

MALLEABLE MIND

Written by

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SELECT SCENE #1: ALICE THE NIGHT AFTER & POLICE STATION

EXT./INT. ENTRANCEWAY. HELLEN'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY
(FLASHBACK 18 YEARS EARLIER).

18 YEARS EARLIER.

HELEN (early 40s), Alice's best friend despite their age difference, opens her front door.

Standing on her building's front step is MAY OREL, Alice's mother (late 50s).

Helen steps back to let her in.

MAY

Have you talked to her?

HELEN

Not since I picked her up last night. She was there for hours. Wouldn't leave. They eventually made her.

Helen closes the door.

Words pour out of her like a running faucet.

HELEN (CONT'D)

She's just been in the room. Doesn't look like the light is on. I'm hoping she got to sleep.

Helen leads May through the entrance way to a staircase leading up to the second floor.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I didn't go in, I didn't want to see. So I stayed outside 'til they said I had to take her home. She was just numb. I've never seen her like that. Said nothing, her face looked like nothing. You know?

(beat)

Second door on the right.

May ascends the stairs, one hand gripping the banister tightly.

May opens the door to Helen's apartment. Helen follows.

INT. HELEN'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Helen gestures to a closed door.

May tentatively walks over to the guest bedroom.

EXT. HELEN'S BEDROOM. HELEN'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

May knocks gently on the door.

MAY

Alice?

Silence.

MAY (CONT'D)

(firmer)

Alice.

May opens the unlocked door.

INT. HELEN'S BEDROOM. HELEN'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

May enters the small guest bedroom. On the bed lays Alice. Back turned, she faces away from May.

May sits down on the twin bed next to Alice.

MAY

(softly)

I'm so sorry.

Alice doesn't move; no acknowledgment of May's presence.

MAY (CONT'D)

I can't tell you--

INT. HELEN'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Helen walks up to the television which plays the morning news on mute.

She turns a dial and the volume comes on.

NEWS REPORTER

The shooting took place around 8pm last night. Several witnesses were in the area at the time.

Helen sits down on her sofa; anxious.

On the television, a frazzled WOMAN (mid 40s) speaks with a NEWS REPORTER.

WOMAN

I live up from the gas station across the way. My window looks down on the road. I heard the gunshot and ran to my window. Saw a man running down the street, then the police showed up. It was one of those fast things like -- happens and that's it.

Hellen finally releases the breath she had been holding in since she picked Alice up hours ago.

INT. CAR. POLICE STATION PARKING LOT - DAY

Alice and May sit in the front seats of May's double parked car.

The police station stretches out in front of them.

At the sound of May's seatbelt unbuckling, Alice becomes alert.

ALICE

No. I don't want you.

MAY

I can be there with you -- or outside the room. Whatever you want.

ALICE

I don't want that.

MAY

Let me--

ALICE

(snaps)
Stop.

Alice undoes her buckle and pulls at the door handle.

The door pops open.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Go home.

Alice reaches back in to grab her purse.

She catches a quick glimpse of May's face before closing the door.

INT. POLICE INTERROGATION ROOM - LATER

Alice sits at a table in a small room.

AMOS (40s) crosses the room and sits down across from her.

His demeanor is tough, verging on imposing.

AMOS

Sorry to make you wait. This case's digging up witnesses left and right. With the media all over this thing and DA pushin', you got lots of people coming forwards to do the right thing.

Amos pushes on.

AMOS (CONT'D)

Can you tell me how it happened?
Just run through and get it on the record.

Alic's tight, dry throat momentarily holds her back.

ALICE

I was at a stoplight. The gas station was across from me where I had just filled up and pulled out. I'm stopped and he comes running up to my door, opens it. He opens my door, waiving a gun.

AMOS

Can you tell me about him?

ALICE

Yes. A b--African American man. 20s maybe?

AMOS

Then?

ALICE

He's screaming, "get out of the car, get out of the car". All the time the gun moving around.

(beat)

Then the gun went off-- just--

Alice points past her right shoulder.

ALICE (CONT'D)
After the shot, he ran. Then the
police got there.
(beat)
Then the ambulance.

AMOS
You know who called them?

Alice shakes her head.

AMOS (CONT'D)
What else do you remember about
him?

ALICE
I don't know.

AMOS
Anything about what he was wearing?
Facial features?

ALICE
I don't know.

AMOS
Take your time. Think.

Amos shifts tactics as Alice blanks.

AMOS (CONT'D)
We got some of the other witnesses
saying her was in blue jeans with a
black shirt. That sound about
right?

ALICE
I don't remember.

Amos holds.

ALICE (CONT'D)
Maybe. Could be.

AMOS
His face -- anything like a scruffy
beard? 5 o'clock shadow?

ALICE
I didn't see his face.

AMOS

He was standing in front of you
with the gun, correct? 2 feet? 5
feet?

ALICE

Yes, but--

Alice squints, unable to verbalize why she couldn't remember
the face of the man standing two feet in front of her.

ALICE (CONT'D)

It's not clear...

AMOS

Think on it.

ALICE

I really don't know. I can't
remember his face.

AMOS

You saw his face at some point. How
'bout when he was running, did he
look back at you as he ran away?
Could've seen his face then, yeah?

ALICE

I don't know. I can't-- I don't
remember.

AMOS

Eye-color? Hair. Long, short, buzz
cut?

ALICE

(snaps)
I don't know!

Alice remembers who she's talking to.

ALICE (CONT'D)

(quickly)
Sorry-- I'm sorry. I didn't...

Amos holds off on this point, deciding instead to move on.

AMOS

Let's talk about the gun. Was it a
black gun, silver?

ALICE

(no hesitation)
Black.

AMOS

And the gun-- did he hold it in his
right hand?

Alice holds her hands in front of her: L - left; backwards L -
right.

ALICE

His right hand. Yes.

Amos jots this down.

AMOS

After the gun went off what
happened?

ALICE

I turned back.

AMOS

To the backseat.

Alice nods, then remembers the recorder on the table. Her
voice begins to crack.

ALICE

I turned to face the backseat.

Beat.

AMOS

We got a couple men in custody. I'd
like you to check out a lineup.
Would you be comfortable with that?
(beat)
I know this is hard. We just need
your help, understand?

INT. POLICE STATION - CONTINUOUS

Alice stands next to Amos in the darkness. Both look forward
to a lit room.

Amos leans in and speaks into a microphone set up on a desk
in front of them.

AMOS

Send them in.

INT. POLICE LINE UP. POLICE STATION - CONTINUOUS

Five black men walk in and stand in their respective spots. Most are slender, some stockier. Several are tall, but mostly average height.

Amos nods towards the glass.

Alice steps closer, the lineup coming into clear view.

ALICE

I was sitting... it's hard for me
to gauge height.

(beat)

I think 3 is too tall.

Amos leans forward. Into the mic--

AMOS

3 can go.

Amos steps back, giving Alice space.

AMOS (CONT'D)

Take your time. Ain't no rush.

From behind the glass, she watches one of the men in particular -- DAVID PAULSON (23).

She takes in his whole body, his arms, hands; specifically his right.

ALICE

Maybe 2... or 5. I'm not sure-- I
can't--

AMOS

(into the mic)

Just 2 and 5.

The rest of the suspects leave the room.

AMOS (CONT'D)

(into the mic)

2 and 5 stand next to each other.

This leaves Paulson and another man.

Alice compares the two, their lives in her hands.

ALICE

I don't know.

AMOS

Take a good look. 2 or 5.

Did Alice hear him correctly? Did he put an emphasis on 2, or was that a natural speech inflection?

She glances at Amos, his stern face pressing her to make a decision.

ALICE

2.

Amos's face relaxes.

AMOS

2.

A POLICE OFFICER, previously unseen in the corner of the room, nods and walks out.

AMOS (CONT'D)

You got family taking care of you?

ALICE

Are you going to need me for anything else?

AMOS

Gonna write up a witness statement and have you sign it. Just what was said throughout the course of the interview. After that, there's work on our end, but you won't be needed until the prosecutor gets in contact with you, if they choose to. That ain't my department.

ALICE

My car?

AMOS

Speak with Jeff. The desk closest to the front door.

INT. POLICE STATION - CONTINUOUS

Alice walks past several police desks.

She passes a WOMAN sitting, pen in hand, ready to sign several documents.

She looks a bit worse for wear.

A policeman sits across from her.

As Alice passes, she picks up--

WOMAN

This just what we talked about?

POLICE OFFICER

(forcefully)

Witness testimony.

WOMAN

Did you get someone to check in on
my kids?

Alice continues down the row of desks towards the front.

POLICE OFFICER

Just sign it.

SELECT SCENE #2: LEESE INTERVIEW PRESENT DAY & FLASHBACK

INT. NATIONAL NEWS STUDIO - DAY (PRESENT DAY)

FADE IN.

A modern, national news studio. Big lights, several cameras,
people mill about.

A much larger studio than the one Alice was interviewed in.

Leese sits in the guest chair. She's older, her posture
suggestive of more confidence.

She's not uncomfortable there, she knows her truth.

Her blouse is mic'd.

NEWS ANCHOR

(to the camera)

We have with us here today, Leese
Paulson, sister of David Paulson,
who in 1993, was convicted of the
murder of a three year old girl.
The story has garnered a lot of
attention over the years, with many
stepping in to condemn his
sentence, including the Pope.

The NEWS ANCHOR turns towards Leese. The light above one of the cameras goes on, signaling a change in camera angle.

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

Leese. Thank you for coming to speak with us.

LEESE

Thank you. It's been a long journey.

CUT TO:

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY (18 YEARS EARLIER) (1993)

Outside the courthouse in which Paulson's trial has just taken place.

The verdict has been given, David has been taken away.

Local reports are all around; people yell and scream at KELLI PAULSON (50s) and her daughter LEESE (20s).

They walk quickly towards a parking lot around the corner, trying to out-walk the crowd and cameras.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Leese drives while Kelli sits in the front passenger seat.

They pull out of the parking lot.

As they're about to turn, a gulp size cup of soda hits their windshield. Leese stomps on the breaks, jerking both her and Kelli forward against their seat belts.

INT. PAULSON LIVING ROOM. PAULSON APARTMENT - NIGHT

Leese and Kelli sit on the sofa in their small apartment. Several other family members mill about. The atmosphere is tense.

The 1993 interview with Alice plays on the television.

LEESE

They're fucking lying!

Kelli is inconsolable.

LEESE (CONT'D)

All of them!

Leese's AUNT ANGELA (40s) walks over to Kelli.

AUNT ANGELA
Come on. How 'bout we go to bed?

KELLI
I can't--

AUNT ANGELA
Leese, put on the pot for a hot
water bottle.

Leese pushes through her anger and does as she's told.

KELLI
(to Aunt Angela)
I didn't think he could do
something--

LEESE (O.S.)
Because he didn't!

Leese walks out from the kitchen, enflamed.

LEESE (CONT'D)
Don't you dare listen to what
they're saying. You know David. You
know him.

KELLI
Maybe it was me.

LEESE
You did nothing wrong. You're a
wonderful mother. He's innocent.

AUNT ANGELA
(to Kelli)
Come on.

Aunt Angela helps Kelli up and walks her to her bedroom, as
the tea pot begins whistling.

LEESE
(to her cousin)
Turn it off!

Leese's cousin JAMAL (16) moves quickly to the television and
switches it off.

INT. KITCHEN. PAULSON APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Leese turns the tea pot off.

Aunt Angela enters.

AUNT ANGELA

(calmer)

Don't talk like that in front of
your mother.

LEESE

How the--

(quiets her voice)

How am I supposed to talk?

AUNT ANGELA

We don't know enough yet. We're
waiting on the lawyer. Nothing we
can do until he tells us what's
going on.

LEESE

I don't know what to do. This...
Not in my craziest thoughts... you
know? You never think...

AUNT ANGELA

I know. Come here.

Aunt Angela brings Leese to her; they embrace.

AUNT ANGELA (CONT'D)

Your family is here. You
understand? None of us believe it.
Not your mother, none of us.

LEESE

He doesn't have a piece of anger in
him. Nothing.

AUNT ANGELA

I know. Hold onto that. Don't ever
let them make you think otherwise.

INT. DENTIST'S OFFICE - DAY

A downscale dentist's office catering to low-income
individuals.

The second floor of a three story building; steep stairs lead
to the small waiting room.

Leese sits behind the desk. Phone to her ear, she checks a
calendar on the desk.

LEESE

He has a 2pm, if you can make that?

Her voice is weak, all of her energy is elsewhere.

INT. BACK HALLWAY. DENTIST'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Leese carries a file through the dentist's office. She passes two rooms with dentist's chairs.

As she nears a small side room for cleaning, she overhears...

DENTAL HYGIENIST (O.S.)

(hushed)

He looked like the type, you know?

DENTAL ASSISTANT (O.S.)

(hushed)

I only met him once. He came by the office.

Leese pushes past the small side room to one of the exam rooms. She holds out the file for the doctor without a word, pushing it into his hands before walking away.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Leese stands waiting for a bus. A cigarette sits between her lips, her thin fingers occasionally pick it out with an exhalation of smoke, then insert it again.

Her movements are shaky and anxious.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Leese sits across the desk from Detective Amos. He looks as though he's been up for hours.

LEESE

I--

Detective Amos puts up his hand quickly, silencing her. His demeanor is much rougher towards her than Alice.

DETECTIVE AMOS

Several people have implicated your brother in the murder of a three year old girl.

Leese shakes her head. Detective Amos puts up his hand again before she can speak.

DETECTIVE AMOS (CONT'D)

I need you to tell me where your brother was last night between 8pm and 8:30pm.

LEESE

I don't know, sir.

DETECTIVE AMOS

That doesn't help him.

LEESE

David would never do this. He didn't.

CUT BACK:

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS (FLASHBACK - 13 YEARS EARLIER 1993)

Leese watches as a bus pulls in and stops in front of her. The door opens with a gasp of air.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

Leese sits down in an empty seat.

Out of the corner of her eye, she notices a MAN staring at her.

His face is aggressive; he pierces her with his stare.

Leese turns away.