

The Silt Verses Chapter 13

FIELDS, EXT, DAY

We hear the sound of rain beginning to fall.

The gentle squeak of windscreen wipers.

The rain sound will endure throughout this episode.

FAULKNER:

(Narrating)

In time, it begins to rain.

The wipers scrape back and forth. We keep the windows down, letting a little of the wet air in, enjoying the sensation.

We no longer talk.

We drive onwards, Carpenter and I.

We take turns at the wheel, as the roads turn to rough and rocky trails through ruined villages and forgotten shrines.

We take turns at tuning and re-tuning the radio, calmly attempting to bypass the static and return ourselves to music and meaning, although all three of us know it's been days since we heard anything like a human voice and there are no longer any iron signal towers visible upon the horizon.

CARPENTER picks up the narration, quite calmly.

CARPENTER:

(Narrating)

And when the petrol gauge dims and the Petropater's dripping face blinks its final warning at us from the dashboard, we park the car beneath an old willow tree that hangs alone in the empty fields.

We get out, and we walk onwards, through the rain.

Gradually, the landscape obscures.

There comes a time when you can no longer see beyond the next hedgerow, the next stile, the next creeping outgrowth of stray forest overwhelming the burnt-out ruins.

High above in the distance, the shapes of rusted military saints on their towering long legs or rolling tracks are just barely visible.

And as we enter deeper into the trailing mists, a familiar, wet scent enters the air. A cool, sticky damp lingers on our skin, making us drip.

It's river mist, I think.

Somewhere out here, in the heart of the barren land, the waters have staked a claim for themselves.

And presently, we come to something strange.

FAULKNER picks up the narration again.

FAULKNER:

(Narrating)

An endless line of warning tape, stretching out across the fields before us. Neon orange, once bright and now hopelessly muddied, staked into the ground at intervals, here and there flapping free.

Old tyre tracks lie in the earth before it, pooling with water.

Someone has built a makeshift shrine to the Riddlespike, God of Boundaries; three crows, impaled upon iron railing-posts that have been driven into the ground.

It looks somehow desperate.

The police were here. Clearly.

And whatever they found beyond the tape, they didn't feel the need to stick around.

They abandoned this place, almost as soon as they found it.

Carpenter walks up to the tape and tears it down with a single, easy tear, like she's opening up a shopping mall.

We step over the boundary line and we keep walking.

CARPENTER:

(Narrating)

In time, we come to a lopsided but official-looking sign, hammered into the earth.

One last warning.

It reads,

A GOD WOUNDED THE LAND HERE.

TURN BACK.

Prayer-marks have been stamped frantically around the sign's edges, as if to keep something at bay.

From somewhere deep inside me, I feel...

FAULKNER:

(Narrating)

-the thrill of getting closer.

CARPENTER:

(Narrating)

-the weight of whatever's coming next.

FAULKNER:

(Narrating)

The final breath before the plunge.

CARPENTER:

(Narrating)

We pass the warning sign on by. We keep on walking.

And then far ahead of us, in the mists, we see something else.

FAULKNER:

(Narrating)

A great angular column of brick, stretching up into the sky.

A clocktower.

But the shape is malformed, and rotten, and beautiful. Great sweeping tides of silver barnacles climb its sides, twisting it this way and that.

Its spire has become something else. A vast, conical shell, ridged with elegant curves, glistening brightly in the sunlight.

CARPENTER:

(Narrating)

As the mists part, the rooftops of Bellwethers begin to drift into focus beneath the tower - and we can see that they, too, are different.

They've grown ancient. Decaying tiles, sprouting with catgrass and beset by the twisting shells of limpets. Chimneypots toppling and broken where they start.

And in the murk beneath, vast crustacean shapes lurk in the empty windows, twitching contentedly in the ruins of the town.

The two of us stand there, gazing up and out across a reshaped landscape.

And as the clock-hands strike the hour upon the great tower, something colossal stirs from within its shell, raising its tendrils lazily to enjoy the cool wet morning air.

The town has been returned to the water.

We hear the bells of the clocktower chiming.

A low, steady peal.

HAYWARD'S CAR, INT

Suddenly, we hear the sound of a car door opening. Feet squelching in the mud.

HAYWARD and DAGGLER have arrived at the group's abandoned car.

HAYWARD:
Do you hear that?

DAGGLER:
Bells. Town must be close.

Looks like this car was theirs. They went ahead on foot. Recently, too.
(As if a thought occurs to him)
Do you have a knife?

HAYWARD:
(Baffled)
Why would I have a knife?

DAGGLER:
(Ignoring him)
Forget it. Found one. Going to let the tyres down.

The sound of the tyres hissing.

DAGGLER:
Any word from Central on the back-up?

HAYWARD tries the tannoy. It hisses empty back to him.

We hear a faint buzz of static.

HAYWARD:

No. The tannoy's down. Even the radio seems to be busted.

DAGGLER:

(Accusatory)

I thought you fixed it, Hayward.

HAYWARD:

I did, I did, it just- it's the reception. There's no towers this far out.

DAGGLER:

Forget it. They can't be far behind us.

Ach, I'm not waiting for the cavalry.

Come on, Hayward! Or we'll lose them.

The police car door slams.

HAYWARD:

(Moving away from the car)

Coming! I-

(Remembering himself)

Ah.

We hear him skid back to the car, quickly open the door, and slam it again.

HAYWARD:

(Apologetically)

Almost forgot my gun.

DAGGLER:

(Withering)

Stick close by, Hayward, won't you?

The sound of running feet.

And above, we hear the peal of the final bells-

BELLWETHERS, EXT, DAY

-and then we're back in the town.

The sound of footsteps, wading through the mud.

CARPENTER:

(Narrating)

We wade forth, through the remnants of the town. The black and seething water rises to our ankles, then to our waists.

The concrete has sunk into ruin.

The clinging mud is everywhere.

Neon signs and shrines flash faintly from underneath the crawling black limpets and barnacles that coat every surface.

The river mist fills the corners of your vision, so thick and so choking that you can't see further than a few feet ahead.

As we walk, Faulkner slips, almost toppling into the torrent - I catch hold of him and steer him back upright.

He's glassy-eyed, grinning at me as he regains his balance. Close to delirious.

FAULKNER:

(Narrating)

It's hard, I have to admit, keeping myself focused at a time like this.

Because I'm already thinking ahead.

I can already see myself, in the not-too-distant future, bearing the mark of the Wither Tide home.

Stepping into the seminary building. All of the old faces there. Katabasian Poole. Mason. Cheering my name, discussing how this tale can best be added to the next chapters of the Silt Verses.

There's a seat for me there - not a throne, nothing like that, just a seat for the guest of honour - and I'll take my place there as we discuss what to do with this new weapon that's been granted to us.

And Carpenter, she can be there too, perhaps lurking in the doorway near the back of the crowd since she no longer wants to be at the centre of things, and she'll look up at me and maybe nod, or smile.

Because I know her now. I can understand how she fits into all of this.

Maybe Page is even there.

Perhaps she's come around to our point of view, in a novice's white robes, ready to learn with a fresh pair of eyes.

(Congratulating himself)

I've come so far, my river, since I first set out in search of you - to be capable of thinking so generously.

I glance at Carpenter, and she glances back at me.

And I know she's already changing her mind about leaving our faith behind.

You'd have to, when faced with revelations like this.

We're caught up in the currents of something immense, and it's dragging us someplace fast.

CARPENTER:

(Narrating)

That's exactly the problem, isn't it?

This is extraordinary.

This is beautiful. All of it.

The spider-crab angels walking softly upon their towers, stretching their mandibles in greeting to the sky.

The hallowed citizens that we encounter here and there, clinging from transformed flesh to the walls and pocked with barnacles, their empty eye-sockets and open mouths become nests for fluttering birds and their young.

With you on our side, my river, we can reshape the world...

...so long as we're willing to shape it like this.

And if it was just you and I here, I could make excuses for you.

I could find an explanation as to why you've led us to yet another pit of sodden horror and mindless primordiality, another playground for your whims, without hope or sense for either of us to be found within it.

If it was just you and I, alone in this place, I could reason us out of this mess...and keep on loving you.

Wait.

At the junction of the street ahead of us, something is walking out.

Its conch-shell residence totters back and forth as it strays past the abandoned cars.

Its two forearms are still human, and it places its muddied palms softly down onto the ground before it.

It turns, and the delicate whiskered tendrils of its mouth reach out curiously in our direction as it gazes upon us with lidded, blinking still-human eyes.

It doesn't seem to care that we've come to visit it.

Perhaps it recognises that we've come in the Trawler-man's name. Perhaps it doesn't make any difference.

It's at home here.

We are not.

The thing turns, and scuttles on, into the drowned heart of Bellwethers.

We'll have to-

The sound of the wet splashing footsteps resumes for a moment, but then-

CARPENTER:
(Crying out as she slips on her bad leg)
Ach!

FAULKNER:
Carpenter?

CARPENTER:
(Breathing hard)
I'm all right. I'm all right.

Just my leg. Stepped funny.

She wheezes for a moment.

Her leg isn't doing well. She's doing worse than she'd like to admit.

FAULKNER:
Do you want to keep going?

CARPENTER:
(Annoyed)

Yes. I want to keep going.

I just need to...

She runs out of breath.

FAULKNER has an idea. He wades away to find something floating nearby.

FAULKNER:

Here - driftwood. Seems sturdy enough.

(Trying to galvanise her)

I can lean on it, and you can lean on it, and we can hobble on together, and if one of us falls, we'll just crack heads and bounce upright.

CARPENTER:

(Wearily, but accepting his help)

Got it all figured out, don't you?

Leaning on the driftwood, they begin to slowly splash on together through the town.

FAULKNER:

(Cheerfully)

Two servants of the Trawler-man, walking into his garden together, leaning on each other for support.

It's the sort of thing they'll write about.

CARPENTER:

You're not turning me into an allegory, Faulkner.

FAULKNER:

No, but just think of it-

Their voices fade.

We hear the sound of them splashing onwards.

Silence.

The crabs chitter in the silence of the town.

We sit with the noise for a moment.

Then we hear the splashing footsteps of DAGGLER.

The crack as he steps on something's shell, deliberately and maliciously, and grinds it down.

DAGGLER:
Disgusting.

Hayward, come on! I can **smell** 'em!

HAYWARD:
(Calling out)
Coming, partner!
(Quietly, to himself)
Godsdamned lunatic.

We hear him stumble and fall - and then he continues to run after his partner.

PARK, EXT, DAY

Again, we hear the curious sounds of the crabs as they scuttle and chitter in the background.

The noise seems louder and more vivid now.

We're approaching something.

CARPENTER:
(Narrating)
And then the heart of the town rises up from out of the mists.

A great sunken park, stretching out on all sides before us.

The grass and flowerbeds have been blessed by the flood, growing tall and wild and strange above the water's surface.

Grey polyp trees sway back and forth like weeping willows in the morning breeze, as the rain falls, their tendrils reaching to the sky.

We're surrounded by people here, I realise.

They stand in mid-motion, walking their dogs or pushing their prams, calcified and reshaped and eroded by a dozen tides, as the water washes up around their waists.

A forest of people, strands of white river-coral extending from their heads and their outstretched arms.

We walk amongst them, silently and cautiously; they, too, are swaying, teeming, with life, and might wake at any moment.

The mists part.

And in the very centre of the park, painted in great strokes across the ruined wall of some clubhouse or public toilet, its purpose no longer clear...at last, we come to it.

The source of all this.

The Wither Mark.

And it's-

FAULKNER:

(Narrating)

-beautiful, of course.

Because the many strokes and swirls that make up the Wither Mark have changed.

They glint like quicksilver. They shift like water.

They look less like a pattern drawn upon a wall, and more like cracks, lines drawn in the firmament, leading us somewhere else.

And as we approach, I realise that we're not alone in our worship here.

Roake, the painter, is still standing before the wall, frozen in one final tableau.

His paintbrush is extended, nearly touching the wall, as if he was on the verge of drawing it back when the tide hit.

His eyes are open, and as we get close, they turn in their sockets to face us.

A stream of shimmering grey barnacles have grown across his mouth.

And as their many lips softly part, he whispers his final message.

The same phrase, over and over.

We hear that voice. Inhuman, croaking, and feeble - but persistent.

ROAKE:

The river rises. The river rises. The river rises.

Silence, as CARPENTER and FAULKNER gaze up at the Mark.

FAULKNER is the first to speak.

FAULKNER:

Think you'll be able to remember the shape of it?

Maybe we could write half of it out each. That way, we've got it on paper, but we're not putting ourselves at risk.

CARPENTER:

(Low and reluctant)

No need. I can remember it.

'I'm never going to be able to forget it' is her unspoken thought.

FAULKNER:

(Taking charge)

All right. We should head further in - maybe take a look at that clocktower before we leave.

They'll want us to see if the Trawler-man's made anything here that hasn't been recorded before. What do you think?

CARPENTER is hesitant, but resolved, when she next speaks.

CARPENTER:

Faulkner.

We can't take this back to the Parish.

I'm sorry. I know that isn't what you want to hear from me.

But it's the truth.

And as soon as she says it, FAULKNER knows what's coming.

FAULKNER:

(Disappointed and wounded)

Not **again**, Carpenter.

CARPENTER:

(Trying to explain herself)

I can't be responsible for bringing this down on the world.

And you - you can't be responsible either.

It isn't fair to you.

ROAKE croaks again. It's like punctuation, the tension rising, throughout the scene that follows.

ROAKE:
The river rises.

FAULKNER:
You **said** you had the stomach for this fight.

CARPENTER:
It's not just about us any more, Faulkner.

This thing - this is anathema, it's toxic. It's too much.

Can you really tell me you trust Mason to use this Mark responsibly?
That only the right people will be hurt and nobody else?

We can't work with this.

So we forget what we saw. We go our separate ways. There's no shame in that.

You can live with your god alone just as well as anywhere else.

ROAKE:
The river rises.

FAULKNER pleads with her.

FAULKNER:
You're acting like this is out of our hands, and it's not - this is the weapon we've been looking for.

This is our chance to strike back at them.

CARPENTER:
(Dismissively)
Oh, who's **them**? The justices? The police? The entire apparatus of the Legislatures?

This thing doesn't come with a face you or I can strike at.

FAULKNER is beginning to grow angry.

FAULKNER:
They killed your parents. They killed your Nana Glass. They wiped our people from the records. Don't you care about any of that?

Because I care, Carpenter. Why don't you?

CARPENTER:

Oh, don't even try it. That's is **my** rage to carry. It's my hurt, it's my sorrow. You don't get to share it with me.

You're a convert, Faulkner. Stop pretending, stop performing.

None of this belongs to you. You want to play messiah and we're just the most convenient vessel.

ROAKE:

The river rises.

FAULKNER:

(Now deeply wounded)

The Trawler-Man brought me here. To this place. On sacred pilgrimage.

He wanted us to find this-

CARPENTER:

I don't know what he wants, and neither do you. I don't know if he wants anything that could make sense to us.

I just know that we can't reshape the world like this.

FAULKNER:

So find me something better.

CARPENTER:

(Growing truly desperate)

I don't **have** anything better. I don't have the answers. But we can figure it out.

Together, you and I, we can figure it out. We just need to find a way to wipe this Mark from the wall-

ROAKE:

The river rises.

Now CARPENTER completely loses her temper.

CARPENTER:

(To ROAKE)

Shut up! Shut up, you vile thing-

A sound of cracking bone as she shatters the calcified man to smithereens-

And almost instantly, the sound of a punch. FAULKNER strikes CARPENTER in the face, knocking her down.

CARPENTER cries out as her leg topples.

Then she stops.

In the scuffle, he's taken her revolver, and now he cocks it.

Both of them are breathing hard.

FAULKNER:
Don't try and get up, Carpenter.
(Furiously, as she immediately tries to get up)
Stay there, I said!

CARPENTER:
(Dazed)
Got a...a mean swing on you.

Vigour of the young.

FAULKNER is too furious to listen to her.

FAULKNER:
You know what hurts most, after all of this?

You still aren't listening to me.

You think this is your decision to make and not mine, and I'll fall in line with your way of seeing things if you raise your voice just enough.

I'm **sorry** you don't feel like you used to, Carpenter. I'm sorry about that.

But you don't get to ruin it for me as well.

CARPENTER:
(Weakly)
Just wait-

Faulkner, listen for just one second. Listen to me-

FAULKNER:
(Coldly)
No.

No, I'm not going to.

FAULKNER turns, and goes.

We hear the sound of his footsteps, splashing away into the distance.

Silence reigns for a long moment. We can hear the chittering of the crab-angels.

CARPENTER tries briefly to raise herself up off her leg - and shrieks in pain, toppling back.

CARPENTER:
Shit!

She lies back there in the shallows, breathing hard.

CARPENTER:
Mm. Lost a tooth.

The sound of her spitting - and the tooth plopping softly into the water.

CARPENTER:
(To the Trawler-man, airily)
You can have that one for free.

She takes a breath - and anger builds in her voice as she speaks to her god.

CARPENTER:
Happy, are you? With how it turned out?

You'll take that boy, and you'll eat him up.

It doesn't matter if you do it today in this sodden ruin you've created, or you wait forty years until he's old and quaking and calls it a blessing to have your servants crawling out from behind his eyes to seek new light - you'll take all that was good and all that was rotten and every ounce of potential in him and you'll eat every part of him up.

And you'll keep on whispering to him that he's right on the verge of realising something, gaining something real and true, and he'll keep walking his way towards your baited fucking lure as it skitters away at every turn until you're ready to bite.

(Furiously)
Doesn't that make you ashamed?

To scavenge off our lives, when they're all we have?

What is the *point* of you?

You son of a bitch! You wet, dead-eyed bastard!

Her voice echoes in the silence, unanswered.

We wait.

Then we hear-

DAGGLER:
(Distant, calling)
I heard something!

HAYWARD:
(Distant, calling)
Over there! Hey! Hey, don't move!

We hear the sound of splashing feet as the policemen approach.

CARPENTER:
(To herself, wearily)
And now this.

The splashing feet approach.

CARPENTER does not try and get up.

The sound of a pair of revolvers being cocked as DAGGLER and HAYWARD stand over her.

HAYWARD:
Sandra, wasn't it?

CARPENTER:
(Wearily)
Hello, Investigating Officer Hayward.

DAGGLER:
(To HAYWARD)
This is one of them?

HAYWARD:
Yes, it is.

DAGGLER:
(Threateningly, to CARPENTER)
Pleased with yourself, are you, mud-worshipper? Just look at what you've done here. Look at these people.
(To HAYWARD)
Check her for weapons.

HAYWARD:
(To CARPENTER)
Where's your friend? He here too?

CARPENTER:
(Calmly)
I killed him. He was infirm in his faith.

HAYWARD:
(To DAGGLER)
She's clean.

DAGGLER:
Good. Get her up.

A watery sound as CARPENTER is dragged upright.

CARPENTER:
Mind my leg, mind my leg!

HAYWARD:
Come on. Let's get her back to the car.

They begin to walk.

But DAGGLER has something else on his mind.

DAGGLER:
Hayward. Wait a second.

HAYWARD:
Come on. Cavalry can't be long.

He begins to splash away through the water, dragging CARPENTER along with him.

DAGGLER does not move.

DAGGLER:
(Calling after him)
Hayward.

I want to float something by you, son. See if we're on the same wavelength here.

I'm thinking it might be easier on both of us if she doesn't make it back.

HAYWARD stops walking.

He turns back to face DAGGLER.

HAYWARD:
(*Uncertainly*)
What do you mean, easier?

DAGGLER:
(*Temptingly*)
Let's say she ran. Let's say she resisted. Let's say we didn't have a choice.

They'll believe us, partner. No matter what we want to tell them.

Just look at what they've done here. The ruin of it.

Nobody's going to care where she ends up dying.

We're free to make our own choices, here and now.

CARPENTER:
(*To HAYWARD, exhausted*)
You going to let him do this? Really, are you?

HAYWARD:
(*To CARPENTER*)
Quiet.
(*To DAGGLER*)
What happens if I tell you no, Dagglers?

DAGGLER:
(*Dismissively*)
You're not going to tell me no.

HAYWARD:
What if I stop you?

DAGGLER:
(*Disbelieving*)
Oh, please.

HAYWARD:
Wait-

A loud shot rings out as DAGGLER takes aim and fires at CARPENTER.

Simultaneously, we hear a splash as HAYWARD shoves CARPENTER down into the water.

She surfaces a second later.

Both are unharmed - and almost equally furious.

CARPENTER:
(*Yelling at DAGGLER*)
Are you insane?

HAYWARD:
(*Yelling at DAGGLER*)
You could have shot me.

CARPENTER:
(*To DAGGLER*)
He's lost his mind, you need to stop him-

DAGGLER:
(*Calmly, to HAYWARD*)
I don't miss, partner.

HAYWARD:
You just did.

DAGGLER:
(*Lying easily*)
She was drawing a knife. You didn't check her properly. She was about to go for your throat. You're lucky I saw it in time-

HAYWARD:
Stop lying to me, Daggle.

DAGGLER:
(*Just as calmly*)
Compelling, though, ain't it?

Put it this way.

If she dies now, they'll give us a commendation for courage under fire.
And we'll get that Stink off you, I can promise you that.

If she goes to trial, they'll give us paperwork....and then who knows what could happen.

Do you really care enough to take a stand, here of all places? About this mud-worshipper, of all people?

We're meant to be a team, aren't we, partner? Us against the world?

Come on, now, what do you say?

Silence.

HAYWARD does not immediately respond. He's hesitating.

DAGGLER:
Thought so.

You just stand back, Hayward. Nothing to worry about. I'll take care of everything else.

And then we hear a familiar voice, crying out in the distance.

FAULKNER:
(Faintly)
Leave her alone!

DAGGLER:
(Annoyed, to himself)
Now who's this?

CARPENTER:
(Narrating)
Faulkner leans heavily on his driftwood staff, as he wades forward towards us, emerging from the mists.

He's taken a moment to paint himself in the only materials he had to hand.

His skin has been daubed in thick mud. The marks of faith, crude and dripping as they are, descend across his arms and his face.

In his free hand, he's carrying my revolver.

I have to admit it, he looks the part.

Like a prophet of the river.

FAULKNER:
(Calling out, furiously, from a distance)
Enemies of the tides. Landridden.

Servants of the false Legislatures.

You are **not** welcome in this place!

DAGGLER turns to face him.

DAGGLER:

(Calling out)

Stop right there.

(Reciting threateningly)

I am a faithful servant of the lawful government of the Peninsula and of the Cloak, whose ken is a just resolution and whose disciples are those who seek it.

You will stand down - or you will be shot.

Do you hear me?

He waits for a response - but FAULKNER ignores him.

FAULKNER:

(Calling out, urgently)

Carpenter.

It's time to run.

His voice rings out across the park.

CARPENTER:

(Narrating)

Faulkner raises his staff high.

And something vast and terrible comes crashing through the wall behind him, toppling brick and smashing glass, tearing the Wither Mark to smithereens in an instant.

Its twisted conical shell shifts left and right, ploughing through the falling masonry.

Faulkner stands there for a single heartbeat, his painted palms raised in frozen salute, as the hermit-crab angel charges forward through the water towards us.

Then he turns, and dives away into the mists.

He's learnt his lesson, it seems, about letting the Trawler-man's servants get too close to him.

The angel ignores him.

It keeps coming for us instead.

We hear the unearthly screech of the angel, the torrents of water being splashed up as it charges.

DAGGLER:
(To himself, trying to maintain his calm)
Right, then.

CARPENTER:
(Narrating)
I'll say this much. The policeman doesn't flinch.

He strides forward through the water, squinting down the sight of his pistol.

He aims, shoots once, twice - and the angel sweeps him up off his feet.

He's screaming as he continues to fire ineffectually up into the maw of its open mouth.

Human hands outstretch to caress his face. They grip hard.

Its ridged claw clenches over him, the tendons tightening.

He stops firing. Stops screaming.

The revolver drops.

HAYWARD:
(Yelling)
Daggler?

CARPENTER:
(Narrating)
A moment of silence.

And then the segmented halves of the policeman fall into the water in a single, symmetrical splash.

We hear it too. The splash of DAGGLER's body falling into the water.

CARPENTER:
(Narrating)
The angel gazes down at him.

Then it turns its great carapace towards us, and bellows a single swollen note out into the mists.

All around us, the coral-people are beginning to shiver, their heads turning blearily and reluctantly towards us; dragging their legs free from their own moorings.

The town is waking up to its intruders.

HAYWARD:
(Urgently and under his breath, to CARPENTER)
You ready to die here?

CARPENTER:
Not just yet.

HAYWARD:
Then come with me.

Come on, **run!**

He shoves her forward.

And together, they begin to run.

We hear the hermit-crab bellow again, as the town slowly comes to life.

And the rising sound of sirens, in the distance.

The cavalry is here.

And then the noise fades out.

A long silence. We might imagine the episode has ended.

But then-

CAR AT THE BORDER CROSSING, INT

The sound of a car slowing to a halt.

We can hear the rain sound more faintly and tinnily now - we're in the taxi with PAIGE.

PAIGE:
(to the unheard DRIVER)
Why is the barrier down?

They don't close the border at night, do they?

Don't worry, I'll go ask.

She opens the car door - the rain sound grows louder - and runs out.

BORDER BOOTH, INT

We can hear the BORDER GUARD, sat in his booth, munching on a packet of crisps without a great deal of concern.

And the radio is playing SID WRIGHT's show.

SID is dying. We can hear it in his voice. He rambles incoherently, slowing to a halt.

SID:

(Incredibly slow and drawn-out, growing fainter)

And the...she couldn't tell me...

The...hurt of it all, I don't...

I don't...

The thump of his head hitting the desk.

A long silence.

Then we hear the door creak open, and the sound of a PRODUCER entering the recording studio.

PRODUCER:

(Distantly, talking to someone else in the room)

Yup, he's gone.

Gods, that took forever.

Pack him up and get him out of the booth. We'll bring in Stephanie to start her shift.

(Into the mic, brightly)

Well, hey, there, folks! Sid Wright has just about finished his shift now.

But don't worry, his successor has been waiting patiently to step in for the past few days now, and she's finally going to be introducing herself, right after these m-

He begins to gurgle unpleasantly.

A moment later, we hear the sound of his body hitting the floor.

SID takes the mic again. His voice sounds different.

Unnatural, and utterly calm, with a soothing quality to it.

SID WRIGHT:

I'm afraid I've changed my mind about sleep.

I don't think it's such a terrible thing.

In fact, I think we could do with a little more of it. And I'm not so sure I'm willing to be a sacrifice after all.

Because in the soft and silent space between death and dreaming, I have glimpsed a better gospel, and I have witnessed the birth of a superior god.

And in a thousand tongues I whisper its glad hosanna: sleep. You've done enough. Your work is done.

Sleep. Never wake.

Sleep.

His voice is hypnotic, powerful, and terrifying.

The radio hisses, and then cuts out once more.

And very suddenly, we can hear a thump as the BORDER GUARD collapses in his chair, fast asleep, his head hitting his desk.

After a moment, he begins to snore.

We can hear PAIGE's frantic knocking on the booth door, to close us out.

PAIGE:

Sir? Sir?

Is everything all right in there?