

FIEND

By
Ryan Sprague

FIEND

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FIEND

CAST: 1 NB, 2M, 1F

FIGURE 15, somewhat physically imposing, but vulnerable. Deaf.
EDDIE 40s, unkempt. Typical slumlord of a man
AARON 30s, conventionally attractive, calm and collected
MARIE 30s, a femme fatale with a mission

TIME : November of 1994.

PLACE: Spacious living room and kitchen area of an East Village Apartment, New York City.

* A slash (/) in text represents overlapping of the following line.

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Fiend was originally produced at the Roy Arias Theatre by DreamCatcher Entertainment in New York City, featuring the following cast:

Figure..... Alex Gould
Eddie..... Joe Regan
Aaron..... Micah B. Spayer
Marie..... Julia Menn

Fiend received its second production at the Kraine Theater by Estraña Theatre Company in New York City, featuring the following cast:

Figure..... Sam Yarabek
Eddie..... Jonah Bamel
Aaron..... Patrick Andrew Jones
Marie..... Emily Tuckman

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A television blares an unbearably loud static in a sparse living room of an East Village apartment. The door to a bedroom can be seen upstage. A glazed window on one side of the apartment. It's eerily dark aside from the flickering snow of a television. Mannequin heads with wigs rest on shelves and on the floor. After a few moments, a shadow can be seen behind the window. Then, very slowly, a pair of black gloved hands pry the window open from the outside. A tactical backpack is gently lowered to the floor inside. The foot of unknown intruder begins to climb through to reveal a dark FIGURE dressed entirely in black. They wear a nondescript mask. They begin surveying the room, presumably looking for something to steal. After a moment, they unzip the tactical backpack and take out a small video camcorder with a light on it. They turn it on and begin recording the surroundings. They go to a desk and rifle through items, making sure to capture everything on camera. They go to the living space and start looking through piles of VHS tapes around the television. After a moment, the bookcase catches their attention and they move to it, recording the books on the shelves and the mannequin heads. Suddenly, there's a loud banging on the front door of the apartment. The Figure freezes. The banging again. The Figure paces, clearly agitated. After a moment, the sound of the door unlocking. The Figure hesitates. Instead of going to the window to escape, they retreat into the darkness of the bedroom. The door is opened, and the light is flicked on to reveal EDDIE, a slob of a slumlord.

EDDIE. The hell's wrong with you!? Didn't you hear me pounding!?! (Moves to the television and turns it off.) Hey! Kosminski! If this thing's been blaring all day with you here, I'm gonna be pretty pissed off. I swear to God, you better be incapacitated or dead! (He notices the open window and closes it. He then peeks into the bedroom.) Kosminski!?! (Eddie heads for the door, but not before tripping on a mannequin head on the floor. He picks it up and looks at it in disgust, his back to the front door.) The hell is this shit? (AARON, a well-dressed, dashing man appears in the doorway. He drops a briefcase and lunges toward Eddie, putting him in a sleeper-like hold. They

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struggle for a moment as Eddie manages to get a few words out.)

EDDIE. It's me...Eddie! It's EDDIE! (*Aaron releases him.*)

AARON. Eddie?

EDDIE. For the love of...YES!

AARON. Why are you in my apartment?

EDDIE. I think I'm having a heart attack...

AARON. Why are you in my apartment?

EDDIE. Alicia down the hall said your boob tube's been barking static for hours. I knocked and you didn't answer. So I came in.

AARON. The cable must have gone out.

EDDIE. That's *your* problem. Don't make it the whole goddam building's!

AARON. Well you know what *is* your problem? The lock on the lobby door is *still* broken. I leave the television on to give the appearance that I am here. I wouldn't have to resort to my own forms of security if you'd just fix it.

EDDIE. I'm already on it, alright? There's protocol. Things take time.

AARON. To secure the building? Correct me if I'm wrong, but there's been a huge crime spree in the neighborhood recently...

EDDIE. It's the Lower East Side. When ain't there crime?

AARON. And a string of murders...

EDDIE. Hey, you chose to live down here, okay? I know your type. Well off... slumming it down here with us bottom feeders to feel better about yourself. You don't fool me, Kosminski. Transparent as a glass of goddam water. (*This one definitely gets to Aaron.*)

AARON. You can't just enter without consent. There are laws.

EDDIE. Wah wah wah. This ain't The People's Court, okay? I don't need Alicia bitching at me all night. So I took the law into my own hands.

AARON. Just please do the bare minimum of your job and fix the lock.

EDDIE. Now you're judging my work ethic? I've been at this for twenty years. I take it very seriously. Unlike you're little twinkle-toe haircuts.

(*Wanders to the bookcase, referring to the mannequin heads.*) Speaking of which, what in the holy hell are those?

AARON. They're for work. Anything else, Eddie?

EDDIE. Yeah. Keep your window shut. It was wide open when I got in here. You're so worried about break-ins and you're practically inviting em in here!

AARON. My window was open?

EDDIE. What did I just say?

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AARON. (*Aaron finds this curious.*) Fine.

EDDIE. Good. (*Beat.*) Oh, and rent's due tomorrow.

AARON. I already mailed it out.

EDDIE. For the love of... I live in the goddam building. I've told ya so many goddamn times!

AARON. And I've told you... in case there's any discrepancies, I have proof that it was sent to you, signed for, and received. (*Eddie stares into the empty eyes of one of the mannequin heads. He ever-so-slightly turns the head away from his eye line.*)

EDDIE. Ya know, Kosminski... I sometimes get the feeling you don't trust me.

AARON. You should *trust* that feeling. (*Eddie gets in Aaron's face.*)

EDDIE. Well the feeling is mutual.

AARON. I have company arriving soon. Please leave. (*Eddie studies Aaron one more time before heading for the door.*)

EDDIE. I'm watching you, Kosminski.

AARON. Goodbye, Eddie.

EDDIE. Eyes in the... (*Aaron slams the door shut and locks it. From the hallway...*) In the back of my skull, Koskminski! Ya hear me!? Eyes in the back of... God dammit, Carl! Stop doing that with your door open!

ANIMALS! All of ya! (*Aaron lets out a sigh of relief, finally alone in his own surroundings. He goes to the bookcase and moves the mannequin head back to its original position. After a moment, he glances at his watch and heads for the bathroom. The shower turns on. A few moments pass as the Figure emerges from the darkness of the bedroom. They once again take out their camcorder and begin silently documenting everything. They move across the bookshelf and to the television. They pick up several VHS tapes, recording the labels. They move to the briefcase and quietly open it, recording its contents. The shower suddenly stops. The Figure stops filming. Once again, they move towards the window to escape. They go to open the window but stop. They appear frustrated. They instead move back into the darkness of the bedroom. The bathroom door opens, the mist of a hot shower escaping as Aaron exits in nothing but a towel. He begins to head to the bedroom when he notices his briefcase is open. Did he do that? Did Eddie? Or someone else? He bends down to the briefcase, takes out a small case and opens it, revealing a pair of solid steel thinning shears, used by hairstylists. He moves*

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around the room with them, suspicious. He goes to the window and peers out. He begins to head towards the bedroom with the shears when... a knock on the door. Aaron freezes. Another knock. He goes to the peep hole and peers out. He spins around, clearly on edge. He sets the shears down on the couch and darts into the bedroom. After a few moments, another knock.)

AARON. One moment! *(He emerges from the bedroom in pants and an unbuttoned dress shirt. He tries to calm his nerves. He notices the shears and quickly puts them in his back pocket. He takes a deep breath and opens the door to reveal MARIE, a stunningly beautiful woman who wears a long, black trench coat with a medium-sized purse slung on her shoulder. She stares innocently at Aaron, who stares back.)*

MARIE. You called? *(Aaron nods.)* This is the right place then? *(He nods again.)* Can I come in or...?

AARON. Yes. Yes, of course. *(Marie enters. Aaron locks the door. He is completely fixated on her hair. Marie moves into the room. She notices the mannequin heads on the shelf.)* Is that natural?

MARIE. Excuse me?

AARON. Your hair. The color. Is it natural?

MARIE. Why?

AARON. Just curious.

MARIE. No. It's not.

AARON. Who did it?

MARIE. I did.

AARON. The roots are flawless. So is the lift.

MARIE. You a barber or something?

AARON. Stylist. Hair *stylist*.

MARIE. That what the heads are for? *(Marie gestures to the mannequin heads.)*

AARON. I bring wigs home to work on. Pet projects. I know they say not to bring your work home with you. I'm sure you don't bring your... *work* home with you? *(The joke didn't seem to land.)*

MARIE. Right. So... it's half up front, half after.

AARON. Right. Yes. Of course. *(He retrieves his wallet and presents Marie with a stack of cash. She starts counting it when she notices something.)*

MARIE. Tens?

AARON. Yes.

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MARIE. You're going to pay me in all tens?

AARON. It's just a thing of mine. I hope that's alright.

MARIE. Yeah. Sure. (*Marie puts the cash in her purse and puts the purse in the pocket of her coat. She unties the coat and takes it off, revealing a blouse, short skirt, and thigh high boots. Aaron's eyes wander up and down her. She catches him as he turns his eyes to her coat, taking it and hanging it near the door. They stand in silence for what must feel like forever.*)

AARON. Would you... like a drink?

MARIE. Not while I'm working. (*Aaron is impressed.*)

AARON. You're different.

MARIE. Different?

AARON. From the others.

MARIE. Other what?

AARON. Women. Usually, they want alcohol. Or drugs.

MARIE. So, is this, like, a usual thing for you? Hiring someone? (*Aaron doesn't answer. His silence says it all.*)

AARON. You're the first I've invited *to* my home. So, it would technically make this a rather *unusual* situation.

MARIE. I'm... honored. Should we go to the bedroom?

AARON. I thought maybe we could stay in here.

MARIE. It's already late. And you're only half-dressed. We should probably/ just...

AARON. Have a seat.

MARIE. I'd rather just go to the bedroom/ and...

AARON. Sit down. (*After a moment, Marie obliges, sitting on the couch. Aaron buttons up his shirt. Marie then crosses her legs, making sure her skirt rises slightly, hoping this will help the situation. Aaron's gaze slowly ascends up her legs.*) Where uh... where are you from?

MARIE. (*Laughs.*) I don't think so.

AARON. Come on. I'm originally from Syracuse. Where did you...? I'm just trying to make conversation.

MARIE. It's a waste of your time with me. Not to mention a waste of your many *ten-dollar* bills.

AARON. I don't see it as a waste. It's how I want to *spend* my money. (*Marie can't argue this. In fact, she finds it rather curious.*)

MARIE. Don't you have friends you could make conversation with?

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AARON. (*Beat.*) I talk to other stylists.

MARIE. I meant outside of your profession.

AARON. And I suppose you have a huge circle of friends outside of yours?

MARIE. We're all lonely. This city has a habit of doing that.

AARON. Exactly! (*Aaron moves closer. Marie flinches, on the defense.*

Aaron can sense it, and backs moves away.) I mean I... I couldn't agree more.

(*A few beats. Marie gives Aaron an inch.*)

MARIE. Jersey. I'm from Jersey.

AARON. And you live here now? Manhattan?

MARIE. Yes.

AARON. Why'd you move?

MARIE. Because I'm from Jersey. (*Aaron lets out a small laugh. Marie is somewhat comforted by this and smiles.*) I moved closer to... audition.

Acting. Cliche, I know.

AARON. I like cliches. They're comforting.

MARIE. Yeah, well... look at me now. Living the *comfortable* dream...

(*Suddenly a siren outside from the distance gets louder and louder as the lights of a police car bounce off the apartment window. Marie and Aaron both tense up for a moment. The sirens and lights fade into the distance.*)

AARON. Are you scared?

MARIE. Of what?

AARON. The murders.

MARIE. It's New York City.

AARON. Yeah, but it's been four in the past two months. All around here. And all... you know...?

MARIE. I know what?

AARON. Well... they were like you. (*Marie brushes this off. But barely.*) Sorry. I didn't/ mean...

MARIE. He won't get away with it much longer.

AARON. He?

MARIE. Yeah. I mean, killing "people like me." Clearly some freak who can't get it up or something. Blames everyone else for his... *disfunctions*.

AARON. That seems a little presumptuous, doesn't it?

MARIE. Maybe. Just seems like whatever it is... the thrill. The game. It would eventually wear off. He'd get... sloppy. Get caught. (*Beat.*) What's your name?

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AARON. (*Beat.*) Aaron.

MARIE. Aaron. I like that. It fits you. (*Marie contemplates it for a moment...*) I'm Marie.

AARON. Marie. It's nice to meet you. Marie... fits you as well. (*More silence.*) Marie?

MARIE. Yes, Aaron?

AARON. What did you think of me when you first saw me?

MARIE. What do you mean?

AARON. Your first impression of me.

MARIE. (*Beat.*) I thought I had the wrong apartment.

AARON. Why?

MARIE. Well. You're... attractive. Most of my clients are either fat, bald, or impotent. Sometimes all three.

AARON. I'm none of those.

MARIE. (*Laughs.*) I can see that. At least the fat and bald part. I don't know... it just doesn't seem like you'd really have a problem finding sex. (*Aaron looks somewhat embarrassed. Almost ashamed.*) And yet here we are.

AARON. I just... it's not that easy, you know. Even for... someone....

MARIE. Someone like you?

AARON. Someone like me.

MARIE. We should probably go the bedroom or wherever you...

AARON. I sometimes wonder what it would be like to have a... significant other.

MARIE. Oh. Aaron, this isn't... I'm not like a girlfriend sorta situation...

AARON. Oh no. Of course. I didn't mean/ it like

MARIE. Okay, good. Just so we're clear on that. (*Aaron nods.*)

MARIE. Having a significant other isn't all it's cracked up to be. Trust me.

AARON. I had one.

MARIE. One?

AARON. Yeah.

MARIE. Like one girlfriend? Ever?

AARON. Yes. In high school. And it was a joke.

MARIE. Most high school relationships are a joke.

AARON. No. I mean literally. It was a joke. There was this small movie theater in Syracuse that would play a lot of older horror movies and... (*Beat.*) We shouldn't waste our time on this. I'm much more interested in you.

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MARIE. Why was it a joke, Aaron?

AARON. It doesn't matter. So, what kind of auditions do/you...

MARIE. Please tell me why it was a joke. I just want to understand. (*Aaron hesitates for a moment. He takes a deep breath and the world disappears. Lights dim on the room as a projection screen light flicks to life with the faint sounds of a movie playing underneath the following dialogue. Marie has completely morphed into another woman somehow. A holier-than-thou teenager. Aaron is also a teenager. This is somehow and somehow a vivid memory of his playing out.*)

AARON. I don't understand.

MARIE. My friends wanted to see how long I could do it. And you seemed like a nice guy. But... I just... can't.

AARON. Can't what?

MARIE. Do this. Be with you. It's... a joke. This was all just a joke.

AARON. You don't want to be with me?

MARIE. I'm gonna go.

AARON. I thought you liked me.

MARIE. Don't make a big deal about it, okay? I'm leaving.

AARON. Please don't leave.

MARIE. I don't want to be here.

AARON. Why?

MARIE. You're weird. You're just... why would you bring me to a movie like this?

AARON. She's a ballet dancer. I thought because you liked...

MARIE. It's disgusting. You're just... don't call me. Don't talk to me at school. Just... stay away from me. (*Loud shrieks from a woman can be heard from the movie as Marie distances herself from Aaron, morphing back into herself, having just listened to this entire sad story. Aaron slowly returns to to the present moment over the following.*)

AARON. I just... sat there. Watching the movie. Not wanting to ever leave the theater. The credits rolled. And then it was just black. My entire world just... went black. (*Beat.*) From what I was told, she moved here just like you for some big dream of dancing. I *feel* as though I may have seen her once or twice. It's funny. You sometimes think you see people you know walking down the streets here. They sort of brush past you with some sense of familiarity. But then you're both gone in an instant, forgetting it ever even

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happened. I'm sure we've crossed paths. Taken the same train. Stood at the same corner. And when those moments happen, I fantasize about what I would say to her. And sometimes, I even entertain the thought of forgiving her for what she did to me. But then I remember the theater that night. And that's when I know.

MARIE. Know what?

AARON. Some people are just never meant to breathe the same air. (*They both sit in silence as Marie studies Aaron.*)

MARIE. Aaron?

AARON. Yeah?

MARIE. I'd like that drink.

AARON. Oh. Okay. Yes... yes, what would you like?

MARIE. Whiskey.

AARON. I don't have whiskey.

MARIE. Beer? (*Aaron shakes his head.*) Wine?

AARON. I don't have any alcohol.

MARIE. Oh. Well, that's what I assumed you meant by... what do you have?

AARON. I have tea.

MARIE. Tea?

AARON. Green tea. It has powerful antioxidants. Also has lasting effects on brain function.

MARIE. So does whiskey. Calms my nerves.

AARON. Are you nervous?

MARIE. Are *you* nervous?

AARON. I think I can get you whiskey.

MARIE. I'll survive.

AARON. It's no problem. I see the empty bottles outside my landlord's apartment all the time. I'm sure he can part with one. Is one bottle enough?

MARIE. A *bottle* of whiskey? (*Laughs.*) You really don't drink, do you?

AARON. I'll get two then?

MARIE. One. One bottle is enough, Aaron. (*Aaron heads for the door.*)

AARON. I'll be right back. Just... don't move. (*Marie nods, smiling. Aaron smiles back and exits. He locks the door from the outside. Marie's smile gradually fades as her eyes fill with tears. She lets out a huge breath of pent-up aggression. She gathers herself and begins to desperately search the room for something. Under the couch. In the cupboards. She searches drawers and*

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cabinets. She slams everything, clearly unsuccessful. She goes to the bookcase and looks behind several books. Nothing. Underneath the mannequin heads. Behind the bookcase itself. Whatever she's looking for, it's not there.)

MARIE. *Shit... shit... shit... (She goes to the television and rifles through some of the VHS tapes. Again, whatever it is she's looking for isn't there. But something is. The Figure slowly emerges from the doorway of the bedroom. Marie's eyes catch the television screen, and in the reflection, she can see The Figure. She slowly gets up and turns as the two stare at one another. The Figure begins to shake their head, scared. They begin to move towards the window again to leave. Marie grabs them by the hand and stops them. She looks into the eyeholes of The Figure's mask. She gently touches the mask and is about to lift it when the door is unlocked. The Figure frantically darts back into the darkness of the bedroom. Marie smoothly moves to the bookshelf, perusing the books. Aaron enters.)*

AARON. I was right. Of course he charged me for it, but I got it. I hope bourbon is... *(Aaron notices her at the bookcase.)* I asked you not to move.

MARIE. I was just... admiring.

AARON. I know but I-

MARIE. What's the big/ deal?

AARON. I'm sorry, but I specifically asked you/ not to...

MARIE. You didn't ask me anything. You *told* me not to move.

AARON. And you did.

MARIE. I did. Let's get one thing straight here, Aaron. Just because you're paying for my time doesn't make me your lapdog, got it?

AARON. It's my apartment.

MARIE. Then I'll leave.

AARON. I've paid for more time than this.

MARIE. No refunds.

AARON. You can't leave.

MARIE. I am leaving. And I'm taking the bourbon with me. *(Marie begins to head for the door.)*

AARON. You're not leaving! *(Aaron blocks her from the door. Marie is startled but hides it. Aaron locks the door, composing himself. The shift is palpable.)* I would... prefer if you stayed. *(A standoff.)*

MARIE. Get me a glass.

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AARON. A glass. Yes. For the... I'll get you a glass. (*Marie slowly goes to the couch and sits. As Aaron brings her the glass, she defiantly opens the bourbon and takes a large swig straight from the bottle. He sets the glass down on the table.*) I don't know how you can drink that stuff. Just the smell makes me nauseous.

MARIE. Your father never snuck you a sip of booze as a kid?

AARON. Never. (*Beat.*) Had a father, I mean. I've never had a father.

MARIE. Everyone has a father.

AARON. Did you want the glass or...?

MARIE. My father left when I twelve. I know the feeling.

AARON. It's not like that. It was... it's not worth explaining. Trust me.

MARIE. I hated mine for so long. I can understand why you'd feel that way.

AARON. I don't hate him.

MARIE. It's part of life, Aaron. Men are shitty.

AARON. I don't hate him. (*Beat.*) I never knew him. I was... conceived unexpectedly. And... involuntarily.

MARIE. Involuntarily? (*Aaron nods. It takes Marie a moment, when...*) Oh that's... Aaron I... fuck. (*She takes a swig of the whiskey again.*)

AARON. She hated him. Obviously. She hated all men. Never dated. Never went out. Expect for school, it was just... her and I. Every single moment of every single day. Wouldn't let any boys near me outside of school. Inside of school...? (*Marie suddenly morphs into a stern, motherly figure, another flashback of Aaron's taking shape.*)

MARIE. Do *not* talk to the boys at school. If they talk to you, ignore them and read a book. If they try to invite you somewhere after school, tell them you have chores or you aren't feeling well. The less men in your life the better. Do you understand me, Aaron? Aaron? (*Marie morphs back into herself.*) Aaron?

AARON. Yes! I understand.

MARIE. Understand what?

AARON. (*Breaks his rumination.*) That we both seem to have mommy and daddy issues. (*Aaron laughs. Marie does not. Aaron gestures to the glass on the table.*) Pour yourself a drink.

MARIE. Should I?

AARON. Yes. Don't drink from the bottle.

MARIE. So, it's okay with you if I pour myself a drink?

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AARON. Of course it is. That's why I told you should.

MARIE. No, you didn't tell me I *should*. You told me *to* drink.

AARON. Sorry, I... what's the difference?

MARIE. One's a suggestion and one's a demand. Is that why you hired me, Aaron? So that you can... be in control?

AARON. No. It's not...

MARIE. Telling me to get on my knees/...bend over... spread wider...

AARON. What? No. That's not what I... we shouldn't be talking about/that...

MARIE. You're right. We should be doing it.

AARON. I can't.

MARIE. You can. (*Marie slithers down, on all fours and kneels in front of Aaron. He is visibly uncomfortable.*)

AARON. It's not what/ I...

MARIE. Come on. I've never had a hairstylist before. (*Marie inches closer and closer on her knees.*)

AARON. It wouldn't/ be...

MARIE. You can do or say whatever /you...

AARON. STOP! (*He recoils, standing up and moving away.*) I was hoping you would understand.

MARIE. Understand what?

AARON. That this could be something more than...

MARIE. More than what?

AARON. *Selling* yourself. It's just... sad.

MARIE. (*Gets up and gets in Aaron's face.*) You know what's sad? A barber living in a shitty neighborhood in a shitty apartment building who has to hire a prostitute just to feel better about himself.

AARON. Stylist. I'm a hairstylist. Not a barber.

MARIE. And I'm not a fucking therapist. I am a sex worker, Aaron.

AARON. Whoever forced you in to/ this...

MARIE. Nobody forced me into this. I wasn't making money acting so I found something else that could make people feel something. Something I'm really, *really* good at. And I love it.

AARON. How can you love it?

MARIE. Because it gives me purpose. When I'm with a client, I mean something to them. Whether it's to satisfy some fetish or to numb themselves. Or just to simply come. It's something that they needed. Something that no

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one else in the world could give them in that moment. It's a blind *trust*. No matter how dirty or sweaty it is... it's two strangers connecting in the most primal way. And it's because of me. I did that. But *you*... you see me as a victim.

AARON. But you're not.

MARIE. Hell no. (*Beat.*) Unless of course it gets me killed.

AARON. What if it did?

MARIE. At least I went out with a bang. (*Marie waits.*)

AARON. (*He doesn't get it. Until finally...*) Oh! I get it. (*He lets out a mousey laugh. It's almost sincere if it weren't so creepy. They sit in silence. Marie takes another swig. Aaron seems lost in her.*)

MARIE. Aaron?

AARON. Yeah?

MARIE. What are you hiding?

AARON. What do you mean?

MARIE. Everyone has something to hide. We'd all be at each other's throats if we were completely honest all the time. Come on. Give it to me. (*A debate wages in Aaron's head.*)

AARON. Stay here. (*Marie shoots him a look. He realizes why.*) Will you please stay here? (*Marie nods. He heads for the bedroom. Marie hops off the couch.*)

MARIE. Wait. You don't have/ to...

AARON. You said you wanted to see what I was hiding.

MARIE. Yes but...

AARON. I'll show you what I'm hiding.

MARIE. It's okay. I was just joking. Why don't we...?

AARON. I want to show you. (*Aaron enters the darkened bedroom. Back in the living room, Marie is visibly anxious. She waits for something... anything to happen. Aaron re-emerges to some relief from Marie. He holds a medium-sized case and places it on the coffee table. He unlocks it and opens it. Whatever is in it, we see a boyish excitement on Aaron's face and a concerned look on Marie's.*)

MARIE. Why do you have that?

AARON. Why does anyone have it? (*Marie doesn't answer. From the case, Aaron pulls out a compact handgun.*)

MARIE. To kill people. (*Marie is frozen in fear. Aaron lets it linger.*)

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AARON. It's for protection.

MARIE. (*Her nerves have calmed slightly.*) Why are you showing it to me?

AARON. You wanted to know what I was hiding.

MARIE. I meant inside of you. Your biggest thoughts... fears... dreams... definitely not a gun!

AARON. How was I supposed to know you were being metaphorical?

MARIE. Well... okay, so who are you *protecting* yourself from? (*Marie takes a very quick glance at the bedroom.*)

AARON. Imagine walking home from work every day and having kids and bums calling you queer. Or following you home from the subway because you look like you have money. Imagine getting hit in the back of the head by a baseball bat, your entire day's tips swiped clean out of your pockets.

MARIE. I don't have to imagine any of that. I've been beaten up and had my money stolen, too. Doesn't mean I carry around a gun in my purse.

AARON. Well, maybe you should start.

MARIE. (*Slowly moves towards Aaron.*) Can I see? (*Aaron presents the gun to her.*) I meant your head. Your scars, that is. I'm assuming you have scars from being hit? (*Aaron nods. He places the gun on the table. He turns his back to Marie. She slowly places her hands on his shoulders. This is the first time they've made physical contact. She slowly guides him to sit on the couch while she stands behind him. Aaron closes his eyes, taking in her touch of his hair and scalp. Marie searches for his scar.*) I love scars. The way the body imperfectly heals itself. (*Marie finds the scar and studies it. Aaron is still enjoying the touch.*) They really did a number on you, didn't they?

AARON. Knocked me out cold. I woke up on the street with a hole sliced in my pants. My wallet was missing. There was blood everywhere. Not a single person called for help. Nothing. And they were three-hundred-dollar pants. So that just added insult to injury.

MARIE. A Snake.

AARON. A Snake?

MARIE. Your scar. It looks like a snake.

AARON. I couldn't take it anymore. Watching over my back every time I got off the train, rounded a corner... found myself on an empty street. I talked to one of our night cleaning guys at the salon. Gave him a few hundred bucks and he gave me the gun the next night. No questions asked.

MARIE. It's not doing much good in your bedroom, though, is it?

FIEND

AARON. I only carry it July through September. The hotter days. Seems to be when the bums and druggies are at their prime. Haven't really brought it out in a while. Considering it's November.

MARIE. So, you only walk around with a concealed weapon seasonally? *(Aaron nods.)* You are... an interesting breed. *(They lock eyes. A moment between them. Marie slowly inches towards him...)* Can I hold it? *(Marie's eyes veer towards the gun. Aaron hesitates but picks it up and hands it to her.)*

MARIE. *(Examines the gun.)* Have you ever shot it?

AARON. Not yet. Pulled it out once. Had to be a few months back before Autumn hit. I noticed someone following me home from work one day. Had a hood on. And a mask.

MARIE. *(She almost drops the gun after hearing this. She catches herself, trying to cover.)* It's heavier than I thought.

AARON. Whoever they were didn't think I noticed. But you learn to always be a step ahead. I played their game. I sped up and so did they. I slowed down. So did they. After about five blocks, I turned into a small alley way. And just as they appeared, I pointed the gun straight at them. *(Aaron grabs Marie's hands and imitates his actions, making her point the gun directly in his face. She grips it tight.)* All I could see was their top lip. Quivering. Their hands, trembling. Like a child. I didn't say a word. We stood there for what seemed like hours. They slowly started to back away and took off. I was shaking from the adrenaline. Just like you are. *(Marie doesn't realize it, but she is, in fact, visibly shaking. She tries to keep a tight grip on the gun, still pointing it at Aaron's head, her composure slowly melting away...)* Marie? *(Beat.)* Marie, are you okay? Let go. *(She doesn't.)* Marie, let go of the gun. *(Aaron rips the gun from her hands. He places it back on the coffee table.)*

MARIE. I... I've never held one before. I guess I was just... I'm sorry. *(Aaron picks up the bourbon by the bottle and hands it to her. She takes a strong swig and composes herself.)*

AARON. I was the same way. I could have shot them that night. We were so close to one another that the bullet probably would have passed right through them. I mean, depending on where I shot, of course. The neck to sternum would have been a challenge. But the head... it would have soared straight through their skull like a pebble through a waterfall. For that single moment, I chose if they lived or died. And they knew it. Like you said... a *primal*

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connection.

MARIE. You were... like a God.

AARON. Technically. (*Marie laughs.*) What's funny about that?

MARIE. It was joke, Aaron. *Technically*, you were one person facing another person in a dark alley. One with more power than the other. But you didn't shoot.

AARON. But I could have.

MARIE. And I could have been an actress. Things *tempt* us. Things we think we're meant to be. Meant to do. Whatever God is, whatever higher power decides our fate, it's not always with the best of intentions. It's unfair. Chaotic. It's... most of the time it's... unjust.

AARON. That's a rather depressing outlook on life.

MARIE. It's a depressing outlook on God. Not life. Huge difference.

AARON. I don't accept that.

MARIE. Oh, you don't have to accept it. I mean, who am I, right? I'm just a prostitute sitting here drinking bourbon and talking to an armed barber about killing people.

AARON. *Stylist.* I already told you I'm not a barber. Don't...

MARIE. What's wrong? Am I *dumbing* down what you do for a living? That must be frustrating.

AARON. A bit.

MARIE. Just a bit? Well then let's crank it up a notch. I think you don't accept it because I challenged your little God complex. I think that the only thing that makes you feel important is trying to be some kind of savior. I think that you hire us to convince us that there's more to our lives and that it's not too late. But it *is* too late, Aaron. For me. For you. It's too late for any of us to be... *saved*. Isn't that right?

AARON. (*Grabs the bottle of whiskey.*) I think you've had enough.

MARIE. (*Grabs the bottle back.*) I'm just getting started. (*She takes another long swig.*)

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