

DARKO

Written by

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EPISODE 1:

EXT. CHINATOWN ALLEY - NIGHT

A woman in a loose hoodie and baggy jeans hustles down an alley in Chinatown, Brooklyn Bridge visible in the distance.

They climb a dumpster then impressively jump to a fire escape. They smoothly pull themselves up and scurry up the side of the building.

EXT. CHINATOWN ROOF

They stare out at the NYC skyline, the city pockmarked by lights. We turn around to meet ANGELA (35) her natural hair spilling out beyond her hood, dark skin, reveling in the height and sight, breathing the air.

Movement catches her attention on the building across the street.

Three boys clad in night-gear make their way across the tops of buildings.

EXT. ANOTHER CHINATOWN ROOF

They wave excitedly, whistle and hoot her on. She gives a huge wave back.

EXT. CHINATOWN ROOF

Many of the roofs in the area are blanketed in graffiti, but she has another prize in mind. There's a water tower a couple of buildings over, at least another hundred feet up. She climbs the railing, gets herself up and over, and starts to make her way, bit by bit.

EXT. ANOTHER CHINATOWN ROOFTOP

The other kids watch her climb in amazement.

EXT. APARTMENT WINDOW

A couple of people watch from their windows.

An older lady disapproves.

EXT. WATER TOWER BASE - LATER

The water tower is old. There's graffiti at the base, but it doesn't continue up the side of the tower. The ladder attached is rusted, flaking, and rickety.

ANGELA

Here we go.

She tests the ladder. It holds. She climbs.

As she makes her way up, she sees tags of rivals, marking the highest that they made it.

The last one, 'Wolf,' is halfway up the ladder.

She stops climbing, anchors herself, manages to get a can out of her bag and POPS the cap which falls down.

The tower isn't the highest point in the city, but it's the highest mid-sized building nearby.

The can SHAKES. She's about to spray when she notices another signature, just a few rungs up.

She has to match it. She makes her way up, rung by rung.

EXT. WATER TOWER - MOMENTS LATER

She reaches the tag.

ANGELA

'Seen,' of course. Clown.

There are only a couple of steps left to the top. She smirks.

EXT. TOP OF WATER TOWER

A couple of shaky steps and she's up. She looks all around.

No tags. She's the best.

She looks down at the top of the tower.

ANGELA'S POV:

The image of what will be starts to snap into place, visualized in full color in her mind.

She smirks and pulls her shirt up to cover her nose, and then starts to spray with quick light slashes.

'DARKO' across the entire top of the water tower.

EXT. CHINATOWN ROOF

The adrenaline leaving her system, she touches down on the first roof. She drops a couple of empty cans out of her bag and she heads across.

She hears SHUFFLING from the fire escape.

ANGELA

Oh crap.

She shoves as many cans as possible into her bag as the balding head of POLICE MAN 1 crests the edge of the roof.

Unseen, she hides in the darkness on the other side of the roof.

Policeman 1 gets up onto the roof as POLICE WOMAN 2, much younger and not balding, comes out of the stairway.

POLICEMAN 1

Next time you can take the fire escape, noobie.

POLICEWOMAN 2

Or we could both just take the stairs...

POLICEMAN 1

Pincer approach!

He sees the spray cans and picks one up.

POLICEMAN 1 (CONT'D)

New paint. He's close.

They circle the roof with their flashlights, slowly closing on Angela's position.

She takes a deep breath, THROWS her bag to distract.

POLICEWOMAN 2

Over here!

Angela RUNS towards the fire escape.

POLICEWOMAN 2 (CONT'D)

Freeze!

She swings over the side landing hard on the other roof and tries to get into the building. It's locked.

ANGELA

Crap.

She runs around. The police find a ladder around the other side and they start to descend.

Angela is trapped. She looks down the side of the building.

EXT. CHINATOWN STREET NIGHT

Police cars surround the building.

EXT. ANOTHER CHINATOWN ROOFTOP

The kids on the other roof watch as police converge.

EXT. CHINATOWN ROOF

Her only chance is to -

ANGLE ON: THE LEDGE

Jump to the next building. She gives herself some room, breathes, and then *sprints* at the ledge.

Coming closer and closer...

But she slows, slows, and then stops.

She can't do it.

She's TACKLED to the ground.

She's cuffed.

EXT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT

She's put into a cruiser - her face showing some fear under the red and blue lights. Then she's taken to -

INT. PRECINCT LOCKUP

A holding cell with several other adults and kids. Elbows on her knees and chin in her hands she looks exhausted and disappointed unlike others in the cell who are lively, clowning, talking shit to each other.

PRECINCT COP (O.S.)
Davidson! Your mother is here.

OTHERS
Awww!/Ooooo!/Mommy's here!

INT. PRECINCT

She's led into the lobby where MIRIAM (52), tall, broad, brown and tough as a single mother to bad ass kids waits, brow low and scowl fierce.

ANGELA
Hi.

She doesn't respond. She turns and walks out.

INT. Q TRAIN DAY

The *early* morning commute has started. The sun still over the horizon somewhere, but it's glow shows 80s New York covered head to toe in graffiti.

Miriam and Angela sit next to each other, Angela with her face pressed up against the window, Miriam betraying no emotions.

MIRIAM
You're too old for this mess.

ANGELA
Again, I'm sorry. I never got caught before.

MIRIAM
You got caught today. You gonna stop?

Angela says nothing. Miriam sucks her teeth.

EXT. SUBWAY TRAIN ON THE BRIDGE

The train enters the tunnel.

INT. Q TRAIN

Angela watches the tunnel walls as Miriam starts nodding off to the rhythmic clunk of the train. She puts her hand on the glass. It seems like she's longing for something.

INT. DARKO LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A three bedroom Brooklyn apartment furnished with hand-me-down furniture from the 70s. There are photos of the family everywhere, Mom, Grandma, and two boys.

CHRIS (17) lightly tatted, messy hair, skinny in boxers and a tee sits on one end of the couch, and LITTLE JEROME PAUL (4), a chunky light skinned little boy with his pointer finger in his mouth, eyes glued to the tv, sits all the way on the other end. There is a tension, however much there can be between a teenager and a toddler.

The door CREAKS open, and Miriam and Angela enter. The door SLAMS shut behind them.

MIRIAM

We're back.

CHRIS

Great. Can I go to bed now?

He stretches and gets up. JP continues to watch TV.

ANGELA

Did you have to tell Chris -

MIRIAM

I had to tell him where I was going at four in the morning.

CHRIS

Finally got caught, huh ma? Real teenager stuff.

MIRIAM

Boy, shut up.

ANGELA

Hi, little angel!

She plucks JP off of the couch and spins him around, JP still trying to look at the TV.

JP

Hi.

CHRIS

I'm going to bed. I have to WORK later. You know, work? For bail money.

Angela ignores him.

He heads to his room and roughly closes his door.

ANGELA
Watcha watching?

JP
Sesame Street.

ANGELA
Ooo - who is that big yellow guy?

JP
Big bird.

ANGELA
He's your favorite huh?

Miriam clears her throat.

ANGELA (CONT'D)
I don't need to hear it, mama.

MIRIAM
You sure? You don't seem to have
heard me once, yet.

Miriam moves into the kitchen. Angela kisses JP on the head
and follows.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)
What is your plan? You're lucky
they let you out tonight.

Angela keeps her voice down.

ANGELA
Please don't start with the plan
talk.

MIRIAM
Your way isn't working, I just
bailed you out.

ANGELA
Mommy it's fine. It was just a
ticket, after all that.

MIRIAM
Next time it won't be fine, and
what if I can't afford it? Can
you?

ANGELA

I'll get a job, I'll keep a job I promise.

MIRIAM

You said that before. What are you going to do different?

ANGELA

I'll... just do it this time.

MIRIAM

Darko. What does that even mean. Is that supposed to be poetic?

Miriam shakes her head and starts making coffee with a percolator.

JP

(from the couch)

No coffee! It smells too bad.

MIRIAM

I'm sorry, baby, but it's coffee time.

JP

Yuck!

Huffs and sits down.

Angela watches Miriam make her coffee, then looks at JP.

ANGELA

Why am I so messed up?

MIRIAM

You aren't messed up, baby. You just won't grow up. Chris? That boy grown.

ANGELA

Oh. So grown means making money.

MIRIAM

Yes.

ANGELA

He's not even going to finish high school. What kind of future is that? *Darko* went to college.

MIRIAM

Is yours better? It definitely doesn't mean playing with paint like these young boys out here, breaking the law, prowling in the streets at all hours.

Miriam looks at her sharp and hard.

ANGELA

You don't get it.

MIRIAM

What don't I get?

ANGELA

What it means to me to be out there. How it feels to figure out the spot, get to the spot, plan it out, make it big - huge - so everyone seen it, knows who you are and where you've been. And not get caught. I only got caught one time. *One time.* Nobody gets away like me.

MIRIAM

I thought you cared about the painting. Now it's the thrill?

Angela plays with her hands.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

No, I don't get it, Darko.

ANGELA

I'll get a job soon.

MIRIAM

Time for bed.

She points down. JP is under the table, listening to Angela and Miriam.

ANGELA

Come on.

She takes JP by the hand.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

Night Mommy.

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM

There is a full size bed shoved in the corner and a desk blanketed with artwork: sketches of people in an absurdist style with big heads and exaggerated expressions piled on top of beautiful realist drawings of people on the subway during their morning commute.

Angela is clearly a studied and fantastic artist.

On the wall are paintings of the family: JP crawling after a younger Chris, who stands with his arms crossed and a grumpy face. Sketches of JP on Miriam's lap.

On the other side of the room are another small bed and drawers, not covered in paper. There are a few childish drawings taped to the wall.

JP runs and hops onto the bed. Angela comes and sits next to him.

ANGELA

Ready for bed?

He shakes his head 'no' very enthusiastically.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

Yeah, I didn't think so. Come sit, lets draw something.

JP

Okay!

He climbs into the chair at the desk.

ANGELA

Alright, sir. Let's see -

She DIGS THROUGH THE MESS. After a moment she expertly tosses one, two, then several jumbo crayons and a sketching pad in front of him.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

All yours.

JP

Okay!

He picks out a yellow crayon and starts with the sun.

Angela lays down on her bed and flips open a black and white composition book filled with sketches, rough drafts. On a fresh page she starts to sketch JP while he draws.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

The sun is coming up. Miriam is asleep in her chair in the living room, next to the couch.

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM

Angela wakes up roughly.

ANGELA
What time is it?

She sits up and looks over. JP has put himself to bed.

THE COMPOSITION BOOK:

Angela has mostly finished a rough sketch of JP drawing. The book sits on the bed as she gets up.

She gets up and goes over to tuck him JP in.

She leans over the desk to pull the shade and block the morning light.

ANGLE ON: JPs DRAWING

JP has drawn himself as Superman, flying over an apartment building. Miriam is in one of the windows with her awful coffee percolator. He's drawn Angela with her own cape standing on the roof, watching him fly.

Angela studies it with pride. The figures are more than stick figures but less than real life. Pretty advanced for a four year old.

JP sleeps soundly.

10 YEARS LATER

INT. JP'S BEDROOM - MORNING

The door to the apartment OPENS and SLAMS shut.

JP's eyes open.

JP (14) is a little heavier, a little rounder than other kids his age. His hair is long and wild, maybe he's growing out for braids. He's tired.

He's in the same bedroom but in the bigger bed, the smaller is gone. Almost all of the art from before is gone.

There's a Fugee's poster, the drawing JP did of himself and his mother as superheroes and the drawing of baby JP, Chris, and Grandma.

JP rolls out from under one or two heavy textbooks. He puts them on the desk, in front of other textbooks and a photo of Angela, bordered in a floral frame.

MIRIAM (O.S.)

JP! Get going!

JP

(yelling back)

I'm up!

INT. DARKO LIVING ROOM

The furniture is the same but everything is a little more faded. The family photos are still there, but on a side table there's a photo of Angela with a lit candle in front of it.

JP comes out of his room in a baggy hoodie and cargo pants as his brother CHRIS (27), built a little bit broader and muscular now is removing his doorman's uniform. He has a fade with a thunderbolt shaved into the side of his head.

JP

Morning Grandma!

MIRIAM (63) hasn't changed at all.

She slides milk and cereal across the counter.

MIRIAM

Breakfast for you -

She slides a plate of chicken, rice, and greens next to it.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

And dinner for you.

JP hurries to his bowl and takes it to the couch. He grunts at Chris as he passes, a 'hello'. Turns on the TV.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

Boy, you did not wake up in a different life. No TV in the morning.

He turns it off.

Chris takes his at the counter, leaning against it like a smooth operator.

CHRIS
They fed me today.

MIRIAM
(skeptical)
Mmmhm. What?

CHRIS
Collards and turkey, cornbread, a
whole feast!

He's lying.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Cold pizza.

She nudges the plate closer.

MIRIAM
Eat some of the greens at least
before you lay down.

He takes his plate next to JP on the couch. They sit and eat
very similarly.

CHRIS
How's school?

JP
Cool. How's work?

CHRIS
'Nother day, 'nother dollar.

JP chuckles at that. Chris smiles but he's tired, the words
for him are life.

Chris points behind JP.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Make sure you clean that up later.

JP, confused, looks behind. Chris grabs his bowl and drinks
the sugary milk.

JP
HEY!

CHRIS
You gotta get your speed up, man,
that was pitiful.

He puts down the bowl and shadow boxes JP, who flinches at
almost every swing.

MIRIAM

JP let's keep it moving. You got something for me?

JP

Yes ma'am.

Chris takes the dishes to the sink. JP gets his report card out of his backpack and brings it to Miriam. He YAWNS deep.

ANGLE ON THE REPORT CARD

A's straight down the line.

MIRIAM

Now that is something right there.

He beams a smile, and she signs it. Chris takes a look and whistles, then kisses Miriam on the cheek.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

'Night honey. You got work today?

CHRIS

Yes ma'am, butcher at 2.

MIRIAM

I'll get you up.

He goes to his room, already sliding out of his pants. He has stupid bright silly boxer-briefs on.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

Have a good day, JP.

JP

Have a good day, Grandma.

He grabs his large and full backpack and he's out the door.

EXT. BROOKLYN

It's hot.

JP walks to the subway with thin orange tipped headphones on. He's listening to the Fugees on a Walkman in his back pocket, with a cord snaked through his clothes, coming up through his collar.

He's great at navigating the crowds, bobbing and weaving like a cat to avoid running into people. He keeps his head up.

SHAY (14) starts following him. She's tall, all legs and arms. She sneaks up behind him like a spy. As she gets close behind him -

SHAY
(deep voice)
Hey kid, run your pockets!

JP jumps

JP
Ah! Take it!

He's loud and people look.

SHAY
Chill, chill, *chill*. People are gonna think I'm *actually* jumping you.

JP
Don't sneak up on me!

SHAY
You're jumpy.

They greet each other with an over elaborate dap up.

SHAY (CONT'D)
You noticed it's hot, right?

She picks at his clothes.

JP
It's light. Leave me alone, I'm comfortable.

He wipes sweat.

JP (CONT'D)
Really.

SHAY
Uh huh.

INT. ATLANTIC TERMINAL SUBWAY - CONTINUOUS

Shay jumps the turnstile.

JP has a pocket full of tokens he uses to get into the subway.

INT. ATLANTIC TERMINAL PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

Swampy, sticky heat.

A train is pulling up as they descend to the platform.

SHAY
Want to sit today?

JP
Yeah.

Shay gives a thumbs up.

JP grabs her backpack and as Shay pushes through the crowd to the front. The door opens, and before people can get off, she's already dragging JP through the press, drawing frowns from commuters.

They snag a two seater in the corner.

SHAY
Oh yeah!

INT. Q TRAIN

The train clunks on the track, the lights pass by.

The train is very full.

Shay carves her name into the seat.

JP slides a little sketch pad out of the side pocket of his backpack. He wipes some sweat off of his face.

As he searches for an empty page we see dozens of clever and fantastical drawings. He's a natural.

Shay looks over his shoulder.

SHAY
Dude, you're so good. Why won't you accept that.

JP
It's just drawing.

SHAY
Just.

JP
You know what I mean. Not like you. You put effort into yours.

INT. Q TRAIN - LATER

JP's mind is outside the crowded train. He squints into the light as the train emerges onto the bridge.

EXT. MANHATTAN BRIDGE

The pair look out at the city together. The train is so crowded, there's not much else to look at.

JUMBLE OF SHOTS:

Roofs blanketed in graffiti. Sides of buildings. People climbing fire escapes. The skyline from the bridge. Trucks on the bridge covered in graffiti. Container ships, covered in graffiti.

The train dives back underground.

EXT. CANAL STREET

JP and Shay break off from the crowd off Canal, heading towards school.

A full bus stop ad reads:

'TAKE IT FROM THE CHAMPS, GRAFFITI IS FOR CHUMPS'

A picture of boxing champions Mike Tyson & Oscar de la Hoya stand with their arms crossed in front of two city employees with power washers removing some graffiti in the background.

The bottom is signed by MARTY ADAMS (50s) with a photo in the corner, smiling with his sleeves rolled and arms crossed. He's balding with toad-like features.

SHAY

Lame!

She sticks her tongue out at the banner.

JP

They're getting pretty serious about it. Don't you think you should stop?

SHAY

No.

JP

Don't you think it's too dangerous.

SHAY

If you go out alone, but I've got
Lena. And used to have Jesse but
his family moved to PA. They tag
cows out there, it's not cool.

She gestures, and almost every surface in sight is tagged.

JP

Yeah but it's against the law.

She hits him with a harsh look.

SHAY

'Against the law?' Dude everyone is
doing it.

JP

Not everyone...

She gestures to -

NEARBY ROOF

A guy in a hoodie sprays a large piece of a basketball player
reaching straight out of the wall. He turns with a thumbs up.

NEARBY ALLEY

A shady guy in a hoodie and ski mask sprays his name on
dumpsters, and turns with a thumbs up.

NEARBY BENCH

Hands sign a quick and vicious signature on the bus stop
bench with sharpie. 'ShayShay'

The shot pulls back to show Shay, who puts her thumb up with
a big grin.

SHAY

He's a clown, and you're a Jr.
clown for following all the rules.

JP

I don't follow all the rules...

SASHA

Oh yeah?

She flips the sharpie and presents it to JP like a sword. She
gestures to the picture of Mayor Adams.

SASHA (CONT'D)
Draw a mustache there.

JP looks at the marker, the bus stop, and then back at Shay.

JP
Nah, I'm not doing that.

She smiles, smug.

SHAY
Don't worry, little guy, I got it.

She takes the cap off, licks her lips, and swiftly gives Marty poop hat.

JP looks around nervously. He sees something that makes him panic.

JP
Shay stop! There's cops over there.

ANGLE ON:

Cops across the street, eating donuts, not paying attention.

He pulls her away.

SHAY
Chill, chill, *chill!* Quick, let's go all the way to the light so we don't jaywalk.

She twirls her sharpie and slides it into her back pocket like a gunslinger. JP rolls his eyes.

EXT. PS 302

SHAY
So. You gonna come out with us some time?

Her stride is long and confident and JP has to pump his short little legs in order to keep up.

JP
Uh, I have a paper due this week for Bell and a history test. And a Spanish quiz. And we have that -

SHAY
So, no, again.

JP

Sorry.

She turns around, stopping him short.

SHAY

Just come out soon, kay?

JP

Okay.

SHAY

Cool. And also can you help me with the Bio test tomorrow because I don't have a clue.

JP

Clue about...?

She stares at him.

JP (CONT'D)

Okay.

She goes, he follows.

INT. PS 302

Kids are heading to class, there's no discernable traffic pattern.

The two friends do their secret elaborate high-five in the hallway.

JP

See you in third!

He runs off, sure to not be late. Shay heads the opposite direction taking her damn time.

CUT TO:

INT. PS 302 CLASSROOM - FIRST PERIOD

Math. The classroom is utter chaos. Some kids are drawing, some are sitting backwards and talking, playing catch. A couple makes out in the corner.

The overworked and underpaid teacher just teaches as if it were silent.

JP takes notes in the front row. The teacher has an algebraic equation on the board. JP raises his hand, and is called on.

JP

X = 4?

MATH TEACHER

Right again, JP!

The teacher nods in approval, JP pumps his fist.

A balled up piece of paper hits him in the head.

INT. PS 302 CLASSROOM - SECOND PERIOD

English. The classroom and kids look the same, but the teacher, MR BELL, 40s, is super cool, clean cut, thick framed glasses.

On the board is some Hamlet related material. 'To Thine Own Self Be True'

BELL

So, what do we think of Polonius here, given what we know of the whole story?

JP's is the only hand to go up. A couple of kids groan.

BELL (CONT'D)

JP?

JP

Well, he's not the best guy ever, using his daughter to spy like that. They don't deserve to die, obviously. But I think Polonius is the kind of guy that just likes to hear himself talk, and maybe he doesn't even know what he means here. It can mean the nice thing, but nice things can also be used to justify all kinds of bad things, too. You just say you're being true to yourself and use your daughter as bait for a royal teenage mess who is clearly going through all kinds of stuff.

BELL

I'll take those points, anyone else?

JP
So maybe don't always be true to
yourself.

BELL
That's a little dark.

Bell turns back to the board.

Two paper balls hit JP in the head.

INT. PS 302 BIOLOGY ROOM - THIRD PERIOD

Biology. Kids arranged around tall lab tables. Shay sits next to JP in the front row, but she keeps to herself drawing with markers in her notebook.

ANGLE ON HER NOTEBOOK:

She has a book just like JP's, except hers is all fantastic and stylized drawings. She's a real thorough cartoonist.

She peeks up at the teacher who's back is turned, pointing and slides her book up to reveal that she's actually drawing on the table.

JP dissects a rat corpse surgically. Shay looks at it and gags.

BIOLOGY TEACHER
Nice cuts on the heart there, JP.

JP smiles, but it's not as bright as before. He's starting to lose steam, his eyes droop.

Two paper balls fly at his head and are -FWANG- deflected by Shay and her textbook.

SHAY
Nice try, Tyler.

TYLER (15), big curly headed white kid, probably held back a year flicks Shay off.

BIOLOGY TEACHER
TYLER!

INT. PS 302 BIOLOGY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

JP puts down his utensils and takes off his gloves.

SHAY

You done?

JP

Don't you even want to try and know about this?

SHAY

Not really. I'm gonna go paint tonight. Gotta get my route straight.

JP looks over her shoulder at a map she has in her notebook. It's marked up with red pen - circles, X's, and lines all over.

JP

How could you possibly make sense of that mess?

SHAY

What? What are you talking about, it's super clear:

THE MAP:

Shay traces with her finger as she explains. It's largely illogical. The arrows and lines are definitely not to scale, but it makes sense to her.

SHAY (CONT'D)

I'm gonna start out at the Williamsburg bridge, then make my way down hitting each bridge. Loop around and hit the high rises in Chinatown.

There's a mess of loops and scratches and circles and X's on the lower part of the island.

SHAY (CONT'D)

Down here I have to try and figure out how to get into the subway level. It's weirdly confusing down there. I even went into an open manhole once.

JP

Gross.

SHAY

That guy Edgar knows a way into the subway tunnels but he's charging a fifty to show you in. And that's if he likes you.

She tries to wave at EDGAR, a German kid in really trendy gear who sees her and simply shakes 'No'.

JP

Looks like he doesn't like you. Come on, pay attention. This stuff matters.

SHAY

To who?

JP

To college.

SHAY

Dude. You gotta ease up. There's this new kid from Korea who says you only have to learn about rat brains if you want to be a doctor. In Korea.

She prods the corpse with one of the knives and makes a fake gagging sound again.

JP

Maybe I want to be a doctor in Korea.

SHAY

Look at these.

She snatches his notebook away, flips through it, and finds some of his drawings.

SHAY (CONT'D)

Okay for college, though? Shouldn't you be, I don't know, well rounded? Look at this. You're awesome.

She takes him on a tour of his own work.

SHAY (CONT'D)

How can you not even want to try and come out?

JP

Grandma doesn't like that stuff.

SHAY

Oh well, you could like... not...
Tell her?

The bell rings.

SHAY (CONT'D)

Please, I'm *begging* you. One time.

JP

I dunno.

SHAY

Whatever.

She gets up to go.

SHAY (CONT'D)

(re: cleaning up)

You got this?

JP

Yeah.

Shay shakes her head, then throws a wad of paper at JP's face.

INT. PS 302 HALLWAY

JP leaves Biology with a smile on his face, not really paying attention to where he's going. He walks directly into the back of Tyler.

TYLER

Hey, loser.

JP

Oh, sorry, sorry Tyler.

TYLER

No sweat bro.

He puts his arm around JP aggressively.

TYLER (CONT'D)

Got me in trouble in class, then
physically assault me outside...
What do you say, want to settle
this now instead of dragging it
out?

JP

My... my bad.

TYLER

All the pain and suffering you
caused me I think adds up to...
whatever money you got on you
now... maybe a couple of weeks of
biology homework. Dunno. Seem fair?

Tyler squeezes him hard around the neck.

JP

Yes Tyler, that seems fair.

Tyler lets him go, big grin on his face, then opens his hand.

TYLER

Perfect.

JP goes into his sock, takes a wad of cash out, and slaps it
in Tyler's hand.

TYLER (CONT'D)

Tell your friend she's an idiot.

He struts off.

JP looks after him and then heads the opposite direction.

Mr. Bell peeks his head out of his classroom down the
hallway.

INT. LUNCHROOM - LATER

The typical high school lunch room. Chaos, social striation,
hunger, and hormones.

Shay and JP sit alone at a two seater in the corner,
splitting Shay's lunch, a sandwich and some fries.

SHAY

Stop letting Tyler mug you.

JP

Oh yeah, I'll just hit him with the
Vulcan death grip.

He makes the death grip with his empty hand.

SHAY

What?

JP
Nothing. Not even a real death grip.

SHAY
He waited until my little ugly duckling was lonely and vulnerable. What a prick.

She looks around to find Tyler.

Finding him holding court with some other loser jerks, she flicks him off.

He nods at her and winks.

SHAY (CONT'D)
Man I hate that guy.

JP
Same.

SHAY
So, what do you think, want to come out tonight? Next week?

JP
Ugh. Please, Shay, give it a rest. No. I don't understand how your mom never catches you.

SHAY
Easy, she's never home. And if she's home, she's asleep.

JP
Dang. That's kinda dark. This is coming from someone whose mom *died*.

SHAY
My mom story is probably sadder than your mom story.

JP
Still, no.

EXT. FIELD

Gym. A field house, class is playing kick ball. Everyone is in uniform. Here, the rest of the kids are focused.

JP is not focused or coordinated.

Tyler, at bat, purposefully aims for JP who awkwardly tries to catch the near misses.

EXT. FIELD - LATER

Then he is at bat. Tyler is pitching. Everyone moves in.

TYLER

Easy out. Everyone move -

He notices everyone is already in, laughs.

The first pitch.

He kicks air once, twice, three times and he's out.

He goes back to the bench and lays down, hands in his tied back hair. He stares up at the ceiling. Everything starts to pile up.

He nods off.

EXT. NYC ROOFTOPS

He dreams of the city rooftops. He's running, jumping across the gaps like a superhero. It's great, and he loves the air, loves being high over the city, unstoppable. He sees his mother ahead of him, leading him on, just as graceful as he is in the air.

He comes to an avenue and after one mighty leap he's flying -

INT. FIELD HOUSE

JP wakes up when a kick ball flies at him and knocks him off the bench.

Tyler whistles, nonchalant as hell.

INT. PS 302 HALLWAY

JP walks down the hallway, the day is over and kids are excited about after school plans, leaving, all buzzing with energy.

He crosses by Bell's open door where we can see him sitting at his desk.

BELL

Hey, JP. Come here for a second.

JP does.

INT. BELL'S CLASSROOM

BELL
How's it going?

JP
Good. Do you need something?

BELL
I just wanted to check in with you.

JP sits at the closest desk.

BELL (CONT'D)
How are all your other classes?
You're doing great here.

JP
They're good. Having fun, you know.

BELL
Yeah of course. I just don't want
you to push too hard. You got four
years here.

JP
Oh...

BELL
Sleeping okay?

JP
Uh, I guess not great.

BELL
Let an old person tell you, sleep
turns out to be pretty important.
Also making friends.

JP
Okay...?

BELL
Why don't you take an extra couple
of days on that essay, I'm sure it
will be great on Friday or even
next week. Have some fun this
weekend.

JP
Okay. Thanks?

Bell puts his hand up for a high five. He's well meaning but nerdy and a little off. JP obliges.

INT. PS 302 HALLWAY

Shay is at her locker. She holds a note deep in her locker so that nobody can see.

THE NOTE:

It reads "Come to my office directly after last period, please. - Principal Parker"

She looks at it.

She crumples it up and throws it in to the garbage, missing.

She closes her locker.

PRINCIPAL PARKER, 50s, black, wearing a brown suit is behind the door. She's got a kind smile but is stern.

PARKER

Follow me please, Miss Strickland.

Shay huffs.

SHAY

Yes, ma'am.

She follows the principal down the hall.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Parker's office is cluttered with books on behavioral science. Earth tones everywhere. A bust of an African woman with braids. Jacob Lawrence. Koko Taylor.

The door reads 'PRINCIPAL' in permanent paint, and a taped piece of paper reads 'Parker' is pen.

PARKER

If I call you to the office after school, then come to the office after school.

She drops a hefty file on the desk. The tab reads 'Shaylene Strickland.'

SHAY

Yes, ma'am.

PARKER

Throwing trash on the floor *and*
drawing on the desks. Care to go
for the hat trick today, young
lady?

SHAY

No, ma'am.

PARKER

Do you have anything else to say?

Shay clams up.

PARKER (CONT'D)

You understand I'll need to see you
and your mother tomorrow.

SHAY

Insanity is doing the same thing
over and over and expecting
different results.

PARKER

So it is.

SHAY

So let's skip what Principal Kahn
did and try something new?

PARKER

Shaylene. You need to be smarter
about this.

Shay knows this speech by heart.

PARKER (CONT'D)

You're underperforming in your
classes. This is high school, I
know you don't think it is true,
but your future rides on this time
now. You should try and get off
this bad path early.

SHAY

You think my mom cares?

Shay stares at Parker, a genuine question. If Parker cares so
much, how can she not see it?

PARKER

I'll see you and your mother
tomorrow after school, please.

She hands Shay a reminder note.

SHAY
You know, you sound exactly like
Kahn. Weird.

EXT. PS 302

JP waits on the corner for Shay, the last of other kids meeting up and leaving. He looks around for her.

Shay comes out with Parker. Shay listens to whatever she is saying with disinterest and then rushes off. Parker shakes her head. When she sees JP she gives a big smile and a mighty wave.

JP waves back, souring Shay's mood.

SHAY
Ready?

JP
Why is the new Principal looking at
you like a failed science
experiment?

She looks back.

SHAY
(gesturing wildly)
Oh you know, basic
"underperforming, my future is
riding on this, bad path," et
cetera, et cetera.

They walk for a second.

JP
Mr. Bell gave me extra time on an
essay today. I didn't even ask for
it. He just... gave it to me. Said
something about sleeping more.

Shay rolls her eyes.

SHAY
Cool.

Edgar stands at the end of the block with a toothpick in his mouth, cool as a watermelon Isee. As kids walk by they nod at him, and he graces certain people with a response.

Shay does a little wave which is not reciprocated but Edgar clearly initiates a nod to JP.

JP
Hey Edgar.

They walk a few more steps but when out of earshot -

SHAY
You have an in with Edgar?

JP
What do you mean? I helped him with his English last week.

SHAY
That's HUGE! Why didn't you tell me?

JP
You want me to tell you every time I tutor someone?

She smacks his arm - WHAP!

SHAY
You know this is different.

JP rubs his arm a lot.

SHAY (CONT'D)
Sorry. You okay?

JP
Yeah I'm fine.

They start to walk back to the subway. JP dragging a bit, he's clearly very tired.

JP (CONT'D)
I gotta go home.

SHAY
Nah. Wanna get ice cream?

JP
Yes. Every day I want it.

EXT. CHINATOWN SCOOP SHOP

Shay and JP come out of the scoop shop with monstrous cones. Shay devours hers messily, ice cream and treats flying everywhere. She finishes and tosses her cone wrapper on the street.

JP eats a little more reservedly with a spoon.

JP
That's littering.

She gets up, all dramatics and puffs of air, and takes her trash to a can with a sarcastic smile.

JP (CONT'D)
I didn't make the rules.

SHAY
Yeah, but you're gunna judge me anyway.

JP
No. I'm just worried about the consequences.

He gestures with his thumb over his shoulder.

ANGLE ON:

Different cops across the street having dumplings and not paying attention. A bus rolls by with 'VOTE MARTY FOR MAYOR!' Plastered on the side.

Shay sticks her tongue out at it then sits next to JP on the curb again.

SHAY
I think Parker's going to suspend me.

JP
Shay! I told you this would happen.

SHAY
Whatever, man, no 'I told you so's' please.

JP
No really, you can't get kicked out, I don't have any other friends.

SHAY
Aw, poor baby.

JP waves her down.

SHAY (CONT'D)
It's just a desk, who cares if it has some art on it? It's like how we pass down our message to the next generation.

JP
What did you draw?

SHAY
A cat smoking a cigarette.

JP
Real meaningful message.

SHAY
Old dirty ass desks anyway. You're still not finished?

JP
Don't rush me.

She knocks the rest of his cone over.

JP (CONT'D)
UNCOOL.

SHAY
(laughing)
I'll get you another one. Totally worth it.

INT. CANAL STREET STATION - LATER

JP and Shay wait for the train, the platform is filling up. There are delays.

The train pulls into the station and it's super crowded. One train near the middle is less full, so they move for it.

OPERATOR
HOT TRAIN! HOT TRAIN!

Another collective groan from the crowd as they file in.

INT. Q TRAIN

It's hot.

The people already on the train are already wet like they just came out of the shower.

The train takes off slowly.

INT. Q TRAIN - MOMENTS LATER

The train is really crawling.

JP and Shay stand by the doors wedged between the metal and someone's back. The clunk-a-clunk of the subway is slow, and JP watches the sides of the tunnels pass by.

The train brakes SCREECH to a halt. There's a collective sigh from the chorus of passengers.

JP

This is torture. I might actually pass out.

JP takes his hoodie off and wipes sweat from his forehead. He presses his face against the glass hoping for relief.

JP'S POV:

There's a dark tunnel, a few support beams, and then another tunnel below it.

Further away there's a single light hanging on the wall, illuminating something written below it.

JP can't quite make it out. Something about it speaks to him. He strains to see it... moving his head around to see - and he finally makes out the lettering.

It's the tag 'Darko,' plain, all black, bubble lettering.

SHAY

What are you looking at?

JP points very urgently.

JP

See it? Right there under that light?

She looks in the direction but doesn't light up with recognition.

SHAY
Yeah, cool. 'Darko.'

Hearing the name out loud sets alarms off in JP's head.

JP
I know that word. Is it a tag? Do you know them?

SHAY
Old school I think, probably mostly got washed off.

He's agitated. He wants to get off the train, somehow take the piece of the wall with him.

The brakes hiss, the train starts to roll.

He starts to breathe hard.

SHAY (CONT'D)
Whoa, calm down, what's going on?

JP
I don't know. I just know that I the word Darko, definitely.

SHAY
You probably just saw it tagged somewhere else.

JP
No, I *know* it.

She unsheathes her sharpie and starts to draw on her arm.

JP (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

She quickly draws the tag on her arm.

He cranes his neck to try and watch it for as long as possible, but it's gone.

JP looks shocked. He wipes sweat. He looks at Shay, who looks excited. She shows him her arm.

'Darko'

EXT. BROOKLYN

Shay and JP peel off from the stream of people, he stops her.

JP

Lemme see.

Shay presents her arm.

JP (CONT'D)

I remember people saying it, in my house, when I was a kid. Darko.

SHAY

Rewind please. Your mom wrote the streets?

JP

But that doesn't make any sense, why wouldn't they tell me?

Neither of them know what to do next.

They walk.

JP (CONT'D)

Have you gone in the tunnel before?

SHAY

Not yet.

JP

Do a lot of people?

SHAY

Don't think so. I want to. Like we all go high all the time... Going down low like... those are the real *real* legends. Like you could *die* down there, or you could be a *legend*.

They walk.

SHAY (CONT'D)

You really think your mom was down in the subway?

JP

I dunno. I know she was into art, obviously, you seen the drawings. Miriam always said she wasted her time messing around with stuff. She never said anything about this, though.

SHAY

She could definitely do both.
Everyone was doing this a few years
ago. *Everyone.*

JP

I'll see you tomorrow.

They do their handshake and he runs off.

INT. DARKO LIVING ROOM

KEYS at the door, it CREAKS open when JP opens it. He comes
in a kicks off his shoes in a hurry.

JP

Anyone home?

Nobody answers but JP sees that Chris' shoes are by the door
and his bedroom is open. He huffs and puffs his way over to
the door and knocks on the frame.

INT. CHRIS' BEDROOM

Chris is in his room pumping free weights with big over-ear
headphones on, plugged into a record player. Old school. He's
spinning Santana.

His room is painted a deep blue. There's a shoddily insulated
pipe running through it, top to bottom. Besides the bed,
drawers, and bench there's weights, a pull up bar, mounted
airsoft guns.

Chris doesn't hear JP come in.

JP

Hey Chris, I need to ask you
something.

Chris doesn't hear him.

JP (CONT'D)

(louder)
Chris, hello?

The hiccup has him flustered. He can't decide whether to yell
or tap him.

He decides to call -

JP (CONT'D)
(yelling)
Hey Chris!

Startled, he drops the weight, hopping out of the way.

CHRIS
What?! What. What bro?

JP
Oh sorry, are you busy?

CHRIS
No, not now. What?

JP enters the room.

JP
Can I ask you something?

CHRIS
WHAT?

JP seems to shrink. He doesn't want to ask now, but he's also deathly curious about what he saw.

JP
Are you okay?

CHRIS
Yeah I'm fine. I love working a double one day just to have a day cut. Wring me out like a towel.

Chris stops and gives JP his full attention.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
What do you want? I'm busy.

JP
Did mom ever do graffiti?

Chris tenses and sharpens.

CHRIS
What makes you ask that?

JP
I saw on the subway this 'tag' Shay called it. Darko? Wasn't that mom's nickname?

Chris gets up and crosses the room, pushes JP out of the way into -

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

CHRIS
Not a name I know about.

JP
I was pretty sure I heard it
before.

CHRIS
You never mentioned it before.

JP
Well. I guess I am, now?

They look at each other.

CHRIS
I don't know, bro.

He gets a glass of water from the tap and knocks it back.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
I'm going for a run.

He tries to slide his sneakers on but ends up having to sit
and retie them. He doesn't make eye contact with JP.

JP
Okay. Do you think anyone else
would know?

CHRIS
Dunno. You're asking if she was a
criminal, right?

JP
No, no that's not what I'm saying.

It takes him a second, but Chris gets his shoes on and gets
up.

CHRIS
I'm out.

He leaves JP standing in the kitchen.

JP grabs his backpack off the floor. What just happened?

INT. JP'S BEDROOM

JP tosses his bag down and flops onto the bed. He stares at the ceiling. He reaches under his bed and slides a box of tapes out. Shuffling through, he picks out Bill Evans, *You Must Believe in Spring*.

Play.

He closes his eyes.

JP'S POV

He sees the tag on the wall across the train tracks, trains passing between him and the word Darko. He watches it through the windows like an old movie on a projector.

EXT. SHAY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

An apartment over a bar in Crown Heights. Shay puts her key to the door, prepares herself.

INT. SHAY'S APARTMENT

A gaudy, upper middle class, new age three bedroom apartment.

There are family pictures. Shay at different ages, happy, gap toothed. Family pictures of Shay and her mother CELINE (40s), a white woman with very long hair, sharp eyes like an apex predator.

Shay kicks off her shoes off, sending them flying into the extremely tidy apartment. She drops her bag in front of the door.

SHAY

Anyone home? No?

She goes to the kitchen.

INT. SHAY'S APARTMENT KITCHEN

Shay opens the fridge. Mostly empty except for various leftover takeout meals.

SHAY

Woo, leftovers.

She opens one. Chinese. Smells it. It's bad.

SHAY (CONT'D)

Eugh!

She tosses it into the trash.

She opens another, and another, all bad. Trashed.

The fridge is completely empty.

INT. SHAY'S APARTMENT LIVING ROOM

Shay is on the phone, looking at a pizza menu.

SHAY

Large. No make that XL meat lovers.
And soda uh, two liter of coke.
ASAP.

PIZZA GUY (O.C.)

Alright, ma'am. \$25.50, be there in
about an hour.

She hangs up. She empties her pockets. She has about 200 dollars stashed in various places on her body.

INT. SHAY'S APARTMENT - LATER

Shay watches OZ while laying on the couch. She's bored. She looks around. She kicks the cushions off the couch.

She empties the fake fruit from the coffee table onto the floor.

She takes a bunch of books off of the bookshelf, rearranges them randomly.

The doorbell rings.

INT. SHAY'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Shay opens the door to a slimy looking PIZZA GUY.

PIZZA

Hey, pizza. That's \$25.50

Shay fumbles with a bunch of cash, gives him \$30

SHAY

Keep the change.

He peers into the apartment, notes the mess?

PIZZA GUY
Everything okay in -

She shuts the door in his face.

INT. SHAY'S ROOM

Shay's room is very colorful, rich, saturated colors. She's painted the walls different colors, and drawn on them. There's a big computer on a desk and a canopy bed.

She drops her pizza on the nightstand and splays out on the bed, face down.

She yells into a pillow.

SHAY
AHHHHHHHHUUUGGGHHHHH.

CUT TO:

INT. JP'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

His eyes open again.

He rubs his eyes, shuffles around in the bed, but he can't sleep. He hears Chris and Miriam MUMBLING from the living room.

Chris' voice cuts through the walls.

CHRIS (O.S.)
...old enough to know!

JP realizes that they're arguing. He slides out of the bed and moves closer to the door, avoiding the squeaky spots.

He can't hear them well. He presses his ear to the door, then to the crack under the door.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Chris paces while Miriam is in the kitchen with a plate of food.

MIRIAM
I don't want him getting any ideas.

CHRIS

Well he's got to grow up.

MIRIAM

He is, but he's taking a different path than you did.

Chris stops.

CHRIS

Well I didn't have any choice, did I? We needed money. That doesn't make me any worse.

MIRIAM

I didn't say anything about worse. You did a great job doing what you needed to do. But he needs to do something different.

CHRIS

Yeah cool. Good for him. I'm just the help. Don't bother the college boy.

MIRIAM

If you don't understand what going to college means for this family then you ain't as grown as I thought.

CHRIS

I got something for him.

Chris goes to his room, and comes back with Angela's composition book.

JPS POV:

JP sees the composition book from his angle. Its very old, barely holding together. Chris slaps it on the table.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I'm giving him this.

MIRIAM

What is this?

She opens it and isn't happy with what she sees.

CHRIS

Grow up, grow up, and take care of yours, you always were saying that to me, right? So now it's time for him to be grown.

MIRIAM

How dare you keep this from me. Why do you have this?

Chris tries to take the book back but Miriam snatches it roughly out of his hands. She dares him to get physical, muscles and all.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

We got rid of all this stuff. All the art stuff. You had no right to keep this!

CHRIS

She's my mom, too! Why are you protecting him so much?

MIRIAM

Because he needs it!

Miriam walks to her room with the notebook and a plate of food while Chris fumes.

INT. JP'S BEDROOM

JP creeps back to his bed. He's buzzing with energy. He lays on his bed breathing hard.

He rolls over and grabs his notebook, starts sketching.

He just draws the tag over and over.

INT. SHAY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Shay comes out of her room dressed.

Everything has been replaced. The couch is set, the coffee table is immaculate, even the books look tidied. Her backpack has been hung next to the door next to a briefcase. Her shoes placed neatly next to her mother's on the mat.

She puts her shoes on, lacing her high tops all the way up, tight.

There's a wad of money on the catch all next to the door, between sets of keys.

Shay takes her keys and leaves the reminder note from Parker in place of the money.

EXT. BROOKLYN

JP is waiting for Shay outside of her apartment.

SHAY

Hey, what's going on. Did you find anything out?

JP

No. I asked Chris about it but he freaked out and flipped out and peaced out.

They do their handshake and start walking to a slower pace.

SHAY

Dang. What are you gonna do?

JP

I don't think I can ask my Grandma. I heard them arguing about me last night. I mean, Mir would not like that whole idea at all.

SHAY

Sure, sure. Sorry.

JP shrugs.

JP

I couldn't even do my homework last night. I can't... think.

INT. Q TRAIN DAY

Another crowded, hot train. The pair is hyper aware in the tunnels, looking for sighs of 'Darko.' There are none.

EXT. PS 302

They stand in front of the school. JP likes school - his mood lightens.

Shay, of course, darkens.

SHAY

You ready?

JP
(with a smile)
Yeah.

INT. PS 302 CLASSROOM - FIRST PERIOD

JP sits through his classes today with a lot on his mind. The rest of the class is the same. He follows the Geometry on the board, but he also catches himself doodling in the margins a couple of times.

INT. PS 302 CLASSROOM - SECOND PERIOD

In English class he stares out the window. Mr. Bell passes back a paper with a big fat A on it, and gives JP an approving nod.

JP receives it and smiles, but very quickly goes back to the window, losing focus.

INT. PS 302 BIOLOGY ROOM

In biology class he picks at his dissection like a toddler with his peas on the plate.

Shay pokes at him to try and cheer him up but his fat simply absorbs her finger over and over with no affect on his mood.

He looks over at Tyler, who squeezes a fist in his direction. JP forgot to do the extra homework.

The bell rings.

INT. PS 302 HALLWAY

They walk out of class and past Edgar who is leaning on the wall in the same pose he seems to always be in. He nods and JP nods back.

A few steps past and Shay turns back.

SHAY
Hey Edgar.

He doesn't respond. She walks back in front of him with a big smile.

SHAY (CONT'D)
ED. GAR.

EDGAR

If you force this acquaintance
you're going to end up looking
stupid somehow.

Like a slap in the face. She steadies on.

SHAY

Would you say you know most
everybody's tags?

EDGAR

If they're in lower Manhattan,
Brooklyn or Queens. Don't mess with
the Bronx.

JP

Hey Shay never mind that.

She waves him off.

SHAY

Ever heard of Darko?

EDGAR

Darko? Old school tag. I think they
mostly got washed off, but they
were all over the place before.
Regular Evil Knievel.

JP gets up in his face, matching Shay, blocking him in.

JP

What do you mean?

Edgar values his personal space.

EDGAR

You want to burn up all the favor
you have with me on this
conversation?

The two nerds look at each other, then Edgar, and nod
enthusiastically.

EDGAR (CONT'D)

Darko had the highest tags, and the
most subway tags. Actually, I think
they are probably responsible for
that fake-mayor-fake-cop Adams'
campaign against us. There's an old
commercial that shows off how Darko
tagged more than 50 subway cars in
a lot in one night.

(MORE)

EDGAR (CONT'D)
Crazy for one person. Adams was
chief of police and he looked like
an idiot because of Darko.

JP and Shay look at each other, finished with Edgar.

SHAY
Dude.

JP
This is crazy.

EDGAR
Can you either move away from me or
let move away from you.

They give him space.

EDGAR (CONT'D)
Don't talk to me again.

He walks away.

SHAY
I never really asked, but what
actually happened? To your mom?

JP
She died in a car accident when I
was four. I really don't remember
her that much. She worked at a
hotel desk for a while. She wasn't
always the best with money. But I
remember Darko. I remember it.

SHAY
That's crazy. Your mom was an
original street artist, man! You
heard the German.

JP
Yeah but what does that mean? Like
what am I supposed to do with this?

Shay smiles wickedly.

SHAY
Embrace. Your. LEGACY.

JP
I dunno. I have homework.

SHAY
You're hopeless.

They do their handshake.

SHAY (CONT'D)
Let me know what's up tomorrow? I
have that meeting now.

JP
Good luck.

SHAY
You, too.

INT. Q TRAIN

JP presses his face against the glass to get a glimpse of the tag. It's so hard to see from a moving train.

He sits back.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

Shay sits in front of the desk, an empty chair beside her. Principal Parker reads something like 'The Warmth of Other Suns.' She eyes the clock. 4:00.

PARKER
Are you sure you told her?

SHAY
Yes, ma'am. I gave her the note.

PARKER
Alright.

A KNOCK at the door.

PARKER (CONT'D)
Come in.

Shay tenses up immediately.

Celine opens the door and comes in like he owns the place.

CELINE
Sorry I'm late. What's this about?

PARKER
Hello, Ms. Strickland. Please sit.

She looks at Shay but doesn't greet her, then sits in the chair.

CELINE
So what has she done now?

SHAY
Cool.

CELINE
Be quiet.

PARKER
That isn't necessary, Ms. Strickland. I just wanted to check in about some behavior that Shaylene has been exhibiting at school.

CELINE
Such as?

PARKER
Well she hasn't been doing well in her classes. She has been defacing school property.

CELINE
What? What did you destroy?

SHAY
Nothing I just drew on a desk.

PARKER
It's a bit more serious than that -

CELINE
We'll pay for the desk. Anything else?

PARKER
No, that's not necessary, but I'd like to try and assess what's been happening with Shaylene -

CELINE
She goes by Shay. You could at least call her by her name.

PARKER
I call all the students by their full name.

SHAY

It's okay mom, she does do that.
Everyone thinks it's weird.

PARKER

I'm sorry?

SHAY

Nothing, can we just finish the
meeting, please?

Parker tries to reset the mood.

PARKER

Of course. I would just like to
understand a little more, and
hopefully get Shayle - *Miss*
Strickland back on track in school,
otherwise we may have to consider
more permanent disciplinary
options.

CELINE

She draws on everything. Her entire
room is destroyed - she's drawn all
over it.

Parker is stunned to hear that.

CELINE (CONT'D)

There's not much I can do besides
pay for the desk, otherwise I'm not
sure how you expect me to control
her.

Shay makes a face at Parker. Parker is uncomfortable.

PARKER

Miss Strickland, would you wait in
the lobby, please?

Eager to leave, she goes outside.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE FOYER

Shay quickly retreats from Parker's office, closing the door
behind her. She sits in one of the chairs against the wall.

The receptionist looks at her as mumbled voices discuss her
next door.

INT. DARKO LIVING ROOM

The door YAWNS and SLAMS as JP comes in.

JP

Hello?

Nobody home. JP starts to set up his homework.

He looks to Miriam's room.

INT. MIRIAM'S BEDROOM

JP

Mir?

No response, so he lets himself in.

The room is plain and very pastel pink. There's a canopy bed in the center across from a large two door dresser. White drawers along the side are topped with tens of pictures. Framed pictures of the family. Of Grandpa. Mom when she was little, Chris and JP.

He looks around. He pokes around in the drawers, the cabinets. The big doors on the cabinet open to a big TV.

He moves over to the side table and sees the top drawer slightly open. He pulls it out.

There's the black and white composition book he saw through the keyhole the night before. He takes it out reverently, puts it on the bed, and opens it.

JP (CONT'D)

Whoa.

It's a sketchbook on lined paper. It's filled literally cover to cover with overlapping drawing ideas, a scratch notebook. Page over page, there's full spreads of men playing basketball, cars, police - all of New York in one notebook.

On every page there's multiple examples of the tag in different styles.

'Darko'

JP (CONT'D)

Darko.

JP sits against the bed and takes it all in. He's overwhelmed, flipping through pages.

He touches his eyes, he's been crying. For how long? He looks around, outside. He can't sit here forever.

He carefully tears out a page from the middle of the book.

THE PAGE:

It's the page with the sketch that Angela did of him drawing with crayons at the desk that night. It's also got the tag DARKO all over it.

He makes sure everything looks right and then quickly into -

INT. LIVING ROOM

Where he gently hides the sheet in his own notebook. He sits at his school work.

INT. Q TRAIN - LATER

Shay sits next to Celine on the train, hugging her bag and looking down.

They don't speak.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

JP is set up on the counter doing his homework when we hear KEYS IN THE DOOR, and the door OPENS and SHUTS.

Miriam is home.

He looks at his page, he's doodled Darko in the margins. He quickly flips the page.

MIRIAM

Well, hello young man.

JP

Hey Mir.

She takes her blue MTA vest off.

MIRIAM

Did your brother come home today?

JP

Nope.

MIRIAM
He works too hard some times.

JP
Yeah, makes him a jerk.

MIRIAM
Let him alone. You focus on your
school work.

He wants to ask, he lacks the courage.

She goes to her room.

JP'S STACK OF HOMEWORK:

Over time his homework shifts from a messy stack to a neat
finished pile. Do kids really get this much homework?

Miriam is in her chair in front of Wheel of Fortune.

JP
Mir can we talk about Mom?

MIRIAM
Alright baby.

JP gets closer to her.

JP
Can you tell me about her again?

MIRIAM
Very kind. Smart like you, so
smart. You get that from her. Your
father isn't very smart.

JP
Okay.

MIRIAM
She could be pretty stubborn, you
know she didn't take the best care
of your brother, but she loved you
both so much.

JP is very surprised she's being this candid.

JP
I know. He hates her.

MIRIAM
He doesn't, he just has a hard time
with her passing.

JP
Sure. And I don't.

Miriam sits up.

MIRIAM
We all deal with it different.

JP
Sorry. I didn't mean to -

MIRIAM
It's fine. Anything else?

JP
Did she ever do more with her art?
She was so good.

MIRIAM
Do more? No. She just always wanted
to be in some show or she got
caught up painting something,
forgot to make dinner, forgot
important family things.

JP
Oh.

MIRIAM
She was a smart young lady, just
very distracted. But you're not
distracted. You're our college boy.

JP
Yeah...

MIRIAM
Is that all?

JP
Um...

Does he have the courage?

The door opens - Chris rolls in.

CHRIS
Hey Grandma.

Miriam takes advantage of the disruption.

MIRIAM
How are you, honey?

CHRIS

I gotta get a new spot. This guy at this place is really trying me with this schedule. Now he wants me to come in tomorrow morning instead of late. Then if I say no I'm not the right guy for the job, right?

Miriam grunts.

JP

Hey Chris.

CHRIS

Yo.

JP

If you got your GED you could get a better job. I could help you get it.

CHRIS

Bro, what? Are you kidding me?

JP

Then you could work the city like Mir did.

Miriam doesn't disagree with JP but knows this won't go well. Chris starts to heat up.

CHRIS

That's crazy. I have jobs man, I'm making money, I don't have time for more school.

JP

I think it would be pretty easy, though.

CHRIS

Oh, because I'm stupid, and you're really smart. You're half my age but your brain is so above what level mine is at it would be easy for you.

MIRIAM

Alright, that's enough of that.

JP

Or work at the hotel like Mom?

CHRIS

What, you're worried about Mom again?

JP

I'm not worried about her. I'm talking about you.

CHRIS

Maybe it's time for you to *grow up*!

MIRIAM

Stop it now!

Miriam stares daggers at Chris. JP notices a silent exchange.

JP

I guess I'll go to bed.

Neither person looks at him.

He zips up and flees into his bedroom.

INT. JP'S BEDROOM

He lies back on his bed, hands in his hair.

Everything starts to pile up.

CUT TO:

INT. SHAY'S ROOM

Shay lies in bed, twirling her sharpie. She sits up, looks for somewhere to draw on.

We get a good look at her room. She's marked up almost all of the wall space. It all comes together like a mural.

She starts to draw on the bedframe.

INT. JP'S BEDROOM

JP lies in bed awake, staring at the ceiling.

JPS POV:

He starts to sketch in his mind on the ceiling, drawing with his hand. The image comes together literally on the ceiling. The word 'Darko' but it's nearly shapeless, unformed. It's just an idea, after all.

He reaches for a sketchpad on his desk and starts drawing.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Chris fully dressed for his doorman shift and JP come out of their rooms at the same time.

JP

Morning.

Chris doesn't respond and exits, letting the door slam behind him.

MIRIAM

Don't go riling that boy up. He's working hard.

JP

How did I rile him up? I offered to help him.

She puts his cereal bowl in front of him.

MIRIAM

You were very young when your mother passed. He wasn't. He felt a lot of pressure.

JP

I just asked one question.

MIRIAM

He doesn't like thinking about it.

JP

What's wrong with wanting to know more about mom?

JP makes a face and starts eating his cereal. Miriam considers, and can't argue against that point.

MIRIAM

Nothing at all. But you gotta let people feel how they feel about it, and not push them. Be good today.

JP stares at his cereal.

EXT. CANAL ST. STATION

Shay waits for JP at the corner. She waves when she sees him emerge from the crowd of commuters.

SHAY
Hey! What happened last night?

JP
Nothing good from talking. But I found this.

He produces the page from Angela's sketchbook.

SHAY
What's this?

She snatches it.

JP
I found this whole sketchbook they were hiding from me. I don't really get why but they really don't want me to know about it.

SHAY
That's it! All over! So it's true!

She really drinks it in.

SHAY (CONT'D)
You *stole* this? Wow. Go you!

JP shrugs uncomfortably.

JP
I didn't steal it! It's not any less mine than it is theirs.

SHAY
And why do we think they're keeping this secret from you?

JP
I... don't know. I can't think of any good reason.

They start to walk.

They pass the bus stop that Shay marked up previously. JP stops and looks at the ad.

'VOTE MARTY FOR MAYOR!'

Shay keeps walking.

JP slides a sharpie from his pocket, apprehensively.

He draws on the image.

Shay realizes JP has stopped, turns back and comes to see what he's done.

ON MARTY'S AD:

JP has drawn a poop on Marty's shoulder.

JP (CONT'D)

Are you going out to tag tonight?

Shay's face turns into an impish grin.

SHAY

Yes?

JP

I wanna go with you.

SHAY

YES!

EPISODE 2:

INT. PS 302 CLASSROOM

A whole class of students, JP in the front, heads down, working. They all frequently check in with the clock.

Mr. Bell reads Twelfth Night at his desk, laughing to himself, having a good time. He looks up and meets eyes with JP. Silly smile.

JP looks down at his notebook, he's ground his pencil into the paper for the last couple of minutes. He looks at the clock. His knee nervously bouncing.

It's 2:59 and 55 seconds. 56 seconds. 57 seconds. 58 seconds...

The last second lasts forever.

RING!

He shoots up, he's the first one out of the room.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAYS

He charges down the hallways with his awkward nerdy confidence, turning down the halls to Shay at her locker. She knows he's coming.

JP

I'm ready.

SHAY

You're not ready.

JP

I'm ready. I've been thinking about it all day. Let's just go before I change my mind.

SHAY

I'm glad you're excited. But first, it's 3 PM. Second, you aren't ready. You need tools.

JP

Like what?

SHAY

Have you ever used a cannon before?
You thought you were going to write
in sharpie?

JP

Can't I just use yours?

SHAY

Nope. So we're gonna go get some.

JP

Are they expensive?

Shay smiles.

INT. HARDWARE STORE

JP and Shay walk down the aisle of a small hardware store.
The spray cans are off on a wall opposite the cashier.

Shay stuffs her bag with cans and runs out before JP has full
comprehension of what's happening.

EMPLOYEE (O.S.)

HEY!

The bell DING as she gets out the door wakes JP up and he
runs out behind her.

EXT. QUIET ALLEY

Shay and JP huddle together.

SHAY

SO. How does it feel? You stole
something today.

JP

Well, I mean technically *I* didn't
actually take anything...

SHAY

God! If you can't even swipe a can,
how are you really going to make it
out there?

JP

Sorry, I mean - "It feels great."
Even though you probably could have
just spotted me.

SHAY

Alright! I'm gonna keep most of these. You probably only need two.

She gives him two. He looks overwhelmed already.

SHAY (CONT'D)

Maybe one.

She takes one back, leaving him with one black can.

SHAY (CONT'D)

Alright, let's practice.

She pops the cap off like an expert and hits the wall.

SHAY (CONT'D)

Try not to be too heavy with it. It's delicate, but still also firm.

She sprays a few lines. She's nimble with it.

SHAY (CONT'D)

See?

JP

Alright.

He takes a couple of squeezes to get his cap off. He goes up to the wall, too close, and takes a couple of tries to get it going.

JP (CONT'D)

Whoa!

He really likes it. He paints a couple of lines, hard and thick.

SHAY

Nice. And the pressure will make hard and softer lines, you got it. Really think of it like sketching. You gotta go over it a couple times.

Shay tags her name 'ShaSha,' in simple lettering. It only takes her a second.

SHAY (CONT'D)

Alright, draw something.

JP gets the hang of it, draws a clumsy subway car. He's pretty happy with it.

SHAY (CONT'D)
That looks good, man!

JP
Oh yeah... What happened with
Principal Parker?

SHAY
Nothing. I didn't get kicked out,
obviously. Actually, I think Parker
backed off.

JP
Whoa. Was your mom mad?

SHAY
I don't even know if she gets mad
at me any more. It's like she
doesn't care at all. I don't know,
who cares. I look out for myself.

JP
I'll look after you, too.

SHAY
You want to be my daddy?

JP
Stop.

INT. Q TRAIN

Shay and JP both crane to look at Angela's tag as the train
goes by.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM

SHAY
Meet me at 10 by my house. Wear
black, all black. Plan out what you
want to write before we go.

JP
Anything else?

She jabs his arms.

SHAY
Maybe do some push ups.

INT. HALLWAY

JP gets home as Miriam is coming out with a big black trash bag.

MIRIAM
Hey honey. Take this down for me.

She hands him the trash bag.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING

JP puts the bag in the bin, then stares at it.

He starts picking, then digging through it, looking for the notebook.

GUY (O.S.)
Yo, lil man, you need a dollar?

He jumps back. No notebook.

INT. JP'S ROOM

JPs room is tidy, his bag and shoes kicked off right by the door.

At the desk drawing in his pad. He finishes off the tag 'JayP,' but doesn't like it. Flipping back through the pages of names he's tried.

Frustrated, he shuts the notebook.

INT. LIVING ROOM.

Miriam is asleep in front of the TV, JP sits on the couch watching her sleep.

He looks back towards Chris' room. Door open, Chris is getting dressed.

He looks at the clock. 9:20. He's anxious.

Chris comes through, wakes Miriam.

CHRIS
I'm leaving.

MIRIAM
Alright, have a good shift.

He simply nods at JP on his way out. JP notices all of the noise the door makes.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)
 (very sleepy)
 You going to bed?

JP
 Yeah, in a minute. You want me to help you to bed?

MIRIAM
 (the show)
 I'll finish this one.

JP
 It's reruns. You seen it before.

MIRIAM
 That's okay, means I'll guess them right.

JP starts to bounce his leg. He watches the TV.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

JP looks at the clock again. 9:29. His leg still shaking. Miriam is asleep again.

ON TV:

Wheel of Fortune ends.

JP
 It's over.

He gets up and turns off the TV making sure to wake Miriam up.

JP (CONT'D)
 Need help to bed?

MIRIAM
 Help me up.

He takes her arm and gets her up. She allows him to walk her to her room slowly.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)
 Night, honey.

He closes the door after her, gently.

Waits a beat.

Then darts to his room.

INT. JP'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

His outfit is a black hoodie, brown pants, and dirty chucks. He check himself out.

He sits in front of the picture of Angela.

He puts the can and his notebook into his pocket, kisses the picture, then slinks out of his room.

EXT. SHAY'S BUILDING

Shay sees JP jogging across the street. She's in all black.

SHAY

I was nervous you were flaking.

JP

Had to wait for Chris to leave.

SHAY

Did you pick a name?

JP

Uh, yeah, I'm Funk.

She laughs in his face.

SHAY

No, you're not. That's all you came up with?

JP

Is it bad? What should I be?

SHAY

Nah, you have to pick it. But Funk is *not* it.

JP thinks about this. Shay doesn't move.

JP

Should we go?

SHAY

Waiting for my crew. Do us both a favor, try not to act like... 'new,' tonight.

JP
You have a "crew?"

LENA (16), appears behind JP. She's tough looking with a pierced nose and her hair tight. She's got on all black, and her white shoes are painted black to match.

LENA
Yo.

JP jumps.

SHAY
This is my neighbor's cousin, Lena.

Lena sounds very chill and genuine, a big thinker.

LENA
Nice to meet you.

She gives JP a fist bump explosion which he fumbles through.

JP
JP. Nice to meet you, too.

Shay does a completely different dap up with Lena.

SHAY
You ready?

LENA
Absolutely. We meeting him here
or...?

SHAY
Nah, at the park. Let's go.

LENA
Alright!

They walk.

LENA (CONT'D)
What's your tag?

JP
Uh, Funk. I think?

Shay snorts.

JP (CONT'D)
Is it bad?

LENA
You don't sound happy about it. I'm
Truth X-V-I.

SHAY
Bam.

LENA
Because I'm writing my truth.

JP
What is X V I?

LENA
Ancient Roman numbers.

JP
Oh. 16?

LENA
Because I'm 16.

JP
Cool. Do you change it every year?

LENA
Why would I do that?

EXT. PARK ENTRANCE

Shay leads, focused and serious. JP follows closely behind
Shay, nervous.

Shay stops them with a military hand signal.

SHAY
We're supposed to meet here.

She makes a bird call with her hands.

JP
What is happening?

LENA
This guy new?

SHAY
Okay. Yes, he's new, but he's cool.

Lena sizes JP up, seemingly for the first time.

LENA
 (big smile)
 Cool.

SHAY
 (aside to JP)
 Okay be cool. I told Edgar you
 wanted a run. He picked you a spot.
 But we gotta impress. You're ready,
 I promise.

JP
 Oh...kay.

The bird call is returned. They look towards the sound.
 Edgar is running across the street.

EDGAR
 Hallo.

He sizes up the crew. JP feels out of place in his not-quite
 blacks.

EDGAR (CONT'D)
 Hello, JP. I had no idea you were
 interested in writing. I very much
 thought Shay was just lying to try
 and hang out. Glad I came.

He gives JP a regular firm handshake.

JP
 Oh, yes, well, thanks for...
 coming.

Awkward, of course. The other three decide to let it go.

EDGAR
 I found you a spot on in an
 underpass deep in the park. Maybe
 don't be as awkward in the park as
 you are right now.

Edgar leads, the other three following.

EXT. PARK

They hunch down by some trees overlooking a large field.

EDGAR
 Alright, it's that one there. I
 haven't seen any cops yet -

He points it out. There's a cop coming through it..

EDGAR (CONT'D)

There he goes. He'll go all the way
around the field. You'll have time.
Come on.

He takes them around the field to the far side of the
underpass, watching the cop walk the opposite direction.

EXT. UNDERPASS

The underpass mostly covered in paint already, but there's a
few small spots in between.

EDGAR

Alright, I'll lookout. You know the
signal.

He crouches by the mouth of the underpass.

Lena pops the cap on two cans at once, a green and a red, and
shakes them up.

She tags the wall. She's a little bit slower than Shay when
she sprays.

'Truth XVI,' she writes in big bright puffy bubble letters.

SHAY

Nice.

LENA

Switch.

Lena and Shay switch positions. JP stands, uncomfortable,
still scanning for trouble.

SHAY

JP go ahead, right there.

She points out a nice eye-level spot. She turns and starts
her own piece.

He takes the notebook out first and scans the various
incarnations of Romeo he's drawn. He can't decide.

He pops the lid and shakes his can. Using his notebook as a
map, he starts to paint.

First he's unsure of himself, his strokes are awkward, shy.

Then he starts to lean into it, let himself enjoy it.

Shay finishes her tag, tosses her can. She looks at JP enjoying himself.

SHAY (CONT'D)
Yes! I can't believe this is actually happening.

JP steps back.

'JayP.' It's a little clumsy, but it's there.

The two of them admire the work.

SHAY (CONT'D)
How does it feel?

JP checks in with himself.

JP
I like it.

He's really humming with energy.

SHAY
Remember this feeling. You did it!

EDGAR
You guys done? We don't have unlimited time.

SHAY
We're good!

He does a sweep, looking at everyone's artwork.

EDGAR
Not bad, meine freunde.

The cop's light pokes around a path.

JP
Uh... uh...

JP sees a cop way down the path. They haven't been noticed yet.

EDGAR
Run!

EXT. NYC STREETS - LATER

The four run until Lena runs out of breath. JP doesn't notice and Shay grabs his shirt to keep him from taking off.

SHAY

Yes!

JP

Oh my god, I can't believe I did it.

LENA

(huffing and wheezing)
Good... job... guys!

The three celebrate.

Edgar stands with his arms crossed.

EDGAR

It was alright.

His tone shuts down their reverie.

EDGAR (CONT'D)

(pointing at Lena)
Your bubble work is okay, but you are not creating any depth. I want to feel the lettering jump off the wall. Two dimensional is boring.

Lena nods like a film student to a famous director.

EDGAR (CONT'D)

(pointing at Shay)
You have been doing the same boring tag over and over again for weeks. It is boring.

EDGAR (CONT'D)

And you. First time jitters, I hope?

JP

A little.

EDGAR

Understandable. That tag was timid and flat. Show me something better next time.

Shay mouths 'Next time?' to JP.

EDGAR (CONT'D)
And pick a better name.

JP
Any ideas?

EDGAR
(cringing)
What? No, you pick your own name.
What is wrong with him?

SHAY
He's nervous, remember.

EDGAR
I don't care. Go home, and don't
tell everyone about this, Shay.

He leaves.

The trio wait until he's out of sight and then EXPLODE into
giddy excitement.

SHAY
Jerome Paul Davidson, how does it
feel to be a...

She does a fake drumroll on her legs.

SHAY (CONT'D)
STREET WRITER?!

His smile won't leave his face.

JP
I don't know... AMAZING?!

They dance with each other.

LENA
That name sucks though.

SHAY
Whoa, harsh.

LENA
Don't try and be someone else, man.
Be you.

JP
That's actually good advice.

He flips through the pages at all the other names he tried.

JP (CONT'D)
I don't know if any of these work.

LENA
You'll figure it out! It's no rush.
Just gotta feel it out, man.

JP
Thanks for your... guidance
tonight, Lena.

Lena gives JP another dap-plosion. It lands better this time.

LENA
Shay, I'll catch you. Nice run
tonight. Woo!

She and Shay do their thing, then Lena takes the next turn.

JP
Has she gone in the subway before?

SHAY
Yeah. Once. Said it was scary as
hell. Won't go again.

JP
Something scared *her*?

SHAY
Think about it. It's dark. It's
filled with like... rats. And
people live down there. Cops. Also
like, the train. You can't even
hear them coming sometimes.

JP
Oh so. Just those things.

SHAY
You're gonna have to toughen up,
kid.

They dap each other up. There's a new electricity in their
friendship.

JP
Yeah.