The refined\_Sreenplay Act 1 of 'Live\_by\_Night\_Novel\_docx':

[Act 1-Scene 1]:

EXT. GULF OF MEXICO - EARLY MORNING

The murky waters of the GULF churn violently under a cloudy sky. Dark, angry waves crash against a small TUGBOAT, rocking it precariously. JOE COUGHLIN (30s, ruggedly handsome but weary) sits on the deck, his feet encased in cement, shackles binding him to the life he desperately seeks to escape.

\*JOE (V.O.)\*

"Every moment I’m here feels like eternity, and I fear what she endures because of my choices. I can’t stand the thought of her out there alone, burdened by my actions. I remember the fear in her eyes when I chose this path. I put her in this position, and the pain of knowing she’s suffering because of me is unbearable."

He stares out at the expansive water, his eyes haunted.

\*JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)\*

"What if the path I chose is one that leaves her to face the burdens of my past? That’s the last thing I can let happen."

FLASHBACK - EXT. DORCHESTER BEACH - SUNSET (YEARS AGO)

JOE and EMMA GOULD (early 20s, beautiful and vibrant) share a stolen moment, laughing together as they run along the beach, splashes of water clinging to their legs.

\*JOE (V.O.)\*

(softly)

"We were meant to have picnics here..."

They stop near a driftwood piece, turning to face each other. Emma smiles, her hair catching the evening light. JOE leans in, their lips nearly touching.

\*JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)\*

"But the world had other plans. Choices... commitments..."

CUT TO:

EXT. GULF OF MEXICO - EARLY MORNING

JOE shudders as the memory fades and reality slams back. The engine of the tugboat sputters ominously, matching the anxiety churning inside him.

\*JOE (V.O.) (sorrowful)\*

"Emma deserves a life without my stain. My love... my regrets."

The TUGBOAT’s crew laughs, oblivious to JOE’s turmoil. He closes his eyes, letting the laughter wash over him like another wave.

INT. JOE’S MEMORY - A SMALL APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (YEARS AGO)

JOE presents EMMA with a beautifully wrapped book of poetry.

\*JOE\*

"I thought you might like it."

EMMA uncovers it, her eyes lighting up in delight.

\*EMMA\*

"Oh Joe... it’s perfect."

They share a tender kiss, both feeling the weight of dreams swirling around them.

\*JOE (V.O.)\*

"But those dreams slipped through my fingers... just like she will if I don’t make it back."

CUT TO:

EXT. GULF OF MEXICO - EARLY MORNING

The tugboat’s engine grinds to a halt. The crew begins to prepare for the grim task ahead. JOE’s body tenses; despair darkens his face.

\*JOE (V.O.) (pleading)\*

"I’ll fight for her. I’ll escape this fate. I can’t let this be how it ends."

He looks at the churning sea, then closes his eyes, picturing EMMA one last time—her smile, her laughter, her love.

\*JOE (V.O.) (resolute)\*

"I’ll find a way. I must."

Suddenly, the tugboat’s attitude shifts; the crew seems distracted, giving JOE a brief moment of opportunity.

He strains against the chains that bind him, determination shining in his eyes as he prepares to fight for his freedom and his love—all the stakes of his life against the rushing tide of the bay.

\*JOE\*

(whispering fiercely)

"For Emma... I won’t go quietly."

FADE OUT.

[Act 1-Scene 2]:

INT. CHARLESTOWN PENITENTIARY - JOE'S CELL - DAY

The dull, gray walls of Joe's cell reflect the oppressive atmosphere of the penitentiary. A small barred window lets in streaks of light, illuminating dust particles that dance in the air. JOE (30s, rugged, eyes filled with regret) sits on the edge of his narrow cot, his hands clasped tightly, trembling slightly.

JOE (V.O.)

I never thought I’d be counted among those who traded love for freedom... but here I am, trapped by the very choices that stole my life away.

He shifts uncomfortably, glancing at a tattered photo of EMMA (early 20s, striking, full of life) tucked beneath his mattress. He pulls it out carefully, staring at her radiant smile, lost in thought.

JOE

(softly)

Her image pricks at my mind, pulling me back to the days when we were free...

JOE

(as he stares at the picture)

As I stare at her picture, I am reminded of...

FLASHBACK - EXT. DORCHESTER BEACH - SUNSET (YEARS AGO)

The sound of crashing waves fills the air. JOE and EMMA run along the shoreline, laughter bubbling between them. She twirls, arms open wide, embracing the wind.

JOE (V.O.)

We chased sunsets... promises whispered like the tides.

EMMA

Joe! Come on, catch up!

She turns, running backward, her laughter echoing. JOE races after her, his heart full, living in the moment.

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But promises are as fragile as sandcastles... quickly washed away.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. CHARLESTOWN PENITENTIARY - JOE'S CELL - DAY

JOE blinks back to reality, a deep sigh escaping his lips. The weight of his decision presses down heavily on him.

JOE (V.O.) (sorrowful)

How could I have let her down? My love was supposed to protect her... not put her at risk.

He stands, pacing the small space, anxiety radiating from him. You can see his heart is heavy with regret.

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And now? Now I’m a distant memory... a ghost haunting her life. What if she’s out there, still carrying the weight of my choices? What if my past comes back to threaten her safety?

He suddenly stops, his expression darkening as he reflects deeper.

JOE

What if I’ve put her in danger? I can’t shake the thought of her being dragged into my mess. It’s my fault that she’s carrying this weight.

JOE

(voice breaking)

With every decision I made, I risk putting her in harm's way. I won’t let my past define her future.

JOE

Every day I remain here, I fear her safety is at risk, tangled in the mess I left behind.

JOE

Every day I wonder if my love has turned into a burden for her...

JOE

(voice trembling with fear)

How can I protect her if I can’t escape this place? Every day away from her puts her at risk.

FLASHBACK - INT. SMALL APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (YEARS AGO)

The ambiance is cozy, with soft light illuminating the room. JOE and EMMA sit close together, reading poetry aloud from the book he gifted her.

EMMA

(looking up, smiling)

Joe, I love this one... it feels like us.

She leans in, resting her head on his shoulder. JOE’s gaze softens, his heart swelling with affection.

JOE

You know I’d—I'd do anything for you, right?

She nods, looking deeply into his eyes as if searching for reassurance.

EMMA

Promise me... we’ll always be together?

JOE

I promise.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. CHARLESTOWN PENITENTIARY - JOE'S CELL - DAY

JOE’s expression hardens as he recalls the promise made.

JOE (V.O.)

But those words were just another lie emboldened by a reckless heart.

He runs his fingers through his hair, feelings of despair and desperation start creeping in.

JOE (V.O.)

I would break that promise... and she would pay for my sins.

He stares out through the bars, his breathing accelerating as he wrestles with his internal turmoil.

Suddenly, a loud CLANG echoes through the hall, jolting him from his thoughts. He shifts, looking toward the door as guards chatter outside, their voices indistinct yet threatening.

JOE (V.O.) (pleading)

I can’t let that happen. I need to break free... for her.

He clenches his fists, determination flooding his features.

JOE

(whispering fiercely)

For Emma... I’ll find a way.

INT. CHARLESTOWN PENITENTIARY - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Through the barred door, a GUARD shouts, but JOE barely registers the noise. In his mind, EMMA’s laughter reverberates like a distant bell, fueling his resolve.

FLASHBACK - EXT. SAVIN HILL COVE - SUNSET

The sun is lowering in the sky; JOE and EMMA embrace, gazing into each other's eyes. She leans in closer, making his heart race.

EMMA

Promise me we’ll never let anything come between us?

JOE

I swear... always together.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. CHARLESTOWN PENITENTIARY - JOE'S CELL - DAY

Joe’s heart pounds fiercely in his chest. He places EMMA’s photo against his heart, a symbol of what he stands to lose.

JOE (V.O.)

If I fail, it’s not just my freedom at stake... it’s hers too. If they find her because of me, what have I done?

He looks fiercely at the camera, determination etched into every line of his face.

JOE

(whispering, resolute)

I won’t let my past destroy her future. What if I'm the reason she suffers? I will not let my choices haunt her. What if my past puts her in danger? I’m haunted by the thought of her suffering because of me.

FADE OUT.