

EXT. SHALLOW GRAVE - DAWN

A bleak horizon bleeds from indigo to gray. Mist rolls low across a patch of earth. Wind hums. Not a bird in sight.

KNEELING in the dirt - a CLOWN

His makeup is smeared to dull pinks and whites, more pathetic than comic. His gloved hands move slowly, methodically, piling dirt onto a body.

He stops. Reaches into his jacket pocket.

CLOWN takes out a tube of lipstick, he paints her lips.

He lingers, staring at the finished mouth. Unblinking. Waiting. Then, he tosses a final handful of dirt onto her face.

EXT. NARROW CITY ALLEYS - DAWN

The CLOWN's boots tap through puddles as he enters a narrow alley - walls high and close on either side. The world feels heavy, gray, claustrophobic.

The CLOWN jumps up and kicks his feet together.

CUT TO BLACK. TITLE CARD "PAPER CRANES"

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

The CLOWN performs on a busy street corner: sign-twirling, spinning, dancing awkwardly to invisible music.

He offers paper cranes to passersby, No one stops.

A group of YOUNG MEN stumble toward him, laughter loud and careless.

One of them peers into the CLOWN'S hat, where a solitary bill lies folded. He grins, snatches it up, and pockets it. The CLOWN reaches for it.

The MAN keeps the bill just outside of the CLOWN's reach.

The CLOWN steps forward, hand out in a silent plea, eyes wide and desperate.

MAN
Dance for us funny man!

The group explodes into laughter again. One shoves him in the chest. Another kicks his hat away.

They surround him now, circling like dogs.

The CLOWN reaches into his pocket and offers them a paper crane.

The laughter turns violent. A punch lands. Another kick. The CLOWN collapses, curling inward, makeup smeared across his arms.

INT. SURREAL TRANCE

A Wedding scene. The CLOWN is a formal suite even though he is still in CLOWN makeup. Opposite from him is his bride, face covered in a veil and lace. Red colored lips shine through the veil.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

The CLOWN is awoken by his trance by a punch to the face, he shortly goes into another trance.

INT. SURREAL TRANCE

A projected version of a blurry women is enlarged on a wall, the CLOWN's silhouette is seen in front of it, reaching his hands out to touch the wall.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

The CLOWN is awoken by his trance by another blow to the face, he tries to get up. The MAN pushes the clown back down to the ground. He spits at the ground near the CLOWN's face, then turns on his heel and walks off. The rest of the gang follows, their silhouettes stretching long across the morning street.

The CLOWN alone now, crumpled in the gutter.

Blood trickles from his mouth and nose. One eye swollen shut, red paint running down his chin in streaks like tears.

He turns his head weakly - there, in the gutter, a paper crane, soggy, its folded wings flattened.

The CLOWN reaches for it.
His hand - bloodied, trembling - drags across the wet asphalt, fingertips grazing the fragile wing.

He lifts it, just barely, the crane sticking to his palm.

He holds it above his face, light piercing through its thin paper.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

The CLOWN is slumped at a dingy bar, face bandaged. He takes a shaky sip of liquor. His hands tremble - the glass rattles softly against the wood.

The CLOWN pulls his duffel bag from the stool beside him. He unzips it - a pile of eviction notices, debt letters, and unpaid bills spill out onto the counter.

He stares at them for a long moment. Then, quietly - methodically - he begins folding one of the papers into a paper crane.

He finishes one crane, then another. Soon, several take shape before him, standing like frail little soldiers across the counter.

The BARTENDER wipes a glass nearby, eyeing the clown with thin patience.

BARTENDER

This ain't a charity bozo, you got
money or not?

The CLOWN blinks up at him. He looks down at his cranes - then slides one across the counter toward the bartender.

The BARTENDER stares at it, then at the clown. His lip curls into disgust. The BARTENDER raises up his hand, ready to smack the CLOWN.

The CLOWN anticipates it and squeezes his eyes shut.

Nothing happens.

He opens them slowly.

A sleek hand has appeared on the counter, slipping folded dollar bills toward the bartender. The BARTENDER hesitates, then takes the money and turns away.

The CLOWN glances to his side - the owner of the hand revealed.

A WOMAN sits beside him now, dark curls frame her face, red

lipstick, her expression is calm.

The WOMAN reaches over and picks up one of the paper cranes he's been folding.

The CLOWN laughs.

The WOMAN smiles at him, she puts the paper crane in her pocket and gets up to leave the bar.

The CLOWN, slightly disappointed that she left so soon, takes another sip of his liquor. He thinks for a moment and follows the women.

EXT. OUTSIDE BAR - NIGHT

A few paces ahead, the WOMAN moves down the narrow street, coat collar turned up. The CLOWN catches up to her and taps her on the shoulder. The CLOWN taps her on the shoulder

The WOMAN tilts her head at the CLOWN

WOMAN

I have a job for you. This could pay a lot of money.

THE CLOWN TILTS HIS HEAD AS WELL.

She slips a hand from her coat pocket. A small teacup gleams in the lamplight. The clown peers over the teacup.

In the teacup, he sees not himself, but seemingly another version of himself. (Mirrors "Wedding Scene" surreal trance from earlier)

WOMAN

Everybody would pay to see their better selves.

The CLOWN is astonished, he does exaggerating hand movements.

The WOMAN puts the teacup back into her purse. The CLOWN nods faintly, he takes the WOMAN'S hand and shakes it in agreement.

CLOWN

Every paper crane I fold shall be yours.

MONTAGE BEGINS

I/E. MONTAGE

The montage starts with a group of people hovering around the teacup and are amazed.

People lining up and handing money to the CLOWN and the WOMAN

The CLOWN and the WOMAN are sitting in the back of the tram, the WOMAN counting money while the CLOWN is folding paper cranes.

The CLOWN and WOMAN are leaning on the wall with newspapers over their face, a group of people walk up to them and ask them to do the trick.

The CLOWN and WOMAN are sitting next to a shore, the WOMAN leans on the CLOWN's shoulder

The CLOWN and WOMAN run and celebrate, we see their silhouette.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

The CLOWN and WOMAN lean against the street wall. The CLOWN counts stacks of money while the WOMAN looks disinterested and her eyes wander around her surroundings.

The WOMAN spots another CLOWN nearby and is doing exaggerated motions and dances to earn money. She wanders off towards that direction.

IN EVERY LOCATION PREVIOUSLY IN THE MONTAGE, THE WOMAN
WANDERS OFF AND THE CLOWN IS CONFUSED

EXT. PARK - AFTERNOON

The CLOWN and the WOMAN sit underneath a tree.

WOMAN

Fortune smiles on us on last.

The CLOWN doesn't smile. He sits unnaturally straight, eyes fixed on her.

The WOMAN, uneasy, moves closer.

CLOWN

You said that before. At the wedding.

The WOMAN looks confusedly at the CLOWN, she shakes her head and starts to move away.

A breeze moves through the grass. The WOMAN glances down. Something pale juts from the dirt near her shoe.

She frowns and leans forward, brushing a little earth aside.

WOMAN
What's this?

The CLOWN sits up, watching.

The WOMAN wipes away more soil - a curve of flesh, red lips beneath the dirt. Her smile falters. She looks to the CLOWN. She points down to the ground.

Her smile falters. She looks to the CLOWN.

He scrambles forward, trying to cover the ground with his hands.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
You buried her here.

The CLOWN's breath stutters. He hovers over the WOMAN, he brings his hands shakily to her neck.

He punches down to the ground, dirt flies up.

INT. SURREAL TRANCE

The Wedding Scene, The CLOWN lifts up his bride's veil to reveal the a distorted uncanny WOMAN. This cuts between her lips in this scene and the very first burying scene. The WOMAN starts hysterically laughing.

EXT. PARK - AFTERNOON

The CLOWN digs at the ground- but the WOMAN is gone.

He's alone, pounding at the ground - each strike throwing up soil and dust. He's not killing - he's digging, desperate, wild.

The POLICE emerge through the trees, slow and deliberate. The CLOWN looks up, breathless, mud streaked across his paint.

CLOWN
Don't arrest me, I have money

The CLOWN grips the duffel and shakes it wildly - what used to be money are now paper cranes, they erupt into the air, swirling everywhere. swirling everywhere.

The CLOWN grabs the teacup and places in front of the police, nothing appears.

The POLICE shove him on the ground.

The POLICE get the CLOWN to his feet and start putting his hands behind his back.

CLOWN (CONT'D)

Please! You can't arrest me, I'm
married to the moon, beloved by the
stars, the world's eternal clown!

The CLOWNS finger moves into frame and places the final exclamation mark.

INT. JAIL ROOM - AFTERNOON

The CLOWN sits alone at a metal table.
His costume is gone - replaced by plain, colorless clothing.
His makeup has been scrubbed away, leaving a pale ring where
his collar once sat. He stares at nothing for a long while.

A newspaper lies in front of him. The headline reads: "PSYCHO
KILLER: CLOWN'S DESCENT INTO MADNESS."

He traces the words with one trembling finger, almost tender.

Fold by fold, the paper begins to take shape.
A crane.