



ABSCISSION

Written by

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FADE IN:

GREEN

Fills the frame. A smooth, organic-like surface FLOATS.

CLICK.

Further back. White striations flutter in and out of focus.

CLICK.

Even further back. Pointed edges reveal themselves.

The frame softens, then refocuses. We're looking at the surface of a PETAL through the lens of a microscope.

A tiny MEALYBUG - the pesky white bug that destroys house plants - emerges from its powdery white cocoon.

CLICK.

Now impossibly tight, the microscopic mealybug menacingly raises its tentacle-like teeth and SINKS them into the plant.

INT. BIOLABORATORY - NIGHT

We see the plant in its entirety: A PASSION FLOWER bathing under two full-spectrum bulbs that dangle from the ceiling.

The top of the plant basks in the purple light. The trunk hides in the shadows, rooted in something sinister:

A SEVERED FOOT.

Standing upright. Cut just below the knee. Devoid of a body but full of life.

Embedded roots fill veins that bulge down the length of the calf. The severed foot still looks fleshy. Healthy. ALIVE.

A single petal gently breaks off the foot plant and poetically flutters to the surface of the cold, hard table.

TITLE CARD: ABSCISSION

INT. BEDROOM, CHLOE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sunlight floods a mostly empty room as CHLOE (27) enters. Spray bottle in one hand, herbal tea in the other. Oversized crew neck reads:

MARSHFIELD U.

EST 1899.

She takes in the barren room. A few cardboard boxes. A mattress on the floor.

ARI (27), pokes through tangled bed sheets. He slithers out, like an insect breaking free from its cocoon. There's a boyishness about him. A man who is unwilling to abandon his youth.

CHLOE

It's noon, get up.

Chloe approaches the bed.

CHLOE (CONT'D)

New tenants move in tomorrow. Your stuff needs to go, like yesterday.

She hands Ari the mug of hot tea.

ARI

What's this?

CHLOE

Tea. Feverfew plant specifically.

Green flakes swirl in hot water. Ari takes sips, then begrudgingly rises. His bare feet meet the hardwood floor, his toes wiggle awake as he takes another sip.

CHLOE (CONT'D)

Bitter?

ARI

The honey helps.

Chloe walks towards the window and draws the blinds open. Plants sit neatly along the window.

She mists the plants. Ari gets a waft of the mist.

ARI (CONT'D)

What's that smell?

CHLOE
Rubbing alcohol. Kills mealy bugs.

ARI
Mealybugs?

Ari collects last night's shirt from the floor and begins buttoning it.

CHLOE
Planococcus. Part of the
Pseudococcidae family. They suck
out plant juices and one by one,
the plant's leaves fall off until
the plant eventually withers away.

ARI
I thought plants were
sophisticated.

Chloe approaches Ari, looking at him appraisingly. He's got the wrong buttons in the wrong holes.

CHLOE
Sophisticated things need help too.
Have you decided yet?

She begins undoing his buttons.

ARI
I still need to run it by my dad.

CHLOE
We talked about this. You try the
treatment, see how it goes, then
tell your father.

ARI
He's never gonna go for alternative
treatment.

Annoyed, Chloe walks towards the closet and pulls out a DOPP KIT: a transparent plastic bag typically used for toiletries. Only this dopp kit carries Ari's RIG.

A tourniquet pokes out.

CHLOE
You just left it out.

Ari blushes with shame.

Chloe softens her demeanor. Rubs his arm. Blurs the line between accusing and accepting.

CHLOE (CONT'D)

I know your father cares about you.
 (beat)
 But he's not gonna go for it unless
 you go for it. And we show him that
 it works.

Ari presses against her touch, reveling in the tenderness.

EXT. STREET - DAY

-- Ari pedals a pedicab. Crude paint along the side reads *WOO RIDES*. A passenger sits in the carriage.

-- Ari parks along the sidewalk. The passenger hops out and pays the fare. Ari counts the loot. No tip.

-- Ari rolls through a puddle and splashes the passenger with dirty rainwater.

INT. OPERATING ROOM, HOSPITAL - DAY

A drop of blood *SPLATS* onto tiled floors.

LIAM (60s), covered head to toe in medical scrubs, lifts his arms. A nurse peels off his latex gloves, then his surgical mask. Classic, silver fox surgeon from some T.V Series. Broad jaw line.

He leaves the room, passing a *BODY* on the operating table. Thoracic cavity split open. Heart *PUMPING*. Another successful heart transplant.

INT. CAFETERIA, HOSPITAL - DAY

Tired hospital staff rests their bones on stiff chairs. Ari among them inhales a grilled cheese as Liam munches on salad, suspiciously eyeing the bags under his son's eyes.

LIAM

Slow down. Chew your food.

Ari ostentatiously chews, drawing the ire of his father.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Any customers today?

ARI

A couple.

LIAM
What about the rest of the day?

ARI
I kept busy.

LIAM
You seem tired.

ARI
I was up early.

LIAM
You, up early?

ARI
Yeah. To help Chloe move stuff out.

LIAM
Ah, right. Is she doing that quack
school still?

ARI
Dad.

Liam leaves it and takes another bite. The two eat in
silence.

ARI (CONT'D)
They have a treatment program
actually. It's different from what
I've been doing.

LIAM
Acupuncture and sound baths can't
cure an addiction.

ARI
No, I know--

LIAM
It's pseudoscience.

Sensing defeat, Ari returns to his meal.

LIAM (CONT'D)
You can't just follow your
girlfriend around. You have
treatment here. Real treatment.

Ari takes a big gulp of water. Clears his throat.

ARI
I've been thinking about taking a
break from the meetings.

Liam doesn't break his concentration from the leafy greens.

ARI (CONT'D)
Six months sober tomorrow. Things
are going well.

LIAM
I agree. Why switch up the formula?

Ari thinks. Gulps down some more water.

ARI
Some autonomy would be nice.
(beat, then)
And you wouldn't have to keep
paying the halfway house.

Liam pushes his perfectly empty plate forward.

LIAM
The money is the least burdensome
part of this whole thing.

That one cut deep.

LIAM (CONT'D)
You need goals outside of staying
sober. Structure.

ARI
I have lunch here three times a
week. Meetings every 48 hours. You
only recently turned the tracker
off on my phone--

LIAM
Well, there you go. Baby steps
first. Then autonomy.

ARI
Come on.

LIAM
Did you consider the listing at the
hospital?

ARI
I don't want to be some nurse--

LIAM
Not quite a nurse. You'd be
cleaning rooms.

ARI
A janitor?

LIAM
Steady income while we ride this
thing out.

Offended, Ari defiantly stands.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Sit.

He doesn't.

ARI
I like doing the pedicab. It's nice
to have control of something real.

The drama draws the attention of others. Liam, suddenly aware
of his surroundings, returns with a hushed tone:

LIAM
Six months sober. That's real.
After a year, we revisit this
conversation. Until then, you'll be
attending meetings.

EXT. ENTRANCE, HOSPITAL - DAY

Ari buckles his helmet. Meanwhile, Liam reaches into his
wallet and pulls out a few big bills.

LIAM
Forget the janitor thing. Just
stick with the program.

Ari hesitates.

LIAM (CONT'D)
My end of the deal. You've been
doing great. Take it.

Ari reaches for the bills. Liam locks in a handshake, yanking
Ari's arm closer and examining his forearm.

Old, healed scarring from dull heroin needles.

Ari draws his arm back, part shame, part frustration. An uncomfortable silence hangs in the air as Ari mounts his pedicab.

LIAM (CONT'D)
So, any plans for tomorrow?

ARI
I don't want to make it a big deal.

LIAM
It's good to celebrate goals met.
Six months--Six Flags. Me and you?

Ari half smiles. Then pedals away.

INT. BEDROOM, CHLOE'S APARTMENT - DAY

-- Ari stuffs clothes in his gym bag. Some come from the closet, others off the floor.

-- Ari stumbles upon a stack of University Brochures. He rifles through them. Harvard. Columbia. Washington. Marshfield.

Each brochure has a matching logo of a GOLDEN TREE. Below it, the acronym "P.O.A.W."

INT. KITCHEN, CHLOE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Empty. Scrubbed cleaned. Ready for new tenants. Chloe dummy checks cabinets, periodically crossing things off on her checklist.

-- Ari enters, bag slung over his shoulder, brochures handy.

ARI
All good upstairs. Found these too.

He offers the brochures to Chloe. She slips them into the final moving box.

ARI (CONT'D)
What's P.O.A.W stand for?

CHLOE
Part of a whole. Marshfield does research in conjunction with other schools across multiple programs. Including your treatment program. More data, better results.

ARI
I want to talk about that--

Chloe peels a roll of packing tape.

CHLOE
Change of heart?

ARI
Things are going okay right now. Is
it really smart to switch up the
formula?

She tightly seals the cardboard box.

CHLOE
Did you tell your father?

ARI
Only that I'm thinking about taking
a break from the narcotics
meetings.

CHLOE
Not that. The part where you
relapsed.

Ari blinks.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
Things aren't exactly going okay.

ARI
That was a speed bump. I'm back on
the road now. Let me get that--

Ari reaches for the sealed cardboard box.

CHLOE
What happens when I leave for
school?

ARI
What do you mean?

CHLOE
You stop going to meetings. You lie
to your dad. Who holds you
accountable then?

ARI
I'm fine.

CHLOE

Ari, something happens and you come up as part of a statistic for drug-related deaths in the county. The world moves on. Except for the ones that love you.

(beat, then)

I won't go through something like that.

ARI

Is that a threat?

CHLOE

No. It's me begging you to be your own man. Give our relationship a chance and try the treatment.

Done with his fickleness, Chloe takes the cardboard box from Ari and leaves.

EXT. COMMUNITY CENTER - DAY

Addicts file into a community center. Long faces. Polite greetings. Forced optimism.

-- ACROSS THE STREET, Ari sits in his parked pedicab. He steps onto the street, then pauses. Changes his mind.

He unchains his pedicab and pedals away, decidedly skipping the meeting.

INT. ARI'S STUDIO - DAY

300 square feet. Maybe. Ari sits at the foot of his bed, admiring the only decoration in his space. A framed photo:

MARIANNE (30s), Ari's mother, cradles BABY ARI (2) in her arms. Love in her eyes. Liam smiles behind them, arms wrapped around his family. A roller coaster loops in the b.g.

Ari sets the photo down and drags his cigarette.

-- The long hand on the clock spins through an hour.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Rows of weathered gravestones jut out of the earth like crooked teeth. Ari walks between them, stopping at --

-- MARIANNE'S GRAVESTONE, Passion flowers crowd around the weathered stone. Purple petals. Curly white tendrils.

Vibrant but depleted.

He lowers and touches the dried dirt below the wilting flowers.

INT. ARI'S STUDIO - NIGHT

-- Ari lay awake in bed. Fidgety. Jonesing. The quiet irks him. He MUTTERS:

ARI
Cut me reeds to blow upon or gather
me a star...

-- Ari chews his nails by the window. His chained pedicab glows under yellow streetlights on the sidewalk below.

ARI (CONT'D)
...But leave the sultry passion
flowers growing where they are.

-- The bills from Liam sit on the nightstand, tempting Ari to indulge. He satisfies his craving with a cigarette instead.

It's good. But not good enough. He sets the smoldering cigarette on the window sill and pulls out his cell phone.

ARI (CONT'D)
(into phone)
It's happening again--I think I'm
having a panic attack.

CHLOE (V.O)
Did you try the poem?

ARI
It didn't work.

CHLOE (V.O)
Let's try square breathing. Inhale
(inhales)
Hold for five, four, three...

He inhales deep. Holds at the top.

-- Ari fills a jug of water from the kitchen sink.

EXT. DISCOUNT LIQUORS - NIGHT

The city sleeps. A half-lit DISCOUNT LIQUORS sign BUZZES high above. Ari's pedicab rolls up.

The jug of water slides along the floor of the pedicab as Ari pumps his brakes.

Ari glances at his rearview mirror. A DEALER approaches.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

-- Ari pedals down the shadowed street, Dealer in tow.

-- Ari inhales deep, holds for five, exhales.

EXT. DISCOUNT LIQUORS - NIGHT

-- Back where they started, Ari glances back at the dealer, who reaches over Ari's shoulder to "pay" him for the ride.

But it's Ari forking over the cash Liam gave him in exchange for a nickel bag of drugs.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Blue moonlight mists around blossoming yellow streetlights.

-- Ari rolls his sleeve down to meet his wrist. He drops his dopp kit inside the glove box in his pedicab, then reaches for the jug of water on the floor.

A wash of euphoria chills his spine. He shakes it off like a wet dog.

He's high.

EXT. ENTRANCE, GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

-- Ari contorts his body and slips between two half-bent beams. The jug of water swishes in his hand as he wiggles through.

EXT. GRAVESTONE, GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

-- Ari stands before mom's gravestone. Fights to keep his eyelids open. They're too heavy at this moment.

He pops the cap off the jug and begins watering the passion flowers around the gravestone.

ARI
O cut me reeds--

But quickly nods off.

His grip loosens, the jug finally slips out of his hand and crashes against the ground.

So does Ari.

Face in the grass, Ari nods off to sleep as water spills from the jug and pools around him.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Morning fog hangs between rows of gravestones. The sun peaks over the horizon as Ari wakes up.

His eyes buzz as he orients himself. Realizing what he's done, he reaches for his cell phone.

Twenty missed calls from dad. Text Notifications populate the home screen:

|| Everything okay?
|| Pls call me.
|| WHERE ARE YOU? CALL ME.

INT. ARI'S STUDIO - DAY

Ari sits on his couch, guilty as charged. Liam paces in the f.g, searching for the right combination of words to express his disappointment.

LIAM
I want you in a meeting today. And
I'm turning the app on again.

ARI
The tracker? It's just a tiny speed
bump. I don't want--

LIAM
Give me your phone.

Ari reluctantly passes his phone. Liam enters the passcode. The phone unlocks.

LIAM (CONT'D)
My son passed out in a graveyard
like some street dog.

Several tears stream down Ari's face, unseen by Liam as he changes the settings on the phone.

ARI
I'm sorry--

LIAM
Don't apologize.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Do better.

Liam tosses the phone back into his son's lap.

LIAM (CONT'D)
I called Fillmore. They have an
open bed. Back to full-time
treatment.

ARI
Dad, I need a different approach--

LIAM
You need a smack in the head.

The room falls silent.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Six months. You were doing so well.

ARI
The burden continues.

Liam deflates, not liking his words thrown back at him.

ARI (CONT'D)
How can you celebrate?

LIAM
What?

ARI
It's the 15th. The day mom passed.
Do you want to go to six flags?

Deep down, somewhere in Liam's heart, pain hangs on a coat rack like an unworn sweater.

LIAM

We can't do this every time we're reminded of mom. You need to leave it behind and focus on healing.

Ari's not there yet.

ARI

Have you left it behind?

Liam doesn't respond. Perhaps he's not either.

INT. ARI'S STUDIO - NIGHT

-- A cup of feverfew tea cools on the nightstand beside the framed family photo. Steam slowly obscures everyone's face.

-- A computer screen glows. On the monitor, a submission page. Marshfield University. Confirmation code. "Submission complete"

--Besides it, a nondescript dropper filled with OIL.

-- On the bed, Chloe massages Ari with oils. Her hands slide down his legs, eventually kneading his calf muscles.

CHLOE

Does that feel good?

ARI

Amazing. Smells good too.

CHLOE

It's made from lavender.

Chloe takes a big inhale from the oil on her hands.

ARI

What if it doesn't work?

CHLOE

I don't know.

Chloe reaches backward for the dropper, then squeezes a few drops of oil on Ari's calves.

CHLOE (CONT'D)

But all I can do is try.

Ari lowers his head into his arms. Finally shuts his eyes.

EXT. DECK, CHILDHOOD HOME - MORNING (FLASHBACK)

Morning dew. Clouds thinly veil sunlight. Spring.

Marianne holds baby Ari in one arm. She opens her free hand and shows Baby Ari:

Tiny black SEEDS. Black spots populate the shell. She closes her hands and points to:

A PASSION FLOWER.

Baby Ari's eyes follow, taking in the beautiful purple petals. Jutting white tendrils.

Baby Ari reaches for it, curious the way infants are. With a smile, Marianne leans in closer and lets him touch it.

MARIANNE

O, Cut me reeds to blow upon, or
gather me a star...
...But leave the sultry passion
flowers growing where they are.

Baby Ari COOS.

INT. ARI'S STUDIO - MORNING (PRESENT)

Ari reaches for his toes and stretches his calves.

MARIANNE (V.O.)

I feel their somber yellow deeps
Their whirling fringe of black...

He rises to face Chloe and flips the light switch. The room goes dark. Chloe hands him his stuffed gym bag.

MARIANNE (V.O.)

And he who gives a passion flower
Always asks it back.

They leave the studio.

INT. LIAM'S CAR - MORNING

Heavy morning traffic. Liam weaves between cars. He presses his cell phone to his ear.

After a few rings: