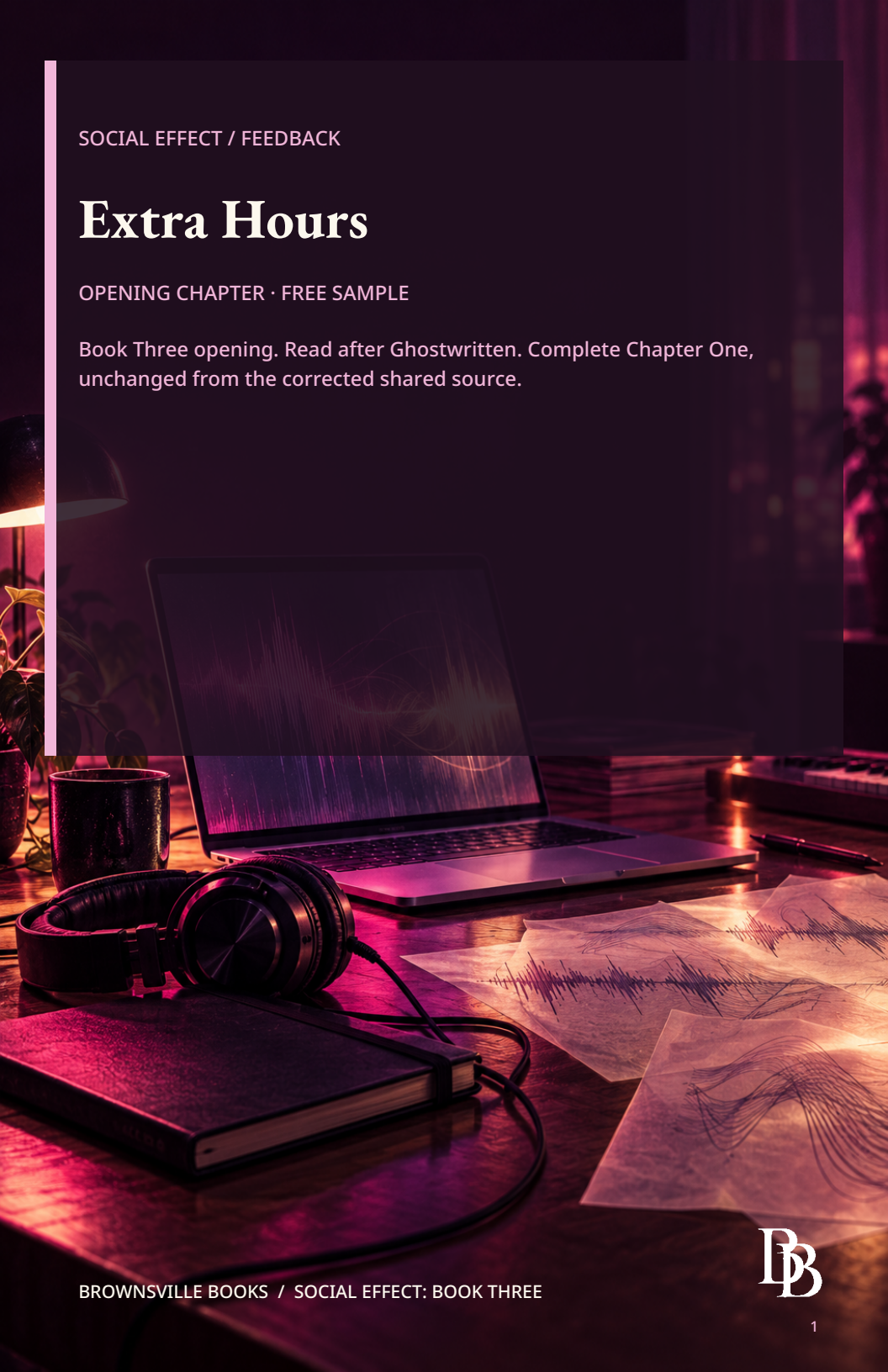
SOCIAL EFFECT / FEEDBACK

Extra Hours

OPENING CHAPTER · FREE SAMPLE

Book Three opening. Read after Ghostwritten. Complete Chapter One, unchanged from the corrected shared source.



Extra Hours

Static had been on the same eight bars for twenty-three minutes before he figured out what the beat wanted from him.

Less. Which was annoying, because he had spent the first ten minutes trying to make the verse sound like somebody had specifically asked for him, then another ten making it sound like he was too good to care that somebody had specifically asked for him. Both versions were terrible.

The beat rolled through the studio again: dry drums, that low note arriving late, space sitting there like a challenge. Static paced from the couch to the booth door and back, tried the line one way, then another. Too crowded both times.

On the next pass he let the second half fall away instead of filling it.

The pocket opened.

Static stopped walking. When the beat came around again, he did the same thing and left the gap alone on purpose.

There.

He smiled before he could stop himself. The producer had heard something specific enough to send him this beat, and now Static could finally hear it too.

That space was his.

Static hated how good that felt.

He ran the section again, quieter now, testing where his voice could sit without pushing. The verse still had holes in it. One line was doing too much. Another was only there because it rhymed, which was usually how bad lines tried to stay employed.

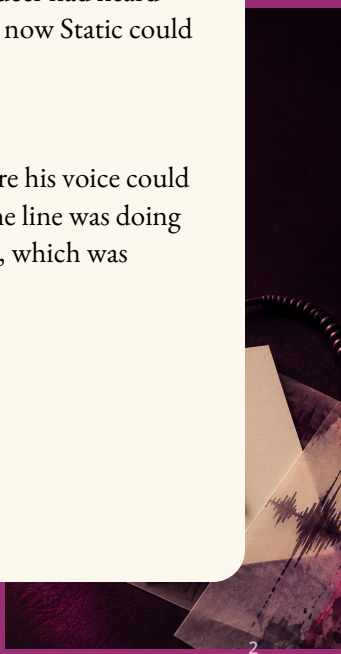
He cut both.

Better.

His phone buzzed on the table.

Static ignored it.

The beat restarted.



He got through the first half clean enough that, for the first time, he could hear the finished version hiding somewhere inside it.

That was enough to make him care.

Which was dangerous.

Static killed the beat before he could turn caring into a personality problem.

He checked the time.

Then checked it again like the second look might give him twelve extra minutes.

It did not.

He grabbed his hoodie and left.

At home, Denise had a grocery bag sitting on the kitchen floor like it had personally offended her.

Static noticed the bag first because it was weird for groceries to still be on the floor.

Then he noticed his mother standing at the counter, opening a bottle of water with her left hand.

"You finally became left-handed?" he asked.

"Expanding my brand."

"You have a brand?"

"Reliable. Tired. Excellent credit."

"Two of those are depressing."

"Only two?"

She got the cap loose and took a drink.

Static looked at the bag again.

"Why is that there?"

"Because gravity continues to work."

"Mom."

Denise sighed through her nose.

It was the sigh she used when he had correctly noticed something she had been hoping to make boring.

"They changed my assignment for a bit."

"At work?"



"No, the circus."

Static waited.

"Modified duties," she said. "Nothing dramatic."

"What happened?"

"Nothing happened. My shoulder's been stupid. Apparently saying that for six months does not count as treatment."

She reached for the grocery bag, stopped halfway down, then straightened like she had only been checking whether it still existed.

Static picked it up.

Denise gave him a look.

"What?"

"I can carry groceries."

"You just lost an argument with orange juice."

"It was a heavy bottle."

"It was pulp-free."

"That has nothing to do with weight."

Static put the bag on the counter.

The television was on low in the living room, somebody in a hard hat arguing that a wall absolutely could not come down while the host kept asking what it would cost to make the wall come down anyway. Two of Denise's plants crowded the windowsill beside it, one healthy and one surviving mostly out of spite.

Usually she would have carried the bag in, complained about the price of something, watered whichever plant looked dramatic, and moved on with her night. Seeing the routine stalled in the middle made the whole thing harder to dismiss than anything she was saying.

"What does modified mean?"

"Inventory counts. Label stuff. Less lifting for a while."

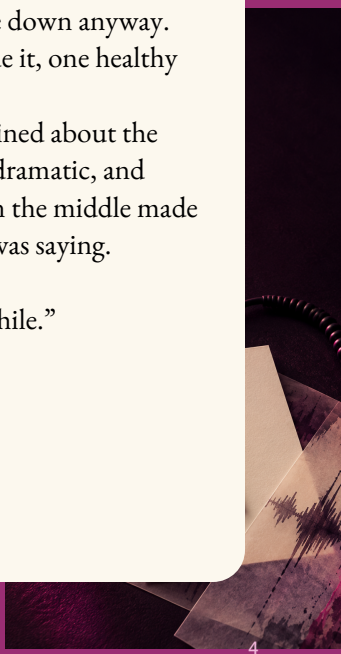
"That's good."

"It is boring."

"You love boring."

"I love being left alone. Different thing."

Static started unloading the bag.



Bread. Eggs. Rice. A box of cereal Denise bought even though she claimed cereal was "dessert pretending to be breakfast."

"What about overtime?" he asked.

Denise went quiet for half a second.

That was the answer.

"They don't want me doing extra shifts until the restriction's cleared."

Static put the eggs in the fridge.

"How long?"

"Don't know."

"What did they say?"

"They said stop asking questions like you work in HR."

"Funny."

"I thought so."

He closed the fridge.

There was a grocery list under a magnet shaped like a tiny house. Half the items were crossed out. The other half were for the next run.

Static pulled the list free.

Denise watched him.

"What are you doing?"

"When do you usually go?"

"Go where?"

He held up the list.

"No."

"That wasn't a yes-or-no question."

"I've got it."

Static looked at the bag he had just lifted off the floor.

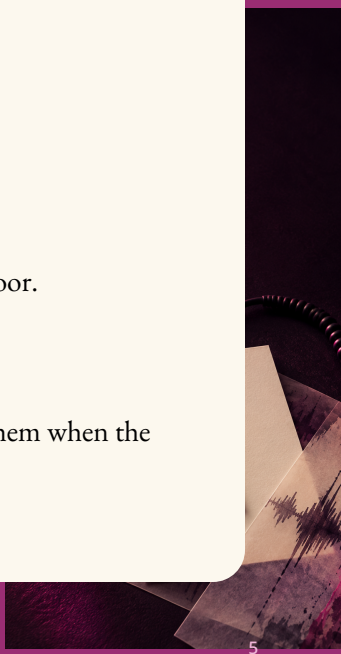
Denise followed his eyes.

"Don't be irritating."

"Wednesday?"

She folded her arms, then immediately unfolded them when the motion pulled at her shoulder.

"Saturday morning."



"Okay."

"Static."

"I'm literally agreeing with you."

"You are stealing my groceries."

"I'm taking the list."

"That is step one in grocery theft."

He folded it and put it in his pocket.

Denise stared at him for another second, deciding whether this deserved a fight.

Apparently it did not.

"Get the good tomatoes," she said.

"There are good tomatoes?"

"This is why I shouldn't trust you."

Static smiled.

He was already doing the math anyway.

Saturday morning meant leaving earlier. Maybe moving one studio block. Maybe going straight there instead of coming home first. The store was twenty minutes the wrong direction if he was headed to the studio, longer if the bus decided schedules were more of a philosophical idea.

He could work around it. He already was working around it.

Fine.

It was groceries.

The apartment was not collapsing.

His mother was still standing there insulting his produce knowledge.

Nothing needed a speech.

By the time Static got back to the studio, Naomi was sitting cross-legged on the couch with one shoe off and the other still on.

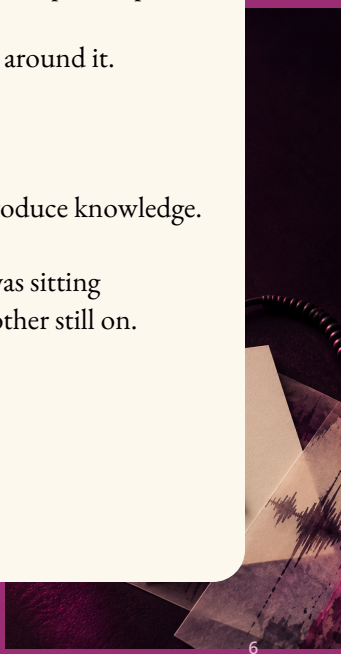
He stopped in the doorway.

"Explain."

She looked down at her feet.

"I got tired halfway."

"That's upsetting."



"I've had a day."

"You've had half a shoe removal."

"Be supportive."

Static dropped his hoodie over the chair.

"I'm supporting you from over here."

Naomi pointed at the speakers.

"You work on it?"

He leaned against the desk like there was nothing to report.

Her eyebrows went up.

"You're trying very hard to look bored."

"I am bored."

"Sure."

Static brought the beat up and let it play.

He had shown pieces to other people before. With Glass, the question became structure. With Simone, it became whether the thing was actually ready to be heard by anybody. Naomi mostly just listened until she had a reason not to.

Naomi listened without talking.

That was one of the things he liked about showing her something. She did not start fixing it just because sound was happening near her.

When the pocket came around, Static stood and tried the section live.

He kept it loose. No performance face. No trying to win the room.

Just the shape he had found earlier.

Naomi's head moved once with the beat.

Static stopped before the unfinished part.

"That's all you get."

"That's rude."

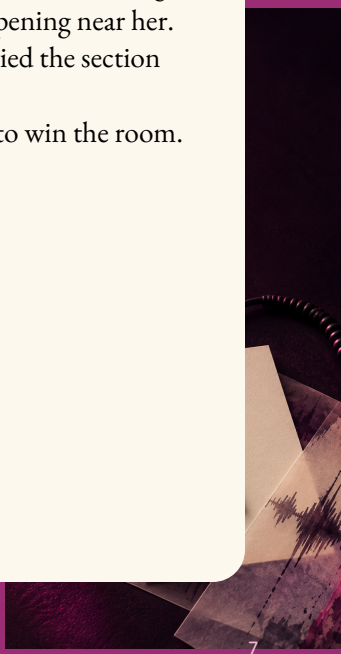
"It's unfinished."

"It was good."

"I know."

Naomi laughed.

"There he is."



Static sat on the edge of the desk.

For a few seconds they let the beat run without either of them saying anything.

Naomi reached down and finally pulled off the second shoe.

“Big moment,” Static said.

“Thank you. It took courage.”

“People said you couldn’t do it.”

“I said I couldn’t do it.”

“Biggest hater.”

She threw a cushion at him.

Static caught it against his chest.

His phone buzzed again.

He almost left it.

Then he saw the producer’s name.

Static opened the message.

Quick thought — if the verse lands where I think it will, we’re probably filming a live take when we do the session. Maybe a couple short promo pieces too. Nothing you need to prep for yet. Just wanted you to know.

Static read it once.

Then again.

Naomi leaned forward.

“What?”

He handed her the phone.

Her eyes widened before she got to the end.

“Oh, that’s bigger.”

“It’s the same verse.”

“With cameras.”

“Cameras don’t make a verse bigger.”

“They make more people see you do it.”

Static took the phone back.

The beat was still playing quietly through the speakers.



He looked at the unfinished section on the screen, then at the message again.

Naomi smiled.

"Run it back."

Static did.

