

**FIX**

By

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**FADE IN:**

**INT. CHICAGO - EL TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY**

Morning rush hour. Bodies merge together into a surging wave as worker-bees swarm towards an entrance to an underground stairwell leading down to a train platform.

Briefcases in hand, steaming coffee pressed to their lips, they all look the same to the untrained eye. A mass of unhappy corporate slaves.

But a keen eyed veteran of the streets well versed in the language of self-preservation sees much more. This is VAN MERCER (31). Unkempt. Dirty. Ragged.

Van is a fall from grace. A junkie of the highest order. A baseball cap is pulled down low to cover bloodshot eyes. A razor hasn't touched his face in a week.

Desperation clings to him like a second skin. But there is something else hiding just beneath the surface of this coarse husk of a man; something that faintly resembles compassion.

Van approaches JACK (60), a panhandler sitting against a wall with his worldly possessions in a shopping cart next to him. He meticulously works on a tattered crossword puzzle book.

Jack is stuck on a word.

VAN  
What's the clue?

JACK  
Eight letter word for showing  
sorrow. Starts with a "p."

VAN  
Penitent

Van's right. Jack jots it down quickly.

Van pulls out a new crossword puzzle book and a roast beef sandwich wrapped in plastic. He hands them to Jack.

While Jack tears into the sandwich voraciously, Van pulls out a PRESCRIPTION BOTTLE of pills, pops two quickly. His hands are shaky as he replaces the Xanax with a cigarette and lights up.

Jack's eyes creeping over Van --

JACK  
How long has it been?

VAN  
Too long.

JACK  
Maybe you should think about  
getting some help.

VAN  
I already have.

JACK  
Something tells me you really  
didn't want it.

Van sucks down his cigarette, stays silent.

JACK  
You gotta help yourself before  
anyone else will.

VAN  
Yeah... That's what they told me in  
rehab right before I checked out.

Van eyes a group of COMMUTERS as they pass by. His eyes fall on a blonde TROPHY WIFE with a Louis Vuitton bag slung around her shoulder and an iPhone pressed to her ear.

Jack gives Trophy a once over.

JACK  
Don't waste your time. That bag is  
a fake. She's a pretender.

Jack nods to a BUSINESSMAN in a crisp suit. A gold Rolex GLEAMS on his wrist.

JACK  
But a man with a watch like that  
has a wallet full of Franklins.

Van flicks his cigarette away. His prey identified, he takes a deep breath, steadying himself. Jack peers up at Van.

JACK  
Take care of yourself, Van.

VAN  
I always do.

We follow Van into the MOB of commuters making their way down a SET of STAIRS towards a TRAIN PLATFORM. Van closes in on ROLEX just as an El Train's brakes come SCREECHING to a halt.

Rolex pulls his cell, makes a call, enters the train.

**INT. EL TRAIN - CONTINUOUS**

Van slips in just behind Rolex. The doors of the El shut and the train lurches forward. Playing it cool, Van glances up at the AD SPACE lining the top of the El train cabin.

Alcohol ads interspersed with drug advertisements for anxiety and depression. Amongst them --

An advertisement from a biotech company named EPOCHON offering money for participating in a clinical trial.

An ELDERLY LADY standing next to Van scoffs, her eyes moving over the same ads.

ELDERLY LADY

You'd think if any of these  
actually solved our problems they  
wouldn't have to shove it down our  
throats so hard.

Van shrugs. He doesn't really care. His eyes pass over Rolex. The train comes to a stop. Doors open. Rolex, still on his phone, walks out with crowd. Van follows.

**EXT. EL PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS**

Van surges forward through the exiting throng of commuters, stalking his prey. He slides behind Rolex with ease. This isn't his first rodeo.

Van bumps into Rolex. Rolex swivels and glares angrily.

ROLEX

Watch where you're going you  
fucking junkie.

VAN

Sorry man.

Van pushes away from Rolex, distancing himself quickly. He deftly slips Rolex's WALLET into his pocket just as --

ROLEX

Hey! Stop!

Van aggressively SHOVES through the Commuters, pushing them out of his way. He glances over his shoulder. Rolex is better at clearing a path than Van is.

Van breaks clear of the commuter mob. Pay dirt. Sprinting now. But Rolex isn't giving up without a chase.

Halfway down the platform Rolex tackles Van. They hit the pavement hard. Van wrestles free, KICKS Rolex in the gut.

Rolex rolls off, screaming in pain. Van scrambles towards an El Train whose doors are beginning to close.

Rolex pushes himself up and gives chase. Van jumps through the train's doors, narrowly making it inside the cabin just as the doors shut. The train lurches forward.

**INT. EL TRAIN - CONTINUOUS**

Rolex POUNDS his fists on the train's windows. But it's no use. This train has left the station.

Mission accomplished, Van takes a deep breath. The train motors off. He pulls out Rolex's wallet and opens it. Van smiles. It's flush with Franklins.

**EXT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT**

Ravers and hipsters lined up, waiting to pay homage to their Techno Mecca. He passes them quickly, fumbling through his pockets for his bottle of Xanax. Not there.

He turns the corner and enters abruptly into --

**EXT. NIGHTCLUB - ALLEYWAY - CONTINUOUS**

A BOUNCER guards the side door. No line here. Only shadows.

BOUNCER

You look like shit man. I can't let you go in looking like that. You're gonna mess up the vibe.

VAN

I'll be out in ten. Swear it.

Van slips him a crisp twenty. Bouncer takes it and reluctantly opens the door. TECHNO music floods out.

BOUNCER  
Stay away from the fucking dance  
floor.

**INT. NIGHTCLUB - DANCE FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER**

Van shuffles through half naked, glow stick wielding HIPSTERS high on more than life. He eyes the VIP BOOTH tucked back in a corner away from the action on the second floor where --

GHOST (30), thug-shiek, expensive pair of Ray-Bans and a menagerie of gold chains hanging around his neck keenly surveys the dance floor.

Ghost's PERSONAL SECURITY is failing miserably at blending in. The two WOMEN in short skirts flanking Ghost, their eyes as wide as saucers, blend in just fine though.

Van approaches. Ghost nods to his security detail. He's cool. Van enters the "inner sanctum."

GHOST  
You look like dog shit white boy.

VAN  
So I've been told already Ghost,  
but thanks for the reinforcement.

Van slams down five Franklins. Ghost snatches them up.

GHOST  
Shit. You want the fire huh?  
Looking to fly high tonight?

VAN  
As high as I can.

Ghost pulls two BAGGIES filled with brown rock heroin, pushes them across to Van.

GHOST  
Knock yourself out cowboy.

**EXT. BUILDING - ALLEYWAY - NIGHT**

Behind a dumpster, Van heats a spoonful of heroin with a lighter. He slips a syringe out of his pocket and draws in the poison with shaking hands, injects his high.

Eyes dilate. Nirvana pulses through his veins. The stars are now aligned. Everything is copacetic. Flying high, he is ready to start his night.

**INT. EPOCHON BIOTECH - POD SUITE - NIGHT**

A dimly lit medical room housing several human sized pods. Inside the pods, two TEST SUBJECTS seizure uncontrollably. Blood foams from their mouths.

Lights flash. Alarms sound. Two SCIENTISTS in white lab coats frantically type into control panels attached to the pods.

FLAT LINED heart rate appears on the monitors. Scientists look at each other, then up to a mirrored WALL of WINDOWS.

A WOMAN'S VOICE speaks calmly over an intercom.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)  
Termination of experiment 2203.  
Prepare data assessment immediately  
for exit report.

The Scientists silence the alarms and begin to look at data on their hand held tablets. The two Test Subjects twitch once more and then go still.

**INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DEN - NIGHT**

Squatter's paradise. Boarded up windows. No working plumbing. No electricity. Water drips from the ceiling and congregates in tiny black pools.

A dirty mattress lies in one corner. Besides Van, the only inhabitants this place has seen in years are the rats.

Van lights a candle and sits down on the mattress. He pulls out a SKETCH BOOK and starts flipping through the pictures.

Most are portraits - Ghost and Jack - and they are good. He starts to sketch, suddenly stops. FLASHING red and blue lights outside.

He blows out the candle and heads for the back door.

**EXT. TY'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

A modest two story slice of suburbia. White shutters on the windows. Manicured lawn. A garden gnome watches Van with accusing eyes as he kneels down and slides into the home through the basement window.

**INT. TY'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS**

Van slips into the dark room like a thief in the night. A loud YELP from below as his feet hit something solid in the form of --

TY MERCER (36). He's everything his brother is not. Responsible. Family man. And a lot less messed up.

TY

What the hell, Van? I told you to call me if you were going to come over. Lori and the kids are sleeping.

A master at shifting conversations --

VAN

Why are you sleeping down here anyway? What did you do?

TY

None of your business.

Flipping on a small table lamp, Ty sees the wreck masquerading as his brother. Van starts to light a cigarette. Ty snatches it from his mouth.

TY

You know better than that.

Van rolls his saucer-sized eyes, flops down on the bed.

VAN

So how's the rehab business? You guys found the cure yet?

TY

Funny... There's always a place for you there.

VAN

Been there done that.

Van bristles. An uncomfortable silence.

TY

How about some coffee? I know I could use some.

VAN

I just need a place to crash for the night. I'm not here for an intervention, Ty.



A festering wound, Ty can't hold his tongue.

TY

When are you going to get your shit together huh? Look at yourself. You're a fucking mess.

VAN

I'm working on it.

Ty shakes his head. He isn't buying that for a second.

Van's eyes move to a framed photograph. Van and Ty's PARENTS. Another photograph. Ty and Van as young boys in altar boy robes standing with a Priest. An embossed caption on the picture reads: "St. Anthony's."

Ty catches his brother's gaze.

TY

You know, you don't have to be a prisoner to your past, Van.

Silence. Van glowers. Ty unrelenting --

TY

It's been seven years. You need to accept that.

VAN

I have.

TY

Sure doesn't look like it. Look, you need to stop using what happened as an excuse for --

Van boils. Ty backs off. He's passed the threshold.

TY

Alright. It's your life. I love you no matter what... You can crash in the spare tonight. We'll catch up in the morning.

**INT. TY'S HOUSE - SPARE BEDROOM - LATER**

Simple. A bed and a dresser. Van's eyes fall on a framed NEWS ARTICLE with a picture of himself as a younger man accepting an award next to a large painting. The headline reads: "Up and coming artist wins big."

Van catches his reflection in the dresser's mirror. Dirty. Greasy hair. Bloodshot eyes. The difference between now and then is night and day.

He takes the framed article, places it face down on the dresser then grabs a blanket from the end of the bed. He covers the mirror. Some realities are just too much to bear.

**INT. TY'S HOUSE - SPARE BEDROOM - DAY**

Sunlight bleeds into the room, fully highlighting the ruffled mess that now sleeps on the spare bed. A NEWS BROADCAST filters in from another room --

BROADCASTER (V.O.)

President Rush has once again submitted his defense funding proposal to the House for approval. The landmark 950 billion dollar request was overwhelmingly defeated just three months ago and pundits are no more optimistic that the package will garner enough support in the House to pass this time around than they were several months ago... In Business news...

Van's eyes struggle open to find another set of eyes staring back at him.

JENNA (7), tugs on Van's sweatshirt, bright anticipation in her eyes. She shoves a drawing in Van's face excitedly.

JENNA

I drew this for you, Uncle Van. I want to be an artist like you.

Wincing, he sits up. The party is over. For now at least. He grabs the drawing as she eagerly awaits his response.

VAN

Wow. You just might be the next Rembrandt, kiddo.

JENNA

Who's Rembrandt?

VAN

Only the most famous artist the world has ever known.

JENNA

Really?

Van nods, tussles her hair.

VAN  
Give Uncle Van a minute to wake up  
okay?

JENNA  
Okay!

Jenna grabs her drawing and rushes from the room.

JENNA (O.S.)  
Mommy! Uncle Van said I'm the next  
Rembrandt!

LORI (O.S.)  
That's great dear. Now go get ready  
for school.

Footsteps stomp upstairs. The sound of breakfast being prepared in the kitchen. Lori's voice lowers --

LORI (O.S.)  
He can't keep showing up like this.  
Not in the state he's in.

TY (O.S.)  
I can't turn him out. He's going  
through a rough patch right now.

Van slips on his shoes quietly.

LORI (O.S.)  
A rough patch? A few months is a  
rough patch, Ty.

TY (O.S.)  
He'll come around. You'll see.

Withdrawal kicking in hard, Van's hands begin to shake.

LORI (O.S.)  
There's nothing you can do to help  
him. Can't you see that? You have  
to let him go. He's a lost cause.

TY (O.S.)  
No one is a lost cause.

Van rises, takes a moment to steady himself, then slips silently out of the room into --

**FRONT HALLWAY**

Stealth mode, Van makes for the front door.

TY

Hey! I got something for you.

Escape plan foiled, Van turns to face the music. Ty hands Van a TACKLE BOX.

TY

Found it cleaning out the garage last week. I think it was from Mom and Dad's place... Figured you might want it.

VAN

I didn't mean to get you on her shit list.

Ty shrugs. It is what it is.

TY

Where you off to so early?

Van drops his eyes. Ty knows. Addiction calls. But he mercifully spares his brother the lecture.

TY

Let me at least give you a ride.

VAN

Yeah. Okay.

**INT. EPOCHON - RESEARCH LAB - DAY**

State of the art. A technological masterpiece of science. LAB TECHS work at stations. In the corner, a row of three cages filled with chimpanzees.

THOMAS KERN (45), air of authority, sanctimonious, strides into the room on a mission for answers. And the woman who has them is --

KATHERINE MILLER (38), self-assured, capable, magnetic in her confidence. Miller is covering the stats of Patient 1 and 2 using a powerpoint reflected on the glass in front of her.

KERN

How did we lose both test subjects, Dr. Miller?

MILLER

They were selected for their skills and their physical fitness. I thought they were the perfect candidates. But it appears their bodies were unable to handle the effects of the drug when we re-dosed.

Kern irritated.

KERN

I'd like to speak with Dr. Miller alone.

The TECHS clear the room.

KERN

Our funding is nearly out Katherine. This was supposed to be it. What are we supposed to do now?

MILLER

We can still make our deadline but we have to think outside the box.

Miller grabs a thick file folder off the counter, hands it to Kern. He flips through it quickly.

MILLER

I have been testing our compound on monkeys addicted to opiates. They have no problems tolerating our drug with repeat dosing over long periods of time.

Kern flips the file shut.

KERN

Meaning?

MILLER

Meaning we need to acquire test subjects who have already built up a tolerance to drugs, preferably heroin since they are resistant to its toxicity.

Kern glances over to the chimps then back to Miller.

KERN

You're telling me we need to recruit heroin junkies?

Spoken out loud it seems preposterous. But Miller doesn't blink. Kern hands her back the file.

KERN

If this doesn't work, it's over.

MILLER

We need the green light.

Kern strides quickly towards the door.

KERN

I'll call the request in.

**INT. TY'S CAR - DAY**

Tension so thick it could be cut with a knife. Ty eyes the ramshackle habitation Van calls home.

TY

This place can't be safe.

VAN

It's a fixer upper but I got it for a great price.

Ty isn't laughing. Van braces for the worst.

TY

You can stay at my place. Get back on your feet. But you can't use --

VAN

Thanks for the ride.

Van quickly opens the door and races for the house. Ty shakes his head. Maybe some causes are lost.

**INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DEN - NIGHT**

Withdrawal tremors gaining speed, Van injects his next dose. With steadier hands, he opens the tackle box and starts a reluctant trip down memory lane.

He runs his fingers along the tubes of paint on the top shelf then pulls up the rack to reveal a PHOTOGRAPH showing him as a younger man with parents. Another shows Van with his brother as young kids in front of their childhood home.

He takes out a few brushes and begins a new work but within seconds his eyes grow heavy. Van nods off. The drugs have won over. Again.

**INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DEN - LATER**

Men's VOICES. Speaking to a radio dispatcher. Cops. Heavy FOOTSTEPS. Van's eyes slowly flutter upon as he regains consciousness. Suddenly, a --

MUSCULAR COP (25), stands over Van, flashlight trained in his eyes. Van shields his face from the bright onslaught.

MUSCLES

Van Mercer?

A WIRY COP (25), appears at Muscles side.

WIRES

We need an ambulance?

Van forces his heavy eyes to focus on the two large uniforms looming above him.

VAN

No... No ambulances. I'm fine.

Eyes beginning to clear some --

VAN

What's this about officers?

MUSCLES

Is your name Van Mercer?

VAN

Yeah.

The Cops roughly PULL Van to his feet and DRAG him toward the front door.

VAN

Hey! Hold up --

MUSCLES

You're under arrest. Now shut the fuck up.

**INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT**

A table and two chairs. A one-way mirror on the wall. Van agitated. Crashing hard. Tapping his fingers. Body shaking.

A surly CAPTAIN (55), enters followed by a young police OFFICER and a state appointed ATTORNEY. Captain throws down Van's file and eyes him coldly.

CAPTAIN

I just want it to be clear that I think offering you anything other than a jail sentence is a waste of everyone's time.

Sweating profusely. Fighting the shakes. Van is confused.

VAN

Can someone tell me what I'm being charged with?

Captain pulls out Van's Xanax prescription bottle and slams it down in front of him.

CAPTAIN

These look familiar, slick.

Van's face drops. They have him dead to rights.

CAPTAIN

The man you jacked. He's the D.A.'s brother. He wants to throw the book at you. But apparently today is your lucky day, asshole.

Attorney slides a piece of paper and pen in front of Van.

ATTORNEY

The D.A. is offering to waive the charges if you agree to participate in a clinical trial. You can refuse, which you have every legal right to do. But I must advise you that with your past record you're facing a minimum 10 year stretch. And I cannot stress the word minimum enough.

Mind reeling. Unsure. Is this for real? A trick? He eyes the paper in front of him.

VAN

Clinical trial?

On cue, Kern and Miller enter. Miller holds a sleek silver briefcase. She takes a seat in front of Van, smiles softly. Kern stands, arms crossed, eyeing the junkie hard.

MILLER

My name is Dr. Katherine Miller, Van. This is my colleague Thomas Kern.

(MORE)



MILLER (CONT'D)

We work for Epochon  
Biotechnologies... I'm sure you  
have a lot of questions.

He does but Van stumbles for words. The shakes are starting  
to take hold. Cold sweat beads along his brow.

MILLER

Why don't we start with the  
clinical trial that you have been  
selected for.

Van nods. Miller flashes that soft smile again, drawing him  
in with her soothing voice.

MILLER

Mr. Kern and I are conducting a  
lucid dream study. Quite bleeding  
edge technology really. The  
details of which I won't bore you  
with here.

Van unconsciously begins to twitch.

MILLER

What we require for this experiment  
are subjects that are able to  
withstand the potency of the drug  
that is needed to bring a subject  
into the lucid dream state.

VAN

You need junkies with a high  
tolerance.

Miller raises an eyebrow. He's quick. And maybe not as dumb  
as she first thought.

MILLER

In layman's terms, yes.

VAN

So you want me to be a fucking  
guinea pig?

Those cold, calculating eyes never leaving Van's --

KERN

If you aren't interested then there  
are plenty of others we can --

VAN

I didn't say I wasn't interested.

Miller's eyes scold Kern. This is her show for now. Let her deal with it. Kern reluctantly retreats.

MILLER

I'm not going to sugar coat it for you. You're obviously astute. Yes, we need test subjects. Guinea pigs if you will. Although we certainly frown on using that label for our test subjects.

VAN

I'll bet... So what's the risk?

MILLER

Substantial.

VAN

So I could die?

Choosing her words carefully --

MILLER

In any study such as this there is always the risk of terminal consequences.

VAN

So I absolutely could die.

MILLER

You could easily die from the next bad batch of heroin.

VAN

I know where my shit comes from.

MILLER

I understand your trepidation. But I can assure you, we wouldn't be proceeding with this study if we believed our drug would kill you.

Van wipes sweat from his brow. Licks his dry lips. He's on the verge of meltdown. And Miller seizes the opportunity.

She opens her briefcase, calmly pulls out a syringe and fills it from a small vial.

MILLER

This is Dolophine. It's used to --

VAN

I know what methadone does. Just give it to me before I have a fucking heart attack.

MILLER

We will need a commitment from you first, Van.

Miller has played her cards perfectly. Van eyes the syringe longingly. This is the quick fix. It's what he needs. Until his next hit.

VAN

What sort of commitment?

MILLER

Your signature on that piece of paper releases you into our recognizance for the next 24 hours. It does not obligate you to the study. What it does obligate you to is appearing for our detailed orientation tomorrow at 10 A.M. Then you must make the final decision as to whether you wish to proceed with us or not.

Van eyes the syringe. Relief from this hell. Inches away.

MILLER

If you choose to part ways with us, you will immediately be reprimanded back into the custody of the state where you will await trial. However, if you choose to proceed with us, all we will require is less than a week of your time and then you are free to go back to whatever life you see fit.

Van holds out as long as he can. But who is he kidding? He grabs the pen and scrawls his signature across the paper.

Miller smiles at Kern. See? I told you so.

VAN

Now give me the fucking shot.

She does. Van's eyes roll back. His breathing calms. The shakes cease. He smiles. Everything is right in the world once again... At least for now.