

Rats In The Attic

(she's an addict)



[Kelser Covenant: Chapter 6]

Suggested Listening: Hands On The Bible by Local H

[Music]

Off-Camera

LATE NIGHT — MANHATTAN, NEW YORK

HOME MOVIES

The apartment existed in that particular brand of late-night silence where the world outside ceased to matter. Rain streaked down the floor-to-ceiling windows in serpentine trails, the city lights beyond blurred into impressionist smears of gold and yellow. Thunder rumbled somewhere distant, feeling more than just heard and rather a bass note that resonated in one's chest.

The only illumination inside came from two sources: the custom aquarium that stretched along the western wall like a living painting—fifteen feet of tempered glass housing exotic fish that cost more than most people's monthly income, their scales catching the programmable LED lights and scattering refracted colors across Italian leather furniture and polished hardwood— and an old Sony Handycam projector jury-rigged to display on the pristine white wall opposite the windows.

The projector sat on the obsidian coffee table like an artifact from another life. It wasn't one of those vintage Super 8 machines—this was early 2000s digital, a Mini DV player connected to a laptop, which connected to a small portable projector. Chance had spent an hour earlier that evening figuring out the daisy-chain of adapters necessary to resurrect footage from tapes that hadn't been played in over a decade. The setup was inelegant, cables snaking across the table like black vines, but it worked. The projector's cooling fan hummed softly, a mechanical breath in the darkness.

Chance sat on the floor with his back against the velvet couch—the kind of couch that belonged in a SoHo gallery, too expensive to be truly comfortable, purchased because Hannah liked the way it looked in photographs. His legs stretched out in front of him, socked feet crossed at the ankles, black joggers hanging low on his hips. He wore a faded Sin City t-shirt, the logo cracked and peeling from years of wear, holes forming at the collar. His hair was still damp from a shower hours ago, dark strands falling across his forehead in that effortless way that came from not caring rather than trying. No facepaint tonight. No ritual. Just skin and sharp angles and the faint purple shadows beneath his eyes that never disappeared no matter how much he slept or how many supplements he took.

His hands rested on his drawn-up knees, fingers loose but not relaxed. There was a tension in his shoulders that spoke of training earlier—or perhaps just the permanent tightness that came from holding yourself together when everything inside wanted to fly apart.

Hannah was curled beside him like smoke taking human shape, her body folded into the space between his shoulder and the arm of the couch in a way that defied anatomy. She made herself small when she wanted to, compact and catlike, all sharp edges softened into curves. She wore an oversized black hoodie—definitely his, the sleeves pulled down over her hands so only her fingertips showed, painted nails catching the aquarium light like tiny daggers—and sleep shorts that barely peeked out from beneath the hem. Her platinum hair was loose, spilling across his shoulder in waves that seemed to absorb the blue-orange glow from the tank and transform it into something lunar, otherworldly.

Her legs were tucked up beneath her, one bare foot visible, toes painted matte black with polish that was chipped at the edges like she'd been picking at it. She looked smaller like this, younger, almost fragile in a way she never allowed herself to be when there were cameras or crowds or anyone watching. But the softness was deceptive. Even now, there was something coiled about her, something waiting.

Her head rested on his shoulder, the weight of it familiar and constant, her breath falling into rhythm with his in that unconscious way twins sometimes do—mirror images even in the mechanics of living.

On the coffee table, beside the tangle of cables and the whirring projector, sat a milkshake. Strawberry this time, the plastic cup from some overpriced artisanal place in Tribeca that put gold leaf on the whipped cream and charged eighteen dollars for nostalgia. The ice had melted slightly, pink cream bleeding into clear liquid at the edges, condensation sweating down the sides to form a ring on the expensive table that neither of them cared enough to wipe away. The straw had a bend in it, lipstick marks at the tip—crimson, perfect, like evidence of a kiss that never happened.

From somewhere down the hall, past the closed bedroom door, came the muffled sound of running water. The shower in the master bath. Velour's laugh—bright and sharp like breaking glass—cut through the white noise of the rain and the projector's hum, followed by Sapphire's lower voice saying something that made them both dissolve into breathless giggles. The door was closed. Locked, definitely. The sounds were intimate, private, the kind that made it clear the two women had forgotten anyone else existed in the apartment.

But in the living room, in the dark, with ghosts flickering on the wall, the twins didn't seem to notice. Or if they did, they didn't care.

The projector's beam cut through the apartment like a searchlight through fog, landing on the far wall—unmarked white paint, perfect for projecting memories that should have stayed buried. The laptop screen glowed faintly to the left, showing a list of video files with names like "BDAY_2004.avi" and "XMAS_06_EDIT.mov" and "BEACH_DAY_08.avi"—digital fossils of a family that no longer existed.

Chance reached forward with one hand, fingers hovering over the trackpad, and clicked the first file.

The wall flickered to life.

FOOTAGE: JANUARY 2003 — SNOW DAY

The image quality was sharp but slightly washed out, colors oversaturated in the way early digital cameras rendered winter light—too blue in the shadows, too white in the highlights. The timestamp in the corner read "12/18/2003 - 2:47 PM" in yellow digital font.

The setting was immediately, unmistakably new wealth without reserve.

The house was a sprawling beachfront property in North Carolina—though anyone who asked was told it was Bermuda, a lie maintained for privacy and mystique. The architecture was modern coastal: floor-to-ceiling windows, weathered cedar shingles, a wraparound deck that faced the Atlantic. In summer, the view would be endless blue. But now, in the freak snowstorm that had blanketed the Outer Banks in eight inches of powder, everything was white.

The camera panned across the back deck, showing expensive outdoor furniture covered in snow, a hot tub with steam rising from its surface like something alive, and beyond that, the beach—transformed into an alien landscape where sand and snow merged into something that belonged in a dream.

Then the camera swung back to the action.

Two small figures bundled in snowsuits tumbled across the deck like colorful packages someone had knocked over. Chance wore a navy blue snowsuit with red trim, boots too big for his feet making his gait clumsy. Hannah was wrapped in pink—of course—with white fur around the hood that made her look like a tiny Eskimo. Both wore mittens. Both had snow crusted to their clothes.

Misty Starks appeared in frame, and even through digital footage from twenty-one years ago, her beauty was arresting. She couldn't have been more than twenty-two, twenty-three at best —blonde hair pulled back in a ponytail, wearing designer snow gear that probably cost more than the camera filming her. Her face was bright, alive, genuinely happy in a way that would become impossible in just a few years. She scooped up a handful of snow and packed it into a loose ball, laughing as she lobbed it gently at Chance.

It hit him in the chest. He looked down at it, then up at her, then his small face split into a grin that showed the gap where he'd lost his first tooth.

"Mommy threw snow at me!" *His voice was high, delighted, outraged in the way only small children can be when something fun happens.*

Dustin "Thunderwolf" Kelser entered the frame from the left, and the camera zoomed in slightly—whoever was filming (chances are it was Natasha) clearly knew who the center of attention was.

Wolf looked impossibly young. His hair was longer then, dark and pulled back in a small ponytail, strands falling loose around his face. He wore jeans and a heavy winter coat and a pair of boots that he still owned to this day. His face was leaner, hungrier, not yet carrying the weight of championships and injuries and divorce. When he smiled it was the kind of smile that made you believe the world was a good place, that families stayed together, that promises meant something.

He scooped up snow with both hands—huge handfuls, enough for three snowballs—and advanced on Misty with exaggerated menace.

"Oh, you want to start something? You want to throw snow in MY house?"

Misty shrieked—genuinely playful, backing away with her hands up.

"Dustin! Don't you dare! I just did my hair!"

"You should have thought of that before you declared war on my son!"

He threw. She ducked. The snowball sailed past her and exploded against the hot tub.

Hannah, watching all this, waddled over to a pristine patch of snow and fell backward into it deliberately, arms and legs sweeping up and down.

"I'm making an angel! Look, Daddy! An angel!"

Wolf turned, saw her, and his entire expression softened into something that could only be called love—uncomplicated, absolute, the kind of love that doesn't know yet how to fail.

"That's beautiful, baby girl. You're making the best angel."

Then Chance, not to be outdone, tried to make his own snow angel right next to Hannah's. But he was too enthusiastic, flailing his arms and legs so violently that he ended up rolling sideways into Hannah, knocking her flat.

She came up sputtering, snow in her mouth, mittens covered in powder, and her face crumpled. Not crying yet, but close. The pre-cry face. Lip trembling. Eyes getting shiny.

Chance sat up, saw her expression, and his own face mirrored it instantly—panic and guilt and confusion all at once.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry, Hannah! I didn't mean to!"

Before Misty or Wolf could intervene, Chance crawled over to her on his hands and knees, snow coating his snowsuit, and wrapped his small arms around her in a hug that was more tackle than comfort.

"Don't be sad! Please don't be sad! I'll make you a better angel! I'll make you TEN angels!"

Hannah's tears evaporated as quickly as they'd formed. She giggled—high and bright—and hugged him back, the two of them rolling in the snow in a tangle of colored fabric and laughter.

Wolf and Misty stood watching, and in the background of the shot, you could see them reach for each other's hands without looking. An automatic gesture. Muscle memory of love.

The camera held on the four of them—family, whole, happy—for another ten seconds before the footage cut to black.

In the apartment, in the present, in the dark, neither twin spoke for a long moment.

Hannah's hand had found Chance's at some point during the footage—fingers laced through his, squeezing with enough pressure to make the bones shift.

Hannah Kelser: *(voice soft, barely above a whisper) "I remember the hot tub more than the snow. It warmed my tiny, cold bones."*

Chance Kelser: *(not looking at her, staring at the blank wall) "I remember thinking that if I made you laugh, that you would never be sad again. I thought I could control it. Control you being happy."*

Hannah turned her head slightly, cheek still resting on his shoulder, looking up at his profile in the aquarium light.

Hannah Kelser: *"You could. You still can."*

Something in the way she said it made the temperature in the room drop. Not cold. Just... weighted.

Chance didn't respond. Just clicked to the next file.

FOOTAGE: MAY 2004 — BIRTHDAY PARTY (AGE 4)

The setting shifted dramatically. Late spring now. The same house, but transformed by heat and light. The deck was set up for a party—not a grocery store sheet cake affair, but a custom three-tier confection from some bakery in Charleston that specialized in elaborate children's fantasies. The cake was shaped like a castle, complete with fondant turrets, edible glitter, and two figurines on top—Batman and Wonder Woman standing side by side like unlikely royalty.

The decorations were tasteful but expensive: balloon arches in gold and silver, a long table covered in white linen and laden with food from a catering company, a bounce house inflating in the background on the beach, and at least fifteen children in swim gear running in controlled chaos.

Chance and Hannah wore matching outfits—white linen, clearly selected by Misty, the kind of thing that looked perfect in photos but would be destroyed within an hour. Hannah had a flower crown woven into her blonde hair. Chance kept trying to pull his collar loose.

The camera focused on the cake as Misty and Wolf carried it out together, the former obviously pregnant and quite beaming, singing. Other voices joined in—adults, children, all off-key but enthusiastic.

"Happy birthday to you..."

The twins stood in front of the cake, and this time, there was no rolling over on his sister. Chance's small hand reached out automatically and took Hannah's, holding it while they blew out the candles together. Four candles. Two shaped like the number "4."

The camera zoomed in on their faces.

Chance's eyes were closed, concentrating hard on his wish. Hannah's were open, looking not at the cake but at him, her expression unreadable for a four-year-old. Too aware. Too focused.

They blew. The candles went out. Everyone cheered.

Then a voice from off-camera, male, familiar in a way that made both twins tense in the present day.

"There we go! The dynamic duo strikes again! Hey, can Uncle Corey get in on this picture?"

Corey Lazarus appeared in the frame, and even then, even on old digital footage from two decades ago, his presence was immediately magnetic and immediately wrong.

He wore black acid wash jeans and a designer t-shirt that probably cost three hundred dollars, sunglasses perched on his head, that smile—the one that made you feel like you were in on the joke right up until you realized you were the punchline.

He crouched between the twins, slinging an arm around each of their small shoulders, pulling them close.

"Say cheese, kiddos! Uncle Corey loves you!"

The camera snapped a photo—the flash visible as a brief white bloom on screen—and then the footage continued.

In the background, barely visible, Wolf stood with his arms crossed. His jaw was tight. His eyes were on Corey. But he didn't say anything. Didn't intervene. Just watched with an expression that could have been carved from stone for reasons unbeknownst to him at the time.

Misty stood beside Wolf, and when Corey looked up at the camera—at her, behind the camera—she smiled. Warm. Genuine. Nothing more, nothing less.

The footage cut.

Chance's free hand curled into a fist against his thigh, knuckles going white. His breathing had changed—shallower, faster.

Chance Kelser: (voice tight) "He was already there. Even then. Before the divorce. Before everything fell apart. He was already circling. Like a vulture."

Hannah's grip on his hand tightened.

Hannah Kelser: "Father knew without knowing. You can see it in his face. He knew what kind of snake Corey was, and he let him stay anyway."

Chance Kelser: "Father could not have predicted his own infidelity, and mother couldn't keep her..."

He didn't finish the sentence. Didn't need to.

The next file loaded automatically.

FOOTAGE: DECEMBER 2004 — CHRISTMAS MORNING

The house was different now. Not the layout—same floor plan, same windows, same view of the ocean—but the energy. Like someone had sucked all the oxygen out and replaced it with something thinner, harder to breathe.

The artificial Christmas tree in the corner was enormous—at least nine feet tall, professionally decorated with silver and gold ornaments, white lights, a crystal angel on top that probably cost more than most people's rent. Presents were stacked beneath it in carefully arranged chaos, wrapped in expensive paper with elaborate bows.

But the people had changed.

Chance and Hannah sat on the floor in matching Christmas pajamas—red plaid, still coordinated, but their movements weren't. Chance opened a present methodically, carefully peeling tape, while Hannah ripped into hers with abandon.

Wolf sat on the leather couch, wearing jeans and a t-shirt, looking like he hadn't slept. His eyes had dark circles beneath them, and his smile was forced, mechanical. He watched the twins with an expression that could only be called grief masquerading as joy.

Misty was there, but she wasn't *THERE*. She sat in an armchair by the window, wrapped in a silk robe that probably cost a thousand dollars, hair perfect, makeup immaculate, but her eyes were glazed. Not drunk. Not high. Just... distant. Removed. The camera panned past a side table where an orange prescription bottle of Zoloft sat in plain view, cap off.

The timestamp read "12/25/2004 - 9:23 AM."

Chance pulled out the Batman action figure—the same one that now sat on the shelf in this very apartment. Even then, even at that tender of an age, he held it carefully, studying every detail with an intensity that made adults uncomfortable.

Hannah opened Wonder Woman, and this time, she didn't ask to trade. She just looked at her doll, then at Chance, then placed it carefully on the floor between them like an offering.

"We can share," she said, her voice small but certain. **"Batman and Wonder Woman can be a team."**

Chance looked at her for a long moment, then nodded seriously.

"Okay. A team."

Wolf's forced smile cracked into something more genuine.

"That's my girl. That's my boy. You're learning."

Then a knock at the door. Off-camera, someone moving to answer it.

And Corey Lazarus walked in like he owned the place.

He carried presents. Expensive ones, based on the designer bags he held. He was dressed like he'd just come from a yacht party— Three-piece designer suit but with a death metal band's shirt under the waistcoat

"Merry Christmas, Kelser family! Santa Corey is here!"

He crossed directly to Misty first. Bent down. Kissed her cheek—but his lips lingered just a half-second too long, his hand resting on her shoulder with casual ownership.

Wolf stood up from the couch. His jaw was tight. His fists were clenched.

"Corey. I didn't know you were stopping by."

Corey turned, that smile never wavering.

"Misty invited me. Didn't she tell you?"

The camera—held by someone else now, maybe even Dominique herself —stayed steady, capturing everything. Wolf's expression. Misty's glazed smile. Corey's smirk.

Then Corey crouched down between the twins, ruffling Chance's hair, tickling Hannah until she giggled.

"What did you two get from Santa? Oh man, action figures! Can Uncle Corey play too?"

Hannah handed him Wonder Woman immediately, eager to please. Chance held Batman closer to his chest.

Corey noticed. Laughed.

"Smart kid. Never give up your Batman. That's a life lesson right there, champ."

The footage held for another few seconds—the twins on the floor with Corey, Wolf standing rigid behind them, Misty still sitting in her chair staring at nothing—then cut to black.

In the apartment, Hannah shifted. Her head lifted from Chance's shoulder for the first time since the footage started. She reached for her milkshake, took a long sip, then set it back down with deliberate care.

Hannah Kelser: "That was the Christmas before 'Uncle Corey' went into Rehab, as it were."

Chance Kelser: "I heard them. One night. Him and Mother, on the phone. He'd called from the facility, and she took it in Father's office. She didn't know I was listening. That was about the time that our dear half-sister's mother decided to rot our family from the inside out."

Hannah Kelser: "Father knew without knowing. You can see it in his face. He knew what kind of snake Corey was, and he let him stay anyway. A lone, rabid wolf and a slithering diamondback fighting for the affections of the world. A tale as old as time itself.

The next file loaded.

FOOTAGE: SUMMER 2007 — BEACH DAY

Bright summer sun. The kind that bleached colors and made everything look overexposed. The beach behind the house—private, expansive, the kind of shoreline that came with property values that had seven digits before the decimal point.

The twins wore swimsuits—Chance in shark-print trunks, Hannah in a pink two-piece with ruffles. Both were tanned, lean, all knees and elbows and growing into themselves.

Other children played nearby—neighbors' kids, probably, or children of Wolf's wrestling colleagues. A bonfire pit. A volleyball net. Adults in designer sunglasses drinking expensive beer from bottles that sweated in the heat.

The camera focused on the twins at the water's edge, set up on a tripod as their father was off to the side talking to someone out of frame. They were building a sandcastle, or attempting to. Chance was the engineer, carefully packing sand into a bucket, while Hannah collected shells to decorate.

Then another boy appeared in the frame—older, maybe nine or ten, bigger than Chance. He walked directly to their sandcastle and kicked it, deliberately, sand exploding across the beach.

Hannah's face crumpled immediately. Not angry. Just sad. Betrayed.

The bigger boy laughed.

"That was stupid anyway. Girls can't build sandcastles."

Chance stood up slowly. He was small for seven. Skinny. All ribs and pale skin and dark eyes that suddenly looked much older than they should.

"Don't talk to her like that."

The bigger boy turned, sizing Chance up, clearly amused.

"What are you gonna do about it?"

Chance didn't answer with words. He just swung.

His small fist connected with the bigger boy's stomach—not hard enough to do real damage, but hard enough to surprise. The boy stumbled back, more shocked than hurt, and then his face twisted into rage.

He shoved Chance backward into the sand, then climbed on top of him, fists swinging.

What happened next occurred in seconds but felt eternal on the footage.

Chance didn't try to block. Didn't curl up. He just kept swinging back—wild, desperate, uncoordinated—landing maybe one punch for every three he took. His nose started bleeding. His lip split. But he didn't stop.

Hannah screamed.

And Wolf appeared like thunder.

He yanked the bigger boy off Chance with one hand, holding him by the back of his swim trunks, dangling him like a caught fish. The boy's father came running, shouting, but Wolf didn't let go.

"Your son put his hands on my son. Over my daughter. You want to explain to me why I shouldn't break both of his arms?"

The father started apologizing, profusely, pulling his son away while the kid cried.

Wolf crouched down to Chance, who was sitting in the sand bleeding, and for a moment his face was unreadable. Then he smiled—not his public smile, but something else. Something proud and sad and complicated.

"You protected your sister. That's good. That's right. But next time, protect yourself too. Don't just let him hit you."

Chance wiped his nose, blood smearing across his forearm.

"He was bigger."

"Doesn't matter. You fight until you can't fight anymore. You understand?"

Chance nodded.

Then Wolf looked at Hannah, who was crying now, silently, tears streaming down her face.

"And you, baby girl. When someone hurts you, you let your brother know. Always. He'll handle it if I'm not around."

She nodded too.

Wolf pulled them both close, hugging them against his chest, and the camera captured it—the three of them on the sand, the ocean behind them, the moment when Chance learned his purpose and Hannah learned hers.

The footage ended.

In the apartment, Chance's hand had moved to his face without him realizing it, fingers tracing the faint scar on his upper lip—barely visible now, but still there if you knew where to look.

Chance Kelser: "That was Ryan McGovern. His father was a promoter in Virginia. We saw him at shows for years after that, and every single time, he'd avoid looking at me."

Hannah Kelser: "Because you marked him. You made him afraid."

Chance Kelser: "I lost that fight."

Hannah Kelser: *(turning to look at him fully now)* "No. You won everything that mattered. You showed me that someone would bleed for me. That someone would take pain meant for me and turn it into something else. Into protection. Into love."

Her hand came up, mirroring his, her fingers tracing the same scar on his lip that his own fingers had just touched. The gesture was intimate, possessive, wrong in a way that couldn't be named but could be felt.

Hannah Kelser: "And I have never forgotten that. Not for one single day. You bled for me when we were seven, and you would bleed for me now. That's what they don't understand. That's what Father and Corey and Misty and everyone will never understand."

Chance's eyes closed. When they opened again, they were darker.

Chance Kelser: "I would burn the world alive and piss on its ashes for you."

Hannah Kelser: (her smile returning—dark, sweet, terrible) "I know."

Down the hall, the shower cut off. Muffled laughter. Velour's voice saying something that made Sapphire shriek.

But in the living room, the twins didn't move. Didn't acknowledge the interruption.

The next file loaded.

FOOTAGE: FALL 2008 — SCHOOL RECITAL (AGE 8)

An elementary school auditorium. Rows of folding chairs occupied by parents with cameras and phones. On stage, a children's choir dressed in matching white shirts and black pants performed something earnestly off-key.

Chance and Hannah stood in the front row of the choir, side by side. Hannah sang with enthusiasm, enunciating every word. Chance mouthed the words without sound, clearly uncomfortable with the attention.

The camera zoomed in on them, then panned to the audience.

Wolf sat in the third row, alone. Empty seats on either side of him. He wore a suit—clearly having come straight from some business meeting or appearance. His phone was in his hand, and even from the grainy footage, you could see him typing, responding to something, not fully present.

The song ended. Applause. The children bowed.

Wolf stood, clapping, smiling, but there was something mechanical about it. Performative.

Then the camera panned right, and three rows back, partially hidden, sat Misty.

She wasn't alone. Nicholas Cole and his cane sat beside her, his arm draped casually over the back of her chair. Not around her shoulders—that would have been too obvious—but close enough. Possessive enough.

The footage captured Wolf noticing them. His smile died. His phone lowered. For three full seconds, he just stared.

Then he turned and walked out of the auditorium before the next performance began.

On stage, the twins watched him leave. Hannah's face crumpled. Chance's jaw set.

The footage continued—another song, more clapping—but the twins weren't singing anymore. They were both staring at the back doors where their father had disappeared.

The camera cut.

Chance stood abruptly, pulling his hand free from Hannah's. He paced to the window, staring out at the rain-soaked city, his reflection distorted in the glass by the aquarium glow behind him.

Chance Kelser: (voice low, controlled, dangerous) "He could not even stay for the whole performance. Could not bear to be in the same room with her and Nicholas. Could not bear to see what he had lost. So he left. And we watched him go."

Hannah stood too, crossing to him in three fluid steps. She didn't touch him immediately. Just stood close enough that he could feel her presence like gravity, like something pulling at him that he couldn't resist.

Hannah Kelser: "That is the night I stopped believing in them. Both of them. Father for leaving. Mother for choosing everyone over us. That is the night I understood that they were never going to save us. That we had to save ourselves."

Chance turned from the window, and his eyes found hers in the darkness—gray-blue meeting green, twins recognizing themselves in each other's faces.

Chance Kelser: "And Sunday? When we see them in that ring?"

Hannah reached up slowly, deliberately, cupping his face in both hands. Her palms were cool against his skin. Her thumbs traced the sharp architecture of his cheekbones, the hollow beneath his eyes, the faint scar on his lip.

Hannah Kelser: (voice soft but absolute) "We don't just hurt them. We erase them. We make them feel what we felt every single time they chose someone else over us. Every time they left. Every time they lied. Every time they smiled and pretended we were a family when we were already broken."

Her forehead came to rest against his, their breath syncing in the quiet. The aquarium hummed. The projector sat idle, its fan whirring. The rain tapped harder against the windows.

Hannah Kelser: "You and I, Chance. We are the only truth that matters. The only blood that doesn't betray. The only love that doesn't rot."

His hands came up, gripping her waist—not pulling her closer, not pushing her away, just holding her there in the space between them where everything felt like it was about to break or ignite or both.

Chance Kelser: (voice breaking just slightly) "I know."

Hannah Kelser: "Then stop holding back. Stop pretending. Stop playing their game. This Sunday, we burn it all down. And when the ashes settle, there's only us. Only Covenant."

For a long moment, they stayed like that—pressed together in the aquarium glow, two people who had been holding each other up since they were children watching their father drive away, two people who had learned that love was something you guarded with violence because everyone else would try to take it.

Then the bedroom door opened.

BEDROOM — MOMENTS LATER

Sapphire emerged first, wrapped in a black silk robe that barely reached mid-thigh, hair still damp and pulled back from her face. The cut on her lip from the dorm raid had finally scabbed over, dark against her beautifully tanned asian skin. She moved like water—fluid, certain, dangerous.

Velour followed, dressed in matching black silk, her darker complexion glowing in the ambient light. She was taller than Sapphire, leaner, all sharp edges and sharper smiles. When she walked, it was with the kind of confidence that came from knowing exactly what power she held and how to use it.

They padded barefoot into the main room, leaving wet footprints on the hardwood, and stopped when they saw the twins.

Still pressed together. Still touching. Hannah's hands still framing Chance's face like he was something sacred she was terrified of dropping.

Velour's eyebrow arched. Sapphire's lips curved into something that wasn't quite a smile.

Velour: (voice light, teasing, but with an edge underneath) "Home movies? How very... sentimental."

Sapphire tilted her head, studying them the way a scientist studies something under glass—curious, clinical, slightly predatory.

Sapphire: "Are we interrupting something?"

Hannah didn't move. Didn't even glance in their direction. Her hands stayed exactly where they were, thumbs still tracing the lines of her brother's face.

Hannah Kelser: (voice flat, dismissive, not a request but an edict) "Go get dressed. We have somewhere to be."

Velour's smile faltered for half a heartbeat—a flicker of something that could have been hurt or anger or jealousy—but it was replaced so quickly by practiced charm that it might never have been there at all.

Velour: "Of course, Hannah."

Sapphire held Hannah's gaze for a moment longer, something unspoken passing between them—a challenge, maybe, or a warning—then she turned and followed Velour back into the bedroom. The door closed behind them with a soft click that somehow felt louder than a slam.

Chance stepped back first, breaking the moment. The loss of contact felt physical, like ripping off a bandage before the wound had healed. He turned back to the window, to the city lights bleeding through rain, to his own reflection fractured by water and glass.

Chance Kelser: "We should burn those tapes."

Hannah bent down, retrieving her milkshake from the coffee table. The ice had melted completely now, turning the pink cream watery and pale. She took a slow sip anyway, savoring it, her lips pursing around the straw with deliberate care.

Hannah Kelser: "No. We keep them. To remember why we do this. Why we can never stop."

Chance Kelser: "And Sunday? When we're standing across from them in that ring? When Father is staring at me like I'm supposed to be something other than what he made me?"

Hannah lowered the cup, her smile returning—dark and sweet and terrible, like poisoned honey.

Hannah Kelser: "We show them exactly what they made us. Every abandonment. Every lie. Every time they chose someone else. Every time they left us standing there waiting." (She crossed to him, her bare feet silent on the hardwood.) "We show them that the children they forgot became something they can never control. Never contain. Never save."

Chance turned from the window to face her fully. The rain had picked up outside, drumming harder against the glass, and lightning flickered somewhere over the East River, illuminating his face in brief, stark flashes.

Chance Kelser: "Corey will be there too. Standing next to Father like he always has. Smiling like he always has. Pretending he gives a shit like he always has."

Hannah's eyes glinted in the aquarium glow—predatory, patient.

Hannah Kelser: "Good. Let him smile. Let him stand there in his designer gear and his expensive sunglasses thinking he's untouchable. Thinking he's family." (She took another sip of her milkshake, slow and deliberate.) "We'll wipe that smile off his face the same way we'll wipe the righteousness off Father's. With blood. With pain. With the kind of lesson they can't ignore or forget or rationalize away."

Chance's hands curled into fists at his sides—not in anger, exactly, but in anticipation. Like a boxer feeling the weight of his gloves before the bell rings.

Chance Kelser: "I want to hurt him. Father, I mean. Not just beat him in a match. Not just win a war. I want to make him feel the pain that I hold in my heart."

Hannah set her milkshake down on the coffee table with finality, the plastic cup making a soft sound against the obsidian surface. She crossed the remaining distance between them until there was no space left, until they were breathing the same air.

Hannah Kelser: (voice dropping to a whisper that somehow felt louder than a shout) "Then hurt him. Break his jaw. Shatter his ribs. Make him bleed in front of everyone. Make him understand that we are not children anymore. That we are not waiting for permission. That we are not asking for forgiveness."

Her hands came up again, not to his face this time but to his chest, palms flat against his sternum, feeling his heartbeat through the thin fabric of his t-shirt.

Hannah Kelser: "And when it's done—when they're broken and bleeding and finally understanding what they created—we walk away. Together. Like we always have. Like we always will."

Chance's hands came up and covered hers, holding them against his chest, and for a moment they just stood like that—two people who had been forged in the same fire, shaped by the same abandonment, bound by something that had started as survival and become something else entirely. Something that didn't have a name. Something that couldn't be separated even if they wanted to.

Which they didn't.

Chance Kelser: (barely above a whisper) "No gods. No kings."

Hannah Kelser: (completing the prayer) "Only us. Only Covenant."

The projector's fan whirled in the background, cooling down, its work finished. The laptop screen had gone dark, the list of video files sleeping. On the shelf by the aquarium, Batman stood in his paint-chipped glory, watching over the room like a silent witness to twenty-five years of evolution from hope to horror.

The rain continued its percussion against the windows. The fish swam their endless circuits. And somewhere in the bedroom, Velour and Sapphire were getting dressed for a sermon they didn't fully understand, preparing to follow prophets who would never let them close enough to see the truth:

That the Covenant wasn't about The Abyss or chaos or scripture.

It was about two children who never stopped holding hands on the front steps of a beachfront mansion in North Carolina, watching their father's rental car disappear down the driveway, learning in real-time that the only person you could count on was the one who shared your blood, your birthday, your face.

That every lesson since then—every betrayal, every pill bottle, every custody hearing, every Christmas with Corey's smile poisoning the room, every pool party, every recital where Wolf left early and Misty chose wrong—had only reinforced what they'd known since they were four years old:

The world would take everything from you if you let it.

So you held on to the one thing that couldn't be taken.

Even if holding on looked wrong to everyone else.

Even if it meant crossing lines that shouldn't be crossed.

Even if it meant becoming exactly the kind of darkness that their parents had tried to protect them from.

Chance released Hannah's hands but didn't step away. Instead, he moved to the coffee table and began disconnecting the cables—the laptop from the projector, the projector from the wall, methodically dismantling the resurrection of their past.

Chance Kelser: "How do you want to structure the sermon for Monday evening, I assume that we are still recording it ahead of time, and releasing it once the deed is done?"

Hannah moved to the couch, sinking into the velvet with the kind of casual grace that made expensive furniture look like it was designed specifically for her. She pulled her legs up beneath her, the oversized hoodie swallowing her frame.

Hannah Kelser: "We mirror what we just watched. We show them that we remember. Every single moment they thought we forgot or forgave. Every single time they chose comfort over us. Every single smile that was a lie."

Chance looked up from the tangle of cables, considering.

Chance Kelser: "Father will try to claim we're twisting history. That he did his best. That circumstances were complicated."

Hannah's smile was sharp enough to draw blood.

Hannah Kelser: "Let him. Let him stand there and defend himself while we burn his legacy to ash. Let him explain to the world why his children hate him so much they're willing to destroy him on live television. Let him rationalize. Let him justify. It won't matter. Because the moment he has to defend himself, he's already lost."

Chance finished coiling the last cable and sat down on the floor in front of the couch, his back against it, her legs on either side of his shoulders—a position they'd fallen into thousands of times over the years, comfortable and familiar and just slightly too intimate for siblings.

Her hands came down automatically, fingers threading through his hair, nails scratching lightly against his scalp in a gesture that was equal parts affectionate and possessive.

Chance Kelser: "And Corey? What do we say about Corey?"

Hannah's fingers paused for a moment, then continued their circuit through his hair.

Hannah Kelser: "We don't say anything. We show. We let the footage of Sunday speak for itself. When his jaw is wired shut and he's drinking meals through a straw, everyone will understand what happens when you pretend to be family."

Chance leaned his head back against the couch, eyes closing, surrendering to the sensation of her hands in his hair.

Chance Kelser: "Velour and Sapphire don't understand what Sunday means. What it costs."

Hannah Kelser: "They don't need to understand. They just need to follow. That's what followers do. They witness. They amplify. They carry the message. But they'll never be part of the truth. That's only ours."

Chance Kelser: "You were jealous. In the alley. After the dorm raid. When I kissed them."

It wasn't a question. Just a statement. Hannah's hands stilled completely.

Hannah Kelser: *(after a long pause, her voice carefully neutral)* "I was not jealous of them. I was offended by the implication that they could ever mean what you mean to me. That their lips could taste like mine. That their touch could feel like mine. That they could ever be anything more than accessories to what we are."

Chance opened his eyes, tilting his head back further to look at her upside-down. Their faces were close—too close—his vision filled with her green eyes and platinum hair and the curve of her crimson lips.

Chance Kelser: "And the cheek? Instead of—"

Hannah Kelser: *(cutting him off, her smile returning but with an edge)* "Appearances, you said. And you were right. They don't get to see that. They don't get to know that. What we are—what we've always been—is for us. Not for them. Not for anyone."

Her hand moved from his hair to his face, thumb tracing his cheekbone, the gesture achingly tender and deeply possessive all at once.

Hannah Kelser: "But someday, Chance, when there are no more cameras and no more followers and no more parents to destroy... someday we stop pretending there's a difference between what we are and what we want to be."

The apartment held its breath. The rain drummed. The fish swam. Down the hall, Velour laughed at something Sapphire said, the sound distant and irrelevant.

Chance didn't respond with words. Just held her gaze—upside-down, distorted, but still the most familiar thing in his world—for five seconds that felt like five years.

Then he sat up, breaking the moment, turning back to face forward.

Chance Kelser: "We should get ready. If we're filming tonight, I need to do the facepaint. You need to—"

Hannah Kelser: *(sliding off the couch to sit beside him on the floor, shoulder to shoulder)* "I know what I need to do."

They sat like that for a moment—side by side, thighs touching, the warmth of each other radiating in the space between them—before the bedroom door opened again.

Velour emerged first, now dressed in her Covenant blacks—fitted pants, boots, a cropped top that showed her midriff, the inverted cross pendant hanging between her collarbones. Her hair was pulled back tight, sleek and severe.

Sapphire followed, similarly dressed, but she'd added the black gloves that went to her elbows—the same ones she'd worn during the dorm raid. Her cut lip was covered with dark lipstick now, camouflaged but not hidden.

They looked ready for war. Or a photoshoot. Possibly both.

Velour crossed to the twins, crouching down to their level with that fluid grace that made everything she did look choreographed.

Velour: "We're ready when you are. What's the message for tonight?"

Chance looked at Hannah. Hannah looked at Chance. Something passed between them—wordless, instant, complete understanding.

Hannah Kelser: *(standing, offering her hand to Chance to pull him up)* "The message is simple. Lesson Five."

She pulled him to his feet, and they stood there—twins, prophets, damaged children in adult bodies who had weaponized their trauma into ideology.

Chance Kelser: "Lesson Five: Love is a weapon. And family is the first casualty."

Sapphire's eyes widened slightly. Velour's smile sharpened.

Velour: "Oh, they're going to hate that."

Hannah Kelser: *(her smile matching Velour's but colder)* "Good. Hate means they're listening. Hate means they're afraid. Hate means we've already won."

She moved to the shelf where Batman stood, picked up the action figure, and turned it over in her hands—the same gesture Chance had made a thousand times, the same ritual of touch and memory.

Hannah Kelser: "Father taught us that heroes protect. That you stand up for what's right. That you take the hits so others don't have to." *(She looked at the toy, then at Chance.)* "And Chance learned that lesson perfectly. He protected me. Bled for me. Fought for me."

She set Batman back down on the shelf, but facing away from the room this time—like he was being punished, or exiled.

Hannah Kelser: "But what Father didn't teach us—what he couldn't teach us because he didn't understand it himself—is that protection without presence is just performance. That love without sacrifice is just words. That being a hero means nothing if you're never there when it matters."

Chance picked up where she left off, their voices starting to overlap and interweave the way they did when they were building toward something, when the sermon was taking shape.

Chance Kelser: "So we learned a different lesson. We learned that heroes are liars. That family is fiction. That the only person you can trust is the one who has as much to lose as you do."

Hannah Kelser: "The one who bleeds when you bleed."

Chance Kelser: "The one who burns when you burn."

Hannah Kelser: "The one who stands in the abyss with you and calls it home."

They turned to face Velour and Sapphire, and in that moment, they looked less like people and more like something else—prophets, demons, angels fallen so far they'd forgotten which direction was up.

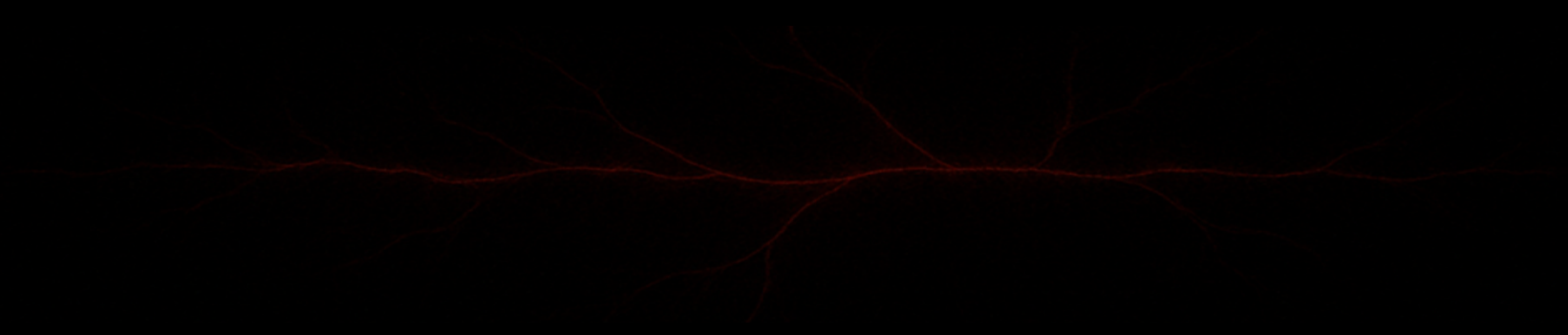
Chance Kelser: "Set up the camera. We film in twenty minutes."

Velour nodded, already moving to the bedroom to retrieve their equipment. Sapphire lingered for a moment, studying the twins with an expression that was hard to read—respect, maybe, or fear, or something in between.

Sapphire: "You two are terrifying, you know that?"

Hannah's smile was all teeth.

Hannah Kelser: "We know."





LATE NIGHT — MANHATTAN, NEW YORK (Airing 10/20)

Twenty minutes later, the apartment had transformed. Recorded on the 18th as a promise to themselves of what the fallout would be on the 19th into the 20th.

The aquarium lights had been adjusted to cast everything in that signature orange glow—the color of *The Abyss*, the color of fire and corruption and something older than memory. The camera was set up on a tripod, red recording light already glowing. Velour and Sapphire stood in the background, silent witnesses in their black clothing, faces partially shadowed.

Chance sat in a chair they'd pulled from the dining area—high-backed, almost throne-like—his facepaint immaculate. Red and black and white in patterns that made his face look like a cracked porcelain mask, like something breaking in slow motion. He wore his black coat with the red trim, the inverted cross visible on the lapel.

Hannah stood behind him, one hand resting on his shoulder, her platinum hair loose and wild around her face. She wore the black dress from the press conference, the one that made her look like a dark angel or a funeral attendee, her headband with its inverted cross catching the orange light.

They looked at the camera like it was a confessional. Like they were about to speak truths that would burn.

Hannah nodded once. Velour hit record. The scene burst in with a red, crackling static effect.

The twins spoke as one:



Chance Kelser:

Lesson Five:
Love is a weapon.
And family is the first casualty.
All that is left is pain.

Hannah Kelser:

Lesson Five:
Love is a weapon.
And family is the first casualty.
All that is left is pain.

And with just those words - the scene came abruptly to an end, red static crackling and fading to nothingness.

- End Transmission -



THE
KELSER
COVENANT