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CAMERA REVIEW

POLICY 8.4 requires three random video reviews.

11 p.m.

Camera 12.

Fisheye lens, silence.

The audio broke three months ago;
the work order is just another pending ghost.

Here is the state of New York's version of the truth:

TUESDAY

- 19:34:07** Sam Harrison strikes Michelle Williams.
Impact to mandible.
She goes down hard.
- 19:34:19** Sam puts his fist through the dayroom window.
The glass is shatterproof.
The glass shatters.
- 19:34:41** He uses a shard to open a two-inch laceration on his
left forearm.
Deep enough for pressure.
Not deep enough for the ED.
We know the calculus:
what bleeds but doesn't transfer,
what scars but doesn't escalate the paperwork.
- 19:35:02** Therapeutic hold initiated.
Garcia and Chen pin the shoulders.
I prepare the injection.
Haldol 5 mg. Ativan 2 mg. Intramuscular.
- 19:58:00** The chemistry begins to win.

20:15:00

Sam sits at the table.
Thompson watches him count cards
nobody is playing.

Stop. Rewind.

Thompson walks backward to the nurses' station.
The cards fly up into Sam's hands.
Sam rises from the table,
moves in reverse toward the crisis.

The medication separates in the bloodstream.
Five milligrams of haloperidol,
two of lorazepam
retreat through muscle tissue,
up through the needle,
dividing into separate syringes.

I carefully recap them.
Return them to the cart.

The vials reseal themselves.
They jump back into boxes,
into refrigerated trucks
driving backward to New Jersey.

At the Janssen plant,
the assembly line runs in reverse.
Haldol becomes its precursor compounds:

haloperidol to fluorobutyrophenone.
Complexity dissolving back into questions.

The pharmaceutical patents expire in reverse,
the research trials un-happen,
test subjects getting sicker backward
until they're well enough
to never need the trials at all.

Sam's blood threads itself back into his arm,
and the cut zips shut
like God changed his mind.

The glass shard flies across the room
with purpose,
like it knows where it belongs.
It clicks into the window,
and the window remembers
it's supposed to be shatterproof,
even though it's been lying about that
for twenty years.

The therapeutic hold releases.
Our hands unpinch
from Sam's shoulders and wrists.
We walk backward out of the room,
Chen and Garcia returning
to whatever they were documenting,
me pretending to audit treatment plans.

We move with that strange backward dignity
that makes even a psychiatric emergency
look choreographed.

Michelle rises from the floor
as if pulled by invisible strings.
Her glasses reassemble on her face.

Sam's fist opens
into what it always was:
a sixteen-year-old's hand
that should be holding
a PlayStation controller
or a girlfriend's fingers
or a diploma
that gets harder to reach
every day he's here.

The incident report deletes itself,
letter by letter
as the cursor eats the text backward.

The diagnosis codes retreat through their editions.
F91.3 becomes F91.2 becomes nothing.
Sam stops being Oppositional Defiant
and becomes just oppositional,
then just angry,
then just a kid
whose dad went to war
and whose mom found heroin
more reliable than therapy.

Keep going. The tape
doesn't care about visiting hours:

The police car that brought Sam here
sucks its lights back into its roof
and reverses away from our back entrance.
The one by the dumpsters,
where families don't have to see the arrivals.

The squad car drives backward
through the Bronx evening
to the group home,
where the hole Sam punched in their wall
fills itself with drywall and spackle and paint,
leaving no evidence

except in Sam's knuckles,
which are already healing backward too.

His fourth foster father's hand unclenches.
The beer he threw returns
to his hand, to his mouth,
to the bottle, to the six-pack,
to the bodega cooler,

then to the Budweiser plant in Newark.
There it becomes water and barley and hops,
which become rain and soil and sunshine
that never knew it would end up as ammunition.

Further back:

The needle—
same gauge as mine, same purpose—
pulls the heroin from his mother's veins.
The liquid un-cooks.
It travels back
to the spoon,
the baggie,
the brick.

It crosses the ocean,
becomes opium,
becomes resin,
becomes poppies
blowing in a field in Helmand Province
where Sam's father is walking backward on patrol.

The war is un-happening.
The IED reassembles itself from scattered metal,
pulling its malice back into the earth.
The explosion implodes into silence.

The shrapnel flies out of Kevin's legs.
The Humvee un-burns.
Everyone becomes nineteen and invincible again.

They all un-volunteer for the army,
walking backward out of the recruitment office,
returning to their high school gyms
where they're about to graduate.

Then backward through senior year,
junior year, all the way

to being children who haven't yet learned
that some countries need liberating
and some people need medicating.

The tape arrives:
spring day, 2015.

Sam is two in Prospect Park.
His parents are still married,
standing close enough to touch.

Sam throws the bread.
The water accepts it.
The ducks snap the crusts from the surface,
hungry for anything given freely.

This is where I want
to stop the tape,
but tapes don't stop
just because you want them to.

So I press play,
and time moves in its merciless forward direction.

Everything happens exactly as it must:
the deployment,
the divorce,
the overdose,
the foster homes,
the police,
our loading dock,
the therapeutic hold,
the needle finding muscle.
The twenty-three minutes of waiting for chemistry
to beat down a sixteen-year-old's rage.

The quiet we're paid to create.

I type my review:

“CAM12 19:30–20:30 reviewed.
Emergency safety intervention per protocol.
Haldol 5 mg/Ativan 2 mg administered.
Patient stabilized.
No emergency transfer required.”

I close the laptop.
Pour the coffee.
Garcia leans in the doorway,
asks how the night is running.
“Calm,” I say.
The meds have finally won.
“Good,” he says.
And we let the lie sit between us.