

EXT. BANK PARKING LOT - NIGHT TIME

The sky is thick with clouds, a dank veil over the moon perched above the thin trees. Feeble branches shivering in the autumn wind. The building is austere, drab; the parking lot is near empty.

A CLOAKED WOMAN exits the bank, wrapping her shawl around her. There is a COLLAR protruding from her neck, digging into her throat and looping around her ears. She walks briskly to her car, MOUTHING WORDS as she does so.

She searches her purse for her keys, but she accidentally drops them. When she kneels to pick them up, a BLACK FIGURE behind snatches her, covering her mouth.

There's a struggle, but she eventually relaxes when she realizes her resistance is futile. The black figure, which we now see is a SLENDER WOMAN DRESSED IN CANVAS UNIFORM, drags her back to the entrance of the bank.

WOMAN IN BLACK

Open.

She complies.

INT. BANK LOBBY - NIGHT TIME

A dim light illuminates the cloaked woman's name tag -- SHREYA. She is still under the other woman's tight grip, a knife to her throat.

SHREYA

What do you want?

The collar from before glows slightly when she speaks, a number escalating from 2314 to 2318. The woman in black looks at this with disdain.

WOMAN IN BLACK

Ny'left?

The word is coarse in her throat, a thick commoner accent. Shreya stares at her a few seconds before registering what she said.

SHREYA

No...nobody. I was the last one out; I locked up.

The woman in black shoves her to the floor and begins to tie her hands behind her back. As she performs a patdown, Shreya asks -

(CONTINUED)

SHREYA (cont'd)  
What do you want?

There's a stick of gum, keys from before, and a pager. The woman in black pockets them all and then pulls out her own token. A picture of a BALDING SIXTY YEAR OLD MAN.

WOMAN IN BLACK  
Fill.

SHREYA  
I don't understand.

A frustrated grunt.

WOMAN IN BLACK  
Find.

SHREYA  
How can I find him?

A pointed look at the device around her neck and then the thick binders on the other side of the counters.

SHREYA (cont'd)  
You tied me up. I can't do this  
without my hands.

The woman in black contemplates this for a second but then shrugs and points to herself. *I'll do it.*

SHREYA  
Are you..

Holstering her weapon, the woman in black waits for the inevitable revelation.

SHREYA  
...one of the Hushed?

The woman loosens the top of her coat to reveal her neck. No collar, no thick wires entering or exiting her body. She sweeps her shoulder length hair to the side to reveal the nape of her neck, which has a VINE TATTOO engraved on it.

WOMAN IN BLACK  
Ma's.

It's an explanation that Shreya doesn't understand but she begins visibly shaking at the confirmation of the woman's status.

The woman hops over the counter and flips on the lamp, fluorescence illuminating her gaunt, angular face. She gestures towards a pile of binders, looking to Shreya.

SHREYA

If you have his name, that would be helpful to. Otherwise, we could search the database.

The woman jolts and hisses at this suggestion. Shreya, sitting on the floor, shrinks back.

SHREYA (cont'd)

Otherwise, there's an index in all the records. I don't know how they're organized. Lilly works the shelf.

The woman lets her babble for a bit as she sifts through the binders, huge, thick, uninviting, and dusty. If Lilly does work the shelf, she hasn't been doing a good job. Shreya continues her drivel.

SHREYA (cont'd)

I can't believe I'm with one of the Hushed. Wow. I thought you guys had died out decades ago - what with that whole massacre and all, haha.

The laughter is weak and the woman bristles.

SHREYA (cont'd)

I saw your robe and I thought...I just thought maybe you were one of them. You have that creepy vibe they have. And your neck.

WOMAN IN BLACK

(mechanical)

Embedded pre-programmed structure with existing word allowances.

SHREYA

Yeah, exactly. Definitely. Yes. All that. Tellers only have the recommended limits. Although, it is only recommended.

Shreya laughs.

BLACK SCREEN

FADE IN:

EXT. BLUE HOUSE YARD - NOON

There's a nonsensical song being sung, clear and bright in the afternoon sun. Flowers, butterflies, all things good and kind flutter in a yard. A garden bustles, like something out of a picture book.

A YOUNG GIRL'S HEAD pops up out from a tree. Thick black hair hangs from her scalp, tied into neat rows. Her eyes and her body is obscured by the branches and leaves.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Dinner!

The girl leaps from the top, landing in the grass with a soft thump. Her heels are used to the bruising and she recovers from the fall quickly, hitting the ground as soon as she can. Feet fly, dust flies, flies fly. The sweet song still sung.

EXT. BLUE HOUSE BACK PORCH - NOON

She arrives, a little sweaty but not out of breath. This is the first time we see her eyes, heavily lidded and pitch black. They are searching for the voice that called her.

LITTLE GIRL

Mom! Let me in!

She bangs on the glass door, the frame wobbling against her might.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Dinner!

The repeat statement is eerily similar to its previous one.

MOTHER (O.S.) (cont'd)

Dinner! Dinner!

The little girl backs away from the door.

LITTLE GIRL

(wary)

Mom, is that you?

MOTHER (O.S.)

(distorted)

Dinner! Din -- dinner...! DINNER!

The glass door slides open and a BEARDED MAN WITH A PORK PIE HAT steps out, a sleek metal box in his lumpy hands. He ripples with pleasure at the sight of the girl.

(CONTINUED)

LITTLE GIRL  
Where's my mother?

BEARDED MAN  
You know so little.

A beat.

BEARDED MAN (cont'd)  
Where's your brother?

LITTLE GIRL  
I don't have one. Where's Mom? Who  
are you? What do you want? Are you  
staying for dinner?

BEARDED MAN  
Words have economy, save yours  
until you're older. Tell me where  
your brother is.

He comes out onto the porch to face her. She doesn't step  
away, but sticks her finger defiantly on his belly (she's  
too short to reach upwards).

LITTLE GIRL  
Now, you listen to me, Mister. Sir.  
My mother told me not to talk to  
strangers. And I don't like the way  
you're gallivanting about. Now  
where's my mom?

He sighs, nursing his temple and then kneeling down.

BEARDED MAN  
You want to see your mother?

She nods fiercely.

He sighs again and then turns around and opens the sliding  
door wider. Then he moves aside the blinds for her to see.

We see toes. Toes slicked with blood, in a pool of thick  
congealing liquid. There's a thick, damp smell that makes  
the little girl's nose curl. She peers in and clutches her  
stomach, vomiting. (We never see what she sees.)

BEARDED MAN (cont'd)  
(unaffected)  
Now, will you tell me where your  
brother is?

INT. BANK LOBBY - NIGHT TIME

The woman in black is crouched over Shreya, the blade of her knife poking into her neck. Both of them breathe heavily.

She traces the edge over the tender spots of her neck, making Shreya wince against the coldness.

WOMAN IN BLACK

Haft'.

She digs the knife in.

A beat.

Then Shreya's agitated breaths. The woman cut off her headset! The glow of the display slowly wilts.

WOMAN IN BLACK (cont'd)

Help me.

She points to the picture she showed her before.

Shreya narrows her eyes, focusing on the picture in the bad light, and then gasps.

SHREYA

That's Minister Jaha.

INT. WHITE HOSPITAL ROOM - UNKNOWN

The little girl is now a MUSCULAR TEEN, height not considerably different, and now with choppy hair. She is bound to an operating table, with restraints holding her limbs and her mouth. She balks under the bright lights and the TRAY OF NEEDLES next to her.

UNKNOWN (O.S.)

Caught sneak. Lab.

She screams, muffled by the rag in her mouth. And then looks around her. There's a SICKLY MAN on another table to the right, his flesh rotting but the slow rise and fall of his chest indicating some life left in him. To the left are the needles. She doesn't want to see those.

A BALDING WOMAN approaches her table, nails painted bright green and sharp. The teen scrambles to get out of her reach, but she can't escape the claws grabbing her head and twisting it this way and that.

(CONTINUED)

BALDING WOMAN

The neck.

A grunt comes from a GRUNT approaching the woman.

GRUNT

Hush.

The woman's lips curl into a smile, cruel in their intentions.

BALDING WOMAN

(to the teen)

Do you know who I am?

The girl is still struggling against the restraints, her neck craning to get out of the woman's clutches.

BALDING WOMAN (cont'd)

I am the one who ordered the mark  
on your mother.

The girl tenses up and stops moving.

BALDING WOMAN (cont'd)

I'm the head of this department. My  
name's Janice.

The girl is still frozen in place, her eyes bulging and watching JANICE remove the cloth from her mouth.

JANICE

It's a pity we had to meet under  
these circumstances. You seem quite  
nice...Hei Ling.

She takes off the mouth gag completely and ZHU HEI LING spits in her face. The man behind Janice surges forward to apprehend her, but Janice holds him back.

HEI LING

(with difficulty)

Where the hell am I?

Janice looks around, faking interest in the empty walls and the armed staff behind her.

JANICE

In detainment. And quarantine.  
Wouldn't want you planting any  
ideas in the rest of our prisoners.

(CONTINUED)

HEI LING

What's on my neck? Why did you talk  
about my neck? Where's --

She screeches in pain as a bolt of electricity floods her  
body. Janice holds the magic button in her hands.

JANICE

I forget how ironic your people's  
name is. You never shut up.

Hei Ling pants and groans intermittently, trying to catch  
her breath.

HEI LING

My people? What are you talking  
about?

JANICE

You have vines on your neck where  
you ought to have collars. You  
speak with reckless abandon. You  
believe you deserve the freedom of  
speech.

HEI LING

Pl --

JANICE

You interrupt authority, you  
trespass on private property, you  
think you have privileges the rest  
of the world doesn't have.

Hei Ling considers these accusations with a cold glare.

JANICE (cont'd)

You have the audacity to question  
me?

A beat.

JANICE (cont'd)

Never mind that. It'll be all right  
and settled now. We've graciously  
offered to perform the vocational  
surgery for you before you leave.

HEI LING

Doesn't that mean I have to  
volunteer?

(CONTINUED)



JANICE

No, it means it'll be done to your  
vocal chords.

GRUNT

...means job.

Janice turns around and looks him up and down. He realizes his error.

JANICE

Lovely man just decided to revoke  
casual speaking in his upcoming  
term.

She takes out her pager and types something into it briefly. The man swallows (an explanation? an excuse? an apology?) and then steps back to silently mourn the loss of privilege.

He yelps -- he's been hit with a baton in the back of his knees -- and crashes to the floor. The man to his right startles and moves out of the way. An OFFICER moves in from the left and whips the writhing figure on the floor, merciless and brutal with his strokes. A glint of metal shines when he pulls something from his pocket...

JANICE (cont'd)

(ignoring that)

It won't be standard -- we don't  
think one of the Hushed can handle  
our typical procedure. But. You  
must be contained.

She pulls out her own scalpel at the same time as the officer behind her does.

JANICE (cont'd)

And you must learn our ways.

We can vaguely make out the commotion in the back. The struggle against the officer stymied by a slew of men donning guns. A scream lurching out of the man's throat before it's strangled by a knife digging into his neck.

JANICE (cont'd)

We will teach you.

She moves in.

BLACK SCREEN

A tortured cry. Hei Ling's.

INT. BANK LOBBY - NIGHT TIME

Sirens whistle in the distance.

SHREYA

Why are you looking for the  
Minister? The public isn't supposed  
to know he exists.

The woman, who we understand is Hei Ling now, shakes her  
head solemnly and points to her brain.

HEI LING

*Fix.*

SHREYA

(sardonic)

I'm sure they can fix you once you  
turn yourself in.

Hei Ling growls and slams Shreya against the floor. She  
yelps when her head hits the ground. Hei Ling gestures to  
her neck and exaggeratedly sticks it out.

HEI LING

(furious)

*Fix.*

Shreya kicks Hei Ling in the gut, pushing her away. She  
tries to wriggle into a kneeling position but the blow has  
rendered her too dizzy to accomplish that.

SHREYA

Why am I even talking to you? You  
don't listen.

A beat as Hei Ling gets up.

SHREYA (cont'd)

Plus, my limit's too stretched.  
Tellers can only say so much.

Hei Ling dusts herself off and then lays Shreya down, feet  
and arms straight. She ties her feet together, tightly,  
enough to make her squirm.

HEI LING

(pointing to the picture of  
Minister Jaha)

Tell.

Shreya sucks on her teeth in disdain.

(CONTINUED)

SHREYA

You're lucky my contract renewal is  
up next week and that my boss  
screwed me over last term...

Hei Ling waits patiently.

INT. SUBWAY - MIDNIGHT

Young Hei Ling now, the kid one, not the teen one. She sits on subway pews. The rest of the place is unoccupied, save for an ELDERLY COUPLE on the other side of the compartment and a STREET RAT standing in the middle of the rows. She blows on her fingers, shivering, and the street rat approaches her and offers a heating pad.

STREET RAT

(flat)

Do you need a handyman? An  
experienced, well-trained, handsome  
handyman? You're better off working  
with me, Kendall Menard, for all  
your patchwork jobs. You *could* call  
the Sam's Shop, but you might as  
well just smash your appliances to  
bits! Kendall gets the work  
done. Call Kendall's Workplace  
today at 231-123-4291.  
That's 231-123-4291. Kendall gets  
the work done.

Hei Ling furrows her brow but nods in appreciation for the pad.

STREET RAT

I'm sorry. That's what I can afford  
on my budget.

She nods again, still unsure of what he means.

JOSHUA

I'm Joshua Park.

He offers his hand, which is smothered in dirt. Hei Ling takes it and shakes it. Her hand comes away dry, to her surprise.

JOSHUA

Where're your parents?

HEI LING

(caustic)

Save your talk for someone else.

(CONTINUED)

He's taken aback by her scathing remark, but also amused. He chuckles and tries again.

JOSHUA

Cut me some slack. I'm on a 35syl  
plan. Watch.

She watches and he positions himself dramatically, crouching and twisting about. Then he cracks his mouth wide open.

JOSHUA (cont'd)

Save money shopping at Gore's  
Parlor. Fifty percent off all  
collar enhancements only from  
midnight to six am today!  
Gore's...where you should go's.

He jazz hands and then smiles so that she can see all of his teeth. A lot are crooked. She can't help but laugh a little.

HEI LING

That was a bad ad.

Joshua shrugs and gets up, taking a seat across from her.

JOSHUA

You never met an AdFad? All scum.  
Most not as bad as me, but this  
plan was cheap.

HEI LING

You got fourteen syllables left.

He sighs and rolls his eyes.

JOSHUA

I sh'be quick. You lost?

She shakes her head.

JOSHUA (cont'd)

But your parents aren't here?

She doesn't respond to the question and he licks his lips, his suspicions confirmed.

JOSHUA (cont'd)

Where you going?

She holds up her hand and wiggles the fingers. He nods knowingly.

(CONTINUED)

HEI LING  
I'm looking for my brother.

JOSHUA  
(quiet, fast)  
If you're *looking* for a place to  
vacation, look no further! Ragin'  
Rapids downtown is the newest  
indoor waterpark -- and fun for the  
whole family! Visit them on their  
website for more information.

She grins.

HEI LING  
It's cool it can customize it to  
whatever I'm saying.

JOSHUA  
Sorta. Where's he at?

She rummages through the purse she has on her side and pulls  
out a crinkled photograph. It is the same one of the balding  
man we saw in the bank.

JOSHUA (cont'd)  
Old bro.

HEI LING  
This isn't him. But this man knows  
where he is. I need to find him so  
he can take me to my brother. Then  
I can be safe.

JOSHUA  
(joking)  
Are you on the run?

He laughs at his own joke but Hei Ling doesn't join in. The  
laughter turns sour and then he glances at her neck. It is  
obscured by a thick scarf but he starts shaking his head.

JOSHUA (cont'd)  
No...

She tugs self-consciously at her scarf once she notices his  
stare.

HEI LING  
What are you looking at?

(CONTINUED)

JOSHUA  
(incredulous)  
You're not the wanted Hush on the  
news, are you?

She breathes very slowly, her exhales softening into small white clouds out of her mouth.

HEI LING  
I'm on the news?

JOSHUA  
Holy hell!

He stands up abruptly and then begins pacing, threading his fingers through his greasy hair as he does so. He mumbles incoherently to himself, a string of nonsense and then very quiet advertisement chatter.

JOSHUA (cont'd)  
The reports say you're loose in the  
city after killing your neighbor  
and your mom near the outskirts of  
the Poma. Wicked stuff.

She holds up her hand, wiggles her fingers solemnly. He swats it down.

JOSHUA (cont'd)  
You're so little.

HEI LING  
I didn't kill them.

He looks her up and down. Twice. Under his breath, he finishes off a tangent about Burt's Bugs Be Gone.

JOSHUA  
I believe you. So who did?

She shifts uncomfortably in her seat.

HEI LING  
I don't know his name, but he was  
tall. He wore a suit and one of  
those hats -- you know, kind of  
like a fedora but not really. Like  
a gangster hat. Maybe he was a  
gangster, I don't know. He was  
looking for my brother, too.

The subway hisses to a stop and the doors open. The elderly couple makes their way out, giving Joshua a once-over before they step off.

(CONTINUED)

HEI LING (cont'd)  
He dropped this picture when he  
left.

She flips the picture over and points at a series of  
numbers. A code of some sort. There's also a smaller number  
scribbled in fine print in the bottom left corner.

Nobody boards their compartment and the doors close.

HEI LING (cont'd)  
Maybe this man's got answers. Maybe  
the numbers mean something.

Joshua takes a closer look at the code.

JOSHUA  
Looks like a processing code for  
collars.

She furrows her brow and shakes her head.

HEI LING  
I searched the public database but  
there's nothing. This is just  
gibberish, far as I can tell.

She looks at the print in the corner.

HEI LING (cont'd)  
That, too.

Crossing his arms, Joshua contemplates this new information.

JOSHUA  
I wish I could help you, but the  
next one is my stop.

HEI LING  
(understanding)  
That's okay.

He pats her on the head tenderly.

JOSHUA  
Tell me your name before I go.

She thinks for a moment, sober.

HEI LING  
...Zhu Hei Ling.

They sit in silence until the subway finally rattles to a stop. He gets up and leaves. Immediately, she begins fingering the holes in her scarf, nervous as hell with all the information she leaked.

EXT. SUBWAY STATION - MIDNIGHT

She should be nervous. He presses something on his collar.

OPERATOR (O.S.)

This is your operator speaking. How may I assist you?

JOSHUA

Yes, I met a girl...

INT. BANK LOBBY - NIGHT TIME

SHREYA

Minister Jaha was the leader of the rebel coalition about five years ago. A new policy had passed that the Hushed were to be included in the tech globalization mandate -- y'all were supposed to get collared like the rest of us. But he didn't like that.

Hei Ling closes her eyes and slumps next to Shreya, leaning against a stone fixture.

SHREYA (cont'd)

He was one of the Hushed. Angry about the whole limit thing. And the whole genocide thing in the past. Thought he could get revenge if he got into the database and screwed everything up.

INT. INTERNAL SECURITY SERVICE DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS - DAY

A large room, screens propped up on a gigantic wall, a steady stream of information flowing across. A map resides in the middle of it, showing the regional locations of other buildings in the department.

Minister Jaha types something in and waits for authorization. A RAVEN HAIRED BOY next to him curses. Both of them have the vine creeping out of their black shirts and onto their necks.

(CONTINUED)



SHREYA

(V.O.)

He did pretty damn well. Shut down the Poma, Slith, and Jraynu region for about twenty hours. Did some horrific damage to the clientele in Sydney. Rerouted most of the service and troubleshooting toll lines to a looping message on the failures of the government.

EXT. REBEL CAMP - DUSK

Now, Minister Jaha and the boy are situated around a campfire, a hoard of vine-tattooed people crowded around them. He speaks animatedly and they laugh at the appropriate times.

SHREYA

(V.O.)

You Hushed live outside the perimeters of the collars. Not within the state or quite out of it, but between the lines. Undocumented. Mostly harmless, that's why the government left you guys alone for the most part. I mean, until Jaha.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAY

Now armorless Hushed fly across a blood-soaked plain against the faceless masses of officers. Bullets fly and pierce one after the other and they crash into the ground to join the rest of their fallen comrades. Glassy eyes and twisted limbs. A slaughter of thousands.

SHREYA

(V.O.)

Brutal. The backlash was almost as bad as the wipeout from sixty years ago.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD NEAR VILLAGE - NIGHT

Torches illuminate the desecrated town and two armed officers carry in a bloodied Jaha. His face is busted up and his legs are rendered useless from the five pits within them. He is thrown onto the ground like a ragdoll.

SHREYA

(V.O.)

Obviously they killed him.

(CONTINUED)

BLACK SCREEN

A gunshot.

INT. BANK LOBBY - NIGHT TIME

SHREYA

Anyway, this wasn't one for the history books, so to speak. No one likes to hear of the government's failures. Or of you people.

Hei Ling doesn't respond.

HEI LING

So they killed everyone because of him?

Shreya laughs, very clear and unassuming.

SHREYA

Well, obviously not everyone. You're still here, tying up innocent tellers.

Hei Ling screams, broken and building, and curls her fingers around Shreya's throat. The grooves of the collar digs in but she squeezes. And Shreya flails, trying to get away.

After a few seconds, Hei Ling lets go and looks away. Shreya coughs feebly, racking her lungs for some air, and then she spits on Hei Ling.

SHREYA (cont'd)

What the hell is your problem?

Hei Ling shakes her head and sobs. No tears come.

HEI LING

(crying)

Ma.

Shreya looks at her sympathetically, sore neck forgotten. And Hei Ling weeps.

INT. DUNGEON CELL - UNKNOWN

A STILL FIGURE lies curled up on the grimy floor of a prison cell. The silence is agonizing. The only sign of life is the shallow rise and fall of its chest, meek and willing to give up.

(CONTINUED)

The door opens, the sudden movement not stirring the person. A GUARD walks in and kicks them square in the gut. They moan.

GUARD

Up. She wants you.

INT. LUXURIOUS DINING ROOM - UNKNOWN

Janice is seated at the very end of a long, wooden table. The room is very dated, antique furniture and soft classical music. There are candles and fake fruit in the middle of the table, good china displayed in wooden drawers to the left and right. She bites into a salad.

Hei Ling is shuffled into the room by the same guard, her hair unwashed and unkempt and littered with debris, her clothes in poor condition. There are thick stitches sown into her neck. She is shoved into the chair opposite Janice across the long expanse.

JANICE

(to guard)

She reeks. Couldn't you have given her a shower before you brought her here?

The guard bows as an apology. She shoos him away.

JANICE (cont'd)

Well, never mind that.

(to Hei Ling)

I have some good news.

Hei Ling stares at a SERVER bringing in soup. It's steaming and thick with vegetables and meat. She salivates slightly. Janice allows her to gulp down some mouthfuls before she continues.

JANICE (cont'd)

We found your brother.

The spoon clatters when Hei Ling drops it.

JANICE (cont'd)

His body was found outside the upper Katsch Peninsula, near the river. My condolences.

Janice eats as if she just told Hei Ling the weather. There is no tonal difference between her condolences or her news.

(CONTINUED)

HEI LING  
(breaking)  
How...?

JANICE  
He was caught sneaking into the  
northern labs. Like you were three  
months ago. But we weren't as kind,  
given his past history.

Hei Ling picks up the spoon and drops it again.

HEI LING  
How could y --

She breaks down in a coughing fit and wheezes, holding her  
throat. It constricts on her and she gags, heaving up a  
little of the soup she had earlier.

JANICE  
(sarcastic)  
I'll tell the cook you didn't like  
the soup so much.  
(a beat)  
Still not used to the structure,  
eh? It's all right. You will one  
day. Got to remember -- two words  
max per time.

Hei Ling shakes her head, baring her teeth.

JANICE (cont'd)  
Such savages. Your brother  
included. What was his name  
again...?

INT. UNDERGROUND SEWERS - DAY

Sirens whistle up ahead. That raven-haired boy from before  
now stands before Hei Ling with an outstretched hand.

RAVEN HAired BOY  
...Ezekiel.

She's on the floor, covered in muck, and accepts the hand  
gratefully. He pulls her up onto her feet and then smooths  
out her hair.

EZEKIEL  
They're looking for you.

He's dressed in combat boots and a leather jacket -- stylish  
bad-boy wear. He's also copping the shaggy haircut.

(CONTINUED)

HEI LING

I guess they're looking for you,  
too.

His eyes soften when she looks at him in the eyes and he caresses her hair. She flinches at his touch.

EZEKIEL

Ma never told you about me?

Hei Ling clutches her sides and shakes her head.

EZEKIEL (cont'd)

I tracked you. You're pretty skilled for a little girl -- not skilled enough to escape me, but...I'm impressed that you've evaded the feds this long. But everyone always slips up some time.

He looks strikingly similar to Hei Ling. The same thick dark hair, bright charcoal eyes, sinewy muscles (his more developed, hers lean and childlike), and upturned noses.

HEI LING

Am I going with you?

Ezekiel shakes his head.

EZEKIEL

Where I go isn't safe for a kid like you. I'm taking you to a safe house. East. I've a friend who can take you in for a little bit while I try to settle some business.

She purses her lips.

EZEKIEL (cont'd)

I've contacted a guy who'll set up new paperwork for you. Something good. You can go to the state of Hyame. They're better about...well. Us.

Hei Ling licks her lips and starts walking down the thin side ledges of the sewer ground. A pool of filth streams by. Ezekiel follows her.

HEI LING

I want to stay with you.

(CONTINUED)

EZEKIEL  
(regretful)  
You can't. My work isn't safe.

She stops. Then she pulls out that picture from before. The one of Minister Jaha. He shakes his head.

EZEKIEL (cont'd)  
I shouldn't tell you. He's  
blacklisted. The less you know, the  
better.

He ruffles her hair, but the act of playfulness is lost when she turns around sharply.

HEI LING  
You can't tell me anything. You're  
useless.

EZEKIEL  
(laughing)  
And you're ruthless. Is this how  
you speak to older brothers?

HEI LING  
You're no brother of mine.

He sighs and rubs his head.

EZEKIEL  
Look. I'll come collect you in a  
few months. This is just a  
temporary situation. I can't...I  
can't do anything more. I'm sorry.

She keeps walking, her stomps more stilted than before.

EZEKIEL (cont'd)  
All I can tell you is that this man  
is very important. You need to find  
him, if I don't. But I will. If you  
see him, contact me.

She cocks her head.

HEI LING  
And how will I do that if I don't  
know where you are?

EZEKIEL  
...I'll find a way.

EXT. SAFEHOUSE GATES - DAY

It is snowing. The metal gates of a quaint house on top of a hill are studded with snowflakes. Ezekiel kisses the top of Hei Ling's head and hugs her. She doesn't return the favor. Waving, he leaves her in the care of a BRUTISH MIDDLE AGED MAN. She walks with him into the house.

INT. BANK LOBBY - NIGHT TIME

Hei Ling isn't crying anymore.

SHREYA

Are you done?

Hei Ling wipes at her cheeks to brush off any signs of tears.

HEI LING

Done.

SHREYA

Anyway, you're not going to find that guy. He's long dead. Like way dead.

HEI LING

Wrong.

SHREYA

Hon, I work in the intelligence department. I know what's up.

Hei Ling shakes her head, refusing to believe.

HEI LING

There's more.

SHREYA

There isn't.

HEI LING

Has to.

Footsteps outside. Many, many. And the clicks of guns.

SHREYA

...And that must be the police.

INT. LUXURIOUS DINING ROOM - UNKNOWN

JANICE

-- I don't remember his name. I  
guess it was inconsequential.

Hei Ling's lower lip quavers and she looks away.

JANICE (cont'd)

(to servers)

Someone bring in the next dish!  
This one puked in hers already.

A WAITRESS hurries out of the adjoining room and takes away  
both the salad and the soup.

JANICE (cont'd)

Thank you.

(to Hei Ling)

Now, I know you'll be better.  
You've got our chip in you. And  
we're starting you on training.

The next dish comes in. It's escargot.

JANICE (cont'd)

We've got an exciting new program.  
Management decided to utilize the  
Hushed prisoners we have. Too much  
money to just detain for fun, I  
suppose. I always thought we'd run  
more tests, seeing as how you lot  
are so different from the rest of  
us, but I guess this isn't so  
bad...

Janice picks up three snails with fork at the same time,  
piercing the flesh and eating unsanctimoniously. Hei Ling  
doesn't touch her food.

JANICE (cont'd)

It's all for the better. You'll  
finally have a purpose in your  
life. Papers. Things to do. Aren't  
you glad? Your life is finally  
beginning. You can serve your  
people.

Janice dabs at the corners of her mouth with her napkin and  
then gets up.

(CONTINUED)



JANICE (cont'd)  
Excuse me, I must go to the  
bathroom. Server! Keep an eye on  
her.

Janice leaves and the waitress from before comes into the room.

When she leaves, Hei Ling tries some of snail. She eats, confused at the taste and the texture, and then spits it out onto her plate.

HEI LING  
Another.

She holds out the plate to the waitress who dips her head in compliance. After she departs, Hei Ling pockets one of the knives -- the sharp steak ones -- and waits patiently for the return of the two women.

INT. SAFEHOUSE LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Young Hei Ling is dressed in her pajamas and is sitting on the stairs, eavesdropping on a conversation between the middle aged man and a WOMAN WITH A PIXIE CUT.

PIXIE WOMAN  
Brutus, you know we can't go  
through with this...

BRUTUS  
We haven't a choice.

PIXIE WOMAN  
There's always another way. I don't  
understand why we always have to  
fight.

BRUTUS  
They don't listen, otherwise.

Hei Ling can't hear well enough so she tiptoes further down the stair, but on accident she steps on a creaky spot. She winces, hoping it won't draw Brutus's attention.

BRUTUS (cont'd)  
Hold on...

Busted. He sees her spying on them and he whacks her gently on the nose.

(CONTINUED)

BRUTUS (cont'd)  
Why aren't you asleep?

HEI LING  
Is there any news on Ezekiel?

He pats her on the shoulder, trying to comfort her.

BRUTUS  
No, love. I'll tell you in the  
morning if there is. Please go to  
sleep.

She looks like she might protest, but she gives up, the  
sleepiness too much for her to fight. She starts walking up  
the stairs.

HEI LING  
Any news and you tell me, okay?

BRUTUS  
Any news.

INT. SAFEHOUSE DINING ROOM - NEXT MORNING

Brutus is eating and drinking his coffee, reading the news  
while he's at it. The headlines spell out some mythical sea  
creature being found in the local lake. There's a plate of  
food for the seat next to him. Hei Ling dashes into the room  
and sidles up in the chair.

HEI LING  
Any news?

BRUTUS  
No.

INT. SAFEHOUSE BASEMENT - DAY

Brutus is fixing one of the pipes, a wrench in his mouth.  
Hei Ling, slightly older, opens the door and flies down the  
stairs to sit next to him and watch him work.

HEI LING  
Any news?

He shakes his head

EXT. SAFEHOUSE BACKYARD - AFTERNOON

Brutus is hacking down a tree, laboring and sweating and grunting as he swings his axe over and over. Hei Ling, slightly older once more, dressed in puffy clothing several sizes too big, runs up to him.

HEI LING

Any news?

He shakes his head.

INT. SAFEHOUSE BATHROOM - DAY

Brutus is sitting on the toilet, doing the do. He's reading the paper (featured: does singing make toenails grow faster?). Hei Ling, now much older, opens the door.

HEI LING

Any n --

BRUTUS

Hei Ling, for Christ's sake!

INT. SAFEHOUSE LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Hei Ling is sitting in the exact same place she was several years ago, on these stairs. Legs curled under her arms as she tries to breathe as quietly as possible. Hei Ling is now that muscular teen. She is listening to another one of Brutus's conversations.

UNKNOWN (O.S.)

We got a whiff of him in the central lanes. He's doing some minor wrecks to ad houses but nothing supreme.

Brutus sighs patronly.

BRUTUS

Always getting into trouble. Do you know why the central zones?

UNKNOWN (O.S.)

Probably just odd jobs. He's gathering reinforcements and crew, we know that. Has been for years. But it's hard to find people after...well. After.

(CONTINUED)

BRUTUS  
What's the next mark?

UNKNOWN (O.S.)  
Zorastre.

BRUTUS  
Big.

UNKNOWN (O.S.)  
The biggest. But it'll probably be  
petty.

BRUTUS  
You never know with Ezekiel.

Hei Ling perks up, her drowsiness extinguished by the name.

UNKNOWN (O.S.)  
But I don't care much for that sort  
of talk, he's old business. There's  
this hit off the coast of...

Hei Ling's lost interest. She heads back up the stairs, this  
time avoiding the creaky parts.

INT. SAFEHOUSE DINING ROOM - NEXT MORNING

Hei Ling and Brutus eating breakfast together. He's not  
reading the newspaper.

HEI LING  
Any news?

A pause.

BRUTUS  
No.

INT. DUNGEON CELL - UNKNOWN

Hei Ling being shoved back into the cell from before. The  
guard is alone and rough. She strokes the weapon in her  
pocket and when he looks away to get his keys, she stabs him  
in the jugular. The collar sparks as he goes down.

She takes the keys and his pager. Then she switches clothes  
with him and locks him up in the cell.

She takes off down the corridor.

EXT. SAFEHOUSE GARAGE - NIGHT

Hei Ling's in an old rickety truck. Sticking the keys in ignition, she inhales deeply. Then she backs out of the driveway and into the street.

EXT. ROADS - EARLY MORNING

She's eating some breakfast burrito or something. The bulge in her fannypack suggests the source of that money.

She whizzes past a sign -- "Welcome to Zorastre".

EXT. BANK PARKING LOT - NIGHT TIME

Hei Ling stumbles into a bush, exhausted. She looks overpowered in the guard's coat and she closes her eyes, wanting to sleep, but then she notices a woman walking out of that building...

INT. BANK LOBBY - NIGHT TIME

TROOPERS storm the area. Hei Ling raises her hands in surrender and stands up. Shreya flails. They both cower from the harsh light coming in.

TROOPER #1

Shreya Debnath, you've been cleared  
for disposal under the Article 3 of  
the Focault Rule.

SHREYA

What, no, you can't --

He shoots her in the head. Then he points his gun at Hei Ling.

TROOPER #1

And you. We've been authorized to  
take you back to the warehouses.

Hei Ling coughs.

HEI LING

For?

TROOPER #1

That's none of my business. I  
follow commands.

(to rest of troops)

Take her in, girls.

They enter and push her to the ground, handcuffing her.

(CONTINUED)

HEI LING

Kill me.

TROOPER #1

Wish I could.

He says this while looking at her neck. The troopers drag her out the door, her limp in their gloved hands.

TROOPER #1 (cont'd)

I asked about you. Why the trouble.  
You know what they said?

Hei Ling doesn't say anything. They move out from the bank.

EXT. BANK PARKING LOT - NIGHT TIME

TROOPER #1

They said they liked your voice.  
That's it. Pretty voice. Good for  
commercials. They just needed to  
train you a little bit to be the  
songbird. There's a new division in  
Karalah and they want a set mascot.  
Funny, right?

They're putting her into a cop car. She doesn't bother resisting.

TROOPER #1 (cont'd)

It's not a big deal. This whole  
thing. And the other things. It's  
to be expected. You've got that  
demon blood running in you. But  
your voice...

(a beat)

Well, I don't know why corporate  
thinks it's good enough after all  
this, but that's that.

He gets in the car, too, and the rest of the formation move back into their own vehicles.

TROOPER #1 (cont'd)

They told me they loved your voice.  
(laugh) That's all.

They drive away.

BLACK SCREEN

FADE IN:

EXT. MUNICIPAL BUILDING FRONT STEPS - LATE MORNING

A GIRL with vines on her neck sits outside, leaning against the stone pillars of the building. She eats a hotdog, no condiments, while watching men with suits walk in and out the steel doors. Some of them give her pitiful looks, the rest don't notice her. If you stop for a moment, you can hear her saying --

GIRL

(mumbling)

Call your local insurance dealer  
today to see if you qualify for the  
Hush procedure...all citizens now  
welcome to participate free of  
charge...Visit your local  
municipality for more  
information...