

Episode 2

EPIODENAME

2.1 Rise and Shine

[Int. cafe. Dusk has fallen; some time has clearly passed since the Ned scene.]

Kishan sleeps in a corner, slumped over a table. He's drooling. Chay's still at the bar, brooding.]

Kishan *[still facedown]*: "Wuhhhh..."

[Chay turns to him. This would probably be a super long shot?]

Chay: "Rise and shine."

Kishan: "Don't wanna..."

Chay: "You shouldn't waste your last hours on Earth sleeping."

Kishan: "..."

Kishan: "Man... I was hoping that I was having a really long weird dream."

Chay: "Heh. Sorry. No such luck."

Kishan: "I'm still having trouble getting my head around it..."

Kishan: "Like, getting drunk really helped, because I was able to just forget and not worry about it... you know?"

Chay: "I totally understand. Want a coffee?"

[A muffled roar comes from downstairs.]

Kishan: "Yeah... just something simple."

Chay: "Hipster coffee, coming right up."

[Chay slides behind the coffee machine.]

*[Something thumps against the floor. Various objects rattle. Can visually communicate this with a *thump!* or something.]*

Kishan: "What's going on downstairs? I didn't even know you *had* a downstairs."

Chay: "There's more to this place than meets the eye."

Chay: "Maddy's down there, desperately trying to fix our debt situation."

Kishan: "It sounds like she's hosting a cage match or something."

Chay: "Well, no... but she's mentioned wanting to do that. There's some wrestler called The Red Comet that she wouldn't stop talking about for a while."

Kishan: "Hah."

Chay: "And then, because of that, Ashley got obsessed with wrestling for a bit, and kept trying to suplex me..."

Kishan: "Did she... manage to? She's tiny."

Chay: "..."

Chay: "A couple of times."

Kishan: "HAH!"

Chay: "It was very humiliating."

Kishan: "I can imagine!"

Chay: "But, to properly answer your question... Maddy's running a gambling ring."

Kishan: "Downstairs? All by herself?"

Chay: "It's a fairly unconventional one."

Kishan: "And by unconventional, you mean..."

Chay: "Mortals generally aren't involved. The stakes are... higher than usual."

Kishan: "Ohhhh."

Chay: "Coffee's ready. Come over and get it."

[Cut to black, skip forward a few secs, you know the drill; Kishan's at the bar now.]

Chay: "They gamble for time, among other things."

Kishan: "You don't sound like you're a huge fan of the idea."

Chay: "Hmph. I'm **not**. It's undignified."

Kishan: "I mean, as long as Maddy's not in danger, shouldn't it be fine?"

Chay: "The Council doesn't like it. They turn a blind eye, because we don't cause trouble otherwise, but I'd rather not have to worry about bad things coming our way because Maddy refuses to approach the problem from a different angle."

Kishan: "And by the problem... you mean the debt, yeah? I was pretty drunk, but I think I remember Maddy storming off after Ned turned up."

Chay: "Yes."

Chay: "I'm a bit worried about her."

Kishan: "Hmm... wish I could help. You all seem pretty nice."

Chay: "The thought's appreciated. Maddy will figure it out eventually, though, I'm sure. She just needs time."

Kishan: "Mmm."

Kishan: "Hey, thanks for the coffee, by the way."

Kishan: "I just realized you haven't actually made me pay for a bunch of them..."

Chay: "Heh. How d'you expect to pay for them?"

Kishan: "Oh, right. Yep. No cash."

Chay: "If I were feeling particularly capricious, I'd ask you to pay in time... but you're a nice kid. And you need every minute you've got."

Chay: "You wanna head downstairs? I can see your eyes darting to the stairs. I'm not going down, but I'm also not gonna stop you."

Kishan: "Yeah, if that's okay..."

Chay: "Go on, then. I'll stick around up here."

[Kishan finishes his coffee in a long draught, and stands up.]

Kishan: "Catch ya in a bit."

[Cut to black.]

2.2 Knife Fight

Kishan had always liked stairwells. People never lingered in them for long, and he'd found them to be a good place to catch a breather.

The stairs that led down to the basement were solid and well-worn, with smooth ruts on each step and a hand rail that had been polished to a silky sheen through years of use. He wasn't *obsessed* with them - that'd be weird - but Kishan definitely appreciated a nice set of stairs.

On further reflection, it was probably a little weird. Just a little bit.

[Cut to Kishan standing at the bottom of the stairs]

Downstairs, perhaps a dozen patrons stood around a low table, clamoring for blood. A few more were perched on wooden crates a bit further back, nursing drinks or - in one case - their thickly-bandaged hands. Maddy sat across from a nondescript woman, with one hand outstretched and her index finger laid on the woman's forehead.

[And, additionally: two knives sit on the table. I'm imagining this shot as having the person across the table be obscured by spectators, so we don't have to identify or show her.]

Maddy: "From you to me. Though your remaining moments on this plane are limited, you give this time freely, without coercion, as agreed."

???: "I consent, and reaffirm my understanding of the terms."

[Back to Kishan. A light in front of him rises to a peak, flashes, and quickly fades.]

Maddy: "Contract fulfilled. You're free to go."

Maddy: "..."

Maddy: "Phew."

Maddy: "That's three in a row, you bloodthirsty bastards."

The crowd cheered. Maddy was clearly an expert at winding them up into a frenzy.

Maddy: "Who's next?"

And, just like that, the room fell dead silent.

Maddy: "C'mon. Isn't anyone here brave enough to challenge me? I thought you came here to play with knives, you pansies."

Maddy: "Seriously. Anyone? Don't hold out on me."

[beat; someone coughs]

Maddy: “Do I need to pick someone out from the crowd, then? Is this what we’ve come to?”

She swiveled her head, and the crowd shrunk away from her intense gaze. They seemed genuinely fearful of her, and Kishan wasn’t quite sure why.

The atmosphere felt weird, so he looked at his shoes, and when he looked back up, Maddy was on her feet, pointing directly at him.

Maddy: “Kishan. Good to see you upright. Interested in a game of skill?”

Kishan: “Me?”

Maddy: “Yes, you.”

Kishan: “Oh... uh... sure?”

Maddy: “Gimme some enthusiasm, my man.”

Kishan swallowed hard, and did his best to sound confident.

Kishan: “Sure. What’s the game?”

[cut to black]

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[cut back]

Maddy: “Five-finger fillet. Some of the people in here just call it the ‘knife game’. You heard of it?”

[cut back to black]

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[cut back]

His eyes grew wide, and he grinned.

Kishan: “**Oh**. Finally, something I’m good at.”

The small crowd broke into murmurs. She matched his grin, and gestured to the seat across from her.

Maddy: "Take a seat, big man."

[Cut.]

2.3 Kishan Fight

Kishan picked up one of the knives in front of him, and brandished it. Its blade was honed to a fine point - most were made for slashing or slicing, but this knife was made for one thing and one thing only: stabbing. He brought it down into the surface of the table, and it made an *extremely* satisfying thunk.

Kishan: "You've got a lot of knives in this place."

Maddy snorted.

Maddy: "Tell me about it."

He brandished the knife, and began twirling it rhythmically. A constellation of candlelight spots reflected off its mirror-polished surface, and in the moments where he held it steady, Maddy could see glimpses of the surrounding crowd in it.

Kishan: "Damn, this thing has a good weight to it."

Maddy: "'Course. I wouldn't make you compete with an inferior tool."

He scoffed, and then just looked at her, as if he was expecting something more.

Maddy: "What?"

Kishan: "Sorry, I was waiting for you to segue into calling *me* an inferior tool."

Maddy: "Shit, that was low-hanging fruit, wasn't it?"

Maddy: "Next time, mate."

Kishan: "Heh."

Kishan did another experimental slash, and this time, it made an audible whoosh. The spectators ooh-ed and ahh-ed, but this wasn't for them. He knew that he only had one shot to get accustomed to the blade.

Maddy: "You done showing off?"

Kishan: "Nothing wrong with putting on a little show."

Maddy: "Sounds like you're stalling for time. Getting cold feet, perhaps?"

Kishan: "Psh. Not a chance."

Maddy: "Let's get started, then. You know what you're wagering?"

Kishan: "Chay mentioned something about you gambling with time."

Maddy: "Ugh. It's not gambling if it's a game of skill."

Maddy: "But that's beside the point. We're both wagering four hours. If you win, it comes from the cafe's balance. If I win, it comes from yours."

Maddy: "You've got around sixteen hours left, in case you weren't keeping track."

Kishan: "Shit, only that many?"

Maddy: "You want some more time, then?"

Kishan: "Hell yes. Let's stop wasting it and get this over with."

At this pronouncement, the crowd's excitement grew to a fever pitch. Kishan was utterly confident; he knew this'd be a cakewalk.

Maddy: "You sure you know what you're getting into? Most people are pretty shy about playing with the time they have left, especially when they've got as little left as you do."

Kishan: "Yep. Let's do this. Unless *you're* getting cold feet."

[Maddy smirks.]

Maddy: "Hardly."

Maddy: "You've got thirty seconds. Smack the timer when you're ready."

[She gestures to the timer.]

She veiled her excitement well. Kishan didn't, and she was banking on him being overconfident.

Kishan placed his left hand flat on the table, and wrapped his other around the knife handle.

Kishan: "Scared?"

Maddy: "Again, no. Let's get this going. I'd tell you to 'take your time', but... that's my job, not yours."

Kishan: "Touché."

He rapped the kitchen timer with his knuckles, then raised the knife and drove it into the table, just beside his thumb.

The crowd cheered, and he fed off their enthusiasm. He was showboating; he drew the knife back up, almost lazily, and stabbed it back into the table harder than he needed to, this time between his thumb and forefinger.

In response, Maddy leaned back, and tapped her finger on the table, feigning impatience.

He met her eyes, grinned, and continued his performance. His stabbing motion got faster as he went, the point narrowly missing each of his fingers.

Stabs - strong enough to drive the knife a millimetre or two into the table - were good if you wanted to put on a show. And, of course, giving the spectators a show was part of the fun.

This, however, was not a game to be won by showboating. It was a game of speed. And while Kishan was going fast enough to put on a show, he wasn't going fast enough to win.

At least, not as long as he was playing against Maddy.

[SFX: Kitchen timer buzzing]

[Kishan drives the knife into the table one last time.]

Kishan: "How'd I do?"

Maddy: "Sixteen sets, if I counted correctly."

Murmurs ran through the crowd.

[Drop some ambient text boxes, similarly to how we did Kishan's muttering in Episode 1:]

???: "Whoa..."

???: "I couldn't do sixteen..."

???: "That's how many Maddy beat me with..."

???: “Is she gonna lose?”

???: “Nah, she’s gonna kick his arse...”

2.4 Maddy Fight

[end ambient chatter]

Maddy held up a hand, and they fell silent.

Maddy: “Sixteen...”

Maddy: “Feeling good about that result?”

Kishan: “Certainly am.”

Maddy: “Righty-o, then. Watch closely.”

Kishan: “Oh, I will.”

She lifted the knife, and the crowd stayed totally quiet. Kishan met her eyes again, and the confidence was still there... mostly.

Maddy: “Sixteen.”

The crowd leaned in, and she slapped the timer.

Her pace started slow, mirroring Kishan’s. She, too, understood the importance of putting on a show.

Maddy: “One.”

But as she accelerated, she looked back up at Kishan, and his satisfied expression slowly began to disappear.

Maddy: “Three.”

She maintained eye contact. This wasn’t just a competition, it was an expression of dominance. Maddy held absolute dominion over her realm, and sometimes people needed a little reminder.

Maddy: “Seven.”

Kishan’s face turned ashen. Barely ten seconds had passed.

Kishan: “No...”

Maddy: "Eleven."

Her speed at the knife game was a point of pride; she didn't have to use magic to beat anyone and everyone who walked through the door. Whether they were garden-variety spirits or visiting demons, she beat them all, fair and square.

Maddy: "Fifteen."

The tension in the room was thick enough to cut with a knife.

Maddy: "Seventeen."

She dropped her blade on the table, and waited.

[Close-up on the timer. It's got eight seconds left. Hold text until it goes off. There's total silence in the room, while it counts down, then, when it goes off, the room erupts.]

The room erupted. Kishan looked heartbroken.

[More ambient chatter.]

???: "Told ya. She's unbeatable."

???: "Is it magic? She could cheat, if she wanted to."

???: "Definitely not. She's just that good."

???: "Poor guy... he didn't know what he was getting into."

[End ambient chatter.]

She leaned in, a sympathetic expression on her face.

Maddy: "Sorry, mate."

Kishan forced a smile.

Kishan: "You beat me fair and square."

Kishan: "I'm pretty impressed."

Maddy: "I aim to please. I'll be taking those hours now, if you don't mind."

Kishan: "Yeah, sure. How does this work?"

She reached out and laid a finger on his sternum.

Maddy: "Just like this. You won't feel a thing."

He felt a brief tightness in his chest, and for just a moment, the tip of her finger burned white-hot.

Kishan: "Ow! Shit!"

Someone in the crowd laughed. She'd pulled this on everyone in the basement at some point: Kishan was just the latest in a long line of chumps who'd burned some time in the Terminal's basement.

Maddy: "Sorry, I lied. It's done now, though."

He rubbed his chest, somewhat resentfully, and stood up. Someone in the crowd shoved a beer into his hand, and he gratefully took a long sip.

Maddy: "Alright. Does *anyone* else dare to compete with me? C'mon. Looking for some actual decent opposition here."

Scattered chuckles from the people in the back. Everyone had wised up to her skills at this point; nobody dared test her.

Maddy: "I'll take any challenge. Even if it's chess or something."

??? *[from the crowd]*: "Any challenge?"

Maddy: "Anything or anyone."

???: "I challenge you..."

[Chay steps forward out of the crowd.]

Chay: "...to get everyone a drink! Round's on me."

The crowd, once again, erupted into cheers.

[Cut.]

2.5 Post-fight

[The crowd, Kishan included, mills around in the basement. Chay and Maddy stand closer to the stairs. She looks a little awkward.]

Maddy: "I didn't realize you were watching."

Chay: "There wasn't anything happening upstairs, and I got bored."

Maddy: "Right..."

Chay: "So, you took some hours from Kishan, huh?"

Maddy: "Yes. I did."

Chay: "Do you feel good about that?"

Maddy: "Chay..."

Chay: "Do you?"

Maddy: "I won them fair and square."

Chay: "He didn't know what he was getting into. There's an obvious power imbalance here that you're exploiting."

Maddy: "He knew the rules!"

Chay: "That doesn't change anything. You led him to believe that he'd get some extra time."

Maddy: "And?"

Chay: "Barring a miracle on his part, that absolutely wasn't going to happen."

Maddy: "It doesn't matter. He's just passing through, a couple hours won't make any difference."

[Chay snaps.]

Chay: "Maddy! I'm disappointed in you. Our patrons respect us. We need to *earn* that respect, by treating them with respect ourselves."

Chay: "This is not respectful, or dignified."

Chay: "Cheating vulnerable passers-through out of their time... we're above that. We're better than that."

Chay: "I don't care whether you think it's dishonest or not. I want you to give that poor man his time back."

[She pouts.]

Chay: "Don't pout. This is serious."

Chay: "I feel like a broken record saying this, but while I understand your intentions are good, you can't keep doing these things."

Maddy: "..."

Maddy: "It's all for you..."

Chay: "If you really want to do this for me, find another way."

Chay: "This isn't worth it, Maddy."

Chay: "It breaks my heart to see you like this, and I know that you're trying your hardest."

Chay: "But this really, truly, is not worth sacrificing your own self-respect over."

Chay: "Everyone here respects you, but you gambling with hours just cheapens that."

Maddy: "Sigh."

Maddy: "I'll give the hours back."

Maddy: "Shame, I was pretty great with the knife."

Chay seemed mollified, and let a small smile cross his face.

Chay: "Still not as good as me."

Maddy: "Ehh. I was pretty close."

[Beat. Then, Maddy sighs, and pushes herself off the wall.]

[Cut.]

2.6 End of the line

[Outside. Pre-dawn. Kishan lurks out the front, either leaning against a wall or lounging on a chair/bench.]

[We do a close-up on his face for a few seconds. He's staring into space, neutral expression. He sighs, and...]

[SFX: Door open/ding!]

Ned: "You right?"

Kishan: "..."

Kishan: "Yeah, I guess."

Ned: "Cool. Mind if I join you?"

Kishan: "Go for it."

[Ned joins him. There's a moment of silence.]

Ned: "Durry?"

Kishan: "Hmm?"

Ned: "You want a durry?"

Kishan: "I'm sorry, I..."

Ned: "Durry. Coffin nail. Cigarette."

Ned: "Do you want a smoke or nah?"

Kishan: "Oh. Right, of course. Yeah, sure."

Kishan: "Sorry, it's been a weird day."

[Ned lights a cigarette for Kishan, then does the same for himself offscreen. Keep in mind that we should never actually show Ned in shot inhaling from one because it's way funnier that way but we ABSOLUTELY should show him exhaling, maybe from the top of his helmet?]

Kishan: "Thanks."

Ned: "No worries."

[Kishan draws from the cigarette.]

Ned: "Where you from, then?"

[He exhales.]

Kishan: "Heh."

Kishan: "You're the first to ask."

Kishan: "I live in Collingwood."

Ned: "Oh yeah? Whereabouts?"

Kishan: "Top end of Smith Street."

Ned: "Bit pricey up there these days, isn't it? Bet you like your avo toast."

Kishan: "Ha. Piss off."

Kishan: "I've got housemates."

[Beat.]

Kishan: "Well..."

Ned: "Nah, I know what you mean."

Ned: "Bit odd. Being dead and all that."

Ned: "Takes some getting used to."

Kishan: "People keep saying that, but it doesn't make me feel any better."

Ned: "I understand."

Kishan: "Do you?"

Ned: "I reckon as much as anyone can, yeah."

Kishan: "Right."

Ned: "Hey, what's avo toast actually taste like?"

Kishan: "Huh?"

Ned: "I've never had it."

Kishan: "Can't you go out and just eat some? I'm sure Maddy could whip it up, if you asked."

Ned: "Mmm. Avocadoes are a highly malevolent fruit. Don't trust 'em one bit."

Ned: "Plus, I've got this whole..."

[He idly rubs/scratches his collarbone, just below his helmet.]

Ned: "...situation."

Kishan: "Oh, so *that's* what the straw was for."

Ned: "You got it. So what does it taste like?"

Kishan: "I dunno. Like avocado and toasted bread. Avocado is kinda cold and mushy but it's got a good taste."

Ned: "Like peas?"

Kishan: "Heh. Definitely better than mushy peas."

Ned: "Love me a bowl of peas, mate."

Kishan: "What, 'cause they're the only thing you can eat through a straw?"

Ned: "Watch yourself."

Kishan: "..."

Kishan: "Gonna zap me with your death council powers?"

Ned: "First off, it's the Council of Death, not a death council. They're totally different things."

Ned: "Secondly, you really think that's what we do? Walk around shooting lightning out of our fingers?"

Kishan: "Well, when you put it like that, it sounds a bit silly, yeah."

Ned: "We don't do anything like that. We just keep things running smoothly, is all."

Ned: "Harassing cafe owners to settle their time debt isn't something we like to do often."

Kishan: "So you just keep the peace?"

Ned: "As fuckin' *ironic* as that sounds, yeah. Ned keeps the peace."

Kishan: "Dude."

Ned: "I know."

[beat]

[Ned holds out the cigarette pack.]

Ned: "Want another?"

Kishan: "Sure."

[we do a timeskip here - just half an hour or so, the sun's up probably 30 degrees above the horizon. Can do this with a cool visual sting: perhaps an extreme closeup of Kishan flicking the lighter synced with the sun coming up?]

2.7 Apology

[cut to our previous view, and Maddy's here now, leaning against the door frame and sipping a coffee.]

Maddy: "..."

Maddy: "I love the sunrises here."

Ned: "They're alright."

Maddy: "You watch many sunrises, Ned?"

Ned: "Not enough, no. Even semi-immortals need their sleep."

Maddy: "I just like to sit here and watch it..."

Maddy: "Even when it's cloudy or raining, there's just something about watching the sunrise that makes it easier to deal with the coming day."

Ned: "Feeling optimistic all of a sudden?"

Maddy: "No, I still feel like shit."

Ned: "Hah."

Maddy: "How about you, Kishan?"

Kishan: "..."

[beat]

Maddy: "Kishan?"

Kishan: "... I don't feel great."

Kishan: "I'm still having a lot of trouble, uh..."

[beat]

Kishan: "You guys I'm dead and I've only got a couple hours left before I have to go and I don't think anyone here really properly understands what it's like to see your last sunrise ever without any idea of what comes next and that is REALLY fucking terrifying"

Kishan: “and I’m never gonna see my friends or my boyfriend or my family again, I’m just gonna pass on and I’ll never know how they’ll remember me or mourn me or if I’m even gonna be remembered as a good dude who tried his best or if I’ll just be forgotten in a year”

Kishan: “but that good dude who tried his best couldn’t even win a friggin’ game of five-finger fillet in the basement of a cafe that basically sits on the banks of the Styx as far as I can tell and, god, I can’t even tell if that MATTERS?”

Kishan: “Were the stakes low? High? I can’t tell, I’m so disoriented and I’m trying so desperately to feel something but all I feel is that I’m slipping away with every second, I’m losing myself by degrees and that’s INCREDIBLY SCARY AND I DON’T KNOW HOW TO DEAL WITH IT.”

Ned: “...”

Maddy: “...”

Ned: “...”

Maddy: “Yeah, fair cop.”

Maddy: “I actually came out to apologize for that. The game.”

Ned: “Oh, for god’s sake, Maddy, have you been gambling again-”

Maddy: “Can it, Ned.”

Maddy: “Kishan...”

Maddy: “I shouldn’t have taken that time from you.”

Kishan: “...You took it fair and square.”

Maddy: “I don’t feel like I did. So I’m giving it back.”

Maddy: “Believe me, I’m as surprised as you are. I don’t usually do this.”

Kishan: “What’s different this time?”

Maddy: “That’s... my business.”

Ned: “I can’t believe you’re still swindling people out of hours to try and fix your debt.”

Maddy: “Dude, I know.”

Ned: “It’s bloody undignified! And it’s a *clear* violation of the rules-”

Maddy: “I will banish you right now, my man.”

Ned: “I thought you’d stopped pulling that crap once you took ownership of the cafe from Chay.”

Ned: “You really think doing *this* is going to help you pay this debt?”

Maddy: "Yes! Absolutely. And if you've got any bright ideas on how to do it otherwise, I am all ears."

Ned: "We should've never granted you and Chay those licenses to practice. You've obviously failed to be responsible with them."

Maddy: "You really think we wouldn't be doing it if we didn't have the licenses, bushman?"

Maddy: "Given your history, the hypocrisy on display here is astounding."

Ned: "That's all behind me, and you know it."

Ned: "I've been working on doing some good for the last hundred years."

Maddy: "With the Council? Really?"

Ned: "Yes. We maintain the balance. You *know* why that's important."

Maddy: "Sure do. I don't need you moralizing at me from your ivory tower-"

Kishan: "Give it a rest, guys."

Maddy: "But-"

Kishan: "I'm pulling the 'last day on earth' card. Quit it."

[beat]

[Maddy sighs, leans off the doorframe, and discards her takeaway cup.]

Maddy: "I'll be inside. Come find me when you want those hours back, Kishan."

[go closeup on Ned and Kishan here so we don't have to animate her going inside]

[sfx: door]

[a quiet moment here - let Kishan idle for a bit, blink, etc]

Ned: "For what it's worth, I'm sorry about all of this."

Ned: "I've never been to the other side. I was too afraid to leave. Walked the land for decades, evading the Council."

Ned: "That's a crime they call 'revenancy'. Staying too long. Upsetting the balance."

Ned: "But, in lieu of booting me straight to the next place, or some sort of eternal punishment, the Council offered me a job..."

Ned: "Sorry. That's all stuff you don't care about, I suppose."

Kishan: "Eh. It's interesting enough."

Ned: "Nah. I'm just filling up empty air."

Ned: "You should head inside and grab those hours back."

Kishan: "Truth be told, I'm not feeling especially fond of Maddy right now."

Ned: "She might've been dishonest with you, but even I can tell she's at the end of her rope."

Ned: "And you might not be able to see it yet, but I think the people in there are fond of you."

Kishan: "You think so?"

Ned: "Maddy wouldn't have offered the hours back if there wasn't something different about you. Plus, that kid Ashley seems to like you, yeah?"

Kishan: "I guess."

Kishan: "She kinda just dragged me off and got me to hold screwdrivers for her."

Ned: "Trust me, she thinks you're great. Go on, go inside and say hi."

Ned: "I've got some business to go stick my nose into, anyway."

Kishan: "Alright. Catch you in a bit? I've got some questions about the Council."

[camera inside, to bar. Maddy's brooding; Ashley sits in a back corner, staring into a cup of coffee.]

[small] Ned: "Course. I won't be out for long."

[small] Kishan: "Later, mate."

2.8 Hours Returned

[sfx: door]

[sfx: Kishan sitting down at a table near the bar]

[Maddy looks up.]

Maddy: "Hey."

Kishan: "Yo."

Maddy: "Do you want those hours back?"

Kishan: "I guess so. It's only four hours. I don't think it'll make much difference."

Maddy: "If it's okay, I'd prefer that you have them. Ashley's been enjoying having you around."

Kishan: "Just Ashley?"

Maddy: "... and me too, I guess."

Kishan: "You seem pretty reluctant to admit that, my dude."

Maddy: "Don't psychoanalyze me. Sit still for a minute."

[Maddy takes a seat across from him, and puts her right hand on the table between them, palm up.]

Maddy: "Alright, lay your hand on mine, and place your index finger on my wrist."

[he raises an eyebrow.]

Kishan: "This a part of your ritual, or just an excuse to hold hands?"

Maddy: "Shut up."

[He places his hand on hers.]

Maddy: "Thanks. Watch carefully, and no matter what you do, don't move your hand."

Maddy: "There's usually a binding spell I use to make sure that doesn't happen, but I've run out of the reagents required, and..."

Maddy: "... you probably don't care about that."

Kishan: "True."

Maddy: "Alright. Yep."

They made eye contact, and Kishan noticed that her pupils were dilated beyond anything he'd seen before; they were dark, bottomless pools.

[Can we darken the stage here?]

Maddy: "I give this time freely and without coercion. As above, so below. I maintain the balance."

Kishan's fingers burned, and he almost pulled his hand back out of reflex, but Maddy's fingers closed vice-like around his wrist.

Maddy: "***I maintain the balance.***"

The burning feeling disappeared as quickly as it came, and she released his hand.

[Lighten the stage again.]

Maddy: "That's it. How do you feel?"

Kishan: "I... hmm. I actually feel better."

Kishan: "I feel less... itchy?"

Maddy: "Yeah, we weren't kidding about that yesterday. As you linger, you begin to upset the balance, and, as I understand, it doesn't feel good."

Kishan: "Right, yeah."

Kishan: "Why does Ned get to stick around, then? Does he just ignore it?"

Maddy: "The Council are a special case. They're more similar to demigods, or demons, than they are to us."

Kishan: "That's fascinating."

Maddy: "Tell me about it. I'd have joined ages ago, but they're uptight dicks."

Kishan: "They don't seem so bad to me..."

Maddy: "That's because you've not run into any of their ridiculous rules."

Maddy: "Bunch of bloody regulations on manipulating life force, and certain standards on the treatment of spirits..."

Kishan: "Is that why you gave me the hours back? Because Ned realized you broke the rules?"

Maddy: "No, that was all within the guidelines, despite his blustering."

Maddy: "I gave them back because I felt bad. That's all."

*[Kishan looks **pissed**.]*

Kishan: "Oh, neat, so you pity me. I love that. I'm actually really into it."

Maddy: "No, dude, it's not like that at all—"

Kishan: "Nah, you don't need to clarify. I get it."

Maddy: "Seriously-"

Kishan: "Last day on Earth. Moving on."

Maddy: "Fine, sure. I'm sorry."

[door sfx]

Maddy: "Sorry, I've gotta serve this customer."

Kishan: "I'll help."

Maddy: "Really? It's probably not a two-person job..."

Kishan: "Yep. C'mon."

[cut to black]

2.9 Katabasis

[forgive me: I have penned an introspective monologue. Kinetic typography here?]

THE KATABASIS

orig.: Ancient Greek

def.: a downwards journey or voyage; an excursion to the underworld; a trip to the coast

the katabasis is considered to be a vital part of the hero's narrative.

every hero goes to hell at some point. and in the stories they usually come back, which is the weird bit. I don't think that's how it works in real life.

the cafe had a bunch of heroes come through, claiming that they were going to conquer hell and come back.

they never returned.

the idea of katabasis is that, in the grand scheme of things, hell, or the underworld, is on the *outside* of wherever we are.

did the ancient Greeks ever consider that maybe we've been on the outside the whole time, just waiting to get in? maybe they did. I guess I'll ask one sometime if I ever meet one.

but perhaps we're just waiting our entire lives for this. to pass through the firmament, to the next place.

to be driftwood that washes up on the shore of whatever that next place actually is.

seems weird but maybe that's where we're naturally meant to be.

this world isn't some sort of proving ground or anything. just a waiting room.

a beautiful, flawed, complex waiting room.

I don't think there's anything like Heaven or Hell waiting for us.

the world doesn't ever operate in binaries or absolutes.

that's just flawed human thinking projected onto things that are much, much more complex than that. and I don't think what's waiting on the other side is even something that we can imagine. I bet it's cool.

it's a shame that it's a one-way trip, though.

[cut to back inside]

2.10 Chess

[Coffee making sounds!]

Kishan: "Phew."

Kishan: "Anything else that needs doing?"

Maddy: "Nah. I'm gonna take this tray of glasses into the kitchen, you can go chill for a bit."

Kishan: "I'll take them. You need a break."

Maddy: "Uhh... sure."

Kishan: "Where's the kitchen?"

[She points.]

Maddy: "That way. You'll find it eventually."

Kishan: "Cool. Back in a minute."

[He disappears with the tray of glasses, and everything is suddenly quiet.]

[Maddy heaves a deep sigh, and opens a book on the counter. She reads for a moment, but gets distracted by something upstairs.]

Maddy: "Hmm."

[She closes the book, and heads upstairs-

-to where Chay and Ashley are playing a rowdy game of chess.]

Ashley: "Your pawns are nothing compared to the raw power of my castles! Nothing!"

Chay: "Yeah? What's this, then?"

[He takes a castle with one of his pawns. We don't have to show this onscreen... but we could also show it in slow motion with ridiculous visual drama. Since Maddy's still a decent distance from them, we could do a crash zoom and show them both in profile.]

Ashley: "Ahh!!! My castle!"

Ashley: "Brought low by my own hubris!"

Chay: "No, it was just a pawn."

Chay: "And... maybe a little bit of hubris."

[Maddy smiles; she's just watching. Looks tired, though. We stay focused on her, watching them, for the next few lines-]

Chay: "Bishop!"

Chay: "Knight!"

Ashley: "Argggh!"

Chay: "Your other castle, and..."

Chay: "Check."

Ashley: "..."

Ashley: "Check, you say?"

Chay: "O-oh. I didn't think of that-"

Ashley: "You activated my trap card!"

[Maddy laughs, more to herself than anyone else.]

Ashley: "Oh! Hey, Maddy! Come check this out."

[She's momentarily surprised, but heads over.]

Chay: "Heh..."

Ashley: "I tricked him into a false sense of security!"

Maddy: "Oh man, that's embarrassing."

Maddy: "You seriously let her outmaneuver you *that* hard?"

[He looks rueful, but in good spirits.]

Chay: "Yes... I'm very ashamed."

Chay: "I suppose the real hubris was inside me all along."

Ashley: "I friggin' love winning. I should try doing this more often."

Maddy: "Pff. A chance win at chess-"

[Chay shoots her a Very Significant Look, and she backpedals]

Maddy: "-uh, could grow into a big winning streak, you know?"

[Ashley beams.]

Ashley: "You wanna play something with us?"

Maddy: "I should really head back down to the bar, there's nobody there..."

Chay: "C'mon. Take a load off. If anyone really needs you, they'll know where to find you."

Maddy: "Hmm. How about I grab us all a drink, make sure there's nobody waiting down there, then we play something? Won't be five minutes."

Ashley: "You actually gonna come back this time? You never come back..."

[Maddy and Chay make eye contact again.]

Maddy: "I'll come back. Promise. Why don't you pick out a game while I'm gone?"

Chay: "Let's find something, Ashley. What do you feel like playing today?"

Ashley: "Something... hmm... something with lots of dice."

Chay: "Dice it is! We'll see you in a minute, Maddy."

[They split, and we cut to outside...]

2.11 Lost Kishan

[Kishan leans/pokes his head around one of the exterior corners of the building, still holding the tray of glasses.]

Kishan: "Huh... I could've sworn she said there was a corridor leading to the kitchen..."

[Inside, top of the basement stairs:]

Kishan: "I *know* it's not down there..."

Kishan: "It's not... upstairs... surely?"

Kishan: "Hmm."

[He looks up, and we transition to the inside of the elevator on the train platform scene]

Kishan: "..."

[There's elevator music. We shake the camera to fake the elevator moving, etc.]

[Give it ten seconds; he stands there looking increasingly confused by the fact that it's going way higher than it should be.]

[SFX: Ding!]

[The doors open, and he recoils a little bit from the bright sunlight.]

Kishan: "What the...?"

[He steps out, and looks around, pulling an unimpressed :| face.]

Kishan: "This *definitely* isn't the kitchen."

2.12 Dnd

[cut back to Maddy &co.]

[Ashley rolls a d20.]

Ashley: "... and THAT's why the fourth season of Robattle Royale was an absolute betrayal."

Ashley: "To me, the fanbase, everyone. They sold out, you guys!"

Chay: "But you still want to be on it one day?"

Ashley: "I... well... yeah. Unless an indie circuit opens up..."

Maddy: "Like in wrestling?"

Ashley: "EXACTLY like in wrestling. Melbourne's got a local show! I want something like that."

Chay: "You could probably put your own local league together, if you worked really hard."

Maddy: "Perhaps you could build the robots and get people to battle them?"

Ashley: "Human-controlled bots are *boring*, though. I want to get more of that spirit juice and put together a bigger Ashling."

Maddy: "Uhh... how big?"

Ashley: "I think I'll start at car-sized, then move on to more of a bus-adjacent form factor."

Chay: "Ha! I'm not sure we have enough to power one of those..."

Chay: "You'd have to get Maddy to source you a large amount of it. We'd need litres of it, at least."

[She looks up at him, and smiles. I really want to get across the impression that she knows what's going on, but is putting on a happy face because even though she's sad he's going, she's seen spirits pass on hundreds of times, and has a bit of a different perspective on things because of that.]

Ashley: "That'd be super cool. Didn't you say it was illegal, though?"

Chay: "Well."

Chay: "Technically."

Chay: "But what Ned doesn't know won't hurt him."

[Maddy snorts.]

Chay: "He'd lose his head if he knew half the things we were doing around here."

Maddy: "I dunno. He seems fairly lenient with you, right?"

Chay: "Ahh... he wasn't always like that. A long time before you turned up, he nearly shut me down because I..."

[He scratches his chin, somewhat awkwardly, and laughs.]

Chay: "Would you believe it's because I sheltered a criminal?"

Maddy: "Ned nearly shut you down because of *that*? Am I thinking of the same criminal you are?"

Chay: "Trust me, the irony was apparent. I found it very, very funny."

Ashley: "What sort of criminal were they?"

Chay: "Just a minor demon on the run. I don't know what she did to get a price on her head. I just took her in when she stumbled through the door, dripping blood everywhere."

Maddy: "Heh. That's metal."

Chay: "It was extremely metal."

[He leans back, and smiles. There's some nostalgia here.]

Ashley: "How long did you manage to hide her for?"

Chay: "Oh, not too long. Maybe six weeks? The time flew by, if I'm being honest."

[Maddy smirks.]

Ashley: "Why's that? Was she from the clock realm?"

Chay: "No, no, nothing like that. We, uh... bonded."

Ashley: "Magically? How'd you do that? I thought I heard you telling Maddy that sort of thing was impossible between beings on this plane?"

[Maddy snickers.]

Chay: "No... not magically..."

Chay: "We were..."

Chay: "...ahem..."

Chay: "...lovers."

[Show these next two lines at the same time: Maddy throws back her head and cackles, Ashley is exhibiting the sort of disgust that only a thirteen-year-old confronted with romance can muster]

Ashley: "Eww. Yuck. Ewwwwwwww."

Maddy: "Ahahahahahaha."

Chay: "Ahh, happier days..."

Maddy: "I love hearing about when you were young and reckless."

Chay: "Gosh! What do you think I am now, huh? Old and boring?"

Ashley: "Definitely old."

Maddy: "Despite myself, I must say you're definitely not boring."

Chay: "There's that patented Maddy charm." *[He smiles here; it's a playful jab]*

Maddy: "Well, you know me, I'm full of 'em."

Chay: "Oh yeah. Charms... hexes... curses..."

Maddy: "That's all on your account, old man."

Chay: "Hah. I won't deny it."

[off-screen] Kishan: "Hey. Maddy."

[Kishan is right there, still holding the tray]

Maddy: "Hey, dude. Having trouble finding the kitchen?"

Kishan: "Yeah, I... couldn't. I checked everywhere."

Maddy: "It's just behind the bar, man, you can't miss it."

[vaguely annoyed] Kishan: "I told you, I checked everywhere."

Maddy: "Nah. You're not catching my drift."

[she raises her voice; I think we can show this by zooming out and having her text be a bit bigger] Maddy: "It's just. Behind. The bar. You can't miss it."

[zoom back in] Maddy: "Have another look. It'll be there this time. Trust me."

[she winks.]

Kishan: "... Fine."

[he exits]

Chay: "How long are we going to keep him here, Maddy?"

Ashley: "Ooh! We're keeping him?"

Maddy: "No, we're **not** keeping him. I'm going to let him stay as long as he wants."

Maddy: "He'll leave on his own accord at some point."

Chay: "You feel sorry for him?"

Maddy: "Weirdly, yes. I don't usually get attached to customers, but he's a good dude."

Ashley: "I like him!"

Chay: "Heh. Do you like him because he's nice, or because he was good at passing your tools over?"

Ashley: "... Yes."

Maddy: "Don't get too attached. He's not gonna be here forever."

Ashley: "Well, duh. I know how it works."

Ashley: "I'm going to enjoy having him around, just like you taught me."

Ashley: " "Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened." "

Maddy: "Ashley... that's from the motivational calendar I threw out last week. I never said that."

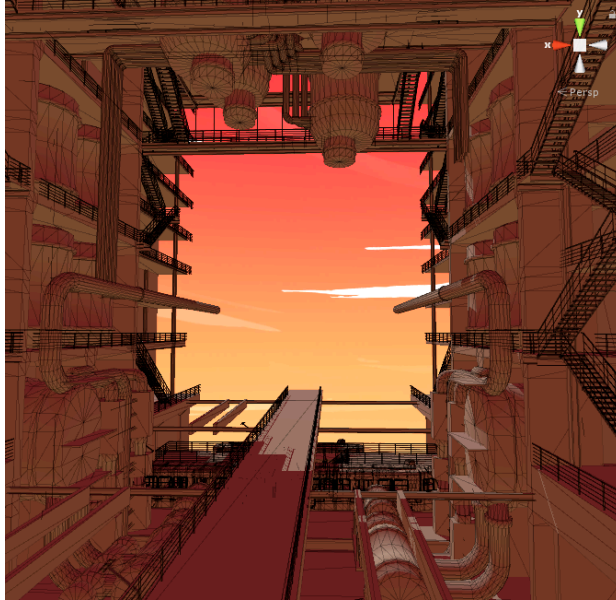
Ashley: "Eh. Same same. I'm used to people moving on, is the point. I can deal with it."

[Chay looks at Maddy, but she doesn't meet his eyes]

Maddy: "Good."

[cut to black]

2.13 Contemplation



[This is a 30-second-ish scene with little to no dialogue. I'm envisioning a lot of swapping between camera shots.]

Upper gantry. Sun is beginning to set. Maddy leans on a railing, sipping a coffee, brooding, and watching the sunset.

She sips. Stares into the nothing space.

Someone (Ned?) passes, far below. She tilts her head, and tracks them until they're out of view.

She sips, and sighs.

She straightens up, stretches, and walks to the other end of the gantry, where she peers down at the cafe.

Down in front of the cafe, Ned lounges on a chair. Maddy's expression, formerly blank, now tightens, and she turns her back.

She sighs once more, and nonchalantly tosses her mug (proper ceramic mug, not a takeaway cup) over her shoulder.

Beat.

[sfx: distant shattering impact]

[from below] "FUCK!"

Maddy: "Heh."

[Cut.]

2.14 Bottled Soul

[Inside. Ned and Kishan sit in a dark corner, each nursing a drink. Ned's beer has a straw, of course. Ned has a large coffee stain on his shirt.]

[We spend a moment watching their faces. Ned's body language is impassive; stony. Kishan is fidgety, and he's leaning forward, paying close attention to Ned.]

Ned: "You gonna keep staring at the coffee stain, or nah?"

Kishan: "Yes."

Ned: "Okay. Whatever."

Ned: "What do you want from this conversation?"

Kishan: "Hmm."

Ned: "I'm an open book, as far as matters of life and death are concerned."

Kishan: "Yeah, yeah. Uh."

Kishan: "I don't want to go. I know you've probably heard this from, I don't know, a thousand people or whatever."

Ned: "Mmm."

Kishan: "It's not about staying around for people or wanting to go back to my old life."

Kishan: "As wonderful and not-stressful as that sounds."

Kishan: "Like, I'm not afraid of what lies on the other side. I don't think there's any point to worrying about it until I'm there."

Kishan: "I just don't think I've spent enough time here."

Ned: "The cafe?"

Kishan: "No..."

[He gestures in a sort of vague fashion to... everything?]

Kishan: "All this. I guess you'd call it this plane?"

Ned: "Roughly speaking, I suppose so."

Kishan: "I want to know what you did to be able to stay."

Ned: "Sure."

Ned: "Did Maddy give you those hours back?"

Kishan: "Yeah. Why?"

Ned: "Well, that's a way. You can just find enough hours to stay as a spirit. Half-here, half-gone..."

Ned: "But it's a wretched existence. I wouldn't want to live like that."

Kishan: "How would you find the hours, though? There's only so many you can get from consenting beings, right?"

Ned: "The crappy psychology of gambling aside... you're right, yes."

Ned: "So, the question is: how do you do that? How do you create life from nothing?"

Ned: "..."

Ned: "The answer is that you can't, Kishan. It's impossible."

Ned: "There's always got to be some sort of balance maintained."

Ned: "Everyone who learns to manipulate the fundamental life forces understands that, no matter whether they're doing good or bad things with their skills."

Ned: "Here's the thing, though. You don't *need* both parties to agree. It's just a social nicety. Something that separates us from, well, people who don't do that. That's where the idea of vampires came from, for example. Those bastards."

Ned: "They're not special or anything. They're just dickheads."

Ned: "Anyway, if you can take life force from people, you can also drain it from animals or plants."

[Visual bit with Ned's drink going through his straw?]

Ned: "But in this business, there's a lot we don't, or can't, understand."

Ned: "One of the things we can't understand is why life force from animals and plants is... tainted. It feels *gross*. If it didn't, everyone would take it, consequences be damned."

Ned: "How were you feeling today, before Maddy took the hours back?"

Kishan: "I... felt like I was slipping away. Like, my mind was really foggy. It was really hard to think, or put sentences together. Nobody really noticed, though."

Ned: "Typical."

Ned: "Imagine that, but ten times worse. You're foggy, but there's also something fundamentally *wrong*. Like you're a collection of puzzle pieces that don't quite fit together. Like an engine that's running out of oil."

Kishan: "That sounds horrifying."

Ned: "Right?"

Kishan: "So... should I do it?"

Ned: "Eh. Probably not."

Kishan: "How would I stay otherwise?"

Ned: "Well... you could always go on the lam. Just run for it."

Kishan: "But you'd catch me."

Ned: "Not me, personally. But, yes, the Council would, eventually,"

Kishan: "And that's it? That's my only option."

Ned: "Perhaps."

Ned: "Depends on how you feel about bonding your soul for eternity to a fundamentally neutral arbiter of justice."

Kishan: "I have no strong feelings about it, one way or another."

Ned: "Smart-arse."

Kishan: "Heh. But, no, I'm open to it. As crazy as that sounds. I'd also accept temporarily bonding my soul to a fundamentally neutral arbiter of justice, if that's an option."

Ned: "Would you regret it if you stayed here forever, instead of moving on?"

Kishan: "I dunno. I guess that'd be up to me, right?"

Ned: "How do you mean?"

Kishan: "In the end, how I feel about taking a big branch in my life is just a matter of how I frame it. I can focus on what I'll regret, sure. But it's not a useful way to spend my time."

Kishan: "If I focus on the future... on everything that's in the possibility space, instead of outside of it..."

Kishan: "That's probably better for me, yeah?"

Ned: "Sure."

Kishan: "You don't sound convinced."

Ned: "Eh. I'm just ambivalent on it. I try not to think about anything too hard these days."

Ned: "But, if you're willing to accept eternal bondage with the Council... I can keep you here. It's not easy work, though."

Ned: "You have to act in the best interest of the system, not its individual parts."

Ned: "Bureaucracy at its finest."

Kishan: "How did you learn to deal with it?"

Ned: "Just took some time. When you're used to it, you learn not to think too hard about what you're doing."

Ned: "As long as you take a holistic view of everything, things generally shake out alright."

Ned: "We tend to only bother the biggest rulebreakers, anyway."

Kishan: "Maddy being one of them?"

Ned: "Ugh. Habitually. She wouldn't be getting so much leeway if it weren't for Chay."

Kishan: "I don't understand that guy. He's nice - we've chatted a bit - but what makes him so special?"

[Ned shifts uncomfortably.]

Ned: "He's provided... services... in the past."

Ned: "I can count on one hand the number of people who know as much about the manipulation of life force as he does."

[He holds up a single finger.]

Ned: "He's been researching it for over a hundred years."

Kishan: "No way. He's that old? He looks, like, sixty, max."

Ned: "Yep. Much older than that."

Kishan: "Wild."

Ned: "We're getting sidetracked, though. How do you feel about joining the Council? I don't hand out offers willy-nilly, you know."

Kishan: "I'm interested, but... can I have some time to think about it?"

Ned: "How much time do you have? You've been out for..."

Kishan: "...nearly twenty-five hours."

Ned: "Hm. You're overdue."

Kishan: "Put it on Maddy's tab."

Ned: "Ha."

Ned: "Okay."

Ned: "I assume you're not going to stick around forever."

Kishan: "Unlikely, if the next few hours are anything like how I felt this morning."

Ned: "I'll stick around until you have a solid answer, then."

Kishan: "Cool."

[Beat]

Kishan: "Wanna get drunk?"

Ned: "We're already drinking, mate."

Kishan: "Nah. Chay told me about something pretty special he's got behind the bar."

Ned: "Unless it's something *really* special, he's probably offered me some. And even then..."

Kishan: "So you've tried the..."

[Close-up on Kishan's eyes]

Kishan: "...**bottled soul**?"

Ned: "..."

Ned: "You pulling my leg?"

Kishan: "Nope."

Ned: "You've got to be mistaken. You haven't seen it in person, have you?"

Kishan: "Uh, yeah, I actually have seen it."

[Ned is obviously shaken.]

Ned: "I... that's... quite illegal."

Ned: "I expected better from him."

Ned: "Dammit."

Kishan: "So, are we going to drink it or not?"

Ned: "Council regulations require me to confiscate it, or force the owner to dispose of it..."

Kishan: "We'd be doing him a favour, then."

Ned: "I... suppose."

Kishan: "C'mon, dude. Chay said it'd knock you flat."

Ned: "When you say 'you', do you mean me, or you, or just anyone who drinks it?"

Kishan: "Anyone. It's like two hundred percent alcohol or something."

Ned: "That's not technically possible, but I'll admit, my interest is piqued."

Kishan: "Well, let's not waste any time."

[Kishan produces two shotglasses and the glowing bottle of spirit from under the table.]

Ned: "Dammit. This was a setup, wasn't it?"

Kishan: "Basically. You in?"

Ned: "Fine."

[He pours two shots, and pushes one over to Ned's side of the table.]

Ned: "Oh, this looks *deadly*."

Kishan: "Good thing dead people can't get alcohol poisoning."

Ned: "Ayyyyy."

[Kishan holds up his shot for a toast.]

Kishan: "To bureaucracy."

[Ned body-laughs (rolls his shoulders?), leans forward, and meets the toast.]

Ned: "Ha. To bureaucracy."

[They (clink!).]

[Cut.]

2.15 Outro

[Up at the train platform, Maddy lies on the bench, staring at the sky.]

[Close-up on her face in profile, then her phone rings.]

[Her ringtone is DARUDE - SANDSTORM, I WILL PERSONALLY FINANCE THIS IF I HAVE TO]

Maddy: "Yo."

???: "Your order's arrived."

Maddy: "Three days late, mate."

???: "It got held up by... a mutual acquaintance of ours."

Maddy: "Ah. Shit. That'd explain why he's in my hair."

Maddy: "I'll be there in half an hour."

[Phone call end boop.]

[Maddy sighs.]

[Final shot is of Maddy, looking tired but determined, as the elevator doors close.]

End of episode 2