitled)
Tío.

CARLOS
(same)
¿Sí?

DIEGO
Abuela called me last night. She says you sound
like somebody else.

CARLOS
Somebody better or somebody worse?

DIEGO
She didn't say.

Carlos watches the scenery. Outside, Panama City gives way to the highway east — shanty corrugated roofs, billboards, the first blue suggestion of the Pacific. On the radio, a Cumbia plays low, the accordion bright.

The car slows for a red light.

On the far sidewalk — a YOUNG WOMAN (20s) crosses with her dark hair pulled into a single long braid down her back. Plastic grocery bags in each hand. She does not look at the car.

Carlos watches her.

She reaches the other side. She turns down a side street. She is gone.

Carlos does not move. The light turns green.

DIEGO
Can I ask you something?

CARLOS
(wary)
Mm.

DIEGO
When you lived in Texas — why did you never marry?

Carlos turns his head slowly.

DIEGO (CONT'D)
Sorry. I know. It's — I'm asking because Camila's
parents always ask me about you. They say: "your
uncle, he went to America and he did well, why no
wife?" And I never know what to say. I say, he just
never did. But is that true?

Carlos looks at the road for a long time.

CARLOS
I was going to marry someone.

DIEGO
Here?

CARLOS
Here.

DIEGO
What happened?

A silence that has in it thirty-five years.

CARLOS
Something happened.

Diego nods. He does not press. He is old enough to know when a sentence ends.
The Cumbia brightens on the radio.

EXT. EMBERÁ-WOUNAAN COMARCA — LATE AFTERNOON

A clearing in dense jungle. A long, open-sided *tambo* with a palm-thatched roof. Brightly painted dugouts pulled up on a river bank. Women in *parumas* of dazzling color. Men in bead collars. Children running.

At a table under the tambo, a celebration underway — it is Camila's cousin's birthday. A suckling pig. *Patacones*. Bottles of *seco* and tamarind juice.

Camila (22, Emberá, all laughter) drapes her arm around Diego's neck. She turns to Carlos and kisses his cheek.

CAMILA
Tío Carlos! Por fin. Mi abuela has been asking
about you.

She pulls Carlos toward an ELDER WOMAN (70s) with a pipe and eyes that miss nothing. The elder takes Carlos's hand in both of hers and holds it.

ELDER WOMAN
(in Spanish, subtitled)
You came. Good.

CARLOS
(also Spanish, subtitled)
I have been working on something.

ELDER WOMAN
(peering at him)
Your heart is loud today.

Carlos goes very still.

CARLOS
(carefully)
I beg your pardon?

ELDER WOMAN
(shrugs)
Some people's are. Siéntate.

She gestures. He sits. A gourd of *chicha* is put in his hand. He takes a sip without thinking. Then another.

The DRUMS start — hand drums, deep and polyrhythmic. Dancers rise. Feathers. Painted skin. The whole clearing becomes motion.

Carlos sits and watches. The *chicha* warms him. For the first time in days, the laptop in his mind shuts.

On the soundtrack, the drumming rises. The camera tightens slowly on Carlos's face.

His lips part. His eyes glisten.

He brings one hand, unconsciously, to his chest.

Beneath the drums — faintly, so faintly that we almost miss it — we hear *it*.

Dot-dot-dash... dash-dash-dash... dot-dot-dash-dot-dot-dot...

The drums swell. Drown it out.

We stay on Carlos's face.

EXT. EMBERÁ-WOUNAAN COMARCA — BY THE RIVER — DUSK

A little later. The party is still going; we hear the drums distantly. Carlos has wandered down to the river's edge with his gourd of *chicha*. The elder woman appears beside him, unhurried.

Somewhere among the *tambos* behind them, someone is playing a guitar — fingerstyle, unhurried, the melody of "*Amazing Grace*" with no words. The tune carries across the clearing the way old things do, half-finished, half-remembered.

ELDER WOMAN
(in Spanish, subtitled)
When I was younger I had a dream.

Carlos waits.

ELDER WOMAN (CONT'D)
A woman with no face came down from the sky. She had hundreds of small voices inside of her. She said she was very tired and could we please let her rest inside of us.

Carlos turns and looks at her fully.

CARLOS
(softly)
What did you say.

ELDER WOMAN
I was eighteen. I said yes.

CARLOS
What happened?

The elder shrugs. Smiles. Takes a pull of her pipe.

ELDER WOMAN
Nothing. She did not come to me. I think she went to somebody else. (she looks out at the river)
Sometimes I wonder if she is still looking.

Carlos's hand moves, unconsciously, to his chest.

The elder's eyes track the movement.

ELDER WOMAN (CONT'D)
(gently)
Ah.

CARLOS
(whispered)
Is this a good thing.

ELDER WOMAN
(considering)
Some things are not good or bad. They are only big.

She pats his arm. Walks back toward the drums.

Carlos stands alone on the riverbank as the light fails.

He is about to turn and follow her when he becomes aware, slowly, that he is not alone.

A small GIRL (6, painted face, bare feet, a purple *paruma* too big for her) has wandered down to the water. She stands a few feet from Carlos, hands clasped

behind her back, watching him with the grave attention of children.

CARLOS
(gently, Spanish, subtitled)
Hola, cariño.

GIRL
(in Spanish, subtitled)
My grandmother says the sky woman is coming.

Carlos's smile — small, reflexive, the indulgent smile adults give children — fades.

CARLOS
(carefully)
What did you say, mi amor.

GIRL
My grandmother says the sky woman is coming. She
said you are calling her.

A beat.

CARLOS
Who is your grandmother, cariño.

The girl turns and points — across the clearing — at the elder woman, who is back at the drums now, not looking at them.

Then the girl turns back to Carlos and regards him a moment longer. She is not afraid.

GIRL
(simply)
She said to tell you — it is almost.

Someone calls a name from the tambo. The girl looks. She breaks into a run, barefoot, toward the drums and the warmth and the other children.

Carlos stands by the river for a long time after she is gone.

The water moves. The drums thump, distant.

He does not turn back toward the party until full dark.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — NIGHT

Alex at the kitchen table, phone-flashlight-bright, notebook open. He is drawing a grid. Each row: date/time. Each column: one letter of an alphabet. Little tally marks are beginning to form patterns.

He looks up at the window. Outside, the building across the air shaft is lit in squares — a dozen televisions, a dozen lives, a dozen quiet strangers.

Alex sees, in one of the squares, a woman laughing on a phone. She wipes her eyes. She laughs again.

He watches her for a long time.

His own heart beats. Steady. Normal.

He is not comforted.

CUT TO:

INT. NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY — DAY

Green lamps. The vaulted ceiling of the Rose Main Reading Room. A mountain of books on a shared table. Alex sits alone, hoodie pushed back, hair unwashed.

Through his earbuds, quietly: *Schubert — Impromptu in G-flat, D. 899 No. 3*. Patient, floating, slightly melancholy. The sound of a mind working late.

Open in front of him: a heavy medical history, *Cardiology in the Ancient World*. A passage circled in pencil. We glimpse it over his shoulder:

...the Greek physician Erasistratus (c. 304-250 BCE) recorded twelve cases in which patients described hearing their own pulse "speak to them, as a drummer speaks to those in the next camp." All twelve were isolated in asylums. Three were executed for prophesying accurately.

Alex writes in his notebook: *GREEK — PROPHESYING ACCURATELY — EXECUTED*.

He pulls down another volume. *Altered States in Shamanic Cultures*. A bookmark. He opens to it. A section heading: "*Heart-Voices in Siberian Tuvan Tradition*."

He reads. He writes. He reads. He writes.

A LIBRARIAN (60s, kindly, cardigan) passes, sees the tower of books, pauses.

LIBRARIAN
Dissertation?

ALEX
(looking up, startled)
Uh — yeah.

LIBRARIAN
What's your thesis.

Alex opens his mouth. Closes it. Opens it again.

ALEX
(softly)
That we've been hearing something for a long time.
And we've been locking up the people who can hear
it best.

The librarian regards him. Nods once.

LIBRARIAN
That'll be a popular one.

She walks on.

Alex turns back to his books.

MONTAGE — PARALLEL LIVES

Music continues: *the DJ 1999 song* low and slow, looping.

— Carlos in his kitchen at 3 a.m., converting morse code to letters by hand. The letters so far: T... H... E... Y... A... R...

— Alex in the Butler Library at Columbia, surrounded by books. Titles include *Symbols of Consciousness*, *The Electromagnetic Body*, *Cardiac Arrhythmia and Perception*. He turns a page. He writes.

— Carlos's phone rings. Diego's face on the screen. Carlos lets it ring.

— Alex's roommate, NILES (22, white, bearded, bewildered), knocks on Alex's bedroom door with a plate of reheated pizza. "Bro?" No answer. Niles sets the plate down in the hallway.

— Carlos in front of a mirror in his bathroom. He has grown stubble. He stares at himself. He says, very quietly, "*Amalia*." And then, as if catching himself,

he looks away.

— Alex in front of a mirror in his bathroom. He has grown stubble. He stares at himself. He says nothing. He cannot think of a name to say.

— Carlos at his computer deep at night, on a forum. Multiple reddit tabs open. *r/medicalmysteries*. *r/UnexplainedPhenomena*. *r/AmIGoingCrazy*. He scrolls through posts. Most are obviously hoaxes. A few are plainly psychiatric. One, buried on page three of *r/UnexplainedMedical*, stops him.

— Alex typing that post. Face drawn. Head down. *"Has anyone ever had their heart palpitate in morse code?"* Click post.

— Carlos reading it. Reading it again.

His hand moves slowly to his own chest.

He types: *"I am not crazy either."*

— Alex, hours later, hood up in bed, his laptop on his stomach. The reply notification pings. Alex stares at it for a long time before he opens it.

His whole face changes.

MUSIC ENDS.

EXT. ALEX'S APARTMENT BUILDING — THAT SAME NIGHT

Across the street, parked at a meter, a black SUV. Engine off. Windows tinted. No driver visible.

Alex's window, lit, is visible from the driver's side.

A small red dot — the tip of a cigarette, the indicator on a device, impossible to say — glows once inside the SUV. Fades.

Nothing else moves.

EXT. HILLSIDE ABOVE CARLOS'S HOUSE — PANAMA — NIGHT

Dense foliage. The distant lights of Panama City below. Carlos's house, warm-windowed, on the slope.

In the trees, high above the house: a glint. The angle of moonlight off a lens.

Held. Held. Then gone.

ACT TWO

INT. CARLOS'S HOUSE — LIVING ROOM — NIGHT

Carlos at his laptop. A video chat window is open but the camera is off on the other side — just a black square with white text: *a_thmpson*. Below it, a chat column.

CARLOS (V.O.)
(typing)
Can you turn on your camera.

A pause.

ALEX (V.O.)
(typing back)
How do I know you're not —

CARLOS (V.O.)
I'm a sixty-year-old man in Panama. You'll feel safer.

A longer pause. Then the black square resolves.

Alex, hoodie up, earbuds out, the light of the laptop in his eyes. His face is younger than Carlos expected and harder.

Carlos turns on his own camera.

CARLOS
Hello, Alex.

ALEX
(tired)
Hi.

CARLOS
You said in your post you're not crazy.

ALEX
Yeah.

CARLOS
Would it help to know that neither am I?

A small, involuntary laugh escapes Alex. It catches in his throat. When he speaks again his voice is thick.

ALEX
Yeah. It would.

Carlos nods. He leans back. Folds his hands.

CARLOS
Tell me, from the beginning, everything you remember.

Alex takes a long breath.

ALEX

(slow, halting)

It started four months ago. First time I thought I was having a panic attack. Second time I thought I was having a heart attack. I'm twenty-two. I'm not supposed to have heart attacks. I went to my first cardiologist. He put me on a Holter. Nothing. Three weeks later, another episode. I went to another cardiologist. He said it was probably stress. Third one said caffeine. Fourth one said nothing we can find. And then two weeks ago —

CARLOS

The newspaper.

ALEX

(looks up)

How did you —

CARLOS

You wrote about it in a comment. On a different thread. I've been looking.

Alex almost smiles. It is a strange, tired expression on such a young face.

ALEX

You've been looking a while.

CARLOS

I have the advantage of being retired.

ALEX

(genuinely curious)

What are you retired from.

Carlos hesitates. Then —

CARLOS

I was going to be a doctor. I was not. I went north instead. Ended up in Texas. Built a small medical supply company there — oxygen regulators, hospital beds. Sold it a few years ago. Came home.

ALEX

Home being.

CARLOS

Here. Panama. I was born in this city. I left it at twenty-five. I came back thirty years later.

ALEX

What happened. With being a doctor.

A silence.

CARLOS

Something happened.

Alex studies him. Does not push.

ALEX

I'm sorry.

CARLOS

Don't be. (a breath) Tell me what you've learned.

ALEX

What I've learned?

CARLOS
From your books. From whatever you've been doing
for four months, when doctors were not helping you.
I can see that you are smart, Alex. I can see that
you have been researching. Tell me.

Alex looks off-camera, at something in his apartment. Then back.

ALEX
I think people have had this forever.

CARLOS
I think so too.

ALEX
I think most of them have been called insane.

CARLOS
I think so too.

ALEX
I think — (voice catches) — I think whatever is
doing this has been trying to reach us for a very
long time and we've been too afraid to listen. And
I think the only reason I'm not afraid enough right
now to stop listening is because I've already been
too alone to care.

Carlos's face softens.

CARLOS
Alex.

ALEX
What.

CARLOS
You are not alone anymore.

Alex looks away from the camera. The camera stays on him anyway.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — BATHROOM — NIGHT

After the call. Alex stands in front of the mirror. The conversation has ended
and suddenly the apartment feels bigger. Quieter.

He studies himself in the glass.

He looks — though he would not admit it — as if someone has turned on a light
inside him.

And then, as the moment passes: he looks utterly, blackly alone.

He runs the water. Splashes his face. Shuts it off.

The mirror fogs a little at the edges.

INT. CARLOS'S HOUSE — BATHROOM — NIGHT

Carlos stands at his mirror. He looks the same way Alex looks. He has not
lifted his head fully. His eyes, in the glass, look back at him and ask him
something.

He straightens.

He shaves.

CUT TO:

INT. CARLOS'S HOUSE — STUDY — MORNING

Carlos at his laptop. Browser tabs: *Flights to JFK. Flights to Austin. Flights to Cairo.*

He hesitates over Austin.

We see, taped to the monitor's bezel, an old photograph — faded — a YOUNG WOMAN (20) with thick dark hair and a shy, proud smile, standing in front of a movie marquee in 1988.

Carlos looks at the photo. Looks at the search for *Austin*. Closes the tab.

He clicks *New York*.

INT. CARLOS'S HOUSE — LIVING ROOM — EVENING

A knock at the door.

Carlos opens it.

Olga stands on the step. Diego hovers behind her, sheepish. Olga has brought a plastic container of food.

 OLGA
You were going to leave without telling me.

 CARLOS
 (caught)
I was going to call.

 OLGA
From the airport?

 CARLOS
 (wry)
From the plane.

She pushes past him into the house. Diego follows with an apologetic shrug. Olga surveys the living room — the papers, the stuck-up printouts, the whiteboard, the laptops — and her face goes through several small adjustments, none of them good.

 OLGA
Carlos.

 CARLOS
Hermana.

 OLGA
 (Spanish, subtitled)
Diego, mi amor, go to the car please.

 DIEGO
Abuela —

 OLGA
The car.

Diego looks at Carlos — *sorry* — and leaves.

The door closes.

Olga and Carlos stand in the middle of his wreckage.

 OLGA
 (Spanish, continues subtitled)
Is it drugs.

CARLOS
No.

OLGA
Is it a woman.

CARLOS
No.

OLGA
Is it — (she gestures at the walls, the papers) —
religion.

CARLOS
Not exactly.

Olga closes her eyes.

OLGA
Dios mío, Carlos.

CARLOS
Olga.

OLGA
You're going to New York.

CARLOS
Yes.

OLGA
To meet someone you have never met.

CARLOS
Yes.

OLGA
And you will not tell me why.

A long pause.

CARLOS
(softly)
I think I have found a reason to be here, Olga.

She looks up sharply.

OLGA
You have always been here.

CARLOS
Not here. Not — (he struggles) — you know what I
mean.

And then she does. Her face changes. The anger in it becomes something sadder,
older, more grown-sibling.

OLGA
Since Amalia.

CARLOS
Since Amalia.

She crosses the room. She puts the container of food on his table, among the
papers. She takes his hand.

OLGA
Little brother. If you are going to become a different man, at sixty — become a kinder one. Not a stranger to us. (holds up a warning finger) You are allowed to be happy. You are not allowed to disappear.

CARLOS
Olga —

OLGA
(firm)
Call me when you land. Call me every day. And if you die in America of some gringo foolishness I will dig you up and kill you again.

Carlos laughs — startled, helpless, moved. He folds her into a hug. She is a foot shorter than he is. She punches him once, lightly, on the back.

OLGA
Go.

EXT. CARLOS'S HOUSE — STREET — NEXT MORNING

Carlos emerges with a small suitcase. He locks his door.

He stands for a moment on the sidewalk and *listens*.

Somewhere — a window, a passing taxi — music drifts. Electronic. Modern.
"Panama City Streets (Beyond Pulse Soundtrack) by DJ 1999." The bass thumps like a pulse.

Carlos breathes. For a long second his face is younger.

Miguel the courier is passing on his scooter. He slows when he sees Carlos.

MIGUEL
(calling)
Don Carlos! (takes off his helmet) Traveling?

CARLOS
New York.

MIGUEL
Long trip?

CARLOS
I don't know.

Miguel nods, as if this is a perfectly reasonable answer.

MIGUEL
I brought your sancocho. Yesterday. My mother made it with gallina dura, the way you like.

CARLOS
Thank you, Miguel.

MIGUEL
(hesitates)
Don Carlos. The — (gestures at his own chest) — the thing. The thing you played for me.

CARLOS
Yes.

MIGUEL
(quiet)
Take care of it.

He says it the way he would say *take care of your grandmother*. As if it is a person.

He puts his helmet back on and rides away.

Carlos looks after him a long moment.

He walks to the taxi.

INT. JFK ARRIVALS — DAY

Carlos emerges into the churn of the international arrivals hall. Families greeting. Drivers holding signs.

One sign reads: *MENDEZ (not the FBI, promise)*.

Behind it, Alex. Hoodie up. An attempt at a smile.

Carlos laughs — surprised, delighted. He crosses to him.

CARLOS
The joke is not as funny as it should be.

ALEX
I know.

Carlos puts one hand, briefly, on Alex's shoulder. It is the first time anyone has touched Alex in a month.

EXT. JFK — TAXI STAND — DAY

They walk together toward the taxi line, Carlos's suitcase rolling behind him. The city air — diesel and soft pretzel — hits Carlos's face.

CARLOS
Manhattan is still Manhattan.

ALEX
You've been here before?

CARLOS
I came once for a trade show. 2004. Javits Center.
I remember the bagels.

ALEX
(a small smile)
You'll get bagels.

They step into the taxi.

INT. TAXI — DAY

Driving into Queens, the skyline assembling on the horizon. The cab's FM radio murmurs low, tuned to a classic rock station the DRIVER — Eastern European, ear to his own phone call — stopped paying attention to an hour ago.

Carlos is quiet, taking it in. Alex sneaks glances at him. Alex's posture has — almost imperceptibly — relaxed.

ALEX
Carlos.

CARLOS
Mm.

ALEX
(hesitant)
Thank you for coming.

Carlos looks at him. Nods once. Does not say anything. The *thank you* hangs in the cab like a small lit thing.

They ride a little while. The radio churns through something from the mid-nineties with a guitar solo. The driver laughs at something on his call, not in English.

Carlos watches the East River slide past the window. He looks less tired than he has looked in forty pages.

Alex leans his head against the cool window. Closes his eyes for a long moment.

Alex is — not smiling, exactly. But close.

The Queensboro Bridge rises in the windshield.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — DAY

Carlos enters with his suitcase. Looks around. Takes it in. The books. The lack of family photos. The general sense of a place occupied rather than lived in.

CARLOS
You have a roommate?

ALEX
Niles. He's away for the weekend.

CARLOS
Ah.

Carlos sets his suitcase down against the wall. Alex has made an effort — there is a pillow on the couch, a clean sheet folded on it, a small glass vase with a single daisy on the coffee table.

Carlos sees the daisy. He does not comment. Something in his face softens.

CARLOS
Let's begin.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — KITCHEN TABLE — LATER

Two laptops open. Three notebooks. A whiteboard — Alex must have borrowed it — propped against the wall, already half-filled with columns of dashes and dots. Empty coffee cups. An ashtray holding a peeled orange rind.

Carlos is running an audio file. We hear the familiar modulated-pulse tone. *Beep. Beep-beep. Beep.*

CARLOS
This is from my chest. Last Tuesday.

ALEX
(listening)
T... H... E... space... Z...

CARLOS
Play it again.

They play it again. Alex writes. Slowly, across a clean page, a sentence assembles:

THE Z A R E C O M I N G

They stare at it.

ALEX
(very quietly)
Missing letters?

CARLOS
Missing or — abbreviated. Or a name.

ALEX
The Z are coming.

CARLOS
The Z are coming.

Silence. Somewhere a radiator clanks.

ALEX
Is my phone recording this?

CARLOS
Everything. Always. Yes.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — THE NEXT DAY

The table has filled up with more. Two whiteboards now. A map of the world taped to one wall, with pins beginning to go into it. A pot of coffee that has been refilled so many times it has lost its purpose.

Carlos bends over a new printout.

CARLOS
Alex. Come here.

Alex crosses.

CARLOS (CONT'D)
Look at this sequence. I got it last night at three a.m. I've been working on it since.

The printout shows morse. Beneath it, Carlos's handwritten decoding:

3 0 9 R E E D S A N A N T O N I O

Alex stares.

ALEX
That's an address.

CARLOS
It is.

ALEX
In San Antonio.

CARLOS
I lived at 309 Reed Street from 1998 to 2012. I sold the house in 2012 when I moved to a smaller place in Alamo Heights.

A silence.

ALEX
How does it know that.

CARLOS
I don't know.

ALEX
(quieter)
Why that address. Why not your current address.

Carlos's face does something complicated.

CARLOS
I lost the most important thing of my life in that house.

A silence.

ALEX
Who.

CARLOS
(after a breath)
A long time ago.

Alex does not push.

CARLOS (CONT'D)
(softer)
I lost the part of me that still believed she might walk in the door.

Alex does not know what to say to that. He says nothing.

Carlos pulls a second printout from under the first.

CARLOS
That's not even the strange part.

ALEX
What's stranger than that.

CARLOS
The next sequence. From this morning.

Alex reads. His face goes still.

C A I R O M U S E U M R O O M 4 7

ALEX
Carlos. You've never been to Cairo.

CARLOS
I have never been to Cairo.

ALEX
Why is your heart telling you to go to Cairo.

Carlos sits down slowly.

CARLOS
I don't know. (he rubs his eyes) But I don't think it's just — my heart. Not anymore. I think — (he struggles) — I think it knows things I don't. I think it knows things nobody I know knows.

Alex stares at the address.

ALEX
309 Reed is a specific memory. Room 47 at the Cairo Museum is — information.

CARLOS
Information we could check.

ALEX
(slow)
Yes.

CARLOS
If it's right about Room 47 — then —

ALEX
Then it's right about other things.

Carlos looks at Alex. Alex looks at Carlos.

Neither of them moves.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — THAT NIGHT

Later. The windows are black. A pot of coffee on the stove. Alex has been running his own decoder. Carlos asleep on the couch under a blanket, mouth slightly open.

Alex stares at his screen. The latest sequence has resolved into English. He reads it once. He reads it twice. He does not move.

The translated line reads:

RED BICYCLE ALEX. THE FIELD. WE REMEMBER IT WITH YOU.

Alex stares at the line a long time.

He sets down the laptop very carefully, as if it might break.

He stands. He walks to the window. He puts one hand against the cold glass.

On the couch, Carlos shifts. Wakes partway.

CARLOS
(sleep-thick)
Mm — ?

ALEX
(without turning)
Carlos.

CARLOS
What.

ALEX
I had a red bicycle when I was seven.

Carlos sits up slowly.

ALEX (CONT'D)
My dad got it for my birthday. He took me to a field outside of town. There was nothing there. Just. A field. He taught me to ride.

CARLOS
Alex —

ALEX
I have had to reconstruct that memory from nothing. I have no pictures. My aunt — when I went to her — my aunt didn't take any of my parents' photographs when she cleared out the house. She just. Didn't. So I have — I have that one afternoon. The field. The red bicycle. My father running behind me and letting go.

His voice catches.

ALEX (CONT'D)
I have never told anybody about that afternoon. Not
one person. Ever.

Carlos is very quiet.

Alex turns from the window. His cheeks are wet.

ALEX
How does it know.

Carlos does not answer.

Alex crosses to him, sits on the floor by the couch, and rests his forehead
against Carlos's knee.

ALEX
(muffled)
How does it know.

Carlos, very slowly, puts his hand on Alex's head.

Somewhere in the building, a pipe bangs.

They stay like that a long time.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — LATER

Carlos on the couch, feet up, running another sweep. Alex sits cross-legged on
the floor with his own chest monitor.

CARLOS
I have been thinking about whether they are —
downloadable.

ALEX
The messages.

CARLOS
Yes.

ALEX
You mean whether they're just stored. Broadcasting.
Or whether —

CARLOS
Whether they're aware. Yes.

Alex looks at him.

ALEX
That's a big leap.

CARLOS
I have had more time to make it.

A pause.

CARLOS (CONT'D)
We could, of course, use electric shocks to try to
send signals back.

ALEX
(deadpan)
No.

CARLOS
(smiling, raises hands)

I'm joking.

ALEX

Are you.

CARLOS

Mostly.

They both almost laugh.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

What if we just... focus. Intensely. What if the channel is quieter than we've been giving it credit for.

ALEX

Like... talk to it?

CARLOS

Like listen for it.

Alex closes his eyes. Sets his hand flat on his chest.

Long silence.

We hear his heartbeat, slowing. Steadying.

Beneath it — faint — the second wave begins.

Carlos leans forward, eyes on the laptop monitor. The secondary waveform is *responding*. Gaps and clusters tightening into a new pattern.

Carlos whispers the translation:

CARLOS

(whispering)

Y...E...S...

Alex's eyes open. He has gone pale.

ALEX

It heard me.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — LATE NIGHT

Carlos on the phone in the kitchen, speaking Spanish in low tones. Diego's voice on the other end, upset.

DIEGO (O.S.)

(Spanish, subtitled)

Tío, this is insane. Come home.

CARLOS

(Spanish, subtitled)

Diego —

DIEGO

You sound like a crazy person.

CARLOS

I have never been more calm in my life.

DIEGO

That's exactly what a crazy person sounds like.

Carlos laughs. Then stops.

CARLOS

I love you, Diego.

He hangs up before Diego can answer.

In the living room, Alex is asleep on the couch, laptop on his chest, headphones askew. Carlos drapes a blanket over him. Tucks it up to his shoulders. Stands there for a moment, looking down.

Then, quietly:

CARLOS
(to himself)
Pobrecito.

He reaches for the lamp. Stops. Looks back at Alex.

Something in his chest — not the morse, not whatever else lives there — shifts.

He registers, the way a man registers a change in the weather, that he has come to care about this stranger's son. That he has, in a matter of days, let someone in.

His first reaction is something like alarm.

His second reaction is small and frightened and resembles gratitude.

He stands in the half-dark a long time.

Eventually he turns off the lamp.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — MORNING

The door bursts open. NILES stomps in, backpack, road-weariness.

NILES
Bro, you will NEVER believe how much the Peter Pan
bus —

He stops. Stares at Carlos, who is in the kitchen making coffee.

Carlos turns. Lifts the coffee pot in greeting.

CARLOS
Niles, I presume. Café?

Niles's gaze moves from Carlos, to the couch (Alex, still sleeping), to the kitchen table (laptops, whiteboard, morse code), back to Carlos.

NILES
...sure.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — LATER

Niles sits on the arm of the couch, coffee in hand. Alex, awake now, sits at the table. Carlos leans in the kitchen doorway.

NILES
So let me — I just want to understand this, because
my brain is — so your heart —

ALEX
Is sending morse code.

NILES
Which you can decode.

ALEX
Which we can decode.

NILES
And it's — messages. Like — from.

CARLOS
We're not sure.

NILES
Okay.

He takes a long sip of coffee.

NILES (CONT'D)
Couldn't this, though, be like — not that I don't believe you, I'm just riffing — couldn't this be like. Normal. Like pyramids.

ALEX
What about the pyramids.

NILES
You know. Like — the pyramids are here. They've been here. We don't know how they got built. But they got built. Nobody's freaking out about them. Maybe this has been happening forever and we just. Didn't know.

Alex looks at Carlos. Carlos looks back.

CARLOS
(slowly)
That is not the stupidest thing anyone has said in this room in the past three days.

NILES
Thanks man.

ALEX
(to Carlos)
Could it have been. Forever.

CARLOS
Heart palpitations, unexplained — they're in every medical record going back to the Egyptians. Visions. Voices. Saints who "heard God" in their chest. Oracles. Poets.

ALEX
You think people have been hearing this for —

CARLOS
I think we are the first ones with the tools to decode it.

A beat.

Alex goes rigid. His jaw tightens. His hand flies to his chest. His eyes go wide and unfocused.

NILES
(alarmed)
Bro?

CARLOS
(to Niles, sharp)
Step back.

Alex's breathing goes ragged. He clutches the table. Then the wave passes. He slumps back in his chair, gasping.

ALEX
(hoarse)
It's new.

CARLOS
What?

ALEX
(to Niles, shaking his head)
No. Not forever. It's new. It just — it just came in. It wanted me to know. It's new.

Niles looks at them. Niles looks at the door.

NILES
I'm gonna... give you guys the apartment for a minute.

He backs out, coffee still in hand.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — LATER

Carlos and Alex at the table. Between them a page of decoded fragments.

...NOT ALONE...

...WE ARE COMING...

...YOUR HEART WAS NEVER SILENT...

...WE ARE LISTENING...

...YOUR WIFE'S NECKLACE IS BEHIND THE BOOKSHELF, CARLOS...

Alex looks up from that last line. Carlos is reading it and his hand is trembling.

ALEX
Carlos?

Carlos takes a long, slow breath.

CARLOS
(barely audible)
Amalia's.

ALEX
(softly)
Wife?

CARLOS
She wasn't. Not yet.

A beat. Alex registers that.

CARLOS (CONT'D)
It was my fiancée's. It was in a box I gave to my mother in 1990 and I have not seen it since. I —

He stops. His voice fails.

ALEX
(softly)
Carlos, that's not what's scary about that sentence.

Carlos looks at him.

ALEX
What's scary about that sentence is — how did it
know.

The radiator clanks.

The laptop's cursor blinks.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — THAT EVENING

Carlos pacing with the phone pressed to his ear. Alex at the table watching him.

CARLOS
(Spanish, subtitled)
Diego. Listen to me carefully. I need you to go to
Olga's house.

DIEGO (O.S.)
Tío, I'm at work —

CARLOS
Tonight. After work. I need you to go to Abuela's
house. I need you to go to the back guest room. The
one nobody uses.

DIEGO (O.S.)
Okay...

CARLOS
There is a bookshelf on the left wall. Behind the
bookshelf. Is there anything behind it.

DIEGO (O.S.)
Tío. Nobody has moved that bookshelf in twenty
years.

CARLOS
I know.

DIEGO (O.S.)
What do you think is behind it.

Carlos closes his eyes.

CARLOS
A small wooden box. Dark wood. About this big. (he
gestures to nothing) My mother put it there when I
asked her to keep it safe in 1990. When I left. I
told her to hide it somewhere it would not be
thrown away when she died. I think she hid it
there.

DIEGO (O.S.)
Tío, what's in it.

CARLOS
A necklace.

DIEGO (O.S.)
Whose necklace.

A long silence.

CARLOS
Amalia's.

Another silence, from the other end this time.

DIEGO (O.S.)
I'll go tonight.

CARLOS
Call me when you find it.

DIEGO (O.S.)
If I find it.

CARLOS
You will find it.

Carlos hangs up. He leans his head against the kitchen wall. Alex watches him.

ALEX
Are you okay.

CARLOS
No.

They sit in silence.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — NIGHT

Hours later. Midnight. Alex asleep in a chair, laptop in his lap. Carlos on the couch, staring at the ceiling, phone on his chest, face-up.

The phone rings.

Carlos snatches it up before the second ring. Alex wakes. Sits up.

CARLOS
Diego.

Alex leans forward.

DIEGO (O.S.)
Tío.

CARLOS
What.

DIEGO (O.S.)
(voice unsteady)
Tío, we had to — we had to move the whole
bookshelf. Abuela was very confused. She kept
saying I was going to break something.

CARLOS
Diego.

DIEGO (O.S.)
It's here.

Carlos's face crumples. He puts his free hand over his mouth.

DIEGO (O.S.)
Tío, it's here. A little wooden box. It was taped
to the back of the shelf. Taped. I just — how did
you know.

Carlos is weeping silently. Alex stares.

CARLOS
(rasping)
Open it.

DIEGO (O.S.)
(we hear him set the phone down, fiddle with something, pick it up again)
It's — (breath catches) — Tío, it's a necklace. A gold one, like a chain, and a pendant, like a little coin —

CARLOS
A Saint Christopher medal.

DIEGO (O.S.)
Yes. Yes. How.

CARLOS
That's Amalia's. That's — my girlfriend's. From before. From before 1989.

A long silence. We can hear, at the other end of the line, Olga's voice saying something we can't quite make out — tight, shocked, maternal.

DIEGO (O.S.)
Tío. How did you know this was here.

CARLOS
I did not know, Diego.

DIEGO (O.S.)
Then how —

CARLOS
Something else knew.

A long breath from the other end. Diego says nothing for a while.

DIEGO (O.S.)
Tío.

CARLOS
Mm.

DIEGO (O.S.)
(Spanish, subtitled)
I thought you were — I always thought you were the sad one. In our family. Since I was small. The uncle who came home from America and ate alone. I thought that was just who you were.

Carlos closes his eyes.

DIEGO (O.S.)
(voice breaking)
You were not the sad one, tío.

Carlos cannot speak.

DIEGO (O.S.)
You were the one who saw. I did not know that. I did not know that until tonight. I am sorry.

CARLOS
(softly)
Nothing to be sorry for, mi amor.

DIEGO (O.S.)
Come home soon. Please.

CARLOS
I will try.

Carlos hangs up. He lets the phone drop onto the couch. He puts both hands over his face.

Alex does not move for a long time.

Eventually he crosses the room and sits on the arm of the couch beside Carlos and, very carefully, puts one hand on Carlos's shoulder.

They stay like that.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — LATER

A cold coffee. A dark window. Carlos, on the couch, composed but hollow-eyed. Alex has made him tea. Alex sits in the chair across from him, watching.

Carlos's phone rings again.

Diego's name.

Carlos picks up.

CARLOS
(Spanish, subtitled)
Diego.

DIEGO (O.S.)
Tío. I drove to Camila's. I could not be alone
after. I am at the Comarca.

CARLOS
(softly)
Good.

DIEGO (O.S.)
Her grandmother wants to speak to you. She made me
call. (a pause, awkward) I don't know what to tell
her. I don't know what to tell anyone. Please talk
to her.

A rustle on the line. A breath. Then the elder woman's voice — thinner than it was in person, but carrying the same unhurried weight.

ELDER WOMAN (O.S.)
(Spanish, subtitled)
Carlos. The sky-woman found you.

Carlos closes his eyes.

CARLOS
Yes.

ELDER WOMAN
She is asking you something. Do not answer too
quickly.

CARLOS
I will try.

ELDER WOMAN
Some of them do not ask. Some only take. You will
know the difference.

CARLOS
(after a beat)
How.

ELDER WOMAN
By whether the room becomes quieter when they

arrive. Or louder.

Alex, watching Carlos's face, understands none of this and all of it.

ELDER WOMAN (CONT'D)

Carlos.

CARLOS

Yes.

ELDER WOMAN

Bring her with you. If you have her.

CARLOS

(barely)

Bring —

ELDER WOMAN

The one the sky-woman spoke of. Bring her with you.
You will need her.

Carlos cannot answer.

A rustle. Diego back on the line.

DIEGO (O.S.)

Tío? She won't tell me what she said.

CARLOS

I will tell you when I see you.

DIEGO (O.S.)

When is that.

CARLOS

I don't know, mi amor. Not soon.

He hangs up slowly.

ALEX

What did she say?

Carlos looks at him.

CARLOS

She said — not all the visitors are good ones. And
that when I come home, I should bring the necklace.

ALEX

Why the necklace.

CARLOS

I don't know. (softly) Not yet.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — NIGHT

A small television on the kitchen counter plays a 24-hour news channel — muted, closed-captioned. The chyron reads: *"HEART SIGNAL" HOAX GROWS ONLINE — ACADEMICS WEIGH IN.*

Carlos turns up the volume.

A PANEL DISCUSSION is underway. A SHARP-SUITED HOST, a PSYCHIATRIST, and — on a third screen via webcam — a SHADOWED FIGURE, their face blurred, credited in the chyron as *"ANONYMOUS PHILOSOPHER."*

HOST (ON TV)

— so you're suggesting this is — what, some kind of
mass hysteria?

PSYCHIATRIST (ON TV)
Mass hysteria is a pejorative term. I'd call it a socially contagious somatic experience. We've seen it with —

HOST
But the two men — the Panamanian and the student — they say they're decoding these messages —

ANONYMOUS PHILOSOPHER (ON TV)
(voice also modulated)
May I?

HOST
Please.

ANONYMOUS PHILOSOPHER
We have always assumed that consciousness is something produced by the body, and that the body itself is silent, a sort of meat vehicle. What if that is backwards. What if the body has been speaking all along, and we have only just developed the humility to hear it.

HOST
That sounds —

ANONYMOUS PHILOSOPHER
Wait. I am not finished. What if there is something inside the body that is not the body? And what if it is not alone. What if it is waiting.

The HOST stares into the camera for a half-second in which his cable-news composure visibly cracks.

Alex and Carlos, on the couch, do not move.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — THE NEXT MORNING

They have agreed to do it: a webcam interview with the same program. The laptop sits on the coffee table. Alex adjusts the framing so both their faces fit.

ALEX
(to Carlos)
What if we look insane.

CARLOS
We are insane. What we have to not look is cruel.

Alex nods, once.

The host's face appears on the screen.

HOST (ON LAPTOP)
Alex, Carlos, thank you for joining us. A lot of people have questions. I want to start with the most obvious: why should anybody believe you?

CARLOS
(calmly)
They shouldn't. Yet.

HOST
I —

CARLOS
I mean that with respect. Belief is not the right response to this. Attention is. That's all we're asking for. Attention.

ALEX
(nervous but steady)
I'm a junior at Columbia. I don't want to be on TV. I would very much like to be playing video games right now. I am here because I have something happening to me that is real, that has been verified by another human being who I had never met, and that I don't understand. I would like help understanding it.

The host's face shifts. Just a little.

HOST (ON LAPTOP)
What do you think is happening?

A pause. Alex looks at Carlos. Carlos looks at the camera.

CARLOS
I think we are not alone.

HOST (ON LAPTOP)
In the — universe?

CARLOS
In our bodies.

INT. CABLE NEWS STUDIO — MOMENTS LATER

The host turns from the monitor to the camera. Professional.

HOST
Alex Thompson and Carlos Mendez, with what they describe as quote-unquote messages from inside their own bodies. Some will find what you just heard concerning. Some will find it inspiring. Some will find it deeply silly.

He turns, crossing the set.

HOST (CONT'D)
When we come back — we've been in touch with a philosopher who has been following the so-called Heart Signal phenomenon for six months. He has requested anonymity. We're happy to grant it. Stay with us.

A bumper. A commercial for an SUV. A commercial for a drug whose side effects include mood changes.

Then:

HOST
Welcome back. With me now, anonymously, via a secured video link, a philosopher at an institution we have agreed not to name. Sir. Thank you for joining us.

On the screen: the ANONYMOUS PHILOSOPHER — face pixelated, voice modulated.

ANONYMOUS PHILOSOPHER
Thank you for having me.

HOST
You have been following this story.

ANONYMOUS PHILOSOPHER
I have been following stories like this one for a long time.

HOST
Stories like this one?

ANONYMOUS PHILOSOPHER
There are more than you think. In medical anthropology. In the Jesuit record. In the private diaries of cardiologists. The men and women whose hearts speak to them — they are, it turns out, a very old tradition.

HOST
You're saying this has happened before.

ANONYMOUS PHILOSOPHER
I'm saying something more careful. I'm saying that there is a pattern. A pattern of people reporting that their interior is not silent. A pattern we have mostly medicated or committed or crucified.

HOST
That's a provocative framing.

ANONYMOUS PHILOSOPHER
What is more provocative is what I believe is about to happen.

HOST
Which is?

A long pause. The philosopher's obscured face tilts, as if he is choosing words.

In the lower corner of the pixelated frame, one of his hands — also pixelated, but just visible — rises, absently, and settles against the left side of his chest. Rests there.

ANONYMOUS PHILOSOPHER
I believe we are about to learn that consciousness is not a property of brains. I believe we are about to learn that brains are receivers. I believe we are about to learn that we have been receiving a particular signal, for a very long time, and that the signal has, up to now, been patient. I do not think it will remain patient.

HOST
Sir —

ANONYMOUS PHILOSOPHER
I have one more thing to say. And then I will go.

HOST
Please.

The hand stays over the heart.

ANONYMOUS PHILOSOPHER
Listen to the two men you had on before me. They are not crazy. They are early. There will be more.

The feed cuts. The host turns slowly back to camera, visibly unsettled.

HOST
We'll — we'll be right back.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — DAY

Alex and Carlos, on the couch, watching the philosopher's segment play out in real time.

When it ends, neither speaks.

Alex turns slowly to Carlos.

ALEX
Did that — did that just help us.

CARLOS
I don't know.

On the coffee table, Alex's laptop PINGS. A direct message notification.

Then another. Then three more.

Alex leans forward. Opens the inbox.

A Twitter DM. From a woman in Lagos, Nigeria. *My brother has been hearing it since April. Please. We have no one.*

Another. A man in São Paulo. *Eu ouço também. I hear it too.*

Another. A graduate student in Seoul. A housewife in Karachi. A truck driver in Saskatchewan. A priest in Lisbon.

Alex scrolls. The messages keep loading.

ALEX
(quietly)
Carlos.

CARLOS
I see.

ALEX
There are — there are a lot of them.

CARLOS
Yes.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — MONTAGE — THAT NIGHT

Music rising — a quiet, patient, plucked-string cue.

— Alex and Carlos at the kitchen table, laptops open, reading messages.

— Carlos pinning a fresh sheet to the wall: *NETWORK*. Below it, a numbered list. Names. Cities.

— The map of the world, now with pins. Lagos. São Paulo. Seoul. Karachi. Saskatoon. Istanbul. Lisbon. Jakarta. Mumbai. Mexico City. Glasgow.

— Carlos on video chat with a MAN in Istanbul, prayer rug visible behind him, the Bosphorus out a window. The man is crying. Carlos listens. Says little.

— Alex on video chat with a WOMAN in Seoul. She is showing him a waveform on her phone. It looks the same as his.

— Carlos at the wall of the map. He takes a step back. Looks at the pattern the pins are making. Which is not a pattern. Which is simply: *everywhere*.

CARLOS
(to himself, wondering)
Dios mío.

MONTAGE — THE WORLD REACTS

The music turns. Bigger. More ironic.

Up comes *"HEART ATTACK (JUST LISTEN)"* by THE STETHOSCOPES — a rock-rap anthem rushed out this week in direct response to the viral interview. Buzzsaw guitar. A snapping snare. A rapper with an asthmatic, urgent cadence. It is already everywhere. Every teenage earbud. Every CrossFit box. Every cab. The sound of this long strange fall.

— A LATE-NIGHT COMEDIAN holds a stethoscope to his own chest. *"Any messages in there, buddy? Oh — yeah — my heart is saying, order more wings. My heart has been saying this for forty years. My heart will not shut up about the wings."* Howling laughter.

— A TIKTOK: a teenage girl, mascara-streaked, holding her wrist to the camera. *"You guys. You guys. It's real. It's real, I can feel it."* The Stethoscopes playing in her bedroom behind her.

— A CABLE PANEL of five men in suits. One, red-faced: *"This is a public health emergency. We are mainstreaming mass delusion and people will die."* Another, measured: *"Or we are about to discover something about ourselves."* The red-faced one talks over him.

— INSTAGRAM LIVE. THE POP STAR, sunglasses indoors, what looks like a Tokyo hotel. *"Guys. Guys. I am not saying I am a host. I am not saying I am not. What I am saying is my tour is now called THE PULSE, tickets drop midnight Pacific, we love you, we go deeper, goodnight."*

— A PRIEST on the steps of a stone church, white-haired, gentle: *"For two thousand years our tradition has held that the heart is where God first speaks. I am not yet ready to say these men are wrong."*

— A TALK RADIO HOST, heard through a cab's tinny speaker, the cab driver's eyes in the mirror: *"— has known for decades. Decades. And the reason they are stepping out now is because they have lost containment, you heard it here —"*

— A MEME. A still of Carlos from the interview, photoshopped with a thought bubble: *"MY HEART IS SPELLING THE IKEA ASSEMBLY INSTRUCTIONS AND I HAVE NEVER BEEN MORE AFRAID."*

— TWO WOMEN on a subway platform. One presses her fingers to the inside of her wrist, wide-eyed. The other, impatient: *"You do not have it, Jen. You do not have it. Put your hand down."*

— A FATHER at a kitchen table. His daughter, maybe eight, watches him watch a muted broadcast. She is eating cereal.

DAUGHTER
Dad.

FATHER
Yeah.

DAUGHTER
Does your heart talk?

The father does not answer right away.

— A BILLBOARD in Times Square, a skincare ad. Someone has spray-painted across the model's face: *ARE YOU HEARING IT YET*

— A woman alone in her car, in a supermarket parking lot, windshield wipers off. She sits very still. One hand on the wheel. One hand over her sternum. She is listening.

— Camera pulls back through the Times Square plaza. On one network screen three stories up, Carlos and Alex's webcam interview is playing on loop. On a screen beside it, the Stethoscopes' music video — Marcus "MC Sternum" Riley snarling into camera, Liv Carver on lead guitar. The hook hits, heard now through a hundred car windows, a hundred open doorways, a hundred earbuds bleeding:

*You can't medicate the message —
You can't deafen what's beneath —
Put your hand down on your chest and —
JUST LISTEN — JUST LISTEN —
JUST LISTEN TO YOUR HEART.*

Ten thousand people walking past without looking up.

MUSIC PEAKS. CUT TO:

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — NEXT MORNING

A sharp KNOCKING at the door. Insistent. Not Niles's knock. Not a delivery knock.

Alex and Carlos freeze.

VOICE (O.S.)
(through the door)
Alex Thompson? We're with the New York Post. We'd
love a comment —

ANOTHER VOICE (O.S.)
— sir, I'm with CNN digital, are you available for
—

ANOTHER VOICE (O.S.)
— Alex, if you're in there, we just want to —

Alex looks at Carlos.

ALEX
(softly)
The back stairs.

EXT. ALEX'S APARTMENT BUILDING — BACK ALLEY — DAY

The fire escape. Alex and Carlos descending, Carlos gripping the rail, going slowly. A reporter in a parka spots them from the main sidewalk, turns —

REPORTER
Hey — HEY! Mr. Mendez! Mr. Mendez is going out the
back!

They hit the alley. They run.

INT. A DINER — DAY

A humble diner on Amsterdam Avenue. Carlos and Alex in a booth, winded, hooded. The waitress has brought coffee.

Alex watches the window.

CARLOS
Niles is on his own.

ALEX

Niles knows nothing. They'll get bored.

CARLOS
We cannot stay at the apartment.

ALEX
No.

CARLOS
We may not be able to stay anywhere. Not for long.

ALEX
No.

A silence. Alex sips his coffee.

ALEX
There was a woman. In the messages last night. From Austin.

CARLOS
Texas?

ALEX
Her signal said something about the Cairo Museum. Room 47.

Carlos's hand stops halfway to his own cup.

CARLOS
Show me.

Alex slides his phone across the table.

Carlos reads. Reads again.

CARLOS
(softly)
So it is not just us.

ALEX
It is not just us.

CARLOS
The same address to more than one of us.

ALEX
Maybe the same address to all of us.

Carlos closes his eyes.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — LATE AFTERNOON

The reporters have cleared. The apartment has the ghostly feel of a place recently besieged. Niles lets them in. He has a stack of business cards from reporters in one hand and a plate of pancakes in the other.

NILES
Guys. Guys. They were out there for five hours.

CARLOS
We appreciate you, Niles.

NILES
One of them offered me eight hundred dollars for a photo of Alex eating breakfast.

ALEX

You didn't —

NILES

(offended)

No, I didn't, I'm not a psychopath, but I want you to know that there is now a number. Like, I could at any moment go get eight hundred dollars by opening your door.

ALEX

Noted.

Niles turns to go. Stops. Turns back. Does not quite look at Alex.

NILES

Hey.

ALEX

Yeah.

NILES

This past summer. A few times. In the night. I heard you. (a pause) The — the breathing thing.

Alex goes still.

NILES (CONT'D)

I was going to ask. I kept not asking. I thought you'd be embarrassed or I'd be embarrassed or — I don't know. I figured if you wanted to tell me you'd tell me.

ALEX

(quietly)

Niles.

NILES

(still not quite looking)

I'm glad somebody is here with you now. That's all. (clears his throat) That's the thing I wanted to say.

He goes into his room. The door closes softly.

Alex looks at the door for a long beat.

CARLOS

(softly)

He is a good one, that one.

ALEX

Yeah.

Alex wipes his eye on his sleeve.

Alex and Carlos sit at the table.

CARLOS

We need help.

ALEX

Yes.

CARLOS

More than each other. More than forum posts.

ALEX

I know.

INT. DR. MUSIKANT'S OFFICE — HUDSON STATE UNIVERSITY — DAY

A cramped, book-cluttered office. On the TV in the corner, the webcam interview plays in silence. DR. LEAH MUSIKANT (42, warm-featured, dark-haired, kind eyes) watches it with her arms folded. A mug of tea cools on the desk.

Behind her: a wall of degrees. UCLA. Columbia Med. Johns Hopkins. A small handwritten sign in a frame says *"If you are not a little afraid of your own hypothesis, you are probably not thinking."*

A knock. DR. EVAN SORENSON (55, silver-haired cardiologist, rimless glasses) pokes his head in.

SORENSON
You seeing this?

MUSIKANT
Mm.

SORENSON
Leah.

MUSIKANT
I know.

SORENSON
Don't.

She turns. Smiles at him — a smile that is half affection, half I'm-going-to-do-it-anyway.

MUSIKANT
Evan. You remember what I said at my orals.

SORENSON
Every day.

MUSIKANT
I said the body is a radio we have never bothered to tune.

SORENSON
Yes.

MUSIKANT
It may just have a signal.

She picks up her phone.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT — NIGHT

Alex at the kitchen table. The phone beside him buzzes once, briefly — a voicemail notification.

On the screen: *Unknown Number · New Voicemail (47s)*.

Alex glances at it. Does not play it.

Carlos, across the table, notices.

CARLOS
You should listen to your messages, Alex.

ALEX
Everyone wants something.

CARLOS
Yes. That's how it is now.

Alex turns the phone face-down.

INT. DR. HU'S OFFICE — HUDSON STATE UNIVERSITY — DAY

Down the hall. A smaller, tidier office. DR. IAN HU (40s) sits at a spotless desk. Two computer monitors. A framed photograph of a young boy in a tee-ball uniform. No clutter.

His phone buzzes. He glances at the caller ID. Something in his neutral face shifts — not much. Just enough that, if anyone were watching, they would notice.

He picks up.

HU

Go ahead.

MAN (O.S.)

(a cleaner, flatter voice)

You've seen the broadcast.

HU

I've seen it.

MAN (O.S.)

Musikant is going to reach out.

HU

I assumed.

MAN (O.S.)

We would like you to be helpful.

HU

I'm always helpful.

MAN (O.S.)

Helpful to us.

HU

(very quietly)

I know what you mean.

MAN (O.S.)

Good.

The line goes dead.

Hu sets the phone down. He looks at the framed photograph of the boy. He turns it face-down on the desk.

He opens a drawer. He takes out a small, black, professional-looking object. Not quite a gun. He examines it. Sets it back in the drawer. Closes the drawer.

He sits. A long beat.

He takes a second phone from his inside jacket pocket — a personal phone, different case. He opens contacts. He scrolls to a name: *OLIVER — MY BOY*. His finger hovers over the green call button.

He does not press it.

He puts the phone away.

He reaches out and turns the boy's photo face-up again. He looks at it a long moment.

Then he turns it face-down again. Slowly. More deliberately this time.

He straightens his tie.

CUT TO:

EXT. MANHATTAN BAGEL SHOP — MORNING

Alex emerges from the glass door carrying a brown paper bag. Carlos follows, sipping coffee from a paper cup.

A woman in a wool coat steps forward from the sidewalk.

MUSIKANT

Alex Thompson. Carlos Mendez.

Alex stops. Carlos stops. Alex's free hand twitches toward his pocket.

MUSIKANT

I left you a voicemail yesterday. And another last night. I took the first train down when you didn't call.

ALEX

(recognizing, a little sheepish)

You're —

MUSIKANT

I'm not a journalist. I'm not FBI. I'm not a cult. I run a research center at Hudson State. My name is Dr. Leah Musikant. I run CNS and PNS studies. I've been researching low-frequency autonomic signaling for eleven years. I saw your interview and I believe you are either the most interesting hoax of the decade or the most interesting non-hoax of the century and I would very much like to run some scans.

She holds out a card. Her hands do not shake.

Carlos looks at Alex. Alex looks at the card. He takes it.

CARLOS

(to Musikant)

We've had a lot of people approach us.

MUSIKANT

I'm sure.

CARLOS

Not all of them with good intentions.

MUSIKANT

I assume so.

CARLOS

(half smiling)

How are we to know you are different.

MUSIKANT

You aren't. But I can tell you that we believe it is not just the heart.

Alex's head snaps up.

ALEX

What?

MUSIKANT

There's reason to think the stomach. The vagus nerve. The enteric nervous system. The spine. We've been running unrelated studies for five years on low-amplitude rhythmic anomalies in visceral patients. Since your interview, my students have been re-analyzing that data. It's there. The same signature. In the gut. In the back.

A long beat.

CARLOS

(softly)

It's not just the heart.

MUSIKANT

I don't think so. I think the heart is just — the drum. The loudest part.

Carlos looks at the bagel in his hand as if he has forgotten what bagels are.

CARLOS

When can we come.

MUSIKANT

Right now. I have a car.

INT. MUSIKANT'S CAR — DAY

Driving upstate. Trees blurring past the windows. Carlos up front. Alex in the back. Musikant at the wheel.

Alex, phone in hand, turns the screen toward Carlos.

ALEX

Have you seen this?

On Alex's phone: a glossy clip of a MALE POP STAR (mid-20s, beautiful, vacant-eyed) on a talk show, laughing.

POP STAR (ON PHONE)

— yeah, yeah, and, like, honestly? I think that's where my music comes from. Like — my heart knows stuff, you know? It literally — it literally tells me melodies, dude. I know how it sounds. But it's real.

Carlos rubs his eyes.

CARLOS

God save us.

ALEX

He's opening a tour.

CARLOS

Of course he is.

MUSIKANT

(from the front, amused)

Put on his song.

ALEX

Don't encourage him.

MUSIKANT

I need to see how much I hate it.

Alex puts it on. A POP SONG with a too-processed hook fills the car. They wince. They also, against their will, bob their heads.

Alex stares out the window. The highway signs go past.

ALEX
(after a while, quieter)
I don't talk about my family.

CARLOS
I know.

ALEX
Car crash. I was eight. Both of them. There's no siblings. My aunt took me. She did everything you're supposed to do. We just never. Loved each other, I guess.

The pop song hums along underneath.

CARLOS
I'm sorry, Alex.

ALEX
What about yours.

Carlos looks out at the trees.

CARLOS
I have Diego. My sister's grandson. He is the best part of all the people we are. His girlfriend — Camila. She will be part of it one day if he doesn't mess it up. Which he will, because he is twenty-four and an idiot.

ALEX
(small smile)
And a wife?

A long pause.

CARLOS
She died in 1989.

ALEX
...oh.

CARLOS
(evenly)
We were not yet married. But we would have been.

Alex looks down.

ALEX
Was that — is that what the necklace was. The one in the message.

CARLOS
Yes.

They ride in silence.

The pop song ends. Musikant clicks on NPR instead. Classical. Satie — *Gymnopédie No. 1*, the slow circling three-note figure floating out of the speakers like something from a different century.

Carlos's head turns slightly toward the speaker.

INT. MUSIKANT'S CAR — LATER

The highway has narrowed to a two-lane parkway. Trees on both sides. Musikant eats a granola bar one-handed.

MUSIKANT
Can I ask you both something.

CARLOS
Mm.

MUSIKANT
Why you two.

ALEX
Why us — what?

MUSIKANT
Why did this pick you.

Carlos thinks for a while before answering.

CARLOS
I do not think it picked us.

MUSIKANT
No?

CARLOS
I think it picked many people.

MUSIKANT
And?

CARLOS
And we are the ones who noticed.

Musikant glances over at him.

MUSIKANT
(thoughtfully)
That's a humbler answer than I expected.

CARLOS
I have had time to learn humbler answers.

A silence. The tires hum.

MUSIKANT
(eyes on the road)
When I was thirty-one I published a paper arguing that the body might carry information in ways we had not trained ourselves to see. It had a more technical title than that. Ten pages. A polite idea.

ALEX
(from the back)
What happened to it.

MUSIKANT
Three peer reviewers recommended rejection. One of them — a man I loved, who was a kind of father to me — wrote one word in the margin.

A silence.

MUSIKANT (CONT'D)
Embarrassing.

Carlos's head turns toward her.

MUSIKANT (CONT'D)

My husband at the time — now my ex — asked me, the evening I got the rejection, whether I could please be a cardiologist like a normal person and stop being a whatever-I-was-trying-to-be.

CARLOS

And.

MUSIKANT

(small smile)

And I could not.

ALEX

Was he angry.

MUSIKANT

He was sad. Which was worse. He was a good man. (a beat) He is still a good man. With someone else. Who is probably less interesting to have dinner with than me.

Alex, in the back seat, laughs once — surprised by the laugh.

MUSIKANT

Eleven years. If it turns out I was right — I was right alone for eleven years. And if it turns out I was wrong — I was wrong alone for eleven years. Either way, it will not have been boring.

She clicks her turn signal. The car slows for an exit ramp.

CARLOS

(quietly)

You were not alone.

MUSIKANT

No?

CARLOS

You had a signal.

Musikant lets out a breath that is almost a laugh and almost a sob.

Alex, in the back seat, is staring at his phone. He lifts it.

ALEX

Guys. This man in Cairo. Hassan. I was texting him last night. He sent me a photograph.

He hands the phone to Carlos. Carlos looks.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Room 47 of the Cairo Museum is the Tutankhamun Jewelry Room. The pendant he's showing — I had to look this up — is the Wadjet Eye. Ancient Egyptian symbol. It's a pictogram of — (Alex consults his phone) — a symbolic representation of the human eye and — wait for it — the inside of the skull.

Carlos stares at the photograph.

CARLOS

(very quiet)

So it has been watching for some time.

MUSIKANT

(glancing between them)

I'm lost.

CARLOS
(gently)
Stay lost for a little longer, Doctor. It is about
to get worse.

EXT. HUDSON STATE UNIVERSITY — CENTER FOR PNS/CNS STUDIES — DAY

A squat brick building at the edge of a leafy campus. A discreet sign.
Security badges at the door.

They badge in. Musikant leads them down a corridor.

INT. LAB — DAY

Bright. Humming. Four rooms visible through interior glass. Equipment: MRI
antechamber, EEG banks, a small operating theater.

Two people wait for them.

DR. IAN HU (40s, quiet, a sort of bland pleasantness that is hard to remember
ten seconds after you see it). And DR. SORENSON, the cardiologist from
Musikant's office.

MUSIKANT
Dr. Hu — neuro, gut-brain axis. Dr. Sorenson —
cardiology. Guys, Alex and Carlos.

Hu smiles and shakes their hands. His handshake is very exact.

Sorenson does not smile. He does, however, shake their hands firmly.

SORENSON
Before anything else. I want to say something.

MUSIKANT
Evan —

SORENSON
Briefly. I don't believe you, but I also don't
disbelieve you. What I know is that Alex has
documented AFIB and Carlos is sixty years old with
an unexamined heart and if either of you die in my
lab I will have an extremely bad week.

CARLOS
(with grave courtesy)
Doctor, I will try very hard not to die in your
lab.

Sorenson nods, once.

SORENSON
That's all I ask.

Hu claps his hands, friendly.

HU
Shall we begin?

INT. LAB — SCANNING ROOM — DAY

A clean white room. Alex on a gurney. An MRI-compatible gown. A nurse affixes
electrodes to his chest, neck, abdomen. Musikant at a workstation. Hu beside
her, clipboard in hand.

MUSIKANT
(into intercom)
Alex, how are you feeling?

ALEX
(calmly)
Fine.

MUSIKANT
Any episodes in the last hour?

ALEX
No.

MUSIKANT
Good. We're going to start with a baseline. Lie still. Breathe normally. Try to think of nothing.

ALEX
(eyes closing)
Sure.

The gurney slides into the bore of the MRI. The familiar knock-knock-knock of the machine begins.

Musikant watches the monitors.

Heart. Steady.

Stomach. Steady.

Vagus. Steady.

Spine. Steady.

A moment. Then — *ripple*.

A flicker in the lumbar sensor. A flicker in the enteric sensor. A flicker, a fraction of a second later, in the vagus.

And then, finally — the familiar secondary waveform blooms in the cardiac trace.

All of them. Coupled.

Musikant's hand rises unconsciously to her own mouth.

MUSIKANT
(to Hu)
Are you seeing that.

HU
(mild, watching)
Yes.

MUSIKANT
It's not just the heart.

HU
No.

MUSIKANT
It's — it's a chorus.

Hu does not answer. His pen moves on his clipboard. He writes something. We do not see what.

INT. LAB — SEPARATE SCANNING ROOM — DAY

Carlos in a chair wearing a skullcap of sensors, more sensors on his chest, his stomach, his lower back, his wrists. Sorenson, in full physician mode, checks a lead on Carlos's collarbone.

SORENSEN
Any chest pain.

CARLOS
No.

SORENSEN
Shortness of breath.

CARLOS
No.

SORENSEN
Vision changes.

Carlos hesitates.

SORENSEN (CONT'D)
(catching it)
Carlos.

CARLOS
Not the way you mean.

SORENSEN
How.

Carlos looks at him. Chooses.

CARLOS
Sometimes, when the signal is strongest — I see things I have never seen.

Sorenson's pen stops.

SORENSEN
What kinds of things.

CARLOS
(slowly)
A landscape. Lavender hills. A sky with two suns.

Sorenson sits down.

SORENSEN
Carlos. (a pause) When did these visions start.

CARLOS
Three weeks ago.

SORENSEN
Frequency?

CARLOS
Rare. Brief.

SORENSEN
Two suns.

CARLOS
Two suns.

Sorenson closes his notebook. Rubs his jaw.

SORENSEN
I need to tell Leah this.

CARLOS
(softly)
Please do.

INT. LAB — TESTING MONTAGE — DAY INTO EVENING

A series of quick, beautiful, ominous images.

— Alex in an MRI tube, headphones on, eyes closed.

— Carlos in a chair wearing a skullcap of sensors, more sensors on his chest, his stomach, his lower back, his wrists.

— On a monitor bank: the familiar large waveform of the heart. *Plus* a smaller parallel waveform from the stomach. *Plus* a smaller one from the lumbar spine. *Plus* a faint one from the vagus nerve. All of them, at times, modulating together in that secondary shimmer.

— Musikant, watching with her hand over her mouth.

— Hu, writing notes, smiling the same bland smile.

— Sorenson, leaning in, frowning.

— A whiteboard now filling up with decoded fragments:

WE ARE MANY.

ARE YOU ALONE.

WHERE IS YOUR STAR.

DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR STAR.

— Alex, removing the MRI headphones, blinking at the ceiling.

— Carlos, sensors still stuck to his skin, standing at a window watching the sun set over the Hudson.

INT. LAB — EMPTY HALLWAY — DUSK

Fluorescent lights, half of them flickering for the end of the workday. A corridor of closed offices. Hu, alone, walking the length of it with a phone pressed to his ear.

His voice is low. Pleasant. Almost cheerful. The way a man sounds when he is not, in fact, doing what it looks like he is doing.

HU
(quietly)
They are here. Yes. Both of them.

(listening)

They are fully instrumented. I have all the readings you will want. Imaging, electrophysiology, the signal decode.

(listening)

No. Tonight, probably. Musikant will not want to release them. I believe she will insist.

(listening)

If she does — yes. I understand.

(a pause; a smile ghosts his lips)

And Sorenson.

(listening)

I understand.

He passes a CUSTODIAN pushing a mop bucket. He lifts his phone slightly away from his ear, smiles at her, nods. She nods back. He returns to the phone as the custodian passes.

HU (CONT'D)
Understood. Standing by.

He reaches a door at the end of the hall. *STAFF ONLY*. He punches a code. Goes in.

The door clicks shut behind him.

In the empty corridor, somewhere, a fluorescent light ticks.

INT. LAB — MRI CONTROL ROOM — EVENING

Just Carlos this time, in the tube. His eyes closed. On the monitors, his signals are quiet, steady.

And then — the lumbar flickers. The enteric follows. The cardiac blooms.

And Carlos's face, through the window of the MRI, *changes*. His eyes roll beneath closed lids. His lips part.

Musikant at the workstation, alone.

MUSIKANT
(quietly, into intercom)
Carlos.

No answer.

MUSIKANT
Carlos, can you hear me.

Carlos's voice, when it comes, is slow.

CARLOS (V.O. ON INTERCOM)
I can hear you.

MUSIKANT
What are you seeing.

A pause.

CARLOS (V.O.)
A sky.

MUSIKANT
What else.

CARLOS (V.O.)
A — a city. Not our city. A tall city. Buildings like — like trees. Like coral.

MUSIKANT
Who is there.

A very long pause.

CARLOS (V.O.)
Many.

MUSIKANT

Many what.

CARLOS (V.O.)

Many like me. Many like them.

MUSIKANT

What are they doing.

CARLOS (V.O.)

They are — packing. They are packing themselves into something. Like — like into a boat. But not a boat. They are — going.

INTERCUT — WHAT CARLOS SEES — WORDLESS

A horizon of silver dunes.

A sky the color of lavender, deepening at its crown into a bruised indigo. Two suns low against that horizon — one the size of a thumbprint, amber; the other smaller, colder, almost white.

A city rises from the dunes. Not built. *Grown*. Towers that branch like coral, translucent, lit from within, each one a vertical river of slow-moving light. The scale is impossible. The highest towers vanish into cloud.

Along the air between the towers, threads of light *move*. Thousands. Each thread a mind. They flow upward. Upward. Upward.

At the apex of the tallest tower — a shimmering disc, a hole in the sky. Threads of light enter it one after another and *vanish*.

And behind the city — very far away, and very large — a third light. Not a sun. Larger than a sun. Wrong in the way that it *moves*. A dying star in its final minutes, already beginning to bloom, beginning to take the horizon with it.

The city keeps packing.

The threads keep rising.

The sky keeps bruising.

INT. LAB — MRI CONTROL ROOM — CONTINUOUS

Musikant at the workstation. Tears she does not know she is shedding.

MUSIKANT

(a whisper)

Going where.

Another pause. Longer.

CARLOS (V.O.)

(barely audible)

Here.

Musikant's hand hovers above the intercom button.

She clicks it off. She stares at the monitor.

She does not call Carlos back out immediately.

INT. LAB — CONFERENCE ROOM — NIGHT

A long table. Printouts everywhere. Musikant, Hu, Sorenson, Carlos, Alex. Carlos is pale.

MUSIKANT

Okay. So. Agreeing, for the sake of argument, that we are not all hallucinating.

SORENSEN

I am not yet agreeing to that.

MUSIKANT

Evan.

SORENSEN

I am saying the signal is real. I am saying I do not yet understand what makes it.

MUSIKANT

Fair. The signal is real. The signal appears to be distributed — not just cardiac, but enteric and spinal and possibly central. The signal responds to directed attention from the host. And the signal is composed of discrete, legible units of information in a human-authored encoding.

HU

(mild)

Which is — how should I say — very strange.

MUSIKANT

Yes.

HU

Because morse code is a human invention.

MUSIKANT

Yes.

HU

So either — forgive me — the two of you are making this up very elaborately — which I do not think you are. Or whatever is generating these signals has learned morse code. From you.

Alex sits up slowly.

ALEX

I studied it. In a merit badge when I was twelve.

CARLOS

(quietly)

I learned it in the Panamanian Boy Scouts.

They look at each other.

MUSIKANT

So it's picking a symbol set it can find in your head.

HU

Which means it has access to your head.

Nobody says anything.

MUSIKANT

There's something else.

She looks at Carlos. A small nod: *you can say it.*

MUSIKANT (CONT'D)

Carlos. Tell them what you told me in the scanner.

A long silence. Carlos weighs it.

CARLOS

(quietly)

I saw a city. When the signal was strongest. A tall city. Not ours. The buildings — they grew. Like coral. And a sky with two suns. And a third light, further off, that was — wrong. Dying.

Sorenson, already prepared for this from the sensor room, sets his jaw.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

I saw many of them. Not bodies — something less than bodies. Packing themselves into something that wasn't a boat but — served a boat's purpose. They were leaving. They were coming. (a breath) Here.

The silence is absolute.

SORENSEN

When you say saw —

CARLOS

I mean I was there. Briefly. I was not in my body.

HU

(mild, considering, almost too quickly)

Fascinating. Temporal lobe phenomena can produce extremely vivid apparent out-of-body experiences. There are well-documented cases with striking architectural consistency — cathedrals, landscapes. The visual cortex under autonomic stress —

MUSIKANT

Ian.

HU

(raising hands)

I am just — one hypothesis. Worth a controlled study.

MUSIKANT

(eyes on him, a beat too long)

Worth a controlled study.

Alex is watching Hu now. So is Carlos.

SORENSEN

I want to say something.

MUSIKANT

Go.

SORENSEN

I want to say you two should not leave this lab. For your own medical safety, putting aside everything else. If this signal is coupled to your cardiac and autonomic function in ways we don't understand — Alex, you have AFIB. Carlos, you have an un-stress-tested heart. I don't know what this signal is doing to you. It may be perfectly benign. It may be stealing electrical resources from your sinoatrial node every time it transmits. I don't know. I want to put you on continuous telemetry. I want you here. Tonight, tomorrow, until we know.

MUSIKANT

Evan, I agree.

ALEX
There are more of us.

Musikant turns, sharp.

MUSIKANT
More of you how.

ALEX
We have been receiving messages for three days.
From people in Lagos. Seoul. São Paulo. Cairo.
Austin. Mumbai.

HU
How many.

ALEX
(carefully)
Over a hundred.

A silence goes through the room.

HU
Over a hundred.

ALEX
That is just the ones who know how to find us.
There will be more who don't.

MUSIKANT
(slowly)
Then we need to study you here and we need to start
building a global protocol for identifying and
protecting the others —

ALEX
We can build a global protocol for them. We can't
do it from inside a building, Dr. Musikant. We need
to go to them. We need to —

CARLOS
Alex.

Alex turns.

CARLOS (CONT'D)
The Doctor is right. Let me finish what she's
saying.

ALEX
(after a second)
Okay.

MUSIKANT
(to Alex, more gently)
You don't have to go to them yourself. You just
have to live long enough to help us help them.
Please. A week. Give me a week of controlled
conditions. Then we discuss.

Carlos looks at Alex. Alex looks at Carlos.

Alex is the one who speaks.

ALEX
We have to go.

MUSIKANT
Alex —

ALEX

(standing)

Dr. Musikant. With respect. For the first time in a year I am not the only person this is happening to. For the first time in a year I am part of a we. Whatever is doing this chose us. Us specifically. There may be others. There are probably others. If I get shut in a lab tonight I won't find them. I won't help them. I —

CARLOS

(gently)

Alex.

ALEX

(to Carlos)

We have to go.

Carlos is quiet. He studies his hands.

MUSIKANT

Carlos, I'm asking you as a friend. Which is inappropriate because we just met. But I am asking.

Carlos looks up. There is something in his face we haven't seen before — a kind of quiet electricity.

CARLOS

For forty years I woke up and my life was — a series of tasks. I completed them. Occasionally I was proud. Occasionally I was ashamed. Mostly I was simply busy. And now, Dr. Musikant — now I am not busy. Now something is happening. I have to know what. I am sorry. I am very sorry. But I will not miss what is happening.

SORENSEN

(quiet)

You will miss it because you will die of it, Carlos.

CARLOS

Then I will die of something, at long last, that matters.

Silence.

Musikant closes her eyes for a long moment.

MUSIKANT

Alright.

SORENSEN

Leah —

MUSIKANT

Alright, Evan. Alright. At least let me pack you both an ambulatory telemetry kit. At least let me know if something happens.

CARLOS

Thank you.

Dr. Hu, silent this entire exchange, nods and rises.

HU

I'll get the kits.

He steps out. The door clicks behind him.

INT. LAB — HALLWAY — MOMENTS LATER

Hu walks briskly down an empty hallway. Checks left. Checks right. Pulls out a phone that is not his personal phone. Dials.

HU

(hushed)

Yes. It's me. They're leaving. No — Musikant is letting them. No, I can't. Not in front of her. Yes. Yes. Understood.

He hangs up. Slides the phone into his jacket. He walks, a little faster, toward a locked cabinet at the end of the hall.

He types in a code.

The cabinet opens.

INT. LAB — CONFERENCE ROOM — LATER

Alex shoulders a black duffel. Carlos has a smaller one. Musikant walks them to the door.

MUSIKANT

The kits will transmit as long as you're within cellular range. If you stop transmitting I will find you. I want that understood.

CARLOS

Understood.

MUSIKANT

And call me.

ALEX

We will.

They turn toward the exit.

Hu appears at the other end of the hall. Walking toward them.

Briskly.

Faster than he was walking before.

In his right hand: a small, black, professional-looking object. Not quite a gun. Something like a taser. Possibly a syringe.

His face is still pleasant. That is the worst part.

Carlos sees him first.

CARLOS

(low, to Alex)

Don't turn around.

ALEX

What —

CARLOS

Walk. To the door. Walk.

They walk. They reach the door.

Hu calls out — calm, conversational:

HU

Alex. Carlos. One more thing before you go.

Alex turns.

Hu is ten feet away. Five.

Hu lifts the object.

Alex's eyes widen.

ALEX
What the fuck.

Carlos SHOVES Alex through the door.

EXT. LAB PARKING LOT — NIGHT

Carlos and Alex burst out into the cold October dark. Fallen leaves. Security lights. A long lawn between the building and the tree line.

Behind them: a door alarm begins to whine.

CARLOS
Run. Alex. Run.

They run.

Musikant's voice, behind them, through the open door: "*Ian? IAN. STOP.*"

Carlos and Alex reach the tree line and disappear into it. We HEAR, rather than see, twigs snapping, fast breath, panic.

CUT TO:

INT. LAB — HALLWAY — CONTINUOUS

Musikant, rounding the corner at a dead run, slams into Hu. She grabs his arm. The black object clatters to the floor.

MUSIKANT
What are you doing.

HU
(calm as ever)
Leah. Step back.

MUSIKANT
Who are you.

HU
I am who I have always been.

MUSIKANT
Who do you work for.

Hu looks at her. Smiles the same bland smile.

HU
Leah. You are going to have a very hard month.

He picks up the object from the floor. He walks past her, calmly, toward the door.

Musikant stares at his retreating back.

Behind her, Sorenson appears.

SORENSEN
What the hell just —

MUSIKANT
(whispered)
Evan. Call the police. Now.

EXT. WOODS — NIGHT

Moonlight dappled through thinning trees. Alex stumbles over a root, catches himself on a sapling. Carlos — older, slower — is ten paces behind, his breathing ragged.

ALEX
(calling back, low)
Carlos. Carlos.

CARLOS
(panting)
I'm here.

ALEX
We need to keep — keep moving —

CARLOS
I know —

Carlos stops. Braces hand on knee. Coughs.

Alex runs back to him.

ALEX
Are you —

CARLOS
(waving him off)
I'm not having a heart attack. I'm having a sixty-year-old's respiratory system.

ALEX
(half laugh, half terror)
Okay.

Far behind them, somewhere in the trees: a SHOUT. Not close. Not far enough.

CARLOS
Road. We need a road. A ride.

ALEX
How?

CARLOS
(already moving again)
I'll think of something.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD — NIGHT

They emerge from the woods onto a shoulder. A two-lane rural road, empty, faintly glossy in the moon. Both men are streaked with mud and sweat.

A pair of headlights appears, distant, growing.

CARLOS
(to Alex)
Let me do this.

He steps out and raises both hands, palms forward, the universal sign of *I am harmless, please*.

The headlights slow.

A battered white Jeep pulls up.

Behind the wheel: an OLDER WOMAN (70s, cardigan, reading glasses on a beaded chain). She regards them through the driver's window.

 OLDER WOMAN
You boys lost?

 CARLOS
Very.

 OLDER WOMAN
Where're you trying to get?

Carlos looks at Alex.

 ALEX
 (low)
Somewhere with no camera.

 CARLOS
 (to the woman)
Someplace quiet. A motel. Off the highway.

She studies them. Her eyes are kind and unfooled.

 OLDER WOMAN
You in trouble?

 CARLOS
Yes ma'am.

 OLDER WOMAN
Whose trouble?

 CARLOS
Our own. Not — not the kind you should be worried
about. I swear on my mother.

The older woman looks at them both, a long look. Something in Carlos's face, or in Alex's, passes her private test.

 OLDER WOMAN
Get in.

They climb in. She pulls off the shoulder. In the rearview, for a single heartbeat, a flashlight beam emerges from the woods.

Then it is behind them.

She drives.

INT. JEEP — NIGHT

She drives. Carlos in the passenger seat. Alex in the back. The heater hums.

 OLDER WOMAN
You Catholic, the older one?

 CARLOS
I was.

 OLDER WOMAN
Me too. Lapsed. You lapsed?

 CARLOS
Since 1989.

OLDER WOMAN
Mm. (a beat) Something happen?

CARLOS
Yes.

OLDER WOMAN
Won't ask.

CARLOS
Thank you.

She drives a while longer. The heater hums.

OLDER WOMAN
My husband was a Navy cryptographer in Korea. He
used to say the weirdest thing about people — is we
think we're the ones talking.

Carlos turns his head to look at her.

OLDER WOMAN (CONT'D)
(shrugs)
Anyhow.

Alex, in the back, leans forward.

ALEX
Ma'am.

OLDER WOMAN
Mm?

ALEX
Thank you.

She catches his eye in the rearview mirror.

OLDER WOMAN
Oh, sweetheart. You're welcome.

EXT. "SLEEPY OWL MOTEL" — NIGHT

Two-story roadside relic. Neon sign with a drowsy cartoon owl, half the
letters out. A handful of cars in the lot.

The Jeep pulls up at the office. The older woman turns to them.

OLDER WOMAN
Cash only here. I got you forty dollars.

She presses two twenties into Carlos's hand before he can refuse.

CARLOS
Ma'am, I can't —

OLDER WOMAN
I raised four boys. You're both somebody's. Get
out.

Carlos's eyes brim. He nods. He gets out.

She drives away without looking back.

ACT THREE

INT. MOTEL ROOM — NIGHT

Two double beds. Brown carpet. A wall-mounted TV. A painting of a boat over one of the beds. The faint, universal motel smell of old smoke masked badly with citrus spray.

Carlos sits on the edge of one bed. Alex paces.

ALEX
He was going to drug us.

CARLOS
Or kill us. Either way.

ALEX
(a little wild)
Dr. Hu. Dr. Hu. That's — who — why?

CARLOS
Some agency. Some government. Probably the FBI.
Probably not just the FBI.

ALEX
How are you so calm.

CARLOS
(honest)
I'm not. I'm just older.

Alex sits on the other bed. Drops his head into his hands.

ALEX
Musikant. I liked her.

CARLOS
She did too. I don't think she knew.

ALEX
She might know now.

CARLOS
I hope so.

A long silence.

Carlos looks at his hands. Turns them over. The motel lamp catches the veins.

CARLOS
Alex. Something happened. In the lab.

Alex looks up.

CARLOS (CONT'D)
When they had me in the scanner. When all the sensors were on me. I — I didn't tell anyone. Not even you.

ALEX
Tell me now.

Carlos draws a slow breath.

CARLOS
I heard something. Not morse code. Not a word. Just
— a feeling. A picture, almost. I saw — a sky. I
saw a sky with two suns in it. And a — a sadness.
An enormous, old sadness. Not mine. Not human. And
the sadness was — saying — help.

Alex is very still.

ALEX
Two suns.

CARLOS
Yes.

ALEX
Carlos.

CARLOS
I know.

ALEX
Carlos. This — this is not our bodies evolving.
This is not — this is not a new human thing.

CARLOS
No.

ALEX
This is someone else.

CARLOS
Yes.

ALEX
Someone who isn't on earth.

CARLOS
I think — Alex, I think it has been coming for a
long time. I think we are early. I think it is
asking permission. And I think its home is dying.

Alex stares at him.

ALEX
You are telling me.

CARLOS
Yes.

ALEX
That aliens.

CARLOS
That something.

ALEX
Are in my.

CARLOS
Knocking. Not in. Knocking.

ALEX
(rising, angry)
Carlos. Listen to yourself. Listen to yourself. We
have been in this — this rabbit hole for months —
and every time it gets weirder you get calmer. You
are not supposed to be calmer! You are supposed to
be — you are supposed to be —

CARLOS

Afraid.

ALEX

Yes!

CARLOS

I lost the ability to be afraid of certain things in 1989.

ALEX

Stop saying that.

CARLOS

I cannot stop saying that, Alex. That is the whole of me.

ALEX

Then let me in on it!

Carlos stops.

CARLOS

What.

ALEX

(voice cracking)

Let me in on it. If that is the whole of you — then tell me. Tell me all of it. You keep giving me one sentence at a time. I am losing my mind and you are giving me a girlfriend died in 1989 like a weather report. Let me in, Carlos. Let me in or I cannot do this with you.

Carlos looks at him.

He opens his mouth.

He closes it.

He opens it again.

CARLOS

Her name was Amalia. She was a nursing student at Universidad de Panamá. She wore her hair in one single braid because she said two was vanity and none was laziness. She made me laugh until I hurt. I was going to marry her in June. In December of 1989 the United States invaded Panama. Operation Just Cause. She was walking home from her shift. A rocket — I have never, to this day, known from which side — landed on a corner of the Calidonia neighborhood and she died with seventeen other people who had nothing to do with anybody's war. I quit medical school. I drank. I did not speak for a year. I went north. I built a life with an adhesive, not a foundation. I sent my mother money. I came back to Panama because I did not know where else to be. I am sixty. I have been on this earth sixty years and of those years I have been present for maybe forty. The last twenty have been a man-shape walking around doing a man's errands. That is the whole of it, Alex. And then. Two months ago. My heart spoke to me in a language I could read. And for the first time in —

He stops. His voice has gone.

CARLOS
(whispered)
For the first time in a very long time I am — I am
in my own body.

Alex stares at him.

And then, without warning, Alex's face crumples. He sits on the bed, elbows on knees, and begins to cry. Silently, shaking.

Carlos watches, helpless.

After a long moment Carlos crosses the room and sits on the bed next to him.

He does not touch him.

He sits.

CARLOS
(softly)
I'm sorry. I should have told you sooner.

ALEX
(muffled)
I can't — I can't do aliens. Tonight.

CARLOS
I know.

ALEX
I can't.

CARLOS
I know.

Alex straightens. Wipes his face with the heel of his hand. Shakes himself.

ALEX
I'm going for a walk.

CARLOS
Don't —

ALEX
(quietly, not angry)
A walk, Carlos. I'll come back.

CARLOS
Alex —

ALEX
I'll come back.

He picks up his hoodie. Goes to the door. Opens it. Looks back once.

ALEX
Thank you. For telling me.

He closes the door gently behind him.

Carlos sits on the bed alone.

EXT. MOTEL — PARKING LOT — NIGHT

Alex walks along the row of darkened rooms, hood up. His breath fogs.

He passes the ice machine. Coughing, rattling, old.

He does not stop at it — yet. He walks to the end of the building and leans on a railing. Looks out at the empty highway. A single distant semi blasts past, taking its sound with it.

Alex lifts his phone.

The message inbox has more messages now than it did an hour ago.

From: Hassan, Cairo. They are close, I think. I feel them close.

From: Priya, Mumbai. My mother died this morning. Before she died she said she understood. What does that mean?

From: Jeong-Hwa, Seoul. Please answer.

Alex scrolls. And scrolls. And scrolls.

He gets to the end of the host messages. He stops.

He opens his photo album instead.

The most recent photos are all screenshots of morse code — thousands of them. Four months of accumulated decoding.

He scrolls back further.

And further.

And then, before the morse: ordinary pictures. Niles, arm around Alex, baseball cap on backwards, both of them laughing at something off-camera. Alex's dorm window at sunrise. Maya in the lecture hall, caught candidly, glasses sliding down her nose. An empty classroom chair. A cup of coffee at a diner counter. A hallway with nobody in it.

The quiet accumulated evidence of an ordinary twenty-two-year-old.

Alex's thumb hovers over Maya's picture.

He could do it. He could open her messages. He could write: *hey — I'm somewhere weird — can I call you.* He could wait for her to call back.

He could walk back into the motel, put on his hoodie, wait for a bus in the morning. He could finish his degree. He could take an internship. He could fall in love with someone — maybe Maya, maybe not. He could grow into a quiet engineer with a quiet apartment in a quiet city. He could have a life where nothing enormous happens.

A world in which he is unremarkable.

A world in which he gets to be small.

He stares at the photograph a long time.

He closes the album.

He slides the phone into his pocket.

He lifts his face to the sky.

ALEX
(to the sky)
You know what's happening to these people?

No answer.

ALEX
You know some of them might die.

No answer.

ALEX
You know I might die.
Silence. An owl, somewhere. Wind.
Alex looks down at his phone. At the long list of strangers.
Something in his face *sets*.
He pulls his hood back.
He laughs once, humorlessly.

ALEX
(to the sky)
You want to talk to me?

A pause.

ALEX (CONT'D)
You want my heart?

Another pause.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Okay.
He turns and walks back toward the ice machine.

INT. MOTEL ROOM — NIGHT

Carlos at the window. He has been standing there a long time.
He finally turns. Walks to the bed. Sits. Picks up the motel phone. Puts it down. Picks it up. Dials.

CARLOS
(into phone)
Dr. Musikant. It's me. He has — we have — I need to
tell you that I now believe —

A SOUND at the door. Carlos looks up.

CARLOS
(into phone)
I'll call back.

He hangs up.

The door opens.

Alex steps in. His arms full.

A bucket of ice. His hoodie draped over his forearm. His face — composed. Too composed.

Behind him, through the still-open door, Carlos can see the walkway — and three more five-gallon buckets and a grocery sack of ice lined up along the outside of the motel room. Alex must have been to the machine, and back, and to the machine, and back. For an hour.

CARLOS
Alex.

ALEX
Don't talk.

CARLOS
What are you doing.

ALEX
(almost kind)
Don't talk, Carlos.

He crosses to the bathroom. Sets the bucket on the counter. Turns on the cold tap. The tub begins to fill.

Carlos stands.

CARLOS
Alex. Alex what are you doing.

Alex, in the bathroom mirror, meets his own eyes.

ALEX
I'm making sure.

CARLOS
Making sure of what?

Alex pours ice into the tub. Steps back out. Drags in one of the buckets from the walkway. Pours. Back out. Another. Pours. The bag of ice from the sack. Pours. He is breathing fast.

ALEX
(as if to himself)
If I can make the heart go. All the way. If I can
make it really go. Then whatever wants to come
through — will have to come through.

CARLOS
No.

Carlos rushes to the bathroom door. Alex is already pulling off his hoodie.

CARLOS
Alex — no — Alex —

Alex kicks off his shoes. Pulls off his jeans. In boxers, shivering already from anticipation, he turns to face Carlos.

ALEX
(quiet)
You said it is asking permission.

CARLOS
(choked)
Yes —

ALEX
I'm giving permission.

CARLOS
Alex —

ALEX
You said its home is dying.

CARLOS
Alex, please —

ALEX
I already had a home die. I know how that goes.

He steps into the tub.

The ice water eats up his legs. He gasps. His teeth slam together.

And beneath it — from nowhere, from everywhere — *Bach, Prelude in C Major, BWV 846*, rises under the scene. The slow, circling, patient arpeggios of solo

piano. The oldest sound in the world for a body going under water. The music is not diegetic. It is simply what Alex is doing, in sound.

Carlos surges into the bathroom. Alex holds up one hand.

ALEX
Not yet.

CARLOS
Alex —

ALEX
Not yet, Carlos.

Alex sits. The water closes over his waist. His chest. His shoulders. Only his head above. Already his lips are blue.

Carlos drops to his knees beside the tub.

CARLOS
(desperate)
Alex, hijo —

ALEX
(teeth chattering, eyes wet)
Carlos — if something — comes through — tell it —
be kind.

CARLOS
No, no —

ALEX
Tell it — there was somebody here — who was — who
was tired.

His eyes roll back.

His body convulses — once, hard — arms jerking out of the water —

The wall-mounted telemetry kit, propped on the sink, BEGINS TO SCREAM. A flat, terrible, high alarm tone.

CARLOS
ALEX.

Carlos plunges his arms into the water. Grabs Alex under the shoulders.
HEAVES.

Alex comes out of the tub dead weight and dripping, his body seizing. Carlos slips on the bathroom tile. They both go down. Carlos drags Alex across the wet floor, across the motel carpet, heaves him up onto the bed.

Alex's skin is gray-white. His lips are the color of bruises. His eyes are closed.

CARLOS
Alex. Alex. Open your eyes.

Carlos presses his fingers to Alex's neck.

A pulse. Faint. Slow.

CARLOS
Okay. Okay. Okay.

He grabs every blanket, every towel. He wraps Alex. He wraps him again. He lies on top of him, pressing his own warmth into him.

The telemetry alarm is still shrieking.

Carlos lifts his head. Finds the kit. Slaps the alarm off.

In the new silence, his own ragged breath. The drip of the bathroom tap he never closed.

And Alex's pulse under his hand, feather-faint. *Lub-dub. Lub-dub. Lub-dub.*

And beneath it —

Beneath it —

Something else. Humming. A small, rhythmic, patterned something else.

Carlos freezes.

...dot... dash... dash-dot... dash... dot...

Carlos listens. He mouths the letters.

H... E... L... L... O...

He stops breathing.

...dot-dot...

He starts breathing again, in a terrible thin way.

...dash... dash-dot...

And then, under Carlos's hand, Alex's lips move.

Alex's eyes do not open.

Alex's lips move, and the lips and the hidden wave in his chest match each other perfectly, syllable to dot, syllable to dash:

ALEX
(whispered)
Hello...

(whispered)

...at last...

(whispered)

...Carlos.

Alex's eyes open.

His eyes are still Alex's eyes, in the sense that they are green and they are the shape they have always been.

They are not Alex's eyes in any other sense.

They regard Carlos with the calm of something that has traveled a very long way.

The mouth smiles.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
(soft, curious, pleased)
You are smaller than I expected.

Carlos cannot move.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
Do not be afraid. I will learn him. I will learn him well. I am very grateful for this. We are very

grateful.

CARLOS
(barely a whisper)
Who are you.

A smile. Wider. A little alien, somehow. Not in the shape — in the timing.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
We do not have a word you have.

CARLOS
Tell me one.

The thing behind Alex's face considers. Then, as if testing the shape of it in a new mouth:

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
Zelari.

The lamp flickers.

Outside, a car door slams in the distance. A dog barks.

And underneath it all — so soft it is almost imagined — *Satie, Gnossienne No. 1*, bleeding from somewhere. A radio in a parked car. A television in the next room. A piano that should not be anywhere near this motel. Its unresolved harmonies hold under the scene like a question asked by something that does not yet know the answer.

The thing behind Alex's face looks at the ceiling, as if examining it, then at its own hand, flexing the fingers.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
(wondering)
Oh. Oh. This is how it feels.

And then, with something that is almost tender —

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
Your friend is still inside. He is resting. He is very tired. He has been very tired a long time.

Carlos's hand has not moved from Alex's chest. The heartbeat beneath it has become something impossibly, patiently steady — slower than a human heart should be, and stronger.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
Will you sit with me, Carlos? There are — many things we need to say to each other. And we do not have long.

Carlos, eyes full, does not answer.

He sits.

INT. MOTEL ROOM — LATER THAT NIGHT

The same room. The lamp burns low. Alex — Alex/Not-Alex — is propped against the headboard, wrapped in the motel's best blanket. He is no longer shivering. His body is, impossibly, warm.

Carlos sits on the other bed, facing him.

CARLOS
Can you tell me where you are from.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
I can tell you. You will not understand it the way
I do.

CARLOS
Try.

The thing behind Alex's face considers the ceiling, as if consulting a map.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
A long way.

CARLOS
How long.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
You do not have the number. (a pause) But our sky
has two suns. The smaller one is old. The older one
is older. A third star — not ours — not a sun — is
about to die loudly and take our air with it. My
people cannot move our bodies away from it.

CARLOS
So you moved —

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
The part of us that can move.

CARLOS
Which is —

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
The part of you that reads this sentence.

Carlos closes his eyes.

CARLOS
You are — a mind.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
(gently)
I am a collection of minds. Many of us. Packed very
carefully. Sent outward. Hoping.

CARLOS
Hoping what.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
Hoping someone, somewhere, would be spacious enough
inside to make room for us. Hoping they would be
quiet enough inside to hear us knock. Hoping they
would say yes.

CARLOS
Alex said yes.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
Your friend said yes. Yes. He was very, very brave.

Carlos's throat works.

CARLOS
Is he — is he gone.

The thing behind Alex's face looks at him kindly. The kindness is strange —
wider than a kindness from a single person.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
No. He is not gone. He is — folded inward.
Sleeping. He can come forward again. We will
practice, he and I. He will learn me, I will learn
him. It takes time. But he is here.

CARLOS
Can I speak to him.

A long pause.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
Not tonight, Carlos.

CARLOS
(softly)
Okay.

The Not-Alex looks at its own hand. Makes a fist. Unmakes it. Seems
fascinated.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
Everything here is — small. And textured. (looks at
Carlos) You are small and textured. I like your
face. It has lines. Our faces do not have lines.
Time is — marked differently on us.

CARLOS
(can't help it, half a laugh)
Thank you. I think.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
(earnestly)
I meant it as a compliment.

CARLOS
I took it as one.

The Not-Alex smiles.

CARLOS
Can I ask you — (he hesitates) — why. Why now. Why
us.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
It is not now. We have been reaching out for a very
long time. Many of your peoples have heard us and
called us different names. Some heard only static.
Some heard us and they were called holy. Some heard
us and they were called mad. It depended on where
they lived and when. A few of them tried to help us
but they did not know how.

CARLOS
And now we do.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
Now some of you have radios. Some of you have
sensors. Some of you have — (gestures at the motel
room) — internet. Some of you have learned to
listen for a shape under the beat. And some of you
have a great deal of empty room inside of you.
(looks at Carlos with something that is almost
love) A very great deal of empty room.

CARLOS
That is why me.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
That is why you.

A long silence.

CARLOS
Are you going to come into me too.

The Not-Alex considers him.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
Only if you ask.

CARLOS
Ask what.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
(gently)
When you are ready, you will know.

CARLOS
And if I am never ready.

A pause. A real one.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
Every host we have ever chosen has said yes. (off Carlos's look) I am not threatening you, Carlos. I am telling you what we have observed. We do not reach for the closed. We reach for people who are already reaching. By the time we knock — the door is almost always already opening.

Carlos looks at Alex's face. At the thing behind Alex's face.

Carlos does not answer.

Carlos sits with that a long time.

CARLOS
Tell me what happens now.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
Now? Now we — (it tilts Alex's head, listening) — we wait. Many of my kind are arriving. They are arriving in the others. The ones your friend wrote to tonight. And many more.

CARLOS
They are all becoming —

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
(gently)
No. Not all. Some. The ones who are ready. The ones who say yes. (a pause) The ones whose hosts — like Alex — are willing. We do not — we do not force.

CARLOS
(quietly)
Ever?

A small pause. Something adjusts behind Alex's face.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
Force is — a word that does not map cleanly between us. Some of your people recognize what we are and open like a door. Some resist and come to understand later. Some resist for a very long time. What we do not do is arrive in a body that has not prepared itself to hold us.

CARLOS
(slowly)
That is not the same as never forced.

The Not-Alex considers Carlos for a long beat. The smile that comes is almost indulgent.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
You have a precise mind, Carlos. I will try to be careful with you.

CARLOS
Some of my people will be afraid.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
Yes.

CARLOS
Some of my people will try to stop this.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
Yes. Some already are. (the Not-Alex looks toward the door, as if it can see beyond it) The man with the kind smile. He is one.

CARLOS
He works for —

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
His government. Other governments. They know. Not as much as they think they know. But enough.

CARLOS
Will they kill you.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
They cannot kill us. They can only kill our hosts. (a pause, something complicated crossing the face) Which is not only.

Carlos looks at Alex's face — his face — and feels the weight of the word *only*.

CARLOS
I will protect him.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
We know you will, Carlos. (very softly) That is part of why we came to him. He was alone. He was very alone. But he was facing toward a man who was also alone. And you were — facing back. We could see your two faces from very far away.

Carlos weeps, silently, not making a sound.

The Not-Alex reaches out, unsteadily — the hand is still learning — and places Alex's palm against Carlos's cheek.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
Thank you for being here.

Carlos cannot answer.

The Not-Alex lets the hand fall. Smiles again. Its eyes lower.

ALEX / NOT-ALEX
I will rest now. He needs me to rest. We will talk more tomorrow.

The eyes close.

The breathing deepens.

The body — both their bodies — becomes a sleeping body.

Carlos remains sitting on the edge of the other bed for a very long time, watching Alex sleep, the motel lamp flickering against the wall.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. LAB — EXAM ROOM — NIGHT — INTERCUT

Meanwhile —

Dr. Musikant sits by a HOSPITAL BED. The PATIENT is a woman in her 30s, pale, tired — someone in the middle of a long study. Her name band reads *PATIENT 17* — *ROMERO, T.*

An EEG hums. A cardiac monitor blips.

MUSIKANT
And the episodes — they've been daily?

PATIENT 17
Twice a day. Sometimes three.

MUSIKANT
And the — the sense you described. The sense of
being listened to.

PATIENT 17
(whispered)
Yes.

MUSIKANT
Tell me what that feels —

The patient *jolts*. Her back arches. She clutches her stomach with both hands. A wet, ugly sound from her throat.

PATIENT 17
(strangled)
— oh — oh —

MUSIKANT
(punching intercom)
Evan. EVAN. Get in here.

The patient convulses. Vomits, a thin clear bile. Her eyes roll.

Dr. Sorenson runs in, two NURSES with him. They ease her back. Suction. Pulse check. Pupils. The crisp choreography of a crisis.

Slowly, slowly, her body settles.

Her breathing evens.

They prop her upright. She blinks. Once. Twice.

And then — her eyes open fully.

She looks around the room with the careful, curious fascination of someone seeing a room for the first time.

She looks at her own hands.

She looks at Dr. Sorenson.

She looks at Dr. Musikant.

Her face breaks into an enormous, astonished smile.

PATIENT 17
(wonder)
I love it. I made it.

MONTAGE — ARRIVALS

A music cue rises — quiet, patient, circling. *Bach — Goldberg Variations, Aria*, performed on solo piano. Ancient-feeling. Inevitable. The sound of something that has been on its way for a very long time and is, at last, arriving.

— LAGOS, NIGERIA. A small bedroom. A YOUNG MAN convulses. His SISTER grips his hand, weeping. He stills. He opens his eyes. He looks at her. He smiles. "*I made it*," he says in Yoruba, wonder in his voice.

— SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL. A cramped apartment. A BUS DRIVER, off duty, on a couch, seizing. His WIFE screams. He goes quiet. His eyes open. Tears fall. "*Cheguei*," he whispers. "*I have arrived*."

— CAIRO, EGYPT. HASSAN — the man Carlos video-chatted with — lying on a prayer rug in his living room. His WIFE, MIRIAM (30s), clutches the doorframe, afraid to enter. Hassan's breathing stops. Restarts. He sits up slowly. His eyes find her.

His face breaks into something we do not have a word for.

HASSAN
(in Arabic, subtitled)
Miriam. Miriam. The eye. The eye in the pendant. It
is the same.

MIRIAM
(terrified)
Hassan —

HASSAN
It is me looking out. From the inside. The whole
time. It was always me looking out.

She starts to cross to him. She is weeping. She does not know why.

Hassan laughs. Not the laugh of a man who has lost himself. The laugh of a man who has woken up.

— MUMBAI, INDIA. A quiet hospital room. PRIYA, beside her mother's empty bed, suddenly doubles. A nurse runs in. Priya steadies. She opens her eyes. She looks at the nurse and says, softly, "*Oh. Oh, hello*."

— SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA. JEONG-HWA at her kitchen sink, dish in hand. She drops the dish. It shatters. She sinks to the floor. She opens her eyes. She laughs, crying, and says something in Korean that the subtitles render as simply *YES*.

— SASKATOON, CANADA. A pickup truck pulled over on a shoulder. A TRUCK DRIVER, slumped against the wheel. He comes to. He looks at the prairie sky through the windshield. He opens the door and steps out into the wind and closes his eyes and tips his face up.

— LISBON, PORTUGAL. A small stone room. A PRIEST kneeling at a prayer rail. He straightens. He looks at a statue of the Virgin and slowly, very slowly, crosses himself.

— NORTHERN NEW YORK STATE. The OLDER WOMAN from the Jeep. Her kitchen. Rinsing a coffee cup at the sink. She goes still. The cup slips from her hand into the basin. Her eyes close. Her eyes open.

She looks out her window at the winter trees. She says, so softly, to no one at all:

OLDER WOMAN
Oh. Oh, I always wondered.

She turns off the tap. She dries her hands on a dishtowel. She smiles, small and private, at a world she can suddenly read.

— PANAMA CITY. Carlos's empty house. The ceiling fan turns in slow circles. The laptop on the kitchen table is still open; its ECG trace is a flat calm line. The half-finished yellow mountain stands on its easel. On the patio, the four coffee plants are heavy with red cherries.

OLGA lets herself in. A plastic container of food in her hands. She calls out her brother's name once, out of habit, though she knows he is not there.

She sets the container on the counter.

She crosses to the table. She reads the notes pinned to the wall. Her face goes grave.

She lifts her phone. She starts to dial. She stops.

She turns. She looks at the unfinished yellow mountain for a long moment. Then at the laptop. Then at her own hand, which has, without her noticing, risen to her chest.

She goes very still.

A small smile touches the corner of her mouth. For a half-second her face is younger — lit from inside by something she has not felt in years.

Then the smile fades. Something wider and colder takes its place.

She says, to the empty house:

OLGA
(whispered, Spanish, subtitled)
Ay, hermano. ¿Qué has hecho.

What have you done.

What she does not yet say, even to herself: *and what — is happening — to me.*

— ONE BY ONE, a dozen faces. A dozen rooms. A dozen ordinary days becoming something else.

INT. LAB — EXAM ROOM — NIGHT

A beat.

Dr. Musikant's face. Slowly, slowly understanding.

The heart monitor beside the bed is beating.

Lub-dub. Lub-dub. Lub-dub.

And under it — very faintly — patterned.

Dr. Musikant's hand, without her quite knowing, rises to her own chest.

Where, if she listens, very very carefully —

Her eyes widen.

INT. LAB — HALLWAY — CONTINUOUS

Sorenson, out in the hallway, on his phone.

SORENSEN

(tight)

I'm at Hudson State. I need to speak to someone in charge. Now. No. I said now.

He hangs up. Immediately his phone rings — an alert tone, not a ring tone. The telemetry app. Red screen.

SORENSEN (CONT'D)

(to himself, horrified)

Oh — oh god — Alex —

He starts punching a number. Then stops. Stares down the hallway toward where Patient 17 is recovering.

He does not know which emergency to run toward.

He chooses Patient 17.

He pockets the phone, loosens his collar, and turns back toward the exam room.

Behind him, through a window, an orderly passes. The orderly's face is — wrong. Too calm. Too radiant.

The orderly smiles at Sorenson as he passes.

Sorenson does not see.

INT. UNDISCLOSED OFFICE — NIGHT — INTERCUT

A dark, windowless office. A MAN in his 50s — expensive suit, no tie — studies a bank of monitors. Each monitor shows a different face. Some we recognize from the montage. Some we don't.

A PHONE on his desk rings.

MAN

Yes.

HU (O.S.)

They got away.

MAN

Where.

HU (O.S.)

Northern New York state. We are tracking.

MAN

Find them.

HU (O.S.)

Understood.

The man hangs up.

He turns and looks at the monitors. On a dozen screens, a dozen newly-arrived Zelari are smiling at strangers in strange rooms. The man watches them for a long moment.

He reaches forward and turns off the screens, one by one.

CUT TO BLACK.

BENEATH THE BLACK, A HEARTBEAT.

BENEATH THE HEARTBEAT, MORSE.

ONE LETTER AT A TIME, UNHURRIED:

W - E - A - R - E - M - A - N - Y

W - E - A - R - E - C - O - M - I - N - G

T - H - A - N - K - Y - O - U

T - H - A - N - K - Y - O - U

T - H - A - N - K - Y - O - U

END OF PART ONE.

"Beyond Pulse" is the first of a trilogy.

In Part Two, Alex — or what wears Alex — and Carlos must choose: refine the MindScape Protocol so that humanity can merge with the Zelari safely, or sever the connection and condemn the Zelari to extinction. Governments are mobilizing. Humanity is splitting. The heart palpitations that were once Alex's affliction now beat as a reminder that two species are fighting, very quietly, for a single body — and that the battle may not be as benevolent as the arrivals first suggested.

Meanwhile, Patient 17 is walking home.

FADE OUT.

THE END (OF THE BEGINNING).

APPENDIX — ORIGINAL MUSIC FOR THE FILM

"HEART ATTACK (JUST LISTEN) "

Performed by THE STETHOSCOPES

Written for the film "Beyond Pulse"

Rock-rap. 3:42. Released in-universe within days of Carlos and Alex's cable news appearance, riding the first wave of the public reaction. Featured diegetically throughout the "World Reacts" montage. The full recording is envisioned as end-credits needle-drop on the Part One release.

[INTRO – spoken, dry, close-mic'd]

They told me my heart was skipping.

Nobody told me it was *trying to say something*.

A single distorted guitar chord crashes in. Drums kick. Tempo: 96 BPM, driving.

[VERSE ONE – rapped, urgent]

Woke up at three with my chest on fire –
Flat on the tile and the lights too bright –
Doctor said *anxiety*, doctor said *caffeine* –
Doctor, I swear to God it's a MACHINE –
Tapping like a telegraph under my skin –
Asking me a question I can't answer in –
Any language they taught me in grade school –
Any language that fits on a prescription tool –
I've been ghosting my own frequency –
Thirty years of static where a self should be –
Turn the radio down, put the phone on shelf –
Apparently I've been *calling my own damn self* –

[PRE-CHORUS – half-time, the rapper almost whispers]

Put your hand here.

Feel that.

Tell me that's nothing.

Tell me that's *nothing*.

[CHORUS – screamed over buzzsaw guitar, full kit]

You can't medicate the message –
You can't deafen what's beneath –
Put your hand down on your chest and –
JUST LISTEN – JUST LISTEN –
JUST LISTEN TO YOUR HEART.
You can't algorithm the answer –
You can't Google what it means –
Put your hand down on your chest and –
JUST LISTEN – JUST LISTEN –
JUST LISTEN TO YOUR HEART.

[VERSE TWO – rapped, more paranoid, slower flow]

They said *crazy* when the prophets heard a voice —
They said *crazy* when the mystics made a choice —
They said *crazy* in the asylums, in the wards —
They said *crazy* 'til the signal cut the cord —
Now the Panama uncle and the college kid —
Doing on TV what the saints already did —
Everybody laughing 'til the laughter turns —
Everybody scrolling 'til the scrolling burns —
What if the diagnosis was a lullaby —
What if we've been sleeping with our heads up high —
What if what I thought was *me* was just the noise —
What if the real *me* is something quiet, poised,
Waiting in the muscle for a ready ear —
Waiting for the volume to be quiet here —
Waiting for a minute with the phone face-down —
Waiting for somebody in a silent town —

[PRE-CHORUS]

Put your hand here.
Feel that.
Tell me that's nothing.
Tell me that's *nothing*.

[CHORUS]

You can't medicate the message —
You can't deafen what's beneath —
Put your hand down on your chest and —
JUST LISTEN — JUST LISTEN —
JUST LISTEN TO YOUR HEART.
You can't algorithm the answer —
You can't Google what it means —
Put your hand down on your chest and —
JUST LISTEN — JUST LISTEN —
JUST LISTEN TO YOUR HEART.

[BRIDGE — guitars drop out, just bass and hi-hat, spoken]

My grandmother died in 1994.
She told me, before she went, *the body knows*.
I thought it was morphine.
I thought it was — you know — the nice thing dying people
say.
She wasn't on morphine.
She wasn't being nice.
(beat)
She was reporting.

[FINAL CHORUS — double-tracked, the whole band screaming, no filter]

You can't medicate the message —

You can't deafen what's beneath —
Put your hand down on your chest —
LISTEN — LISTEN — LISTEN —
LISTEN TO YOUR HEART.
You can't algorithm the answer —
You can't Google what it means —
Put your hand down on your chest —
LISTEN — LISTEN — LISTEN —
LISTEN TO YOUR HEART.
(one voice, breaking, last repetition)
Listen.
Listen.
Listen.
(whispered, single breath)
Listen to your heart.

[OUTRO]

A single cardiac monitor beat. Lub-dub.

Then — underneath it, for the final four seconds of the track — a faint patterned trembling that is almost, but not quite, a different rhythm.

Fade to silence.

END OF SONG.

The Stethoscopes — Marcus "MC Sternum" Riley, lead vocals & rap; Liv Carver, lead guitar & scream vocals; Dmitri Oh, bass; Pilar Faria, drums — formed in Brooklyn in 2021. "Heart Attack (Just Listen)" is their first charting single.

Music and lyrics © composed for the film.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE TWO

CARLOS MENDEZ

Sixty. Panamanian. A graying mustache and a quiet, watchful face. In 1989 he was going to be a doctor and going to marry Amalia, and then Operation Just Cause took her inside a week, and for thirty-five years he has been the shape of a man without being one. A small medical supply company in Texas kept his days occupied. He sold it a few years ago. He came home. He paints badly. He grows coffee. He has a modified stethoscope wired into a laptop on his kitchen table and, it turns out, too much time. He is the first to hear the signal. He is the one who listens.

ALEX THOMPSON

Twenty-two. Columbia engineering. Blue hoodies. Eight years old when his parents died on a road between two cities; raised afterward by an aunt and uncle who managed the task and not the boy. Four months ago his heart began to behave strangely, and no one he went to could tell him why. He is clever in the way isolated children become clever: quickly, and without joy. He is the second to hear the signal. He is the one who says yes.

PANAMA

OLGA MENDEZ

Sixty-five. Carlos's older sister. An apron. A phone she answers on the second ring. She raised her grandson Diego because someone had to. She is the person Carlos would miss most if he were fully present in his own life, and in the final frame she may no longer be fully present in hers.

DIEGO

Twenty-four. Carlos's great-nephew, Olga's grandson. Open, cheerful, an Emberá bead bracelet his girlfriend gave him. Adores his great-uncle with the unembarrassed love of a younger man for an older one. He is the one who puts his hands on a bookshelf that has not moved in two decades, and moves it.

CAMILA

Twenty-two. Diego's girlfriend. Laughter first, thought second, love always. Emberá, granddaughter of the Elder Woman. A character the film will need in Part Two, if this family has a Part Two.

THE ELDER WOMAN

A woman in her seventies with a pipe and eyes that have stopped being surprised. At eighteen she dreamed of a faceless woman coming down from the sky. She has been waiting politely for that woman ever since. When she shakes Carlos's hand at her granddaughter's party she knows something has changed in him before he does.

THE GIRL AT THE RIVER

Six. Bare feet. A purple *paruma* too big for her. Her grandmother has sent her down to the water with a message, and she delivers it with the steady attention of children who have not yet learned to be afraid of grown men. She tells him the sky woman is coming. She tells him he is calling her.

MIGUEL

Thirties. Courier. A regular delivery every Tuesday. Carlos places his hand on his own chest and tells Miguel what he is hearing, and Miguel's face does a small private thing, and then Miguel promises *sancocho* and leaves. He does not come back that day. He comes back later, with the *sancocho*, and does not ask.

NEW YORK

NILES

Alex's roommate. Twenty-two, beard, the unhurried decency of a man who is fine. Does not understand any of what is happening in his apartment. Makes pancakes. Offers theories involving pyramids. And, eventually, tells Alex that he heard him breathing in the bathroom a few nights this past summer and did not know how to ask.

MAYA

Twenty-one. Classmate in Alex's Fourier Analysis lecture. Glasses. Offers him her notes the morning his body becomes unmanageable in public for the first time. She is the life Alex is weighing in a motel parking lot some weeks later, looking at a photograph of her on his phone he has never shown anybody. She does not know this about herself.

AUNT MARGARET

Fifties. Alex's aunt, since he was eight. The size of their relationship is a text he does not pick up in the attrition scene, and a phone call in Act One against the sound of a Bach cantata leaking from her television, and the fact that she says *I love you* surprised.

DR. F. REYNAUD

Fifties, French, tired. Alex's cardiologist. Has put him on a thirty-day monitor and then a sixty, is prepared to put him on a ninety. Asks him how he is sleeping, and notices that he cannot quite answer, and files it somewhere.

THE NIGHTCLUB WOMAN

Late twenties, one gold hoop, generous eyeliner. Dances near Alex because he looks sad. Leans in and says, half-joking, that his heart is loud. Does not understand why he runs out of the club, and shrugs, and goes back to dancing. Never appears again. She is one of several people in this film who speak true things without meaning to.

THE OLDER WOMAN IN THE JEEP

Seventies. Cardigan and reading glasses on a beaded chain. Widow of a Navy cryptographer who once told her *we think we're the ones talking*. Picks up two filthy strangers on a dark country road because something in their faces passes her private test. Pays for their motel room with two folded twenties. Drives away without looking back. In the final montage, at her kitchen sink, rinsing a coffee cup, she too has woken up.

THE LAB

DR. LEAH MUSIKANT

Forty-two. Runs the Center for PNS and CNS Studies at Hudson State. Eleven years ago she published a paper about the body speaking in ways we had not trained ourselves to hear, and a man who had been a kind of father to her wrote *embarrassing* in the margin and sent it back. Her husband, that same year, gently asked her if she could please be a cardiologist like a normal person. She could not. She is the third person in the film to believe what Carlos and Alex are telling her, and in the final frame her own hand rises to her own chest without her permission, and her face changes.

DR. EVAN SORENSON

Fifty-five. Cardiologist. Silver hair, rimless glasses, the fine clean skepticism of a man who knows what a hallucination looks like and what it doesn't. Does not believe, does not disbelieve, and would rather that the two men in the lab not die of whatever this is. At the climax an alarm goes off on his phone for Alex and, a moment later, for the patient in the next room, and he must choose which emergency is his. He chooses the one he can reach.

DR. IAN HU

Forty. Neurologist. So evenly pleasant that he is almost difficult to describe. Works for a place other than the university. Has a son named Oliver whose photograph sits face-up on his desk at the beginning of his private scene and face-down at the end of it. Raises a small black object in a corridor, and smiles.

PATIENT 17

Thirties. A name band reading *ROMERO, T.* A subject in a long cardiac study she did not know was about her. On-screen long enough to go through, in front of Dr. Musikant, exactly what Alex has just gone through in a motel bathroom two hundred miles away.

THE PUBLIC AND THE WORLD

THE ANONYMOUS PHILOSOPHER

A pixelated face and a voice that has been put through a filter. Two cable-news segments, one calm sentence that recontextualizes the century: *they are not crazy. They are early.* Never named. Never seen. Never wrong.

THE HOST

Forties. A cable news anchor who has done this job a long time and keeps his composure almost always. It cracks twice in our film — once the first time a philosopher tells him what he is looking at, and once the second time.

THE POP STAR

Mid-twenties, sunglasses indoors. Claims his heart tells him melodies. Launches a tour called THE PULSE. Is most likely lying, but — given the rest of the film — not certainly.

HASSAN

Forty. Cairo. Texts Alex a photograph of a Tutankhamun-era pendant the night before the Zelari comes for him too. His wife Miriam is in the doorway when it happens. His first sentence afterward, in Arabic, is about how he was always the one looking out.

PRIYA

Thirty. Mumbai. Messages Alex on the morning her mother dies, whose last coherent sentence was *I understand*. By nightfall Priya is saying the same sentence back to a nurse, from the other side of it.

JEONG-HWA

Thirty. Seoul. Shows Alex a waveform on her phone that matches his. Later, at her kitchen sink, a dish slips from her hand into the basin and breaks, and she laughs, and says one word the subtitles render simply as *yes*.

THE GLOBAL HOSTS

A young man in Lagos, a bus driver in São Paulo, a trucker on a prairie shoulder in Saskatchewan, a priest in Lisbon, the weeping man from Istanbul whom Carlos met on a video call, and dozens more the film does not name. The first wave. The ones who said yes.

IN PANAMA, ABSENT BUT PRESENT

AMALIA

Twenty, in 1989. A nursing student at Universidad de Panamá. One single thick braid down her back, because two was vanity and none was laziness. She made Carlos laugh until it hurt. They were going to marry in June. In December, a rocket whose origin remains unknown — American, Panamanian, or neither — fell on a corner of the Calidonia neighborhood and killed her, and seventeen other people, none of whom had anything to do with anybody's war. She appears once in the film, on a far sidewalk, a young woman with a braid crossing with grocery bags, unaware of the old man watching her from a car. Spoken of by Carlos several times. Not spoken of by Carlos in her absence for thirty-five years. Her Saint Christopher medal is taped behind a bookshelf in her former future mother-in-law's guest room.

AT THE END, AND ONLY AT THE END

THE ZELARI

A civilization of minds whose home turns under two suns, and whose third nearest star is about to die in the wrong way. What they cannot carry is their bodies. What they can carry is everything else. They have been sending themselves out for longer than humans have had writing. They knock on the hosts who have room. They arrive when invited. One of them arrives in Alex. One of them may, if Carlos asks, arrive in Carlos.

THE MAN IN THE WINDOWLESS OFFICE

A well-cut suit, no tie, fifties. A wall of monitors. The monitors show the faces of the new arrivals, one by one, all over the world. He watches them. He picks up a phone. He gives an order. The audience does not yet know what he is.

THE MUSICIANS

THE STETHOSCOPES

A rock-rap quartet out of Brooklyn, formed three years before the film. Marcus "MC Sternum" Riley rapping; Liv Carver on lead guitar and scream; Dmitri Oh on bass; Pilar Faria on drums. Their single *"Heart Attack (Just Listen)"* is written, recorded and released in the week after Alex and Carlos appear on cable news, and in the next month it is briefly the only song anyone is playing.

DJ 1999

An electronic producer. Responsible, over the film's running length, for three separate cues that become the interior soundscape of a young man in New York who does not yet know what he is or what is inside him. Never named beyond the handle. Never seen. Felt throughout.

"Beyond Pulse" is the first of a trilogy.

End of cast.

APPENDIX — SOUNDTRACK

The film's fourteen cues, in the order they arrive. Public-domain compositions are so marked; originals are credited to the in-universe artists who wrote them.

ACT I — TWO CITIES, TWO MEN

1. Chopin — Nocturne in B-flat Minor, Op. 9 No. 1

Public domain. 1830-32. Solo piano.

Night. A record. A man alone at his kitchen table with a laptop that is about to show him something he cannot unsee. The Chopin carries him through three scenes and lets him hear the signal without panicking, as if the music were the hand of an old friend keeping him upright. It fades down into silence as Miguel the courier leaves — the sound of grief putting itself away for the night.

2. Debussy — Arabesque No. 1, L. 66

Public domain. 1888-91. Solo piano.

Dawn in a city that does not yet know. Carlos has been up all night. The coffee plants on his patio have put out new cherries. Somewhere down the hill a window is open and a radio is on, and the Arabesque drifts up to him piano-first — a sound from a Panama morning that has not yet noticed what is happening to one of its own.

3. DJ 1999 — "Mo Man (Ill Tribute)"

Original.

Alex in Central Park. Hood up. Earbuds in. Warm synthesizer pads like someone breathing next to you through a wall. This is the music a lonely twenty-two-year-old plays to feel less alone, and it is the first music the film attaches to him, and it is already doing a job.

4. Bach — "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" (BWV 147, chorale)

Public domain. 1723.

Leaking through the phone line from Aunt Margaret's television. She has a late-evening program running for company. The chorale is one of the tenderest pieces of music in the Western tradition, and it plays under a conversation between an aunt and a nephew that has not been loved in ten years. The gap between the holiness of what is being heard and the emptiness of what is being said is the whole point.

5. DJ 1999 — untitled

Original.

A nightclub Alex stumbles into because he cannot go home yet. Slow, deep, a kick drum that is arrogant enough to match the rhythm inside him. The track continues under the parallel-lives montage that follows, stitching two men across two hemispheres into one insomnia.

6. A traditional Panamanian Cumbia — selection by music supervision

Generic in the screenplay; music supervision to place.

Diego's car radio on the highway east. Accordion bright. The song is about a girl, or about a harvest, or about heartbreak, and neither Carlos nor Diego is really listening. It is the sound of a country going about its day while one of its sons hears something new in his chest.

7. Traditional — "Amazing Grace" (melody only, solo guitar)

Public domain. Melody 18th-century Scottish-American.

Dusk by the river in the Emberá-Wounaan Comarca. Someone in the tambos is playing the melody fingerstyle, no words. The elder woman, beside Carlos, is

telling him about the dream she had at eighteen. The guitar carries across the clearing the way old songs do — half-remembered, half-imagined, half-someone-else's memory being lent to you for the evening.

8. Schubert — Impromptu in G-flat Major, D. 899 No. 3

Public domain. 1827. Solo piano.

Alex in the Rose Main Reading Room at the New York Public Library. Hood down for once. Earbuds in. The Schubert is patient and melancholic and expensive-sounding, and it plays under him while he quietly learns that every mystic in every century has been trying to say the same thing he is now trying to say.

ACT II — THE WORLD FINDS OUT

9. DJ 1999 — "Panama City Streets (Beyond Pulse Soundtrack)"

Original.

Carlos on the sidewalk outside his house with a suitcase. The track drifts through a window or a passing taxi, bass first, a pulse beneath the morning. Alex had a theme in Central Park; Carlos has his now. The film has set out from two places toward one.

10. THE STETHOSCOPES — "Heart Attack (Just Listen)"

Original. Rock-rap, 3:42. Full lyrics in the Original Music appendix.

Three chords and a scream and a rapper with asthma and a chorus you can hear from the next car: *JUST LISTEN TO YOUR HEART*. Written, recorded and released within a week of the interview. By the time we hear it in the film, it is already the only song anyone is playing. It scores the World Reacts montage — the comedians, the TikToks, the Times Square screens, the parents at kitchen tables. The sound of a culture deciding to have an opinion about a thing that is no longer up for opinions.

11. Erik Satie — Gymnopédie No. 1

Public domain. 1888. Solo piano.

NPR classical in Dr. Musikan's car, turned low, as she drives Alex and Carlos north. The three-note figure that floats and re-floats and does not quite land. Carlos's head turns almost imperceptibly toward the speaker. The first of the film's two Saties, and the first of its two arrivals — Carlos, in the back seat, quietly arriving in himself.

ACT III — WHAT WATER IS FOR

12. J.S. Bach — Prelude in C Major, BWV 846

Public domain. 1722. Solo piano. From The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I.

Non-diegetic. The Prelude rises under Alex as he empties the last bucket of ice into the motel bathtub and steps in. Its patient circling arpeggios are the oldest thing anyone knows how to put underneath a body going under water. The scene does not play as a suicide. It plays — because of the music — as a baptism, which is what it has always been underneath.

13. Erik Satie — Gnossienne No. 1

Public domain. 1890. Solo piano.

The motel room afterward. Alex's heart has stopped. Something has come through. The Gnossienne bleeds in from nowhere — an impossible piano in a room that should not contain one. Its harmonies never resolve. It plays under the entire arrival scene as a question being asked by something that has not yet learned the answer. The second Satie. The second arrival. The Zelari, into Alex.

14. J.S. Bach — Goldberg Variations, BWV 988 — Aria

Public domain. 1741. Solo piano.

The global arrivals montage. Lagos, São Paulo, Mumbai, Seoul, Saskatoon, Istanbul, Lisbon, Northern New York State, Panama City. A dozen faces in a dozen rooms going through what Alex went through in a bathtub. The Aria is an old man's instruction for a young princess to sleep through. Bach wrote it three hundred years ago, patient and unhurried and inevitable, which is exactly what the Zelari have been from the beginning. The film's loudest peak is its quietest music.

UNDER THE END TITLES

THE STETHOSCOPES — "HEART ATTACK (JUST LISTEN)"
(FULL STUDIO RECORDING)

3:42. Ends on a single cardiac monitor beat, which continues past the music, which continues past the credits, underneath which — so faintly you have to lean — a second, patterned rhythm. Not an echo. Not a mistake. The film is listening back.

A NOTE ON RIGHTS

All public-domain works listed here are unrestricted as compositions. The recordings are a separate matter, and music supervision will either license historic performances (some pre-1929 recordings are themselves public-domain in the United States) or commission new ones. The production has discretion.

The four original works — three DJ 1999 tracks and "*Heart Attack (Just Listen)*" — are commissioned for the film.

The Panamanian cumbia cue is written into the screenplay generically and is to be selected at the production stage, period- and region-appropriate, from traditional repertoire.

End of soundtrack.

APPENDIX — FULL TRAILER

"BEYOND PULSE" — THEATRICAL TRAILER (2:25)

FADE IN:

BLACK.

Silence. A long one. Long enough to make an audience settle.

Then — a single, intimate sound: *lub-dub*.

Close. Inside the chest.

Another: *lub-dub*.

Close enough to be our own.

CARLOS (V.O.)
(whispered, Panamanian-accented)
It started in my heart.

CUT TO:

INT. CARLOS'S HOUSE — NIGHT

The green line of a home electrocardiogram traces steadily across a laptop.
Carlos — mid-fifties, tired, handsome — watches it.

Beneath the steady line — something *flickers*.

He leans in.

The signal beneath the beat sharpens into a pattern. Gaps. Clusters. Gaps.

Carlos's mouth parts.

CARLOS (V.O.)
A signal. Where there should have been only a
heartbeat.

CUT TO:

INT. NEW YORK APARTMENT — NIGHT

ALEX (22), hoodie up, staggering against a kitchen wall, one hand pressed to his chest. His breath ragged.

ALEX (V.O.)
I thought I was losing my mind.

CUT TO:

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM — NIGHT

Alex in a hospital bay. Fluorescent light. A young resident writing on a clipboard. Writing a *long* time.

ALEX
(pleading)
My heart was spelling words.

The resident's pen stops.

A SILENCE.

Then — from somewhere — a single sustained note of low synth, beginning.

TITLE CARD:

TWO STRANGERS.

CUT TO:

A modified stethoscope wired into a laptop. Morse code scrolling down a screen. Carlos, writing furiously in a notebook. The letters assembling: T... H... E... Y... A... R... E...

TITLE CARD:

ONE SIGNAL.

CUT TO:

INT. VIDEO CHAT — NIGHT

A black square on Carlos's laptop. White text: *a_thmpson*.

It resolves into Alex's face, hoodie up, pale, waiting.

CARLOS
You said in your post you're not crazy.

ALEX
Yeah.

CARLOS
Would it help to know that neither am I?

The synth *deepens*.

A first drum enters. Slow. Insistent.

MONTAGE — escalating:

— Carlos at JFK arrivals, looking for someone. A hand-lettered sign: *MENDEZ* (*not the FBI, promise*).

— The two of them at Alex's kitchen table. Laptops, whiteboards, coffee cups, a map of the world taking pins.

— A decoded message on Carlos's monitor: **YOUR WIFE'S NECKLACE IS BEHIND THE BOOKSHELF**. Carlos's hand flies to his mouth.

— Diego and Olga in Panama, wrestling an old bookshelf away from a wall — pulling from behind it a small wooden box, taped there for thirty-five years.

— A coin of gold hanging from a gold chain, held up in Diego's hand. His face breaking.

CARLOS (V.O.)
I lost her in 1989.

A beat.

CARLOS (V.O.)
Something is giving her back.

CUT TO:

DR. LEAH MUSIKANT (40s) in a bagel shop doorway, cutting them off on the sidewalk.

MUSIKANT
We think it's not just the heart. We think it's the whole body.

CUT TO:

Alex's eyes widening inside an MRI tube.

CUT TO:

A whiteboard filling: **WE ARE MANY. WE ARE COMING. WHERE IS YOUR STAR.**

CUT TO:

The drums swell. The synth widens into a chord.

— The TV in a late-night comedian's set, a stethoscope pressed comically to the host's chest.

— A priest on a church step. *"For two thousand years our tradition has held that the heart is where God first speaks."*

— A teenage girl on TikTok. *"You guys. You guys. It's real. It's real, I can feel it."*

— A meme flashing onto an iPhone. **ARE YOU HEARING IT YET**

— The Stethoscopes' lead singer snarling into a music video camera.

— Times Square. A jumbotron. Alex and Carlos's interview on loop. Ten thousand people walking past without looking up.

ALEX (V.O.)

(haunted)

Who knows the things my heart knows?

MUSIC building —

CUT TO:

DR. IAN HU (40s) rounding a corner of a hospital corridor. He smiles. In his hand: a small black object, not quite a gun.

CUT TO:

Alex and Carlos *running* across a lawn at night.

CUT TO:

A battered white Jeep on a country road. An older woman behind the wheel. *"You boys lost?"*

CUT TO:

A motel room. Neon owl out the window. Carlos at the phone. Alex at the door.

CUT TO:

A BATHROOM MIRROR. Alex's face. Drawn. Decided.

ALEX

(softly)

I'm making sure.

MUSIC BUILDS —

CUT TO:

Alex stepping into a tub filling with ice. Carlos in the bathroom doorway, face broken.

CARLOS

Alex — no — Alex —

ALEX

(shivering)

You said it's asking permission.

CARLOS
(choked)
Yes —

ALEX
I'm giving permission.

SMASH TO BLACK.

SILENCE.

For a long moment, nothing.

Then — from the void — a single slow sequence of morse code. *Dot... dash... dash-dot... dash... dot...*

A voice behind it. Patient. Curious. *Not Alex.*

ALEX/NOT-ALEX (V.O.)
Hello... at last... Carlos.

Another beat of black.

ALEX/NOT-ALEX (V.O.)
(softer)
We have been speaking a very long time.

Another beat.

ALEX/NOT-ALEX (V.O.)
(softer still)
You have only just learned to listen.

BLACK SCREEN. White text appears one letter at a time, each with a sharp morse-code click:

B · E · Y · O · N · D P · U · L · S · E

The final letter lands. HOLD.

A final slow heartbeat. *Lub — dub.*

Then — so faintly it may not be there — a *second* heartbeat, half a beat behind the first. Not an echo. A *companion.*

CUT TO BLACK.

SUPERIMPOSE, small:

IN THEATRES THIS FALL.

THE FIRST OF THREE.

FADE OUT.

END OF TRAILER.