

FADE IN:

EXT. DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

Skid row. Late, cold.

Bodies sprawled in doorways. Decaying warehouses, smashed windows. A SIREN SCREAMS in the distance.

EXT. AN ALLEY - NIGHT

Garbage, graffiti, your worst fears.

Then the SOUND of shoes slap-slapping, stumbling, recovering and running again.

From out of the darkness a MAN lopes forward. He trips, falls hard onto the slimy asphalt. Struggles up. The SIREN wails closer.

The man presses back into an alcove, hiding in the shadows, eyes darting. Panicked. FRANCIS VILLION, mid-twenties, but with all the youthful glow kicked out of him, a thick featured black man, hair uncut for the last year of his life. Just call him Villy, citizen of the streets.

The police SIREN peaks as a cop car roars past the far end of the alley. Now Villy unglues himself from the darkness and slinks out onto the main drag.

Staggering around the corner he whacks his shoulder against a drain pipe. YELLS out in pain.

Under the street lamp it's seen that Villy bleeds from a nasty wound in his side.

When the pain subsides he grabs control of his brain once more. He takes a breath and launches off the opposite way from the cop car.

CLOSEUP - VILLY

Jogging, he wipes his face on the grubby sleeve of his peacoat, tries to squeeze his eyes back into focus. A haunted man who cannot escape the searing pictures in his head.

FLASH CUTS

As he remembers...

Villy and another TRAMP scuffle in a railroad yard, pulling at each other's clothes, hitting, grunting.

Other DERELICTS watch with blood lust in their eyes.

The tramp and Villy bang into a blazing metal barrel and it tips, spewing flames and glowing coals out onto the ground.

The spectators HOWL with pleasure.

Then a switchblade knife SNAPS open.

The tramp grins and thrusts the blade up for Villy to see, a flash of steel in the firelight.

The tramp lunges. Stabs Villy deep in his side.

But Villy fights on. Grunting confusion, bodies contort... suddenly the tramp stumbles backwards, falls into the flames and thuds onto the coals. The tramp gapes up at the black sky as blood gurgles in his throat and spills from his lips.

Villy stands over him, swaying and hurting. Now it's Villy who clutches the knife, staring down at it in amazement.

CLOSEUP - VILLY

Back in the present, sweaty and sick with pain. Eyes fierce and fearful. Lumbering onward down the hard, unforgiving street.

Escaping.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. A DRUGSTORE - NIGHT

The kind of local pharmacy you sometimes find in older suburbs. Pasadena or Eagle Rock. In a brick building so ancient it's got a couple of apartments upstairs.

Neon sign in the window reads: "OPEN 24 HOURS, TO BETTER SERVE YOU."

MRS. RIJOS (O. S.)

It's not safe to be open at two in the morning, Mr. P. If it's so urgent, let them go get their pills at RiteAid!

EUGENE (O. S.)
I'm fine, Mrs. Rijos.

MRS. RIJOS (O. S.)
You shouldn't be here all alone at
this hour. No way, no how.

INT. DRUGSTORE - CONTINUOUS

A small family business that WalMart hasn't quite buried yet. Four aisles of goods and a prescription counter at the back.

MRS. RIJOS trundles toward the front door pulling on her cloth coat.

EUGENE PATATRAC follows, seeing her out. Always the gentleman, he has arrived at 70 years of age with a face both honorable and strong. Caucasian.

EUGENE
We've got to compete with the big
chains. Convenience is king.

MRS. RIJOS
It wasn't so bad when Mrs. P was
around with you, out in back. It's
no good being alone all night when
just anybody can walk in.

At the door.

EUGENE
Not to worry. Thank you. Good
night.

Shaking her head, Mrs. Rijos exits. Eugene closes the door.

Slowly he looks around his store. Memories flood in. A heavy sadness presses down on him with the weight of a bolder.

Eugene locks the front door.

PHARMACY COUNTER

Where the usual impulse items are set out for sale. Next to the cash register stands a CITY OF HOPE contribution canister, partly filled with one dollar bills and pocket change.

Eugene walks around behind the counter and pulls open a drawer. He pushes aside some paperwork to reveal...

A .45 caliber army pistol.

He picks it up. Checks it over like the military man he is. The clip is in.

Eugene studies the weapon. Rubs his eyes, looks at the wedding ring he still wears.

He picks up a corded phone from under the counter, sets it before him and dials.

EUGENE

This is the Patatrac Pharmacy. I need your custodial crew here at 6:00 a.m. sharp, is that understood?

(a beat)

No, they've not been late recently, it's just...it's important this morning that they get here before my employees do. Your crew won't be late? Good. Thank you.

He hangs up. Eugene pulls an envelope out of his white smock pocket, addressed to "MRS. RIJOS," lays it on the counter where someone will be sure to see it.

And with that, everything is ready.

He stares at the gun a moment. CLICKS the safety lever off.

Eugene turns on a RADIO, and suddenly Debussy wafts through the silent store air. His eyes fill. It's been a painful journey of loss to arrive at this moment.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF THE DRUGSTORE - NIGHT

Out of the deserted neighborhood darkness...Villy shuffles toward the only shop with lights on. "OPEN 24 HOURS, TO BETTER SERVE YOU." He can barely push one foot in front of the other.

Villy stops at a corner of the building, sags into the alcove next to mailboxes belonging to the apartments upstairs. He pulls himself together. Glances at the mailboxes.

He presses on, up to the front door of the pharmacy. Pushes to enter, but bangs his shoulder into the glass because the door is locked. He winces in pain.

Impatiently, he slaps his palm on the door.

INT. PHARMACY COUNTER

Eugene HEARS, looks up. Sees the scruffy man banging on his front door glass. A street bum.

No shop owner in their right mind would let him in.

After a moment, Eugene lays the .45 back in the drawer, leaving the drawer part way open.

INT. STORE

Eugene walks up to the front door. He unlocks it.

Villy slouches inside and they eye each other. A tense moment.

EUGENE

Yes?

VILLY

Uh...man, you got some disinfectant? Rubbin' alcohol or somethin'?

EUGENE

I don't sell anything you can drink.

VILLY

Shit, I ain't gonna drink it!

EUGENE

If you don't have the money to buy anything, I'll have to ask you to leave.

VILLY

I can pay, man.

Villy shuffles deeper into the store, makes his way on back to the prescription counter. Eugene follows.

Villy fumbles in the pocket of his Navy peacoat, pulls out a wad and slaps it on the counter.

Cash. Maybe \$50 in small crumpled bills -- and also a sleek, ebony switchblade knife.

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